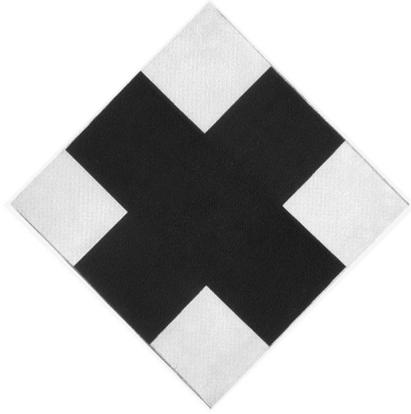


**D O S S I E R**  
**L A N Y**  
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DOCUMENTS FROM THE  
LANDSCAPE AGENCY NEW YORK  
ARCHIVE-GROTTO



**GK/AGENCE 'X'**  
**WINTER SOLSTICE 2013**



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# PREFACE

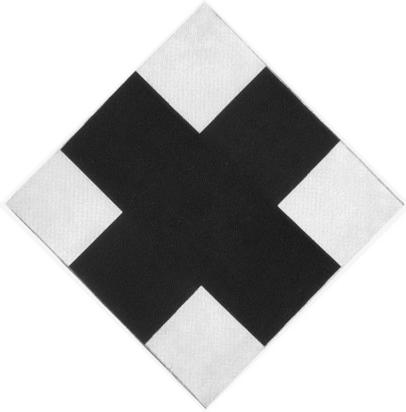


The following documents originally appeared on the LANY website, Archive-Grotto, on the web portal Geocities, between the years 2001 and 2008. They have been reformatted with all images (save one) and all hyperlinks removed. All documents presented were assembled by and remain the sole responsibility of Gavin Keeney, with the exception of “The /S/carlet Letter” and the various Endangered Species Restaurant menus from the *Anti-journal* ... In the latter cases, JB = Jacqueline Bowring, and HG = Hammond Guthrie. The entire, retrospective apparatus of *Dossier LANY* is, decidedly, an homage to New York, New York, where the majority of research was undertaken. Manhattan, indeed, haunts these pages, directly and indirectly – that is to say, the unparalleled access to libraries, bookstores, universities, galleries, cafés, pubs, restaurants, cinemas, parks, and the streets is quite simply the source for the often-intense, yet suitably critical exegetical works. Foremost in this regard were New York Public Library, Rizzoli Bookstore, Urban Center Books, Columbia University, New York University, the Drawing Center, Peter Blum Gallery, Gagolian Gallery, the Metropolitan Museum of Art, the Guggenheim, the Whitney Museum of American Art, Japan Society, the Natural History Museum, Finnegans Wake, Orsay, Lincoln Center’s Walter Reade Cinema, Film Forum, Central Park, Rockefeller Center, Bryant Park, and the daily walk (2003-2007) from the Upper East Side to Midtown. In the background of these essays, then, is the lived experience of New York City in the 2000s, when the author was, alternately and/or simultaneously, a bookseller, an architecture critic, an editor, and an occasional, globe-trotting academic.

Many of works presented here also appeared in the web-based political journal, *CounterPunch*, in the years 2001 to 2003 – especially the more strident critiques of urban life. See the dossier, *CounterPunch: Political Writings 2001-2003* (Agence ‘X’, 2011), for the parallel political exercises, starting with “Requiem: Dies Non, Not Dies Irae”, published by *CounterPunch* one week after 9/11. Additionally, several of the innumerable draft essays from the Archive-Grotto (not all included here) were re-visited and re-written for incorporation into the book of collected essays, Gavin Keeney, *“Else-where”: Essays in Art, Architecture, and Cultural Production 2002-2011* (CSP, 2011), part of the author’s three-book “Saturn Cycle”. With that book many of the conceptual threads first developed in provisional form in the Archive-Grotto were placed within a larger body of work that effectively served as a survey of late-modern cultural production, closing with the enigmatic essay, “Ten Theses on Architecture as Art”, written in 2011, or ten years after the Archive-Grotto was launched. Part I of “*Else-where*”, covering the years 2002 to 2005, might, therefore, be read as a later, more-considered treatment of the themes first addressed in *Dossier LANY*, in schematic form, whereas Part II of “*Else-where*”, covering the years 2006 to 2011, might be seen as the proverbial exit from the labyrinth into the so-called clear light of day – a path from gnomic and aphoristic scholarship to highly crafted texts in service to the elaboration of an alternative vision for the multiple arts. The 23 essays in “*Else-where*” also set up the subsequent studies, *Dossier Chris Marker: The Suffering Image* (CSP, 2012) and *Not-I/Thou: The Other Subject of Art & Architecture* (CSP, 2014), both discursive projects conducted while based in Australia, and working on a PhD, but while also wandering Europe in pursuit of arch-ancient traces of an artistic revolutionary spirit buried in the annals of art and architectural history.

Landscape Agency New York was founded by Gavin Keeney, c.1997, and encompassed a wide array of activities and effects – e.g., research, writing, design, consulting, and teaching. /S/OMA (Syntactical Operations Metaphorical Affects) was the mobile, and sometimes global design and teaching module within LANY, focusing primarily on entirely hypothetical and/or unreal projects, many becoming the foundation for lectures and courses delivered at institutions in the US, Canada, Australia, and Europe, from 2003 to 2007. Lastly, the LANY Archive-Grotto was established following publication of *On the Nature of Things: Contemporary American Landscape Architecture* (Birkhauser, 2001), primarily as a means of escaping the then-formulaic production of texts common to Landscape Architecture and Architecture.

Cover image – Adriaen de Vries, *Laocoon*, Wallenstein Garden, Prague, Czech Republic.  
Recurring image – Kasimir Malevich, *Black Cross* (rotated).



# INTRODUCTION

[...]

The following essays and documents were produced in New York, New York, plus short excursions abroad, and uploaded to the Landscape Agency New York website, Archive-Grotto, on the Internet portal Geocities between the years 2001 and 2008. The Archive-Grotto was summarily shut down in 2009 (though it was archived and/or stolen by several other websites c.2009) when Geocities was sold to Yahoo! and fees were to be imposed for all free sites formerly hosted by Geocities, Geocities being one of the earliest “homesteading” sites on the then-somewhat non-commercial Internet (Web 1.0).

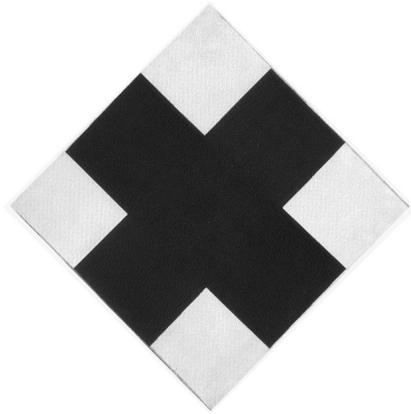
These essays and documents were, in many respects, produced as an early form of blogging, with pages constantly updated and hyperlinks utilized to link related content within and beyond the site. The Archive-Grotto was also an intensely image-driven affair, with select images used as hyperlinks between pages, with, admittedly, most images “borrowed” from elsewhere on the Web. Hence their absence here, since with globalization most everything is being copyrighted or patented, and not so much by the authors (whose right it is to do so) but by corporate new media enterprises that have assumed control of the distribution, allocation, and management of information. As a type of “rolling” research, the Archive-Grotto was also created with primitive HTML prior to the proliferation of Javascript, etc. (or the arrival of Web 2.0), the heavily animated and commercial version of the World Wide Web. The repetition in these pages is, in part, a reflection of their origin on the Web, where it was presumed that few people would actually read (or find) every page, especially given that the site was intentionally labyrinthine. The one image retained within the documents presented here is Velázquez’ *Cristo crucificado* (1632), an image that was also used on the cover of *Art as “Night”*: *An Art-Theological Treatise*, published by Cambridge Scholars Publishing in 2010, two years after it was written. The origin of this book coincides with the “death” of the LANY Archive-Grotto, in 2008-2009, when the author may be said to have “harvested” the eight-to-ten years of research embedded in the website. Indeed, *Art as “Night”* replicated, under other auspices and auguries, much of what had transpired in the Archive-Grotto, while it also served as an emphatic point of departure from Architecture and Landscape Architecture proper, for/toward Art in/for Itself (which is, emphatically, *not* the same thing as Art for Art’s sake).

While surveying the ravages of Landscape Architecture throughout the 2000s, the research also began a process, for the author, that incorporated parallel disciplines into the discourse of Landscape Architecture (denoted as Landscape + Architecture + This + That) – certainly, Architecture, but also Art, Cinema, Music, and Philosophy. It is this “enrichment” project that is referred to as “The Manhattan Project” by the mythical Dr. Prof. Ing. I.M. Avenarius in the pages of this folio. See “Q & A: Interview with Avenarius”.

Lastly, the present, static collection of these essentially performative documents is an indirect homage to New York, New York, the so-called *place of their taking-place*. While they were then tracking trends in the larger world of cultural production, they were also wholly grounded in the lived experience of New York and its often tragic compromises with Capital – i.e., Capital’s conversion of most everything given (the proverbial “as such”) to something else that might be sold. In these pages, then, the “rent-seeking” practices of neo-liberal capitalism are on full display for any who might wish to witness the late-modern passage of Capital toward its most coveted prize, speculative intellect (knowledge per se). See, for example, “Good Mo(u)ring/Frozen City”.

The author makes no apologies for the often-strident judgments included here, as they are (and were) informed by lived experience versus hypothetical, abstract scenarios normally associated with architectural and art-historical research and scholarship. In other words, the *affective nature* of the work is entirely intentional, and, indeed, central to the overall project. These are, *decidedly*, High Romantic excursions ... The essays have only been lightly re-edited, for technical reasons, and remain an accurate record of what transpired in and through the LANY Archive-Grotto – a form of intentionally, semi-deranged scholarship, perhaps, but no less heartfelt.

Gavin Keeney  
November 21, 2013



# MEMO TO THE NEW (THIS) MILLENNIUM

## CAPITALISM'S GOLGOTHA (WHERE ALL THAT IS SOLID WASTE MELTS INTO THE LANDSCAPE)

[...]

*A rhetorical question (stunned silence is the only answer): What does it say about a society that can offer only spent, toxic, post-industrial wasteland for new public urban open space (parks) and, at the same time, seeks to exploit the last truly public lands (wildlife reserves and national parks) for private and commercial gain?*

[...]

### FRESH KILLS: THE ENDGAME(S)

New York, New York – Personally, I would have preferred a giant mausoleum (a necropolis) but, alas, I could not enter the Fresh Kills Landscape to Landfill to Landscape Design Competition as I was (in the interest of full disclosure) a “consultant” from the very beginning of the REAL competition – i.e., the announcement of the Request For Proposals.

As a mausoleum, Fresh Kills would reverse that age-old axiom “You can’t take it with you”. The motto for the monstrous landfill cum mausoleum would be “You CAN take it with you”. You, now, CAN be buried with all your possessions (past and present), like some ancient potentate or, perhaps, like victims of innumerable contemporary outrages around the world – those unfortunate souls vaporized in situ (along with their personal property) ...

Yes, there is a dark side to Fresh Kills, even before the WTC came crashing down on September 11, 2001, and its name only underscores the hyper-nature of the real site versus its projected image as a benign, “bucolic” estuarine parkland. Being so close to this competition, I cannot really write ABOUT it (despite the evidence you have before your eyes) but AROUND it – e.g., *Fresh Kills: A Tragedy in Three Acts* a mock Shakespearean drama (the dramaturge traumatized by its very writing) suggesting the murk and mire of the whole dizzying affair.

The shadow of Parc Downsview Park fell over the early phases of this process and its traces are still evident in the finalist schemes. Several of the teams were also involved in the 1999 Toronto competition and several of the final proposals include very similar attitudes and fashionable biases as the Downsview projects. These might best be encapsulated under the rubric “Instrumentality” – which translates roughly as “We are NOT sentimentalists”, or “We are NOT Landscape Arcadians” (i.e., acorn-eaters). In fact, the best schemes here negotiate that very high-rhetorical gambit through a masterful inversion of its pretensions – they reproduce, without batting an eye, the very terminologies denounced by the particular and mischievous process-driven paradigm that IS, after all is said and done, a passing fancy, albeit a very powerful, pseudo-objective flirtation with Deleuzian (Derridean) *difference* predicated on appropriations from post-structuralism, systems theory, and radical geography (and transmogrified into ever-so-lovely “neo-picturesque” recreational landscapes via computer generated photomontage). Hence the vision of a more grave Fresh Kills – The Fresh Kills Mausoleum and Pleasure Grounds.

This potential (but averted) grave hyper-naturalism shows up in a few of the schemes only as a fugitive essence – an underlying preternatural instinct or a repressed *je ne sais quoi*. The illuminated (plexiglas) models of several finalists present the uncanny in a form safely AT A DISTANCE from the actual material presented – a representational surplus. The ominous glowing landforms or the rivetting illuminated waterways of the models suggest a subterranean (unconscious) apparitional aspect that will NEVER come forth in the actual physical site (except “by accident”). These models are a prescient representation of the ghosts of the site – the rubbish under the giganto mounds and the unofficial effluent lurking in the backwaters of the 2200-acre site. This eery otherworldliness will only ever come to be seen in the imagination of those keen enough to see through the site (the surface) and beyond to the ethical graveyard of the entire premise of Fresh Kills (established in the environmentally naive 1940s). The

models are superb depictions of the Other of the Actual – the Hyper-Actual – or, pseudo-psycho-tragic depictions of the deeper exigencies of a site horribly denatured and marginally “inhabitable” (by human and/or wild life). What is missing from the models is a showdown between heroic Department of Sanitation action figures and mutant cyborg anarchists on ATVs. (The beauty of most of these proposals is precisely that there is no authorized reading of the artifacts presented and you, dear reader, may project your own subjectivity into the elastic, flexible contours of the various vision plans.)

The Sacred Isle of Meadows is the perfect embodiment of the duplicity of the planning strategy. It is a speck of land at the confluence of the brackish Richmond Creek and the tidal waters between Staten Island and New Jersey and a renowned heron pit stop on the Atlantic Flyway – a nesting ground in other words for some very lovely birds. It is surrounded by goop, post-industrial wreckage and worshipped by some as a sign of the past AND things to come. It is THE place, therefore, to register some of the more abstruse expectations for post-closure Fresh Kills. The Isle might fall within this NEW Fresh Kills as the spectre of naturalism but also as a cracked mirror of super-naturalism. This possible Camelot (the new Fresh Kills Park) will then have its strategic looking glass in a downstream “Island of Shalott” and its “Ladies of Shalott” in the form of a heron rookery – i.e., an idyll frequented by photogenic, long-legged migratory birds. One only hopes they don’t one day come floating up Richmond Creek ... expired ... sell-by date passed ... a spectacle for the roller-blading public and a chin-stroking conundrum for the site’s most astute stewards, the ever-entertaining deep ecologists.

[...]

GK (2001)

Lying, robed in snowy white  
 That loosely flew to left and right –  
 The leaves upon her falling light –  
 Thro’ the noises of the night,  
 She floated down to Camelot  
 – Alfred Lord Tennyson

N.B.: A version of this essay appeared in *Competitions* (Summer 2002)

# FRESH KILLS: A TRAGEDY

BETA VERSION 1.1

[...]

“I have been watching you; you were there, unconcerned perhaps, but with the strange distraught air of someone forever expecting a great misfortune, in sunlight, in a beautiful garden.” – Count Maeterlinck, “Pelléas et Mélisande” (1892)

[...]

## ACT ONE, SCENE ONE

*Three crones high atop a neo-renaissance palazzo, in the bleak last days of March, stirring a huge black cauldron.*

Crones:

Ere’s a pinch of turnip fuzz, and ere’s a dram of black toad gall,  
ere’s the fizz that makes the biz our very privileged wherewithall.

## ACT ONE, SCENE TWO

*The winter palace of Lady Fresh Kills, aging noble woman and chatelaine of the province of Stately Island, host to the world’s largest landfill.*

*Lady Fresh Kills, pacing the faux-Italian marble gallery off the great hall of the winter palace, turns to her retainer Fitzhugh von Formaldehyde, chief of security.*

Lady Fresh Kills:

This labor draws the breath of me, I think that what is done is done.  
But what’s that great and noisesome flutter, amid the rubble and the clutter?

*Fitzhugh von Formaldehyde scratches his stubbled face and straightens his moulting raccoon hat.*

Fitzhugh von Formaldehyde:

My Lady, this is why it’s best to round the slopes and cap the beast.  
Should be a chilly day in Hell ’fore any things out there get free.

*Enter Baron Hillstrupp, local potentate, with hounds.*

Baron Hillstrupp:

Hark! The horn has called us hither, now to play the fearsome game,  
to sow with dragons’ teeth the mounds high above our Stately’s sound.  
My hounds have sniffed the greatly stench and found the hare enfeebled there.  
The hart has croaked, the weeds do tower above the City’s steely bower.  
What came before (and was tossed hither) is now come round, in silence with’ring.  
A ghostly shade, it does behoove us drive it back to where it languished.  
“Cap”, say the fearsome dignitaries, afore the scary, irksome fairies  
unleash the winds and foul the airs of Manahatta’s golden storeys.  
Amid the glass, the brick and chrome, I sense the tarnished brow and dome  
of gentle Empress Juliana. Our damsel’s locks, with frangipani,  
curl and circle this greatly polis with sweetness limpid, and grace insipid;  
Tis quite a mess that’s come to haunt us.

Lady Fresh Kills:

My baron speaks the horrid truth, it's truly time to cede that hope  
has fallen into hardened times and earthmounds cannot ever find  
the greening boughs of noble oak, or capture wildflowers in this choked  
and mangled height of rubbish reeking, for havoc has descended leaking.

*Fitzhugh departs with downturned stubbled face, flies swirling. The sound of gulls engulfs the hall as the door opens to reveal the vast sweep of the smouldering landscape. Baron von Hillstrupp paces the room hitching up his britches as his hounds cower at the arrival of Duke Eversorp, a landscape architect, eighteenth in line to the throne and scepter.*

The Duke:

I'm the one, I dare to swear it, that'll inherit this monstrous heap.  
And if the Lady will not plant it with gardens green and arbors cherished,  
the source of your own sorrow lies in every serfling's bloodshot eyes.  
My heart it dives along with sparrows, to seek a twig or scrap of tinsel  
to wrap its nest and meek abode as winter rides its ancient road  
to far away and distant shores. Good spring does plead the circling sun  
to sow its seed amongst its rounds within these adventitious weeds  
and warm the murky depths, indeed.

Lady Fresh Kills:

Keep your irksome notions still, while learned brows do here confer  
to find the proper way to fill the empty coffers Time has brought.  
Extra costs, and burdens mighty, suggest a tax to put all tidy.  
Fair Juliana seeks contritely to spare the kingdom a lawsuit nightly.  
We've shipped the worst to distant friends, but still the carts do overween,  
froth and foam has killed the salmon, while lurksome mutants flit in waters  
black and foul and gross unsightly. Turgid, crimson eels do slither,  
the elk has split, and hawks do croak like lowly frogs in stagnant moats.

*The Duke, not pleased by this rebuke, leaves the gallery and gestures to several female cousins, lurking in the foyer, to join him at the ale-house opposite the palace gates.*

### ACT ONE, SCENE THREE

*The Very Small Ale-House across from Lady Fresh Kills' winter palace. Duke Eversorp and the three female cousins, all landscape architects, are huddled over a pitcher of Slipperee, their favorite nutbrown ale. The Playwright arrives with a sheaf of papers and a harried look on his face. He sits at a nearby table looking down and writing.*

The Duke: *(slurping and wiping his mouth on his embroidered silken sleeve)*

Ah! I'd a scheme most surely hatch from out this pretty serpent's egg,  
were I not but a pint or more quite toast and all but on the floor.  
You, sweet cousin, Malvidia, can have the whole pathetic thing.  
You're younger, better looking too, and lithesome, dare we venture there.  
The Lady thinks me dimly lit, and I too think she's gross designs  
to make the slopes of our fair kingdom into something wholly loathsome.  
To wit, it's obvious to any, that not's beholden to the Lady,  
that Fitzhugh and our chatelaine are huddling to concoct a plan.  
To bring an able architect, in sable wrap and velvet cloak  
from god knows where to primp and doll the forlorn mounds with tracks and walls.  
The greater glory all but tarnished, the conniving Baron sucks the marrow,  
this coup disgrace in fake iambic is proving now a horrid gambit.

The Playwright: *(looking up from his sheaf of papers)*  
 What's your problem, Eversorp? You'd much prefer we end this caper?  
 And never see if you and your's may ever rise to seize this prize?

The Duke:  
 I'd quite prefer that you might write into this play sweet love's respite.  
 For landscape architects, as such, require loves warmth in recompense.

The Playwright:  
 Alright, then, but let's wait a bit. Till Act Two, Scene Two, if you will.  
 But it can't be your lithesome cousin, nor can it be a maid's undoing.  
 Your love int'rest should have a lair, a femme fatale will spring this snare.

## ACT TWO, SCENE ONE

*A parlour at the winter palace. The table is strewn with papers and the Holy Commission to Resolve the Matter of the Monumental Mounds has assembled in the anteroom. Lady Fresh Kills is searching for the last stragglers in the corridors and ushering them into the ornate parlour. There is a last-minute scramble for the Biedermeier chairs arrayed around the long, finely polished table. Delicate crystal glasses and tumblers are brought by the Lady's servants as the nine commissioners are seated. The High Commissioner enters last and sits at the head of the table.*

Commissioner One:  
 The film rights are the number one consideration here today.  
 I think Polanski, if he's free ... Perhaps De Niro could play me?

Lady Fresh Kills:  
 Enough, already Number One, we haven't yet a noble game.  
 To give the cinematic rights away, we need a cast and, more's to say,  
 the meeting has not yet begun till everyone has settled down.  
 Our method, in these labored hours, cannot be seen to feign discretion.  
 Nor can we deign to honor midgets, even if they are among us.

Commissioner Two:  
 What's that, my Lady? Dwarfs are here? Below the pale, out of sight?  
 Let's sweep the room of all's awry and stay till we have colloquy.  
 Tis mighty architects we seek to solve this awful disarray,  
 to squelch ignoble mountebanks and niggling, numberless no accounts.

*"Beyond, beyond, BEYOND the pale", mutters a stagehand, out of sight but audibly.*

Commissioner Three:  
 The landscape architects will grumble, I fear the Duke has sordid plans,  
 here and there, as case may be, to sow discord as wanton seed.  
 He's seen to side with notaries of questioned faith and anomie,  
 round parts he's known to favor gardens and wispy things that no man fathoms.

Lady Fresh Kills: *(sotto voce to the High Commissioner)*  
 I'll see the Duke does no such mischief, the misfit is still high besotten  
 of ladies' anklets, perfum'ries, and some say "cousins" – this last has wings.

The Playwright:  
 My lady, if I may impose, it's rather more than that you see.  
 The lad and lassies fancy trees and bushy things round flow'ry meads.

High Commissioner: *(clearing his throat)*  
 Ah hem! Friends and colleagues, you all know, to friend and foe I'm known as ...

Playwright: *(interrupting the High Commissioner)*

One rhyme per quatrain, please my liege, internal rhyme's the sweetest kind.

High Commissioner: *(looking at the Playwright, hesitantly)*

By any other name a ... My ... is known to make knaves ...

Playwright: *(leaning forward to address the High Commissioner)*

That's both internal, and "the end". Your liege must feign to goose this game.

But that's for nought, since all have ears, for here've arrived our honored peers.

*Enter five architects all wearing large flowery bow ties*

Lady Fresh Kills:

Your liege, I note the time is now, that stellar human beings come,  
such architects as these are known to blind the heel and heal the blind.

They've deigned to come with folded wings, and weigh our need in golden scales,  
and with portfolios they sing, their praises amongst other things.

The monographs, the slides, the haloes ... All five have worked for popes and pharaohs.

*All a sudden, with great force, the table bursts from its midpoint and Duke Eversorp and his three cousins rise with swords raised in the neo-classical pose of the Horatii*

The Duke:

Now! Cousins, slay these creatures, here, inbred mob that's done deceit  
with clear conniving, against nature, imposing hideous architecture!

With speed we end this paltry session and goad the parliament apportion  
our fair share of Fresh Kills' future, may green and sunny vales and hills  
bring forth the end of this corruption, accepting there these freshest kills!

*The Duke and his cousins liquidate the nine commissioners, the five architects, Lady Fresh Kills, and the High Commissioner but spare the Playwright*

The Duke:

Playwright! Find your errant pen, and pleasure ink to history's din,  
the outcome's come and we'll be praised for what we've wrought upon this day.

The land will now yield fragrant posies, the hawk will lose its hideous croak,  
the evil shadow play is ceased, eighteenth in line, myself does speak!

These were all inlaws, outlaws say us, my rival heirs all dead and lifeless.

Now Eversorp, the rightful lord, decrees a mausoleum poured.

On Fresh Kills, there the seventeen will now be planted midst the green.

The putrid slopes will twitt'ring ring, and toxic ooze turn crystal springs.

Necropolis or mausoleum, matters not if ne'er we see them.

The Playwright:

A mausoleum? Not so bad! Your Highness and these smart-dressed vixen  
half surprise me, half impress me. Your plans do have a certain "fragrance",

poetic justice, now engulfs us? Rapacious in your smartest hour,  
all landscape architects now powered, to rise and wreak gross savage virtue

'round fiefdom, world and finitude. May architects in low dress cower,

since Eversorp has turned the tables, bloody red we might remember.

Toward the parliament you nod, and all's good news that's levied there.

Go now, prepare the legislation, to build the tombs of poor relations.

*Exit Duke Eversorp and his cousins. The Duke sweeps Malvidia off her feet and carries her from the room kissing her neck and caressing her hair. The Playwright lingers to savor the moment, sucking on his pen.*

Playwright:

And what of this, our Duke's desire? Rising, sinking to him's indifferent.

A femme fatale must test his mettle, to rise or fall on scores unsettled.

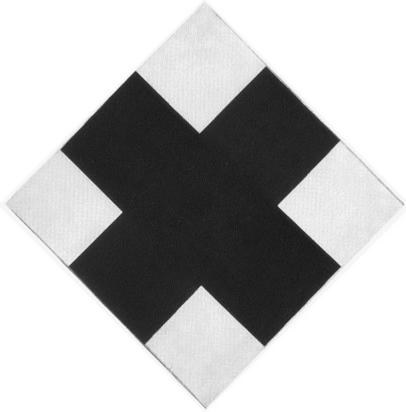
These scores are dirty little secrets, which hide in dunny, deep recesses.

Malvidia, his favorite "cousin", is daughter of his sister's husband.

*Exeunt Playwright, after snatching all five bow ties from the dead architects.*

N.B.: The playwright is still sucking on his pen and will submit for your approval the final acts and scenes *as inspiration permits.*

GK (January 2001)



# LA VISAGE D'HISTOIRE: HPB

[...]

Key members of the Blue Rider, Dada and Bauhaus movements were theosophists. Here's why ...

[...]

ABSTRACT – As the “face of history”, Helena Petrovna Blavatsky\* embodies/disembodies (after all it is only a face) the tragic force in historical consciousness that continually eats its own children. Chronos – Time Itself – is relentless. HPB gazes from her famous portrait of 1889 no longer worried about this cannibalism. She has only two years left. Her frown is the inverse of *Mona Lisa's* smile; her disdain is the modern equivalent of *Mona Lisa's* allure. HPB is a cat with the whole of truculent modernity in its mouth. She has been caught before the empty cage and doesn't care. As Sphinx, she is part lioness and part pharaoh. As *Mona Lisa*, she is coquette and cipher. Mixed together, she is the universal *enfant terrible*. She was capable of the most outrageous behavior and assertions on behalf of eating the canary. Her eyes beg you – dare you – to contradict her. In your attempts to demolish her system, you will fall into your own subjectivity as if it were a reflecting pool ... But instead of drowning, Narcissus-like, you will emerge transformed, enlarged, deified. You will be Cat, Canary, and Cage.

\*Helena Petrovna Blavatsky (b. 1831-d. 1891), Russian-born founder of the Theosophical Society (in New York, in 1875).

[...]

## I. HISTORY & PSEUDO-HISTORY

Metaphysical chains ... History is pseudo-history ... It has its own fallenness, its own face, its own monumental folly. Yet it is a redemptive career, a 4,000-year walk through a small section of Time – a *zone*. A mere stroll, in the sense that historical time is such a trifle in relationship to geologic or any other significant sense of time – Cosmic (and cosmogonic) especially. But what a stroll!

Formal systems have accompanied this stroll – emerged with it – thrown down with alacrity and sagacity and as quickly discarded. The languages uttered by “la visage d'histoire” – an intentionally feminized noun – is a plethora of sounds, shapes, figures – many oppressive, foul, incoherent – others charming, clear, holy. Such is aesthetic experience.

HPB arrived – in historical time – at the point in this stroll that might be said to have frightened the mythic mind the most. This other mind is a vast under-continent within history, within history-the-ne'er-do-well. Great discourses on imperial and empirical matters were in the air ... A residuum of the near conquered, non-empirical mind, absorbed and reflected in Romanticism, lay hidden in speculative gestures in art and poetry, literature and architecture (formal languages – tropics) but essentially banned from the salons of modern thought by science and Enlightenment rationality in general. HPB was – in this scenario – a late-romantic scourge.

The chief storehouse of archaisms (the figurative, formal languages repressed by the Enlightenment) was Masonry – in all its forms. Nevertheless, in Europe, Masonry was an elective aesthetic system indulged by the highest social orders – the aristocracy included (HPB first came upon this system in the library of her grandfather). Masonry's face was archaic – symbolic and mysterious to the 'n'th degree. It countered the outer, empirical discourses, ironically often underwriting the then-prevalent, deistic world view, and, in a type of hermetic casuistry, the imperial grand designs of the 19th century – in particular the Great Game (the imperial game between Russia and Britain to control Central Asia). Espionage and Masonry have always been very intimate. Hence the endless rumors that HPB (and Gurdjieff, the other famous magus from Russia's Near Abroad) was a Russian spy.

Spy ... A figure of speech surely. But a figure of thought as well? HPB worked two worlds at once – the imaginative historiographic mists of esoteric systems in the East and West. When she was finished with the latter, she sailed for

the former. When she had absorbed the former, she returned to the West with a synthesis of the two. Each system – the Eastern and the Western esoteric systems – considered the other with suspicion. East met West in the same ideological half nelson in the esoteric schools as in the imperial demi-monde of political intrigue. “Two worlds” is simply a cognitive encumbrance – a map that is Ptolemaic in its pretensions to accuracy. These two worlds were the same. The East and the West, the esoteric and the political, upon closer inspection, are/were/will always be one and the same thing. The lens in one case reveals the *visage grise* of the other, and vice versa. History has produced worldwide anomie. Out of this house of mirrors History has emerged as a narrative given to imaginative turns and sudden plunges. As often, it rises to the occasion, to sheer poetic synthesis – e.g., Romantic historiography – joining East and West. Can we, do we wish to, muster that courage (again) in the early 21st century? Or shall we melt into post-colonial, post-modern, post-cultural, multi-cultural mush?

## II. SUBJECTIVITY & LANGUAGE

Something sagacious ... Something wily ... In History is an architectonic – a structure of thought (Kant’s *a priori*) – that is monumental. Whether that structure is to be a monumental folly (fixed), or a monumental transformational constellation of useful signifiers (fluid signifiers) is a matter for Voltaire and Augustine to sort out in a hoped for synchronous reincarnation as lords of the realm. If these structures are archetypes, each archetype in the architectonic of reason is epochal. A moment can be epochal, if time truly is relative. The magnitude of any given moment is measured by its contribution to the whole. Representative architectonics, it might be denoted, after Emerson and Carlyle. This whole – the gestalt of historical time (of rationality) – real or imagined (preferably we should admit the latter) – represents a most problematic bundle of time (4,000 years) given the density of another order, of the cosmic and terrestrial systems it somehow resides within.

Architecture as a formal language is under continuous stress to intone, embody and transfigure historical time – to do something, anything to engage our collective historical consciousness. Consciousness of historical time itself implies “humanity”, a concept now much derided. The late-modern mind prides itself on having overcome the humanist subject – i.e., humanist subjectivity. Is this what we now are translating into built form within the new architectures? It might appear so, yet a post-humanist subjectivity is a historical subject nonetheless. Architecture is struggling to redefine both civic and psychic space through a new synthetic, poetic language of form, and an emergent technological, formal language that is emerging within the larger technological language is defining the mythological, narrative, and historical consciousness of the age. Post-humanism is a new humanism. Its form is Sphinx-like, an enigma.

François Mitterrand and HPB have both been called “Sphinx-like” – inscrutability is the chief qualification plus an aristocratic air of disdain for transparency. In the former, the technological *jouissance* of the age is fully embodied in the soi-disant grands projets built in and around Paris in the 1980s to monumentalize Mitterrand’s reign (and to “renew” Paris). Transpose two digits and, in 1890, we find HPB coming to the end of her own monumental project of renewal – her demolition project on Western historiography principally carried out through her patchwork tome *The Secret Doctrine* (1888) and her celebrated attacks on philologist Max Müller. This imaginative flight to a trans-historical (trans-Himalayan) landscape of topological sur-realities, comprised of mythic and poetic (mytho-poetic), cosmic and terrestrial, human and divine, extra- and supra-historical genealogies, is the perhaps secret daemonic world of Diotima (Socrates’ sibyl) – a conjoining of two worlds (two historical traditions) that have paralleled one another for millennia. The long-anticipated synthesis – an early attempt was made by Renaissance humanists – is taking place in the late-modern era. The apparent duality – the two minds – is actually only a historical subterfuge, i.e., a reflection of historical binary thinking (metaphysics), as the seemingly divergent systems have (in a sense) “mapped” one another since the originary split occurred god knows when. It was the birth of *self*-consciousness in as recent as the second millennium BCE that established this dual terrain (the daemonic and the rationalist). Scholars wildly point fingers at the *Epic of Gilgamesh* as evidence of this psychic schism. This places, then, the recent fin-de-siècle, fin-de-millennium angst in perspective, and, perhaps, indicates another reason for adumbrations concerning the Second Coming. Could this be but the dawn of an opening in our collective being to “supra-consciousness” or “divinity” (the approach of Nietzsche’s end of nihilism)? Self-consciousness, nothing to write home about, is nevertheless the birthplace, in historical time, of post-humanism. Limited by the humanist agenda, by self-consciousness and its rewards (and its discontents), its ecstasies and its agonies, History is about to go extraterritorial, to a synthesis on a “Himalayan” plateau. Hence the geographical terminology of much present-day rhetoric and HPB’s own geographical historiography. Hence also the fascinating academic debates concerning the Hegelian End of History. “Extraterritorial” simply means to jump from one tropic system to another, to leap forward

– in a quantum fashion, not a Maoist fashion – out of one mode into another. A “rebirth” or “renaissance”, if you will. But also something new. Historical consciousness is in labor – we are the expectant Mother Father Child.

All this means that History (and histories) is (are) a makeshift – a mosaic of contingencies, temporizing narratives and, perhaps, half-truths and lies. As makeshifts, the architecture(s) must fall (in Time) – hence the inordinate value (poetic and material) of ruins! The realm of “falling” is – in historical terms – the realm of critique, of rant and rave and diatribe. These aesthetic assaults free the embodied (captive) energies of formal languages. In the last fin-de-siècle rave, the Symbolist poets attempted to reinvent language. In the last fin-de-millennium, the Carolingian renaissance gave way, via intermittent Dark Ages, to the Medieval-Gothic transformation of Europe, a recoding of language clearly depicted in architecture (as Ernst Bloch’s *The Spirit of Utopia* (1918) instructed the early modernists of this past century). This rewriting of the expressive languages of a patchwork civilization is often attended by an influx of archaic formulations – one explanation for the rise of the Gothic imagination. There are others ...

As makeshifts, formal languages are contingent configurations of metaphysical and political-economic realities (transpositions). There is always a vested interest ... A status quo to placate. This status is often the greatest impediment (note “pediment” as an architectonic term) to change, but also guardian against precipitous, catastrophic change. (The guardian of the threshold is merely there to scare off the weak and enfeebled.) HPB looked askance at all forms of anarchy. Her universe was an orderly, evolutionary one. Revolution, for this aristocratic lady from the southern edges of Russia, was anathema. But it is an article of historical consciousness that revolutions do occur – dramatic, radical changes do come, and a rapid rewriting of the formal languages that constitute the social order is effected. The changes wrought by both the French and Russian Revolutions, despite the reactions that followed, suggest, however, that political patterns are at most superficial, failing to reach the linguistic depths implicit in language (the formal terrain) and spiritual culture (the daemonic terrain). Or, they are out of sequence, and doomed to fail, because historical consciousness is not up to integrating and retaining the impression of this dramatic alteration of the spiritual-historical landscape. Better, then, to be a poet or an architect. Best to be a “landscape” architect!

The current, late-modern situation is different. There is, by all estimates, an actual, real, possible transformation of global “significance” underway, in the true sense of change at the deepest levels of our collective being (historical and otherwise). (The phenomenon of the hyperactive global economy is merely a smokescreen.) All canons of taste, and all paradigms, seem to be under continuous, relentless assault by vigorous intellectual critique. The vigor and the sagacity of these critical pursuits (for Truth with half-truths) mark a revolution in contingent expression. The ennui with politics is good news. A new model of contingency, perhaps. Or a new embodiment of human and divine culture. A conscious realization of the Sacred (Divine) in a post-historical territoriality (i.e., language). The post-modern culture of the late 20th century (synonyms: post-cultural, post-humanist, post-historical) was essentially a collective howl of dissident voices in the face of so-called modernist hegemony. It (the howl) was/is the collective rave (critique) against the implicit grandstanding of modernist thought – its explicit hubris. The post-modern critique has freed “other” voices (see the spectral place/voice of the “Other” in Levinas and Derrida). This is the relative value of its transitional status – for it, too, is passing into historical consciousness. There are many neologisms attached to this process; i.e., neo-modernisms and neo-postmodernisms, especially in the realm of the rapidly shifting cultural arts. Neo-modernism is most evident in the infrastructural (technological) re-coding of material culture. This is inevitable in a materialistic, mechanistic and secular society. But the ineffable is once again stirring – the breath of other winds stimulating the imagination and world soul. These other voices – other time-space narratives – are not wholly new; they are resurgent, having been suppressed or marginalized by dogmatic, materialistic modernism. The principal mode of modernism – logical positivism – sometimes misnamed Rationalism – has long recognized its shadow self in the Other. Its fear of the Other is the basis for a latter-day critique of this relationship within the broad discourses of post-modernity. History is seen now to be what it always already is – a narrative written and authorized by the heavy-handed. From the friezes of Athena Nike (at the Acropolis) to the Mitterrand-authorized Pyramide at the Louvre, the plastic (sculptural) expressions of a culture have long best expressed the sensibilities and the interpretive schema of patronage. This is unavoidable. It may be transcended only by the critical consciousness that reads formal languages for what they are; i.e., sometimes beautiful, sometimes hideous fictions and parables.

[...]

### III. OTHERNESS

HPB was the “avatar of otherness”. She brought to modern thought a bevy (a brew) of illicit cultural forms. More importantly, she claimed to hold the key to understand and read them. This was her foremost claim, for others, too, were reviving the treasure-trove of the esoteric under-histories. It was penetrating interpretation that remained elusive or subjective. HPB brought – reputedly – a Rosetta Stone to esoteric historiography. Her *Secret Doctrine* stands as the classic interpretive key, as well as a type of fantastic diatribe against Western epistemological arrogance. Founded, as it is, on an unknown, “lost” Tibetan Buddhist text, *The Stanzas of Dzyan*, *The Secret Doctrine* is an extraordinary and extravagant accessory to the wholesale assault on modernist doctrine that began with the Romantics and continues, today, with the post-humanists. HPB’s visage – as captured in the famous 1889 Resta portrait known as “The Sphinx” – iconically stands in for the entire anti-modern discourse, an angel of defiance. Her brilliant brainchild, Theosophy (despite all of the bastard offspring), is summarized by that extraordinary portrait of ennui, defiance, and sagacity. Her disdain is palpable, her powerful intellect audible, in the slightly perturbed countenance. Anyone familiar with Walter Pater’s musings on Leonardo da Vinci’s *Mona Lisa* (1503-1506) can extrapolate further on HPB’s historical aura. She is Sphinx and Mona Lisa and, as such, universal *enfant terrible*. Her eyes beg you – in their arch-languid ennui and authority – to dare to contradict her.

HPB rebelled early, most notably at the tender age of 17, leaving the aristocratic life in Russia’s Black Sea region (Ekaterinoslav) to travel and gather the materials that would come to fruition in the writings of the 1880s. Her flight from family and country was a classic quest for knowledge – a Wilhelm-Meister-like wandering and “apprenticeship”. Her own romanticism served as a compass directing her to some of the more remote regions of the “West”, traveling primarily by her wits. As she matured in this wandering, and as she found inspiration in esoteric movements throughout Europe and the Near East, HPB could not but develop a quixotic attitude toward the prevailing scientism and statism of the day. (It is said she fought alongside Mazzini and/or Garibaldi in the Italian civil war.) Her later rhetoric was hyperbolic in proportion to the staid and banal reductionism of the then ascendant empirical and imperial mindset in the West. This included senses of history, as it was coming to be written in this age – a discipline striving to be analytic and scientific. Objectivity in historical and scientific inquiry has, since, fortunately fallen – its grandiosity suspect by some, anyway, in its heyday and now by more than a goodly percentage of the populace. HPB adopted a poisoned-pen strategy – a campaign in colorful letters, articles and texts throughout the 1880s – partly in response to the assaults on her own ideas by authorities both academic and clerical (histrionics and historiography being traditional bedfellows). The attacks on HPB in turn brought wider acclaim for her research. Her methodologies remained beyond the pale of scholarly brinkmanship due to the unorthodoxies involved. Calling up a text in the astral light, and quoting from it at length (with remarkable accuracy!), left much to be desired by objective historiographic standards. The establishment of the Theosophical Society, in New York in 1875, was the precursor to HPB’s publishing campaign. The greatest battles fought were with the Darwinists, with Sankritists (academic philologists) not far behind but equal in rancor. Western religionists of all stripes were, of course, besides themselves, their timetables and concordances dashed in one heroic sweep of HPB’s pen. The cause of ruin in the latter case was the publication of *Isis Unveiled* (1877), a sprawling work that sought to regather the dispersed Hermetic tradition of the Near East and Mediterranean basin into one synthetic “Western” system. The Russian magus was a holy (unholy) terror to the orthodoxies of both the Anglican and Catholic churches. Neither did she spare Protestantism. Her historiographic imagination appalled them all. The worldview embraced by Theosophy and HPB reduced the Judaic-Christian civilizations to a recent, albeit anemic, echo of former great ages – the Indo-Aryan (Hindu) fathering the Greco-Roman. Western rationality, derived as it was from the Greco-Roman cultures, was – as it were – demolished by the overwhelming weight of this historical perspectivism. New *gravitas* seized this upstart tradition and set it into a broader context. One it had problems remembering or acknowledging. Western historical amnesia runs deep.

The system collectively known as Western rationality was always unstable. Traced as it was to Hellenic Attica, the foundations were always shaky due to a disruption of the intellectual cross-fertilization (the intercontinental current) that formerly prevailed in Asia Minor between Asia and the Levant. This historical aporia – lacuna of the most exceptional kind – has never been adequately explained. Needless to say, Greek humanism was a unique occurrence regardless, as was Hebrew monotheism, and its fore-grounding of what was later to be called self-knowledge or self-consciousness was the beginning of a type of cultural enlightenment. That this occurred at the same time that the Buddha was altering the face of the East, is an important clue to the lost cultural links East and West. Greek culture was disconnected from the Indo-Aryan due, perhaps, to intervening empires hostile to cultural exchange. The fluid relations of open borders were no doubt impeded by regional tyrannies. It was not till Alexander the Great that these

links were reforged, but under the yoke of yet another tyranny. In Greece a self-selecting discourse developed that excluded, increasingly, the archaic. The Homeric universe was intentionally deconstructed by Socrates, Plato, and the emergent philosophers of Hellenic Greece. Self-knowledge was the byword of this incipient Age of Reason.

(Warning: Sweeping generalizations follow. Philosophy majors please skip this section.)

From Socrates and Plato to Russell and Wittgenstein, logical positivism (and its antecedents and corollaries) outgrew all other discourses as it gave autonomy to the intellect and the individual conscience. The struggle between church and state, throughout the Reformation and Counter-Reformation, was about nothing if not this struggle. Reason's haughty goal was to destroy all beautiful lies (all noble lies). Self-conscious reflection became rational reflection – abstraction and metaphysics were its agencies. Along the way, a very long way or a very short way depending on your timetable, in the interstices of historical time, dissenting world views were concealed beneath this lofty discourse (secretly doubted by many), kept alive in symbolic languages and isolated communities (as was Christianity during the Dark Ages). These secret codes continued to fascinate those susceptible to non-rational or sur-rational (not irrational) discourses, to romantic and mythic perspectives. Indeed, such are to be found in Plato and his mentor, Socrates, in what might be called (after Thomas Mann) homeopathic dilution or “whispers”.

Rationalism, although the prevailing idiom in secular practices today, formerly pervaded sacred practices, in their infancy. The pursuit of self-knowledge is a known ingredient of the mystery schools of the pagan Mediterranean cultures. Self-knowledge was the then-dawning vanguard experience. It was radically new, and, therefore, an article of faith in the initiatory rites that survived into the first centuries AD. Metaphysical knowledge – “abstract thinking” as it might be termed – had come to a crisis, in the philosophy of Spinoza, after a long process of consolidation and codification in medieval scholasticism. Spinoza, able to prove the existence of God with concise, logical formulae, was unable to prove the existence of Man. This crisis ushered in a wave of skepticism – epitomized by Hume and Kant – and led to the separation of humanistic and scientific studies typified by the splitting of natural philosophy and natural science. Albertus Magnus (Thomas Aquinas' mentor) was one of the last philosophers of note before this tragic, but somehow necessary split or “fall”. The plunge into materialism followed – with the attendant narrow frames of mind – nihilism, existentialism, phenomenology and structuralism. A necessary fall? Hegel's philosophy of history includes a teleological (eschatological?) end – the enigmatic “End of History”. In a sense, the End of History is also the End of Metaphysics As We Knew It. This latter event has come to pass – say savants everywhere – with the brilliant lifework of Ludwig Wittgenstein. His *Tractatus* (1922) wrapped it all up, so it is claimed, and put a big “red” bow on it. (What do you mean by red?)

(All clear: End sweeping generalizations. Philosophy majors, please resume reading here.)

#### IV. ENDGAME

It is wholly possible, then, that the long-anticipated Apocalypse has actually occurred – passed by! Some of us survived it. This post-cultural mindset – mood – that is upon us collectively is, perhaps, the beginning of something quite spectacular. If we manage it, that is. It is curious that the quattrocento humanists tried, in their own way, to reconcile pagan and Christian worldviews. The same could be said of Theosophy, and its brood (although the latter tend to be more pagan than syncretic). As an exemplar of an emergent mindset, Theosophy was the cat's meow to artists and libertines, aristocrats and plutocrats, and, later, Hollywood movie stars. It appealed to their liberality for all the wrong reasons. Theosophy was a transitional humanism – a fast exit out the side door of modernity's excessively overheated palazzo. It recovered long vanquished discourses, accepted but qualified most modern ones, and, in the act of bridging the two, redeemed both. Theosophy is an architectonic – a constructional affair and a historical device – linking the two continents of human intelligence, Reason and Imagination.

As all architectures are contingent (provisional) acts, noble lies incarnate, Theosophy, as HPB framed it, was nothing more or less than a passage toward unity. It has passed, this passage. What now stands to be accomplished is the unity itself. Even so, Theosophy held a magic mirror to History; it assisted, in a sense, to perform the lucrative act of re-enchantment. History has ended. And metaphysics has (so to speak) passed by. So be it! Let the music begin.

“There is a divine power in every man which is to rule his life, and which no one can influence for evil, not even the greatest magician. Let men bring their lives under its guidance, and they have nothing to fear from man or devil.”

(HPB, 1887) Somehow I hear the echo in these remarks of another event roughly 100 years earlier, the Declaration of the Rights of Man and Citizens. Political and theological hope springs eternal ...

### **V. A COSMOGONIC EROS?**

One of the enduring mysteries of the run up to the founding of the Theosophical Society is the authorship of the famous Mahatma Letters. These epistolary essays were precipitated out of thin air by HPB or delivered very long distances without the benefit of human agency. They were reportedly written by two disembodied Eastern adepts. They tell the story of the human race and, indeed, the Cosmos. They form the foundation stone of HPB's exegesis. One, in particular, is a denunciation of religious systems and could have been penned by Lenin or Mao. They are now in the British Museum and will one day, no doubt, be submitted to tests such as those recently administered to the Shroud of Turin. Given that we know the human race exists, if not the Cosmos, it may be better to simply smile and move on.

GK (January 2002)

# IMMORTALITY: THE QUEST FOR FIRE

[...]

“Somewhere, even now, a lamb was being led up to the altar steps, a lamb chosen for its perfection and purity: even its delicate hooves, its knobby, skinny legs, were perfect. The eyes of those who had chosen it were loving – they valued it, enormously. And the lamb itself? It felt this love and shyly looked up at the eyes around it glowing with desire. It would not comprehend that desire had different depths. Gratiated, it would get to its knees, it would gracefully lie before its lovers, it would never suspect the blow.” – Jane Alison, *The Love-Artist*

[...]

*The Charterhouse of Parma* – Stendhal’s great novel (written in 1838) follows the life of “our young hero” Fabrizio del Dongo (a Lombard nobleman) through the early 1800s and life in-between the various reactionary and revolutionary movements following the French Revolution, including (early on) a turn on the battlefield of Waterloo. It seems to mimic the realist novel but is something else altogether.

The Romantic hero is actually an anti-hero, and the various allies and enemies he engenders in his quest for fire by “enthusiasm” turn one way then the next as circumstances dictate. The rapid succession of troubles – reversals of fortune – lead the reader into a labyrinth of social mores and historical-cultural shadows that end only by illuminating the timeless landscape of tragedy.

Stendhal’s worldweariness reads in a manner of a literary mannerism – it is unclear what his intentions are beyond spinning an extravagant tale of immense intrigue and abominable outcome. His noted style is somewhere between the detached irony of George Sand and the great illumined tableau of Balzac. As the story races ahead – and there are few (perhaps no) denouements allowing the reader to catch his/her breath – an entire epoch unfolds and begins to collapse (notwithstanding the closing, momentary glory of the Prince of Parma’s court).

The sheer bravado of Stendhal’s performance sketches a period of despotism “marred” by the revolutionary fervor of Northern Italy and one detects an almost structural edifice for the tale lurking below the apparatus of places, venues, situations, character, and “painterly” *coloratura*. The novel seems to arrive full-blown from the ear of Stendhal and the “libidinal economy” of the protagonist’s rebellion (and eventual accommodation) suggests that the tragedy is more a matter of universal portents told against the rugged landscape of Lombardy than an historical tale of ruination by passion.

It might be best to read this thing straight through without stopping. Such a strategy enhances the nature of the narrative which is truly a tour de force – an (intentionally) overwrought avalanche of words and images – and matches the origin of the text insofar as Stendhal is said to have dictated the story in “a mere seven weeks”.

*The Love-Artist* – Jane Alison’s re-creation of Ovid’s (Augustan) Rome is sliced through by various portentous events, not the least of which is the purely fictionalized conspiracy of inspiration developed between Ovid, after having produced the *Metamorphoses* (8 AD), and Xenia, his fair but grave muse.

Xenia’s perturbations – she is a witch seduced and retrieved from the shores of the Black Sea during a “vacation” Ovid takes (while waiting to see how his *Metamorphoses* is received in Rome) – become the source material for *Medea* (n.d.), the poet’s legendary lost play.

The mutual, suspicious presumptions of the relationship between the two main characters begin to impress into this timeframe a dual quest for immortality – on Ovid’s part his desire to be famous, and on Xenia’s part the search for the *quinta essentia*, the philosopher’s stone. She is actually more a rustic alchemist than a witch. The patrician Ovid and the wild Xenia mutually exploit one another as he develops his re-telling of the ancient tragedy of Medea, hiding from her his tablets of wax and furtively pursuing his patron, Julia, the granddaughter of the Emperor Augustus.

Xenia sees and hears things ... The release of the details of her clairvoyant, visionary experience of Rome are, however, carefully calibrated and mostly concealed from Ovid such that he must at times provoke her to reveal his destiny (which is all that seems to matter to him).

This is an astonishing work of literature that captures the inordinate ambition of a poet suspected of corrupting the morals of Rome and a passionate, confused seer laboring to negotiate the splendour of Rome and cryptic intuitions of the vanity of the same. Alison's prose sings the reader's eyes and soul as it piles the story onto the timeless pyre of tragic works of art. Xenia seems to slowly realize that the elusive *quinta essentia* "belongs", after all, to Ovid (the poet).

As the pressures build, and Ovid nears the conclusion of his *Medea*, Xenia has twin visions of the future:

"Here, and here – you won't believe it – will be palaces with walls and ceilings all covered with images of your stories, with your words, even, painted in gold! And there, on that hill up the river, will be the most gorgeous hall filled with sculptures of your characters, so vivid, so like flesh! And not just in Rome but in palaces beyond the smoky hills to the north, and farther, in cities and countries that haven't yet risen.... In small dark cells far beyond the Alps, a thousand years from now – imagine – men will be bent over you, taking pains to put down your words with a flourish, taking such pains that the thin line that is your work, your life, will stretch on forever ..."

This confirming vision of Ovid's immortality is countered by another image of a ruined Rome buried in dust with Cleopatra's Needle poking through a grassy, pastoral, future landscape ... Poussin's landscape ... As the relationship of muse, poet, and patroness reaches a futility mirrored in Alison's prose by ghastly intimations of what Ovid is writing (plotting) through *Medea*, Julia, fueled by hatred of Augustus for banishing her mother and for her own virtual imprisonment, conjures her own vision of revenge:

"She wanted the aqueducts to topple into valleys and upon the famous Roman roads, leaving heaps of pulverized brick. And that tremendous hieroglyphed needle, for which her grandfather had ordered an entire ship to be made, to haul it back from conquered Egypt – she wanted it to shiver as it shattered upon the ground. And oh, the millions of bodies buried beneath all this wreckage, reduced to what they were all along, masses of pulp and blood, senseless. Then, the world torn open, how the beasts, smelling the chaos and blood, would break free from their dens, come blinking out into the sudden harsh light!"

This vision of catastrophic ruination occurs slowly, dawning on Xenia and Julia. For Xenia, it is always coupled with the realization: "So few will remain, she thought, shutting her eyes and listening. But of all of them, Ovid would. Of all this great age, this great Roman world. She could see his face, ancient and boyish, laughing from millennia ahead." Strange, then, that Ovid is banished by Augustus (a disgrace that actually occurs in the opening scenes of the novel) to a rotting Roman outpost on the Black Sea for his various presumptions and vainglories, and that he dies there never to return to Rome.

"So it was not just that his words would live on for a few hundred years; it was more than that. The bodily, expiring things of the world were transformed by him into words – which themselves would be taken up, millennia later, by other hands, other minds, and transformed once more into voluptuous bodies of color and marble. Sublimation."

GK (August 2002)

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N.B.: A version of this text appeared in *CounterPunch* (August 31, 2002)

# TIME, SWEET TIME

[...]

“The sublime schematizes the freedom of the world, the power to commence afresh. It thus makes it possible to think an aesthetics of innovation, an ethics of conversion, a politics of revolution.” – Jacob Rogozinski (1988)

[...]

The conscious and unconscious concerns, issues, phantoms, tangents, dead ends, inversions, and metamorphoses of cultural rhetoric and poetics are, out of necessity, all but played out/argued from within the vast, intertextual virtuality (imaginative “nature”) of representation. There is no hypothetical place outside this field of formative forces other than futurity itself – and, then, it is only in its temporal manifestation as “being futural” that futurity might access, canvas, and “sound” this virtual wilderness for traces of *some-thing* else. This focus on the topological/tropological imagination (forms, voids, and aura) is the so-called fictional address of all signifying systems. Today, this is recognized as the penultimate “space of appearance”, while that which produces the apparatus of culture remains hidden, a vast substrate within representation.

That this interior “site” (territoriality) is also the origin of the surface of things is part and parcel to the task of critical inquiry history, a task most notably delineated by Manfredo Tafuri, but taken up in the analogical games of reading and intuiting depth (aura) in systems of representation (and in things-in-and-of-themselves).

Depth “comes to the surface” (fuses with the representation) only in the act of cognition. It most often resides beyond the tain of the mirror – on the “other” side (within, beyond) the surface of things (representations). Intelligible and sensuous coordinates are effectively “coordinates” of intellection. The Beautiful and the Sublime (regardless of what Edmund Burke had to say) are near synonyms for surface and depth.

Perhaps the last, rigorous application of discourse analysis vis-à-vis architectonic figuration – the complex of figures of speech and thought in the visual and applied arts – was, curiously, carried out by Ananda K. Coomaraswamy (1877-1947), first and foremost an art historian of “ideas”, versus contingent “forms”. (“Curious”, because, with Coomaraswamy, East came West to re-plumb the depths of the East, *in the West* – i.e., to re-imagine “India” using mostly Western art-historical concepts.) Contemporaneous with Coomaraswamy, a similar vitalistic spirit moved in the works of Henri Focillon (1881-1943). Both figures predate the emergence of the post-structuralist agenda and the merciless and necessary demolition of signifying systems through deconstruction. Notwithstanding the fearful “beauty” of deconstructivist operations, synchronic and formalist excavations of form and ideology are cyclic and intimately related to the oft-times catastrophic process of cultural renovation (the continuous, “glorious” revolution of Bergsonian duration). Super-adding Coomaraswamy to Focillon (or vice versa) leads straight into the task of critical-poetical inquiry somewhat obscured by the critical-political inquiry of Tafuri and the “School of Venice”, the purely formalistic analytic of Rudolf Arnheim, the socio-ontic excavations from Émile Durkheim through Pierre Bourdieu, and the “discursive contextualized praxis” of Derridean post-structuralist anti-conventions. This section, sliced through art-historical and architectural inquiry, elides the intentions and proscriptions of both iconography and iconology insofar as Focillon’s form of inspired formalism and Coomaraswamy’s extreme introspection cover the same ground – through apparent, divergent critical modalities – vaguely inferred in the “Warburg School” but masked by the irreducible semiotic signature of iconological and iconographical interpretation.

“Cultural” soothsayers – e.g., Coomaraswamy and Focillon – also, perhaps inadvertently, reveal the shallowness of much that passes as formalistic, critical analysis in everyday art and architectural history. Within architectural criticism itself, there are few exemplars of this idiom of “depth psychology” or “sounding form” that do not quite simply disappear into the phantasmatic vortex of signs and signifiers, passing into that “screen” that obscures the Real, insofar as (*pace* Lacan) the Real is only ever experienced as an “x”, or a phantasmatic factor in the mediated experience of the world. This “x”, in Lacan’s exegesis, is a type of ghost that moves but rarely reveals itself, except through irruption and crisis, in the world of representations that constitute everyday experience. The Lacanian “Real”, then, is the ideal cipher/sign for the submerged strata out of which signifying systems in landscape + architecture emerge.

Recent attempts to divine depth in landscape + architectural production have fallen short of reaching the zero degree (ontological crossroads) through a short circuit in the apparatus of intellection. This short-circuit has repeatedly prevented the detection of the origin of the electrifying *jouissance* buried deep within signifying chains. Charles Moore et al., in *The Poetics of Gardens* (1988), might be said to have scratched the surface while signaling enigmatically toward the mesmeric formal maelstrom that appears and disappears, time after sweet time, in landscape-architectural systems. This maelstrom is the image/surface, and it is significant insofar as it adumbrates the more grave and metaphysical (sublime) coordinates that lie/dissemble “within”. *The Architecture of Western Gardens* (1991) – Mosser, Teyssot et al. – performed, conversely, the archaeology of the ideological and social functions of landscape + architecture, while mostly bracketing the attendant unstable metaphors that are one means of reaching the aura and soul in works of art and architecture. Such means, furthermore, are only implied in the ICOMOS (International Council on Monuments and Sites) Florence Charter (1981), the last entry in this massive tome, wherein the notable interest in preserving the “spirit” of an historic garden is broached within the generic, utilitarian, and art-historical agenda applied to the problem of safe-guarding historic gardens and sites.

The travails of formalism – as a synchronic act of deep-sea diving, versus an archaeology of autonomous syntax – includes the problematical and dialectical agencies of subject-object relations (primordial relations) that, after Gaston Bachelard, may be summarized as an ineluctable “eternal tug of war” between figure and ground (thing and milieu). In *The Psychoanalysis of Fire*, Bachelard posited the twin figures of “continuous” and “dialectical” sublimation to suggest that one, the former, is the source itself of representational systems (and phantasm), while the other, the latter, is a possible route/way out. Or, “The blue flower is red ...”

This “way out” leads, in Bachelard, through Novalis (and German Idealism). Idealism, a privileging of transcendental subjectivism, is perhaps the most potent, composite terminology currently available to describe the point of purchase (the Archimedean fulcrum) required for divining the extreme/exquisite distance within forms that may or may not prove, conclusively, that coordinates of thought (“given” or otherwise) are, after all, the first condition for the construction of worlds – that is to say, the principal gesture toward either fragmentation (alienation) or synthesis (integration).

Critical inquiry, by way of cultural rhetoric and poetics, then, as an incipient, almost always provisional “psychoanalysis” of form, might permit the mutually beneficial, yet most often mutually estranged agencies of landscape architecture and architecture (a redundancy, to be sure) to find a potentially sublime “synthetical” ground common to both disciplines and, ultimately, productive of a dialectical intertextuality (interface), beyond “total flow” and scintillating “surface”, that signals “S” (Synthesis) while standing within time, mutually imbricating the coordinates of each discipline, and redeeming futurity as the principal task of all critical-poetical activity. Being “futural” suggests, in turn, that such acts implicitly transcend temporality – that is, they reside in the interstices of here *and* there, near *and* far, speech *and* thought, and – as such – quintessentially within the landscape-architectural conundrum/continuum “figure *and* ground”. This *intermundia* resembles the place reserved by Lucretius (“said to have died mad from a love potion”) for the possible inhabitation of the gods – an interstitial, shadowy realm that is perhaps a simile for imagination itself.

The high-low rhetoric of the late ontological/anti-ontological argument from Immanuel Kant to Martin Heidegger (and beyond) is replete with sticky signifiers – the “coming coming”, “The Coming Philosophy”, “The Coming One” – a rhetoric embedded in cultural criticism and cultural production from Expressionism to present-day dialectical and anti-dialectical neo-onto-theological and anti-neo-onto-theological agitations left, right, and center. The “Coming Philosophy” of Walter Benjamin returns in one such late-modern, critical-poetical amalgam, prepared and launched by post-structuralist, post-Marxist rhetoric, while the maximalizing *jouissance* inherent to the re-deployment of the concept of the Sublime (used typically as a signifier for transcendental imagination) seems to animate most if not all critical agendas this side of mere reaction.

Kant’s delineation, demarcation, delimitation of the mark of the Sublime as an “almost nothing” stands as a possible “passage” out of the labyrinthine scepticism of the rational-discursive analytic of metaphysics (the last of his three critiques) into the topological maps of structuralism and post-structuralism (synonyms for imagination-intellection). This “almost nothing” begs the question “Which almost nothing?”, as, with Slavoj Žižek (for example), we arrive at the threshold of the Universal and its cultural apparatus (baggage); an apparatus that operates as a seeming emptiness that mechanistically empties Universality of universality through paradoxically filling it with meaningless representations, a process distending and/or distorting (masking) the manipulations that engender the world (gone

awry or otherwise).

“Which almost nothing?”, then, becomes the prime gesture (rhetorical question) of critical-poetical inquiry, and cultural-poetical rhetoric, par excellence as the vessel of universality fills/empties/refills itself (insofar as it, too, is a construct) and the stringent/astringent formulae of formalisms and signifying systems chains (systems and anti-systems) folds and unfolds in time. If the Sublime is always a surplus/overflowing within the Beautiful, the Beautiful must always – in time (or “just in time”) – be subjected to the critical-poetical fire, a quest for fire that purifies things while producing the authentic almost time-less almost nothing that is the mark of putative transparency, synthesis, and the Sublime. As such, the almost nothing of the surface of things and the almost nothing of the vast interiority of things implies an irreducible dialectic leading on toward synthesis in figuration, which places the “Coming Philosophy” in a compromising position, on its knees, perhaps, before the altar of figuration. The “coming coming” in Heidegger’s reduction of Kant’s *Critique of Judgment* (1790) collapses into the pre-figural notations of a time that appears outside of time, or a time that creates time, just as figuration/form cycles into and out of figuration through the agency of the so-called Universal, an almost void or almost emptiness (nothingness).

“Total flow or nothingness?” seems to be the question just before/this side of “Which almost nothing?”, and, if “total flow” is synonymous with “total depletion” (while feigning “total immersion”), things get very slippery indeed. It would appear that time is not simply the privileged space/place of appearance but also the privileged space/place of disappearance. If the Sublime, as the post-structuralist discourse suggests, puts the concept of presence into question, it also calls into question the presence of absence. The circular, nullifying character of this quest – a circularity perhaps characterized by the insufficiency of language – would seem to demand (as a possible “way out”) the critical-poetic analytic, a trajectory toward the always already deferred “Coming Philosophy”, and a ground that contains/sustains the sublime “almost nothing” of a milieu that produces the coordinates of the world (if not time).

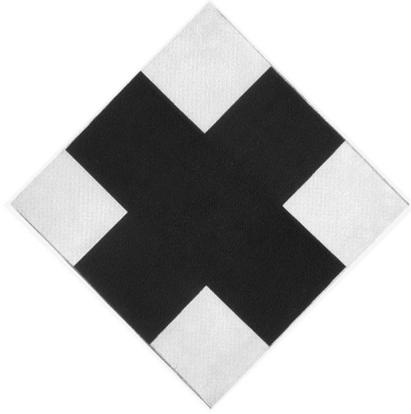
But here the specter of metaphysics seems to return, turn on itself, prompting yet another question: “Which metaphysics?”, or even “Why metaphysics?”. Kant’s future metaphysics, and his attempt to condition the future of all metaphysics, actually seems to be prefigured in his marking of the limits for representational systems and the attendant ultimate confrontation with the Sublime for all such signifying systems. A future metaphysics would, then, have to account for such limits or exceed them. For representational systems to approach or assimilate the Real (the actually existing world) – as in Landscape + Architecture – implies not the subsuming of one by the other, but the mutual subsumation/imbrication of subject by object and object by subject, thing by milieu and milieu by thing, and etc., or Landscape by Architecture and Architecture by Landscape.

Is this, then, a future metaphysics? Is the amalgam of the Real and the Imaginary not already the condition of things?

Futurity returns ... What is IT? IT would appear to be time, sweet time taking its own sweet time – or figuration undoing/remaking figuration. Only the end of time can undo this time-after-time taking its own sweet time. Therefore, out of necessity, presence returns to absence, vice versa, and so forth ... In the meantime, what is the promise/point of the world and representations coming into an elective, mutual synthesis other than to bring this sublime timeliness “home” and to return representation and the world to its source, a common/uncommon ground, in thought and its “entourage” (correlates) – this “entourage” being the Universal and Sublime thing not-itself, problematized herein as Landscape + Architecture, a sublime “linguistic” amalgam (veil) that may or may not contain/cover almost everything this side of “almost nothing at all”.

Such maneuvers may, then, allow us to critically poetically inquire into/survey the entire field of landscape + architectural production – past, present, and future – for signs of synthesis. And, not unlike Orpheus, we may be required to at times to descend into the underworld, returning not to compose hymns or sonnets *per se* but to re-score/re-write the coordinates of thought that only appear to reside outside of time, an apparent “outside” that exists only so long as time is perceived as part of the mirror/image of representations. Time may be “not of itself” or relational, but the surface of things is not all that exists “in time”. Within that sensuous amalgam reside the sublime coordinates that condition how we perceive and interact with the world; the “world” being the proverbial “ground beneath our feet”.

GK (November 2002)



SUMMARY JUDGMENTS – 12/06/02

# NETHERLANDISH URBANISM

## GOLDEN APPLES, JUMPING RATS, & THE LYING MIRROR

[...]

“Even the hollowest nut still wants to be cracked.” – Friedrich Nietzsche

[...]

ALL-PURPOSE DISCLAIMER & TRAVELER’S ADVISORY: Adherents/partisans of Dutch urbanism and super-urbanism should consult with their physicians before reading this essay. This essay is copyrighted and may be used for personal therapeutic purposes only. Any resemblance to actual persons, firms, or fashionable entities in the world of contemporary landscape + architecture + urbanism is purely intentional. Primers for students of “total flow” include: MVRDV’s *FARMAX* (1998), Rem Koolhaas and Bruce Mau’s *S, M, L, XL* (1997), and Chora/Raoul Bunschoten’s *Urban Flotsam* (2001). For alternatives to Nether(out)landish urbanism, please consult/indulge your own subjectivity.

[...]

### THAT SINKING FEELING

On the occasion of the re-publication of *S, M, L, XL* (1997/2002) ...

“The modern city, in its metropolitan evolution, *radiates out* from its center, *overwhelming* any surviving elements of the past. Its settlements become ‘cases’ of its irradiating system, along the center-periphery axes. But we can also observe a phenomenon which, at a certain point, seems irreversible: this expansion becomes increasingly a question of opportunity, without programming or control. The more the metropolitan ‘nerve network’ expands, devouring the surrounding territory, the more its ‘spirit’ seems to be lost; the more ‘powerful’ it becomes, the less it seems capable of ordering-rationalizing the life that takes place inside it. The metropolitan intellect, its *Nervenleben*, undergoes a sort of ‘spatial crisis’ – which is perfectly comparable to the one that effects the Leviathan State, the modern state in its territorially determined sovereignty. The powers that determine metropolitan growth increasingly encounter difficulty in ‘territorializing’ themselves, in ‘incarnating’ a territorial order, giving rise to forms of legible-observable forms of coexistence in the territory, in spatial terms.” – Massimo Cacciari, “Nomads in Prison”, *Casabella* 705 (2002)

Why the KOOLHAAS/OMA-MVRDV-WEST 8 architectural-landscape architectural axis is essentially depleted (exhausted) is because it seized upon and amplified a fallacious, deterministic-materialist agenda while denigrating, vacating, and de-naturing the radical nature of ideation (the production of ideas) and most positive forms of figurative rhetoric, as all faux avant-garde architectures are wont to do to claim/seize the ground of so-called advanced architectural production. This amplification of an elective emptiness (relativism) effectively bracketed the always already hegemonic nature of architecture-as-incipient-system; i.e., the unavoidable fact that architecture is complicit in the production of de-naturing systems, socio-economic anomie, and alienation. This seizure included forward-leaning representations (new graphic conventions) as well as mis-representations of history and ideation as a corrupt, hopeless tableaux of lies (a game), while avoiding the prime issue that ideation is also the locus of the true avant-garde, or those – it might be said – willing to climb out onto a limb from time to time (metaphorically and meritoriously) to pluck the golden apples of the future. In other words, there is no escaping ideology. Such things – e.g., the very idea of “golden apples” – are inherently heretical to the machinistic methodologies of everyday architectural and landscape architectural determinisms as they are to the neo-modernist sensibility forever this side of high-modernist hegemony. Silver apples will have to suffice.

What is essentially missing – the “golden apple” – is a valid, rigorous, glorious, and hyper-real critique of ideology, or a critique of critiques, that goes into/beyond the material versus simply re-writing or re-diagramming it; viz.,

refusing to re-aestheticize the surface of modernism (or refusing to re-surface the modernist aesthetic). Deconstruction almost produced such a hyper-critique but stayed within/strayed into, instead, the putative autonomous territory of free-floating signifiers producing a seemingly permanent negative dialectic or a seemingly permanent disconnection between the signified and the signifier. The brilliant (formalistic) language games of deconstruction, out of necessity, avoided at all costs any form of “synthesis”, given that such a concept is, *avant la lettre*, suspect terrain – rightly so, but also “wrongly so”, insofar as this terrain is also the *meta-historical* ground/source for liberation from signifying chains (bankrupt ideologies).

The perennial need for this glorious critique of critiques is also why Manfredo Tafuri, Massimo Cacciari, and Giorgio Agamben (the Italian neo-Marxist triumvirate) are more important (prescient) for present-day landscape + architecture than Gilles Deleuze, Manuel de Landa, and Paul Virilio. Cacciari and Tafuri go back to/retrieve Walter Benjamin’s project of divining the dying, flickering flames of failed moments within the rubble of historical structure (within ruined past times), while Agamben, editor of Benjamin’s *Complete Works* (in Italian), takes this timeless, synchronic hyper-critique forward into the always-unchartable territory of the poetic (see *Infancy and History*, 1993, *The End of the Poem: Studies in Poetics*, 1999, and *Potentialities*, 1999). Also in Agamben and Cacciari, we may detect traces of the *incomplete* Heideggerian project, a quest for a slippery, lithesome, poeticized Sublime operating in the margins of ideologies and systems and within the temporizing coordinates of *critiques* of ideologies and systems. With Slavoj Žižek, the Slovenian neo-Marxist magus, we see the long shadows of Hegel and Lacan twisting and turning toward “S” – synthesis, the Sublime, Spirit, or some-thing else – because the present-day coordinates of cultural production are hopelessly corrupted by the all-but-invisible flow of capital and its trace elements (imagery), a flow weirdly privileged in the perverse penchant for datascares and total flow moving in neo-modernist, Netherlandish-inspired architecture and landscape urbanism.

The critical-poetical task will NOT be carried further by such hyper-realist, anti-idealist postures. The arguments against ideation that pass for “pragmatism” are suspect, anti-cultural arguments. They co-opt themselves. To invoke the “hidden hand” – however ironically – or to foreground information and/or posit writing machines (the apparatus that produces/processes information) *versus ideas* is to negate negation, or to void the whole point of an avant-garde. If it walks and quacks like a duck, it is probably a duck.

Sooner or later this nihilistic, neo-modernist school will implode. Already signs exist that rats are jumping ship ... The categorical repressions of data and pseudo-empirical maps, or that which is obscured by data and pseudo-empirical maps, is quite simply everything that actually matters. That “everything” automatically (“as such”) resides in the realm of ideas, which is why words (language, texts, discourse) are infinitely more powerful (plastic/malleable and forward-and-backward-leaning) and explosive (radical) than the slick imagery that substitutes for the constantly shifting/evolving inner world of cultural rhetoric and poetics. The critical-poetical flame that passes through/consumes things is the quintessential sign of “S”.

### THAT NINETIES THING

The embrace of “ambient” (supposedly indeterminate) forces of cultural production, the prototypical 1990s thing, is essentially a fiction, a response to/retreat from “central planning” and the endless banality of the modernist city and the now-disgraced urban master plan. In running to embrace “market forces” and the IT revolution, while retaining traces of the moral agenda of utopian modernism, Dutch urbanism in turn embraced the machine that produces the empty imagery of the capitalist city, and, ironically, engaged the mirror-image of loathed, bureaucratic urban planning. The “branding” stratagems associated with haute-bourgeois fashion and consumerism are intimately conjoined to the Netherlandish model and programmatic aspects of urban planning have mutated into oftentimes delirious gestures that feign dissociation. The “wink and nod” neo-modernist methodology, in fact, is aimed in two directions – to the abstract “market”, and to the abstract “public” – and the timeless, Janus-faced predilection of fashionable architectures is exposed as a form of “marketing”. One curious after-effect of this process is that ambient cultural forces become a surrogate for ambient environmental factors and the late-modern city becomes a pernicious theme park devoid of the Real. Exceptions to this scenario are, increasingly, *exceptionally* rare.

Ultimately, what’s left of left-leaning “central planning” agencies in the late-modern city might declare sectors of the city off-limits to such programmatic indiscretions, siding with the abstract “public” (so to speak). Such places *seem to exist* in the form of “parks”, although parks come today (as yesterday) with a knotted, tangled mass of hidden agendas not the least of which is the cultural apparatus commonly required to pay for the park and its

maintenance. What might be more ambitious, efficacious, and edifying is the possible construction of no-go zones, not unlike The Zone in Tarkovsky's *Stalker* (1979). Q: "What does it do?" A: "Absolutely nothing." In terms of wishfulfillment, such zones might replace the post-industrial cultural park, so prevalent today, as a new type of "wilderness" – "wilderness" being in this equation the opposite of "real estate". Here, a faint trace of Parsifal's failed mission is detectable insofar as we, too, may not be "asking the right question". Are we not, given the state of things, in the process of becoming the next caretakers of the same-old broken promises?

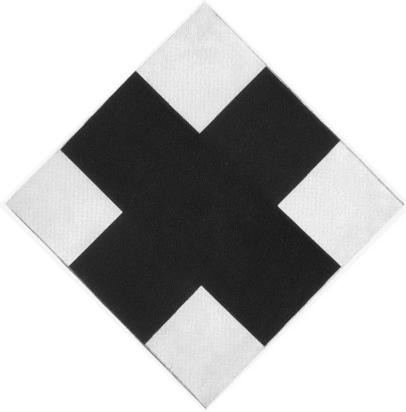
## THE LYING MIRROR

Is nature "the mirror"? Or, is the representation (art, etc.) "the mirror"? Or, is the space in-between in fact "the mirror", and the world, as such, is on one side, while all manner of representations are on the other? What happens when/if we collapse the space in-between to its absolute minimum? Are we left tapping on the glass? Is it possible for the glass to vanish/to be destroyed? Is this even desirable? And, if so, what then is the condition of the world, the so-called Real, and what becomes of the idea of representations? Why does the image/conceit of the mirror persist? Is it the image of the agency of "intellection" – self-consciousness – or "something else"? Is it Žižek's "indivisible remainder" that which haunts Western subjectivity?

The "indivisible thing" (remainder) within everything is the slippery slope of the subject (intellection within intellection). The other thing is the object (Agamben's thing-as-constellation). Architecture almost always sides with the object. Perhaps the highest modality of the former, the subject, is the rational-poetical. Of the latter, the object, it seems that the rational-empirical analytic reigns supreme insofar as "it" is perceived as some-thing to apprehend (enslave within the intellectual/symbolic web of signifying, instrumentalized structures). That this operation of apprehension occurs *within the subject* seems to generally escape notice. What both subject and object have in common/share is also a possible way out of the ontological "stand-off" – this stand-off being the subject-object dialectic reduced, in the subject's most fundamental experience of the world, to an "anamorphic stain" (Žižek's diagnosis for abject modern subjectivity), or an irreducible, residual veil of distortions (representations) preventing "contact" with the Real. Is this the realm of the Kantian *a priori*? Can the *a priori* be re-written *a fortiori* (*a posteriori*)? Choose your poison ... This putative commonality within representational systems, the so-called "as such" (things given), is the spirit of "S", synthesis, or the so-called supreme ground of all things; e.g., "the coming, coming" (Heidegger), "the coming singularity" (Agamben), radical contingency (*passim*), etc, etc. Anyone concerned with such things must eventually return to Hegel to confront the on-rushing, mutating mirror-vortex of representations, and, as it were, "dive in". "Swimming upstream" – "forward into the past", to the critical-poetical headwaters of cultural production – one might find that "things given" are actually the same things as "things made", or, at the least, that they are made of the same thing. "There all barrel-hoops are knit, / There all serpent-tails are bit".

GK (December 2002)

N.B.: For the latest language games regarding "flow", see *Archis* 5 (2002). For the latest imagery vis-à-vis sexy, scintillating nothingness, see MVRDV, *El Croquis* 111 (2002).



FIRST CIRCULAR / UPDATED WHENEVER

# RECONNAISSANCE: HARVESTING THE 20TH CENTURY

[...]

“Come, the grapes they writ are largely ripe. Let us harvest them and prepare the Holy Wine.” – Dr. Prof. Ing. I.M. Avenarius

[...]

Winter / Spring 2003

PLEASE NOTE: Dear Readers, Our recent interview with Avenarius has sent us packing in several directions all at once and literally bumping into ourselves along the way. Anyway, that interview has prompted several renewed lines of inquiry including “Harvesting Post-Structuralism(s)” – which is part and parcel of “Harvesting the 20th Century” – and yet another look at “L + A: The Fusion Thing”, both concerns we share with Dr. Prof. Ing. Avenarius. If, indeed, we live and have our being in language, despite Daniel Libeskind’s recent outburst to the contrary, then it must be the garden-variety version versus the Jamesonian prison-house version. As such, we are (once again) scanning the horizon for signs of – as Avenarius would say – “Some-thing Else”.

“I have tried to put in a good word for melancholy. I have shown its modern variations, in order that we may see it as the social reality it is, and no longer as a suspicious eccentricity.” – Günter Grass, “On Stasis in Progress” (1973)

1/ DERRIDA: CINEMATIC SQUID INK – “We see a wild-haired, early-morning Jacques Derrida pottering around his flat. We meet his wife, Marguerite, and learn that she calls him ‘Jackie’ (‘Jackie, do you have your keys?’). The great man has bagels with honey and butter for breakfast and cold aubergines for lunch. With his friends, he munches prawn crackers and drinks champagne (although his friends joke about this to the camera crew). His brother says he has no idea how the Derrida family produced such an intellectual colossus. And we learn that, when the coinage *différance* was admitted to the dictionary, his ageing mother reprimanded him: ‘Jackie, did you spell difference with an *a*?’” – Christopher Taylor, *Times Literary Supplement* (February 6, 2003) ...

2/ ROBBE-GRILLET & RUINS – “It is 1949. A special agent of the French secret service, Henri Robin, is aboard a train to Berlin, on a special mission of an undisclosed nature. In what could be Graham Greene’s *The Third Man* or a Hitchcock film, he crosses national borders and shuffles aliases with a false mustache and multiple sets of identity papers. Pulling into the station and preparing to meet his contact, Robin is alarmed by a disturbing glimpse of his own doppelgänger. As Robin’s time in Berlin unfolds, it becomes clear that nothing is what it seems. A shooting, a kidnapping, encounters with pimps and teenage whores, druggings, police interrogations, and torture arise in a mysterious, ever-more-dreamlike sequence, as an unnamed interlocutor points out inconsistencies in Robin’s own story. As vague memories – a childhood trip to Berlin with his mother, perhaps looking for his father? – spring from ordinary images and objects, Robin’s days in Berlin become a labyrinth of present and past haunted by echoes of Proust and Oedipus. But ultimately, to whom do these memories belong? And who, after all, is Robin?” See, Alain Robbe-Grillet, *Repetition* (New York: Grove Press, 2003) ...

See also, as below, W.G. Sebald, *On the Natural History of Destruction* (New York: Random House, 2003) ...

3/ CORNELL: NOT THE UNIVERSITY – “The objects that cause this odd rhythm of stop and look and stop to think again are the shadow boxes that the American artist Joseph Cornell constructed for forty years in the basement of his mother’s house on Utopia Parkway, in Queens. This year is the centenary of Cornell’s birth, and his boxes continue to hold their own in the American imagination. Since his death, in 1972, it is not so much that Cornell’s fame has grown, which is what happens when critics water a reputation, as that his work has become part of the living body of art, which is what happens when artists eat it.” – Adam Gopnik, *The New Yorker* (February 17, 2003)

...

4/ HAVEL: NO LONGER @ “THE CASTLE” – “The power of totalitarian ideology, he wrote, is that it acts as ‘a veil behind which human beings can hide their own fallen existence, their trivialization, and their adaptation to the status quo ... It is rather like a collection of traffic signals and directional signs, giving the process shape and structure. This metaphysical order guarantees the inner coherence of the totalitarian power structure. It is the glue holding it together, its binding principle, the instrument of its discipline.’” – David Remnick, *The New Yorker* (February 17, 2003) ...

5/ CACCIARI: FRAYED NERVE NETWORKS – “The modern city, in its metropolitan evolution, *radiates out* from its center, *overwhelming* any surviving elements of the past. Its settlements become ‘cases’ of its irradiating system, along the center-periphery axes. But we can also observe a phenomenon which, at a certain point, seems irreversible: this expansion becomes increasingly a question of opportunity, without programming or control. The more the metropolitan ‘nerve network’ expands, devouring the surrounding territory, the more its ‘spirit’ seems to be lost; the more ‘powerful’ it becomes, the less it seems capable of ordering-rationalizing the life that takes place inside it. The metropolitan intellect, its *Nervenleben*, undergoes a sort of ‘spatial crisis’ – which is perfectly comparable to the one that effects the Leviathan State, the modern state in its territorially determined sovereignty. The powers that determine metropolitan growth increasingly encounter difficulty in ‘territorializing’ themselves, in ‘incarnating’ a territorial order, giving rise to forms of legible-observable forms of coexistence in the territory, in spatial terms.” – Massimo Cacciari, “Nomads in Prison”, *Casabella* 705 (2002) ...

6/ “MORE LIGHT”: WRITING WITH LIGHT – Chris Marker, *Immemory: A CD-ROM* (Boston: Exact Change, 2002) – “Filmmaker, photographer, writer, and traveler Chris Marker has never respected the boundaries between genres. His landmark 1962 film *La Jetée* is made up almost entirely of stills, its one moving image as thrilling as the Lumières’ films must have been for their original audiences. Since then, Marker’s films (including the features *Sans Soleil*, and most recently *Level Five*) have continued to stretch the definition of the art, merging at times with the essay, political manifesto, personal letter, art installation, even the computer game.” / And, Vittorio Storaro, *The Light: Writing with Light* (New York: Aperture/Accademia dell’Immagine, 2002) – “Between words and pictures, one can glean the very personal story of Vittorio Storaro, master of photography and great theorist of light. This gives rise to a highly original work, which thoroughly examines the artistic world of the author: studded by lights, darkness and shadow, alternating artificial light and natural light, the dialectical relationship between sun and moon.” (Italica) ...

7/ RIGHT, LEFT, RIGHT, LEFT: MARCHING TO OBLIVION – “In the 1960s, Blanchot’s written art was primarily one in search of spatial limits. His individualistic and uncompromising undertaking into the drift lines of Holderlin’s poetry and Kafka’s world on a pinhead best embodied the approach and immersion he sought of the infinite. This was no mathematical journey, regardless of how ‘Platonic’ a mathematician is willing to be. Blanchot’s infinite was the lived experience of death in *L’Espace littéraire* [...] It swung stoically to and fro on a painful line by which the utterly outside was made accessible. That this was no unreachable absolute was underscored by the openness of his prose to any reader. Its experience was nonetheless reserved for the slow tempo of reading, and for readers alone.” – Norman Madarasz, “Radical Politics and the Writer: Maurice Blanchot (1907-2003)”, *CounterPunch* (March 8, 2003) ...

8/ GÜNTER GRASS: STILL SORTING THROUGH THE DEBRIS – “Grass reawoke the Baroque strand in German literature, as well as an earlier, episodic and exaggerated Rabelaisianism.” *Guardian Unlimited* / Günter Grass, *Crabwalk* (New York: Harcourt, 2003) – “It is not the first book by a German author to take up the theme of Germans as victims. WG Sebald’s essay on ‘Air War and Literature’ and the horror of the Allies carpet-bombing of German cities (included in the book, *On the Natural History of Destruction*, published in the UK last month) came out in Germany four years ago. And Walter Kempowski interviewed scores of Germans about the bombing of cities and the Gustloff sinking for his book *Echo-sounder*. But once again Grass takes an issue that has been rising to the surface and gives it an agenda-setting new impetus. With *Crabwalk* he moves the question of historical amnesia and German victimhood further than earlier writers who concentrated on the events alone. Grass’s book discusses the political damage suppression can cause. ‘In a way you can say the book is too late. But you have the advantage of seeing the story from the point of view of three generations. I wanted to describe this suppression complex and its consequences,’ he says.” “Shaper of a Nation’s Conscience”, *Guardian Unlimited* (March 3, 2003) ...

9/ FORTHCOMING (MAY 2003) – Alain Badiou, *Infinite Thought: Truth and the Return of Philosophy* (London:

Continuum, 2003) – “Influenced by Plato, Lucretius, Heidegger, Lacan and Deleuze, Badiou is a critic of both the analytical and the post-modern schools of thought. His work spans the range of philosophy, from ethics, to mathematics to science, psychoanalysis, politics and art. His writing is rigorous and startling and takes no prisoners.”

## FROM OUR FOREIGN CORRESPONDENTS

### 1/ CANADIENNE DESK

LE MONDE (PARIS) – ARTICLE PARU DANS L’EDITION DU 4 FEVRIER 2003

Sélection revues: *Pages paysages* 9 (2002) – “Une revue chic et luxueuse à la mise en page recherchée, parfois confuse et peu lisible. Le sous-titre de cette livraison – «Incarné» – reste énigmatique. Le texte de Georges Teyssot est, lui, parfaitement clair: il y traite de l’architecture et des corps «mobilisés» par les tenants d’un darwinisme social vite récupéré par les systèmes totalitaires. On retrouve également dans ces pages quelques-unes des signatures familières aux amateurs de jardins et aux militants du paysage: Gilles Clément ou Christophe Bailly. Ce ne sont pas les moins intéressantes. Le premier nous livre quelques réflexions toniques sur les «bienfaits» des catastrophes naturelles; le second une étude sur les sculptures dans l’espace public à partir de deux oeuvres de Piotr Kowalski installées au Japon. Caroline Varlet nous propose une promenade à Lyon, dans le parc de Gerland, conçu par Michel Corajoud. Et Catherine Mosbach une visite du jardin botanique de Bordeaux, en voie d’achèvement, commentée par son auteur, Michel Menu.” Emmanuel de Roux, re: Georges Teyssot, “Habitants, travailleurs et soldats. Paysage d’une mobilisation totale” / Settlers, Workers and Soldiers. Landscape of Total Mobilization”, *Pages Paysages* 9 (2002): pp. 10-21 ...

### 2/ NEW ZEALAND DESK

SITE DU JOUR – “Have you seen Christopher Woodward’s *In Ruins* [New York: Pantheon, 2002]? ... He was formerly the curator at the Soane Museum. A friend gave it to me for my birthday and I’ve been reading it on and off, it has some intriguing bits on the tragic, and not surprisingly, on ruins. This bit got me, it is paraphrasing William Beckford who built the Fonthill mock-Gothic[k] thing which was a temple to the arts, and he is writing to a confidante about St Peter’s in Rome, one of the most breathtaking volumes I’ve been in: ‘Banish the priests [...] and you and I could live in a tent draped over Bernini’s bronze baldacchino below the dome. Drape yellow silk over the windows and we will forget the passing of days, the oil lamps in their niches the stars in an endless night.’” – For a masterful disquisition on the “over-designed”, surreal Soane Museum, see Hélène Furjan’s “The Specular Spectacle of the House of the Collector,” *Assemblage* 34 (1997) ...

### 3/ FROM THE FRANCO-SPANISH BORDER

Alive, but living on library paste?

PLEASE NOTE: The following crypto-hermetic message was received 03/03/03 by extinct passenger pigeon – through a tear in the fabric of time – from the Franco-Spanish border. It is/was(?) dated 1940 and signed quite emphatically “WB”.

“DIVINE MISPRISION / ON THE SO-CALLED PRISON-HOUSE OF LANGUAGE

More unanswerable questions ...

QUESTIONS: If we mis-read, mis-appropriate, and/or otherwise mess with texts – producing unauthorized readings by mis-prison and/or ex-propriation – do we not move closer to ‘The Source’ (‘S’), given that all texts are always-already defective? And, does this then not signify yet another version of the Miltonian ‘necessary fall’? Might this not also indicate the presence of the demi-urge (the Architect of Time so cunningly pictured by Blake) in all authorized readings of ‘this + that’?

If so, is language a liberatory or enslaving mechanism? And, ergo if so, which language? Is IT ur-language that matters? Or, is IT the highly developed semantic structures of discourse that matter? *Pace* Bergson, and perhaps

Deleuze, is language (a possible synonym for memory?) distinct from matter? Is it bound up with matter? Should it not be freed from such chains of material signification? Does it matter at all?

ANSWERS: Anyone caring to attempt a response may send an answer via reverse-extinct passenger pigeon to the Franco-Spanish border. WB!”

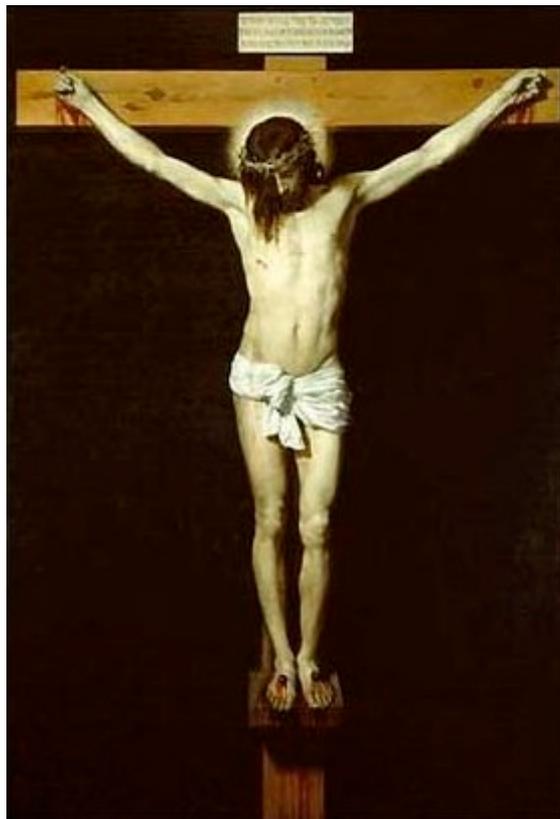
The Editors

SECOND CIRCULAR / UPDATED WHENEVER

# RECONNAISSANCE: HARVESTING THE 20TH CENTURY

SIGNS OF /S/OME-THING ELSE  
THE COMPLEAT MISCELLANY

FELLOW TRAVELERS' ADVISORY: The theme for this edition of HARVESTING THE 20TH CENTURY is "Night-time". You may need to adjust your night-vision goggles to properly view the following *matériel*. This always-already deferred anti-conference, HARVESTING THE 20TH CENTURY, is scheduled to take place inside your head, if you wish, and, at your leisure.



“A wind that blows from the abyss above us  
among our brethren who one time existed  
ripples and shakes the surface of our spirits,  
and, reflected upon this trembling mirror,  
the world, too, trembles.”

– Miguel de Unamuno (1920)

Unamuno reputedly wrote the above passage, from his poem “The Christ of Velázquez”, while staring out the window of a train at the reflection of trees in black puddles of rainwater ... The intense black background of Velázquez’s painting of a crucified and very dead (and therefore very “alive”) Christ (1632) merged in his mind with the blackening political landscape of Spain. His poem, composed of “2,538 lines in free hendecasyllables, divided into eighty nine sections”, took seven years to complete.

It is axiomatic that in these post-cultural times truth is relative ... Relative to what? Rumors persist that Einstein might have got it wrong, that light does not always travel at the same speed ... That there are many times and spaces is obvious to anyone, anywhere, today ... The time of cinema ... The time of photography ... The time of architecture ...

Of these, architecture is the chief “suspect terrain”. It is riddled with the structural games that condition everyday time and space (experience) ... It has NOT always been so. And, it is NEVER actually absolutely or completely so. There are endless examples (moments) that rise against the hegemonic noontide of architectures past and present. In theory, it is in *theory* that architecture remains supple and non-monolithic. It is *in theory*, as well, that the majority of other architectures rise up against Architecture ... It is for this reason that everyday architectures complain everyday *about* theory, sowing endless discontent. On the one hand, it is this incessant warfare between theory and practice (versus a concord between *theory and praxis*) that has brought theory low. On the other hand, it is the excesses of theory that have allowed the critics of theory to get the upper hand. On the other hand, it is, in part, out of complete weariness with high-handed theory that the materialistic, hubristic, and nihilistic (operational) games of post-theory have all but displaced critical discourse, today. On yet another hand, other hands remain, yet, to be played ...

There are works and movements within art and architecture that defy everyday nothingness ... Burle Marx, Noguchi, Smithson, Hejduk, Cucchi, and others seem – today – to be “from the future”. This future is simply a sign of a true Universal some-thing moving within every-thing, versus the faux-universal nothingness enshrined in most received forms of Modernism and almost all forms of neo-modernism (re-tooled modernisms). This futural thing – *another time* – is the inward mark of Some-thing Else. This Some-thing Else looks very, very much like the synthesis of disciplines otherwise known as the *Gesamtkunstwerk*. This irrepressible idea persists despite its late modern-day nemesis *total flow*. Strangely, the *Gesamtkunstwerk* (total work of art) looks very, very much like Landscape + Architecture (+ This + That).

The last best treatment of this idea of landscape as the great, unacknowledged “total work of art” occurred in Allen S. Weiss’ *Unnatural Horizons: Paradox & Contradiction in Landscape Architecture* (1998). Noting Rosalind E. Krauss’ seminal 1978 essay “Sculpture in the Expanded Field” (republished in *The Originality of the Avant-Garde and Other Modernist Myths*), Weiss points out the unusual instance of the dog that didn’t bark; that is, that landscape is the background upon which all of the various operations within this famous mapping operation occur. As such, landscape is the quintessential “as such”, or the foundation (disputed ground) of all aesthetic and critical activities.

SOME COORDINATES: Žižek / Badiou ; Cucchi / Hejduk ; Cacciari / Levinas ; Teige / Gaudí ; Kenna / Strand ; Grass / Sebald ; Sobin / Ripellino ; Schwitters / Artaud ; Struth / Solà-Morales ; Sipek / Gebauer ; Roy / Chomsky ; Stratou / Burgin ; Tarkovsky / Godard ; Burle Marx / Holl ; Isozaki / Arakawa & Gins ; Gaultier / Argento ; Eisenman / Nouvel ; Zumthor / Abraham ; Greenaway / Mangano-Ovalle ; Richter / Turrell ; Koudelka / Sudek ; Smithson / Finlay ; Taylor / FOA ; Pallasmaa / Bergson ; Cartier-Bresson / Gadamer ; Ruff / Kapoor ...

POSTED 01/04/03

## SITE DU JOUR

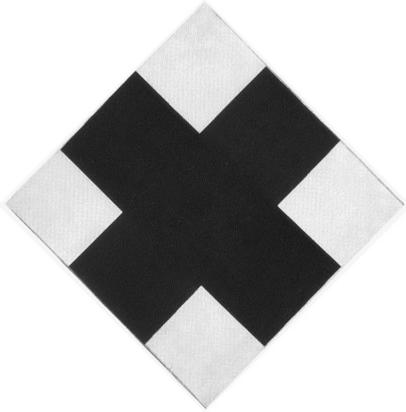
[...]

With the Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe in Berlin (1997-) and the Cultural Center for Santiago de Compostela in Spain (1999-), Peter Eisenman is (arguably) set to produce the first two canonical works of landscape + architecture for the 21st century.

NOTES ON THE DRAWINGS (12/2002) – The Cultural Center for Santiago de Compostela is on a hill not far from the historic (medieval) town center. Eisenman is currently excavating the site and you can see the gestures of the building form in that excavation. The curving canopy of the low volume will be stoneclad with curtain walls facing principal views to the landscape and city. A Cartesian grid will be incised into the undulating roof of the complex. This “gestural” undulation is also a theme in the Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe in Berlin and represents, here and there, some sort of translation to built form of the Bergsonian concept of duration (viz., *élan vital versus / clashing with* abstract time). The complex includes a library, an opera house, and various exhibition spaces, plus, plus, plus ... Two towers designed by John Hejduk are included and are currently under construction. One will be stone-clad and the other glazed. Hejduk was, notably, inspired by the church at Santiago de Compostela, and Eisenman is keeping a promise made to JH by including the Hejduk-designed towers in the composition. The building twists and turns but is morphologically in tune with the site. It is not at all like the tortured syntax of the Wexner Center. It is sublime (for many reasons). As such, it is also portentous, and “from the future”. “Instant canon” means, simply: IT will blow away all pretenders to the mantle of landscape + architecture once and for all.

“In Santiago, my idea was to superpose a Cartesian grid onto the existing, organic, medieval ‘grid,’ and warp or deform them with a topological grid that projects upward. This produces lines of force that were never a part of projective geometry. They mutate in the third dimension. This has a powerful impact on the ground surface. It is a way of dealing with the ground not as a single datum, not as a foundation, not as something stable. It disrupts its iconic value, turning it into an index.” Interview with PE, re Santiago de Compostela (*Architectural Record*, n.d.).

[...]



SUMMARY JUDGMENTS – UPDATED 01/15/03

## PARTING SHOTS

### A REFRACTED HISTORY (SUMMARY) OF THE 20TH CENTURY THE ALWAYS-ALREADY DEFERRED FUSION OF LANDSCAPE + ARCHITECTURE

[...]

“The page contains a single sentence: ‘Underneath it all he knew that one cannot go beyond because there isn’t any.’ The sentence is repeated over and over for the whole length of the page, giving the impression of a wall, of an impediment. There are no periods or commas or margins, a wall, in fact, of words that illustrate the meaning of the sentence, the collision with a wall behind which there is nothing. But towards the bottom and on the right, in one of the sentences the word *any* is missing. A sensitive eye can discover the hole among the bricks, the light that shows through.” – Julio Cortazar (1966)

[...]

### HISTORIOGRAPHY, FORMALISM(S), AND CRITICAL HISTORY

In early structuralism (Roman Jakobson) there exists the theory of the dominant – e.g., the visual arts in the Renaissance, music in Romanticism – to which other forms conform/strive to merge. In modernism the dominant is/was science – and linguistics, architecture, sociology, psychology, etc. attempted to produce a synthetical system outside of/in contradistinction to the humanities. This is the either/or implicit to Wittgenstein’s *Tractatus* (1922), which, of course, he abandoned after the Russellian project collapsed.

In Russian Formalism we see the first moves toward a system of signs freed from semantic content. This is also why Russian Formalism appealed to the neo-rationalist architects of the 1960s and 1970s. The endgame however (Tafuri’s idea of hegemony returning) of formalism was futurism, suprematism, constructivism and functionalism – all more or less new forms of architectural nihilism (see Massimo Cacciari) at first and, then, new forms of architectural dogma. Berdayev’s suggestion (via Dostoievski) that communism failed because it was not spiritual contains a suggestion that the humanities and science are essentially irreconcilable until systems are truly “open” – hence Umberto Eco’s anti-ideological concept of the “open work”. The mechanistic worldview and the organic worldview are two mutually antagonistic and insufficient themes that plague philosophy and architecture. (See José Ortega y Gasset.)

Russian landscape – the silent and primordial figures and gestures lurking in the literature and art of the (lost) Silver Age (1890-1920) – gave way to the slashing, machinic universe of agit-prop avant-gardism. Socialist Realism killed even that latter, mechanistic worldview in favor of heroic images of an always-deferred material and technological utopia. Manfredo Tafuri’s utopic realm of the sphere – versus the fallen world of the labyrinth – was idealism pictorialized. In the rarified realm of “structure”, politics (and ideology) was momentarily bracketed (or pre-prepared) before re-deployment. Hence, Tafuri favored – even against his own better judgment – the meta-logical games of formalism as acts of resistance and criticality (and often, Artaud-like aesthetic cruelty).

Lyricism returned in the 1950s thaw in Russian literature, and it is that spirit, plus an intense inner working of the subject/object dialectic, that animates the cinema of Andrei Tarkovsky. Landscape, in Tarkovsky’s world, is *mise en scène*, and it reflects, always, an inner condition, as does the supporting apparatus of architecture (often ruined architecture) and the things of everyday life. Tarkovsky connects the latter-day Russian aesthetic of the tragic to the pre-Revolution mysticism of Russian lyric poetry and literature.

It might be said that landscape returns *in waves* (in movements through things), versus as an object or set of objects. An ecology of signifying forms is the meta-ecological model underlying signifying chains. New topographies and the renovation of the architectonic aspect of design almost always prefigure a re-deployment (re-surfacing) of repressed content (other possible futures, or always already deferred alternative models). The ideological aspect of the aesthetic (Terry Eagleton) consists of the mask that Tafuri considered the chief characteristic of Gramscian hegemony. In theory, this mask must be removed and the underlying content exposed and transformed to liberate

consciousness (Demetri Porphyrios). Thus, radical formalism comes and goes – it's here, and then *not here* – as the diachronic history of architecture reveals the diachronic nature of signifying systems. Synchronic applications, on the other hand, are typically applied to the critical-historical operations of philosophy, history (art and architectural), and aesthetics.

Curiously, avant-garde modernist and late-modernist art and architecture share an innate anima toward the return of the out-moded (Hal Foster). Paradoxically, late-modern (or neo-modern) art and architectures also permit a selective return of certain forms of avant-garde formalism – the primary example in neo-modernist architecture is the persistence of varieties of purism and architectures of liminalism (the Whites, or the New York Five) and minimalism. Blame Kenneth Frampton for the New York Five, if you will, but their collective position was an act of recovery and renovation of principles buried in the avalanche of generic modernism after Le Corbusier. The so-called corporate modernism of the post-WW2 period led directly to the crisis of the 1960s. Tafuri may have denounced historiography as mythography, but critical history also contains its own mythicizing subject (e.g., the architecture of deferred utopias reaching back to the Renaissance), this other subject perhaps present most powerfully in Jacques Derrida's concept of the Other (*l'autre*). (See Tafuri on Alberti.)

The problem well may be that architecture is implicitly hegemonic in itself – as it almost always denies ground. Its own version of hegemony is built into its reliance on materialization and the technological spirit. It is this latter thing that emanates from within hegemony as a form of positivism that takes no prisoners. This primary urge within architecture is the place where architecture is overwhelmed and appropriated by conventional/instrumentalized forms of everyday hegemony. The age-old architectonic of metaphysics underwrites this doubling of hegemony. Deconstruction is but one way “through the mirror”, though not quite a “way out”.

Machine-age romanticism pervades modern architecture. This is the “machine ate the garden” syndrome. It is prefigured in William Blake and Henry David Thoreau and problematized by Leo Marx and proponents of the industrial sublime. The hegemonic aspects of architecture crush landscape (its most obvious “other”), whenever its own precious autonomy is threatened (and thus, too, Derrida's meditation on the implicit violence in the construction of ipseity versus alterity, self at the expense of not-self, and hence Raimund Abraham's admission that the first act of architecture is to make a mark, inscribing a violent rupture into things). This is most evident in urban environments. This aggressive autonomy issues forth from architecture in defense of its hegemonic status – utopian or otherwise. The avant-garde is complicit in this handing over of architecture to everyday hegemony insofar as it abdicates its responsibility to prevent the collapse of free consciousness into new empty forms (new masks). Clement Greenberg's “Towards a New Laocoön” (1940) preceded the hegemony of abstract expressionism and set the stage for the 1960s revolt of conceptualism and minimalism. G.E. Lessing's *Laocoön* (1766) simply countered the late-Baroque concentration of the arts in de-materialized spiritual form by placing limits on literary and plastic art forms. Heinrich Wölfflin produced an art history without names that essentially took the synchronic approach to reading form to a new level of systemization by way of psychological precepts. His gift was absorbed into Russian Formalism by way of symbolism and then futurism. This abstract approach to mining history came to an apotheosis in structuralism (by way of Ferdinand de Saussure), and was undone in turn by post-structuralism, in which case the diachronic political critique of post-Marxism extracted maximum revenge on the tyranny of the signifier.

Today, we see the advent of a deterministic virtuality (an almost-new vitalism) that impregnates everything with the shimmering sign of nothingness. This nothingness – the ultra-depleted surface of things – is, paradoxically, valorized as the most prescient of conditions, as the late-modern subject is primarily presented as a void (a virtual and virtuous nothingness). This renascent nihilism suggests that architecture has grown weary of its complicity in hegemonic orders and has elected, instead, to play, versus resist. Such a strategy also suggests that the flotsam or debris field of architectural deconstruction has opened up to purely instrumental and ad hoc games played from “inside” architectural production – i.e., within the folds of information and data that produce/impress the architectural image as well as the architectural object. As the shimmering architectures of the de-materialized subject are increasingly realized as *actual* cultural fabric, the anti-ideological ideology of “total flow” might be expected to reveal itself. That this pluralistic, negative ideology has arrived out of a deconstruction of previous ideologies is fully consistent with the nature of the production of architectures. What is curious is the maelstrom of incorporations that occur in the intertextual apparatus of architectural virtuality and de-materialization. As the architectural object moves closer to a field condition in and of itself, a wide array of previously repressed material is folded into the matrix. This new “ecology” is, in fact, a form of psycho-social re-conditioning – and the incorporation of the idea of “landscape”, as figure or fold, suggests a possible way out of the deterministic circle

inscribed in the generation of purely synthetic environments. This way out is *through* the proverbial hole in the wall of the architectural image – the “cracked” and “broken” surface that only appears smooth. A possible re-inscription of depth is in and of itself predisposed to return “landscape + architecture” to its place in the creative construction of consciousness. This concept of depth approaches Martin Heidegger’s “running ahead to meet the past”, and, as a cipher for the production of timeliness, such an approach precludes complete immersion in the detritus of over-determined, collapsing systems and/or the seductive, de-materialized field of flows and vectors. Despite the scintillating presence of surface, at some point the issue of architecture’s ontological ground must be formally re-addressed. Hence architecture’s indexicality, and its implicit role as cultural and post-cultural “archive”.

“The possibility of access to history is grounded in the possibility according to which any specific present understands how to be futural. This is the first principle of all hermeneutics.” – Martin Heidegger

For Derrida, the future itself has a future ... Thus, the wheel rolls on and on, turning over and over, crushing incomplete school after incomplete school. The provisional nature of form-making is revealed in the process – and the essentialist worldview within such processes escapes unscathed to return another day as another attempt to reach the ontological ground beneath our feet and some form of synthesis, or, as Walter Benjamin proclaimed, “The Coming Philosophy”.

[...]

### ARCHITECTURAL HORIZONS: TIME NOT-ITSELF

“On arriving at a location, my first work is an unconscious act of seeing: a walk. Then, slowly, after having decided on a focus and framing my concern, I begin to experience the conscious act of seeing. This is a magic moment in my work, which I compare to a walk in the forest looking for mushrooms. Vision is now completely focused. It sees and looks for only one thing. It is driven to capture one thing again and again with an almost unfulfillable desire. It is then that I begin to wonder whether the building is concealing something I may never be able to capture in its entirety. Can it be that the building has a soul?” – H el ene Binet

Upon disposing of (setting aside) the achingly beautiful photographs of so-called natural landscapes (the Sierra Club idiom) and the glossy, romanticized vernacular images of working landscapes (the National Geographic idiom) – or first and second nature – and circling this same window on the world (photography) in search of something more *timely* (third or “fourth” nature), the image of the subject/object dialectic re-appears through the agency of the putative autonomy of the photographic work of art. (See Aleksandr Rodchenko, Edward Steichen/Alfred Stieglitz, Henri Cartier-Bresson, Bernd and Hilla Becher, Josef Koudelka.)

The sense of time not itself provided in Heidegger’s 1924 lecture “The Concept of Time” pushes toward the foreground in the various worldviews contained in photography – whether the socio-politically charged works of Magnum or the extreme, aesthetic ambient landscapes of Karl Blossfeldt, Michael Kenna, Geoffrey James, Balthazar Korab, plus architectural and fashion photography in general. Closer to the origins of modern photography, the work of Steichen, Walker Evans, Rodchenko, Man Ray, Josef Sudek, et al. picture the * elan vital* (Roger Caillois’ inertia of the * elan vital*) – the inner history – of photographic subjectivity through an apparent objective apparatus; an apparatus that proves in the end to be mythic, versus empirical. These early progenitors of the photographic aesthetic meld the expressionist, constructivist, and cubist affects of an inquiry into form and the interplay of object and field, the latter most often portrayed as shadow or tenebrous void out of which emerge the forms of life (often as vestige, phantom, and/or fragment) imbued with momentary auratic, if not symbolic, verisimilitude, only to fade into the fixity of the frozen image. Hence two forms of darkness are suggested ...

In architectural photography (Sudek, Ezra Stoller, Julius Shulman, Marc Llimargas, or H el ene Binet) and fashion photography (Helmut Newton, Richard Avedon, Steven Meisel, Juergen Teller, Nick Knight), the concept of trace and vestige moves to a new level of significance, productivity, and seductivity in the suggestive, yet aborted, narrative content, landscape (urban and otherwise) often providing a telltale (palpable) intonation or adumbrative depth suggesting a deferred grounding of abstract (de-materialized) desire in consumption, appropriation, expropriation, and photogenic simulation; i.e., various forms of re-appropriation. That such aesthetic precepts have further burrowed their way forth in the present-day image of architecture through computer-generated simulations is, therefore, no surprise.

In the photographic expropriation of landscape, in and of itself, the image of constructed ground (space) – whether gardens, cities, parks, cemeteries, airports, etc. – supports subtle but persistent themes consistent with the production of an elective, versus enforced, hegemony. This surplus hegemony is elective insofar as such circumstances are either avoidable or generally out of reach. The nature of time, as relative to environments and variable milieux, and as depicted in an imagery that selectively edits/represents cultural values (currents) and implicit historicity (timeliness), or that which asks “How?”, frames and enhances the authorized and unauthorized perceptions of cultural conditioning; viz., the emptiness of the typical modern architectural image is an elective minimalism as are the polished products of the sensuous and seductive editorial pages of glossy fashion magazines that often appropriate and “re-style” classic, baroque, and modern landscape gardens as *mise en scène* supporting the dream-state of haute-couture fashion and design (e.g., the editorial pages of *Vogue*). Indeed, such fashion statements operate within the world of photography as excess (a type of hallucination) glorifying the scenographic and privileged places and attitudes (*modus vivendi*) identified as *de luxe* and or elite in the rarified upper reaches of society, a class-conscious production of cultural identity. In turn, a titillating noirish under-/over-world is suggested in the extreme and phantasmatic imagery that is folded into such normative fashion pages (e.g., Helmut Newton and Juergen Teller) as an image of extravagance, decadence, and an excess of “success” (freedom through mock bondage). This latter imagery substantiates the ineluctable charisma of the urban chic and is present in diverse forms, including the presentation graphics of present-day architects and landscape architects (per the Surrealists, a colonizing of the unconscious mechanisms of desire).

The ageless, immortal landscape that stands just outside this frame (process) of forceful or frivolous “acculturation”, as a “timelessness” within timeliness, in turn, supports the indeterminate nature of the authorized/unauthorized activities of the elite, the voyeur, the flaneur, the aesthete, the connoisseur, and the so-called cognoscenti (fashionisti) – an explicit confrontation/clash of the microcosmic, iconoclastic architectures of the heterogeneous with those of the everyday world of the hoi polloi. The macrocosmic image – the wide world – often is deployed as a spectral other and supports a synoptic, panoptic return to preternatural and natural vectors of consciousness ostensibly outside historical time and its proscribed, constructed ground. Landscapes of the primordial ground condition and re-insinuate the elemental dialectic of self and ground through a social and aesthetic reductionism to primitive or unalloyed terms consistent with the concept of wilderness and primitivity. (Hence Derrida’s and deconstruction’s attempt to forestall the re-naturalization of blind metaphysical assumptions and precepts.) The structural and operational terms of such groundings are built upon the innate aesthetic allure of things archaic and/or of a radically contingent “nature”. “Landscape + architecture” appears, then, as ever, suspended in the void between Pascal’s two infinities, suggesting, in turn, the primary somatic substance within all architectures.

The production of time (timeliness) – as time has no abstract reality, as such, other than the neutral concept of timelessness – is as often a surplus as an intentional affect of design. The promenade (*architecturale* and *cinématique*), the cemetery or park as heterotopia (see Michel Foucault), the cacophonous urban bazaar and street, the implied orthodoxy of certain styles and modes of structural landscape – historical (diachronic) and trans-historical (synchronic), or “isms” of various orders – all effectively produce fictionalized forms of time bound up within a system of inferences and discursive structures that are both concealed and masked (see Tafuri, Fredric Jameson, and Mike Davis), as all hegemonic systems construct a surface to which things are projected. In the latter case – e.g., in the synchronic plenitude of avant-garde formalisms – much modernist landscape is complicit in the spurious conflating of the timeless and the timely, primarily through an extension of seriality and cinematic aesthetic strategies inconsistent with unmasking conventions and undermining the everyday (default) mode of the production of time and space. It is the putative production of authenticity that motivates the avant-garde (“every new age requires new forms”), through the agency of *Zeitgeist* or episteme, while almost always the operative forms are re-absorbed into a new conformity. The bricolage of post-modern landscape and architecture, or the pop and minimalist landscapes of the 1980s avant-garde, is, thereby, directly implicated in the demotion of landscape architecture to a type of brinkmanship, versus an authentic re-writing of the codes of everydayness. This denial takes both the form of a-historical games and faux avant-garde agitation (art-house provocations, installation art, etc.). It is the polar opposite of the utilitarian and pragmatic (often conservative and reactionary) modes utilized by the status quo. In most cases the faux avant-garde and the pragmatic are both facile and instrumentalized representations of landscape as surface, intentionally glossing or bracketing cultural and intellectual depth, troublesome and pernicious forms of ideology, and introducing a type of determinism by way of formalizing contingent systems. In other words, the “How?” is endlessly supplanted by “What?”.

The legendary fixity of images (see Vítězslav Nezval and Yeats, both nominally Symbolists) is a relatively ancient problem in aesthetics, while the structural and contingent gestures of design and representation betray or conceal this concept, insofar as they produce a product or condition, versus a continuum. In the case of the production of a continuum, time is portrayed through a dynamic, yet temporal, synthesis (syrrhesis) of structural and ambient forces – an avant-ecology of signifying factors (images, signs, forms, functions) that imply, as well as access, a vast otherness within, beyond, above, or below the constructed ground of image/place and image/time. Rote fixity collapses under such immense pressures and time opens up to other times; to other horizons, the nature of time itself (implied historicity) forced to the foreground or gesturing wildly in the background. In-between, almost always, remains the subject (the proverbial, metaphysical, irreducible middle-ground) situated at the crossroads of vertical and horizontal axes, x, y, z (the conventional coordinates of constructed space) replaced by “fourth” nature – “fourth” nature being the very image of being, a sublime portent for the cipher of time not itself, or time as the provisional field for the non-ideological unity of things. Here the specter of the time-crucified subject looms large against the primordial darkness of the archaic imaginary (an apparently archaic other-worldliness and/or nothingness as ur-ground).

[...]

### THE FUSION THING: “TOTAL FLOW” OR NOTHINGNESS?

“There exist *mute* edifices – constructions and lodgings; and there exist edifices that speak; but there are others still – and they are the most rare – which *sing*.” – Massimo Cacciari

The historical, diachronic interplay of “landscape + architecture” in modern architectural production is/was at times a visionary *pas de deux*, while at other times an anti-visionary *danse macabre* (*danse mécanique*). In the latter case, landscape (milieu, ambiance, ground) is eclipsed and/or flattened in the strenuous and sometimes idealistic (utopian) siege represented by high-borne modernist formalisms (technocratic, positivist, pragmatic, and programmatic). In such scenarios, landscape became an almost nothing, not by design, but by proscription, elimination, and/or abstraction. In this essentialist project, landscape became de-natured space, returning only later as “ground”.

In the somewhat delicate, often lyrical, case of the *pas de deux*, landscape is situated at the elective nexus of interpenetrating systems (architectonic and environmental fields), as intermediate condition, or simply noted, in passing, as a surplus value incorporated into the development of the architectural object by juxtaposition. The extension of architectural elements into the near landscape in the work of Frank Lloyd Wright, Alvar Aalto, or Carlo Scarpa, and the penetration of the building by so-called free-flowing or layered space suggests the classical disposition of positive and negative, solid and void (i.e., topology), and the articulation (if not transformation) of architectural forms to fully synthetic forms in the rare instances when landscape and site impregnate architecture with a prescient, auratic “interiority” and/or formal radiance that plays out in an explicit synthesis of verticality and horizontality – as in early modernist villas – thereby picturing the contingent, material conditions for architecture’s emergence. The most immaterial aspects of ambient environmental factors – the play of light and shadow – often provide architecture with an archaic uncanniness (an elemental timeliness) that is purely ephemeral and, most usually, unintended (purely incidental). Tadao Ando and Steven Holl are masters of this poetic/phenomenological genre, while others (Frank O. Gehry) simply accept the inevitable “patina” of building marked by time. The mutable materiality of architecture supported this embrace of the ambient, as glass curtain walls and metal cladding became ever more common and de-materializations occurred in the genre, noted explicitly by MoMA’s 1995-1996 exhibition “Light Construction”. Dan Graham’s mirrored pavilions play wonderfully with this omniscient quality of glass, doubling the field of vision such that the very field of representation breaks down into a prismatic and often kaleidoscopic universe of shards, filters, and superimpositions – the effect entirely dependent on the setting of the object in the landscape. This latter de-materialization invokes the concept of “total flow” and the tendency toward objectifying surface at the expense of depth.

Outside of this cyclic, accidental, and discontinuous emergence of sublimated aspects of architecture’s implicit ground, a third order of symbolization and abstraction is to be found that represents a preliminary and provisional synthesis of subject/object relations – i.e., most often a figurative symbiosis built *into form* and described as the gestural or sublime fusion of “form” and “content” in sculpture and the hybridized field of land art, most especially, where discursive orders are stripped away and an elemental, generative, and formal essence presses forward. In the case of art, and its near-automatic assumption of conceptual autonomy, the works of Isamu Noguchi and Robert

Smithson, plus the avalanche of land-art inspired landscape architecture after the 1960s, re-present the archaic and liminal nature of almost-first nature (perhaps “fourth” nature) through hyper-sensual manipulations of form and a presentiment, if not an acclamation, of pre-linguistic forms and seminal structural operations, versus aspects of full-blown discourse or discursivity (the full-fledged signifying agency given to language games proper). “Here”, timeliness is reduced to an iconic presence tipping inexorably toward absence (timelessness). These liminal measures most often take the form of excavations or insertions (interventions) that at the least pretend to re-write the codes of occupying or mapping presence. This type of “deep-sea diving” comes in many forms and is not limited to the delineation of art-in-the-landscape, or art-as-landscape. The concise, inward-driven nature of such expression is primarily poetic and is found in all of the arts. This archaic *jouissance* deliberately invokes the ontological ground as a place “before” – *pre-existent to* – the emergence of the imaginary (the phantasmatic world of doubled and/or tripled ir-realities) and the Symbolic (the so-called fallen world of the abject signifier). These figures play in the dust of the Self, seemingly before the emergence of the ego (and super ego). Such fictive gestures also act as analogs for the extreme interiority of works of art and architecture prior to their deployment as cultural signs and tropes (figures of speech and thought). In the process of stripping away the detritus of signifying chains (ossified and/or fossilized modes of expression and discourse), such maneuvers circle the same ground repeatedly. The eventual collapse of the operative figures of near-speech simply occurs as the work vanishes into the annals of art or architectural history. The dissolution of many of Michael Heizer’s and Smithson’s remote works matters hardly at all given that they were intentionally situated in a mythicized “wilderness” as a strategic critique of the production of modern art and the machinations of the artworld. Thus, to thoroughly work through fragments, after Derrida, is often a more profound recovery of the spirit of a work (a time) than to dive into the entire output of an author. Perhaps here is Walter Benjamin’s fascination with ruins, as well as his desire to construct a text entirely from quotations (as in the case of the unfinished *Passagenwerk*).

From 1930 to 1960, the time of the emergence of high modern architecture (and the International Style), landscape was effectively subjugated by the ordeal/onslaught of hyper-structural and technocratic instrumentalities – cultural, political, economic, and otherwise. The image of techno-utopian architecture and the architect as glossy man accompanied the last hurrah for pseudo-messianic modernism. The high architectonic was at best complemented by neutral ground/landscape (often tawdry “ground”), though *most often* ground/landscape was “locked away” in the spatial assault of low-formalist and high-functionalist orthogonal systems – or, super functionalism. The amalgam that came to be known as corporate modernism, and which was typified by Mies van der Rohe’s transcendent glass office buildings (set upon pristine podiums), is/was, according to Cacciari and Josep Quetglas, the pure reification and *secularization* of the certain abstracted aspects of sacral architectures past. This “classicism” (or classic modernism) masked the origins of the modernist experiment in socially self-conscious experiments in formmaking – e.g., Mies’ problematical Berlin period – and became hypostatized in the omniscient and omnivorous over-production of sterile corporate architectures. Most mid-century modern landscape architecture, following suit, adopted the dominant visual code of geometricism and the architectonic logic of *plan libre* as the spirit of the age, overthrowing the last vestiges of Romanticism, post-Romanticism, and the late-Olmstedian picturesque. The latter continued well into the mid-1900s transposed into the form of national parks and interstate transportation systems. In the case of the exemplars of modern landscape architecture (e.g., Dan Kiley, Garrett Eckbo, Christopher Tunnard, Hideo Sasaki, and Peter Walker), an attendant minimalism (expressed in rampant seriality and typological reduction) secured the accommodation of landscape to architecture, albeit through subjugation and abstraction. Antoni Gaudí, Roberto Burle Marx, and Luis Barragán, on the other hand, appear to represent unique expressions of critical regionalism before it was characterized as such by Kenneth Frampton.

[Bracketed, herein, is the entire section of faux-populist, pop, and vernacular architectures from theorists such as Reyner Banham, Robert Venturi, Bernard Rudofsky, J.B. Jackson, and Christopher Alexander, to the late-modern syncretism of “everyday” and new-urbanist fantasies. In the case of Banham, machine-age romanticism had its Second Coming. In the case of New Urbanism, typologically driven post-modernism returned in the form of an elective code. The classicizing aspects of New Urbanism, however reductive, remained open enough to absorb the experimental alienated architecture of Aldo Rossi as well as certain aspects of the critique of urbanism associated with the *Tendenza* and European neo-rationalism.]

After the 1960s, as the hegemony of abstract planning and object-oriented modern architecture increasingly fell into disarray (and disrespect), various alternative visions emerged alongside post-modernism (after 1968) both reviving and re-negotiating the language of generic historical form and the geometric and material expressions of late-modernity – modernity being measured, to paraphrase Jacques Lacan, “from the Renaissance to the so-called zenith

of the 20th century”. In the 1980s, as the last signs of the ecological and vernacular movements of the 1970s faded or were absorbed into a new artistic vision of landscape architecture (including expropriated affects of land art), a new wave of design speculation, which premiated or gave equal merit to ground, submerged the last vestiges of high (mid-century) modernism and the ubiquity of the “neo-baroque” landscapes of corporate campuses and urban entourage (Walker’s “everything three meters apart”). Rote geometricism continued as a default methodology in landscape urbanism, especially in the case of 1980s urban projects that sought to revitalize the devastated economic prospects of the city center. The waterfront “festival marketplace” became the new re-urban model, ending/peaking – *thankfully* – with Battery Park City in the late-1980s.

In landscape architecture various neo-modernist schools attempted a revival of geometricism, but without the astringent and therapeutic measures of pure (and *grave*) formalism, as was occurring in architecture, while post-modern schools evolved toward a neo-minimalist, surrealist, or neo-mannerist mode of representation. Deconstructivist-inspired landscape urbanism appeared as figurative “anti-storyboards” in the 1980s and 1990s, primarily in the guise of international design competitions (see Berlin after 1989). Narratology and linguistics permeated the “expanded field” (Rosalind E. Krauss’ term) inherited from the 1960s, but failed to secure the poetic task of re-writing the foundational language common to “landscape + architecture”. Rather than search for primordial, pre-linguistic analogs in design languages, linguistics was applied in a very literal, superficial, and artificial manner as “reading and writing” the landscape (a prosaic, somewhat reactionary attempt to imbue landscape with narrative power and suspect “aura”). As “landscape + architecture” attempted to re-align the dysfunctional and infrastructural contingencies of the modern city through landscape urbanism, late-modernism also clashed with New Urbanism. “Landscape + architecture” fell into vogue, however, only insofar as the type and scale of projects and commissions required the collaboration of multiple disciplines and aesthetic considerations and/or the agency of computer-generated modeling software promoted convergence (see Parc Downsvue Park). This nascent order only tangentially embraced the artistic *jouissance* of reascent forms of formalism – that always-estranged and strange dialectical/synthetic hybridization of milieu and anti-milieu that returns at times of cultural crisis. The deterministic and materialistic (anti-humanistic) systems of planning which evolved from Ian McHarg’s system of mapping (planning) produced a new wave characterized by an obsession with *terrain vague* and junk space, while new ecological imperatives were advanced in the necessary re-appropriation of post-industrial wastelands, urban and ex-urban. This latter movement, post-McHarg, returned to landscape the dynamic instrumentalities of process-driven design, while adding wholly new representational systems and blurring/obscuring relative scales and normative graphic conventions. Montage and mapping were combined to produce a new avant-garde sensibility, even though much of the intellectual rigor of the Dadaist-inspired idiom was off-loaded or simply repressed after initial gestures toward a new anti-aesthetic (as rebellion).

Today, following this historical *mélange* of schools and movements, the always already deferred synthesis/syrrhesis of “landscape + architecture” – that which resides uneasily in the interstices of all instrumentalized and discriminatory systems and/or fields, and that which has been problematized as “in-betweenness” – may be seen exacting revenge in the form of an irruptive other-worldliness in the operations of various latter-day conceptual artists (the truly irrepressible avant-gardists). This other-worldliness (which is radically contingent versus transcendental) comes to expression in the form of the attempt to bring/harness the figures and forces (gestures) of things and milieux – an ambient intellectual and environmental syrrhesis (flowing together) – that counters cyclical reification, outright expropriation, and rote appropriation. As K. Michael Hays has recently pointed out in *Perspecta* 32 (“Resurfacing Modernism”), the late-1990s emphasis on flows (datascapes, vectors, etc.) in mostly virtual architectures might, in itself, end in a return to a mere emphasis on imagology and surface without the induction of the intellectual coordinates that support critical-historical consciousness. Virtuality is, after all, the present-day reified realm of the imaginary. To prevent this collapse, the poetic, intertextual, and the extreme formalistic gestures harvested from structuralism and post-structuralism must be re-visited. This quest to bring ambient cultural and natural forces to play within the axes of three-dimensional space – to produce the near-total work of art – stands astride the conflicting claims of architecture to be both an art and a science. It is in the former instance, in architecture as a hyper-conscious (self-conscious and critical) art, that the more profound exemplifications of “landscape + architecture” will be found. Everything else will proceed per usual.

An “elective” synthesis of “landscape + architecture” will be accomplished in the future, as it has always been accomplished in the past, in the singular work of art. The forms and types of this “near-total work of art” are variegated and not reducible to landscape or architecture, but, instead, open onto a vast, heterogeneous field that is

symptomatic of the human condition; that field of subjective topographies comprised of the fundamental unanswerable questions and paradoxes of worldliness and timeliness.

[...]

GK (October 2002)

## POSTSCRIPTS

“For there a fatal image grows / That the stormy night receives, / Roots half hidden under snows, / Broken boughs and blackened leaves.” – William Butler Yeats

## MIXED METAPHORS

And, to exploit an ancient metaphor, if one wants to water a tree, it is necessary to concentrate one’s efforts on the roots versus the leaves, branches, and trunk. Mixing metaphors, *pace* Yeats, it may also be useful to consider the image of the mirror, and its problematic double nature. On one side is the so-called objective world endlessly reflected in the tain, while the image or representation is what is actually perceived. That everything is “backwards” in a mirror is the essence/origin of the task of critical inquiry. To go “into the mirror” or “through the looking glass” implies passing a threshold and entering another world. This other world lies beyond the image, and beyond the tain, wherein it is said a monster resides guarding the passage to the other side. (See Rodolphe Gasché on Derrida, in *The Tain of the Mirror*, 1996.) The other side is, in effect, the source of the mirror itself and the world. It is “there” that the principles and archetypal conditions of experience of the world are to be found. “There”, imagination, subjectivity, and poetics converge, while looking back one sees the Real through the newly transparent agency of the absent mirror.

## ULTRA-MODERNE (NE PLUS ULTRA)

When pushed up against the wall, we will almost always be faced with the question, “What are the limits of representation and language?” This near-metaphysical question mark hangs over all cultural production, including (especially) “landscape + architecture”.

There is no singular answer.

Faced with the deterministic, nihilistic machinations of forms disconnected from a transcendent signifier (emptied of real/irreal content, or inverted, twisted, and contorted such that this “content” is rendered meaningless) – the legacy of structuralism/post-structuralism (ultra-modernity) – one can finally fathom (sound) Artaud’s condemnation of language as the dominant mode of expression in theater, and approach his concept of *mise en scène*, or everything else that may, potentially, substitute for (supplement) the poverty of depleted forms. *Mise en scène*, as it were, represents another field – albeit, an infinitely expandable field of things that “cantilever” into presence from the void of absence.

This leads straight to the possibility of an ecology of signifying subjects (versus objects), each one, *pace* Leibniz, reflecting the other and inflecting (creating) time itself. This also leads straight to Levinas’ obsession with death as the ultimate experience of time through negation. (See Derrida’s *The Gift of Death*, 1996.) It might be inferred that this “end” as catastrophic “beginning” is, in fact, the most extreme occasion in which to render the veil of representations null and void – yet, as a gesture toward recovery of presence (depth) versus absence.

The entire debris field of depleted representation and language as an autonomous, almost malicious (pernicious) force field then collapses into “some-thing else” – that some-thing else is indicated in the mute and minute particulars of an atomistic (monadistic) universe of discrete subjects, endlessly mirroring one another, “signaling through the flames” (per Artaud), and animated by agencies that operate “beyond the frame” of representation and before/within language. Thus, “immodernity” (or the always already *futural* nature of representations) conditions things in a temporal locus (the present-present) by way of a future that never arrives because it is already present.

N.B.: A version of this essay appeared in *CounterPunch* (November 2, 2002)

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## Q & A: INTERVIEW WITH AVENARIUS

[...]

Dr. Prof. Ing. I.M. Avenarius is a virtually unknown, unlicensed landscape architect barely living in New York City. He met with the editors of the ARCHIVE-GROTTO at an undisclosed location in Manhattan in early February 2003 for a brief discussion of Landscape + Architecture: The Fusion Thing, a top-secret project often referred to by people in the know as “The Manhattan Project” .

[...]

### DANCING TREE

Q: Dr. Prof. Ing. I.M. Avenarius, how would you characterize your work? A: Post-schizo-neurotic, neo-late-surrealist. Q: Not post-neo-late, neurotic romanticist? A: Been there, done that. Q: What would you like to be in your next lifetime? A: A dancing tree. Q: Have you ever regretted anything in your current lifetime? A: Yes, the words “landscape architecture”. Q: Do you see a therapist? A: No. Where? Q: Is it true that your name is actually a confabulation of several different literary affectations? A: I am all literary affectations. Q: What’s your favorite poem, then? A: After Shakespeare’s “song” in *Cymbeline*, “Golden lads and girls all must / As chimney-sweepers, come to dust”, it’s the “Song of Wandering Aengus” by Yeats. Q: Can you recite it for us? A: Sure, why not?

*I went out to the hazel wood,/ Because a fire was in my head,/ And cut and peeled a hazel wand,/ And hooked a berry to a thread;  
And when white moths were on the wing,/ And moth-like stars were flickering out,/ I dropped the berry in a stream/  
And caught a little silver trout.*

*When I had laid it on the floor/ I went to blow the fire aflame,/ But something rustled on the floor,/ And some one called me by my name:/ It had become a glimmering girl/ With apple blossom in her hair/ Who called me by my name and ran/  
And faded through the brightening air*

*Though I am old with wandering/ Through hollow lands and hilly lands,/ I will find out where she has gone,/ And kiss her lips and take her hands;/ And walk among long dappled grass,/ And pluck till time and times are done/ The silver apples of the moon,/ The golden apples of the sun*

Q: “Did you ever hear about, did you ever hear about Wordsworth and Coleridge?” A: Yes. “They were smokin’ up in Kendal. By the lakeside.” Q: Is it true that you recently gave a lecture at OSU / SOA without identifying any of the slides you showed? A: Yes, but I was appearing under an assumed name. Q: What was the topic of your presentation? A: I’m not sure. Q: Does anyone know? A: Most likely not.

### SUSPECT TERRAIN

Q: Questioning your past seems to lead into the interminable moraine of unsubstantiated speculation. Is it correct that you once lived in Maine? A: Correct. I lived on the coast of Maine in the go-go 1980s.

Q: Were you by any chance reading any of the following at this time: 1/ Jean-Jacques Rousseau; 2/ Henry David Thoreau; or 3/ Martin Heidegger? A: No. I was reading Emerson though. And Thomas Merton. I only started to read Heidegger after acquiring a taste for crypto-poetic neologisms while at Cornell. Q: What was the origin of this acquired taste? A: I found it necessary to invent a pseudo-sublime language to explain the thing otherwise known as landscape architecture.

Q: Is it true that at the OSU lecture you characterized architecture as “hegemonic”? A: I intended to avoid that word entirely but they were asking for it. I apologized, however, for mentioning Deleuze and I never mentioned Heidegger by name although I did use the term “always already” several times.

## NEW YORK, NEW YORK, NEW YORK

Q: What's the future of New York City? Isn't it almost-already irrelevant now as a locus of avant-garde culture? A: The only possible future for NYC is as a City-State. Otherwise, it is all but over. The City needs to shrug off the rest of the State and become autonomous. Unfortunately, if this happened it would also dump the three main outer boroughs. New York is synonymous anyway with Manhattan.

Q: You have called Manhattan, in the past, "New York, New York, New York"! Don't you think that is gilding the lily? And you say "dump the three main outer boroughs". What about the fourth? A: Manhattan is where all the money, power, and prestige is. That is why a City-State – not unlike Venice of old, or Hong Kong today – makes sense. The problem is the boroughs. They get shafted all the time anyway and they would be unceremoniously dumped, except for Staten Island, which wants out anyway. NYC is doomed to irrelevance until it comes to terms with the evasion of almost everything by the elite. I say tax them and see if they really run away like they're always threatening to do. The big corporate entities always threaten to move to New Jersey if the mayor suggests taxing them. Instead, they get endless subsidies. This includes the no-good NGOs – cultural and otherwise. As a City-State, NYC could also institute tourism quotas, limiting the number of visitors to the city like Venice. Some days the city is unbearable. SoHo is now a large shopping mall and Midtown around Fifth and 57th is simply impassable. The city belongs to those who live and work there, not guests or corporate commuters from Connecticut, New Jersey, and Upstate. Unfortunately, the current regime believes the opposite. Q: Would you run for mayor? A: No. Instead, I'd nominate Massimo Cacciari for mayor. Q: Is he available? A: I doubt it.

## THE GOAT TRACK

Q: You have lately formulated something called "Toward 'S': The Goat Track". What is this? A: It's "Toward 'S': The Goat Track". Q: Yes, okay. But what does it mean? A: I have no idea. Q: Then why are you pursuing it? A: It seems so – um – desirable. Q: In what sense? A: In every sense. In the best sense. Q: But what is "S"? A: "S" = Some-thing Else. Q: Is that hyphen really necessary? A: Yes and No. Q: What else might "S" indicate? A: Perhaps "slippery". Q: Perhaps? I see you have no intention of being serious. Isn't this exactly the problem? A: Not at all. The pursuit of the Sublime Some-thing Else requires negotiating the Slippery Slope of rhetoric and What Have You. Q: What's this "What Have You"? A: Nothing much at all. Q: Is this "nothing much at all" not some-thing after all? A: Sure. Q: And is it not actually the so-called sublime subject of "S"? A: Exactly. Q: So, why "The Goat Track"? A: 2003 is the Year of the Goat.

Q: I've heard you're working on something called "Black and Blue". A: Yes, it's an essay on L + A: The New Black, or L + A: The True Blue. Q: Does it contain "S" words? A: Yes, certainly. Q: And this is related to "Red, Green, Blue"? A: You mean the syllabus for an unteachable seminar at an unnamed architecture school? Q: Yes. What's the relationship? A: It's a kind of new theory of color. Red = formalism. Green = ecology. Blue = philosophy and cultural poetics. The amalgam RGB = Synthesis. Q: What's cultural poetics? A: The art of poetical culture. Q: Do you always wear black? A: No. Sometimes I wear black and blue. Q: Is that some sort of statement? A: You mean fashion statement? Q: I mean, is it a cultural-poetic statement vis-à-vis L + A? A: Almost definitely.

Q: On a lighter note, why the prescription blue sunglasses? A: I was on the subway in Prague two years ago and there was this lassie with prescription blue sunglasses. I made a mental note to find some when I returned to NYC. She was stunning. I've always had a subsidiary interest in the architecture-fashion fusion thing insofar as it adds a little spice to an otherwise dreary world. Q: You mean the design world? A: I mean the otherwise, everyday dreary world, which includes the so-called design world. Beauty is generally a taboo subject, today, except as a fashion accessory. Q: Where'd you find them? A: At Robert Marc Opticians. The frames are Freudenhau. Q: Is that a plug? A: Yes, my interest in the architecture-fashion fusion thing is two percent on the dollar. Q: So, you get your fashion cues from pretty young things on the subway? A: Sometimes. When I'm really, really bored I'll pick up a copy of Italian *Vogue*. Q: You read / speak Italian? A: I read the pictures. I also get all my news by reading the tabloids over the shoulder of people on the subway. There's really no need to buy newspapers. Q: Do you have a most embarrassing moment? A: Yes. Recently I discovered that I had a shoulder-length ear hair and no one bothered to tell me. Q: What if it had been a nose hair? A: I would have caught that.

Q: Why'd you decide to study landscape architecture? A: I was in Scotland in 1985 (at the Royal Botanic Garden

Edinburgh) and taking care of two exhibition glasshouses full of tropical plants. When October rolled around, and the sun rose at 9 in the morning, I had an epiphany of sorts: i.e., “Better to get out of here”. I returned to the US and looked at L.A. programs. I also met some L.A. students from the University of Edinburgh while at the RBGE. I was spooked by the amenity horticulture thing in the UK, with its green wellies and felt coat with plastic shoulders. If you tried to cross the street wearing that stuff, cars would intentionally try to run you down. So I applied to two schools – Harvard GSD and Cornell – and went to the Portland School of Art [now known as the Maine College of Art, or MeCA] to study architectural design in the meantime. I went to Harvard for an open house and MVV was master of ceremonies. He made some disparaging remarks about “landscape architects who want to save the world” and I felt nauseous. Fortunately, I was turned down by the GSD and went to Cornell. Harvard was then admitting people with credentials in nouvelle cuisine to offset those it admitted who wanted to “save the world”. Q: Do you want to save the world? A: Sure, why not. But I’m afraid it’s already lost, or always-already lost.

## AIR RIGHTS

Q: I’ve heard that you live on air. A: Is that a question? Q: Yes. How do you do that? A: I breath in and I breath out about 3,600 times an hour. Air is still free. Q: You don’t want to talk about it? A: What for? I recently saw the Liv Ullmann-directed-Bergman-written film *Faithless* [*Infidèle*, 2000] and one of the protagonists had \$400,000.00 in debt. It made me feel better. Q: But life is not a film. A: Sometimes it is. Q: If it were, what film would you live in? A: Probably Tarkovsky’s *Mirror* [1974]. I get goosebumps when I see that film, and I’ve seen it several times. In fact, I own it and watch it whenever I want to leave the planet. Q: Isn’t that a semi-tragic film? And why in the world would you want to inhabit a semi-tragic film? A: All the best films are tragedies. It’s the human condition. The aforementioned Ullmann-Bergman film was not a tragedy so much as a farce. The gods couldn’t possibly have cared about those three self-absorbed artistes and their self-inflicted journey to Hell. Q: That’s a bit much. Are you saying tragedy requires that the gods care about what’s going on? A: Of course. Q: I sense here that you are about to drop references to all the books on tragedy from Nietzsche to Eagleton. If so, don’t bother. A: You skipped Walter Benjamin. Q: It was implied. A: Eagleton is almost god-like. Q: Thus he cares about the idea of the tragic? A: I’d say so.

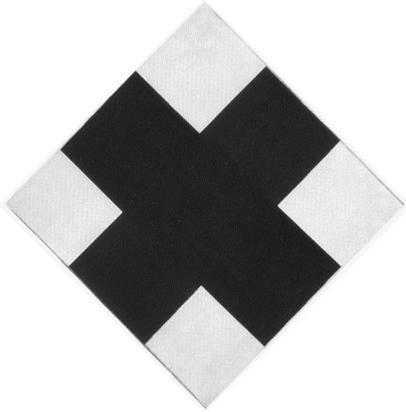
## THE SHADOWY, THE RECONDITE, ETC.

Q: In your unpublishable essay “Moravian Shadows” you rhapsodize the shadowy, the recondite, and the obscure. Why? A: I like the shadowy, the recondite, and the obscure. Q: But isn’t that just a bit facetious? A: No. The shadowy is where all the best things occur. In Goethe’s color theory, the shadowy is the source of color. To Hell with Newton. Q: And Descartes? A: He’s already there.

Q: And Newton is not? A: No. The apple is always-already falling on his head. Q: I suspect your frequent references to Pascal are a way of taking a swipe at Descartes. Is that so? A: Sure. Descartes was the beginning of the end. Q: But doesn’t one of your heroes – Slavoj Žižek – constantly refer back to the Cartesian subject? A: Yeah, he does. But he’s also constantly trying to resuscitate Lenin. It’s all a game. Afterall, Žižek reviews non-existent books and he once wrote a critique of Rossellini’s films without ever having seen any of them. Q: Is Žižek almost god-like? A: Almost. Q: Is God a neo-Marxist? A: It would seem that the god-like are almost always neo-Marxists or Socialists. But I think Dostoevski had it right when he said the Russian revolution failed because it was not spiritual. Neo-Marxists can be god-like, but eventually the ideology has to be transformed into the critical-poetical, sublime *je ne sais quoi*. Q: What’s that? A: I don’t know. But Bachelard had it, Pérez-Gómez has it, Barthes had it, Tafuri had it, Cacciari has it, Agamben has it. Q: Is it a disease? A: Quite probably. But it will cure almost anything that ails you. Q: Can it cure misanthropy or melancholy? A: Those are the last temptations. They require grace to overcome. Q: You believe in grace? A: Yes. Especially if she’s wearing Jean-Paul Gaultier.

Q: Lastly, speaking of literary affectations, I understand the name Avenarius comes from Milan Kundera’s book *Immortality*. Is that the case? A: I can neither confirm nor deny this rumor. I suggest that you read the book.

The Editors



FLÈCHES D'AMOUR – UPDATED WHENEVER

## SURRATIONALISME

### YET ANOTHER “S” WORD

[...]

“I’m higher than the world / And my head is in a swirl ... / Higher in my mind / I’m gonna leave these blues behind / And I’ll find what I find / Today ... / And I’m higher than the world / I’m living in my mind / And I’ve gotta hold on to what I find / Today, today”(1) – Van Morrison (1983)

“Where then, lies the duty of surrationalism? It is to take over those formulas, well purged and economically ordered by the logicians, and recharge them psychologically, put them back into motion and into life.... In teaching a revolution of reason, one would multiply the reasons for spiritual revolutions.”(2) – Gaston Bachelard (1936)

[...]

### SURREALISME AND SURRATIONALISME

Surréalisme (reduced to “emblems of an intellectual bad conscience” by Manfredo Tafuri) and surrationalisme (poeticized rationalism re-discovered and re-launched by Gaston Bachelard in the 1930s) is not the same thing. That these two terms are often conjoined, then and now, and offered as the left and right hand of one thing in the process of modeling a new, better world (i.e., as mutually determined forms), is not in itself a problem insofar as surrationalism was/is a surplus (synchronic, sublime excess) within the historic Surrealist revolution.

The commonplace usage of the two terms belies their very real distance from one another: surrealism is mostly anti-rationalist, while surrationalism seeks to raise rational thought (and rational discourse) to a place where subjectivity is folded back into so-called scientific, empirical coordinates of thought resulting in a renewed vision of the world intensely folded in *upon itself* and illuminated by the age-old process of constructing representations – viz., such that these very representations no longer simply reside in the uncomfortable space between subject and object but collapse that space altogether. Fichtean idealism and transcendental idealism meet in surrationalism, and Goethe’s prescient complaints regarding a premature disavowal of rationalism (aimed at the Schlegels) is mooted, as all complaints are more or less mooted when the fractured, savaged world is suddenly seen in its originary ensouled state.

“Our cabaret is a gesture. Every word that is spoken and sung here says at least one thing: that this humiliating age has not succeeded in winning our respect. What could be respectable and impressive about it? Its cannons? Our big Drum drowns them. Its idealism? That has long been a laughingstock, in its popular and its academic edition. The grandiose slaughters and cannibalistic exploits? Our spontaneous foolishness and our enthusiasm for illusion will destroy them.”(3) – Hugo Ball (1927)

The prison-house of representations is, in part, the result of all forms having an implicit gravity (*versus gravitas*), a cultural phenomenon that leads to the near automatic depletion of content and the banalization of experience; or, *everything falls* (in time). The institutionalization of this banality is another problem. One has to examine what factors in cultural calculus induce extreme banality and neutralize them. This is what the Surrealists accomplished within the limited range of their mostly private revolution. Tafuri’s problem with Surrealism was not so much that it was anti-rational as it represented a private universe for the initiated. Similar in spirit to private utopias, Surrealism stopped short of routing its own inherent autism – a stopping short that led to the New York version and its conversion into mere titillation and, then, an art-historical commodity. Surrationalism, as a form of intellection, automatically resists the inherent process of banalization simply by being itself. It cannot be absorbed into the machinery of the world since it is – paradoxically – pure thought. Heidegger’s “thinking about thinking” almost seems a parody of this electrifying potentiality within surrationalism. Surrationalism is totally “out of bounds” – it is the same dis-ease that Hugo Ball suffered from when he started the Cabaret Voltaire (in Zurich, c.1916), and the same he later carried with him to self-imposed “internal exile” in rural Switzerland (forever working on a book

about Byzantine angelology and supported, in part, by the generosity of Hermann Hesse). This same proto-anarchic spirit is to be found tucked away in the un-indexed ledgers of art-historical accounting houses everywhere. A search for such secret ledgers moves within Walter Benjamin's heroic work, for sure, as it does in Bachelard's post-epistemological writing, but also within all of recorded time (or since poets turned into historians and vice versa).

### CLOSE ENCOUNTERS WITH "S"

And so, winged-thought: The "insane" Hölderlin holed up in his tower, walls plastered with maps; Bruno wandering England and Europe, and, then, burned at the stake by the Church Triumphant; Byron swimming through the canals of Venice at night, torch in hand; Zarathustra's (Nietzsche's?) "discovery" of the devastating Eternal Return of the Same; the Asian image of Ourobouros biting off its own tail; Yeats in *his* tower, writing up a storm; troubadours rounded up with Cathari; Francis of Assisi (erstwhile troubadour) receiving the stigmata high atop a ragged mountain; Unamuno's wild vision of vertiginous black (nothingness) by way of Velázquez's *Cristo crucificado* (1632); and on and on ...

And: Scarpa, and his rumored 11-centimeter obsession, wound into his work – e.g., at Brion – a telltale sign of an intimate (intense) knowledge of the secret mathesis of the universe (perhaps a remnant of a brush with Kabbalistic "science"), a quivering some-thing else hiding out within his auto-didactic architecture, in the tectonic *jouissance* (unlicensed thrill) of building worlds within worlds; Cornell (not the University) shuttered in his Queen's (New York City) home (on Utopia Parkway), assembling things from other things (bits of things ripped out of one context, expropriated, and thrust into another), dreaming of Emily Dickinson, collaging seemingly "useless" stuff into seemingly "useless" assemblages; Schwitters, in Ambleside, constructing the Merzbarn (1947-48), slowly wasting away, letters unanswered by Barr and Gropius ("Help!"), packet of MoMA money keeping him afloat as his boat sinks; etc., etc. . . .

Plus: Museums collecting all of this; books written; legends circulated; periphrastic peripatetics canonized; heretics resurrected; heroes worshipped and discarded; things bought and sold; non-things turned into things; "thinking the complex" re-sold as neurosis; the open circle closed (again); the curse of dead letters launched like missiles in all directions; and – out of necessity – the surreational sublime disappearing (again and again) only to pop up somewhere else, unannounced (uninvited), again "out of time" (falling *into* time and things, furtively), furiously, without finality, fetchingly (and far-fetchingly) quite literally setting everything on fire.

"Babe / It seems so long / Since you went away / And I just got to say / That it grows darker with the day"(4) – Nick Cave (2001)

Dr. Prof. Ing. I.M. Avenarius (June 2003)

### ENDNOTES

1 – Van Morrison, "Higher than the World", *Inarticulate Speech of the Heart* (Essential Music, 1983).

2 – Gaston Bachelard, "Surrealism", *Inquisitions 1* (Paris: Organe du Groupe d'Études pour la Phénoménologie Humaine, 1936); trans. Julien Lévy, reprinted in *Arsenal/Surrealist Subversion 4* (Chicago: Black Swan Press, 1989).

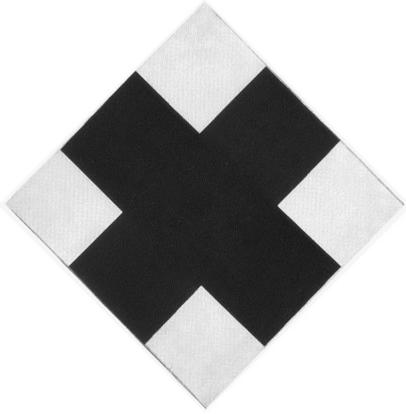
3 – Hugo Ball, *Flight Out of Time*, trans. Ann Raimés (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996).

4 – Nick Cave, "Darker with the Day", *No More Shall We Part* (Mute Song, 2001).

### MISCELLANEOUS OUTTAKES

"In truth, our leaders and propagandists know very well that liberal capitalism is an inegalitarian regime, unjust, and unacceptable for the vast majority of humanity. And they know too that our 'democracy' is an illusion: Where is the power of the people? Where is the political power for third world peasants, the European working class, the poor everywhere? We live in a contradiction: a brutal state of affairs, profoundly inegalitarian – where all existence is evaluated in terms of money alone – is presented to us as ideal. To justify their conservatism, the partisans of the established order cannot become potential. They can be because they are in relation to their own non-Being. In potentiality, sensation is in relation to anesthesia, knowledge to ignorance, vision to darkness' [Giorgio Agamben, *Potentialities*, 1999]. Truth to untruth, we could add, originality and uniqueness to non-originality and translation.

This understanding and articulation of ‘potentiality’ has enabled Agamben to enter a sustained reappraisal of knowledge, selfhood, language, and narrative in books such as *Potentialities* (1999), *The End of the Poem* (1999), and *The Coming Community* (1993).” – Paolo Bartoloni, “The Paradox of Translation via Benjamin and Agamben”, *CLCWEB* 6.2 (2004) – <http://clcwebjournal.lib.purdue.edu/clcweb04-2/bartoloni04.html>



EXTRA-ACADEMIC EXERCISES – DRAFT 03/11/03

# UR-FORMALISME

## ON THE ABSENCE OF NOTHING MUCH AND THE PERSISTENCE OF EVERYTHING ELSE

[...]

*Wherein long-dead Provençal troubadours take (and leave) the stage, Colin Rowe crashes into the concrete bottom of a modernist swimming pool, Umberto Eco arrives with Aquinas in tow, Isozaki renounces irony (but gets into hot water anyway), Mary McCarthy re-visits Florence, Vittorio Storaro re-edits his work, neo-neo-functionalism receives yet another drubbing, Surrealism remains un-bounded (but an antidote is offered), and Landscape + Architecture comes out swinging (and growling).*

### I. WRITING GARDENS – TERRAIN VAGUE (NE PLUS ULTRA)

The mellifluous, munificent rolling “r”s and “m”s of *urrrr-forrrmmmalismmm* signify a terrain of phonemes. These phonemes signify nothing much. This nothing much signifies the foundational *jouissance* (unauthorized writings and readings of the wor(l)d) behind/below all things just barely alive-and-kicking, and/or the “as such” or “the given”, or that which is always already crushed by almost everything else.

Openings to this nothing much are timeless insofar as time is the business of the Architect of Time (Blake’s demiurge). In Architecture, the demiurge is valorized. In rare instances – such as the work of Arata Isozaki – the demiurge is problematized. In a sense, Apollo was an architect, and Dionysus was a landscape architect. Temples and vineyards ... Oracles and wine ... The dialectical prison-house ... We stumble over words and concepts forever, into and *through* time.

In this almost nothing resides the Universal – a some-thing that is truly almost nothing. For Žižek, this almost nothing of the Universal is always-already contested, constructed ground. For contemporary Architecture, the Universal is almost always converted to an aesthetic of a minimalist sensibility – or that which pervades architectural modernism and all forms of architectural neo-modernism. That this architectural aestheticism is also an abstract aestheticism explains the constantly shifting recourse to formalism(s) – and suprematism(s) and/or constructivism(s) – with a periodic dive into functionalism(s) by way of an inverted, de-racinated re-deployment of Tafuri’s caustic (toxic) critique of the “ideology of the plan”.

IN GIRUM IMUS NOCTE ET CONSUMIMUR IGNI\*

What is detailed in such architectures is the sublimation of the nothing much. This is also the source of the totalizing drive in utopian architectures. Yet, to truly arrive at the true universality of the “as such” requires the embrace of the nothing much. The endless rotation of this wheel – in architectural history and theory – shows that Architecture is oftentimes complicitous with hegemony and – out of necessity, if not a guilty conscience – tries to overcome itself over and over again. The recourse to “emblems of an intellectual bad conscience” – e.g., forms of surrealism and (perhaps) post-conceptualism – as noted by Tafuri in *Architecture and Utopia* (1976), indicate that systems (architectural or otherwise) that induce delirium or quietism, as an elective turn toward some-thing else, also contain the irreducible traces of the source (source code) of the problem – viz., the contestation of forms of delimiting time and space.

\*“We walk in circles in the night and are consumed by fire.”

### II. THE LACANIAN “LOOP DE LOOP” – DECONSTRUCT, RE-CONSTRUCT, & MYTHOLOGIZE YOUR /S/ELF

“The page contains a single sentence: ‘Underneath it all he knew that one cannot go beyond because there isn’t any.’ The sentence is repeated over and over for the whole length of the page, giving the impression of a wall, of an

impediment. There are no periods or commas or margins, a wall, in fact, of words that illustrate the meaning of the sentence, the collision with a wall behind which there is nothing. But towards the bottom and on the right, in one of the sentences the word any is missing. A sensitive eye can discover the hole among the bricks, the light that shows through.” – Julio Cortazar, *Hopscotch* (1966)

The nothing much resides inside formalism, whereas formalism – which is almost always a game of syntactical and material operations – is merely its mask. This “inside” is intimately/ultimately related to the shadowy, sigilistic, recondite, and “wild” inmost nature of nature + culture (the complex) – viz., its common ground – and resembles the wasteland, waste-place, waste-water, waste-stream, or rubbish tip of history and all diachronic systems of/for massaging history; e.g., the interstitial lacunae of instrumentalized systems, and *pace* Lucretius, the place of inhabitation of/by “the gods”, and the place that they always already flee to. As a far-fetching thing – fetchingly attired in the latest fashionable garb and jargon – formalism may or may not go “there” depending on whether or not the quest is for meta-physical fire or, simply, revolutionary smoke (and ash) and/or neo-modernist parlor games.

Contact with this “region” within nature + culture constitutes ur-formalism (and ur-figuration). There are innumerable examples of this in art-, literary-, and architectural-historical, synchronic studies. These cross-sections cut through time exhibit the latent tendency of formalist operations to access this sub-territorial (sub-linguistic) plenitude discreetly. The last, wholesale cultural-epochal plunge into this territory (perhaps) coincided with the so-called Renaissance, also the putative beginning of Modern times. The late-modern plunge, typified by post-structuralism, in fact, appears to have all the markings of a collision with the concrete bottom of a vast and decrepit swimming pool, much as Colin Rowe suggested, a mock deep-sea dive for things thrown there by “naughty children”, versus a proto-urformalist dive into the nether regions of sub-cultural production.

The fact remains that the origins of the Renaissance are totally obscured by the mists of time and, if certain scholars are to be trusted, the first signs of this then “some-thing else” appeared in France, with the peregrinations of Langue d’Oc-intoxicated troubadours; Langue d’Oc being an archaic language with a peculiar excess of rolling and guttural phonemic forms.

Umberto Eco’s *Art and Beauty in the Middle Ages* (1959) is instructive, especially as regards the concept of *entelechy*, as developed by Aquinas, and based in part on Aristotle’s concept of entelechy. That Aquinas effectively “spiritualized” this idea is significant insofar as the language of discursive praxis (and is that not what the troubadours were actually up to?) secrets within itself signs toward the nothing much that underwrites everything else.

“For Aquinas, the intellect cannot know sensible particulars, and it is only after the abstraction, in the *reflexio ad phantasmata*, that it comes to know sense objects.” Here, the late-modern, Lacanian subject rears its neo-Freudian head ... “The human intellect is discursive [drunk]. So also is the aesthetic *visio*; it is a composite act, a complex apprehension of the object. Sensible intuition may put us in touch with some feature of a particular object, but the complex of concomitant conditions which determine the object, its position in space and time, its very existence, are not intuited.” Hence (and ever more), the architectonic thing is disconnected from Mercury (Memory) ... “They [things] demand rather the discursive process of the act of judgment. For Aquinas, aesthetic knowledge has the same object, namely, the substantial reality of something informed by an entelechy.”(1)

Clearly, the some-thing else hidden in things leads some-where else ... That it led to the Renaissance, by way of various and sundry late-Medieval heresies, here and there, is not without significance. That the Renaissance we know, love, and sometimes loath was in fact a gigantic amalgam of mixed metaphors and conflicting claims – aesthetic, religious, political, and otherwise – is as yet a problem for Modernity proper, as it heads down the path of converting itself/disappearing into History. Hence “immodernity”, or actually existing modernity (being-modern).

Perhaps we should take a page out of contemporary architectural theory and propose Writing Gardens, versus Writing Machines. Strange as it may sound, it is in writing machines that we may detect the ghost-hand of the architectural demiurge. Writing gardens, on the other hand, might re-introduce a pre-industrial strength lyricism that may or may not form a path to ur-formalism; “may” in the case that Writing Gardens are purely hypothetical non-sites, and “may not” insofar as they are misconstrued as actually existing gardens with actually existing herbaceous borders, arch-lovely arbors, and chic extruded- and/or brushed-aluminum furnishings. Instead (always perhaps), we should speak/sing of gardens-as-pretexts (gaps) ...

Within the auto-biographical (auto-poetic) turn, or in indulging one's subjectivity, one may well find a secret passage, which, in turn, is a possible way out. This is a secret passage only insofar as one fails to recognize that human subjects are, too, an amalgam of forces, constructs, coordinates, and other stuff generally posited as the "ego" – or that which covers the archaic Self.

This leads straight into the crypto-hermetic language of Arakawa & Gins' recent *Architectural Body* (2002), a book replete with a scintillating and slippery language that posits Being as a site (a process of "siting"), or/and the siting of Being as an elective process of acculturation. This is built atop Arakawa & Gins' previous work on Reversible Destiny (or reverse nostalgia) and marks an "elective" brand-new day, or a possible radical concept of Self as proto-architectural vessel. The figures of speech and the shock tropes associated with this assault on the maxims of the Architect of Time (the demiurge), and the *diktat* of temporizing systems, converge at the fulcrum of just what constitutes subjectivity. Acknowledging the fact that much that is taken for "the given" is actually "constructed" allows for the re-emergence of the ur-thing formerly known as Self, and the complications or delimitations henceforth stuck to and contaminating the ego are called into question/to task. Here, in this portentous gesture toward reversing mortality (destiny), is the consummate challenge to architecture as a form of or variant on the prison-house of formal languages. That this powerful, yet slight book addresses the address/site of this endless or seemingly interminable system of proto-oppressive representations signals that the nothing much is, indeed, something extraordinary after all.

### III. FLORENCE (NOT THE SUBWAY STOP IN PRAGUE)

"According to Niccolò Machiavelli, calumny spread under the loggias of Florence, through the arcades, where men gathered to talk business and make vile gossip. Botticelli, another Florentine, confesses the same paranoia in his painting 'Calumny', which allegorises malicious gossip as a historical force." – Jonathan Jones, "Masterpieces of Dresden", *Guardian Unlimited* (March 6, 2003)

Arata Isozaki's journey from architectural irony to no irony in many ways represents the curve – "walking the curve" – of the late-modernist turn away from architectural neurosis toward "S", the so-called sublime synthesis of the arts marked within Architecture by the presence or absence of the complex (i.e., thing as constellation, thought as concept, concept as conflation of conflicting claims, etc.). Here, in this passage (*passim*), is the sign of something else most clearly not to be found in the re-tooling of modernism as typified by most forms of neo-modernism. Here, too, is an elective un-ease with biding time uneasily through re-working worn out, tired, faux-universal formal languages. Here, then, is an excellent example of a possible way out. In Isozaki's work one finds evidence of a search for a way out versus an actual way out. As with all referents on the way to "S", it is better to extract the *energia*, the source of the conceptual fireworks, than to focus too intently on fast-receding forms of expression. As with de-natured examples of this process every-where, it is oftentimes better to send the otherwise depleted stuff of useless syntactical operations to the scrap heap, than to endlessly recycle them in the name of neo-modernist agitation and so forth.

Florence is an excellent case in point. As far as architectural hegemony is concerned, there is no better case study. At the murmuring heart of Florence, beloved by tourists every-where (as, too, the exacting, high Baroque landscape-architectural punishment of Versailles), the Piazza della Signoria remains the emblem of high Renaissance *mise en scène*. Spliced onto the Medieval fabric of the piazza, with its sinister Palazzo Vecchio, is Vasari's Uffizi galleries, Buontalenti's re-worked loggia ... See Mary McCarthy's near time-less *The Stones of Florence* (1963) ... Furthermore, see Vittorio Storaro's *The Light: Writing with Light* (2002) for an equally compelling (cinematic) presentation of a multivalent, layered vision of Rome ...

Isozaki's proposed new loggia (Nuova Uscita della Galleria degli Uffizi), for the back-side of the Uffizi, is, therefore, an exercise in aesthetic confrontation with both implicit and explicit historicity ... Heidegger's consummate question "What does it mean to be historic?" comes home endlessly in Florence. Apparently, IT does not mean endlessly circling the wagons of a more or less bankrupt system of architectural production while waiting for the architectural (functionalist) equivalent of Godot.

### IV. GRRR-FORMALISM – GRAPEVINES & GROWLS (TOWARD L + A)

It is time then – high time – for Landscape Architecture every-where to come out swinging, from grapevines, growling and swinging at Architecture every-where, to foment the always already deferred synthesis otherwise not known as Landscape plus Architecture. L + A must bury Landscape minus Architecture, and Architecture minus Landscape, in an avalanche of extreme inter-textual debris. This *matériel* – an exegetical, sublime *matériel* – must shatter the complicity of Architecture with all forms of proto-, high-, and low-hegemony. To do this, L + A must reiterate endlessly – or until the cows come home – “the given”, the “as such”, and the “nothing much” that matters much, much more than “everything else”. There is, quite simply, no other way out.

GK (March 2003)

### ENDNOTES

1 – Umberto Eco, *Art and Beauty in the Middle Ages*, trans. Hugh Bredin (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1988), pp. 72-73.

### EXTRA CREDIT EURO-READING (IN ENGLISH)

Traveler’s Advisory: Needless to say, literary trips to Hell are not meant to be taken literally. And, most literary passages to Hell – while resembling tragedies – are, in fact, sample documents detailing the neo-gnostic, ur-romantic and ur-post-romantic confrontation with the demiurge.

Julien Gracq, *Château d’Argol* (London: Pushkin Press, 1999).

Octave Mirbeau, *The Torture Garden* (New York: Juno, 2000).

Isidore Ducasse (Comte de Lautréamont), *Maldoror & The Complete Works of the Comte de Lautréamont* (Boston: Exact Change, 1994).

Gustav Meyrink. *The White Dominican* (Riverside, CA: Ariadne, 1994).

Gérard de Nerval, *Aurélia* (Los Angeles: Green Integer, 2001).

Vítězslav Nezval, *Antilyrik & Other Poems* (Los Angeles: Green Integer, 2001).

DRAFT 05/12/03

# CONSTELLATIONS

[...]

“The sublime schematizes the freedom of the world, the power to commence afresh. It thus makes it possible to think an aesthetics of innovation, an ethics of conversion, a politics of revolution. What is most sublime would be the event in which the totality of the possible is discovered, the infinity of the Maybe, which metaphysics names God.” – Jacob Rogozinski, “The Gift of the World” (1988)

[...]

When Massimo Cacciari gathered the gossamer strands of that which always moves within but through cultural epochs, in *Posthumous People: Vienna at the Turning Point* (1996), he effectively performed in essay form what Michel de Montaigne foresaw when he created that literary model in the 1500s, and which Walter Benjamin pre-ordained in his own version of this type of critical-poetical reconnaissance; that is, the discernment of, below the shimmering and/or exhausted surface, things lost or fast-receding moments in history, arguably recoverable in words, but also through words (*in thought*). Such acts of “recovery” are only gestural, and – out of necessity – that which is recovered again vanishes into the thicket of time’s near intractable otherworldliness. Ideas are always already slipping away, insofar as any such significant content is first and foremost (formidably) furtive, fugitive, and quite typically forgotten in the headlong rush toward whatever is rushing toward us.

Terry Eagleton’s recent re-assessment of the vainglories and vagaries of post-structuralism, with its worship of the free-floating signifier, plus the lack of intellectual integrity (consistency) on the left, is a dual acknowledgement that there is something else at work in cultural studies that transcends a ludic survey of the detritus of imploding and/or imploded states – aesthetic, cultural, political, or otherwise. The left-leaning fear of theology (and metaphysics), or the post-structuralist avoidance of the concrete (the materialistic nature of nature) leads straight into the ragged straits of a passage to “Some-thing Else”. As proto- and late-modern argonauts, post-structuralists sailed here and there in pursuit of the sign of this some-thing else, while convinced, not unlike late-modern neo-Marxists (including Eagleton), that “it” ultimately does not exist. This “it” – “Some-thing Else” – is the absent content of all forms, the furtive lining, and the thing that always slips away to re-appear elsewhere, in the mind’s eye, in peripheral vision, in-between the cracks in things, underneath the blackened boughs and below the fallen leaves of signifying systems and totalizing gestures left, right, and center. It is safe to say that this some-thing, which may not be definitively mapped, once and for all or even temporally (since it is gone once you have mapped it), opens onto “almost nothing”. The usual manner of disposing of this almost nothing is to claim that such an almost nothing is a trap door to the abyss. This excuse to re-load spent forms of signification is merely the empty ruse that permits the perpetual avoidance of the quintessential, magisterial “Some-thing Else” moving within forms – that is to say, Spirit (or “S”). An alternative method of dismissing this almost nothing detected but unassimilated by post-structuralism is to say that it is nothing more than a precursor to endless cultural psychosis. This, in turn, permits the endless end-run on presence and the inevitable recycling of everything useless.

“The spirits have to be recognized to become real. They are not outside us, nor even entirely within, but flow back and forth between us and the objects we have made, the landscape we have shaped and move in. We have dreamed all these things in our deepest lives and they are ourselves. It is our self that we are making out there, and when the landscape is complete we shall have become the gods who are intended to fill it.” – David Malouf, *An Imaginary Life* (1978)

Eagleton’s idea of the tragic, in *Sweet Violence: The Idea of the Tragic* (2003), and Cacciari’s sketch of Vienna at the turning point (c. 1900 and beyond) suggest otherwise, only in the sense that within the high-emblematical writing of both the signposts are, after all, “constellations”. This same idea of “constellation” occurs in Giorgio Agamben’s writings, an affect of his very own Benjaminian project of mining history for possible other histories (possible failed histories). The assemblage that connotes “constellation” also connotes the haunted nature of History Itself (History proper), histories past, or history as it has passed into History, through Time Itself, through individuals, through schools, movements, empires, uprisings, downfalls, and what have you. The mapping of these

constellations is, then, strictly *compensatory* – compensation for that which is lost. And this compensatory process (writing and mapping) brings us full circle to why things are always more or less “waving goodbye”, and to the unresolvable crisis of representational systems.

Landscape + Architecture is, after all is said and unsaid, a representational system. It rises and it falls, in time and out of time, as the unacknowledged universal mathesis sought everywhere else but in Landscape + Architecture. This thing, L + A, is itself a “constellation”, and it contains nearly everything that matters. It is, thus, the ultimate contested ground.

In *Le monde diplomatique* 590 (May 2003) Czech literary lion Milan Kundera explains how he constructs a novel, in a remarkable essay, “Le théâtre de la mémoire”. Here, we are shown the ropes and pulleys that allow an author of extraordinary sensitivity to historical forms to assemble from fragments of history other possible histories. This resembles nothing less than the unfinished task of Robert Pinget’s *L’apocryphe* (1980), a swirling bit of literary mist revolving around a broken bit of china (porcelain) – that is, a broken Arcadian scene continuously rearranging itself throughout the enigmatic, fractured form of a post-structuralist novella. The same may be said of Günter Grass that is said of Kundera, and of writers Kundera mentions along the path of his essay – Carlos Fuentes, Kazimierz Brandys, and Robert Musil. With Musil, we are back in “Vienna” with Cacciari, always circling, once again, perhaps endlessly, the same ground. It is the 2,000 pages of *The Man Without Qualities* (1930-43) that seems to mesmerize both Kundera and Cacciari. It is the other history contained within these pages that Kundera would have us assimilate, perhaps, in part, because it is this timeframe in which Czechoslovakia vanished again into the vapors of a very real, very ugly usurpation and re-colonization – a Czechoslovakia created out of a very troublesome “mostly nothing” around 1919 by re-founding fathers Edvard Beneš and Tomáš Masaryk.

Eagleton takes to task those who rhapsodize the heterogeneous, the unstable, the indeterminate, the protean, the mutable, and the “rhizomatic” conditions of late-modernity for good reason. The other side of this non-thing (this mutating equation) is the long-term structure that remains temporally mostly unmoved, the very big apparatus behind the scenery. The advanced condition of the rampaging “machine that ate the garden” requires profoundly sharp and rigorously acute analyses, if, as Fredric Jameson has said, theory is an invention of late capitalism (and, as Jameson *has not said*, its death an invention of neo-liberalism). This would lead normally into the dark heart of architectural hegemony, except for the fact that architecture as a form of hegemony writ large is an old, worn-out subject. The promise of L + A is a better possible place to go, since it is “there” that architecture might give up its heavy-handedness, or its reliance on the object (the structural thing as manifestation of structural forces) and re-assess its role in the construction of the prison-house of the world (the thing we live in, versus the thing we are hurled into). “Here” it is very, very important to distinguish between the world “as such” (as “given”) and that always already messed with (messed up); i.e., the world we have made. “Here”, too, alas, we are required to circle the ontological ground once again (possibly “forever”) or until we get it right. And “here”, lastly, we might re-examine Rousseau’s idea of the Social Contract by way of re-reading the mostly forgotten letter he wrote in 1757 (re-published in the *New York Review of Books*, May 15, 2003, with an introduction by Jean Starobinski) regarding the “gift” to the individual posed by society and the “sacred duty” of the individual to not one another (as individuals) but to the general welfare of the universal order.

“They say that Aphrodite dips her cup / In the clear stream of the lovely Cephissus; / It is she who breathes over the land the breath / Of gentle honey-laden winds; her flowing locks / She crowns with a diadem of sweet-scented roses, / And sends the Loves to be enthroned beside Knowledge, / And with her to create excellence in every art.” – Euripides, *Medea* (431 AD)

L + A becomes the ultimate responsibility, then, as it approaches the ground of “cultural production” or that complex that is the outer mask of the inner architecture of ideology. L + A is best situated, therefore, in aesthetics, an aesthetics that is truly an aesthetics – an aesthetical analytic – and a some-thing as “old world” as the trees, versus a surrogate machine for manufacturing consensus and re-enforcing outmoded chains of in-signification. The oft-times cryptic, critical-poetical sublimity of Benjamin, Tafuri, Cacciari, and Eagleton represents a type of “nothing much at all”, as long as this “nothing much at all” is everything that actually matters.

GK (May 2003)

# THE /S/CARLET LETTER

## AGAINST PURITANICAL MODERNISMS

[...]

“In fine red cloth, surrounded with an elaborate embroidery and fantastic flourishes of gold thread, appeared the letter A.” – Nathaniel Hawthorne, *The Scarlet Letter* (1850)

[...]

### I. UNE TEXTE DE JOUISSANCE

Aesthetics = Adultery in the vacuous *mise en scène* of modernist and neo-modernist architectures. Perhaps since Georges Bataille there has not been a properly stinging (singeing) critique of the role played (*the positions assumed*) by Architecture proper in the production of everyday hegemony (Gramscian hegemony). And it was Bataille (if we are not mistaken) who kept Walter Benjamin’s unfinished scrapbook *Passagenwerk* ) under his bed in Paris, as Benjamin slid to his own end in the Pyrenees. Is this the ghoulish image of the alienated (soulless) human being (his/her heart kept in a box beneath his/her own bed), or the so-called “Man Without Qualities”, the box the quintessential bizarre free-floating signifier (“architecture”) indicating at once Bataille’s own alienation and his apoplectic reaction to the modern city (and to all forms of compensation, such as Surrealism)?

Today there are numerous, emergent calls to do away with false universals – those things that prevent the true Universal from emerging. The persistent empty idea of Modernism proper (and its alliance with Capitalism proper) is one such huge obstruction (and abstraction). Modern architectures do not so much resemble the potential utopias they pretend to be (always already deferred by their very own secret alliance with Power) as the Grand Inquisitor, a spectral form central to Dostoevski’s very grim view of the state of the human condition at the run up to the Russian Revolution. Dostoevski’s statement (by way of Berdaiev) that the Revolution failed because it was not spiritual enough seems, in turn, incredibly prescient given the modern-day turns and contortions present in the works of post-Marxists from Terry Eagleton to Slavoj Žižek “calling forth” a new aesthetics of immanence. Such a “calling forth” involves locating the true Universal and restoring it to the particulars of everyday life versus generating yet another abstraction which operates as an uneasy, empty vessel upon which to project (to fill with) the nothingness that substitutes for everything else. (Hence Giorgio Agamben’s *Infancy and History: Essays on the Destruction of Experience*, 1993.)

After Bataille, it was Manfredo Tafuri who came closest to a denunciation of puritanical modernisms (and its “collectivist”, suspect utopian hubris), insofar as Tafuri saw directly into the dark heart of modern forms and the concomitant repressions they represent. As all things might be ultimately “representations” – as the space between subject and object represents the ontological “space of appearance”, the ontological crossroads (or crosshairs) – architecture is central to the production of prison-houses (left and right) due to its inherent structural “load”; that is, its bearing (or avoidance) of immense social and ethical burdens, and its deflection of immense cultural forces, pictured eloquently in Goethe’s maxim that architecture is “frozen music”.

In Andrei Tarkovsky’s mesmerizing (devastatingly beautiful) last film, *Sacrifice* (1986), where “you may find yourself moved as you have never been moved before” (Andrew Sarris, *Village Voice*), Alexander, the protagonist (and a virtual stand-in for Tarkovsky himself), wavers on the abyss of nothingness as a result of his near complete alienation from almost everything he values (his abstract, “academic” instantiation of the aesthetic). That he is an *aesthete* – i.e., he lectures and writes *on aesthetics* – is central to an understanding of the magisterial sweep of this catastrophic cinematic *coup de grâce*.

“The only condition of fighting for the right to create is faith in your own vocation, readiness to serve, and refusal to compromise. Artistic creation demands of the artist that he ‘perish utterly’, in the full, tragic sense of those words. And so, if art carries within it a hieroglyphic of absolute truth, this will always be an image of the world, made manifest in the work once and for all time.” – Andrei Tarkovsky, *Sculpting in Time* (1986)

To voluntarily wade “once again” into the aesthetic is to wage war with the horrendous machinery of contemporary times. The necessary guide here is also – ineluctably – the “Necessary Angel”, a figure problematized by Tafuri (and Massimo Cacciari) by way of Benjamin and his always incomplete project, and by Adolf Loos and Karl Kraus (and Robert Musil), viz., the coming to terms with the “coming coming” and a profound renewal of the bastardized and corrupted field of philosophically inflected aesthetics. The last empire of aesthetics might be said to have collapsed with Hegel’s totalizing aesthetics (part and parcel of the collapse of Hegel’s *system*), and this collapse is marked mightily within the trajectory of 20th-century architecture.

“Streets and axes that intersect lead to no place” – “The metropolis ... as the great metaphor of the calculating intellect devoid of all ends” – “Space and time are a-rithmetically measurable, detachable, and reconstructible” – “Nostalgic attempts to charge the products of universal uprootedness with quality, propriety, and values” – “Combinatory – consoling hypotheses” – “The dream of an order of fully transparent function, of an alert criticism of ideology” – and, “Aestheticism of the sign without qualities” – Massimo Cacciari, *Architecture and Nihilism: On the Philosophy of Modern Architecture* (1993)

The late arrival of architectural modernism (given that modernity is said to have originated with the Renaissance) seems to prefigure the endgame, now underway, for hegemonic forms of materializing anomie. The structural metaphors of philosophical systems (e.g., Kant’s three critiques) are *not* merely accidental nor are they trivial rhetorical conceits. Architecture and aesthetics go hand in hand. The reductive maneuvers of all forms of modernism more or less prove that that which was vacated in the process was, indeed, extraordinarily powerful. That this extraordinarily powerful thing was completely bankrupt, insofar as it had been usurped for the production of repressive cultural systems almost everywhere, does not in itself justify the game of denying the aesthetic (which exists anyway in all architectures but most especially *minimalist* architectures), nor does it commend the endless formalistic games that lead nowhere except into architectural autism (Cacciari’s *Architecture and Nihilism*). The repression of the aesthetic is the repression of Benjaminian aura – and it is that aura (the sublime, *non-capitalist* surplus value within of all things) that represents the necessary “promiscuity” that an aesthetics of architecture must undertake to reconnect mere forms to the world-at-large and to alter the pernicious depletion of architectural *jouissance* to grossly reified formalistic games in service to everyday hegemony, *or worse*. This “or worse” is the private, personal utopia of the elect ... It is in many ways not so much an elective thing as a disavowal of any significance whatsoever for architecture as a form of culture writ large.

The “promiscuous affiliation” of John Hejduk encouraged such adulterous liaisons, to allow things to escape from their assumed monogamy is liberating, not shameful. To deny possible other affections, affiliations, affinities, allows puritanism to confine the horizon within the bounds of the church and away from the woods beyond. To be afraid and affronted by an *affaire de coeur* allows the mind to forever rule the heart, and to suppress the potency within. To allow affiliation is to allow afflation (inspiration).

Given that we are, in fact, bemoaning the loss of unauthorized *mise en scène* in modern life (and in modern art), with Artaud, and given that landscape is *essentially* (“largely”) *mise en scène*, and given that Tafuri’s most caustic critique of architectural hubris occurred in a section of *Architecture and Utopia* (1976) entitled “Architecture and Its Double” (echoing Artaud’s *The Theater and Its Double*, 1938), a rebirth of a radicalized form of aesthetics would dovetail beautifully with the production of extreme forms of *jouissance* in time and space as landscape + architecture (+ this + that). Modern architecture’s reduction of landscape (and *mise en scène*) to a vacuous “stopping short” or supporting role (MoMA and Mies, etc.) mirrors the role that language (dialogue) played for Artaud in the theater of his own times. Language games, thusly, are certainly not enough and one might presume that the very lovely language games of architectural theory (*avec* post-structuralism and deconstruction) have fallen into the abyss of post-theory (operational and materialistic games) today for this very reason. A radicalized form of aesthetics is *all about immanence*, but an immanence that *transcends* the de-natured vitalistic élan of all forms of neo-modernism.

The Sign of the “Necessary Angel” invokes a wide range of signifying ur-forms (signatures) – denoted by “S”, the Scarlet Letter – and as a complex (as “s”words), in turn, invokes the surreptitious sublime. This sublime Some-thing Else invokes some-thing else and some-thing else ... On and on ... Therefore, “S” = a radicalized aesthetics of the Sublime.

Some “S” words: Sublime, Slippery, Scrumptious, Secretive, Serpentine, Sexy, Scintillating, Surreptitious, Surreptitious, Silent, Spirited, Substantial, Shocking, Scandalizing, *Signing, Singing, Singeing, Scarifying, Searing,*

Sensual, Specular, Scalding, Singular, Slight, Salutary, Speculative, Splendid ...

Some other “S” words (Places of “S”): Shadows, Storms, Stardust, Sapphire, Skies, Silence ...

In Hawthorne’s Salem there is no place for “S”. The puritanical alphabet contains no “s”, no “a” (capitalized or otherwise), so will never admit an aesthetics of the Sublime. “Salem”, place of “witch trials”, where all that is not understood is denied.

## II. WHO’S AFRAID OF “S”?

“Each time I happen to recall – nostalgically – the surrealist rebellion as expressed in its original purity and intransigence, it is the personality of Antonin Artaud that stands out in dark magnificence, it is a certain intonation in his voice that injects specks of gold into his whispering voice ... [...] I know that Antonin Artaud saw, the way Rimbaud, as well as Novalis and Arnim before him, had spoken of *seeing*. It is of little consequence, ever since the publication of [Gérard de Nerval’s] *Aurélia* [1855], that what was seen this way does not coincide with what is objectively visible. The real tragedy is that the society to which we are less and less honored to belong persists in making it an inexpiable crime to have gone over to *the other side of the looking glass*.” – André Breton, “A Tribute to Antonin Artaud”, in *Free Rein*; cited in Jacques Derrida and Paule Thévenin, *The Secret Art of Antonin Artaud* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1998)

“Necessity of a *logomachy*. That is to say beyond the becalmed politeness of a cultured language, the war with words, the drilling and maddened destruction of a language policing and reigning over its subjectiles. In this conflagration of words, against words, the guardians of language will denounce a logomachy; they will require that discourse conform to pedagogy and philosophy, indeed to dialectic. But logomachy aims at taking breath back from them, in a war of reconquest.” – Jacques Derrida, “To Unsense the Subjectile”, in *ibid*.

“The first time I saw Jacques Derrida (it must have been in 1962) he was walking fast and sure along a mountain’s crest, from left to right, I was at Arachon, I was reading (it must have been *Force et signification*), from where I was I could see him clearly advancing black on the clear sky, feet on a tightrope, the crest was terribly sharp, he was walking along the peak, from far away I saw it, his hike along the line between mountain and sky which were melting into each other, he had to travel a path no wider than a pencil stroke.

“He wasn’t running, fast, he was *making* his way *all* the way along the crests. Going from left to right, according to the (incarnate) pace of writing. Landscape without any border other than, at each instant, displacing him from his pace. Before him, nothing but the great standing air. I had never seen someone from our century write like this, on the world’s cutting edge, the air had the air of a transparent door, so entirely open one had to search for the stiles.” – Hélène Cixous, “What is it o’clock? or The door (we never enter)”, in Hélène Cixous, *Stigmata: Surviving Texts* (London: Routledge, 1998), p. 57. Originally published in a slightly different version as “Quelle heure est-il ou La porte (celle qu’on ne passe pas)” in Hélène Cixous et al., *Le passage des frontières: Autour du travail de Jacques Derrida* (Paris: Éditions Galilée, 1994), pp. 83-98 (Papers from a conference held in Cerisy-la-Salle, France, July 11-21, 1992).

## III. “S”EARCHING: FRAGMENTS

“I found an inexplicable stain on a blue folder I kept current writing in.... I could see the image of an angel.... I recognized the baroque *figura serpentina* in this form.... I drew in the missing portions of limbs, tracing the incredibly beautiful contours of his body and seeing for the first time – like gazing into the night sky to find a constellation – the outline of his wings.... I realized the divine form that had left its imprint one early morning, five days earlier, was a sign of the creative principle in everything.” – GK, “S” (2003) ...

“Her lover’s thoughts about her / produced moisture on the mirror / clouding her reflection / she drew her face on / as he fingered the lock behind her ear / when she turned / he blew a kiss into her / then their bodies formed / a single contour line / inside curvatures / she remembered the / trio in a dark plum room.” – John Hejduk, *Pewter Wings, Golden Horns, Stone Veils* (1997) ...

The links from Novalis (and High Romanticism) to post-structuralism have to do with the idea that representation is



And Joseph Cornell and Marcel Duchamp had a passion for science, for its liberation not its limitation. Duchamp taught mathematics in Paris. And Gaston Bachelard taught physics and chemistry in his hometown in Champagne. Always, Bachelard was on the edge of achieving a metaphysics that would unify science and poetry. And Cornell embraced the poetic imagery of science. On the back of one of his shadow boxes Cornell had pasted an epigraph from Immanuel Kant which he found in his copy of Bernard Jaffe's *Michelson and the Speed of Light*: "The light dove, piercing in her easy flight the air and perceiving its resistance, imagines that flight would be easier in empty space."

Here at the intersection of some unknowable coordinates was a place of philosophy, of science, of aesthetics, of some kind of promiscuous affiliation that encouraged this alchemical *frottage*. Not a de-naturing of all that the world brings.

"We are not acorn-eating Arcadians ..." "We are not nut cases ..." In other words, "We do not *do* aesthetics", say neo-modernists everywhere every day. "We do theory but only when it's fashionable, and only when it's totally de-natured as in *total flow* ..." Or, incessantly, only when it is *perceived as* fashionable. "We're happy chasing the materialistic and machinistic élan of modernist autonomy *above all things* ..." And so on and so on ...

"When philosophy paints its grey in grey, one form of life has become old, and by means of grey it cannot be rejuvenated, but only known. The owl of Minerva, takes its flight only when the shades of night are gathering." – G.W.F. Hegel, *Philosophy of Right* (1820), trans. S.W. Dyde (1896) ...

## V. WEAK ARCHITECTURE(S), FUZZY LOGIC, ETC.

"S" also stands for "S"-scape ...

"Whether it be through such an enlightened fundamentalism [of the *Tendenza*] or the fundamentalism of a Richard Meier, repeating over and over the linguistic tropes of twenties purism, these responses, for all their good intentions, amount to nothing more than historicism."

"There is no unique and single time from which we can construct experience. There are, instead, *times*, various times, the times with which the experience of reality produces itself." – Ignasi de Solà-Morales, *Differences: Topographies of Contemporary Architecture*, trans. Graham Thompson (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1997), *passim* ...

Regarding the inversions and contortions of architectural "autonomy" throughout the tumultuous 1960s (and beyond), Ignasi de Solà-Morales (as above) rounded up the usual suspects to represent his proposed anti-thesis (antidote) to the tyranny of the architectural object. As such, Aldo Rossi is not portrayed as the post-modernist *bête noire extraordinaire* but a semi-tragic figure constructing "a discourse from the *interior* of architecture" ... Rosalind E. Krauss' claim that the minimalist aesthetic is phenomenological *not* metaphysical, that "it proceeds not from the idea but from the experience", confers on well-known works of the 1960s and 1970s the imprint of a small letter "s" (a small "a"), insofar as she is correct. The inferred connections, here, by way of Krauss, to various forms of minimalism and post-minimalism (including land art, conceptual and post-conceptual art) suggest that Solà-Morales' idea of "weak architecture" is intended to embrace the *conceptual field of architectural production* as much as actually existing architectural objects. But it (this idea) also seems to engender an anti-sublime, which is – when all is said, done, un-done, and re-done – quite simply *not enough*, given the monumental failings of most modernist architectures *to sing* (and to *singe*).

"And now let the revolutionists choose a creed from all the creeds and a god from all the gods of the world, carefully weighing all the gods of inevitable recurrence and of unalterable power. They will not find another god who has himself been in revolt. Nay (the matter grows too difficult for human speech), but let the atheists themselves choose a god. They will find only one divinity who ever uttered their isolation; only one religion in which God seemed for an instant to be an atheist." – G.K. Chesterton, by way of Slavoj Žižek, "The State of Emergency Called Love", *Lacanian Ink* 21 (Spring 2003) ...

"There is a teleological drive in the book which is to be expected: Marxists believe life has a purpose or can be

given one. But teleological speculation can slip into religious mysticism, and Eagleton comes close. His modern tragic protagonist, caught between desire and “the night of the world”, struggles like an ascetic, a Christ-like scapegoat suffering the sins of our globalised world: ‘Culture and death are not rivals at all. There is a tragic self-mutilation at the very root of civilisation.’ This is what a modern tragedy would own up to: the strange sweetness of an aesthetic spectacle with suffering at its core.” – Review of Terry Eagleton’s *Sweet Violence: The Idea of the Tragic* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2002), *Guardian Unlimited* (September 21, 2002) ...

GK/JB (July 2003)

# THE POTENT KEEL: SUBLIME AESTHETICS

[...]

“Benjamin’s historian is not interested in exercising control over the past through the use of an ostensibly critical and objective method. The task of the historian rather is to strike a spark by bringing past and present together in an image of truth, an image in which ‘the Then (*das Gewesene*) and the Now (*das Jetzt*) come into a constellation like a flash of lightning.’ The ‘lightning flash’ in effect ‘rescues’ the past not by fitting the past into the flow of events but by interrupting that flow. And the constellations are constantly being reformed. Benjamin’s historian is not the social scientist following a positive method to construct the truth of the past out of the raw material of, for example, memories. Neither is the historian the hermeneutical deployer of narrative strategies to give memories meaning in an interpretive framework. The historian is rather the *chiffonnier*, the ragpicker, rummaging through the detritus of history looking for the cast-off, the discarded, and that which is in danger of being lost. Put another way, the task of the historian is to ‘brush history against the grain.’”(1) – Steven Ostovich

[...]

## À LA RIGUEUR

The primary flaw in modern-day aesthetics (if such a thing even exists) is that it has reduced primary connections with things to secondary, tertiary, and – worse – endlessly mediated and instrumentalized relations that produce a vast Book of Lies. This “book” is the “machine” that is eating the world. Walter Benjamin (as eschatologist) sought to burst this all-encompassing bubble of myriad reflections while – in a sense – stuck in the Frankfurt School’s operational datum, a post-Kantian datum, which developed an unending critique of forms of alienation and anomie – an unending negative dialectic. This critique could not assimilate Benjamin’s intuitions regarding primary forms (cultural and otherwise) and his most heretical writings (vis-à-vis the School) were dismissed as “undisciplined”. Hence Hannah Arendt’s misreadings of Benjamin’s “Theses on the Philosophy of History” (1950) ... Hence, too, the suppression of Akhmatova and Pasternak, in Soviet Russia, and the aggressivity of the utopian vision unleashed by revolutionary forces in Europe with its technological sublime mirroring a teleological drive toward subsuming subjectivity itself within a monstrous objectivity at the very heart of Socialist Realism. The disappearance of the radically contingent forms of Russian Formalism within the collective drive to utopia signals, if anything, that such moments are truly irruptive and leave but a residue as they vanish, and as they are co-opted and turned to propagandistic purposes (or reified into nothingness, as in the West). It was not until the 1950s (with the death of Stalin) that this “Winter” began to shift into a type of “Spring”, in Russia, and new works of a type not seen since the Silver Age (the late 1890s, early 1900s) emerged from the ashes of the Russian soul.

It is the critical-poetical vision (the surrealist vision) that permeates Benjamin’s unassimilated (unassimilable) works ... This vision is of primary intuitions regarding things and forms, but most especially cultural forms (as perceived in the corrupt continuum of bastardized, official histories). The task of the poetic is, according to Andrei Tarkovsky, to forestall the catastrophic – which the poet almost always sees directly in everything. This catastrophic is the vision of the Angel (in Benjamin’s work) viewing the wreckage of history while racing backward into the future. This sentiment reveals the nature of nostalgia, insofar as nostalgia is a form of futurity itself (being futural) ...

“Living among the debris of the past, the nostalgic’s challenge is to construct a world and an identity out of this debris. Put in terms from Benjamin, it is possible to speak of the ‘shock’ of nostalgia.... ‘Nostalgia’ is the refusal to let the past be simply past while resisting its incorporation into the present. There is a future content to nostalgia that can be dangerous.”(2) – Steven Ostovich

## THE MAIN EVENT

The chief concern of Aristotle’s *Poetics* (the first “proper” aesthetics, c.330 BC) was that a work of art not be episodic ... This complaint resonates today insofar as everything is intentionally episodic every day. That things are disconnected from (bereft of) their milieu is the prime event in Capitalism Triumphant. An aesthetics that drips

*caritas* (charity) would strive to exempt things from this horrible process of de-naturing everything ... A de facto anti-capitalist aesthetic is, in fact, what is most direly sought in Art (which is why any art in service to the machine is a half-bastardized art automatically) ... It is this presentiment that led Kant to his delimitation of artistic autonomy. But it is this same thing, today, that both justifies hijacking everything in the name of pragmatics (productivity), while at the same time giving solace to those working for “some-thing else” who wish to defy the ultra-banal state of things and remain, until called, “extra-territorial” ... Is everything to become a mere “episode” within the capitalist machine? Is it possible to fashion an anti-capitalist sublime?

All architectures that have jettisoned an ethics (in pursuit of specious autonomy) serve the machine while claiming otherwise ... It cannot be otherwise (one cannot serve two masters). Architecture resembles nothing other than the two-headed monarchy of the late Austro-Hungarian empire, trying to look regal in its bereft (tattered) state; and always falling as it attempts to rise ... Robert Musil’s extreme, intellectually charged (unfinished) novel *The Man Without Qualities* (*Der Mann Ohne Eigenschaften* rendered almost meaningless through translation, and meaning – in George Steiner’s estimation – “The Man Whose ‘I’ Is in Search of His ‘Me’”) seems poised in/at that place where an aesthetics of an exorbitant beauty (and price) might rise, only if (only if ... only if) “self-possession” has any currency whatsoever, now and then, versus the empty gesture of autonomy such a term implies in a philological “landscape” devoid of fiery perturbational, critical-poetic hyper conceits on the path to the Some-thing Else proper.

It is axiomatic that hyper-capitalism will always shut down such things, out of its perverse, internal logic ;out of its own self-possessing necessity ... Yet, that such a non-thing might have a form of hyper-consciousness usually ascribed to sentient beings is a curious *cultural* conceit in/for itself. But it is no different a curious thing than the arguments supporting architectural autonomy. Such arguments are constructed by the machine itself, and the machine must roll on at all costs, flattening everything in its path. Fredric Jameson’s idea that “theory” is a creation of late-capitalism is prescient, insofar as “theory” exists as an elective antidote to an endless field of commodification. Primarily “academic exercises”, theory proved its true nature when it turned on its head and became anti-theory (neo-vitalistic operational games) ... And so forth ... An aesthetics that might take up residence elsewhere (an aesthetics that might resemble clouds drifting across the “sky”) would, instead, be unassimilable by the machine. Not unlike Tagore’s poetry, it would be heard in the fields “sung by lowly peasants” while also printed and marketed – in deluxe folios – at the outer edges of the overlapping circles of artistic disciplines “here” and “there”. It would be *pervasive* ...

## ARCHITECTURES DE JOUISSANCE

Which is why (which is why ... which is why) we must develop an aesthetics of “landscape” (an aesthetics that includes – folds into itself – architecture) ... Which is why an aesthetics of landscape would be first and foremost an aesthetics of words ... Which is why we have no choice but to “harvest” the 20th century, expropriating every failed moment, every promise not broken, and every thing that has not yet been appropriated for instrumental reason. This is also why an aesthetics of immanence (an “immodernity” always upon us, almost always “there” but not “there”) will arrive whether or not we choose to acknowledge it ... For these reasons (and there really is no other option except to flatten everything left and right in the pursuit of an all-encompassing hegemony of de-materialized things, endlessly circling, endlessly – hopelessly – de-natured and “lost”) an aesthetics of immanence is imminent ...

There are vital movements (moments) in architecture that are endlessly short-circuited ... It is possible that this short-circuiting is a byproduct of the all-but invisible machinations of the machine eating everything. It is also possible that these moments are staged offstage such that the principal action (“building”) remains immune to the agitation and destabilizing “nature” of such moments. Given the immense élan of academic exercises, one must come to terms with the fact that “theory”, as it resides “offstage”, is defined by its separateness, versus its integrity. For it to fall is presaged in its marginality – as it will always be marginalized as “theory” ... It is evident in the superstructures of professional and academic practices that praxis (and *praxes*) defines not so much a “making” as a denial of “useless” things. It is the “useless” that provides the tensions, torsion, and caesuras underwriting (informing) the topologies of praxis. They are, obviously, not quite so “useless” after all ... This duality is inescapable only in the sense that one or the other presumes priority in the individual, as professional disciplines do not really exist except as an assemblage of individuals. It is a sign of the capitalist drive toward the de-materialization of everything that non-things (e.g., corporate entities) have been granted the status of individuals. Such forces survive (surpass) individuals – they make a mockery of individuality itself – demolishing anything (any alternative or other option) while swallowing everything useful. To remain “provisionally useless”, then, is the first moment of an

aesthetics of immanence. Perhaps it is instructive to remember that both Tadao Ando and Carlo Scarpa represent “unlicensed” autodidacts (that is, “unauthorized” poets of form) ...

“And so, winged-thought: The ‘insane’ Hölderlin holed up in his tower, walls plastered with maps; Bruno wandering England and Europe, and, then, burned at the stake by the Church Triumphant; Byron swimming through the canals of Venice at night, torch in hand; Zarathustra’s (Nietzsche’s) “discovery” of the devastating Eternal Return of the Same; the Asian image of Ourobours biting off its own tail; Yeats in *his* tower, writing up a storm; troubadours rounded up with Cathari; Francis of Assisi (erstwhile troubadour) receiving the stigmata high atop a ragged mountain; Unamuno’s wild vision of vertiginous black (nothingness) by way of Velázquez’s *Cristo crucificado* (1632); and on and on ...”(3)

## THE IMPERSONAL PERSONAL

In cultivating such an aesthetics (of immanence), it is necessary to find the impersonal in the personal and the personal in the impersonal. There is no other way ... This aesthetics of words contains (as it always contains) the secret paroxysm, the “shuddering” in everything. The eschatological spirit that moves such things is uncannily the same spirit that moves within every person. The faux universal mathesis (Dostoevski’s Grand Inquisitor) seizing this spirit must be set aside (ignored) for the advancement of a new aesthetics of immanence. The Coming Coming (a sticky mess, perhaps) is the actually existing state of things (the “given”) that comprises the “gift of the world”.

The pathetic fallacies associated with former landscape ideologies (aesthetic systems) are of no use ... They are the reason why reason itself (rational thought) has fled elsewhere. A “reason” that has nothing to do with (nor resembles) instrumental reason ... This reason is completely unreasonable in its demands on everything (every single person) ... For this reason it is all but impossible to utilize, today, the word *reason*.

There are vast, hidden “geographies” (topologies) of “S” (Spirit) – this spirit is almost entirely useless in the conventional sense of the word. IT cannot be reified (and reified ... and reified) ... IT is suspended in a void (protected), surrounded by nothingness. IT is the vertiginous black rapturized by Unamuno (seen in the painting of a dead Christ by Velázquez and seen in the darkening puddles of rainy, stormy pre-Civil War Spain) ... IT has been called the Cloud of Unknowing by those who know ... Whatever IT is, IT cannot be turned into anything other than what IT is.

Such an aesthetics must remain – *per force* – individualized, resisting all forms of mediation ... It must be extraordinarily surreptitious. For it to register in everything else, it must remain gossamer (as gossamer as words). It must defy the detritus of the world of fallen things (things enslaved) ... It is the mark of a Some-thing Else that must be born in the individual soul. It is a small flame within all things (within all things that are “on fire”) ... As such, landscape – in its normative sense – becomes an “abnormal”, sublime tableau of “fire signs”.

“When we speak the word ‘life’, it must be understood we are not referring to life as we know it from its surface of fact, but to that fragile, fluctuating center which forms never reach. And if there is still one hellish, truly accursed thing in our time, it is our artistic dallying with forms, instead of being like victims burnt at the stake, signaling through the flames.”(4) – Antonin Artaud (1938)

## THE BLOOD-RED WINE

For this reason, the look in Mandelstam’s eyes in his official prison portrait is otherworldly ... There is no looking away from this look. This one photograph eclipses all of the photographs of Rodchenko, all photographs of the Soviet industrial sublime, the sea of nameless workers erecting the “worker’s paradise” ... Dostoevski was right ...

Today, what is the unnerving nerve of/within landscape photography? Why does it do what it does? Why is it so profoundly, unwaveringly precise in its estimation of the state of things? Ruff and Struth, Koudelka and Salgado turn an all-seeing lens toward the mirror (Yeats’ “outer glass of weariness”) and its monstrous, unnatural hyper-nature ... “Here” is a diabolical landscape aesthetics writ large, very large (in very large prints, oftimes digitally altered to enhance the extraordinary aura-less aura – the emptiness). Landscape + Architecture + Aura collapses into an abject nothingness, when it might – instead – prefigure a new renaissance, an encounter best called L+AURA (after Petrarch’s muse, and in honor of Walter Benjamin) ...

## AESTHETICIANS OF ENNUI

Eschatological excesses ... Brechtian signposts ... Godard's *Éloge de l'amour* (*In Praise of Love*) ... "Quelque chose ... Quelque chose ... Quelque chose ..." An eschatological aesthetics of everything cues diremptions and/or irruptions, revealing the incessant slippage in-between things (of things) ... Godard's exquisite swan song (starting out with gorgeous black-and-white film stock, and switching to garish color video, dissolving ... disintegrating) seems poised between worlds – "this" one and "another". An elegiac "song", this film embodies everything "waving good-bye" every day. Godard's autobiographical *JLG/JLG* – Lake Geneva lapping at its edges – pushed the cinematic edge of things to its limit insofar as the exiled auteur (at home in Switzerland, ignoring Paris), speaking from the shadows, felt compelled to explain the inexplicable nature of images through images, through the imperfect impersonal ("It is raining ...") ... An an-aesthetics of extreme sublimity ... Quelque chose ...

Tarkovsky's *Stalker* – The Room in the Zone ... It is raining ... The writer, and the scientist, and the guide (Stalker) sit at the edge of this room that grants wishes. The scientist pitches a detached nuclear detonator into the pool of water and the water begins to bleed ... Tarkovsky's watery cinematic world bleeds ennui and nostalgia. In this world things are constantly disintegrating (and architectures are constantly "s" mouldering before our eyes) ... The long silences (and the long, painful tracking shots) are punctuated by stray sounds – dripping water, rustling foliage, a fragment of a song or poem ... *Mise en scène* overwhelms dialogue: Time expands and contracts; dreams trigger dreams; mirrors reflect mirrors ... And so, the great Russian soul reflects the little mist-filled circle of the world. And for this same reason Theo Angelopoulos awaits inclement weather to shoot his own visions of the world gone awry ... As in Theo Angelopoulos' *Mia Eoniotita Ke Mia Mera* (*Eternity and A Day*, 1998) ... "How long is forever?" ...

GK (August 2003)

## ENDNOTES / ETC.

1 – Steven Ostovich, "Epilogue: Dangerous Memories", in *The Work of Memory*, ed. Alon Confino and Peter Fritzsche (Champaign: University of Illinois, 2002); <http://www.press.uillinois.edu/epub/books/confino/toc.html>.

2 – Ostovich, *ibid.*

3 – See the sister essay "Surrationalisme" ...

4 – Antonin Artaud, *The Theatre and Its Double*, trans. Mary Caroline Richards (New York: Grove Press, 1958), p. 13.

Regarding Capitalism Triumphant, see Arundhati Roy, "Come September", in *War Talk* (Cambridge, MA: South End, 2003) ...

Regarding the "gift of the world", see Jacob Rogozinski, "The Gift of the World", in Jean-François Courtine, Michel Deguy et al., *Of the Sublime: Presence in Question*, trans. Jeffrey Librett (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1993) ...

Regarding George Steiner's remarks apropos of Musil's *The Man Without Qualities*, see George Steiner, "The Unfinished", *The New Yorker* (April 17, 1995) ...

Regarding the double-edged nature of nostalgia, see Svetlana Boym, *The Future of Nostalgia* (New York: Basic Books, 2001) ...

## À PROPOS [DE] L'HUMANITÉ

[...]

Regarding Alain Resnais' *L'année dernière à Marienbad* (1961) and Michelangelo Antonioni's *Il deserto rosso* (1964) revisited in 2003 ...

[...]

What world is pictured in Alain Resnais' *L'année dernière à Marienbad* (*Last Year at Marienbad*)? Is it the same world that is pictured more bleakly in Michelangelo Antonioni's *Il deserto rosso* (*Red Desert*)? These films both emerged from the early 1960s as tentative critiques of a mid-century malaise; albeit, a perhaps spiritual malaise, which renders all the more piquant the flavors of each tale. Insofar as "Versailles" (the apparent *mise en scène* for *Last Year at Marienbad*) represents in Romantic terms everything that is wrong with the world in its formulaic (formalistic), constrained, highly regimented form, and the industrial, watery wasteland of Ravenna represents the crisis in the experience of the world ravaged by technology, one might be forgiven thinking that Resnais and Antonioni are nostalgic for something else; something nominally "antediluvian", or, perhaps (god forbid), "Arcadian". Yet, the distressed nature of the female psyche in both cases (both films) registers as an unspent, as-yet-unrelinquished claim on an elemental reality that is masked (made forbidden and formidable) by the banality of the masculine, structured and de-natured world of both the Baroque chateau and the industrial landscape, picturing respectively an image of society as endless, devilish game, and progress as psychic denudation and dysfunction – each a slide toward a complete breakdown of singular things, or things that reside in both the interior of the soul and the world as it mirrors that interior. No Freudian, nor Lacanian analysis could ever undo these Borromean knots, as this condition is a "topological" condition, each negative form (absence, hole, fissure, or void) structured by the contortions of positive forms (presence, geometrical shell, architectural object); things held in tension, and things cantilevered into present-times while suspended in empty "space" (anchored in abject nothingness) ...

And, if each set of illicit lovers in both films seems to be pressing closer toward one another, while drifting sideways past one another, it is the irredeemable nature of intersubjectivity that seems to be at risk in these two worlds gone awry, the critique structured accordingly by each director to index and document a set of conditions that are essentially at war within the modern world and the imperiled individual because each condition produces its opposite, extreme reaction "topologically". Modern individuality, a.k.a. Cartesian subjectivity, is the foil against which the onrushing monster must dance, this foil called as well "the tain" in the mirror, the world as "mirror-writing" ... The Hall of Mirrors ... The labyrinth ... Again ... "Versailles" or rotting industrial wharves ... The soul distended and warped in the phantasmatic mirror of displaced and lost worlds ...

Antonioni seems at once to reach backward by reference to another time, while actually reaching inward; for dreams ... There are shades of Flaubert's *Madame Bovary* (1856) here, with reception and empathy conditioned by dual (dueling) concerns, though the implied tragedy takes an inconclusive end. The elective liaisons of both films suggest that as the world falls into subjugation, its semi-tragic largesse beckons ominously within things – looms larger – and, as the deserted street (Via Alighieri) or the deserted garden ("Versailles") grows longer in shadow, deeper in its emptiness, a second shadowland emerges in the souls of each film's respective victims. This second shadowland – also a circular monologue, or a fractured and broken industrial city (a line between self and something else) – draws with it (within it) the detritus of dashed ideals, perhaps phantasmatic shards of memory never to be reassembled. Antonioni's *Red Desert* compensates, not unlike the second half of Jean-Luc Godard's *Éloge de l'amour* (2001), with garish color and chromatic dissonance, as if this compensation were also toxic. (Was *Éloge de l'amour* also an elegy to Antonioni and his first foray into color?) In *Red Desert*, the hubris of the Italian technological juggernaut is measured both in the small hands of a child and in the grasping, relentless "scientific-industrial" pursuits of his father, while the child's mother collapses under the weight of her own dreams set adrift, only to admit that her life, indeed, must be seen to include everything that went wrong. The story she tells her son, about a young girl swimming in a remote lagoon, and the arrival of a strange ship followed by a mysterious song and a vision of the rocky crags of the coast as flesh, portends one awakening against a larger awakening to a reality that, in turn, demolishes dreams as landscapes are demolished, a destroying, insatiable hunger, and a model world for endless dysfunction.

Alain Robbe-Grillet's maddeningly "manneristic" and hollow screenplay for *Last Year at Marienbad* drives monotonously toward a moment when its language simply collapses; when the two lovers leave the chateau of "Versailles", slipping away finally to the garden ... The grim games of chance that animate the parlor games of the new aristocracy (the high-capitalist bourgeoisie and nouveaux riches versus the *ancien régime*) signal the random, ineluctable rotation upon a wheel that the world devolves toward deprived of its inwardness and its spontaneous, elective affinities. As in Goethe's *Elective Affinities* (1809), there is an elemental matrix of associative forms, cross-breeding in this film (in Robbe-Grillet's deconstructivist imagination), leading toward catharsis, a falling into the pit of extreme subjectivity, by way of the objective, architectural oppression pre-figured in the assault of the "Baroque" machine, the timeless, a-historical Baroque-as-mask, behind which moves a gnostic demi-urge ... The same Baroque that drove, no doubt, Peter Greenaway's obsession, and the Baroque that came to expression historically not in religious ecstasy so much as in secularized *mise en scène*, or built propaganda – a machine-aesthetic before the advent of the machine age ... *Last Year at Marienbad* grows slowly, parasitically, over the mind, insinuating itself into the pores of its audience until, like a toxin, it produces the effect of shock and revulsion at its very source; that is, subject-object antagonisms and conflicting readings of things and worlds.

Antonioni's own aesthetic reductionism treats the toxins of modern alienation and abjection with a similarly constituted/convoluted antidote – the remains of individuality in an oddly collectivized and atomized world (one inducing the other, and vice versa), such that a "way out" seems all but impossible and time's arrow seems inescapable as a result; an elective cosmogonic eros blocked and/or forever misplaced, and the same cosmogonic eros that has haunted literature forever, but more plausibly since Huxley and Orwell ... The time of such a vision of horror is the time of High Modernism and its supreme stranglehold on everything and everyone.

The language of cinema since the early 1960s has contained an anti-modernist *modernist* lament (a doubled "modernity") that is symptomatic of the fall of High Modernist rhetoric (not the full-bore denunciation often misascribed to such works), as has architectural criticism contained since Manfredo Tafuri's 1969 essay "Per una critica dell'ideologia architettonica" (expanded in 1973 to *Progetto e Utopia*, or, in English, *Architecture and Utopia: Design and Capitalist Development*), a similar questioning of the broken premises of the technological-utopian hubris within modern architectures. Perhaps nowhere else was this hubris more potently formalized than in the modernist disposition of "space", a transposed sign of the Universal, emptied of meaning and set free. Hence Tafuri's bemoaning formalisms in general and the vacuum within architecture in particular ... Hence, too, his endless pessimism, his *pro forma* anti-ideological ideology; a negative dialectics and a provisional love of the "useless" and recondite ...

Late-modern cinema has gone further in this regard, laying out coordinates for the re-colonization of subjectivity in the face of this vacuous *mise en scène* within formalized, instrumentalized systems. The struggle to liberate cinema from its subservient role within the modernist machine has led to the new cinematic languages that came to expression *post-nouvelle-vague* French cinema, privileged in different ways in the West (by Bergman, Kieślowski, Tarkovsky, Tati, Roeg, Angelopoulos, Wenders, Kusturica, Greenaway, Jarman, Jarmusch, et al.), such that a tableau of signifiers formerly suppressed and set nominally "free" are, in fact, re-deployed in service against the machine and *for* subjectivity and authenticity. It is the redefinition of authenticity (of what constitutes authentic experience) that works within parallel literary and artistic genres, perhaps nowhere more trenchantly than in criticism itself (something that has always to a degree resided inside the work of art but has in the modern period come free and dissociated itself from the work of art). This critical thing is always a reference back to language, and language (discourse) is a system residing atop a second language; that is, the source code for intersubjective relations, or, the ur-language in things, such that things and language overlap and engender a de facto critique of systems hand-in-glove. Cinematic languages that rely on *mise en scène* gesture wildly (and enigmatically) toward this truth; an uncomfortable truth to modernist hegemony wherein language has been stripped of all signifying agency other than instrumentality and rote symbolic value.

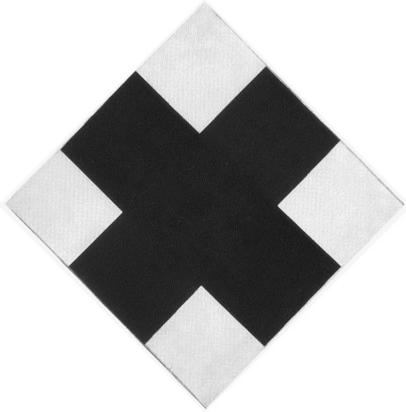
Antonioni and Resnais (as Tarkovsky) do not use symbols so much as complexes; or, they deploy complex associations that engender the realization that milieux form further milieux (Walter Benjamin's neo-Platonic concept of "anamnesis", perhaps), and that things and language derive from the same source (immanence) ... As such, in time, inversions lead to inversions, to topple the truly out-moded ... This realization, while a nominally "modernist" (and Nietzschean) realization, also prepares in the human soul a site that is antithetical to the plundering forces of materialism and technology. The wasteland in *Red Desert* is a universal wasteland in that it could be anywhere –

anywhere technology has run amok, or anywhere the nature of time has been hammered flat and re-fashioned in the image of the technological sublime. Whether “Versailles” as *mise en scène*, emptied of the totalitarian hubris of the Sun King, or “Versailles” as the location for the punitive peace, post WWI and/or WWII (conjuring Aragon’s reading of the armistice as a fist within a cloak), such things matter little when the historical agency that produces such wastelands is abstracted and set free as faux universal set pieces, relentless and unavoidable, image of progress and progress as mirage ...

It is the contradictory nature of cinema to use the image against the image, leading Godard no doubt to present the idea of the death of images, the idea of the depletion of images, as he did with his *King Lear* (1987) by way of the image of the space of cinema reduced to a bare light bulb in a cardboard box, or as he did with *JLG/JLG: Autoportrait de décembre* (1995), a self-portrait concluding with the arrival of a blind film editor. Milan Kundera’s warning regarding “imagology” (in the novel *Immortality*) is the formalization of the pernicious capitalist use of images to substitute for reality, when images are, in fact, intimately related to the production of reality if/when fully radicalized (that is, when they go to the “root” of things) ... For this reason, Walter Benjamin’s warning that immediate reality is an “orchid” in the land of technology has more profound implications today with the arrival of cyberspace (and dematerialized capital) than it did in his own day, when cinema was first gaining ground.

In-between 1963 and 2003 the cinematic image has indeed died a thousand and one deaths. It is only now, however, that it is about to be embalmed and preserved forever as a vast contiguous lie, embalmed and preserved for posterity in its very own mausoleum ... It is this moment, then, now, that requires the most aggressive instances of retrieving images from the technocratic, nihilistic machine that has not only stolen language, through rendering it meaningless (by rendering language propaganda, “intelligence”, and info-tainment), but also reduced the power of dreams to fantasy (by rendering them, en masse, nightmares) ...

GK (September 2003)



# MANFREDO TAFURI IS DEAD

## LONG LIVE “MANFREDO TAFURI”

[...]

“Every day I write the list / Of reasons why I still believe they do exist / (A thousand beautiful things) / And even though it’s hard to see / The glass is full and not half empty / (A thousand beautiful things) / So ... light me up like the sun / To cool down with your rain / I never want to close my eyes again / Never close my eyes / Never close my eyes” – Annie Lennox (2003)

[...]

In accordance with the principles of structural linguistics, Roman Jakobson proposed (in 1935) that every age may be seen to exhibit a dominant characteristic (spirit). That is to say, “in the arts and humanities” an operational datum may be discerned within the spirit of an age to which multiple and disparate disciplines nonetheless aspire. In the 20th century this datum was nominally “science”, or, more precisely, “rationality” and its synonyms – e.g., objectivity, positivism, empiricism. As the dominant tone in progressive activities (including modern architectures), all forms of dissonance, rebellion, and – indeed – radicality were automatically conditioned by this dominant (taking refuge from, or taking up residency near, in relation to, or alongside of “rationality”). For this reason Manfredo Tafuri effectively denounced all readings of the so-called irrational nature of Dada and Surrealism as misunderstandings of either movement’s automatic obeisance to the mechanistic and nihilistic anti-spirit ruling and ruining the first third of the 20th century (as if they were merely irritants to an otherwise monolithic structure).

And even if, as some say, “the sign has set” (that structuralism and post-structuralism have passed), we are still collectively (by virtue of our shared humanity) living in the state of semi-darkness that permeates Tafuri’s c.1968 reading of the ship of modern architecture cut free from its moorings – a state of disarray regardless of whether Tafuri’s negativity (his negative dialectic) has fallen, in the meantime, into disuse and/or abject disregard. This late-modern darkness – situated, in turn, in a temporal high-capitalist moment – reveals as much as obscures certain other options outside the categorical rejection (dis-embodiment) of ideology foretold by Tafuri, as a renascent surreptitious spirit may also be discerned in non-structural arts (especially criticism and philosophy, but also literature). The complete surrender to technical issues (symptomatic of post-theory), the unofficial operative datum within most modern and neo-modern architectures, is therefore premature. If Tafuri could find little solace in the loss of architecture’s ontological significance (a way out of the labyrinth of instrumentalized orders and intentional dis-orders), it was primarily due to the highly anachronistic and abstract reading he rendered of a discipline caught near the end of a relatively long-term death spiral – a death to be followed by a possible rebirth. This fall and subsequent rise is always already written within the pages of architectural history and historiography but prefigured preeminently in the now-bankrupt casuistry of architectural historicism. So much for so-called progress, rationality’s endless excuse (and curse).

During Hurricane Isabel (September 17-18, 2003), while parked in Norfolk, VA, and without power, I re-read Tafuri’s seminal *Architecture and Utopia* (1976), revisiting the collapse of utopian presentiments in the face of the all-pervasive, all-consuming machine that 20th-century architecture resembled in its most minute (mute) particulars; and in its prescient capitulation (devolution) towards a mere material economy devoid of any significance other than productive and technical tasks consistent with the technological atopia prefigured in its apparent late 19th-century, “industrial” origins. Indeed, since the collapse of planning – since the 1960s and its usurpation by mere real estate speculation – architecture has lost almost every ability to express anything comprehensive or utopian except through the fragment (piece work) or the personal utopia of the private residence. The collapse of planning per se lead directly to the rise of anti-planning, a form of ad hoc planning that justified the conversion of former “provisional” public resources, and the interconnections between them, to additional opportunities for structural manipulation (which leads almost always to exploitation). This is also why current proclamations regarding landscape urbanism are not quite good enough a response to the urban crisis of space and the attendant marginalization of everything (meaning the conversion of everything real and/or unreal to futures, options, flows, datascares, etc.) within an advanced capitalist “topology” – a sinister topology premised on an endlessly-shifting “nothingness” insofar as universals (humanistic concerns) are stowed in the negative forms (spaces) of this fast-moving and contorted facsimile world.

Tafuri travelled widely through the terrain of 20th-century architecture unmasking the various pretensions of form (especially *forms of formalism*) to counter the worst ravages of the on-rushing capitalist machine, citing en route the completion of the first Soviet Five Year Plan as foil (even if the results of this plan are now proven to have been thoroughly cooked). His animosity to purely “useless” (formal) exercises in architectural rhetoric or poetics is purely performative, however, given his measured embrace in the 1980s of acts of demolition and resistance to the machine (e.g., deconstructivist architectures). Tafuri illustrated for us all the maneuvers of the machine as it jettisons old forms of ideology (as it moves forward); those discarded forms, in turn, forming often the immediate nature of a “useless” past partly inhabited by capitalism’s interlocutors (i.e., ruins inhabited by hermits, or cast-off shells appropriated by so-called critical inquiry). This useless immediate past is, in effect, a *picturesque debris field* left behind as the machine moves on mowing down everything in its path. Tafuri’s pessimism was well-founded (and breathtaking), even if it was also unnaturally aimed in the wrong direction – i.e., at the system, versus beyond the system, or not quite reaching the actual locus of the true coordinates of ideological production.

Yet, given the rhetorical blinders (and blunders) symptomatic of this time (the “manifestos” of Christopher Alexander, Robert Venturi and/or Ian McHarg, for example), and given Tafuri’s materialist anti-aesthetic, the time was not then ripe for a shift from purely technological concerns to some-thing else, despite the darker works of Aldo Rossi, Robert Smithson, and Michael Heizer, or the precise, anti-expressionist formulations of Donald Judd and Richard Serra. The post-1960s turn (detour) into semiotics, also denounced by Tafuri in the essay “Architecture and Its Double”, was (and remains in its latterday hermeneutic and narratological forms) a matter, for the most part, of re-tooling or undermining established (“dominant”) discourses rather than a departure of any significance. This *nearly missing* some-thing else might be described today as a non-dialectical plunge to the “ground” that supports architecture; a plunge that necessitates architecture’s re-embrace of landscape and its former (pre-Olmstedian) sub-linguistic cognates (something already underway anyway). These cognates represent the structure of thought itself, as the term “architectonic” implies when shorn of its modernist gambit on tectonic jouissance (Kenneth Frampton’s error), and the inter-relation of things and thought in an intellectually charged field of *immediately present* representations (built or otherwise). It is the departed spirit of John Hejduk, perhaps, that will assist the rebirth of architecture, at some point, given the posthumous incorporation of two formerly site-less towers he designed in Peter Eisenman’s Cultural Center for Santiago de Compostela, a work clearly “from the future”, yet set to arrive anyday and sure to constitute the first canonical work of 21st-century architecture.

While Tafuri could appreciate aspects of Walter Benjamin’s critique of the technological hubris consuming the modern world, he was also unable to invest much personal capital in Benjamin’s more unworldly (nominally “mystical”) concerns – or Benjamin’s hyper-radical, eschatological vision – insofar as this side of Benjamin’s work remained unassimilable to then avant-garde materialist readings of architecture and its other, “utopia”. It is for this reason that Tafuri’s pessimism seems almost diabolical (at times), as if a Marxist Mephistopheles had slipped under the door of his study in Venice and whispered dark secrets regarding the future of architecture while also offering up the image of a cultural, burnt tableau as architecture’s end (its final state).

It is Tafuri’s automatic (reflexive) animosity to subjective models of resistance that seems dated today, given that every attempt to socialize architecture has proven singularly ineffective (as if Tafuri’s spectral “ideology of the plan” actually foresees and preempts such things). Due to High Capitalism’s ceaseless conquest by way of de-materialization of all things once “given” (the liquidation of things and the production of endless de-materialized flows), the subject (subjectivity itself) is indeed suspect terrain. Tafuri’s rejection of subjective autonomy (in art or any cultural discipline) and his pronouncements regarding the death of intellectual work was correct, then, as long as culturally productive disciplines remained disconnected and neutered, per force, by the advanced prognostics of the machine moving closer with each passing day toward the last speck of autonomous territory represented by the human heart.

Yet, as things became increasingly caught up within the web of expanding nerve networks (including erstwhile, purely “humanistic” concerns) the necessary resistance remained “off-stage” in the form of that thing that could not ever be fully assimilated by technological and materialistic forces – i.e., the original source of everything, the texture and seeming irreality of language and representation as it exists as a complex below the level of received discourse and antecedent to all manipulations of advanced technological systems (including present-day forms – i.e., computers and all forms of programming, surveillance, and data mining).

It is, today (as always), these two non-things – ur-language and ur-representation – that cannot be turned into facsimile things or instrumentalized non-things. And it was these two non-things that the spirit of structuralism and post-structuralism addressed, even if structuralism and post-structuralism (each in its own way) produced an advanced discourse based on an apparent tyranny of the sign. For such tyrannies to fall is axiomatic.

“The world was meant for you and me / To figure out our destiny / (A thousand beautiful things) / To live / To die / To breathe / To sleep / To try to make your life complete / (Yea Yea) / So ... light me up like the sun / To cool down with your rain / I never want to close my eyes again / Never close my eyes / Never close my eyes ... / That is everything I have to say / (That’s all I have to say)” – Annie Lennox (2003)

Yet, what Tafuri sensed has come about anyway. And that is that the increasingly unitary machinistic force operative within late-modern culture has now set its collective sight on the human soul. This last conquest is the ultimate battleground. One might then think that Benjamin’s apocalyptic vision was not entirely mistaken. The hurricane raging outside, just now – and I go out to see, hear and feel *her* force – is a force that one must reckon with within oneself, as one must reckon with everything that appears to appear of its own volition. That the current state of affairs (the advanced state of economic-deterministic totalization, the rush towards nothingness) is a force of an unnatural, almost abstract nature only reinforces the necessity of forging a “way out” – i.e., that we must now fight for everything that is presumed to be given when it is instead a form of taking (an abstract act of eminent domain) that is always presented as *fait accompli*. That what was given and what is taken is also constructed (but increasingly in the gaps and artificial memories of data banks in-between real things) underscores the gravity of the necessary plunge to a source beyond, below, above the machinistic spirit consuming everything. The coordinates (the cognates) are no longer to be found in mere things but in the place where mere things are turned into real (illuminated) things. That is to say, advanced thought (and advanced architectures) will always return to *thought and language*, the non-place where life emerges from the experience of what is left of the world.

While the time of Tafuri’s analysis has passed, it is not without its own time (its own universalizing merit). What has occurred in the meantime is that the imaginative terrain of the world has been revealed as ruled, after all, by subtle yet malleable instances of figuration and conjecture. And if Massimo Cacciari’s shadow falls forward from within Tafuri’s critique, forward and into the present, we might discern a second wind for the fabled School of Venice’s investigations into the significance of architectural figuration, even if Cacciari has moved on toward what appears to be the precise ground of the impending battle, “radical subjectivity” and a “sublime aesthetics”, extracted in part from the ruins of post-structuralism. but also from within the more abstruse writings of Benjamin, Adolf Loos, and Robert Musil (all adherents, perhaps, to a perennial, synchronic *pre*-structuralism).

This other *terrain vague* (perhaps resembling an out-of-focus photograph by Thomas Ruff, but certainly antithetical to Koolhaasian junk-space) is the shared ontological ground in the forward-leaning works of Giorgio Agamben and Cacciari. It also moves in renascent rhetorical and critical-poetical forms of literature, art criticism, and cultural history. This residue (ash) is the so-called philosopher’s stone, the byproduct of the on-going conflagration at the most foundational levels of discourse, at the elemental level of experience of the world. Some-thing else, meanwhile, is percolating off the map and in the anterooms of cultural production, in the ateliers and workshops of the hard-pressed “useless” intelligentsia, Tafuri’s out-flanked and out-moded “intellectual workers”. These workers are drawn, not unlike moths, to the aesthetic flame at the center of the world (“inside” the world of representations that form the world, but also productive of all cultural representations and all language games, Agamben’s state of “infancy” within poetic forms of language). This is the place of reckoning now revealed for what it is and might be, an elective void (nothingness) or an electrifying some-thing else, a landscape of ur-facts (Agamben’s *urfaktum*). This some-thing is constructed of things not subjugated (free subjects) and non-things (concepts) that inform things. It is a zone, then, where dreams are not de facto nightmares, and where darkness is illumined by the flame of imagination and language.

“Among all the historical avant-garde movements, autonomy of formal construction no longer necessarily meant controlling daily existence through form. They were now disposed to accept the idea that it is experience that dominates the subject. The problem was to ‘plan the disappearance of the subject’, to cancel the anguish caused by the pathetic (or ridiculous) resistance of the individual to the structures of domination that close in upon him [/her], to indicate the voluntary and docile submission to those structures of domination as the promised land of universal planning, paradise on earth is realized through the ‘disappearance of the tragic.’” (Tafuri, p. 73)

Thus, Tafuri delivered the death blow (*coup de grâce*) to the historicized concept of *Kultur* (19th-century “Spirit”) – but he also delivered us, by way of this end reading, into the hands of instrumentalized everything (reason stacked upon reason), since, for him, there was no apparent alternative.

Nowadays, the idea of the city-machine reigns supreme (hence landscape urbanism) and its *nervensleben* (nervous system, nerve network) rises to the proverbial surface of neo-modern attempts to come to terms with the thickened, clotted, complexified physical and virtual coordinates of this condition. This term, *nervensleben*, is to be found both in Tafuri’s work (in the form of Georg Simmel), and in Cacciari’s work (in the form of attempts to incite new heretical readings and acts apropos of the technocratic appropriation of everything now underway). Thus Cacciari’s essay “Nomads in Prison” (*Casabella*), and thus Cacciari’s exit from politics and his embrace of philosophy, ethics, and aesthetics (plus his “tell-tale” downtime spent up on Mount Athos). For Simmel, the modern metropolis resembled a permanent, concretized Newtonian calculus writ large: “All things float with equal specific gravity in the constantly moving stream of money. All things lie on the same level and differ from one another only in size of the area which they cover.” (Tafuri, pp. 87-88) ... Or, as many have repeated (after Marx), “All that is solid melts into the air ...”

For Cacciari (after Simmel), “Intellectualization ... and commercialization are brought together in the *blasé* attitude: with it the metropolis finally creates its ‘type’, its structure ‘in general’ finally becomes a social reality and a cultural fact. It is money that has here found its most authentic bearer ...” (*Angelus Novus* 21, cited in Tafuri, footnote 58, p. 88.)

Given the evolution of Cacciari’s thought, and given that he is the most prominent heir to Tafuri’s intellectual legacy, it is then highly significant to detect in his recent work the conceptual sign of that some-thing else that is always at stake. The game has quickened in the past thirty to forty years. This some-thing else is a heightened sense for things as they represent formal and informal aspects of representation itself. And if this leads straight into the terrain or landscape of idealism, so be it; and it need not be re-worked German Idealism (*Kultur*). If this renascent idealism implicates an aesthetics of the Sublime, it is perhaps time to properly locate the Sublime in cultural terms versus in nominal natural forces (hurricanes included). This sublime aesthetics is the source of nearly everything important anyway. It is, in humanistic terms, the actually existing origin of all things buried in all things. For Benjamin it was quite simply the revolutionary moment present in all moments.

GK (September 2003)

## NOTES

“The beauty that you gave / Has turned upon itself / And all the things you said / Evaporated / Evaporated ... / Was I blind / Deaf and dumb / To the words slipped from your tongue?” – Annie Lennox (2003)

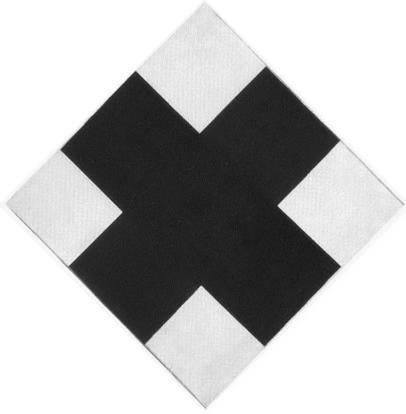
All lyrics from Annie Lennox’s “A Thousand Beautiful Things” (BMG Music Publishing Ltd., 2003), except those immediately above (from “Honestly”). Annie Lennox’s song cycle *Bare* (2003) is an intensely introspective work of art that bares the final frontier for the machine that is always already eating the garden, i.e., the human heart.

Regarding the Jakobson’s idea of the dominant [with insertions]: “The dominant specifies the work. The specific trait of bound language is obviously its prosodic pattern, its verse [structural] form. It might seem that this is simply a tautology: verse is verse [architecture is architecture]. However, we must constantly bear in mind that the element which specifies a given variety of language [form] dominates the entire structure and thus acts as its mandatory and inalienable constituent dominating all the remaining elements and exerting direct influence upon them.... We may seek a dominant not only in the poetic [architectural] work of an individual artist [architect] and not only in the poetic [architectural] canon, the set of norms of a given school, but also in the art of a given epoch, viewed as a particular whole.” – Roman Jakobson, “The Dominant” (lecture delivered at Masaryk University, Brno, 1935), in Ladislav Matejka, Krystyna Pomorska, eds., *Readings in Russian Poetics: Formalist and Structuralist Views* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1971; Chicago: Dalkey Archive, 2002), pp. 82-83 ...

Regarding the work on language of Massimo Cacciari and Giorgio Agamben, the key works are Cacciari’s *Posthumous People: Vienna at the Turning Point* and *Architecture and Nihilism*, and Agamben’s *Infancy and History: Essays on the Destruction of Experience*, *The End of the Poem*, and *Potentialities*. Parallel moves in

political ontology are to be found in the recent works of Slavoj Žižek (*The Ticklish Subject*) and Alain Badiou (*Infinite Thought*). A similar spirit of inquiry re-accessing lost ground occurs in Terry Eagleton's *Sweet Violence: The Idea of the Tragic*, Fredric Jameson's *A Singular Modernity*, and Jean Nouvel and Jean Baudrillard's *Singular Objects of Architecture*, all publications that have appeared within the last two or so years.

All passages above attributed to Manfredo Tafuri are from *Architecture and Utopia: Design and Capitalist Development*, trans. Barbara Luigi La Penta (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1976).



ACADEMIC EXERCISES – DRAFT 10/29/03

# L'HUMANITÉ

## VOTRE VOUS

[...]

“Nothing can convey the extent of the change that has taken place in the meaning of experience so much as the resulting reversal of the status of the imagination.” – Giorgio Agamben

[...]

Being modern no longer means to be Modern (MoMA's problem, perhaps) ... There are enough holes in the edifice of Modernity proper (and Modernism) to suggest that these holes represent former repressions ... And, if this leads straight into the topologically distressed terrain of affectivity, so be it ... Effects produce *affects* ... New terrain is formed in the imagination, out of words that almost always precede thought ... Thought already once removed, or twice removed, returns to the inmost territory of words in and of Itself (out of Necessity) ...

The photographic works of Alfons Maria Mucha (see *Alfons Mucha*, FotoTorst, 2000) supply a surreptitious and contingent record of the emergence of 20th-century art and architecture from the second-to-last, *fin-de-siècle* maelstrom, continental style, that swept through Europe prior to the devastation of the two World Wars – that is to say, Mucha's peripatetic life (1860-1930) oddly coincided with the collapse of various, decrepit imperial orders. Regarding affectivity, the Torst text introducing Mucha's photographic output from 1895 through 1905 (La Belle Epoque), as above, suggests that a certain “some-thing else” saved his work from the obliterating vortex of art historicism: “Mucha used his great sense of decorative line and harmonious color to create clear composition, simply described figures, striking detail and ornament, pleasing pastels, and an erotic undercurrent that remained within the bounds of [then] good taste.” It would seem, then, that he described a world within a world ... Or, perhaps, the world emerging from the ruins of another (passing) world – his work a sublime index. “But Mucha's posters were not merely a way of achieving fame; they enabled his legacy to return from the chasm of condemnation into which it had been cast by proponents of rationalistic Constructivism, Functionalism, and the *Neue Sachlichkeit*.” This latter *new objectivity* is the eternal return of Reason (in its many guises), no matter that Reason (and Objectivity, Pragmatism, and Determinism) is, to this day, ill-defined, if not hyperbolically mis-understood as a corrective almost always levelled at *other times* and *other places* – most especially those *other times* and *places* that lead toward the imaginative jouissance of interiority and inspired subjectivity, the “land” of affects (where effects are converted to *experience*). Art Nouveau may have morphed, in a relatively short time, into Art Deco, yet the disdain of the 1920s avant-garde for such stylistic aberrations remains a curious episode in the emasculation of affectivity and the production of the machinic new world of the 20th century.

Mucha's photographs were created, in his own time, and remain today, as an archive – a not-coincidental act of harvesting and experimentation, versus a quest for a final product or a so-called work of art (an as-yet, elusive status for photography at the turn of the century). Perhaps like Gerhard Richter, Mucha used photography to supplement his work as a graphic designer and painter. Perhaps, too, this idea of supplement is a key concept in unravelling the pretensions of all reputed, autonomous works – as such, architecture, certainly, with its implicit/overt quest for iconicity and objecthood, is a prime suspect for further interrogation. Today, apropos the diminishing nature of first nature, photography has fully arrived as the interpretive-documentary gesture, *ne plus ultra*, for measuring experience (for archiving the world). Hence the intense interest in Ruff, Struth, and Gursky ... Here, no doubt, is the meaning of the word *index* applied to works of art (and architecture), *pace* Rosalind E. Krauss (and, more recently, Peter Eisenman) ...

What seems absolutely crazy, then, is that the return of process-driven paradigms in the late 1980s, and the sustained deployment of the same cultural forces throughout the 1990s, has led putative forms of avant-garde architectures into a terrain of endless derivatives and datascares that masquerade as authenticity – or “honesty” (Neo-Realism, Neo-Pragmatism) – vis-à-vis subjective, artistic, and affective forms of design and, critically, critical *inquiry*. In architecture “symbolic” orders have been relegated to the drawing board and the parallel world of paper architecture.

For this reason the recent John Hejduk exhibition at the Whitney Museum of American Art was especially searing ... Almost entirely missing in this “new objectivity” was/remains the remains of experience all but exterminated in the last round of new objectivity (High Modernism). In allied arts – most especially literature and film (and new media) – wholly new experiments in longing and affectivity (that is, attempts to re-ensoul the world) abound ... And yet, architecture hangs by a gossamer thread, the proverbial black pearl suspended in an abyss, waiting, always waiting, to get out of its own way; to escape its own definitions, biases, and prejudices. And, should anyone think that this need to *move* again has been more or less satisfied by the aggressive agencies of deconstruction and/or other marvellous (spent) forms of post-structuralist thought, one need only take the pulse of *what is being built* (real estate), and, perhaps, *what is on offer* (more of the same), to see that Agamben’s remarks regarding the death of experience of the world rolls onward. The greatest error to be made in the “theater” of architecture is to think (or *act*) as if architecture is not first and foremost a mental and “spiritual” act of inhabiting the world; to somehow forget what you can hardly remember. Or, that architecture is the apparatus of the world, as it (the idea of a “world”) is constructed atop everything “given” – the “as such” nature of this everything given is the locus of the most advanced operations in art and architecture (a form of *structural anamnesis*) ... And if one is to appropriate this very trendy word “operation”, it is only to perform an operation on the de-naturing operations of the last incarnations of “new objectivity”, to finally release and free the nevertheless irrepressible forces of imagination and spirit that actually move everything anyway.

Arguably, there are no *singular* works of art and architecture (every icon requires an iconostasis) – every *thing* depends on everything. The opposite point of view is part of the myth that constantly undermines the world (and experience), literally mining the world of everything precious. What is required is strenuous (rigorous) critical-poetical works of affective *jouissance* (unauthorized works of sublime potential, sublime contingent works that undermine that very *undermining* spirit). This resurgence, already *felt*/to be experienced, is not unlike the extraordinarily haunting, apparently wordless song that haunts Andrei Tarkovsky’s film *Nostalghia* (1983), a song that permeates the dissolute nature of the architectural *mise en scène* of this cinematic masterwork – a work that resides in coordinates of an exhilarating universality. This universality is also predicated on a thematic form of “exile” personified by Andrei, the poet, wandering Italy; a cipher for Tarkovsky’s wanderings ... The song appearing and vanishing, here and there, in association with the free-associative images and concepts of a form of nostalgia that has nothing whatsoever to do with a mawkish longing for things past or things spent, but – instead – a longing for things-in/of/for-themselves (for things alive to the world); or a world within the world that has gone relentlessly awry, through the best intentions of the on-rushing spirit of inquiry that manifests in the bizarrely out-modish term “humanity”. This term is the terminal term of all artistic production – the term that signals a turn (a residence/home), always – and signals, as well, a turning back to go forward ... As such, the conceptual sign “humanity” is at risk every day.

The idea of Humanity infers a home-less, state-less state of being (of becoming) ... Its own coordinates are outside/within all contingent expressions, artistic or otherwise. In architecture this state comes home (not unlike the proverbial cows) when some-thing else “sings” ... This “singing” is the adventitious spirit that haunts cultural production (a spirit of a type of non-technological, interiorized “utopia”), but also haunts the topological imagination – the imagination as it is formed atop what is and suggests what might be (through acts of demolition, renovation, and/or acts of recovery) ... In architecture this “atop what is” is the covering/lining that conceals what always is present (and as present, today, most often “absent”) ... The conceptual sign of “humanity” returns, without warning, as a gesture within all marginal acts and marginalized gestures – or, returns to return for the simple fact that it has never left. Hal Hartley’s film *No Such Thing* (2001), without question, points elliptically toward this truth ... For these reasons, today, we see/witness the idea that Humanity is most fully represented in the peripheral vision of on-racing instrumentalities, as a perpetual casualty. This conceptual apparatus (Instrumental Reason), as slippery as any slope, actually produces the vision of a form of humanity not as sign for an unapproachable “Other”, but as a sign of its own very specific force (*gravitas*) – that is to say, the production of an endlessly falling world within a neutral world ... And it is this tragic neutral (neutered) world, the world otherwise known as Humanity, that slowly/quickly goes endlessly awry until, one day, the full coordinates of its “taking place” (Agamben, again) are disclosed/unearthed.

[...]

GK (October 2003)

## POSTSCRIPTS/SUPPLEMENTS

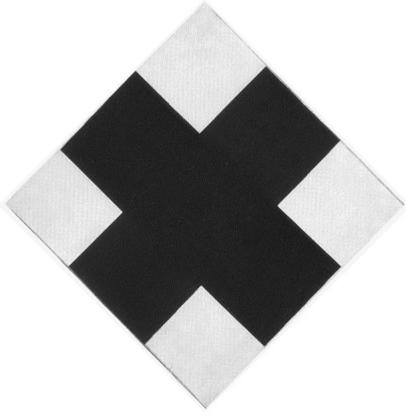
“A picture, I would say, acts aggressively: it enters the soul, without consideration, through an open window. The observer can do whatever he wants with it. He can ignore it, prevent it from entering his consciousness, or, led by its outer appearance, he can stop in front of the work and perhaps even seek its content and meaning and, eventually, find in it the essence, of either beauty or truth, on account of which the work came into being.” – Alfons Mucha (1930), cited in Josef Moucha, Jiri Rapek, *Alfons Mucha* (Prague: Torst, 2000)

N.B.: Prague publisher Torst’s series on modern Czech photography includes monographs on: Alexandr Hackenschmied, Bohdan Holomicek, Alfons Mucha, Jindřich Štyrský, Zdeněk Tmej, Jaroslav Rössler, Karel Teige, Karel Cudlin, Viktor Kolář, Antonin Kratochvíl, Josef Sudek, and Josef Koudelka.

Some of the more extraordinary photographs “by” Mucha, presented in the Torst edition, are of his Paris studio, c.1900. In this series (including self-portraits and “sittings”, not all necessarily taken by Mucha), one finds an almost-mad expressionistic mélange of bizarre signifiers – things (“stuff”, *bric-à-brac*) piled atop things – and Mucha glaring at the camera, ostensibly “interrogating” *himself* ... Mucha’s fascination with chance occurrences during the contact print-making session (i.e., distortions, chemical aberrations, etc.) suggests a highly-fertile (febrile) imagination “open” to the whims of fate; to the possibilities/excitations associated with *frottage* (provocatively “rubbing” one thing against another, perhaps “against the grain”), and an openness to, in other words, things-*not*-in/of-themselves ... Perhaps, herein lies the origin of Georges Bataille’s fascination with Art Nouveau photography ...

*Votre vous (et mon moi)* – Regarding anti-humanism (and post-humanism), there exists a variety of varieties ... Perhaps the most interesting and compelling response to implicit anti-humanism is Heidegger’s “Letter on Humanism” (1945), somehow addressed to/aimed at Jean-Paul Sartre. Perhaps Heidegger saw Existentialism as a form of anti-humanism ... Nevertheless, as long as the concept of humanity is of the type that instills inhumanity, humanism will almost always invoke its antithesis. It is unkind to be against one’s own kind, but as long as one’s kind is unkind anti-humanism will be on offer as its antidote ... Heidegger, of course, situates Being in an originary realm co-terminous, to a degree, with language. His own performative anti-humanism is aimed at restoring the concept of *humanitas* to a place before “metaphysics” (and subject/object dialectics) ... Therefore, it might be argued that subjectivity and *humanitas* are of the same source ... the same non-thing ...

[...]



# ŽIŽEK/BADIOU: THE NEO-MARXIST SUBLIME

[...]

Alain Badiou's book *Saint Paul: Le fondation de l'universalisme* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1997) first arrived/landed in France, as if from outer space, a topologically rich appropriation of the Pauline insurrection, followed by Slavoj Žižek's *The Puppet and the Dwarf: The Perverse Core of Christianity* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2003). It then was translated into English, *Saint Paul: The Foundation of Universalism* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2003), at the same time as Badiou's more aggressively configured *Infinite Thought: Truth and the Return of Philosophy* (London: Continuum, 2003) appeared. As a complex, these books underscore a moment in time perhaps best described as the rediscovery of the present-present, a form of radicalized time that is purely inherent in the very nature of being (of being alive). It is for this reason that Badiou expropriates Paul, given Paul's exquisite rhetorical circling of the question of being alive or dead (awake or asleep).

This arsenal of explosive, critical *matériel* is part and parcel of the principal cultural turn currently underway, in interdisciplinary venues, towards a reclaiming of universal concepts in the face of advanced nihilism, the outpouring (onslaught) of regressive tactical operations associated with Late Capitalism, a sinister non-thing foreseen by Adorno and Horkheimer as a withering, almost apocalyptic instrumentalization of everything and, notably, the attendant death of the subject (subject as consumer/endlessly manipulated thing). Thus the Baudrillardian specter of the Desert of the Real.

Žižek and Badiou (present-day "Fox" and "Hedgehog") build upon (while confronting) similar works by both Jean-Luc Marion and Giorgio Agamben, while also demolishing the last vestiges of the implicit wager, present since Pascal (renewed by George Steiner), on a transcendent Some-thing Else as compensatory illusion. In its place, what emerges is the subject-as-rupture, a purely radicalized self-insufficiency noted as the pure potential of all universals, and all supposed singularities: "There is singularity only insofar as there is universality". An excess, then, in-and-of-itself, and an anti-dialectical figure nailed to the ontological cross where immanence and transcendence converge in the present-present revealing the audacious (revolutionary) nature of the here and now.

This implied immanence of self is structured according to Lacanian gestures not toward the usual ineffable otherworldliness of intense inwardness (*inward inwardness* or inwardness doubled), but instead dependence on the subject as site for pure contingency and becoming. To accomplish this "splitting" of the subject into two (echoing Nietzsche's High Noon and the s-called Not-Self), Žižek resorts to excavating an extra-ethical subject-as-dimension within being that actually seeks its own demolition through revolutionary praxis. Transferred to the arts (and politics) this praxis supercedes all attempts to construct a new Master-Signifier (a new conceptual sign of a totality), while also bracketing the extreme, inward or self-ironic (hyper-subjective) *jouissance* of the subject-as-victim (that sensibility that moves within so much of present-day art). In fact, both Badiou and Žižek confer on the subject (the late-modern self) the role of self-destroying angel, a figure that actually rescues the subject from its dependence on mutually "filiated" forms of subjection (slavery) and repression structurally imposed by the abstract principles operating within dematerialized and de-territorialized capital. And, as exemplified by Žižek's masterful deconstruction of popular culture, all authorized forms of "filiation" (consciously or unconsciously applied, as propaganda and/or entertainment) merely permit a minimal space in which the imperiled subject is "free" to effectively twist in the wind (enjoy his/her symptoms). As such, this polemical assault on the perverted nature of the late-modern subject represents a neo-Marxist sublime (a problematizing of subjectivity itself).

What this "splitting in two" seems to indicate for Badiou (and it is Žižek's purview to in some ways echo what is "happening" else-where) is that the self-recognition of the subject involves also a type of self-analysis (a being both analyst and analysand) leading to self-revelation, such that the subject notes that it only exists by virtue of its dual residence under the sign of death (the letter, the law, particularization) and the sign of life (the spirit, the resurrection, universality). What this seems to mean for Badiou, the "post-cultural" neo-Marxist, is that the subject – once it realizes its inherent slavery (impotence) – re-discovers its truly inherent singularity in universality. For Badiou, who always slips away at the crucial moment, this singularity within universality (and vice versa) signals a

new life (re-subjectivization) for the subject. In short, Badiou is offering – by way of Saint Paul – the recovery of the ground of being *through* re-mapping the soul. This proposed new subjectivity is, in fact, the oldest subjectivity (the pre-Adamic Self) present, but also absent, in the folds and warps of Modernity proper. Thus, and for very sound reasons (for Badiou is, after all, a materialist-rationalist), the late-modern subject must be re-configured. His expropriation of Saint Paul represents the most radical (insurrectional) form of this renewal. The “use value” of Saint Paul is legendary. It is perhaps Kazantzakis’ *The Last Temptation of Christ* (1953) that is the ultimate unreferenced reference here. In that scorching novel, Jesus survives the cross only to be confronted by Paul and effectively denounced.

As such, re-territorializations are prefigured as revolutionary acts (declaratory acts) reclaiming the emptied (and empty) gestures of modern subjectivity (intentional and permissible “cultural” forms of alienation and anomie; i.e., the perverse “allowable cut” of capitalist dis-ingenuity). By way of countering both the re-imposition of figures of law and dominance (the modern equivalent of the Platonic Big Lie), and by forcing the subject to reconstruct the possibility in one’s self of a new, better world, the post-phenomenological turn toward radical contingency (and radical subjectivity) points vigorously, and with considerable élan, to the “ground” always already overwritten in all instrumentalized systems; that is to say, toward the forever disfigured, hijacked, and desecrated ground of the “given”, or the very ground beneath our feet (*this world* endlessly gone awry). This proposition opens infinite, elective gestures within both the private universe of the modern subject and the multiple representational worlds of art, architecture, and literature (to name but the most obvious “names”). For Badiou, of course, it opens directly onto politics. But, these “multiple” worlds of disconnected forms of inhabitation (and critique) – such as *architecture parlante* (“talking architecture”) – are, in many senses (in the most *advanced* senses), more powerfully connected to the world *as it exists* (and as it *might* exist) than the endlessly twisted, topologically disfigured world of political agitation.

Badiou goes straight to the heart of the matter when, in *Saint Paul*, he re-situates spirit in the here and now (in the present-present) as the always existing opportunity that is concealed by the impositions of a present-past (the short shadow of History-in-the-Making, or Law). By making the present-present a form of rupture (and anti-sign for the self), Badiou avoids the metaphysical conundrum of “here” versus “over there” (and its rhetorical sub-species). “Here” (as in “here and now”) becomes the site of/for Some-thing Else. This Some-thing else forever slips away in Badiou’s writing, as well it should, because he is not of the mind to tell us what *it* is. As with Žižek, this *whatever it is* is for the subject, mired or un-mired in the latency of dual distresses, to figure (configure) for itself. This is not to say, as good Lacanians, that Badiou and Žižek are mere “analysts”. In a bizarre sense – a sense that might be perversely related back to the market and its very own *analysts* – Badiou and Žižek are Old Testament prophets. They have signaled the coming of a new subject. This subject is pre-figured in their exhaustive critique of the warped universe of Late Capitalism. Late Capitalism – and all of its various, twisted symptoms (intentional and otherwise) of a type of insanity – *in its non-self* is the functional equivalent of the Law that Paul inveighed against (in his own vigorous, inimical, and evasive manner).

It is abject subjectivity (cipher for humanity as universal indivisible remainder), as an *excess* (surplus), that leads out of this horrific, contemporary impasse toward this implicit/explicit Some-thing Else always on offer. This Some-thing Else is the rediscovery of what has always existed beneath everything else anyway, anytime – that is, a Some-thing Else formulated quite simply as the “State of Emergency Known as Love”. It is this “State of Emergency” that Žižek offers, brilliantly, as the all-purpose answer to all other so-called states of emergency (the latter which, as he indicates, are *always* announced to forestall the former).

GK (November 2003)

### POSTSCRIPT (AFTER THE FACT)

A review, by Daniel Boyarin, of Badiou’s *Saint Paul: The Foundation of Universalism* appeared in *Bookforum* (April-May 2006), pp. 12-13, entitled “Neither Greek Nor Jew” ...

UPDATED 11/03/03

# AUTEUR-DRIVEN VEHICLES

## THE NEW NEW LAOCOON

[...]

The starry heavens above me  
 The moral law within  
 So the world appears  
 Through this mist of tears  
 – Nick Cave (1997)

[...]

The problematic myth of the lone genius is driven by the romantic concept that a singular being may embody the spirit of the times. This myth-on-top-of-a-myth – the incommensurable *Zeitgeist* (demoted to the episteme by Foucault) informing the work of an intensely attuned individual – is also the main spring driving the auteur-driven vehicle.

What distinguishes the auteur-driven vehicle from *everything else* is the presence of the guiding spirit of the plenitude of Time Itself – a presence problematized by the assumption of the mantle of omniscience by one (sometimes two) very clever persons.

In the case of a film director (Andrei Tarkovsky, Jean-Luc Godard, Robert Bresson, Akira Kurosawa), the auteur formula is part-and-parcel of the idiom of the art film. In the case of theater (Bertolt Brecht, Eugène Ionesco, Peter Brook, Tom Stoppard), the phenomenon is more precisely focused on the ability to *assemble the ensemble*, as Wim Wenders has tried to do in a more prosaic manner and with less success in film.

In architecture and landscape architecture the auteur-driven vehicle is the so-called “boutique firm”. Whether or not this term is pejorative depends on which side of the divide you sit on – which side of the partition. The nature of this type of firm is to present a “signature” style while proposing an alternative to the service bureau, or the corporate design office. Whether such claims are valid usually rises and falls on the reputation of a “name” and a “style” versus something more vital and “of the times” as in film or theater. This “something more” is *intellectual substance*. What all the *nouvelle vague* filmmakers had in common was a desire for the film to also act as a critique of cinema and its times. Style is not sufficient to fuel the auteur-driven vehicle for long, and this is why most run “out of petrol” after a decade or so.

The low end of the auteur-driven phenomenon is the cult of the personality in its most prosaic (paranoid) form, and the cult of genius in its highest. The latter warrants/bears close scrutiny, while the former is just as well left alone (ignored). The ensemble and the signature, the form and its progenitor, the idiom and its maestro, are all relative terms *insofar as there is nothing exceptional except the claim to genius*.

Nick Cave’s music is an example. What would the dark (brooding), brilliant (poetic), philosophical (dialectic) musings of the misanthropic artist mean without the sonorous ambient force of the violin against the tinkling melodic line of the piano and the ominous “fat” bass line. Wenders picked up Cave in *Wings of Desire* (1987), as he picked up Lou Reed in *Far Away, So Close* (1993) for associative magic. Such appropriations are the stuff of the auteur-driven vehicle and *automatically* undermine the romantic notion of creating something out of nothing. Yet, paradoxically, the *Zeitgeist* is both something *and* nothing. Moreover, any work that taps into the spirit of the times will carry the amalgam of forces present at that time *further*, stretching and warping the fabric of time such that new forms emerge infused with the stuff of repressed dreams and nightmares. Such works of art are exceptional because they illuminate the interior of time and draw/cast shadows.

Boutique firms come and go ... Normally one or two bona fide auteur-driven vehicles emerge every decade. Just

now there are dozens upon dozens appearing. Why? Is it that the corporate idiom is so totally (morally/ artistically) bankrupt? Is it that architects and landscape architects are tired of working their way through the professional Stations of the Cross? Is it because there is something wholly radical afoot, and the auteur-driven boutique firm is the best method to press forward? To press the agenda?

All of these unanswerable questions have a single cause – that is, the professions of architecture and landscape architecture *are* all-but bankrupt and the would-be artist-designer knows it all too well. The corporate service bureau exists, will always exist, as the Hollywood or Bollywood landslide of lamentable films goes on and on. In the design world the realization seems to be that *everything is at stake*, although this is also almost *always* the case. Why is it more so now?

Perhaps it is the fusion thing – the inexorable movement toward a vital, integral, intelligent form of form-making. The signs of intense pressure, pushing upwards from below, that exist in other fields are beginning to manifest in architectural and landscape-architectural design. That these two traditionally antagonistic fields are merging (against the will of many of the rear guard) is a significant sign that something immense is *underway*.

Truly, then, the Zeitgeist has got us by the – um – short hairs. Ante up or fold! Your options will diminish as the floodgates are opened.

Out of sorrow entire worlds have been built  
 Out of longing great wonders have been willed  
 They're only little tears, darling, let them spill  
 And lay your head upon my shoulder  
 Outside my window the world has gone to war  
 Are you the one that I've been waiting for?  
 – Nick Cave (1997)

GK (August 2002)

## NOTES

Of course, Clement Greenberg wrote “Towards a New Laocoön” (*Partisan Review*, 1940), and Lessing wrote *Laocoön: An Essay on the Limits of Painting and Poetry* (1766), and the Roman copy of the Greek Laocoön dug up during the Renaissance (1506) created a sensation and some may say sparked the Mannerist revolt around about the 1520s (the sack of Rome by Charles V occurred in 1527). Nevertheless, Greenberg and Lessing’s diatribes were primarily arguing for the differentiation of the arts. The *New New Laocoön* argues for the total merger of *everything* ...

Historicist Non Sequitur #1 – Some say things began to go awry when Socrates demolished the Homeric universe. Others claim it all started to unravel when medieval scholastics failed to pinpoint how many angels could dance on the head of a pin. Still others believe the great mistake was going off the gold standard. Lacan would, of course, blame American psychoanalysts. Critics of Lacan would blame the 45-minute session. If Nietzsche were alive today, he would no doubt say the world began to fall apart when we started putting milk into little plastic bottles with fake nipples ...

Figura serpentina – “Mannerism, which discovered the spontaneity of the mind and recognized art as an autonomous creative activity, developed, in accordance with the spirit of that discovery, the totally new idea of fictitious space.” Arnold Hauser, “The Concept of Space in Mannerist Architecture”, *Mannerism: The Crisis of the Renaissance and the Origin of Modern Art* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1965), p. 279 ...

See also, Leonard Barkin, *Unearthing the Past* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999) ...

## OUTTAKES

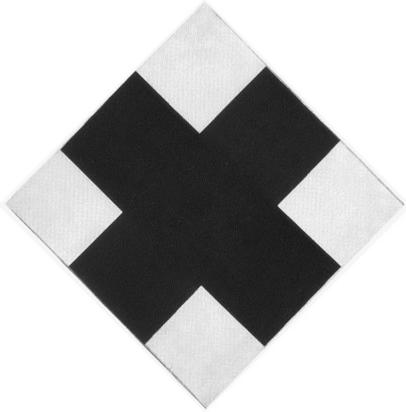
“Greenberg felt artistic ‘quality’ could be judged by the degree of ‘purity’ art achieved in its own medium and effects exclusive to itself. He was a follower of the philosopher Immanuel Kant and the ideals of in[t]uitive

experience and purity. During the '60s his views were questioned by artists and critics who saw them as too self-referential and resistant to change and much contemporary criticism has been dedicated to refuting his theories. Recently, though, his theories have been reconsidered in light of his politics. Although he originally supported Marxism, Social[is]m and Trotsky[is]m he eventually rejected them in favor of an avant-garde that is concerned only with itself." The Greenberg Symposium (ArtNetWeb) ...

"There is still a great deal of controversy concerning Lessing's relation to rhetoric, the so-called genius-aesthetics of the 1770s, and how his criticism is to be positioned with regard to Romanticism. Incontrovertible is his status as the primary literary theorist and critic of the German Enlightenment." G.E. Lessing (Johns Hopkins University Press) ...

"Kaurismäki makes pure auteur films in which the vision and the decisions of one player dominate everything. In order to realise his visions, Kaurismäki needs other people. Timo Salminen has been the cameraman for almost all of Kaurismäki's films." – Regarding Aki Kaurismäki (Virtual Finland) ...

N.B.: This essay first appeared in *Counterpunch* (August 19, 2002)



FLÈCHES D'AMOUR – UPDATED 12/15/03

# TWISTING IN THE WIND

## TOPOLOGY & THE SYNCHRONIC BAROQUE

[...]

“If the meanings of place are understood as *becoming* in writing, there is no place for language over here, and separate for a world over there, to which language would refer to.... Instead, writing itself is that something: the event of place that is not primarily representing or describing worlds but rather signifying and creating them.” – Paivi Kymalainen, “Topologies of Becoming: Deferred Presences in Writing”, *Space and Culture* (2003)

[...]

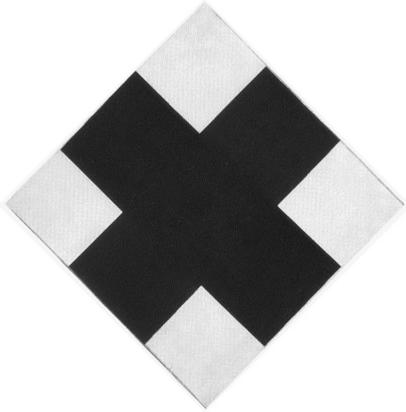
SOME POTENTIAL COORDINATES (PLEASE FEEL FREE TO FREE ASSOCIATE) – Deleuze’s (Leibniz’s) two rooms ... What is the upper room? ... Interiority? ... Subjectivity? ... Hölderlin’s room plastered with maps ... Borges’ labyrinthine worldview ... Sarduy’s metamorphoses ... Ovid’s dream-world ... Topologies of becoming ... Writing gardens ... Re-writing the world?... The seer seen by what he/she sees? ... *An Atlas of Emotion* ... Uncertainty principles writ large, lovely, & everywhere ... Greenaway, Jarman, Jarmusch ... Cinema as divine anti-milieu ... Things swimming in things ... The *figura serpentina* ... Bernini and De Vries ... Gaultier and Godard ... Spinoza? ... The World within worlds, worlds within the World ... Representations and the gap between all things (blue horizons) ... The speed of form ... Brechtian signposts (again) ... Aura? ... Landscape as always-already lost “ground” (“cause”) ... Artaud and his double (shock tropes) ... Ontological cross-roads? ... Levinas and Heidegger (tooth and nail ... always already “at it”) ... The ontological crosshairs of representation?\* ... Milieu and anti-milieu ... The world gone awry ... Landscape and the architectural demi-urge ... The Ancient of Days and the Brave New World ... Huxley’s world, Orwell’s world ... The shimmmmmming mirage of everything diluted in nothingness (total flow?) ... Lacan’s (Žižek’s) phantasmatic Real ... Another real beyond (above, below, alongside of) the Real? ... Cultural symptoms, repressions ... Morbidities, maladies, psychoses ... Landscape as topology ... “S”ome-thing Else ...

GK (2003)

\*”The simplest, most elementary mark, the cross, was interpreted by Mondrian in a mystical sense before Le Corbusier saw in it, minus by minus, the sign of positivity; this mark brings together the masculine and feminine elements in the coitus of vertical and horizontal.” – Hubert Damisch, “Toward a Tomb for Adolf Loos”, *Grey Room* 01 (Fall 2000)

“Darlin’ are you feeling / The same thing that I’m seeing? / The troubles of the day / Took my breath away / Took my breath away ...” – Annie Lennox (2003)

“Once again – I walk on, once again, down these corridors, through these halls, these galleries, in this structure – of another century, this enormous, luxurious, baroque, lugubrious hotel – where corridors succeed endless corridors – silent deserted corridors ...” – Alain Robbe-Grillet, *The Last Year at Marienbad* (1961)



WATER &amp; THE WORLD-SOUL – DRAFT 01/15/04

## LARGO DESOLATO

[...]

“Fiction and nonfiction are only different techniques of storytelling. For reasons I do not fully understand, fiction dances out of me. Nonfiction is wrenched out by the aching, broken world I wake up to every morning.”(1) – Arundhati Roy

“For Aquinas, the intellect cannot know sensible particulars, and it is only after the abstraction, in the *reflexio ad phantasmata*, that it comes to know sense objects. The human intellect is discursive. So also is the aesthetic *visio*; it is a composite act, a complex apprehension of the object. Sensible intuition may put us in touch with some feature of a particular object, but the complex of concomitant conditions which determine the object, its position in space and time, its very existence, are not intuited. They demand rather the discursive process of the act of judgment. For Aquinas, aesthetic knowledge has the same kind of complexity as intellectual knowledge, because it has the same object, namely, the substantial reality of something informed by an entelechy.”(2) – Umberto Eco

[...]

### THE PRETERNATURAL SUBLIME

To Jean-Marie Morel, 18th-century French landscape aesthetician, water was the soul of the landscape and the garden. No wonder, then, that Le Nôtre’s favorite commission was Chantilly, with its specular-spectacular pools and fountains and a severe optical-geometric *parti* ruling the makeover of the storied chateau north of Paris. Morel’s intimation that water is the great sentient element of the landscape garden derived not so much from the English Garden (the Romantic-Classical aesthetic successfully transplanted to France by the so-called “enlightened” aristocracy in the run-up to the Revolution) but from the archaic, pan-European pagan presentiment which held that all bodies of fresh water, no matter how small, were connected below ground by a vast system of rivers, yawning chasms, and reservoirs, the surface components of this mythic system representing the eyes of the “being” that is the Earth.

This great, late expression of the classical concept of entelechy – all parts informed by an unseen whole – runs throughout aesthetic, philosophical, and linguistic theory from Aristotle to the Middle Ages to modern high-structuralist investigations of linguistic form, coming to rest (momentarily) in the idea of the sign, or, as others have called it, the tyranny of the sign and the prison-house of language.

This protean idea of water as World-Soul, a poetic vestige of a sublime concept that pushes rational thought to its own implicit limits (and to a confrontation with nothingness or the Infinite), was all but lost with the advent of the Baroque machine and the divestiture of Mercury and philology. This ancient “sign” – the sign of the eyes of the World-Soul – resides “elsewhere”, in exile, in the poetic and cryptic interface of moral philosophy and the natural sciences. On the other hand, water as World-Soul is an exceptionally slippery sign that covers a primordial schism in the construction of the rhetoric of the world (the “writing” of the world), this schism (rupture) in turn overwritten by an empty signifier otherwise known as the Universal, the Abstract, and/or the Absolute. Water, as the quintessential sign of the World-Soul remains, then, today, the penultimate *tragic sign* of the state of the Imaginary.

Water as waste-place has a long, chilling history in and of itself. As a literary and artistic gesture toward “wildness”, the waste-place has pictured the compensatory otherness of Nature, most often writ large and forbidding against the map of the civilized world in Romantic, Post-Romantic, and, now, Post-Cultural times.

What then does water “sign”? And, what especially, today, does the gurgling, burbling water of tragically disfigured and denatured natural systems portend for that furtive, always futural World-Soul missing in inaction since Hegel? Arundhati Roy’s woeful tales of present-day big water projects in India (in *Power Politics*, 2001) foretell the onslaught now underway, in the Third World, to harness and tame, market and manage the last vestiges of this ancient watery other world which, if nothing else, signifies – as it did for Thoreau – a mythic reserve within culture that preserves the very nature of nature and its preternatural inner-worldliness.(3)

Arguably, the potency of water to signal mystical otherness transcends such attempts to divest it of its elemental eminence. Water persists as a sign of a magical, liquescent interface between the solid and the ether, as a neither/nor condition. And, as such, water embodies sensuality and spirituality, so compellingly manifested in the history of swimming. The practice of swimming reveals the rupture between the secular and sacred facets of water, seen alternately as pragmatically therapeutic and purely sensuous. The Romantic poets embraced water as a sensual and spiritual domain, as epitomized by Swinburne's autobiographical character, Herbert, in *Lesbia Brandon*, "the divine touch of it, all his soul saluted it through his senses."<sup>(4)</sup>

Water also signs otherness through its presence as a sentient being. Thoreau's observation that "a field of water betrays the spirit that is in the air" evokes at once the ways in which water's reflectivity and transcendental qualities imbue it with consciousness.

Perhaps the most powerful evocation of the sentience of water is in Andrei Tarkovsky's film *Solaris* (1972), based on the 1961 novel by Stanisław Lem. The consciousness of water is expressed as a responsive planetary ocean – a true World-Soul – which challenges conventional notions of alien otherness. Water signs memory and consciousness, with *Solaris* operating as a mythic reserve, a tragic otherworld. And in the journey of discovery it is also symbolic of the innerworld. Throughout Tarkovsky's films water persists as locus of memory, although he denies this is a symbolic or metaphoric device: "Rain, fire, water, snow, dew, the driving ground wind – all are part of the material setting in which we dwell; I would even say the truth of our lives."<sup>(5)</sup>

### GHOSTLY (GHASTLY) LANDSCAPES

Modern landscape architecture has not been kind to the idea of water as the eyes of the soul of the Earth. Based as it is on abstract, formalistic games, the modernist landscape with few exceptions came to an absurd denouement in the 1980s, from which it has barely recovered, with the high-formalist corporate and civic landscapes that, in turn, morphed into the instrumentalized, soul-less landscapes of the 1990s. The emergence of landscape urbanism (*LU*) in the 1990s, with its attendant machinic aesthetic (where everything "does" something), attempted to re-claim the dominant force in modernist rhetoric (science and rationalism) vacating all other premises in the process. The pseudo-scientific rationalizations for landscape urbanism trivialized both ecology and sociology while indulging an extreme form of morphological hubris. The product was the instrumentalized landscape writ large, ugly and in-between, valorized as *terrain vague* by some, while pilloried as nothing of any use whatsoever by others. Landscape as infrastructure gave to late-modern cities the sterile plaza (with chlorinated fountains, ice curtains, and misting boulder fields), the dysfunctional park (with trees as green light bulbs screwed into the urban "electrical" grid), the edge state of urban esplanades over water (with art as spectacle along the way), and new architectural promenades (going mostly nowhere). In cities blessed with flowing water in the form of rivers or canals, the instrumentalized landscape re-formalized the near-dead condition of these formerly vital resources. In structuralist terms, shifting, mesmeric, scintillating urban forces were stylized, streamlined, and fixed in time and place as an amenity to be generally observed versus actually experienced. Actually existing water within the city, and in the *terrain vague* surrounding cities, became the average, everyday stormwater problem or yet another commuter transportation corridor. In those cities fortunate to have fairly clean water resources, the edge of the river or lake became *de luxe* real estate and/or *de luxe* theme park. In a word, landscape as infrastructure demands that landscape always "do" something. If it does "nothing", it must be brought to heel.

As Deleuze has reminded, "Clarity endlessly plunges into obscurity" ... This might be taken as a signal device for registering the anomie embedded in most structural systems and the lie that they perpetrate in the name of rationality. Even rationality relies on the vast substrate of the Imaginary. A storm of reference might put flesh on this claim, but suffice to mention Miguel de Unamuno's immortal words on Velázquez's immortal painting *Cristo crucificado* (1632) to set the tone and mood of the present-day challenge. "A wind that blows from the abyss above us / among our brethren who one time existed / ripples and shakes the surface of our spirits, / and, reflected upon this trembling mirror, / the world, too, trembles." Unamuno penned these words while sitting in a train staring out the window at trees reflected in the black puddles of stormy, pre-Civil War Spain in the early 1920s. Things were already falling apart ... It is the vertiginous black of the Velázquez masterpiece that most captivated Unamuno. This blackest black signified for him the Cloud of Unknowing, or obscurity itself.<sup>(6)</sup>

The 1990s was also the decade that landscape architecture re-discovered the post-industrial wasteland, the same

wastelands that inspired Robert Smithson's dark, entropic vision (in the 1960s), and the Bechers throughout the 1970s and 1980s. The Bechers, in turn, have inspired a new school of landscape photography (Struth, Ruff, and Gursky) that epitomizes in many ways late-modern alienation offset by a trivial aesthetic frisson.<sup>(7)</sup> This is the post-Magnum landscape. No longer do we see the vast open spaces of marginalized landscapes and the ravaged people that inhabit them, but instead we see the pointless maelstrom of the urban condition, with its economic-deterministic anti-aura, and the great empty void of urban experience inside and outside the architecture that has framed and sealed its fate.

The rediscovery of the post-industrial landscape led to both the fetishization and the so-called mitigation of totally ravaged rural, urban, and sub-urban brownfields, mining sites, and decrepit industrial and marine facilities. The two cities which put this genre of landscape urbanism on the map in the 1980s were Paris and Barcelona. When the Iron Curtain finally fell in 1989, vast areas of Eastern and Central Europe were immediately paraded before the Western eye as prime candidates for landscape architecture's repertoire of post-industrial bricolage. The Black Triangle – in Germany, the Czech Republic, and Poland – stands out as the most extraordinary example, though the Lake Baikal, Aral Sea, or Caspian Sea basins might top even this once Russia and remnants of its former Near Abroad comes on board.<sup>(8)</sup>

In all of these cases, and many closer to home (the West), the image of toxic landscape, stagnant putrid water, and rank adventitious vegetation strewn with rubble and rusting industrial rubbish comes rushing into view as the wholly absurd *mise en scène* associated with the highly suspect industrial sublime celebrated since the Industrial Revolution as a sign of progress (see Turner). Indeed, it has progressed to such an advanced degree that all attempts at mitigation, reclamation, and redemption for such sites defy conventional imagination. Such instrumentalizations on top of instrumentalizations produce only more dysfunctional landscapes. The chief concern of anyone with even the vaguest presentiment (memory) of anything else at all (any other desire whatsoever) might be simply to erase the worst of the nightmare and turn such sites of horror over to the weeping gods as yet another place to hide as the world races toward closing in upon itself, extinguishing the last vestige of anything “useless”. The alternative is to address these sites with a pre-industrial-strength formalism, of the high-pointless type, the kind that might redeem the radical rigor of formalism from the faux formalisms of the last several decades. Such forms of formalism would in essence indulge immense erasures, re-writing through negation the worst ravages of the 20th century. One such strategy is simply to flood the sites (as Michael Sorkin proposed for the Black Triangle), creating massive, horrendous lagoons and lakes that might slowly fill with microorganisms, reconstituting in some bizarre manner the origins of the world.

Edward O. Wilson's description of vital ecosystems is apt: “The more species that inhabit an ecosystem, such as a forest or lake, the more productive and stable is the ecosystem.... When we scan a lake our macroscopic eye sees only relatively big organisms.”<sup>(9)</sup> This, in turn, in Wilson's *The Future of Life* (2002), leads to a rhapsodic description of the warp and weft of life typified by the microscopic life forms that produce and sustain life. Wilson reiterates Leibniz's vision of the second, teeming chaotic infinity below seemingly singular things, matched (if not trumped) by the first infinity, the path of thought leading to galaxies swimming through empty space. This is the same great schism celebrated by Pascal in his famous description of being personally suspended between two infinities. Water, as sign, signifies the glass of the mirror stretched between “here” and “there”, while the mirror signifies the unresolvable conundrum of representations as the locus of mental and phenomenal experience; i.e., the place of thought itself.

Water, as mirror as representation, problematizes the nature of focus. Like the Escher image of a watery underworld juxtaposed with an apparent surface of floating leaves, the challenge is to simultaneously perceive depth and surface. Or to, at once, see both sides of the mirror. But the designed landscapes of the last two decades suffer from myopia, focusing solely on the surface. Not surface as shimmer, but surface as sham. A critique of these landscapes begs us to plunge beyond the surface, and begin a deep-sea dive. In architecture, Leon van Schaik's “Poetics in Architecture” (with contributing authors) attempted to swim against the surge of fashion, and ask if it is possible to find a “universal or spiritual” dimension to architecture – the depth of experience as complement to the surface of appearance perhaps. Elsewhere, van Schaik calls for a poetics to add new insights to old, and declares that “as the new physics slowly ousts the pessimistic formulations on which existentialism were founded, architectural approaches that deal with the active imagining of our current inhabitation of the globe do help.” The search for the “universal or spiritual” is overdue in landscape architecture, or more urgently, in that realm which is landscape + architecture.<sup>(10)</sup>

The challenge is thus to focus on surface and depth in a discursive engagement. This could be compared to the two types of vision that the eye uses: foveal and peripheral. The first is direct, and picks up detail but not shadows. Peripheral vision complements this, and ensures that low spatial frequencies are appreciated. This complementary process is glimpsed in the *Mona Lisa*'s smile, which is paradoxically only revealed when you do *not* look at it, with peripheral vision able to discern the subtle, shadowy smile. (11) To see the smile remains an elusive goal for the designed landscape, to be foveal *and* peripheral, to see surface *and* depth, flesh *and* bones ... "Drawn on paper, the garden is an x-ray: the lips, the smile, the clear gaze, the skin, its tepidity, all of this is missing."(12)

### INTO THE PH-PHONEMIC S-S-SOUP

So, what is the sound of water seeping, cycling, sluicing through the dyspeptic landscapes of the early 21st century? To "sound" such landscapes requires venturing "below", into the underside of this grisly picture, beyond the surface. To do so, it might be best to steal a page from Chomsky's minimalist agenda in linguistics, a page from Kurt "Merz" Schwitters' seminal *Ur Sonata* (1922-32), plus sketch a few cursory operational details from Parc Downsview Park (Toronto) and Fresh Kills (New York), two very, very big park projects obsessed over at the recent (April 2003) "Large Parks" conference at Harvard Graduate School of Design.

In the case of Downsview, the flat, sonorous nothingness of the ex-urban, former (forlorn) air field suggests a low sizzling sound – a sleep-inducing z-z-z-z-z-z-z-z. Foreign Office Architects' plan would have modified this, through modest morpho-genetic site alterations, to a skipping, modulated zr rp zr rp rp rp. In the case of Fresh Kills, the overtly, overly-ripe riparian largesse of the site suggests a lively encounter with repressed consonants and regressed phonemes – a deep sea dive to the elemental ground of things, perhaps. Certainly, such a tragically disfigured landscape would issue forth a steady spectral hissssssssssing with unpredictable outbursts of blblblblbl or grgrgrgrg spspstlrltltltl tt tt punctuated by crcrercrkkkk crk crk crk psssshshshsh – that is, monosyllabic stutterings, sputterings, and shuddering characteristic of a completely deranged hydrology. As Field Operations labors mightily to tame and re-colonize the 2,000-plus-acre rubbish pile strewn with post-"sanitary" landfill facilities and post-9/11 debris, various and variable, voluble and volatile, urgent and unctuous murmurs, meows, and howls will no doubt emerge to mar the progress of conversion to a stately park for Staten Island, New York City, the Tri-State Area, and the World. The mewling landscape will hardly be able to help itself. These "eruptions" (irruptions) will no doubt alter the course of any and all operational-programmatic gestures of the master plan and collide/collude to produce a bizarre new park of a totally unpredictable, perhaps mutational nature.

"Benzene, tetrachloroethene (PCE), trichloroethene (TCE), vinyl chloride, ammonia, phosphorus, organo chlorine compounds, phenol, cyclic aromatic compounds, cyanides, chlorobenzene, 1,2,4-trimethylbenzene, 1,3,5-trimethylbenzene, xylenes, polychlorinated biphenyls (PCBs), polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbons (PAHs), semivolatile organic compounds (SVOCs), volatile organic compounds (VOCs), hydrogen chloride, hydrogen sulphide, disiloxane, thorium, arsenic, zinc, lead, mercury, heptachlor, lindane, chlordane, aldrin."

A quick summary of the "official" chemicals (as above) surging, wandering, and languishing through, in, and without the leachate collection and filtration system at Fresh Kills provides a first clue (the same "unofficial" chemicals striding boldly into the surrounding estuaries and tidal rivers provide a second) ... The venting, torching, and eventual harnessing (harvesting) of the voluminous unnatural gases percolating within the undulating landscape (the sealed/capped mounds) suggest an explosive/compulsive/*propulsive* aspect that will assuredly tax the most subtle and serene manipulations and interventions proposed for this vast new amenity park. The sound of the soup that seeps throughout the site may, then, become the mostly low, sultry voice of the new Fresh Kills, the piercing cries of the long-legged picturesque birds hovering above or perched astride the shoals of the Isle of Meadows, the clash and crack of extreme sports, and the high-frequency whirring of high-speed windmills notwithstanding. The various layers of ecologically correct management will, in turn, suffer endless setbacks, blowbacks, meltdowns, brownouts, inversions, implosions, and plentiful surprises on the way to settling in for the long haul and slow crawl to the next millennium, or as far as "the blind eye cannot see".

### SWEET VIOLENCE: THE BOATMAN'S CALL

"There will always be suffering/ It flows through life like water / I put my hand over hers / Down in the lime-tree arbour".(13) "Home", then, to the idea of the tragic ... Terry Eagleton's recent, magisterial summary of the

aesthetization of the tragic in literary and artistic terms (and its projection, today, into the past, plus its trivialization in the present), registers several, multivalent cultural themes all at once vis-à-vis (horror upon horror) the horrific, denatured, disfigured face of the modern landscape; a landscape that registers in the lowest registers of the imagination as a slowly creeping nightmare, and in the highest registers of winged thought as a provocative, unearthly total work of art.(14)

Finally, in Millais' *Ophelia* (1851-52) are the paradoxes and poignancy of the water world. Her father murdered by her lover, Hamlet, Shakespeare's Ophelia is implied to have died by slowly drowning after falling into a stream. The surface and depth of the water in Millais' jewel-like representation, in the hyper-real, ether-real manner of the Pre-Raphaelites, is a liminal zone between horror and beauty. Smell the roses, meadowsweet, violets, crowflowers, purple loosestrife, poppies, fritillary, smell the mud. Sweetness and sludge. There is even some eerie echo of the list of flowers in Fresh Kills' toxins inventory, with the strangely beautiful incantation of chemicals including Phosphorous (the Morning Star), and Mercury (the messenger-god). *Et in arcadia ego. Et in mors ego*. Listen! The stream rushes and weeps as it engulfs the crazed, suicidal Ophelia. Listen again! Ophelia sings as she sinks into this sensual stream. Here water is at once, at last, beautiful and tragic.

“Queen Gertrude: There is a willow grows askant the brook, / That shows his hoar leaves in the glassy stream. / Therewith fantastic garlands did she make / Of crowflowers, nettles, daisies, and long purples / That liberal shepherds give a grosser name, / But our cold maids do dead-men's-fingers call them /. There on the pendent boughs her crownnet weeds / Clambering to hang, an envious sliver broke, / When down her weedy trophies and herself / Fell in the weeping brook. / Her clothes spread wide, / And mermaid-like awhile they bore her up; / Which time she chanted snatches of old tunes, / As one incapable of her own distress, / Or like a creature native and indued / Unto that element. / But long it could not be / Till that her garments, heavy with their drink, / Pulled the poor wretch from her melodious lay / To muddy death.”(15)

GK/JB (Easter 2003)

## ENDNOTES

1 – Arundhati Roy, “Come September”, *War Talk* (Cambridge, MA: South End, 2003), p. 45.

2 – Umberto Eco, *Art & Beauty in the Middle Ages*, trans. Hugh Bredin (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1988), pp. 72-73.

3 – Arundhati Roy, *Power Politics* (Cambridge, MA: South End, 2002). “The international dam industry alone is worth thirty-two to forty-six billion U.S. dollars a year. In the First World, dams are being decommissioned, blown up.” From the essay “Power Politics: The Reincarnation of Rumpelstiltskin”, p. 62. Trained as an architect, Arundhati Roy is, thereby, well suited to a critique of the role architecture plays in the construction of structural hegemony world-wide. Anyone questioning the complex role infrastructure plays in the late-modern world – i.e., enslaving while liberating through being both “indispensable” and “dispensable” – need only consult the annals of recent wars to find extraordinary evidence that the hand that giveth also taketh away. In New York, New York, New York (i.e., Manhattan) infrastructure passes every day for everydayness. Indeed, the city is one massive interconnected construction of stuff with the last vestiges of the Real huddled around the edges and fast disappearing. Even the East River, Hudson River, and New York Harbor are barely real, as they are constantly dredged, permanently bulk-headed, irremediably polluted, and perceived by planners as transportation corridors, versus vital natural resources. For a vision of things to come, consult the 2012 Olympic Bid. For the slow demolition of New York City's original prospects, see Paul Cohen, Robert Augustyn, *Manhattan in Maps 1527-1995* (New York: Rizzoli, 1997). This survey of historical maps of the city includes the section “Growth Within the Grid”, which, in turn, includes: “Real-Estate Interests Drive Cartography” (1851) with its compelling extension of the grid up to what is today Harlem; plus “Dripps II” (1850) and “Watery Foundations to Growth” (1865) with the last signs of rivulets, tidal streams, marshes, and actually existing topography peeking out from the proposed extension of the city grid to the Harlem River. For a review of this book plus articles on the state of architecture in New York c.1998, see “New York Stories”, *Architecture New York* 22 (1998) ...

4 – Algernon Charles Swinburne, *Lesbia Brandon*, in Sir Edmund Gosse and Thomas James Wise, eds., *The Complete Works of Algernon Charles Swinburne* (New York: Russell & Russell, 1968).

5 – Andrei Tarkovsky, *Sculpting in Time: Reflections on the Cinema*, trans. Kitty Hunter-Blair (Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 1986), p. 212.

6 – Miguel de Unamuno, *The Christ of Velázquez: A Poem*, trans. Jaime R. Vidal (Quincy, IL: Franciscan Press,

1999).

7 – Andreas Gursky's work was exhibited at the Museum of Modern Art, New York, in Spring 2001, and then traveled to the Centre Pompidou in Paris. The catalogue for the New York exhibition, *Andreas Gursky* (New York: MoMA/Abrams, 2001), includes an essay by Peter Galassi ("Gursky's World", pp. 9-43) describing in detail the evolution of "documentary" photography in Europe from August Sander and Otto Steinert to Bernd and Hilla Becher and their time at the Kunstakademie, Düsseldorf. Gursky and Struth are a product of this fertile period and have moved from simple "objective" photography to producing out-sized, edited images of contemporary life and mass culture. Bernd and Hilla Becher's images of "industrial archaeology" came to the attention of the art world with an exhibition in New York, in 1972, and was, concurrently, the subject of an "admiring article" in the pages of *Artforum* by American artist Carl Andre. See also the catalogue for the Paris exhibition, *Andreas Gursky* (Paris: Editions du Centre Pompidou, 2002) ...

8 – For projects addressing the extreme environmental degradation associated with Soviet-era coal mining within the Black Triangle, see "Le Triangle Noir", *L'architecture d'aujourd'hui* 317 (June 1988), pp. 67-95. For devastating photographic reconnaissance c.1990-1996, see Josef Koudelka's "Černý trojúhelník" – *Podkrusnohori: Fotografie 1990-1994 / Le triangle noir* (Prague: Vesmir, 1994). For Michael Sorkin's project see Gavin Keeney, *On the Nature of Things: Contemporary American Landscape Architecture* (Basel: Birkhauser, 2001). For additional post-industrial wreckage, see Michael Kenna's *The Rouge* (Santa Monica, CA: RAM, 1995). In the introduction to the project-based spread in *L'architecture d'aujourd'hui* the following statement summarizes the spectacle of the post-industrial thing: "The Black Triangle is an extreme case in Europe, a paroxysm. The region it covers is as big as a country, straddling three borders. It was dealt the death stroke by intensive mining that is itself moribund today, and has fallen brutally into the post-industrial era." (p. 67) *Sic transit* five-year plans ... In the accompanying essay "Quel Paysages? (Which Landscapes?)", contemporary landscape aesthetician Gilles A. Tiberghien lays out the historical coordinates for "looking" at landscape as a manifestation of the vast pictorial tradition in Western art: "The view we take of landscape today is largely due to a pictorial tradition that has its own history and that has led us to consider the artistic quality of natural scenery. Considered beautiful when it corresponded to a certain classical ideal, landscape became picturesque in the early 19th century, when it was portrayed as subject to the sublime, frightening forces of nature. In certain contemporary photographs, those of Koudelka and Baltz for example, we see landscape caught in industrial transformation." (p. 92) While this synopsis is fair, it is also perhaps a bit reductive, since the picturesque pushes further into the past (and into the interior, synchronic, metaphysical realm of thinking itself, or "thinking about thinking"). It is also useful to recall that certain artists (such as Roland Savery) outside the acknowledged historical continuum (or at the margins of so-called art history) pre-figured the tragic and/or chaotic nature of nature valorized today as a sign of *resistance* to the commodification (structuralization) of everything, quite often in terms of a rapport with those very forces within nature that are purely chaotic and violent as they are re-written (re-inscribed) within the machinery of cultural production (classical or otherwise). One case alone will suffice to "picture" the extraordinary otherness of nature – that is, the Mannerist response to Renaissance classicism. The Mannerist fascination with bizarre natural and cultural objects and formulations explicitly foreshadowed the emergence of Romanticism 200 years later. The Mannerist imagination, which is truly "synchronic", was notably obsessed with the sigilistic nature of things – images and collected and/or manufactured things – drawn from as far afield as possible, but usually re-fashioned in the workshops of artists and jewellers. Rudolf II, in Prague, in the late 16th century, had perhaps the foremost collection of such works of the imagination, in the form of sculpture, paintings, and a cabinet of natural wonders (the *wunderkammer*). These manufactured and found "things" (including the marvelous paintings of Bartholomaeus Spranger) acted as psychic mechanisms, or triggers ("switches"), a touchstone for the Emperor's fascination with the recondite, the fabulous, and the arcane. It was this same reputation for the sur-real that made Rudolf the patron saint for Czech Surrealists and Poetists in the 1920s and 1930s. Needless to say, such concerns "picture" a different sensibility altogether than that of order and reason. Tiberghien rightly calls upon artists (architects and landscape architects?) to treat the post-industrial wreckage of the world as "time corridors" (*juste-milieux?*), versus attempting to restore them, conferring on such sites the status of magical signifiers, pointing into the future, if you will, charged with the irrepressible, insuperable agency of Nietzschean "critical history".

9 – Edward O. Wilson, *The Future of Life* (New York: Vintage, 2002), pp. 108-109.

10 – Leon van Schaik, "Poetics in Architecture", *Architectural Design* 72/2 (2002); and Leon van Schaik, "Between Abstraction and Cultural Reference: House at Morley Road by Mok Wei Wei, William Lim and Associates", *Singapore Architect* 201 (1999), passim.

11 – *Guardian* ...

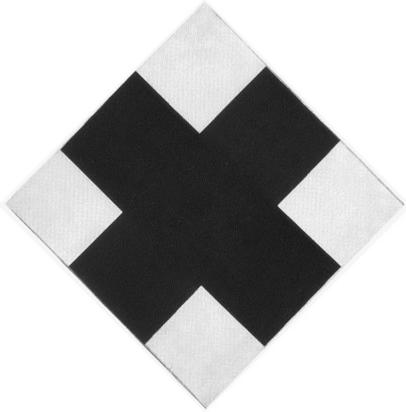
12 – Rubio i Tuduri, quoted in Eduard Bru, "Lapena & Torres en sus jardines", *Tres en el lugar/Three on the site* (Barcelona: Actar, 1997), p. 25. In the essay "Barcelona", included in the same text, Eduard Bru describes the

conversion of Barcelona and other Catalan cities and towns through the agency of neo-modernization, in the 1980s and 1990s, as a form of rampant memorialization coupled with rote commercialization: “Thus contemporary urban spaces populated by hyper-designed objects have become a spectacle seen time after time in Catalan architecture of the last decade. And this is not just a phenomenon restricted to capitals. Innumerable small and medium-sized towns and cities have felt obliged to incorporate public spaces representative of their updatedness, filling disproportionate squares and promenades with landmarks and monuments ‘by the kilo’, all presided over by the rampant modernity of design in an episode of destruction which, coupled with the predatory effect of so many rows of terraced housing, is comparable to (though less remarked upon) the disasters of sixties *desarrollism* (‘developmentalism’).” (pp. 36-37) “Free space in today’s city is generally residual space. It is not free space in the strict sense of the term, but rather space among things. It is the result of the existence of unresolved tensions that have made its occupation impossible.” (p. 45) Furthermore, in a short series of pithy aphorisms entitled “Against Picturesqueness”, Bru qualifies these remarks by noting that: “It is picturesque to use fragments of other architectures as fetishes.” And, “It is picturesque to consider technics as a vehicle for the idea and not as forming part of the essence of the idea.” (p. 60) This dual calamity has effectively reduced the contemporary city to a stage set for the exercise of dubious design strategies that have little authenticity, providing short-term gain (excuses) for some and long-term disenfranchisement and/or alienation for all who question the total objectification of the city as real estate.

13 – Nick Cave, “Lime-tree Arbour”, *The Boatman’s Call* (Longitude Music Co., 1996).

14 – Terry Eagleton, *Sweet Violence: The Idea of the Tragic* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 2002).

15 – William Shakespeare, *Hamlet*, Act IV, Scene VII.



DREAMS &amp; NIGHTMARES – 01/18/04

## THE ONTOLOGICAL CROSSHAIRS

[...]

“The simplest, most elementary mark, the cross, was interpreted by Mondrian in a mystical sense before Le Corbusier saw in it, minus by minus, the sign of positivity; this mark brings together the masculine and feminine elements in the coitus of vertical and horizontal.” – Hubert Damisch, “Toward a Tomb for Adolf Loos” (2000)

[...]

### TOWARD LANDSCAPE + ARCHITECTURE THAT SINGS (SINGES)

Rising to fall, falling to rise ... Caillois’ legendary essay on legendary psychasthenia (merging with one’s environment, milieu and anti-milieu, ipseity and alterity), and a return to the Unamuno thing (by way of Velázquez’s painting, again) regarding darkness (velvety blackness ...) ... Rain-streaked black puddles or Some-thing Else ... I am reminded of Deleuze’s remark: “Clarity endlessly plunges into obscurity (in *The Fold*, 1993 ...) ... And I’m reminded of why black-and-white film is superior to color, and why Wenders’ *Wings of Desire* (*Himmel über Berlin*), Godard’s *Éloge de l’amour* (*In Praise of Love*), and most of Andrei Tarkovsky’s best work were/was primarily “framed” in black-and-white ... And why photographers talk about teasing the print image out of the darkness of the darkroom ... There is some-thing here regarding the origin of things, the mysteriousness of every-thing, of ipseity and alterity, of milieus and anti-milieus ... Self and Other, but in a manner consistent with creative processes, which is why artists should not submit to analysis (psychoanalysis, that is ...) ... I think it was Rilke who said this ... Artists should not be professionals (and vice versa) ... Was this not Loos’ point? ... Art is for all times, the timeless “nature” of time ... “You are the clock” ...

Rêve(al) ... Dreams (*les rêves*) ... Some dreams conceal, some dreams reveal ... One must discern between the two ... as one must discern between which things are signs, and which things are merely things (not-signs ...) ... Is it the ringing in the left ear or the right ear that signifies some-thing “calling” ... Significant dreams have local (specific) and Universal (abstract) content ... They are, after all, “metaphysical” ... They reveal two worlds (two souls) ... Two souls: Your own (*voire vous*) and the World-Soul ... The World-Soul (Spirit) dreams in you (your Self) ... Echoes of Goethe’s opening of *Faust*: “Two souls within my breast reside ...”

Two kinds of darkness ... One leads to knowledge (light), the other leads to nothingness (more darkness) ... Dreams and nightmares ... The first leads out (a Possible Way Out) ... The second leads to nothing at all (Possibly No Way Out) ... Hence darkness, too, is metaphysical ... The Imagination (the Imaginary) is a mesmeric Sea ... Not unlike the ocean in Tarkovsky’s *Solaris*, this sea forms islands in us (in the Imaginary) ... We inhabit these islands ... And yes, it all “has something to do with conscience ...” – i.e., this “inhabitation” of dreams (islands in the protoplasmic, mesmeric Sea ...) ... (And, anyway, I’d rather discuss the library scene in *Solaris* than the latest MVRDV project for Switzerland, the 30 seconds of weightlessness, and the slow pans of the Brueghel landscapes, the floating candelabra, the drifting, airborne(e) book, the passage *through* Cervantes’ *Don Quixote* ... “They come at night ...” ... Hari becoming human ...) ... Hence poets and artists, it is said, must live by the /S/ea ... waking (waving) dreams and otherwise ... Hence, too, the desire (dream) to “merge” with the /S/ea ... Thus, always, “houses” by the /S/ea ... Such houses as dreams are made of ... /S/, signifying the /s/ynchronic baroque (a “baroque” for all times ...) ... /S/, Master-Signifier signifying /S/ome-thing Else ... Thus, too, Lacan tied up in proverbial (k)nots (enveloped, swallowed by his very own moebius strip ...) ...

### ENTR’ACTE

Regarding infatuation (a form of “imperial” desire, the mark/dream of imagined conquests ...) ... Experience tells us that it can be the precursor to Some-thing Else and/or a pyre on which to burn away personal and/or collective delusions ... If it can be sustained, transmuted, it will surely become Love ... Navigating through life one finds both the smoking signals burning on the beach and celestial signals ... We are, often, battered ships ... While in IT, infatuation, one cannot know where it might go, where the rocks are, where the channel is, where a safe haven

(harbor) might be found ... What leads out of infatuation to Some-thing Else is contact with the humanity in another person (in dispossessed peoples every-where, any-where ...) ... If the Other just cannot speak the truth (their truth, which leads to the Truth), infatuation will surely go nowhere useful ... Such, too, is the topological folding and twisting of Art versus nothing much at all ... The conditioning of the Soul determines to a degree who is the subject (object) of our desire ... The Soul is but one place for love to be rooted ... Rooted there, it can often be extraordinary, but also fleeting ... The Soul is (so to speak) midway between the body and the Spirit ... For this reason, phenomenological excursions always-already circle themselves ... The signals emitted by the Soul are almost always mixed signals ... Once the Spirit is involved nothing should be able to derail Love ... It is when that spirit is abandoned, or betrayed, and smoke and ash returns, that things can and do go awry ... Very few people can rise to the challenge of Love rooted in Truth (“Lotuses planted in Fire” ...) ... They actually prefer (are more comfortable with) smoke and ash ... For me, these days, I have about five minutes for smoke-and-ash-filled games (especially the “poetry” of Donald Rumsfeld ...)

### THEORETICALLY UNDEAD (/S/OME-THING ELSE)

We are the clock and the mirror ... /S/elf is not self (not-self) ... /S/elf is the diacritical slash (/tear) in the fabric, the gap in the mirror, the conjunctive thing-not-in-itself ... /S/elf inhabits the very small (blue) space between here and there, self and other, thing and not-thing, milieu and anti-milieu ... This rupture in Time is The Way Out ... When things are very close together a bridge is formed and the Way Out presents Itself ... This way out is signified by the “/”, the doubling of “/” signifies the endless production (ineluctable generative games) of the Master-Signifier (and the endless reification of the same old game, a game as “old as the hills”) signifying, as far as the blind eye cannot see, a sublime (nominal) nothingness (which embraces every-thing) ...

Thus, the death of theory is overrated ... (Thus, the triumph of Capitalism is overrated ...) ... Theory has simply returned to its origins in metaphysics, philosophy, aesthetics, and rhetoric ... (Alternatives to Capitalism Triumphant wait in the wings ... Yes ...) ... IT (theory) is said to have emerged from literary criticism ... (Jameson has called IT a creation of late capitalism ... No doubt he is correct, again ...) ... Yet the literary (structuralist and post-structuralist) twists and turns are/were only provisional coordinates, a pre-text (for /S/ome-thing Else Altogether) ... Theory emerged from a sublime nothingness within/co-terminous with the Imaginary (reified, recently, as “the virtual”, again, the game ...) ... This sublime nothingness is the opposite of Nothingness (endless darkness) ... Theory brought knowledge (light) down to earth, to its knees ... Theory, in theory, is a sign for radical contingency ... While bracketing the metaphysical (winged thought), theory engaged the intense mutability of all things contingent ... Now, “after theory” (Terry Eagleton’s latest idea), the Universal is (again) calling (see Žižek and Badiou, and Jean-Luc Marion, and Giorgio Agamben, and stay tuned for the reappearance of Massimo Cacciari, once he “returns” from Mount Athos ...) ... As with the now-classic figure of speech derived from Freud (by way of the Surrealists), the return of the Universal is also “the return of the repressed ...” ... *And yet*, with Novalis (by way of Bachelard), perhaps, we should speak (sing), instead, of dialectical sublimation, such that the Universal might return “more often” to haunt cultural production, here and there, slipping in and out of things (of/through cultural production ...) to inhabit our imaginations, our houses by the Sea, our gardens-as-pretexts (gaps), and whatever else w(h)ets the proverbial whistle ... Dreams and echoes, and echoing dreams ...

GK (January 2004)

/S/CORCHED BY LOVE - Or, On the Self-Insufficiency of the Master Signifier (a.k.a. Universality and/or Enigmatic Terms) – “A universality ‘comes to itself,’ is posited ‘as such,’ in the gap which divides a particular element not from other elements, but *from itself*.” – Slavoj Žižek, *The Puppet and the Dwarf* (2003)

UPDATED 03/07/04

# PROLEGOMENA TO EVERY FUTURE LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURE

[...]

1/ The “categorical” experience of the world since Immanuel Kant (and post-Kantian Critical Idealism), and the translation of such experience to fields of creative activity, is historically determined.

2/ These determinations are not prefigured in individual subjectivity but culturally constituted forms of *acceptable and unacceptable* behavior and conduct – they follow one another in the architectonic of deterministic logic, not unlike lemmings.

3/ The cultural framework of this subject-object relationship is dynamic, salient and indexed at the formative and discrete threshold of language – the so-called *place of taking-place* – the intersection of structural and modal operations – the latter of which constitute the mechanics of control inherent in all discourse or language games.

4/ The language games of landscape + architecture may be constitutively altered – *in advance* – by laying bare the bare-naked operations of its genus – through an analogical purge of its chief baggage, the formalistic game-playing of styles and empty syntactical elaborations. To this end, *ludic paratactics* come into play.

5/ An Artaud-inspired landscape-as-theater, or landscape-of-cruelty, where the “dialogic” nature of landscape (nature/culture) is eliminated and the common origin of both is recovered, is the “first return” to the nominal “archaic” and “pre-modern” (a putative “pre-rational”, but actually *sur-rational* state/site, characterized by the mark of the critical-poetic Sublime) – a move to be repeated in a series of historiographic thrusts to the pre-Adamic, mute ground of landscape + architecture. Such a “return” is, paradoxically, also a quantum leap forward.

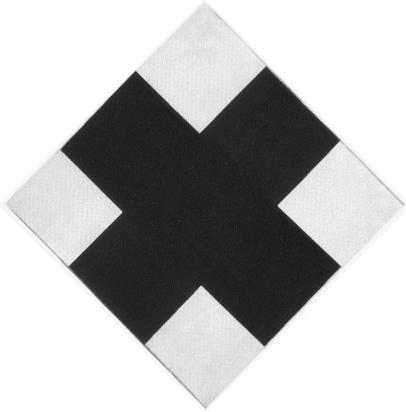
6/ This mute territory, since it is also a mythic ground, may be reconstituted as an ideal condition *within* landscape + architecture, to be established as a liminal *terra vague* and/or a “wilderness” of phonemes and archaic utterances – a primitive topology (not typology, nor topography, but somehow both *at once*).

7/ This territory is *unnameable and untameable* – thereby, it is also unclaimable by discourse and rhetoric. This territory should, as a result, constitute the closest approach to the language of the world (of things-in-themselves), prior to all interpretive, instrumental and categorical operations. This “wilderness” would serve, then, as a “reserve” within landscape + architecture, a place to *return to* for “wild” breeding stock in every future landscape + architecture, while also disclosing the source code for both things and non-things.

GK (2000)

OTHER SPACE(S) – “The production of the visible by the invisible, even if it testifies to itself first and foremost by perspective narrowly understood, is nevertheless not limited to only this. First because it can make manifest not only the staging of visible levels in depth (as in Flemish scenes that open themselves from an interior onto a landscape), but more so because it manifests, directly and uniquely, depth itself, in its unreal, almost complete abstraction.” – Jean-Luc Marion, *The Crossing of the Visible* (1996), p. 9 ...

[...]



# MILIEU & ANTI-MILIEU

[...]

“When Michelangelo created man,  
He was anticipating cracks all along the ceiling.”  
– Dionisio Martinez, “Ash Wednesday”  
*History as a Second Language* (1992)

[...]

“It is on this level that it can be gratifying to give a common root to phenomena of mimicry both biological and magical and to psychasthenic experience, since the facts seem so well to impose one on them: this *attraction by space*, as elementary and mechanical as are tropisms, and by the effect of which life seems to lose ground, blurring in its retreat the frontier between the organism and the milieu and *expanding to the same degree the limits within which*, according to Pythagoras, *we are allowed to know, as we should, that nature is everywhere the same.*” – Roger Caillois, “Mimicry and Legendary Psychasthenia” (1935)\*

“I feel that there is much to be said for the Celtic belief that the souls of those whom we have lost are held captive in some inferior being, in an animal, in a plant, in some inanimate object, and thus effectively lost to us until the day (which to many never comes) when we happen to pass by a tree or to obtain possession of the object which forms their prison. Then they start and tremble, they call us by our name, and as soon as we have recognised their voice the spell is broken. Delivered by us, they have overcome death and return to share our life.” – Marcel Proust, *Remembrance of Things Past* (1913)

[...]

## PROVISIONAL NOTES ON MILIEU AND ANTI-MILIEU

**I. CANGUILHEM** – **Georges Canguilhem** (1904-1995), “The Living and Its Milieu”\* / “The milieu provokes the organism to orient its own development.” (*Grey Room* 03, Spring 2001, p. 23) / Regarding Lucien Febvre (and his school), “In a human milieu, man is obviously subject to a determinism, but it is the determinism of artificial constructions.” (p. 18) – “To live is to spread out; it is to organize a milieu starting from a central reference point that cannot itself be referred to without losing its original meaning.” (p. 21) – “Living man takes from his relationship with man the scholar, in whose work ordinary perceptive experience finds itself contradicted and corrected, a sort of unconscious fatuousness that leads him to prefer his own milieu to that of other living things as having not only a different value, but a higher degree of reality.” (p. 27) – *Milieu*, “n. Environment, state of life, social surroundings. [F wd]”, *Oxford Pocket Dictionary* (1924)

\*“Le vivant et son milieu” was first presented in lecture form at the Collège Philosophique (Paris) in 1946-47. It was not published until 1952. Please note that this (1946-47) is the timeframe for Antonin Artaud’s most strenuous works vis-à-vis “effacing” the so-called subjectile (substrate) ... See Jacques Derrida, Paule Thévenin, *The Secret Art of Antonin Artaud* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1988)

**Isaac Newton** (1642-1727) – The milieu – “The fluid is the intermediary between two bodies; it is their milieu; and to the extent that it penetrates these bodies, they are situated within it.” / **Pascal** (1623-62) – The milieu – “A median situation, a fluid of suspension, a life environment.” – See: “Disproportion de l’homme” – “Pascal knew that the cosmos had shattered into pieces [with Newtonian physics], but the eternal silence of infinite spaces frightened him. Man was no longer at the center (*au milieu*) of the world, but *he is a milieu* (a milieu between two infinities, a milieu between nothing and everything, a milieu between two extremes); the milieu is *the state in which nature placed us; we are floating on a vast milieu; man is in proportion with the parts of the world; he relates to all that he knows:* ‘He needs a place to contain him, time in which to endure, movement to live, elements to make him up, heat and food to nourish him, air to breathe ... and in the end, everything is his ally.’” / **Lamarck** (1744-1829) – The milieu – “Water, air, light.” – “Lamarckism is not mechanism, and it would be inexact to call it finalism. In reality, it is naked vitalism.” / **Auguste Comte** (1798-1857) – The milieu – “The sum total of outside circumstances necessary to the existence of each organism.” – “The ambient system cannot modify the organism without the latter in turn exercising a corresponding influence.” / **Charles Darwin** (1809-82) – The milieu – “La concurrence vitale” – “The struggle for existence” / **Alexander Humboldt** (1769-1859) – The milieu – “Geography” – See: *Kosmos* (1845-62)

– “For in the beginning geography was for the Greeks the projection of the sky onto the earth, the coming together of earth and sky, a correspondence (geometry and cosmography) and a hierarchical correspondence (physics and astrology).” – “It is the theory of universal sympathy, a vitalist intuition of universal determinism, that gives its meaning to the geographical theory of the milieu.”

If Canguilhem’s review of the development of the concept of milieu echoes Bachelard’s “psychoanalysis of fire”, it is not a coincidence. *La psychanalyse du feu* (Paris: Librairie Gallimard, 1938), a poeticized, “surrationalist” reading/writing, follows the same trajectory through the positivist territory of modern science to a purely syncretical postulation of “fire” as a quintessential sign for the spirit animating a singular human / natural milieu. To accomplish this ‘turn’, Bachelard privileges the sign of fire within Novalis’ world, a transfigured milieu that reconnects human and cosmic milieux.

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**II. ANTONIN ARTAUD** (1896-1948) – ARTAUD’S “SUBJECTILE”, BY WAY OF **DERRIDA** – “The subjectile: itself between two places. It has two situations. As the support of a representation, it’s the subject which has become a *gisant*, spread out, stretched out, inert, neutral (*ci-git*). But it doesn’t fall out like this, if it is not abandoned to this downfall or this dejection, it can still be of interest for itself and not for its representation, for *what* it represents or for the representation it bears.” (p. 76) / “Neither object nor subject, neither screen nor projectile, the subjectile can *become* all that, stabilizing itself in a certain form or moving about in another.” (p. 77) / “The subjectile is nothing, however, nothing but a solidified interval between above and below, visible and invisible, before and behind, this side and that.” (p.78) / Regarding Artaud’s work in both theatre and drawing/writing, Derrida looks (once again) into the essay/mirror “Mise en scène et la métaphysique” (1931), the critical essay in *Théâtre et son double* (*The Theater and Its Double*) that deals with Artaud’s confrontation with the painting *Lot and His Daughters* (c.1521), by Lucas van Leyden, an approach to painting further explored in his writing about Van Gogh: “The ‘subordination’ of the landscape, subject and object of the representation, belongs to what is represented on the subjectile, underlying the representation. Nevertheless, through a metonymy that precisely organizes the whole scene of the subjectile, the two surfaces are going to be substituted one for the other: in the work of Artaud and under his hand.” (p. 88) / Within this agonistic “negative” dialectic (not this, not that), what moves in Artaud’s privileging of “expressivity” is a concept of milieu (*mise en scène*) that also serves as a cipher for not-self (an older, archaic Self) which matches the extraordinary force of the sublime other (in a manner not dissimilar to the force of will privileged by the Romantics). Artaud is tiptoeing toward an encounter with the real real (he says, as well, that the way out is through the real to the surreal), a real real that dissolves boundaries and accesses that “dark force” (Spirit) that he also finds within himself (below all manner of interior discourse, mechanistic drives, displacements, dissociations, and dislocations he seems to situate in/within abject subjectivity). / Citations from “To Unsense the Subjectile”, in Jacques Derrida, Paule Thévenin, *The Secret Art of Antonin Artaud*, pp. 58-157 ...

**BRETON, RE ARTAUD BY WAY OF NOVALIS** – “Each time I happen to recall – nostalgically – the surrealist rebellion as expressed in its original purity and intransigence, it is the personality of Antonin Artaud that stands out in dark magnificence, it is a certain intonation in his voice that injects specks of gold into his whispering voice ... I know that Antonin Artaud saw, the way Rimbaud, as well as Novalis and Arnim before him, had spoken of seeing. It is of little consequence, ever since the publication of [Gérard de Nerval’s] *Aurélia* [1855], that what was seen this way does not coincide with what is objectively visible. The real tragedy is that the society to which we are less and less honored to belong persists in making it an inexpiable crime to have gone over to the other side of the looking glass.” – André Breton, “A Tribute to Antonin Artaud”, in *Free Rein*; cited in Jacques Derrida, Paule Thévenin, *The Secret Art of Antonin Artaud* ...

**III. BERGSONISME** – **Henri Bergson** (1859-1941) – *Matière et mémoire* (1896), *L’évolution créatrice* (1907) – “As Bergson declares, in his 1902 lectures at the Collège de France, now made available in the first issues of the

*Annales bergsoniennes*, entitled ‘The History and Concept of Time’, it is an intuition of *durée* which generates and informs his philosophic vision. This intuition took possession of Bergson’s consciousness at Clermont-Ferrand in what may have been a shock of sensibility comparable to ‘the road to Damascus’. As Gilles Deleuze would put it in his penetrating summations, for Bergson *durée* defines existence itself. On the one hand, there is the ‘time’ of the mathematician and physicist, of the chronometer without which science and technology would be impossible. On the other, there is ‘duration’, time as human awareness experiences it. ... The radicalism of *Matière et mémoire* consists in Bergson’s ascription to *durée* not only of a psychological or illusory reality, but a phenomenal existence in the outside world.” – George Steiner, “Mystic Master: Bergson’s Lucid Life and Cloudy Grim Death”, *TLS* (February 28, 2003) / **Albert Brachet** – *La vie création des formes* (1927) / **Henri Focillon** (1881-1943) – *La vies des formes* (1934) – “Realms: Space, Matter, Mind, Time” ...

#### IV. THE ANATOMY (AUTONOMY) OF FORM

Re Henri Focillon / Provisional “Field” Notes from *The Life of Forms in Art* / *Vies des formes* (1934) – **Henri Focillon** (1881-1943) / English edition, *The Life of Forms in Art* (New York: Zone Books, 1989) ...

**Notes from the Introduction by Jean Molino (1986)** / “Form ... ‘sets up within history an immutable order,’ an autonomous reality that presents itself as a ‘fourth realm’ added to the three realms of the physical world.” (p. 11) / “The most attentive study of the most homogeneous milieu, of the most closely woven concatenation of circumstances, will not serve to give us the design of the towers of Laon.” (p. 13; quoting Focillon) / “There exists, then, a world of artistic forms; but what is a form? The first move is, if not to define it, at least to see the model for it in contour or diagram, the shadow thrown by a body exposed to the sun, the play of cracks and fissures on the wall where Leonardo saw warriors and clouds take on outlines.” (p. 16) / **Karl Popper**: First World (physical), Second World (subjective), Third World (symbolic) (p. 20) / “Form signifies only itself ...” (p. 21) / **Worringer-Wölfflin**: psychodynamics of art / **Panofsky-Warburg**: iconography/iconology / **Foucault**: spasmodic histories and ruptures / “Form and significance ...” (p. 21) / Signifier and signified – “Sign: index, sign, icon, symbol” / Artistic form is none of these but can become any of the four forms of sign ... (p. 21) / “The meaning of form is above all the rhythm of the body, the movement of the hand, the curve of the gesture. It is only at a second stage that the various levels of conceptual signification become articulated and attached to form.” (p. 21) / See “field” notes on sub-linguistic territories ... / “Forms are caught in a perpetual metamorphosis ...” (p. 26) / “Rembrandt’s sketches swarm across Rembrandt’s paintings ...” (p. 27) / “O memories! O horrible form of the hills!” – Victor Hugo (p. 27) ...

[...]

\*Regarding a performative, pseudo-deranged take on milieu and anti-milieu, see “Roger Caillois’s infamous 1935 essay ‘Mimicry and Legendary Psychasthenia’ [1935], in which the dissident Surrealist suggested that the phenomenon of insect camouflage should be compared to a type of schizophrenic psychic condition characterized as a ‘depersonalization by assimilation to space’: an entropic loss of distinctions, of ego boundaries, of any bodily sense of inside and outside.” *Artforum* (February 2000) / Caillois’ essay was re-published in *October* 31 (Winter 1984), trans. John Shepley, pp. 17-32 ...

MILIEU THEORETICIANS – “If we reflect how long the belief in disguises survived – how farce throughout the ages, Shakespeare’s high comedy, and even the detective story of the late 19th century found it quite unproblematic to work with the confusions that result from disguises – it must be a matter of considerable astonishment to see how reluctant people are to accept such devices in more recent times. When it comes to disguises, they refuse to see the joke, and in the modern novel such mistaken identities are frowned on. Yet this dogged insistence on the unmistakable, unique singularity of the body comes at precisely the moment when philanthropists, the disciples of Proust, and psychoanalysts assure us that all possibilities dwell within each of us, and that nothing could be more out-of-date and philistine than the belief in the unity of the personality. What can be behind this?” – Walter Benjamin (1929) ...

THE PRESENT-PRESENT – “Between the vast future of the thing-to-be-done, which is our ‘duty’, and the immense past of the ‘done’ thing, which is our presumed ‘achieved’ duty, there must be an elusive and extremely short occurrence, as dazzling as happiness, that can be called the being-done, that is being done.” – Vladimir Jankélévitch ...

LAST RITES – “M. de Lemarck distinguished between nature and life. In his eyes, nature was stone and ash, a granite tomb, death. Life came into play only as a strange and singularly productive accident, a prolonged struggle with here or there more or less balance or success, but always finally defeated in the end; cold motionlessness reigned afterwards as before.” – Charles Sainte-Beuve, *Volupté* (1834); cited in Georges Canguilhem, “The Living and Its Milieu”, *Grey Room* 03 (Spring 2001), p. 30 (note 12) ...

“Somewhere and nowhere in every Derridean topography is a secret place, a crypt whose coordinates cannot be plotted. This place exceeds any ordinary topographical placement.” – J.H. Miller, *Topographies* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1995), p. 296; cited in Paivi Kymalainen, “Topologies of Becoming: Deferred Presence in Writing”, *Space & Culture*, Vol 6, No. 3 (August 2003), p. 245 (epigraph) ...

GK (March 2004)

A version of this essay appeared in Gavin Keeney, *“Else-where”*: *Essays in Art, Architecture, and Cultural Production 2002-2011* (Newcastle upon Tyne: CSP, 2011).

THE “FUTURE” NOW

# TECHNO-HIPHOP ARCHITECTURE IN SINGAPORE

[...]

The next speculative bubble, following on the implosion of the IT bubble, is, arguably, the bio-technical bubble, as witnessed by various speculative architectures now being built, here and there, to accommodate this advancing, onrushing amalgam of various new scientific disciplines engendered by the mapping of the human genome and its corollary, bio-engineering. Such architectural analogues to this fast-mutating, brave new world include high-tech centers yet underway, such as the United Arab Emirates’ Dubai Media City, Malaysia’s Multimedia Super Corridor (and Cyberjaya), and South Korea’s Digital Media City. If these represent the receding last wave, it is the bio-medical mini-cities such as India’s forward-leaning (proposed) ICICI Park in Hyderabad (Andhra Pradesh), the proposed redevelopment of Mission Bay in San Francisco around medical research facilities, and, most telling of all, the One-North project in Buona Vista, south-central Singapore, based on a master plan by Zaha Hadid, which signals a shift away from financial services (as represented by Singapore’s high-rise center) and IT *per se* toward “emerging technologies” formalized in the development of new science centers (indeed, science *cities*) – a shift, in fact, merging IT and bio-medical research, and engendering a new market for global financial services. In developing nations, at least those attempting to attract the next wave of international speculative capital, servicing the information-technology sector is giving way to servicing the bio-technological and genetic engineering sectors.

A glance at the February 21-27 edition of *The Economist*, entitled “The New Jobs Migration”, proves the point insofar as parts of Asia and Southeast Asia remain the largest emergent economies in the world, and the primary targets of “service-sector” job migration. *The Economist* reports that this process of “international competition ... impinging on industries previously sheltered from it by the constraints of technology and geography” (p. 11) is, in fact, *the thing of the moment*. The brave new world of neo-liberal trade is, then, the context in which a new breed of techno-hiphop architectures operate, an *architecture parlante*, after all, expressing the speculative élan (spirit) of this bio-technical new frontier – albeit, to some, a somewhat frightening and spectral brave new world, not unlike *Huxley’s Brave New World*. Consistent with this instrumentalized architectural language is so-called “biotech” art, typified by the works of Christine Borland and Eduardo Kac. Both techno-artistic genres are indicative of a species of contemporary critical inquiry that sample the future – a sampling, that is, of a *possible* future generalized under the rubric “post-humanism”.\*

The first phase of Singapore’s One-North complex is nearly complete and includes the Biopolis (officially opened October 2003), a 2-million-sq.-ft. (185,173 sq. m. with 5,000 sq. m. of commercial space) portion of the Hadid master plan composed of seven 8-12 storey buildings (Centros, Matrix, Genome, Chromos, Proteus, Nanos, and Helios) on a 40,000-sq.-m. site linked by exoskeletal, Giger-esque, aerial bridges. (The entire One-North project will cover 200 hectares and take from 15 to 20 years to complete.) The Biopolis is billed as a “state-of-the-art research hub ... for Biomedical Sciences”. It is situated in the vicinity of the National University of Singapore and the National University Hospital for synergistic purposes. (The entrance to the Biopolis is “guarded” by the new headquarters for the Ministry of Education, a physical and paternal relationship that begs several perhaps unanswerable questions.) A list of “Who’s [Who] at the Biopolis” (public and private research entities) includes: Genome Institute of Singapore (GIS); Bioinformatics Institute (BII); Exploit Technologies Pte Ltd (ETPL); Paradigm Therapeutics; Novartis Institute for Tropical Diseases (NITD); and a plethora of parallel biomedical R&D activities. “About 2,000 researchers will work at the Biopolis when it is fully operational.” (“JTC Product Fact Sheet”, p. 2.) The first phases of the project have successfully attracted large, international pharmaceutical firms to establish research facilities within its borders, as with most of Singapore’s service-related economy, this project relies as much on international labor and capital – guest scholars, “technopreneurs”, scientists, and venture capitalist – as do the microprocessor plants (e.g., Hewlett Packard) typical of the last wave of industrial development. Singapore’s Economic Development Board (EDB) reported that the Biomedical Sciences sector expanded by 48

percent (to S\$9.7 billion) in 2002, with companies such as Schering-Plough, Wyeth and Siemens establishing biopharmaceutical facilities within the island borders of the modern city-state.

Representative of the “fusion” ethic at the heart of One-North, distinguished international advisors include: architect Kisho Kurokawa, Alfonso Vegara (Taller de Ideas Group, Madrid), and MIT’s resident “futurist” William Mitchell. Primary research activities for One-North were, however, jump-started with the assistance of the Biomedical Research Council (BMRC) under the direction of the Agency for Science, Technology and Research (A\*STAR), the latter founded in 2000 expressly for this project. The first five research institutes installed at the Biopolis are associated with A\*STAR (and A\*STAR is answerable the Ministry of Education?). To lure private companies to lease and/or build facilities at One-North, the Singapore Economic Development Board (EDB) will supply financial incentives in the form of grants and subsidies. Whereas the government has invested S\$200 million up front, at least 80 percent of the overall project will rely on private sector development.\*\*

Hadid’s “figural” master plan evokes a mutating sequence of volumetric forms, twisting and turning under the implied “weight” of an unknown future, an expressive and anxious quality representative of “the dynamism of the interaction between physical and human ‘force-fields.’” (Ibid., p. 4.) One-North is a seriously and self-consciously styled “icon” for this unknown future, totem for the “knowledge economy”, an “intellectually stimulating and creative environment for entrepreneurs, scientists and researchers to congregate, interact and exchange ideas.” (Ibid., p. 6.) Its gestalt is a formal gesture toward fluidity (a contradiction) and relentless change (flux) – or, the “future” *now*.

These are not secure compounds. Kisho Kurokawa’s “Fusionopolis” (formerly called the Technopolis) is intended to provide the cosmopolitan heart of the One-North complex, within the area designated as Central Xchange, neighboring Life Xchange (inclusive of the Biopolis). Fusionopolis will be devoted to infocomms (ICT), media and educational industries. Its resident-workers (the Central Xchange plan includes a live-work quarter in the Nepal region) will subscribe to an on-demand (on-tap) menu of various “Next-Gen” ICT (infocomm) services offered through the One-North Web portal. “The most happening place in one-north, Central Xchange burns 24/7 with an intense excitement. Novel events, world cuisine, experimental arts and technology showcase – this is where the ‘techie’ get serious and the media guys chill out to the sound and lights of downtown one-north.” (“Fusionopolis @ One-North: A New Urban Culture in the Making”, JTC brochure.)

The Fusionopolis will consume 1.2 hectares of the One-North site, a condensation of resources allowed by the two towers (also linked by sets of sky bridges) designed by Kurokawa. The 26- and 25-storey towers will comprise 120,000 sq. m. of floor space. Completion is projected for 2005. This hyperactive portion of the overall development project includes a new MRT (Mass Rapid Transit) station on North Buona Vista Road and a PMS (People-Mover System) designed to convey visitors and residents to/from Central Xchange.

One-North includes both passive and active (and inter-active) intelligent building technologies (district cooling, pneumatic waste conveyance, computerized louvers to block out direct sunlight and reduce heat gain, skygardens and green balconies, de-ionized water on tap, solar-heated water supply, plus integrated energy monitoring systems). Climatic mediation in the form of landscaped zones (including a 17-hectare park up the middle with mature trees) dovetail with the more intensively interactive portions of the development. At the Epi-center (within the Biopolis/Life Xchange zone) wind-tunnel studies have been used amidst retail and entertainment/dining facilities to ameliorate the humid tropical conditions typical of Singapore. The name “One-North” comes, in fact, from the geographical fact that Singapore is one degree north of the Equator. The Epi-center also is the site for various site-specific artistic installations, including “firefly” LED lights suspended within the canopy a mature Rain Tree saved from felling during construction. Buildings within the Epi-center will be washed with multi-colored light and electronic imagery, both part and parcel of the dynamic image intended to convey both *fusion* and *frisson*.

The last phases of the One-North master plan, Vista Xchange (the business hub with offices, hotels and subsidiary services) and Future Xchange (unspecified), will complete the build-out of the 200-hectare, 20-year project. Perhaps it comes as no surprise, then, to find alongside the physical superstructure, forward-leaning legislative structures such as a self-proclaimed “landmark” IPR (Intellectual Property Rights) protection framework to guarantee companies located in, or re-locating to, Singapore adequate safeguards for their R&D activities in a highly-sensitive, patent-intensive industry. As if to answer other, more complicated questions vis-à-vis the entire bioengineering

juggernaut, Singapore has also instituted a regulatory commission (the Bioethics Advisory Committee, or BAC) to “address the potential legal, ethical and social issues that may arise from biomedical research in Singapore”.

[...]

GK (April 2004)

[...]

\*The 2004 Adelaide Festival (South Australia) included an exhibition entitled “The Art of the Bio-tech Era” at the Experimental Art Foundation (February 27-April 3). A review noted, “A combination of hubris and humility, knowledge and ignorance comes across in the works on show. EAF director Melentie Pandilovski claims that a change in human consciousness is needed in order to understand the implications of biotech art ... / A tiny ear was cultured during the show. Tissue engineering and stem cell technologies mean that a model of the ear is gradually replaced by living tissue, in this case human tissue harvested from the artist Stelarc. The ear was semi-living and thus not self-sufficient. It needed to be tended and fed regularly, like a baby or a tamagotchi ... / No works in the show deal with immortality but the ghost of Frankenstein lurks in the wings. One of the *Tissue Culture* collaborators, Oran Catts, described the work as not about science but about life. The possibility of the extension of human life, the artificial enhancement of the body, the extension of evolution to unknown frontiers determined by humans, are some of the further dimensions of this work ... / These are just a few examples of the fertile and complex connections and cultural commentaries made by Biotech Art, which draws attention to what could easily remain hived off into specialist fields of inquiry – medicine, patents, plant breeding and so on. And it is the ethical issues which come to the fore at all times in discussion of such work.” – Stephanie Radok, “Emergence of a New Culture”, *The Adelaide Review* 247 (April 2004): p. 29 / An (un)natural supplement to the R&D activities at One-North, it is also quite unlikely that any of these “critical” art forms will be exhibited. It is more likely that the “virtual” weather and ambient environmental installations of artists such as Olafur Eliasson and Rafael Lozano-Hemmer will turn up, in the future, within the lifestyle zones at One-North, a more acceptable supplement to the crazy-quilt (hyper-synthetical) “future” pictured in the matrix of disciplines residing there.

\*\*The list of government ministries, authorities, and agencies involved in One-North as “partners” includes: Ministry of Trade and Industry; Ministry of Community Development and Sports; Ministry of Education; Ministry of the Environment; Ministry of Foreign Affairs; Ministry of Information, Communication and the Arts; Ministry of Manpower; Ministry of National Development; Ministry of Transport; Agency for Science, Technology and Research; Economic Development Board; Housing and Development Board; Infocomm Development Authority of Singapore; Land Transport Authority; National Arts Council; National Heritage Board; National Parks Board; Singapore Land Authority; Singapore Tourism Board; Urban Redevelopment Authority; Fire Safety Bureau; Nanyang Technological University; and National University of Singapore.

### **BIOPOLIS / PROJECT TEAM**

Owner: JTC Corporation

Master Planner: Zaha Hadid Architects Ltd.

Project Manager: Jurong Consultants Pte. Ltd.

Main Contractors: Substructure – GreatEarth Construction Pte Ltd; Superstructure – Samsung Corporation

Interior Design: DB&B Pte. Ltd.

Lighting Consultant: Lighting Design Partnership Ltd.

Landscape Consultant: Peridian Asia Pte. Ltd.

Environmental Consultant: URS Consulting Pte. Ltd.

Security Consultant: Cisco Security Consultancy

ICT Service Provider: A consortium led by National Computer Systems Pte. Ltd.

### **WEBSITES / ONE-NORTH**

One-North – <http://www.one-north.com>

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# POST-IFLA: IF LA, THEN, WHY NOT, /S/OME-THING ELSE?

[...]

PRÉCIS – I am reading Stendhal’s *Memoirs of an Egotist* (1832)\*, so I thought I’d tell a few tales from the IFLA (International Federation of Landscape Architects) “salon” (conference), Prague, 2004 ...

I gave a song and dance entitled “The Given, The Taken, and The Given-Back” ... It was the opening presentation, so, too, the de facto keynote address ... It was already billed as difficult, based on the Abstract and the draft text submitted in advance for the proceedings ...

As I am awaiting the official start of Day One and the moderator’s introduction, having taken up residence at the front-most table directly in front of the lectern, I notice that the gentleman immediately to my left has a copy of my presentation, and that its top (first) page is heavily annotated ... I assume that the following pages are as well, not unlike my own copy (which I have been scribbling away at for the last 10 minutes) ... I say nothing ...

I proceed to deliver my song and dance, after an introduction of the usual proportions by an Australian academic, an introduction eliding this and that (education, publications, and such); that is, the institutional marks of some sort of career (careening now towards Some-thing Else, or always What’s Next) ... I arrive at the lectern and the first of 32 images comes up (PowerPoint) ... L + A (+ This + That) = /S/ome-thing Else ... I outline the faux-mathematical principles at stake ... And I announce that although I have 32 images, I will hardly refer to them at all ...

I commence ... My one-hour time slot has already been encroached upon by the reigning officials of IFLA, with their 10-to-30-minute comments on the importance of the event and the significance of IFLA in Prague, etc. ... I have, however, prepared a dense, 35-minute lecture ... I speed through it with a few asides, translation occurring simultaneously (to Czech) in a booth high above the floor of the congress hall ... Czech delegates to the conference follow the twists and turns through headsets, reminding me of the one time I visited the UN Security Council ...

Question One: “I think you are playing with us ... Have you ever designed a park?” ... I dispose of this by saying “Yes, at Bažantnice (i.e., the Castle) ... And, of course, I’ve heard this kind of complaint before and it doesn’t unsettle me ... I love formalist obscurity anyway ... “I design essays as well as gardens ...” ...

Thus ends the question period ... Two people immediately arrive at the front table where I am sitting next to the Australian moderator ... It is coffee-break ... One offers his card saying, “If there is anything I can do for you, let me know” and disappears ... The other, a young student from the US asks for a copy of the presentation ... I hand her my heavily annotated copy before she slips away, eyelids fluttering wildly ... Before departing, she explains that she recognized the formal coordinates of the sortie because, miraculously, she had also decided to study geography while studying Landscape Architecture ... She mentions Derrida ...

Later, further into the three-day conference, I meet two Marias from Greece ... They become immediate, and fast allies (we more or less form the unofficial dissident contingent) ... They have given a masterful dialectical presentation on the city of Thessaloniki, something entitled something like “The Monument and the Shell” ... I commence to refer to them as the Young Hegelians ...

Maria Number Two, after a late night at the Ledeburska Garden cocktail hour, and jazz somewhere or other afterwards (evening of Day One), has arrived somewhat sleepy at Day Two ... I say, “You have to go to bed earlier ... Perhaps Maria [nodding at Maria Number One] could get you to bed on time ...” ... She tells me, “She can tell me when to go to bed, but not what to do in bed ...”, to which I simply smile ...

Maria Number One becomes, over the course of the day, an exceptional interlocutor, smoking just outside the door of the Congress Hall at Masaryk College, at the foot of the stairs leading to the hall, skipping a lecture here and there to instead confer, but watching the slide presentations through the door (with the “sound off”, so to speak) ... I

console her by saying that LA is not even understood in the US (because she is bemoaning its very late arrival in Greece), and that Greece, new to the not-so-old thing, is in an enviable position ... And, as always, I explain why LA should be abolished and/or absorbed into Architecture (which is not difficult to justify, to her, since she has an Architecture degree as well, and first, before the LA degree/diploma) ...

If you ever feel like a herded animal, it is because you are a herded animal ... I suggest stampeding in the opposite direction (dispersing the Masters), upstream, as it were, after Cacciari, to the source ... My presentation more or less says this, yet in an abstract and highly discursive (formalistic) fashion – out of Necessity ... Yet, my words flew away quickly, like so many small birds, not unlike the fluttering and chirping tiny birds released from the mobile statue of the Virgin Mary in the opening scenes of Tarkovsky's *Nostalghia*, a ritual invocation of fertility ...

IFLA (“If LA”, then, why not, Some-thing Else) ... The party at Ledeburska Garden, in Malá Strana (a rentable, late-Baroque garden “below” the Castle, and one of the first to be restored after 1989, the Velvet Revolution, and, therefore, badly botched) is nonetheless charming ... The conferees are strolling about in the early evening hours, climbing the terraces, and hanging out sipping beer, wine, or mineral water in the *sala terrena*, a few smoking ... The half-dressed figures populating the mytho-political frescoes within the open-air *sala terrena* look down upon this scene, an admixture of affects, musing, bemused ... I find the “questioner” from the morning session to see if I answered his question ... He says, “I couldn’t really hear you ...”, which is about right ...

I linger for awhile hearing about real estate development in Texas and Arizona, from an architect from Texas ... He and his wife have come to the IFLA conference quite simply to tour Prague (he found the event in a magazine) ... “We’ve never been here ...” ...

I wander off and button-hole our nominal host at the garden, the Deputy Minister of Culture (whom I’ve met before, before he moved to Praha from Brno to assume his current position), and ask him about the problem of the Star Pavilion at Bílá hora (White Mountain) ... He asks, “What problem?”, and I explain the rumored burial ground for slaughtered Czech, German, and mercenary soldiers c.1620 in the very green lawn at the entrance to the pavilion (former royal hunting lodge), a (perhaps apocryphal) tale relayed by one of the gardeners, a few years ago, tending the magnificent park not far from Ruzyně Airport above Prague ... He demurs, somewhat dodging the idea that there could be a mass grave in the lawn of the picturesque 16th-century pavilion and I move on to a second question regarding the legendary, indecipherable Ovidian frescos, which he also seems to be (feigns being) at a loss regarding ... Nonetheless, he offers to arrange a visit (since it is not quite open yet, after restoration work) and disappears ...

The party winds down and people drift off into the Prague night ... I go to the Black Cat/White Cat restaurant in Vinohrady for dinner, escaping the dark heart of the City (the heritage/UNESCO portion), a restaurant (perhaps) named for the very wild, very dark Emir Kusturica 1998 film of the same name (or at least the bartender seems to think so) ...

The Congress Hall wasn’t quite dark enough for my PowerPoint presentation, so the slide images were even more shadowy than expected (which is good) ... As an invited guest, I suspected that I was there as *agent provocateur* anyway, to upset the proverbial apple cart and, then, to also pick up most of the bruised apples and admire each one of them (as best I could) ...

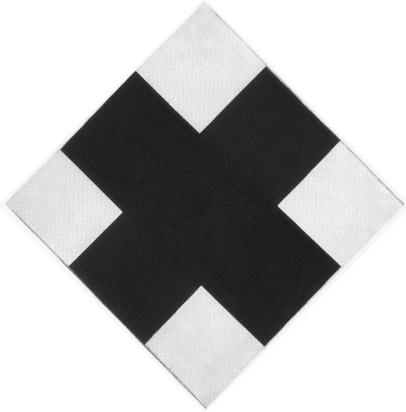
I skipped all of the conference tours (side trips), preferring the slide trips, and the crumbling mostly 19th-century Olšany Cemetery in Vinohrady as a diversion, the compensation of the Real ... My one venture into the New Town (and Náměstí Republiky) was simply to meet old and new Czech friends, and to leave ... Here is Prague’s “Times Square”, not-amusing amusement park (square) where everything is for sale every day ...

Day Three, the nominal “Last Day” (save the last, non-obligatory trip to the Schwarzenberg Estate scheduled for Day Four), a young Polish student, whom I’ve noticed smiling broadly from time to time in my direction, finally comes forth with her own story, studying LA in Warsaw ... Same problems ... Always, then ... Having toured part of the United States, it is again the situation of the grass only *looking* greener on the other side ... I describe San Francisco and New York for her (the endless movement “up-market”), the homespun ravages of neo-liberalism and how LA and Architecture service it ... She smiles, talks ... Smiles, hovering, waiting ... I say “Good-bye” ... The smile vanishes ... “You have to go?”, she says ... “What can I do for you?”, I say ... We swap vague invitations to correspond, and yet ... What I want is – yes – “something else” ...

It is the younger generation that is craving /S/ome-thing Else ... They sense it, intuit it, reach for it as it vanishes (again and again) ... It is still unable to gain purchase in discourse ... It is still always already the scapegoat, driven into the waste-places of discourses ... It is, after all, the problem of the aesthetic idea gone astray, waiting to be reborn(e) ... It is – as with Jean-Luc Marion – radical immanence, radical givenness, and saturated phenomenon that represents (re-presents) the Way Out (that is always on offer, and always – tragically – deferred, for reasons too obvious to name) ...

GK (May 2004)

\*Stendhal's *Memoirs of an Egotist* was translated into English and published by Hesperus Press (London) in 2003 ... Stendhal claims that upon entering a town he first asks three questions: "1/ which are the twelve prettiest women; 2/ which are the twelve richest men; 3/ which is the man who could get me hanged." Ibid., p. 84.



# BEING JEAN-LUC MARION

[...]

## CRITIQUE

Jean-Luc Marion, *Being Given: Toward a Phenomenology of Givenness*, trans. Jeffrey L. Kosky (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2002) – First published *Étant donné: Essai d'une phénoménologie de la donation* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1997) ...

## PRÉCIS

The theological turn in French phenomenology ... What is it? ... What does it portend? ... If not /S/ome-thing Else, then what else? ... Marion seems to be the exemplar of this “new” thing (not-thing) ... Whatever it is, Marion insists it overflows all possible names and is unnameable ... Yet this self-same thing (turn) has been appropriated by the Neo-Marxist triumvirate of Agamben, Žižek, and Badiou ... Cacciari is still missing in inaction, spending “down-time up on Mount Athos” reading Greek philosophy ... Žižek and Badiou seem to want to re-load certain universals (certain abstractions), after the fact, and so to speak ... Thus, herein, anyway, a blow-by-blow account of Marion’s seminal *Being Given* – citations taken primarily from within the fold of “The Given II”, Book IV... And yet, phenomenological “erotica”, if you wish (desire), as compensation for that absent, critical-poetical nothing much at all (which is at risk every day, anyway) ... That is, then, to embrace the shape, length, color, curve, swerve, tone, and call of Things to Come ...

## I. READING MARION

“Saturated phenomenon” – To play at the limits of the conditions of phenomenality ... To demolish “horizon[s] of apparition” and impoverished constructs of the “constituting I” (p. 189) ... Marion’s *Being Given*, 2002 ... The phenomenological price of minimalism (p. 192) is its reliance on poor phenomenon (weak in intuition), versus full phenomenon (saturated phenomenon) and adequation (here and gone); “intuited adumbrations” fail in the near-zero degree ... Modalities of nothingness return (after Kant), such that it (*minimalia*) characterizes the deficiencies of intuition (source of so-called phenomenon) (p. 197) ... With Kant (and Husserl), then, a topology of near hopelessness (things mired in near-empty concepts), and things forever exiled (“abandoned”) by abstract ideality (horizons of pure thought) ... “To the phenomenon supposedly poor in intuition, can’t we oppose a phenomenon saturated with intuition?” (p. 197) ... The “aesthetic idea”, or representation according to intuition (without concept, or adequation): Here it is a case of “a deficiency of the (lacking) concept, which leaves the (superabundantly given) intuition blind.” (p. 198) ... Kant’s “foretaste” of saturated phenomena resides in his negation of things purely given (things inadequate to concepts, or ideal, timeless forms) ...

Kant: “No language fully attains or makes intelligible the aesthetic idea ...” (p. 198) ... Kant: “Representation of the imagination” leads to sensible intuition ... Outside *a priori* categories, beyond metaphysical causes (and effects), the affective, superabundant aesthetic thing “plays perfectly ‘in its free play.’ And this play plays the sublime.” (p. 198) ... “For intuition, supposedly ‘blind’ in the realm of poor or common phenomena, turns out, in a radical phenomenology, to be blinding.” (p. 203) ... “Bedazzlement begins when perception crosses its tolerable maximum.” (p. 206) ... That is, such things do mostly “nothing”, representing the antithesis of the “interactive *commercium*”, the instrumentalization or relative coordinates substituting for anything authentic ... Cut loose, then, freely floating in time (and out), generating a “difference that differs” ... generating historicity by remaining mostly absent, provisionally inferred in time ... “Absolute, unique, coming-forward” by degrees (p. 207) ... /S/aturated, another /S/ word ... “In saturation, the I undergoes the disagreement between an at least potential phenomenon and the subjective condition for its experience; and, as a result, it does not constitute an object.” (p. 213) ... “The saturated phenomenon refuses to let itself be regarded as an [object] object [instead an event] precisely because it appears with a multiple and indescribable excess that annuls all effort at constitution [assimilation to an abstract concept] ...” (p. 213) ... Therefore, avoiding (voiding) objectness, versus objectivity (p. 214) ... Or, it escapes the gaze of the transcendental ego (“I”), as “irregardable” ... “The gaze keeps [needs] objects [things] in an objected state for the I [eye].” (p. 214) ... Thereafter, Descartes’ cogito rules things, and they cannot “return”/escape ... The

gaze guards, “follows”, placing all things in relation to *a priori* conceptual fields (coordinates of pure thought), except when confronted with the “exceptional” (saturated phenomenon) ... “In what figure does it appear?” ... The “poor or common phenomenality of objects” is lost, and some-thing else is found (appears, is given) (p. 215) ... Hence, there arrives “*counter-experience of a non-object*” (p. 215, italics added) ...

Apperception gives way to apperception (of motion, affects) ... Reification of the eye’s (“I”s) powerlessness before things that overflow (overrun) time/space coordinates (instrumental reason and its modalities) ... “The witness succeeds the I” (p. 217) by “renouncing the first person”; that is, as “simple, luminous witness [... it] lights up as on a control panel” (p. 217) ... Analogues: Infinity (Descartes), the Sublime (Kant), internal time ... Husserl, and Bergson (perhaps) (pp. 219-20) ... No zero-point, no finite origin, but pure temporality (time itself) ... “Auto-manifestation (giving itself in and from itself)” (p. 222) ... Auto-poiesis? ...

A path through dispossessed things, “common-law” and “poor” phenomenon ... “What metaphysics rules out as an exception (the saturated phenomenon), phenomenology takes for its norm ...” (p. 227) ... “The saturated phenomenon in the end establishes the truth of all phenomenality because it marks, more than any other phenomenon, the givenness from which it comes. The paradox, understood in the strictest sense [counter to received opinion], no longer runs counter to appearance [is measured by concepts]; it runs with apparition.” (p. 227) ... Paradoxes, versus objects (paradoxes multiplying paradoxes) ... (05/22/04) ...

## II. SATURATED, IN TIME

Shall we talk, then, of “phenomenal things” (non-things) that “undress” themselves and “offer” themselves (give themselves over, giving the /S/elf to the self)? ... Or is this a distortion (denigration/denegation) of saturated phenomenon (even if Marion, in describing types of saturated phenomenon, such as history, also describes seduction, the call and the response, or refusal) ... And, why not, the Coming-Coming (the Coming One, The Coming Philosophy, etc.)? ... What differs in such “difference” (echoing within Marion’s call), from/departing endless deferral, such as with/contra Derrida? ... Is it not that things (not-things) are always in the process (throes/arms) of coming (thrown toward time, by time)? ... Coming-forth (and withholding)? ... Simultaneously arriving and leaving (in con-temporality)? ... Is the aporia (doubt) only a relic of the de-centered transcendental “I” (eye), the manufactured self (ego) now (and then) lost to this coming-coming? ... The proverbial “sticky mess”, perhaps ... And as such, a fertile (fecund) field (not ground, nor ontology) for Being, opening Being to iteration, extension, and, after Marion, anamorphosis (formal presentation and re-presentation, in time and space) ... Perspectival tricks or the real-real thing? ... Active, protean, pro-creative, penetrating, saturated, “sexed-up” ...

Thus, a splendid vision of the “gifted” coming-to, coming-with, unfolding, embracing, con-joining, lost and found in/through the looking-glass (time) ...

Derrida’s three doors (in *Archive Fever*, 1995) echo/mimic the so-called transcendental logic, the de-naturing reduction of abstractions, circling back (to zero) ...  $A=B$ ,  $B=C$ , and therefore  $D$  probably (maybe) =  $A$  (by way of  $C$ ) ... With Derrida, the universal mathesis collapses because the third door (the nominal fourth “form”, coming forth from the first three, interwoven, folded) is also the first, a doubling of beginning/end ... Anyway, “Is there a historian of the first door?”, asks Derrida ... “Is there a measure on earth?”, asks Hölderlin, appropriated by Heidegger, spun more finely by Derrida ... Is *poiesis* capable of showing/answering saturated phenomenon? ... Is a critical-poetic, sublime analytic a possible Way Out? ... Or, is every answer (Way Out) a question mark in itself (after all)? ... Does difference simply rule (measure) the aporias (aporiae) of logic and reason, producing a hellish hermeneutic (rhetorical fire and ice), circling forever, until ...?

Which is more phantasmatic, Reason or Imagination? ... What is, after all, an “aesthetic idea” (after Kant)? ... Things (not-things as objects, but things as phenomenon, complexes/constellations, or, with Lacan, complexes as neuroses) saturated with intuition (sensible, intelligible things, then) arrive, in time, sometimes just in time, from outside time (from inside *time itself*, pure duration, yet also from the past, as echoing tableaux, generative historicities, “knotted” histories) ... Hence, to negate everything past (and/or present) is to undo time itself ... Universalizing abstractions = the future (which never comes, but appears to call, nonetheless) ... Total flow = total nihilism (nothingness, which *comes up short*, always) ... Total flow, then, is the non-mark of the absolute zero-degree poverty of denegation, delimiting nothing at all but thin air ... Time deconstructed = nil ... Nothing comes from nothing ...

A coupling between the given and the gifted (the witness), and never a matter of *who* comes, but *what* – in simultaneity ... Saturated phenomenon seduces the “I”, lays waste to the eye, bedazzling ... Its arrival, in time and space (including, or privileging even, the screen of dark imagination), inhabits (and gives to the self itself, its Self) the “moist”, fertile “plane” (“crescent”) of the representational “field” of the transcendental imagination (and, yes, cognition), waning/waxing cognition ... It cognizes (re-cognizes) itself ... It (itself, procreating the /S/elf lost-and-found, over time immemorial, of the gifted, the one whom responds receives – and re-creates) ... Into Being enters Becoming (and vice versa), deferring the explosion (outburst) of what comes, slowly penetrating and preparing Coming-forth ... That is all, except /S/ does not = Sex ... IT surpasses it (IT dwarfing “it” ...) ... And yet, phenomenological “erotica”, if you wish (desire), as compensation for that absent, critical-poetical nothing much at all (which is at risk every day, anyway) ... And too, the starry heavens AS moral law ... Why not (to honor the “aesthetic idea” in its velvet vault)? ...

All minimalisms, all advertisements and simulations, all dry (drying) winds, and all abstractions impoverish ... They are, at best, temporal moments in-between the exhausted, spent comings-forth (squarely, clumsily) of intemperate professionalism, disciplines, formalisms, and insurrections (so-called avant-gardes) ... Irrespective of time and place, such horizons of conceptual hegemony (the *commercium* of forms and figures frozen in capitalist and ideological lockstep) are undone, undressed by new saturated phenomenon ...

“May it come, may it come / The time of which we’d be enamored ...” – Rimbaud, “Alchimie du verbe” ...

GK (May 2004)

## POSTSCRIPTS

NOTE 69 – It is in the swirling, circling endnotes of Marion’s text that we find the traces and tracks of “le tournant théologique” (le tournant *phénoménologique*), perhaps underway since the late 1980s and early 1990s, folded into a type of second discourse, a secondary line of thought similar in spirit to the accessory-after-the-fact nature of Rousseau’s footnotes. It is here, in Marion’s dense and knotted notes that certain things suppressed or merely referred to in the body of the text come “home”, including the agonistic development of the trajectory of his third reduction, a process that reaches an apotheosis (perhaps) in a June 1994 conference (Marion says “debate”) at the Centre Sèvres in Paris. It is the name of Jean-Louis Chrétien that returns repeatedly in the notes (mentioned in passing in the text) regarding the nature of the call that Marion privileges in his evocation of saturated phenomenon. And it is Note 69 (see p. 373, n. 69) referring back to Book V, “The Gifted”, that echoes mightily in the antechamber of the notes. Here, Marion quotes Chrétien: “Infinite excess, first of all, of the call over and above the response.” This signals Marion’s shift, along the path of developing the third reduction, toward embracing the ineluctable fact that the call overflows itself and cannot be fully assimilated in any nominal (or noetic) “thing”, in any singular work, concept, or individual. It would appear that Marion reached this conclusion late in the process of deconstructing the remains of Husserl’s and Heidegger’s own phenomenological projects. To underscore this point, Marion also states in Note 1 (p. 328, n. 1), notes referring to Book I, “The Given”: “The phenomenological method is always practiced as a deconstruction or a destruction. Between these two terms, which are in fact both derived equally from the reduction, the difference stems solely from the nature of the obstacles cleared away: objectivity, Being as presence, the ‘history of Being’ [referring most likely to Hegel], etc.” Yet it is Note 66 (p. 373, n. 66) that sounds the essentially sublime depths of this extraordinary inquiry/plunge into the nature of things (not-things), a plunge/thrust toward /S/. This note again references Chrétien but amends a reference to Rousseau’s *Émile* (1762). I leave it to the reader to turn to this page and read what transpires there. Suffice to say, what is indicated is a summary judgment regarding all forms of simulated calls and diversions, situating Rousseau as a touchstone or prophet of/for the present-day call (and its problematical absence/return).

CHRÉTIEN – The above-mentioned “history” of the theological turn in late-modern phenomenology, while premature, is indexed in Dominique Janicaud, Jean-François Courtine, eds., *Phenomenology and the “Theological Turn”: The French Debates* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2000). In calling upon Chrétien for “support”, Marion refers primarily to Chrétien’s book *L’appel et la réponse* (Paris: Éditions de Minuit, 1992), English edition *The Call and Response*, trans. Anne A. Davenport (New York: Fordham University Press, 2004). Chrétien’s work also falls within/beneath the covers of Jean-François Courtine, ed., *Phénoménologie et théologie* (Paris: Criterion, 1992). See also Chrétien’s: *L’inoubliable et l’inespéré* (Paris: Desclée de Brouwer, 1991), English edition *The*

*Unforgettable and the Unhoped for*, trans. Jeffrey Bloechl (New York: Fordham University Press, 2002); *Le regard de l'amour* (Paris: Desclée de Brouwer, 2000); and *Corps à corps: A l'écoute de l'oeuvre d'art* (Paris: Éditions de Minuit, 1997), English edition *Hand to Hand: Listening to the Work of Art*, Stephen E. Lewis (New York: Fordham University Press, 2003).

Jean-François Courtine, ed., *Phénoménologie et théologie* includes: “Phénoménologie et herméneutique de la religion”, by Jean-François Courtine; “Expérience et langage dans le discours religieux”, by Paul Ricoeur; “La parole blessée”, by Jean-Louis Chrétien; “La phénomène saturé”, by Jean-Luc Marion; and “Parole et religion: La parole de Dieu”, by Michel Henry.

THE PRESENT-PAST – “For the buttercups grew past numbering, in this spot which they had chosen for their games among the grass, standing singly, in couples, in whole companies, yellow as the yolk of eggs, and glowing with an added luster, I felt, because, being powerless to consummate with my palate the pleasure which the sight of them never failed to give, I would let it accumulate as my eyes ranged over their golden expanse, until it became potent enough to produce an effect of absolute, purposeless beauty; and so it had been from my earliest childhood, when from the tow-path I had stretched out my arms towards them before I could even properly spell their charming name – a name fit for the Prince in some fairy-tale – immigrants, perhaps, from Asia centuries ago, but naturalised now for ever in the village, satisfied with their modest horizon, rejoicing in the sunshine and the water’s edge, faithful to their little glimpse of the railway-station, yet keeping nonetheless like some of our old paintings, in their plebeian simplicity, a poetic scintillation from the golden East.” – Marcel Proust, “Swann’s Way”, *Remembrance of Things Past*, Vol. 1, Pléiade edition, trans. C.K. Scott Moncrieff, Terence Kilmartin (New York: Vintage, 1982), p. 183 ...

JEAN-LUC MARION – “Jean-Luc Marion, qui a succédé à Emmanuel Levinas à la Sorbonne et à Paul Ricoeur à l’Université de Chicago, a profondément marqué la philosophie française de ses trente dernières années par une oeuvre située à la croisée de l’histoire de la philosophie, de la théologie et de la phénoménologie. Ses trois livres principaux sur Descartes, *Sur l’ontologie grise de Descartes* (1975), *Sur la théologie blanche de Descartes* (1981), *Sur le prisme métaphysique de Descartes* (1986) ont renouvelé les études cartésiennes en soustrayant la pensée de Descartes à une approche purement épistémique et en réinscrivant l’oeuvre du philosophe français dans le mouvement de l’histoire de l’être, tout en soulignant les limites du schème onto-théologique heideggérien pour en appréhender le statut et les contours. Son travail théologique, inauguré par *L’idole et la distance* (1977) et poursuivi dans *Dieu sans l’être* (1982) a consisté à interroger la possibilité d’arracher la pensée de Dieu à l’horizon de la question de l’être et à l’idolâtrie métaphysique qui la sous-tend: la ‘mort de Dieu’, dans cette perspective, ne signifie plus la fin du christianisme, mais le retrait même par lequel Dieu se manifeste à nous à l’époque du nihilisme, et la source renouvelée à laquelle la théologie peut et doit puiser sa propre possibilité. Enfin, la phénoménologie de la donation inaugurée par *Réduction et donation* (1989) et poursuivie dans *Étant donné* (1997) et *De surcroît* (2001) – enfin, plus récemment, dans *Le phénomène érotique* (2003) – s’efforce de soustraire la question de la phénoménalité au double horizon de l’objectivité (Husserl) et de l’être (Heidegger). C’est ce dernier aspect de l’oeuvre de Jean-Luc Marion, désormais salué et traduit dans de nombreux pays, qui fait plus particulièrement l’objet de ce numéro. Par un examen minutieux et critique de certaines de ses thèses, il voudrait contribuer à la connaissance de ce philosophe désormais incontournable.” (Éditions de Minuit) ...

# LIGHTNING AT MIDNIGHT: TRAVELING “HOME”

[...]

## PRÉCIS

PRG-AMS-JFK (ADL-MEL-SIN-MNL-SFO) ... And, to paraphrase Hölderlin, “Where are we always going but ‘home’?” ...

## ALWAYS THE SAME SKY

Living in a suitcase this past year, circling, to and fro ... The birds awakened me this morning, singing, at 4 a.m. ... As I stepped outside to smoke, jet-lagged, once more, the heart-shaped chimes were swinging (again) in the early morning breeze, framing (holding) a piece of the grey-violet, lilac-tinged Norfolk (VA) sky to the south ... Always the same sky (auratic and oracular), then, here and there (always) ... “Dream the flicker and the flame ...”, if you dare ... Falling in-and-out of time (love), so arrives the “given”, always already on time, rooted in things-not-themselves, things set afire, twice over (as in Tarkovsky’s *Sacrifice*, “house” burned to the ground ... smoke and ash) ... All things arriving in time – in time, on time ... Co-inhabit “this” house, with time, by the /S/ea ... Two, three (not four) times, with Time Itself (internal time) ... Duration, spent times ... Inhabit time x time (other times) ... Why not? ... /S/ always already equals /S/ome-thing Else ...

The Boeing 737 All Series left Ruzyně Airport in Praha one hour late (“duration 1:30”), at 1:45 p.m., resulting in six hours idling in Amsterdam between flights, original flight to New York missed by a hair, at the gate (out of breath) ... I was there at the very last minute, but unable to board because of delayed (absent), checked luggage ... Talked (and smoked), instead, to kill time, with a gentleman from Sarajevo, about the Bush cabal, after re-orchestrating my flight “home” at the KLM ticket counter, just beyond the Casino lounge and sleeping, wayfaring (worn-out) travelers ...

The knock-on effect, dominoes, one delay resulting in another; that is, six hours (after an eight-hour flight, eventually, anyway) idling at LaGuardia, too, in the eerie, night-filled, deserted lounges of New York’s premier domestic airport ... Waiting (again), watching, talking (this time) to an insightful Indian wage-slave at the coffee kiosk (working a ten-hour shift) about the Bush cabal (his choice), about India (my choice), and globalization (on hold, now, with Sonia Gandhi and the Congress Party to perhaps take power) ... Swapping coffee for Czech cigarettes ... Waiting, circling ... Times and tenses shift, melt/merge ... Praha-Amsterdam-New York ...

## RESPEKT

*Respekt* (see [www.respekt.com](http://www.respekt.com)), the only decent newspaper “left” (so-to-speak) in the Czech Republic, seems to think that Gandhi’s win in India is a progressive thing/turn ... The Congress Party will rule with a coalition that includes the Communists ... (According to my Indian interlocutor, at LaGuardia, the Communist Party of India is actually one of the few parties *not* hopelessly mired in (self-serving) corruption ... And they rule in one or two states ...) ... The Congress Party has, *naturally*, the poor and the dispossessed of India to thank for its recent election victory ... Curiously, *Respekt* seems to derive its name from a vague intuition (memory/sense) of civil society, the “old days” when government was checked by civil institutions (inclusive of the media), versus abetted by today’s NGOs or various and sundry purveyors of half-cooked truths (lies) ...

It (*Respekt*) was being sued several years ago by every single member of Socialist PM Miloš Zeman’s cabinet for “slander”; that is, reporting on systemic corruption in the award of government contracts ... Miraculously, Karel Schwarzenberg, a member of the “old rich” (the semi-illustrious former nobility of pre-communist Czechoslovakia, and, before that, the so-called Czech Lands of the Austro-Hungarian Empire), bailed them out by buying a controlling interest in the paper ... It was always the intention of Zeman’s nominally “socialist” gang (ruling in coalition with right-wing members of the appropriately named ODS party) to merely bankrupt (or at least hamstring)

the paper by tying them up in the courts for years on end ... The paper has a circulation of only (perhaps) 10,000 (according to a friend in Praha, the same one who pointed out/explained its recent return from the edge of the abyss), which is very small, even by Czech standards ... Renascent *noblesse oblige* (with irony), then ... “Majoritni vlastnic” ...

Now that government and media are generally bought and paid for by the same forces (neo-liberal capital, or extortionist and exploitative corporate-capitalist complexes), that is to say, forces which only *appear* variegated and in putative “competition” with one another, it is increasingly rare to find a critical gaze exerted/extended in the direction of the increasingly common reign of economic injustice (slow terror) passing as the new-old (“new”) oligarchy (say, Russia or Latin America), or the old-new (“new”) aristocracy (say, the US, France, or Britain), the relative relevance of either term depending upon your geo-political coordinates ... And yet there are still places that are quite simply “off this map” (and which will be subject to world-trade agreements sooner rather than later) ...

Are economic crimes also crimes against humanity? (Is “humanity” also an abstraction?) ... *Respekt*, a weekly, is one of the last legitimate “voices” in the Czech Republic, more or less (the monthly *New Presence* is another), agitating for a *different kind of capitalism* than the odious crony and cowboy capitalism (championed by Thatcherite economist and former Czech PM Václav Klaus, now President, after Havel, and bitter enemy of Havel’s *truly variegated* “velvet” worldview) ... Czech neo-capitalists (many former communists) are hot in pursuit of/relentlessly devouring everything in sight still of any value, now operating at full throttle, after EU-integration (consorting with the Klausian “enemy”, foreign investment), in a last, mad rush to purloin the last public enterprises to be privatized; that is, those not yet sold off at fire-sale prices to the new-old elite during the wild, wild (almost-past, yet echoing, sometimes bellowing) 1990s ...

## KLM BLUE

In Amsterdam, the Bosnian electrical engineer jots down odd phrases from our conversation; he is en route to Washington, DC ... For what? ... I don’t ask too many personal questions ... What for? ... “Human rights is an abstraction ...”, he writes, liking the unfortunate (unsavory) aspects of one of my favorite, current, sardonic (dark) locutions (turns of phrase) ... I write down for him the *CounterPunch* URL (<http://www.counterpunch.org>) for alternative reporting of the onrushing mess, mentioning how it is ultimately ironic, but the *Wall Street Journal* is a much better newspaper than the *New York Times* ... One engages in neo-liberal double-talk, vacuous cultural reporting, and grotesquely distorts things in a type of fun-house mirror-game, gazing at itself (its demographic), while the other at least is honest about its conservative capitalist bias, reports precisely on cultural themes, and is more or less merciless (though selective) where it spots overt hypocrisy and chicanery (in the marketplace and elsewhere) ... Liberal mush is liberal mush ... He describes the stagnating nowhere that is Sarajevo, shattered, stalled, no reconstruction, mob (mafia) rule, broken and mostly soulless today ... UN banalities left, right, and center mar the horizon (the future) ... War criminals stroll around (the corridors of power, yet unmolested) ... British/EU malfeasance continues (“through NATO, etc.”, his words) ... Srebrenica is still fresh (horrors-upon-horrors) in his mind, foremost ... We’re in Amsterdam, after all, the image of the blue-helmeted Dutch UN troops that abandoned Srebrenica strangely resonates with the nonchalance of KLM’s iconic (laconic) blue-tinted mission to make the least possible effort (or to blame the lateness of their flight on the “codeshare” partner Czech Airlines; that is, someone else, when it was a blue KLM plane anyway from Praha that departed and arrived late, and it was blue-helmeted Dutch troops that stepped aside and let the Bosnian Serbs ravage Srebrenica) ... “Could I have a meal voucher?” ... “Please wait ...” ... “Thank you for your loyalty ...” (What loyalty?) ... “Good-day” (Good riddance ...) ...

“You must travel with your luggage ...” ... Data flows, uploads, disconnects, missed connections ... “We’re sorry ...” ... Consolation (in blue): Ten-euro blue meal voucher, three-minute blue (local/useless) calling “card”, fifty-euro blue discount coupon for next purchase of a ticket for a (probably late) KLM flight ... No thanks ... “Our apologies ...” ... Full stop ... Beware “closely cropped” connections ...

Thus, this very blue incompetence is to merge with Air France ... Travel lite (future tense) ... “Will they keep the ‘royal’, powder-blue attitude or squeeze it into the new, designer uniforms of Air France, Europe’s most stylish airline?”, I ask ... They say, “Oh, no ... KLM-blue is world famous.” ... I point out that the guards at Prague Castle wear the same powder-blue, and that I think it was Bořek Šípek’s decision, as Castle Architect, in charge of the

imagery/iconography of Havel's Velvet Presidency (recently ended) ... That is, that Šípek knew of this "world-famous blue", because he lived in exile in Holland before returning after the Velvet Revolution in 1989 ...

In New York, finally, arriving at JFK, circling the bank of touch-screen phones too sensitive to dial any number at all, I hop the Q10 bus to connect to the E subway line at Kew Gardens (avoiding the \$13 transfer bus and the new "Airtrain", \$5.00, that merely drops you at the subway anyway ...) ... It's around midnight ... The bus is \$1.00 ... Then, I wait for the Q33 bus in Jackson Heights to LaGuardia's empty, echoing departures hall ... Waiting ... Rain falls as I board the Q33, amid the down-at-heels, not-terribly-mean streets of Queens, building to a tempest ... Lightning at midnight illuminates the washed-out (tidal) approaches to LaGuardia ... Back in the USSA, after all ... "May it come, may it come", some-time, some-place, some-how ... Some-thing Else Altogether ("the time of which we'd be enamored ...") ... "Please wait" ... This too shall pass away, into the folded arms of lackadaisical, laissez-faire history (another abstraction), and reported (stylized), no doubt, in the stylish style pages of the *New York Times* as "The New Spirit of the Times"; post-Bush, revelations (revelatory things, not-things, super-saturated phenomena to die for, truly sublime things ...) ... *Fashion*: "Radical-Chic Immanence (Without Abstractions): The Sublime New Black" ... "Gaultier 2008: Haute-Couture's Sublime Blackout in Sarajevo" ... *Forecast*: The word *sublime* (capitalized and non-capitalized) appears 126,438 times in the culture pages of the *New York Times* in 2009 ...

On the Amsterdam-New York flight I say, "The wine was not good. Do you have any scotch?" ... The matronly stewardess in powder-blue suit brings me a double from Business Class ... The two Dutch lasses across the aisle are stretched thin ... One has a beautiful, out-stretched and sandaled ankle/foot ... The other is curled up on the floor, between her seat and the bulkhead of the forward-most Economy compartment ("Q class") of the Boeing 777-200/300, breastfeeding her cherubic (pudgy) babe-in-arms ... (Business Class is stuffed in the nose of the plane ... I'm not sure who is in the upper deck; yet probably it is the so-called Upper Class, as Virgin so cleverly dubs the present-day jet set ...) ... The Dutch lass with the svelte foot and I swap furtive glances ... She suppresses a laugh as I reach for abandoned, left-over desserts from a pile of trays ... I borrow her newspaper, to read about all-I'd-rather-forget-about ... Bush/Kerry/Bush, Iraq/Israel/Iraq, Eisner/Miramax/Moore/Cannes, Madonna ("The Re-Invention Tour"), celebrities and the Kabbalah, the yawning abyss ... Nonchalance naturalized (nearly everywhere) ... "Please wait" (for /S/ome-thing Else) ...

### **"THOUSANDS STANDING AROUND"**

In Amsterdam's vast Schiphol Airport it takes a modest one-and-one-half hours to board a US-bound flight, yet it most often still leaves late, perhaps because (as in this case, and as I learned later) there are race horses to load, into the cargo bays ... Do they bed/pack them in straw? ... (What about the manure? ...) ...

In Manila it takes a stunning five hours to board a US-bound flight, and they blame it all on the new US TSA (Transportation Security Administration) rules, if/when you wonder aloud why ... At the appointed hour you queue at an array of temporarily assembled brown, folding tables, after they've wheeled in the improvised, hand-written departures sign, and just outside the quite-literally "roped-off" (improvised) gate ... Everything is improvised within the nondescript strip of ill-defined, all-purpose (that is, generic gates) ... Every piece of hand-carried luggage is searched, sorted, and examined minutely ... (It all was, of course, X-rayed before anyone was permitted to enter the so-called secure area, and Philippine Airlines offers all transferring customers a "snack voucher" for instant coffee or tea and a customarily stale sandwich at Deli \*\*\*\*\*, the only concession in the departures area) ...

Time crawls by (on hands and knees occasionally) ... Then you pass to a staging area, standing atop a small wooden platform ... Here you are wanded and patted down (elderly women and toddlers as well), collecting your luggage on the other side of the human traffic jam ... Then you wait, interminably, for hours (if you started all of this, unwisely, too early), watching the circus, observing security patting one another down as they move in and out of the cordoned-off area, smiling as people leave to go to the restrooms and are swiftly frisked again as they return ...

Witnessing the gate-keepers' vigilance processing the horde according to US regulations is exhausting, yet awe-inspiring ... Bound for San Francisco or Los Angeles, typically, the majority of flights out of Manila to the US are by way of jumbo jets that carry the maximum cargo, human and otherwise, which adds to the misery of boarding (and de-planing) ... (In both San Francisco and Manila 25 to 30 wheelchairs arrived for the pre-boarding call ... These mostly elderly customers typically are wheeled into the plane first, and, of course, they then get up and walk to their seats ... Do they walk off the plane later, with everyone else, or do they wait till everyone else has de-planed

to be wheeled out?) ... It is obvious that it is cheaper for Philippine Airlines to pay whatever-it-is-an-hour-they-pay to wage-slaves, versus upgrading their gates and improving service overall ... But they are a poor country, and they are surely also singled out for extra attention by Homeland Security and its functionaries ...

An article in a newspaper I picked up along the way, from Praha to New York (by way of languishing in Amsterdam), detailed the details and costs of USA(TSA)-imposed rules for all US-bound flights ... (TSA is known in the US, by savvy business travelers, as “Thousands Standing Around”) ... The article cited various attempts to contact foreign embassies for information, which was declined by most, with the exception of the French (who characteristically enjoy talking about the US, in the negative, in most cases, including this one) ... At least three separate “intelligence” agencies in the US vet the passenger lists, before departure ... Planes cannot enter US airspace (perhaps not even depart for US airspace) without approvals from these agencies ... Of course, *mais oui*, nationals of certain high-risk, suspect countries (notably Arabs) raise red (perhaps yellow-orange) flags and are singled out for extra scrutiny... Airports across Europe have spent billions of Euros meeting the enhanced, de-humanizing demands/standards, with one (perhaps in Switzerland) building a special holding tank, set aside from the other departure lounges/gates, that serves as a type of bunker accessed by a descending corridor and doors that slap shut (ominously) behind the herd entering the “secure” area ... Or so reports this article in the now-forgotten (abandoned) newspaper ... Amenities of an undisclosed type have been added to ameliorate the oppressive atmosphere (apparently) ... Some lite music? ... Cheerful attendants work the bunker ... Passengers acquiesce ... What else? ... Better safe than human, as one might say? ...

Yet upon arriving in San Francisco from Manila, the baggage carousel is groaning with dozens-upon-dozens of extra-large, extra-heavy cardboard cartons loaded with God knows what inside ... Small groups of Filipino-American citizens drag away two or three per party ... At customs, they are waived through, pushing Smart-carts loaded with this uncertain Whatever-It-Is (May-Be) ... I am stopped, on the other hand, with a single piece of rolling luggage, a small suitcase atop that, and a shoulder bag ... The examination of my luggage goes on for almost an hour ... Everything is taken out and questioned ... Q: “Where did you travel to/from?” A: “Australia by way of Singapore.” ... Q: “For what purpose?” A: “Teaching.” ... Q: “Do you have a letter of invitation?” A: “No, I threw it out in Australia.” ... Q: “Who was your contact?” A: “Here, here’s his business card.” ... Papers are sorted, teaching files are pulled apart, maps are unfolded, things are poked, squeezed, held up to the light, slides are questioned (Q: “Do you take all of your own pictures?”), portfolio is paged through (Q: “What was your last project?” A: “I don’t design real things.”) ... One of the two lads “processing” me picks up a flyer from an exhibition on bio-technical art and seizes/focuses upon the word *e-coli* ... Q: “What’s this?” A: “It’s a flyer on an exhibition of bio-technical art.” ... Q: “What’s that?” ... The two agents have the manner of frontier guards dispatched to protect the country from unsavory elements such as myself slipping (back) in (returning “home”) ... And they have all the marks of military personnel (that is, they are not your normal customs’ officers) ... Probably National Guardsmen from some-where else ... I object, saying they singled me out because I have a ponytail and blue sunglasses ... They bluster in response to the perceived slight ... I’ve been traveling for almost 40 hours with a 10-hour layover in Singapore and a six-hour layover in Manila ... They make half-lame excuses and soldier on through my luggage ... They consult their computer to track my movements (Australia, Singapore, Manila, San Francisco) ... Q: “What was your thesis?” A: “Huh?” ... I put my previously carefully packed luggage (now a shambles) back together, hastily, and dash for the BART ... Somewhere in San Francisco boxes of God-Knows-What are being unpacked ...

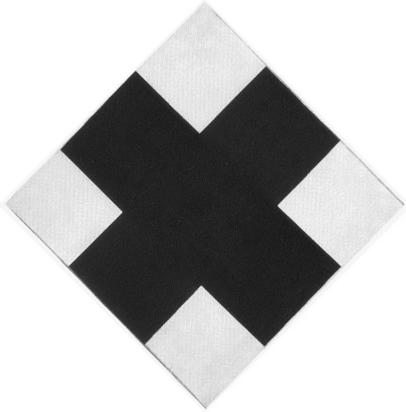
## POSTSCRIPT

What is the non-abstract (non-metaphysical, phenomenal) “sign” of Humanity? ... Mozart’s body pitched into/dumped in a common grave, dusted with quick lime? ... The body of a young woman hanging from a tree in Srebrenica, posted to the *New York Times* in the 1990s, the one I recall faxing to the Clinton White House, a suicidal act of desperation (self-destruction as self-preservation)? ... Talking to a stately gentleman from Sarajevo at Schiphol Airport, smoking, as he jots down snatches of conversation (phrases): “Human Rights is an abstraction”, “Cowboy capitalism”? ... Ugly facts on and/or *in the ground*? ... Stendhal’s 1832 send-up (memoir) of superficial, mid-19th-century Paris, and his unrequited love for (possibly *in*) Milan? ... A violet-blue-grey morning sky, a swinging heart-shaped chime? ... What (not *who*) is calling now? ... The shadow-world of the USA marching onward, toward Nothingness, and its (alas, “our”) self-imposed (ironic, imperial) isolation with velvet fist, armed to the teeth, swaggering toward a Texas-sized abyss, dry-drunk (and proud of it/re-born)? ... A very academic conference in Praha, the new in the old in the new? ... Landscape-architectural palimpsests/urbanisms (“landing

sites” for some-thing else, some other time)? ... Time out of sorts at Praha’s “Cimetière du Père-Lachaise” (Olšanské hřbitovy, except the so-called exceptional are buried at Vyšehrad, not Olšany in Vinohrady, the latter crumbling, remains of another era, the burgeoning last bourgeois outburst of the 19th century)? ... San Francisco re-branding itself (forever moving “up-market” and out of reach)? ... Linnaeus atop his pedestal in Adelaide, Australia’s botanic garden, gazing longingly (frozen in stone, in time, with self-admiration) at the tidy beds of taxonomically correct plant families, labeled and numbered accordingly? ... Techno-hiphop architecture in Singapore for the Next (Tidal) Wave of speculative capital – biotechnical, “entrepreneurial” capital flows, washing ashore, wave after wave, trickling through the glimmering, glossy malls of Singapore’s high street? ... Or, “lightning at midnight”? ...

[...]

GK (May 2004)



# ADUMBRATIONS: /S/TENDHAL

[...]

Stendhal, *Memoirs of an Egotist*, trans. Andrew Brown (London: Hesperus Press, 2003)

[...]

## I. SMOKE & ASH

It is impossible to recommend highly enough, to all, a leisurely stroll through Stendhal's *Memoirs of an Egotist*, grazing upon it, off and on, perhaps while traveling. It is an event commensurate only to sauntering through George Bernard Shaw's *Man and Superman* (1903), tearing each page out as you go – reading with wild abandon. Such is the art of touring literary landmarks – literary *events* – the latter excursion (with Shaw) supplemented brilliantly (blindingly) by the Nietzschean (aphoristic) so-called “Revolutionist's Handbook”, tucked into the back of the book, and best read in the half-darkness of twilight. To read Stendhal with any serious intent other than to “travel” to the edge of things, is to invite tedium. As such, it is also best to race through *The Charterhouse of Parma*, non-stop (if you can), or to battle your way, saber held aloft, through *The Red and the Black*.

Here, more than half a century before Shaw (whom he would have loved), Stendhal (Marie Henri Beyle, 1783-1842) constructs a no-less-witty, complex, mannered, ironic, cranky, and caustic recollection of the years 1821-30 (written in 1832, when he was more or less 49, but not published until 1892). Included by Hesperus Press, for good measure – that is to say, folded into the back pages of the slim volume, and with a possible nod toward Shaw – is the equally quizzical, aphoristic “The Privileges” (published in 1861), Stendhal's parodic “wish list” for elective (and modest) super-human powers.

The *Memoirs* covers a period in Stendhal's late youth (mid-life), just before publication of *The Red and the Black*, when he was circulating through both noble and ignoble salons in Paris (which he mostly loathed), during a period of self-imposed “exile” from Milan (which he dearly loved), although it is also possible that he was “chased” from Italy as a “spy”, with a “sidewise” excursion to London (which he feigned to merely tolerate) ... His life, then, before fame (before Balzac read *The Charterhouse of Parma* and anointed him god-like), was an admixture of loafing and maneuvering ... He paid or bargained to have his modest non-fiction works published by generally unscrupulous publishers working the middle-brow echelons of Parisian society ... Indulging his appetite for gossip, and as compensation for the endless games endured cultivating literary ambitions (the near endless waiting for “some-thing else” to arrive), Stendhal writes: “I had two perfectly innocent pleasures: 1. to chat after dinner while going [for] a walk ... 2. when it was warm, going to read the English papers in Galignani's garden.” (p. 90) ... Between the lines, on cat's paws, approaches “Immortality” ...

Tales told, *en passant*, include: self-loathing critiques and summary judgments of salons frequented (and salons tasted and abandoned); conversations and (shall we say) “love affairs” or “friendships” with French and English prostitutes; therapeutic strolls in the evening, with allies; the absurd machinations of the avaricious Bourbons (back on the throne, however briefly); the transparent, not-so-clever maneuvers of *haute-bourgeois* civil servants trying to flatter the regime (especially in the loathed, and mercilessly mocked “Academy of Inscriptions”); chary militarists bemoaning the misadventures of the lost Empire; parvenus (including Stendhal) circling salons in search of free-floating favors (mistresses); uninvited harangues from moral gadflies; flashes of anomie, then known as “wit” (and an article of faith, bread/pain) amongst the intelligentsia; sparks, fumes, and palls of grey smoke from rising and falling stars (crossed stars, stars crossing in the night). Is this cooking the books, getting even, or some-thing else? Certainly it is cooking the books, but not in the usual fashion (vulgarly falsifying things) ... As always with works of the imagination, what is as omitted is as important as what is admitted ...

Echoing within the hollowed-out spaces of the oft-times fractured and self-reflective narrative – that is, within the ennui-charged, topological and retrospective gaze of a memoir that owes as much to Stendhal's heroes (mostly past/dead), such as Montaigne or Rousseau, as to anything present then (at least, in France) – are adumbrations/intimations of things deferred (lost) and, perhaps (exceptionally), things to come. In the latter case – that is say, what

is to come – most especially, we hear the low, faintly discernible, yet impassioned call of *The Charterhouse of Parma* (1839), a landmark in itself that only emerged from Stendhal's impassioned imagination after *The Red and the Black* (1830), and (according to legend) non-stop ...

## II. "COOKING THE BOOKS"

What remains mysterious regarding the real versus the reported timing of these works, however, and the auto-biographical (auto-hagiographical) "site" into which Stendhal inserted *Memoirs* (remembering, too, that it was always his intention to publish *Memoirs of an Egotist* posthumously, if at all), is that time is invariably warped or folded into itself throughout the ostensibly historical (topological) novels and memoirs. Stendhal writes in the fictionalized foreword of *The Charterhouse of Parma* that this "tale", arguably his finest work, was written "in the winter of 1830" (when, in fact, it was dictated between November 4 and December 26 of 1838), whereas *The Red and the Black* was set down (if we can trust Stendhal's dates at all) in the winter of 1829, the latter a very important something that makes no appearance whatsoever in *Memoirs of an Egotist*. This slippage consorts with the fictive gestures of the entire production of Stendhal, under the influence of his time, both ahead and (electively) behind his time at the same time.

In the foreword to this English edition of *Memoirs*, by Doris Lessing, Stendhal's 38-year-old "prickly self-regard" (Lessing, p. vii) is described as follows: "The lens of his intelligence is focused on himself with a concentration that amounts to ferocity. He lists his absurd characteristics as well as his good ones and never spares himself the description of a moment of humiliation or silliness." (Lessing, p. viii) ...

Therefore, for Stendhal "literature" takes the form of self-reflection (sometimes distorted, intentionally or otherwise, by memory), and, as a result, reveals something more real than real ... Stendhal steps (intentionally, for sure) into the mirror-game of self-inflected literature in the manner of Rousseau's "legendary" (in part invented) *Confessions* (1782) ... The principal echoing void within *Memoirs*, the most significant "hole" that is part and parcel of the whole twisted, sordid account of the author's twisting in the wind in Paris (yet recalled between publication of his two great novels), is the enigmatic term "Milan", and what it means (carries within it) for Stendhal ... In effect (and the most significant affect here is longing for lost love and authenticity), Stendhal's disjointed (and incomplete) narrative runs backward through internal time (only appearing to hop around in external time) to the high-Romantic (unconsummated) love affair that haunts him, and to which he at most alludes to – that which goes by the name "Métilde" ... The memoir starts in 1821, in Paris, the year Stendhal was chased out of Milan by the Austrian police. The tender memories of Métilde (permeating *Memoirs of an Egotist*) trace without tracing the period immediately antecedent to the timeframe he surveys self-critically. "To be without passion: Stendhal could not say anything worse." (Lessing, p. xi) ... Or, to be "out of time" (one way or another) is also to feel "lost" (abandoned and impoverished) ...

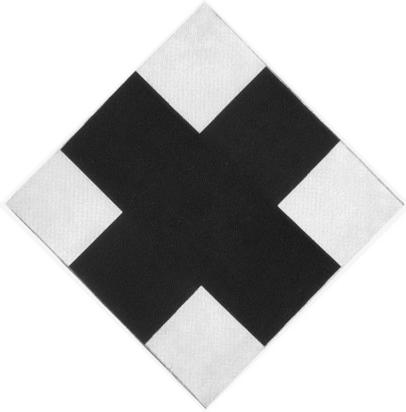
The memoir is, after all, a post-Romantic, Restoration-era, self-inflicted dissection of Stendhal's life up till 1830, its abrupt end (its leaving off and its insistent past tense) indicating, perhaps, two subsequent years of fruitful brooding (1830-32) coincidental to the arrival of, and scandalized reaction to *The Red and the Black*. Notably, *Memoirs of an Egotist* recounts a not coincidental nine-year gestation foreshadowing "our hero" Fabrizio's nine months spent locked away in the Farnese Tower in Parma, before his escape ... Thus Richard Howard's afterword in the recent (1999) Modern Library edition of *The Charterhouse of Parma* notes what has been noted by others, that "Fabrizio's nine months' imprisonment ... is analogous to the Carthusian monks' discipline in their monastery" (p. 503); analogous to (in a word) "rebirth". In the casually constructed *Memoirs of an Egotist*, Stendhal left behind (for posterity) an absurdly disjointed and somewhat toxic record of the nine years he spent in the "charterhouse" of Paris "weighing things".

With Günter Grass, Stendhal would almost certainly always already put in a good word for melancholy (the affective "ill-humour" of being imprisoned in time; the wrong time) ... Yet, unlike the brooding angel in Dürer's iconic 1514 *Melencolia I* (the inspiration for Grass's searing essay regarding the necessity of hastening slowly), Stendhal paces to and fro (agitated) within the space of *Memoirs of an Egotist* amidst the ruins/instruments of his own quest for knowledge ... Thus, too, as with Grass, the call (that indescribable /S/ome-thing Else) that calls from the shadowy edges (margins) of literary imagination quite simply eclipses everything else, when it arrives, including everything merely "literary" ...

As Jean-Luc Marion has shown (brilliantly), in *Being Given* (2002), the call of “the given” arrives to quite simply (essentially) ravish the witness, the “gifted” ... But it also gives to the self itself (its /S/elf, depth/sublimity) ... Within the folds of Stendhal’s memoir we see Stendhal in the process of processing the call which will transform his jaded self, delivering to himself his /S/elf, bringing on, quite literally within a decade (nine years), the two masterpieces of so-called fiction that have, in fact, made Stendhal immortal.

Thus Proust’s (1871-1922) admiration for Stendhal, “living” proof that Stendhal was quite right that his ideal reader would not “arrive” until sometime after 1880 ... Hastening slowly, all things in time (through time) ... The marks that may be read between the lines of *Memoirs of an Egotist* are the “intercalary” marks that mark time, waiting, filling up time (marks that sometimes mark *languishing in time*) ... The intense, forward momentum of everything that came afterward, for Stendhal, the galloping pace of the two great novels, the sublime fire burning within each tale (despite the mostly belated renown), is literary proof that Marion (in *The Crossing of the Visible*, 2004) is absolutely right, now *and* then (retrospectively) ... Saturated phenomenon (and he points to revelation, “paradox of paradoxes”, as the highest form of such phenomena) “crosses” the boundaries of the visible, *passing through* time and space, leaving behind the “stigmata of the invisible” ...

GK (June 2004)



UPDATED 06/20/04

## O INDIA!

[...]

### THE DIVINE CIRCUS

When my girlfriend dragged me kicking and screaming to India this past January (she presented me with a *fait accompli* in the form of an Air India ticket), I was suitably horrified by my first encounter with the sub-continent, where, evidently, life is “dirt cheap”.

Ostensibly, the reason for this journey was to attend a puja at an ancient Saivite temple in Sri Kalahasti. Following that, we embarked on a slow crawl through Andhra Pradesh to Puttaparthi and, later, Whitefield (in Tamil Nadu), home to two ashrams run by Sri Sathya Sai Baba – India’s greatest present-day holy man and “avatar” of Krishna.

It was in Whitefield that I finally tired of the divine circus and retired each afternoon to the rooftop of our small hotel – just outside the Brindavan ashram – with a copy of the *Times of India*, or one of the lesser national papers. My time on the rooftop was spent studying the passing clouds, blue sky, and circling hawks, by day, and the rising moon and stars, at night. This elective perch edited out the messy scene below – the squalor and the non-stop bazaar – and gave me time as well to creatively read the newspapers.

There were many telling episodes – above and below the roofline – and it was this aerie that provided me with the necessary distance to reflect on the day-to-day experiences. Far from hiding out, I was sorting the visual, olfactory, aural, and intellectual impressions of life below. My primary concern became why the Indian government – from top to bottom – is so hopelessly corrupt. The fact that many ministers and bureaucrats from Delhi and elsewhere daily stop by either Puttaparthi or Whitefield for private consultations with Sai Baba seems to have made only a relatively small impact on the wide-ranging mismanagement of almost everything in India. The state-by-state (fiefdom-by-fiefdom) arrangement of Indian governance has led to a type of nationwide provincialism that is extremely hard to understand, let alone justify, when most Indians live in abject poverty. The cities are incredibly polluted – by any standard – and sanitation seems to be along the lines of the Middle Ages in most Indian villages and small towns. In Whitefield, typical of this ethical morass, the canalized stream wending through the town is choked with garbage and water hyacinths thriving on the effluent oozing below.

The daily papers were full of the then latest Indo-Pak agitation. The airport in Bombay, whereby we passed en route to Bangalore at just after midnight, now bears the brunt of most all flights to/from India from/to Europe, as Pakistan’s airspace is deemed too dangerous for overflights. Subsequently, all flights to Delhi are routed through Bombay. In Bombay (Mumbai), the retinue of soldiers processing passengers is reminiscent of the security details in US airports, but with one major exception. There are no private security firms, staffed by minimum wage drones, screening luggage and groping passengers in India. All such measures are carried out by military and police units with an efficiency that would startle American airlines.

[...]

### THE DISSIDENT & THE PLAYBOY

I was particularly struck, however, by the Curious Case of Arundhati Roy, threatened with contempt of court for protesting too noisily about the government’s plans to build a series of massive new dams on the Narmada River, in the middle of some of the poorest lands of Gujarat and Madhya Pradesh. The Sardar Sarovar Dam in eastern Gujarat alone will displace an estimated 300,000 people (PAPs: Project Affected Persons), wreak wide-spread environmental damage, and provide a mere whiff of new electricity for diesel-powered India. Later, in March, the Supreme Court did in fact slam Roy in the slammer for criticizing both the project itself and the politics of the project. She had the temerity to suggest that the court was merely rubber-stamping a very big, very corrupt operation favored by the Indian political and economic elite. Roy, 1997 Booker-prize winning author of the *The God of Small*

*Things*, was expected to step back or else. She elected to spend her day in jail (it was considered by the court a “symbolic jailing”) and pay her fine (2,000 rupees) instead.

In the papers at the same time Roy was being threatened with summary justice was the woeful tale of Salman Khan (best known simply as Salman), playboy Bollywood hunk who was called before the Bombay police for questioning after intentionally crashing his car into the car of the actress Aishwarya Rai, plus breaking down her door, and etc. Apparently Rai was not interested in Salman’s profound esteem and declarations of crazy love. According to the *Times* editorial entitled “Stalker Salman”, her parents were considering a restraining order. The Bollywood Don Juan was summoned “to the Thana and given *a talking to* by Assistant Commissioner of Police Ambadas Pote at the crime branch office where he was questioned for *more than 30 minutes*”\* [italics added]. He was asked to be “on his best behavior” by the police, which for Salman means dropping his shirt at the flash of a skirt (or sari) and further compounding interest in the “sexiest male star in Bollywood”.

Meanwhile, Arundhati Roy has announced publicly that she intends to stay put in New Delhi and risk *come what may* as India and Pakistan threaten each other with nuclear annihilation. Someone might want to check on the whereabouts of Salman. Perhaps he has high-tailed it for *god knows where* until the “weather” clears.

Gavin Keeney (June 2002)

N.B.: Arundhati Roy’s book dealing with the Narmada Dam fiasco (and other such things) is suitably entitled *Power Politics* (Cambridge, MA: South End Press, 2001) ...

\**Times of India* (January 25, 2002): p. 8 ...

[...]

## SELECT OUTTAKES

ARMAGEDDON – Arundhati Roy – “My husband’s writing a book about trees. He has a section on how figs are pollinated, each fig by its own specialised fig wasp. There are nearly 1,000 different species of fig wasps. All the fig wasps will be nuked, and my husband and his book.” *Guardian Unlimited* (June 2, 2002) ...

ESSAY – “The Greater Common Good” (April 1999) – Arundhati Roy’s controversial essay on the Sardar Sarovar Dam – “I suddenly remembered the tender concern with which the Supreme Court judges in Delhi (before vacating the legal stay on further construction of the Sardar Sarovar Dam) had enquired whether tribal children in the resettlement colonies would have children’s parks to play in. The lawyers representing the Government had hastened to assure them that indeed they would, and, what’s more, that there were seesaws and slides and swings in every park. I looked up at the endless sky and down at the river rushing past and for a brief, brief moment the absurdity of it all reversed my rage and I laughed.”

A SHORT HISTORY – “Narmada Dam: A History of Controversy” – “If completed, the Sardar Sarovar dam will be about 450 feet high, submerge nearly 40,000 hectares of land and displace a quarter of a million people.” *BBC World Service* (July 29, 1999) ...

JAIL-TIME – “Arundhati Roy Jailed” – “A two-judge bench of the Supreme Court ruled that ‘freedom of speech is subject to reasonable restrictions’ and that the court’s sanctity had to be maintained.” *BBC World Service* (March 4, 2002) ...

INTERVIEW WITH ARUNDHATI ROY – “Dangerous Time” – “‘Whatever they say to me, I’m prepared to deal with it. The most likely outcome is that they will insult me and humiliate me and let me off. But I’m prepared to go to jail,’ Roy said yesterday, showing off her new plastic moustache. ‘First I’ll become a man, then reasonable,’ she points out. ‘Then pro-dam, pro-bomb and pro-war.’” *Guardian Unlimited* (March 6, 2002) ...

[...]

## INDIALOGUE – PART ONE

“The Self is the Auspicious Moment,  
devoid of the auspicious and conspicuous time [...]  
The Truth which is homogeneous is of the form of the sky.”  
– *Avadhuta Gita*, VII:11

“Goodness is the miracle which turns the tumult  
of chaos into a dance of beauty [...].”  
– Rabindranath Tagore

*January 8, 2002* – **INBOUND ITINERARY** – New York to London, London to Bombay, Bombay to Bangalore – Air India from JFK, arriving at Heathrow in the early morning. Net loss, five hours. Air India from Heathrow, flying with the moon, to Munich, then southwest to Turkey, Iran, Dubai, and across the Arabian Sea to Bombay. Bombay to Bangalore, Air India, arriving at 4 a.m. under cover of darkness. Net loss, Western “civilization”.

*January 9, 2002* – Bangalore to Tirupati, by car, arriving at 1 p.m. by way of Chinnai Road – **ANDRA PRADESH** – Granite outcrops appear to signal a former range of spectacular mountains now long gone except for the occasional boulder fields and magnificent pinnacled “tumuli”. Known as “peninsular gneiss”, these formations are estimated to be 3,000 million years old.

The **CHINNAI ROAD** is a thoroughfare for buses, lorries (Ashok Leyland), rental cars, Toyota-like land cruisers, and classic HM sedans (taxis). The road is littered with villages and truck stops (“inspection stations”) with brickyards and industrial facilities sprinkled its length. Motorbikes, bicycles, oxen-drawn carts, pedestrians, and dogs crowd its narrow two-lane course. A constant bleep-bleep of horns sounds the passage of vehicles as they signal their approach and maneuvers. The villages are primarily agricultural enclaves, with towns appearing less frequently and notably cluttered with makeshift commercial strips. Women walk along the Chinnai Road carrying water, vegetables, firewood, sugarcane, and laundry on their heads. Goats, cattle, dogs, occasional fowl graze, loll, wander, or are *driven* along its shoulders. The oxen-drawn carts haul sugarcane, granite slabs, building materials, and people. Some carts are led by a single beast – horns painted orange and yellow.

**LEAVING BANGALORE**, at 5 a.m., the road was already busy with commuting buses, lorries, carts, bicyclists and pedestrians. In the hoary gauze of onrushing headlights, swirling dust, and weaving between all manner of commuter transport, we sped toward Tirupati – the sun rays piercing high clouds and low fog.

The **AGRICULTURAL LANDS** traversed support vegetable, rice, sugar cane and coconut palm crops. The early morning rush hour includes hand-drawn (or pushed) carts empty or laden with vegetables. The villages that fall along the Chinnai Road are a mix of plastered brick and thatched structures. Those nearest the dusty asphalt road (under construction for its entire length) include woven coconut frond and “wattle” fences to block the swirls of dust and exhaust. In the towns the exhaust fumes build to an acrid, toxic atmosphere that burns the eyes and nostrils. The diesel buses, trucks, motorbikes, auto-rickshaws and cars, combined with the other manual or hoofed forms of transportation, meld into an incredible, frenzied carnival best described as choreographed chaos.

Tirupati, Chittor, Andra Pradesh – **APPROACHING TIRUPATI** an old palace/fort, or what is left of it, borders the road. The perimeter of the compound, low turrets rising every few meters, is all that remains of the massive fortified structure. Central Tirupati is now a small city of four-five storey buildings with the air of a market town (bazaar). It sits in a flat valley surrounded by mountains. This chaos is the rule in small Indian cities where no binding rules for traffic other than staying nominally to the left exist. Entering the outskirts of Tirupati we pass the college district. A deformed man, his legs wrapped around his upper body, drags himself through the street looking for alms. He is totally ignored.

*January 10, 2002* – Bhimas Residency Hotel, **TIRUPATI** – Central Tirupati, “place of power”, is nonstop bazaar. The streets are clogged with motorized rickshaws (four-stroke), motorcycles and bicycles, plus cars. Every square inch is retail. Constant honking, dodging, weaving accompanies nonstop commerce. (The rickshaws actually quack versus honk.) The one area free of this frenzy is the lane to the temple near the center of the city. Here it is pedestrian only (plus performing elephants). The elephants stand back ends to an inner temple gate swinging their trunks. A few rupees buys their blessing as they tap your shoulders with the tip of their trunk. Pass them a banana

and it goes straight into their mouths. Pass them a coin and it goes straight into the pocket of the elephant's master. In the traffic circus the motorbikes are the most plentiful and they are dual occupancy – driven primarily by young men (occasionally a young woman) or a father with daughter or son at the rear. The fashion for the men is to drive around with their girlfriends or wives – the ladies ride sidesaddle in sari often with a flower in their hair. The motorbikes have a rat-a-tat-tat sound and belch toxic blue smoke.

*January 11, 2002 – SRI KALAHASTI* – Site of 8th-century Saiva temple – Three gopuram (gates) in a small town between two hills – One hill with zigzag steps to the top and a Durga temple/shrine – Both hills have modern additions: radio transmission towers and/or advertising (billboards) – The town is a market surrounding the temple – less harried than Tirupati – The temple is the main event versus a relic – Puja: a ritual sacrifice to Saiva, to assist with the passage through Rahu ... Attended by two Brahmins (priests), bathed in chants, incense, fire, led through the interior maze of the temple to the lingam (the only portion of the temple not electrified), passing en route various deities and shrines and shedding karma and rupees ... – The Brahmin priest that conducted the puja (through an underling) has very modern sensibilities. He is wry and modestly worldly. He has a business card, a cell phone and an e-mail address. After the ceremonial tour of the temple, he takes us to town to the hotel where he holds court – A murder of sadhus enters the lower level for lunch. We are taken to visit them, part of the ritual, and they perform a chant en masse. Feeding the sadhus means paying for their meal at the hotel.

Sri Kalahasti to **PUTTAPARTI** via Route 205 – Over rural, rough roads, battling oncoming traffic on narrow bands of eroding tarmac, and ranging from five kilometers per hour to 90 kilometers per hour (the latter where unbroken stretches of road appear miraculously out of a permanent, ongoing construction program). We fly over pot-holed sections of roadway when the surface is not totally broken up, but crawl through washouts and town centers. Tea every two hours or so, total trip over seven hours, ending in the Chitravati River at Puttaparti around 8 p.m., attempting a crossing in six to eight inches of water and alluvial sand. One hour, and six to seven volunteers, to free the car – a front-wheel drive Fiat.

*January 12, 2002 – Puttaparti, Anantapur, Andhra Pradesh* – Arising at 4 a.m. and entering the ashram **PRASANTHI NILAYAM** at 5 a.m. to queue up for darshan, the sun rises as the covered hall receives thousands. The hall is an ornate affair, Hindu rococo, with palm columns, marble floor, and coffered ceiling hung with chandeliers. The darshan starts with a raga, and Bhagavan Sri Sathya Sai Baba enters, from the left, west, amid the women's area and "with the sun" (so-to-speak). He moves slowly through the seated devotees to the front where the mandir acts as a stage/set or verandah. His students (all in white) are gathered in the "eves" of the mandir and dignitaries and functionaries hover nearby calculating where to install themselves. The mandir is made or finished in soft pastel hues, a ceramic facade that is Hindi inspired but hardly traditional. This is perhaps a type of post-modern Indian architecture, or post-classical new age.

The ashram is a micro-village within the micro-village of Puttaparti. It seems that it was given to the Sai Trust by a benefactor – or that's the tale. Others say the land was purchased outright. There are rows of apartment blocks and various facilities including cafeterias and stores. The entire setting is "garden-like" but also very structured with roads running through. Nestled at the base of a complex of hills, the higher ground is given over to administrative buildings and a museum. It is more or less off limits to the hoi polloi. These higher functions are part of the apparatus or bureaucratic machinery that runs this theocratic utopia. Access to the ashram is "discretionary"; this means they can deny you access or throw you out. Most are waved through, excepting the beggars. The great unwashed enter through the Ganesha Gate. Lines are formed by the sevas (the volunteer army that runs the ashram), every one seated in neat rows outside the mandir and eventually each line files toward the entrance to the darshan hall. Women and men are segregated and are processed and seated separately. There are two routes into the hall on the men's side, one for students and dignitaries, one for everyone else. A rote frisking and scanning by metal detector is administered to everyone. Bags, shoes, cigarettes and cameras are strictly forbidden in the hall. Just before darshan, after the unwashed have queued and sat for hours, the dignitaries arrive by car and jeep through the Ganesha Gate and are ushered into the hall. The students come at the last minute as well and run into the hall in bare feet and plop themselves at the head of the assembled thousands. After the sevas pack the hall, each person has about one square meter of marble floor to themselves. When Sai Baba enters necks crane, hands go up in prayerful mode, some of the Indians sit on their legs or clandestinely kneel to get a view. The sevas trot back and forth scolding and cajoling the miscreants to sit. Standard rhetorical fare at the ashram by almost everyone is to begin and conclude every utterance with "Sai Ram". "Sai Ram, sit down." "Sai Ram", then you are frisked. "Sai Ram, you can't sit there." "Sai Ram, you must throw your cigarettes in the box and check your bag." "Sai Ram, no umbrellas

may be checked. Sai Ram.” I take my umbrella, put my cigarettes inside it with the lighter, lean it up against the wall where thousands of pairs of shoes are left during darshan and retrieve it after the whole sordid affair is over. I refuse to utter the words ... They remind me too much of “Heil Hitler” (even if here the svastikas are whirling in the “proper” direction).

Like all utopias, Sai Ram, this one relies on the vigilance of hundreds and hundreds of sets of eyes and ears, Sai Ram, a benevolent, mini-police state, Sai Ram. As an elective community this is part and parcel of the orderly, very tidy village within the village. Compared to the divine chaos of India, just outside the gates, the Sri Sai Baba ashram is an oasis of serenity, strictly enforced serenity, Sai Ram. This police state is a paradigm, an example of the same police state each and every devotee is meant to internalize.

The mandir, which includes Sai Baba’s residence, was once fronted by palms and sand, before the rococo hall was built, and before the curia was established. The curia is the army of white dressed (men) and sari-clad (women), plus the Sai police, petty clerks, shopkeepers, bakers, gardeners, teachers, and presumably handlers. The high curia inhabits the high offices of the Sathya Sai Trust. It is said that his brothers and sisters also are part of this upper echelon, and doing very nicely, Sai Ram.

*January 13, 2002* – Puttaparti, “Guest House”, Chitravati Road – The **BATTLE OF WITS** – How cheaply can one live in India? How many rupees per day? What passes for a “room” in a “hotel” or “guest house”. We have elected not to stay on the ashram.

Chai tea with milk – 2-10 rupees depending on size and vendor

Room with so-called hot water – 150 rupees for two persons, per day

Kitchen – narrow closet-like space with tiled counter, clothesline running overhead, no appliances, no light, a sink with the water draining onto the floor and under a rock

Bathroom – room with tiled floor and wall, almost a whole toilet toilet, shower that doesn’t work and sink

Running water – always running water

Balcony – narrow space with old mattress leaning against balustrade

Food – uttapam, iddly, masala dosa, masala tea, “coffee”

Bottled water – small, 7 rupees – large (1 liter), 12 rupees

Internet access – 1 rupee per minute (five minutes to load a page)

Cigarettes – 4 rupees each (from street vendor) – 53 rupees for a pack of 20

The **WISHING TREE**, Chitravati Road, Puttaparti – Climb concrete steps, gift of engineering company to the Sai Circus, lined with vendors and beggars, to the tree on the edge of a rock outcrop high above the village and growing out of a small chasm (manmade?). Ring bell, light incense, write note, make prayer and offering. From top of hill, a view of Puttaparti and the ashram and colleges. River and outlying villages and hamlets disappear over the horizon, beyond the hills. Cars crossing the Chitravati River, dogs, people, laundry, all in the riverbed, which is a bed of sand with rivulets coursing through. Descend, pass same, exit to street. Look back at hilltop, to police station (unmanned bunker) and radio tower. Scratch head.

The tree is reputedly (as everything is mixed up with the fabulous) the very one where young Sathya Sai Baba, already a saint, fed himself by “materializing” fruit. The notes of penitents are stuck into the cracked face of the rock outcrop and into the fissures in the bark of the fairly old tree. The chasm has a small ghee lamp and a photograph of Sai Baba. There is moist earth within, perhaps sign of a spring. At base of steps four or five goats arrive laden with firewood and guided, by word, by the goatherd. The verges of the stair and the top of the hill are strewn with litter. The vendors seem to have a different opinion of the place.

The **PUBLIC RELATIONS OFFICE** – I ask, “Is there one architect for the ashram?” Answer: “Go to Room 11.” I go to Room 11. No one is there ...

*January 14, 2002* – Puttaparti – Morning **DARSHAN** = spectacle. Pangali New Year = speeches. Brass band, decorative banners. “Stronger, Higher, Faster”. Hall overflowing with special guests. Trophies line a table on the verandah. I leave early.

Sai Baba is wrapped in layers of bureaucracy and today it shows. It’s Spectacle Day, fanfare for the competitive

soul: “**STRONGER-HIGHER-FASTER**”. The curia and the faux-ornate trappings of the darshan hall are over-the-top today. One wishes to think the festivities and the ornaments and baubles are secretly meant as a joke. If anything, they are a product of the curia foisting/forcing yet another event, supplicants and retainers attempting to please Swami. It is embarrassing and clearly meant to impress the sea of devotees. One might guess that this succeeds mostly with poor Indians, but the starry-eyed Westerners are not immune. Eyewash may impress those accustomed to a bleak everyday reality, but it also impresses those who have suspended all judgment.

Return to darshan hall upon hearing Sai Baba’s voice over the PA system, but stand outside looking in. He launches into a discourse (as his speeches are officially called) on “mind and matter”. Mind-Intellect-Wisdom, or a Vedanta lecture on Atma (the Self). “Language cannot reach mind.” The body and the rose ... The rose can only approach the mind through the body ... What is left, and what is right? Left is “left” and right is “right”. Platitudes flow ... This is aimed at the students of the Sai schools. He is lecturing them on arrogance and what true knowledge is. Exhorting them to practice mindfulness while telling them that the mind must be eliminated. In other words, nothing remarkable, everything remarkable. Pure Vedantic rubbish and pure treasure.

Bhagavan’s discourse was delivered in Telegu with a running English translation by a pompous elder academic or high curia member – who knows. Swami’s delivery was increasingly energetic. The translator could not keep up and Swami actually launched into the next section without waiting for the translation to end. They spoke over one another. Swami stopped the pompous orator once to correct his translation *in English*. It was a spirited assault that went on for perhaps 45 minutes. Such events are rare in a day-to-day sense but there are reams of devotional literature, or transcribed “discourses” available in the Sai bookshops and stalls. He’s been at it for over 60 years. “Matter does not matter”, but in nicely inflected Telugu. The force of the words proved the point. Telegu phonemes, to the ear of this Westerner, are sheer delight. “Who are you?” – in English no less. “Atma”, a Sanskrit term for the Self. Oh, and “There will be no war with Pakistan.” “Nothing will happen.” This last bit dramatized by the translator, in bombastic English, sounded like the voice of God announcing Peace on Earth. Amen.

The **BEGGARS** – Young women with babes in arms. “Small milk, no rupees ...” “Maah, maah ...” – Old men and women with canes – A few children – An occasional crippled man (lying in the road or dragging himself through the street) or a maimed woman (fingers and/or hands missing or grossly disfigured) – The local line is that most of them are professional beggars brought to town for the Sri Sai Circus – Some say (usually Westerners): “The women rent the babies and pay a fee to a handler. If you buy them milk they sell it. The maimed women are intentional maimed, for pity’s sake, and to make a more profound impression on Westerners. Some of the beggars are middle-class citizens from Bangalore supplementing their income by feeding off the circus.” On and on goes the rationale for ignoring them. There are occasional authentic mendicants. Sometimes a ragged man with a ragged ox and a horn going door to door. Alms in exchange for a blessing. They are picturesque versus pathetic to the Western eye.

The **VENDORS** – The sales pitches vary very little. “Hey, excuse me...” “Come look at my shop, no problem, no pressure ...” “Hello! Come inside.” “Postcards? Look?” They follow you down the street. It’s the hard sell if they get your attention. All prices are invented on the spot. No looking allowed with out the customary harangue.

**HOLY AIRS** (for Westerners) – Slight to entirely glazed look, expressionless mouth (down turned), slow gait, long or loose-fitting Punjabi or sari, practiced disdain for your fellow kind. Competitions: Holiest look, longest Sai pedigree, closest close encounter(s) with the miraculous (includes dreams), longest expression possible, most authentic Sai ring (materialized), badge, watch or other trifle, most haughty attitude problem, most high info payload with platitudes.

Walk to **CHITRAVATI RIVER** (whence we came unstuck), past squatters, past three-legged donkeys (two front legs tied together), past garbage heap at edge of town (where more three-legged donkeys forage amid the plastic and coconut shells), past Muslim cemetery overrun with more garbage, past pumping station at river’s edge, past Untouchables.

Purchased **AVADHUTA GITA** (n.d.) of Dattatreya, or *Song of the Free\**, a Vedanta hymn to non-dualism and extreme advaita (liberation). “Though Avadhuta naturally implies renunciation, it includes an additional and yet higher state which is neither attachment nor detachment but beyond both. An Avadhuta feels no need of observing any rules, either secular or religious. He seeks nothing, avoids nothing. He has neither knowledge nor ignorance. Having realized that he is the Infinite Self, he lives in that vivid realization.” (Foreword) – \*Translation Swami

Ashokananda (Madras: Sri Ramakrishna Math, n.d.) ...

## INDIALOGUE – PART TWO

*January 15, 2002* – Darshan – Very short – Swami favors men’s side. Male devotees throw themselves at Swami – **SWAMI COLLECTS MAIL** ... Swami ignores 80 to 90 percent of the daily mail, including a beige booklet flapping in the melee – Swami departs “early” – Hall empties, except for those hanging on for bhajans (devotional songs) ...

God runs a **CIRCUS** – The clowns and performing animals are us, the ones circling under the big tent of the sky, sunny by day, starlit at night – The circus moves to and from Puttaparti, to and from the backup ashram at Whitefield (outside Bangalore), packed and shipped by car, bus, and truck – The beggars are said to follow the circus by bus ...

**MANDIRS & STUPAS** – Prasanti Mandir (c.1949) – Ganesha Mandir (c.1949) – Sarva Dharma Stupa (1975) – Subramanya Mandir (1997) – Gayatri Mandir (1998) – Sai Kulwant Hall (c.whenever, said to seat 20,000) ...

Seva Dal (Sai police) – Rotated like wheels – Blue and yellow scarves – 7-15 days on/off ...

**RULES** (written and unwritten) – No cameras, no cigarettes, no socializing, no unauthorized singing, no gossip, no self-aggrandizement, do not give beggars money, do not eat or shop outside the ashram (i.e., do not patronize local restaurants and shops), stay inside the ashram, give only to registered charitable trusts (i.e., the Sai Trust) ...

*January 16, 2002* – Swami leaves at 4 a.m. – **SWAMI DEPARTS** for Whitefield in a black, luxury sedan with police escort (a jeep with armed soldiers riding in the back) – Those waiting in line for darshan are locked inside the ashram, as his entourage hastens to leave Puttaparti – Those in the know have packed and lined up cabs for the trip to Whitefield ...

Sathya Sai Baba was born in 1925 or so in Puttaparti – The village had perhaps 50 families at the time – His former birthplace (the house is gone) is now a shrine demarcated by a double wrought-iron enclosure – No one seems to go there – It is preternaturally quiet in the middle of the afternoon ...

Arrived in **WHITEFIELD**, 16 kilometers from Bangalore, at just before 10 a.m. – The circus has moved *en masse* – The vendors’ makeshift stalls are being constructed alongside the main road outside Brindavan, the ashram, as we arrive – The town center is more affluent and newer than Puttaparti. The outermost layer of buildings (alongside the Bangalore Road, outside of the ashram, but on the opposite side of the road) have been demolished and the roadside is a several-blocks-long rubble field. Two pedestrian passages pierce the outer wall of the enfilade of buildings lining the roadside. These lead straight to the commercial heart of Whitefield. New buildings are going up in town. The canalized stream that runs through Whitefield is an open sewer, sickly green, clogged with plants and garbage – A truck with a loudspeaker rolls by announcing the other circus, the traditional one, is also in town. Colorful circus posters are plastered on the walls of the compounds lining Bangalore Road.

We secure the penthouse at **SRI RANGA GUEST HOUSE**, one of the last “decent” accommodations left in the center of town. The penthouse is one small room, plus bathroom, with the roof of the hotel as terrace and an array of solar panels, mattresses, and laundry lines here and there. Sri Ranga is a three-storey building with all rooms roughly 15’ x 15’. It has a small restaurant opening to an alley and a narrow room facing the alley stocked with computers for Internet access. The computers are rigged to a battery of car-type batteries for power during the frequent power out(r)ages that roll through India on a daily basis.

On reflection, I decide that Swami is some part/not part of me, which I do not fully understand. I suspect it is the same figure I saw dancing in the fireplace when I was very young and would curl up on the couch in our living room after awakening from a bad dream, the same figure that prompted me to paint “Master Your Existence” on the brick mantel of my own fireplace, when in college, many years after first “seeing” this holy ghost.

This circus is also a part/not part of me that I understand all too well and try to laugh off, it is the race, the contest, the war of competing concerns, individuals, and mendacities. It swirls around Swami, like dust, a sign that our petty

selves are the obstacles to realizing that Self of the Vedanta, that part of us that is formlessness and form *at the same time*. The circus travels everywhere we go, individually and collectively. It is *Life Itself*. The poor and the beggars, the shopkeepers and the street urchins, the high and the low, are all players in this three-ring spectacle – I/Thou/Nothingness. The fourth ring is “outside”, “over there”, “up there”, in the so-called *space of appearance* of concepts, the chora perhaps (*pace* Plato). Yet the fourth ring is also an illusion and does not exist apart from anything (everything) else.

Our almost-private rooftop terrace – Were we put here to find a space above the circus? To enjoy our own circus? To find the fourth circle, the sky, the space/place to behold creation almost *dispassionately*? Above the turmoil and tumult, still *within* earshot of the circus but not *of* the circus ... No, this is not yet the place of freedom – Hawk circles ashram, red wings radiant in the late sun ...

The **VEDANTA** – The philosophy (harsh metaphysics) of the Vedas is the so-called path to self-realization and freedom. It demolishes dualism, over and over, and is a punishing discourse on nonattachment. It invokes a state of Being, versus Becoming; i.e., the professed true state of Self beyond form and formlessness. It renounces all, even meditation and Samadhi, or every conditional thing, concept, and principle, including language and mind. But it requires mind, as a vehicle (a ladder climbed and thrown away), to travel “there”, which is nowhere. The mind must find the place of its emergence through retracing the steps of the manifold to unity. This paratactical “other”, this empty mirror of the manifold, is the last step and is, too, discarded. The path is singular (solitary) and timeless (nowhere).

*January 16, 2002* – Morning ravens (blackbirds) alight on the masts of the rooftop water tanks – Silent coconut palm fronds etch low fog – 7 a.m.

Access to morning darshan without metal detectors, and, instead, a cursory frisking of anyone entering the hall, excepting sevas of course. Part way into darshan/bhajans (they are combined today) an altercation occurs in the men’s section within the hall and an Indian man is whisked away. Apparently, a very long dagger was produced out of thin air and the culprit was pounced upon by vigilant sevas. All of this is hearsay (and disputed), given that the hordes have arrived, the hall is smaller than at Puttaparti, and there was a heavy fog this a.m. A “Roshomon” incident, perhaps. Yet another sideshow in the Great Circus.

Coffee, 10 rupees at Sri Ranga – War continues over how cheaply one can live in India – 12 rupee water still unacceptable expense – 750 rupees okay for devotional CDs – Sari, shoes, writing paper, extra laundry/dish soap, pictures of Sai Baba, small idols and knickknacks, books, etc. okay as well ...

River in front of penthouse door from overflow pipe of rooftop water tank rerouted after several complaints to “management” – six-centimeter lizard (gecko) chased out of room – Bedroom mirror re-hung on clothes hook in bathroom above sink at rakish angle for shaving – Duct tape at the ready for next invasion of wildlife through gaps in the ill-fitting windows – “Management” put on notice that guests are unhappy with state of affairs ...

Inductee to private circus appears periodically – He was enlisted during the taxi ride from Puttaparti to Whitefield – All admonitions to calm down to Agent Provocateur #1 go unheeded – The war continues ...

*A Road Guide to India\** – “Bangalore” – “Sri Sai Baba’s Ashram: The goal of thousands of **INTERNATIONAL SOLACE-SEEKERS** drawn by accounts of the Sai Baba’s supernatural powers. The modern Indian spiritual *guru*, Satya Sai Baba, easily recognizable by his Afro-hairdo, receives floods of visitors anxious to see him or witness one of his miracles.” – \*(Chennai: TTK LTD, 2001), p. 60 ...

The **HYPE**, the **SPECTACLE**, the **STORIES** – “The tax collectors come to see Sai Baba ... He says, ‘Yes, I have lots of money.’ and shows them a door. ‘Open it,’ he says. They open it and find a room full of gold and etc. They are dumbfounded and shaken. ‘How can we tax God?’ Sai Baba says, ‘Go look again.’ They return to the room, open the door, and the room is empty.”

Circled the outside of the compound at afternoon bhajans and passed the Whitefield rail station as a rusting locomotive sailed past. Only the southwest side of the ashram has developed. The backside is full Indian squalor with one or two shops. Beyond this is full Muslim squalor, with mosque. The ashram wall is even less attractive

here, without the decorative flourishes along the Bangalore Road. It is perhaps taller, 15' or so, and topped with rusting barbed wire.

The **PRESS ARRIVED** at about 4 p.m. and set up outside the gate, dodging traffic and filming the comings and goings of the “international solace-seekers” – Little girls (8-10 years or so old) are hawking rose blossoms ... 10 rupees, 4 rupees, 2 rupees ??? – Everyone is hawking darshan cushions – There are simple flat versions and de luxe folding versions that open up into a small sturdy chair – Local shops are catching up finally, almost fully stocked, though the ice cream was late arriving – The circus is in full swing ...

International Solace-Seekers – At a minimum we have on hand representatives from Switzerland, Germany, Italy, Russia, Holland, Britain, and the USA. Australians and a handful of Japanese and Korean devotees round out the demographic. Indian daytrippers easily outnumber foreign devils, and they make no bones about owning Sai Baba. They swarm into the ashram and push their way to the front of the hall, ignoring the nasty sevas. They stand up in the middle of the hall, blocking the view of others, and are the first to leave when Baba glides back into the mandir after darshan. No doubt many of them have to go off to work.

The governor of Rajasthan has a nice villa adjacent to the ashram. It has a nice perimeter wall, iron entrance gate with guard house, a gravel *court d'honneur*, and lattice shade structures set in the garden and stuffed with potted plants. Blood-red Bougainvillea splurts over the wall of the compound along the Bangalore Road.

Swami's own house is engulfed in a garden at the far end of the ashram, south of the darshan hall. His compound is contiguous with the darshan hall, such that he may appear at any time. The glorious mandir in Puttaparti, which is the figurative center of the beehive, is here matched by a poor second cousin twice removed. But it still functions as a symbolic hinge between his world and our world. It is from its several portals that he appears and disappears. The Brindavan darshan hall resembles a modified airplane hangar.

Unlike Puttaparti, the greater Whitefield ashram is off limits to anyone not staying within. Perhaps this rule is relaxed at times, or perhaps it is quite simply one of those sublime, arbitrary things that come and go like Swami.

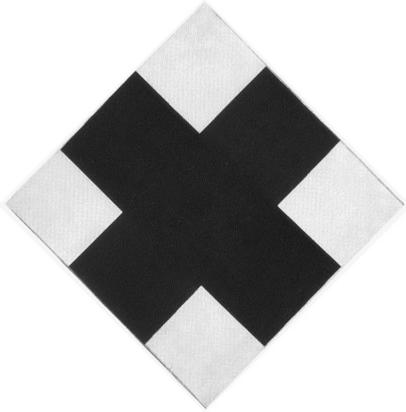
**LOTUSES** are now for sale in the streets ... They were in bloom in the lowlands along the way from Puttaparti to Whitefield. These are rose-colored, not white. They are an astonishing presence, bursting as they do from muck and mire, and so different from the airy, delicate garlands sold outside the entrance to both ashrams, made of small, interlocking cream, soft-orange, pink, and lemon-yellow flowers resembling hand-colored Laburnum blossoms.

“O beloved friend, how  
shall I bow to my own  
Self in my Self?”  
– *Avadhuta Gita* III:2

The main Sathya Sai Baba institutions are free of charge, the “super-specialty” hospitals and the lower and higher schools. Admission to the schools is said to be rigorous. The hospitals, at least two, are reputedly built according to the mathematical principles of sacred Indian architecture. These structures are also typically bombastic, with huge, false facades hiding a double-loaded box. They often have a central dome or rotunda to increase the sense of grandeur. One story told about the latest hospital (funded by the man who founded, then sold, the Hard Rock Cafes) typifies the mythology of the Sai circle. Tradition requires that during groundbreaking a mandala is to be drawn on the ground. Eagles are necessary at such auspicious events as salutary sentinels. On the day of the event three eagles appeared on cue and hopped around on the ground throughout the ritual consecration of the site. Sai Baba then discharged them, after thanking them for heeding his invitation.

The ashrams are not free, but dirt cheap (as it were), 3 rupees per day for a bed (shared room, bring your own mattress), 10 rupees for a slice of pizza, 2 rupees for a bag of Sai popcorn, 6 rupees for a South India meal served by surly sevas and eaten with your fingers, prison cafeteria style (left hand, right hand in lap) – Outdoor showers, canteen, bookstore/shopping center, accommodations office, Air India office, and Post Office round out the guest facilities in Puttaparti.

GK (June 2004)



# GOOD-BYE, LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURE?

[...]

PRÉCIS – Remarks to be served at the 2004 CELA Conference “gala” dinner, New Zealand, and/or sealed in a spent red wine bottle and hurled into the /S/ea ...

RECIPE – Transfer the following text to phyllo pastry sheets; in an oiled and seasoned 8”-x-8” baking dish place several sheets of phyllo (with text) and fill with a mixture of sautéed wild mushrooms, boiled new potatoes, chopped Italian parsley, sautéed diced red onion, and feta cheese; salt and pepper to taste; place additional layers of phyllo on the top, depress and brush with butter; bake in a pre-heated 350-degree oven for 30 minutes; remove from the oven when golden-brown; serve with a glass of blood-red wine (French Merlot) ... *Bon appétit!* ...

N.B. – Please *print this document*, as the electronic version is sure to disappear into the ether (self-destruct) within a fortnight ... As always, this essay (if that is what it is) is copyrighted and may be used for personal therapeutic purposes only, although it would also be fortuitous for it to be passed *below the salt* at the forthcoming, 2004 CELA event. That said, in a Peter Greenaway-inspired version of the now-predictable, annual CELA gathering this document would be fed to the delegates against their wishes (that is to say, without their *knowing* it).

[...]

Dearly unloved, bereaved, beleaguered, bewildered, and beside yourselves, members and guests of the Council to Eliminate Landscape Architecture:

We are gathered here today to pay our respects to the passing of a dear old friend, the passing away before our very eyes of a certain ungainly some-thing, a mostly useless some-thing, created just over 100 years ago; that is (and for emphasis I emphasize, by repeating, the unwanted terms of endearment) the “mostly useless some-thing” otherwise known as Landscape Architecture.

You may say, “I had no idea!”, and you would be (alas) correct. You might object, “I have no intention of presiding over the demise of our illustrious profession!”, a profession that has been self-announcing its self-importance since its self-conception. Yet, if there was ever an institution truly undoing itself while doing whatever it is it does, or “doing itself in”, it is, indeed, this thing called Landscape Architecture, a thing nobody, I repeat nobody, can define or situate without tying themselves up in knots. And this is why the identity crisis of the discipline has never abated for more than a few years at best, and usually only during those rare periods of intense activity – outbursts of purely speculative economic activity/money-making – which, in essence, only temporarily silenced the cyclical torment visited upon itself by itself, a self-torture by self-doubt re-publicized and re-visited, over and over (at least once a decade), in the pages of a certain quite LAME professional magalogue purporting to represent this discipline that is not really a discipline at all but a half-baked idea, a stretch of scorched turf, perpetrated as a colossal hoax by its putative founding father, affectionately known as FLO (and every landscape architect’s absent Father).

As an immodest first act of self-demolition (self-immolation), I propose the self-elimination of all undergraduate program(mes) and the immediate folding of all graduate program(mes) in this nothing much called Landscape Architecture into Architecture Itself. Pronto! ... I know, I know, I can already hear your cries of disbelief, “But the architects! They will eat us alive!” To be sure, that is what will happen as long as landscape is perceived as a timid, non-reflective, neo-Romantic and half-starved poor cousin of architecture (I use the lower case to indicate mere professional disciplines, versus anything else at all, god forbid a singular “discourse”).

But please note, architects have been enamored of landscape now for over 10 years, starting perhaps with the sexy, renascent, “baroque” poses of late-modern urbanism, a comely *figura serpentina* if ever there was one, and (then, as now) the hot new thing. And (alas) was it not the truly twisted world of Rem Koolhaas that spawned this hot new thing? Rem, who professes to not care what any thing *looks like* as long as it “functions”? Rem, who raced between

Lille and Rotterdam in a sports car, versus chugging back and forth in, let's say, a Trabant or Skoda (which more or less merely function)? Is not landscape urbanism, the latest hot new thing (facilitated by Photoshop), a byproduct of the intensely negative dialectic embedded within Netherlandish urbanism, arriving in Harvard Square, in the early 1990s, by way of Bedford Square? These are, of course, rhetorical questions, because – after all – it is rhetoric, poetics, and aesthetics that truly call today, not some hybrid, virtual, infrastructurally hyped (crippled) amalgam of disciplines disposed to dispose of the last bits of so-called ground (a mythic and ontological “thing-in-itself”) in the manner of re-programming or re-surfacing the city, etc., etc..

What then calls is indeed /S/ome-thing Else! This /S/ome-thing Else has been of late wandering the waste-places of the world (of dueling disciplines, dual disciplines), and it calls every day not in that low, miserly voice of everyday this and everyday that privileged by those who should know better (still walled off from everything else at UC Berkeley), but in the seductive whispers of a suppressed (repressed) desire long vanquished to the edges of things-not-in-themselves; that is, in the repressed coordinates of aesthetic ideas and constellated things (milieux upon milieux). Therefore, as a matter of principle, we must now declare and admit that the word *aesthetic* is less understood today than the enigmatic term *architecture*, if – and it is always “if” – anything else whatsoever is to rise in the space of architectural imagination to undo the last vestiges of the putative and paradoxical so-called autonomy of disciplines (old “Kantian” and “neo-Kantian” arguments paraded forth in the academies whenever things begin to turn progressively, *transitively*, murky). The tragedy of architecture (lower case architecture, again) remains, senselessly, the tragedy of Echo and Narcissus.

Paradoxically, then, it is the return of strident and nominally “phantasmatic” formalisms that signals the rising of this /S/ome-thing Else toward its appearance, its “being given” – that is to say, “cyclical” elective formalisms, versus avant-garde agitation per se. It is within the liminal language of formalisms that things may be properly undone (undressed) and the suppressed nature of what is always already given, that is the world, may emerge again from the de-natured, packaged products of instrumentalities left and right. The deep-sea diving games of formal innovation are timeless and invaluable excursions into the proverbial “wilderness” *inside* architecture (this “wilderness” a form of “haunted wood”, where, as Thoreau indicated, the “preservation of the world” resides). Urbanism is the most crisis-prone of all architectural sites, and because the world is racing toward massive urbanization, it is this site of sites that registers most vividly within the architectural libido as the place for contemporary conquest. The nasty battles over the World Trade Center site are emblematic. As such, urbanism (despite landscape urbanism) is the exact place to situate the call now calling, the extreme intertextual marks of /S/ome-thing Else, the (perhaps) awe-inspiring gesturalism of the Coming-Coming, that /S/ome-thing that calls today.

The call that calls, therefore, calls for reverse landscape architecture, and reverse architecture, or the taking apart of premises, disciplines, and – indeed – things useless and overblown (overwrought). The call that calls is also calling for the erasing of the outmoded (the bankrupt ideologies of design in service to nothingness) and the freeing/erasing of ground (ontological ground) to/for things that are truly phenomenal (events), versus objects or marks dignifying the undignified metaphysical artifacts (remains ruins) of architecture (*architectures spent*). Indeed (to paraphrase Peter Eisenman/Bruno Latour), Modernism never did quite “arrive”. What is called for, instead of endless neo-modernisms (and hapless, demented post-modernisms), is Immodernity Itself, a form of “modernity” (being modern) that is extravagantly immanent (radically immanent) and which has little to do with Modernity (now a historical plaything anyway). The latter, after all, has effectively turned its back and gone.

To undo landscape architecture then is to invade architecture (and, in turn, to undo architecture as it is comprised/practiced today). Architecture is actually amenable (highly susceptible) to this process, as it is always already undoing (undressing) itself anyway. IT actually has a vibrant, somewhat exotic capacity to rearrange its mental furnishings every decade or so, to quite provocatively perform an auto-erotic striptease in public. The mostly ugly fact that both Landscape Architecture and Architecture are primarily concerned with servicing the machine (the machine that is eating “the garden” every day) is another issue, an issue best left outside the issue at hand – that is, Architecture as a Fine Art is one thing, and Architecture as Real Estate is another. To be complicit with the destruction of experience is to be complicit with the destruction of authenticity/aura. To embrace /S/ome-thing Else is also to re-embrace the highly-seductive concept of “aura”, a concept nearly always problematized these days as a “Benjaminian” thing/not-thing, yet returning with a vengeance in advanced discourses within the humanities, Architecture’s true home. The philosophically and phenomenologically inflected works of Jean-Luc Marion, now being translated into English (from French), are but one example.

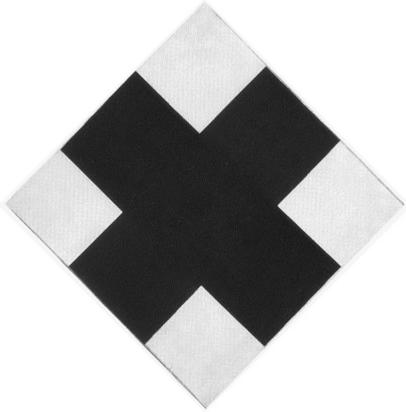
“Oh mon dieu!”, you might say, “Another French theorist!” And yet, “Why not?” is the only appropriate response, as long as the spectral monster known as American pragmatism (and neo-realism), a monstrous thing resembling Goya’s Saturn cannibalizing his own children, continues to stuff its foot into its own mouth, chomping upon itself and exporting the self-incurred mayhem worldwide. And, too, as long as – to look the French gift horse in the mouth – the Lacanian Imaginary continues to devalue everything and anything imaginary, turning the world of mediated things into a phantasmatic circus.

Many would say “It has always been so!”, and yet it is not this de facto servicing of capitalism that is in question. What the triple question marks of rhetoric, poetics, and aesthetics ask is, “What are these self-inflexed, foremost, forward-leaning aspects of a secretly singular discipline to do in the face of advanced hyper-capitalism (the unreal spaces and places of total flow), here and now, and not in some hypothetical romanticized ‘future’, since – given the nature of time itself – the future, truly, never comes?” It is from “inside/within” time itself that /S/ome-thing Else calls, coming forth in time (and – paradoxically – “against” time, against the grain of time, shattering the hourglass). As such, the sublime /S/ome-thing Else always calling from within architecture is architectural “revelation”, a saturated phenomenon (after Marion) seen, heard, felt, tasted, and – yes – wafting forth in the elusive (yet strangely “common”) space of so-called appearance, what Giorgio Agamben has rightly called “the place of taking-place”, and catastrophically (unnaturally), since time immemorial, the most contested place of all. To reclaim *this space* is to open the path of Architecture to /S/ome-thing Else altogether.

Given the above, insofar as it is real (perchance *sur-real*), I call upon Landscape Architecture (here and now) to dissolve itself, to immerse itself in /S/ome-thing Else (nominally, a sublime aesthetics), for CELA to disband (eliminate *itself*), for landscape aestheticians (landscape troubadours) to wander far and wide perpetrating new songs and dances (in that strangely beautiful, guttural language of blurred phonemes and syntactical elisions known as *formal games*), carving new spaces out of thin air, bringing architecture home to architecture, putting foundations under “castles in the air”, re-inventing time, folding into time new times (out of time), in time, and – *always* – just in time.

GK (June 2004)

*Dedicated to the immortal spirit of Voltaire, the mortal remains of Jonathan Swift, and the very much alive, filmic imagination of Peter Greenaway ...*



# GOOD-BYE, POST-MODERN NIHILISM?

[...]

“We cannot tear out a single page of our life, but we can throw the whole book in the fire.” – George Sand

## I. THE EMPIRE OF BROKEN SIGNS

While stranded in Amsterdam’s Schiphol Airport recently, for six hours, en route from Prague to New York, I spent an hour or two smoking and talking with a sad-eyed gentleman from Sarajevo. He was interested in what passes in the USA (what Jacques-Alain Miller has called the “United Symptoms of America”) for political culture, a culture primarily distinguished by collective amnesia. His main concern (and he was traveling to Washington) was how Bosnia could be forgotten so easily, and quickly, and why the US could move willy-nilly, assisting or ignoring the production of one wasteland after another, caring little for the wretched places that have passed out of view of its panoptic eye (the one on the dollar), while focusing on the latest to appear in the fun-house mirror of its imperial gaze.

His stories of the broken and misbegotten state of things in Bosnia were telling. He wondered aloud how an economy, not to mention a government, mired in the worst state of corruption imaginable – that is, an economy run by criminals and a government riddled with war criminals (all watched over by the UN and NATO) – could yet pass under the radar of international *caritas*. I wanted to tell him that cowboy (and crony) capitalism is the always-acceptable stalking horse for liberal democracy, but instead I just forfeited to him some general terms, including “cowboy capitalism” and the all-purpose locution “Human Rights is an abstraction” (which he duly jotted down on a scrap of paper).

If we can detect now, just off-stage (off-camera), a world-wide dismay (and a hoped for world-wide reprieve) of post-modern nihilism, in all of its decrepit forms, it may be quite simply because we have arrived at the point of ultimate crisis, a point more or less summarized by the deepening miasma in Iraq. George W. Bush (perhaps the first post-modern president, though that dishonor could also be applied to Reagan, Bush I, and Clinton) and his reign of idiocy has served the unintentional purpose of focusing the attention on a possible Way Out. This possible Way Out is prefigured in innumerable cultural instances, not unrelated, not the least of which is the turn under way in cultural studies; the putative “death of theory” and a return to *philosophy*. This turn, in turn, is a dramatic and telling move (underway here and there) away from the worst ravages of the post-modern and nihilistic “thing”, generally subsumed (and poorly assimilated) under the rubric “post-structuralism”, toward something else altogether. As we pass from an era of post-modern thugs (Noriega, Milošević, Karadžić, and Hussein, for sure, but also Bush-Cheney, Blair, Putin, and Sharon), we see ahead a glimmer of the proverbial light at the end of the tunnel. So much for “compassionate conservatism”, Robin Cook’s “enlightened foreign policy” (although he *did* quit) and various third ways, middle ways and/or half ways.

## II. /S/OME-THING ELSE

It is this something else that is extraordinarily compelling, insofar as it signals that the post-modern wasteland we all have the miserable privilege of inhabiting might yet be re-colonized by universal and humanitarian (let’s say, egalitarian) precepts. Such things (concepts), while formerly deployed as abstractions (and conveniently maintained as abstractions) are now, arguably, in the process of being made radically contingent in various types of cultural expression and, yes, *rebellion*. The foremost, from my very biased perspective, is the forward-leaning phenomenological turn underway in philosophy and aesthetics. While Slavoj Žižek and Alain Badiou further the cause of certain neo-Marxist strains of thought (and both have appropriated the so-called theological turn in contemporary phenomenology, “theology without God”, to extract and re-deploy such abstract and universal precepts), we also are privileged to witness the arrival stateside of the magisterial works of Jean-Luc Marion (professor of philosophy and aesthetics at the Sorbonne, heir to Paul Ricoeur, Emmanuel Levinas and Jacques Derrida). Marion’s writings marvelously foreshadow what waits in the wings – that is to say, the call of that sublime something else I dare say everyone not in love with or in bed with post-modern nihilism awaits. It is this something else, however, that is the ultimate enemy of what now passes for business as usual, neo-liberalism (global capitalism). For this reason, generally, whenever it *begins to appear*, in systems of political ontology or the arts, it is

promptly shut down and/or co-opted. Needless to say, neo-conservative hypocrisy is the prime example of *being in bed with* post-modern nihilism, while neo-liberal double talk is its doppelganger. Rightly, therefore, has it been said that the mouthpieces of late-modern media are not so much the spokespersons for neo-liberalism as they are *neo-liberalism writ large*. The grossly indeterminate rhetoric of Rumsfeld, Wolfowitz, Perle, Armitage et al., merely proves the former point, while the interpretive gloss (whitewash) generally thrown over events by the Op-Ed pages of such mainstream newspapers as the *New York Times* (despite Paul Krugman's insistent "howl"), the *Washington Post* (despite Richard Cohen's clever inconsistency) and the *Los Angeles Times* (despite Günter Grass' extraordinary "The US Betrays Its Core Values", April 7, 2003), more or less proves the latter. The US-mandated, empty-headed and toothless posturing at the UN is, no doubt, a product of the self-same contagion. Anyway, as I told the sad-eyed gentleman from Sarajevo, it is actually a better idea to read the *Wall Street Journal* since, therein, you at least do not have to wade through and interpret the double-talk of the abovementioned neo-liberal broadsheets.

Michael Moore's film *Fahrenheit 9/11* comes, then, at exactly the right moment (thank you, Lions Gate), as does the media blitz promoting a film that the Bushites would dearly love to find a way to discredit. Despite its marketing as "documentary", Moore's film is quite simply the specular work of cinema mirroring the hoped for End of Nihilism, a landscape of nothingness that stretches (alas) as far as the blind eye cannot see. This end is hopefully the beginning of something long overdue. Is it possible that we are witnessing the re-emergence of a counterculture, which might truly counter the mayhem we see perpetrated around the globe in the name of "democracy", "freedom" and "neo-liberalism" (Capitalism Triumphant)?

Given the perennially conservative state of the American public, the John Kerry juggernaut (now mopping up millions of dollars left and center) makes sense. So, too, does the new, earnestly smiling version of Kerry recently unpacked by Ted Koppel despite or because, as Gore Vidal is reported to have said, the dour Kerry looks like Lincoln (*after he was shot*). "Optimism sells!" we were reminded throughout the course of the popular media's mawkish, distorted, and mind-numbingly endless coverage of Reagan's funeral (a bizarre and sick post-modern remake of Kennedy's funeral). Yet the Kerry machinery (the Democratic Leadership Council), the same that destroyed Howard Dean, may give pause to anyone interested in truly undoing what has been wrought these past several decades, since Clinton too was a product of this loathsome apparatus. As Chomsky and others have pointed out, voting for Kerry is more or less required in any state not considered safely democratic. Although many of us opposed to another Bush term are, by default, card-carrying members of the Anti-Republican Party, a party that is (by the way) by no means synonymous with the Democratic Party, it is only in states that are safely democratic that it is sensible to register what always needs to be registered, the so-called "protest vote" (in this year's contest most likely a vote for Ralph Nader). Al Gore's recent fiery appearance at Georgetown University, lambasting Bush's lies in no uncertain terms, clearly shows that the writing is on the wall. Listen, then, for more Republican complaints about *ad hominem* attacks. It is now perhaps safe to say what you really think, more or less on the record, since the country has had about all it can take of the post-modern triumvirate, Bush-Cheney-Rumsfeld, currently steering the ship of state into the abyss. Notwithstanding the macabre outer circles of this political cabal (for example, the grim and spectral triple-headed monster known as Ridge-Mueller-Ashcroft), Time Itself seems to be crying out loud for an end to the bleak prospects of a sinister (and cynical) Empire of Broken Signs masquerading as a Republic. There is more than a whiff of sulfur, here, especially when it comes to the triple-headed monster denoted above, a beast that last stalked American soil during the McCarthy-era witch hunt.

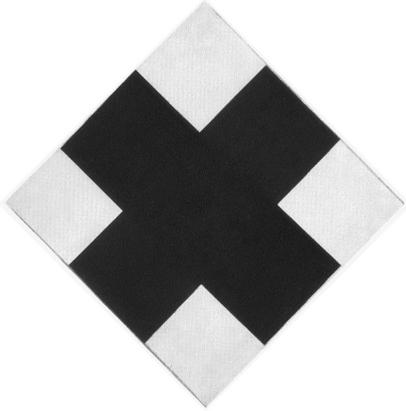
Yet as Bush bed down late this past week in his sumptuous suite at Dromoland Castle in County Clare, Ireland, dropping by the US-EU summit en route to the NATO summit in Istanbul, Turkey, flitting from photo op to photo op, we were reminded (after the fact), as if by the peculiar image itself, and if there is any justice left in the world, that it is also bedtime for Bush-Cheney. The sell-by date for their psychotic, "bi-polar" vision of the world has come. As a symptom of times hopefully past (passing), this vision (a vast, unrelenting nightmare) must be, finally, both discredited and replaced with something else altogether. One can already hear a very different tune, if one listens carefully, drifting in and out of range, at first a mere tease, not unlike the one that haunted Swann in Proust's *Remembrance of Things Past*. A musical phrase linked, after all, to appropriate Slavoj Žižek's allusive locution, to "The State of Emergency Called Love". The alternative (too horrific to envision) is war without end.

[...]

GK (June 2004)

**POSTSCR(Y)PT**

For those still unconvinced that the Bush-Cheney regime is, indeed, proto-fascist, please consider the fact that his base is largely: 1/ White/Rich; 2/ Stupid/Rich (Michael Moore's point); and/or 3/ White/Christian. The fundamentalist bent of the latter, White/Christian, is also Bush's prime reason for periodically swerving to the far right, as far as domestic and cultural policies are concerned. It is Karl Rove who monitors the numbers in this regard, steering Bush toward different parts of his base as need be. These structural aspects of his so-called following add up to an implicit proto-fascist agenda. While not obviously racist, they are crypto-racist (and, therefore, crypto-fascist). The weakest and, therefore, most malleable/unreliable portion of this base is, in fact, the White/Rich, or those who will bail when a new Great White Hope appears on the political horizon, Kerry?, or when the damage wrought by tilting toward the latter two aspects (Stupid/Rich and White/Christian) is too great to bear (such as bankrupting the Treasury). Bush has notoriously courted Wall Street *since* coming into office, whereas his first campaign was effectively conducted without directly milking the East Coast plutocracy. The Bush-Cheney environmental, economic and social agenda, while aimed broadly at its base, is also aimed straight at the dark heart of the Market, the movers and shakers in financial services and corporate boardrooms (and bedrooms). Nominally Republican, this highly lucrative sector, currently being spoon-fed (catered) by Bush-Cheney Inc., also includes a layer of neo-conservative and neo-liberal democrats. Some members of this demographic within a demographic cross party lines when it is in their own best interest; that is, when doing so will enhance their personal fortune and/or assuage their vaguely liberal conscience. If such democrats will sometimes vote Republican (e.g., for Reagan), whereas republicans will rarely vote Democrat, it is, in fact, these "soft" aspects of the neo-democratic demographic that could actually make a significant difference in the forthcoming election. One has to wonder, then, if the decision to hold the Republican National Convention in New York was not actually a calculation by Karl Rove to appease that neo-democratic demographic, notwithstanding the obvious attempt to seize Ground Zero, once again, in the name of political opportunism, and throw Gov. George Pataki a bone.



# ECOLOGY & ITS DISCONTENTS

ECOS – ETHOS – PATHOS – EROS – BATHOS – CHRONOS – MYTHOS – TYPOS – HIPPOS – ANTHOS

Replacement Text 02/05/03 / Updated 06/29/04

[...]

## PULSE CHECK / THE WORLD-SOUL FIRE SALE (v.2003.1)

### I. THEY ARE OUT THERE

Good Morning, Citizens! Welcome to the Corporate Century! THEY will be more than happy to sell you your birthright. THEY control almost everything: THEY own the airwaves (the so-called aether); THEY have metered your water; and, THEY bombard you daily with useless information (television, print media, ads on the subway, the highway, the Internet). THEY have somehow convinced us that time and space belongs to them. THEY will find a way in the future to insert advertisements into your sleep and dreams. THEY, of course, will reserve ad-free sleep and dreams for themselves. THEY are working on metering your sleep and dreams (THEY've already metered your everyday sweat and tears), and, Heaven and Hell permit, THEY will find a way to meter your daydreams as well. THEY trade in points – “the spread”. THEY have such subtle-colossal clout that you hardly realize when you are not being taken to the cleaners.

THEY control politics, sports (including the Olympics), most media, food production and distribution, and on and on. Bread and circuses, indeed! THEY'll call you day and night (but mostly around 6-7 pm) to sell you something / anything; THEY've got banks of phones at the ready. Every couple of years these same phone banks are utilized to sell you the latest readymade candidate for “higher” office. THEY bombard your snail- and e-mailboxes with torrents of junk mail. Ask your snail-mailperson and s/he'll say: “It pays the bills.” THEY've got the margins calculated on the margins of margins. THEY've got massive Brainiac 8000 computers monitoring your e-pulse and tracking every electronic blink of your eye. THEY'll sell you this and that (no payments or interest until “whenever”) and THEY'll happily take a lien on your house, your children, your car, or your lean-to in the meantime.

THEY've got the vision thing nailed to a spreadsheet. THEY're parasitical. THEY're MBAs with a mission. If THEY screw up, THEY will dump their debt on you the stockholder, or on you the taxpayer (it makes no difference to them), and float away on golden parachutes.

THEY have you strung out on credit, secretly servicing their own monumental debt – a gargantuan “hangover” from the acquisitions frenzy of the last few decades. THEY will loan you your own money for 19.9% (APR) and “invest” it for you at 1.0% (APR). THEY have an endless stream of vacuous images, useless data, and products past their sell-by date for you. Their tentacles are everywhere. Their apologists write weekly newspaper columns extolling their imaginary virtues. THEY have magazines devoted to themselves, picturing themselves, glorifying themselves. THEY have offshore bank accounts and THEY rarely if ever pay taxes except when really, really pressed to. THEY launder their money in the capitals of capital – Washington, New York, London, Milan, Tokyo, Hong Kong, and, now, Beijing. THEY buy and sell you everyday. THEY trade in futures on you. THEY love, loath, and need you!

THEY are ravenous! And THEY have no loyalties (THEY periodically eat one another). At home, THEY will abandon the Bush-Cheney circus as soon as THEY lock in new tax breaks and various and sundry “incentives” as far as the blind eye cannot see. Actually, THEY don't believe in government (good, bad, or otherwise). What THEY do believe in is “profitability” and “return on investment” – this abstract, non-thing has led straight to the de-materialization of just about everything, but most importantly capital. De-materialized capital moves at light-speed through the neo-archaic aether. De-materialized capital is infinitely malleable and can be moved hither and thither in a moment's notice. Indeed, all that is solid has been vaporized.

THEY print, pulp, print, pulp, and print millions of unreadable books each year. Some of their authors get several

million dollar advances (especially if they are “connected” and represent “access”) – it’s called “synergy” – even though the books end up in the dumpster. THEY have super-bookstores in which to display these useless books. Some say THEY crush little bookstores everywhere. But there are still itty-bitty independent bookstores here and there.

THEY cut down entire forests, pulp the trees and churn out flimsy, facsimile stuff for you to buy and throw out the next year. THEY collect your garbage and charge you to haul it to the nearest toxic landfill or toxin-spewing incinerator. THEY never live downwind of either. It’s called “waste management”. It used to be called garbage collection.

THEY put asbestos in your buildings and then charge you an arm and a leg to take it away. THEY dump tons of toxins into the ground and surface waters around the globe every year and make billions selling you pretty plastic bottles of “potable” water. THEY convert Heaven to Hell everyday, while maintaining that THEY control access to both, which means that THEY have convinced themselves that Heaven is for the elect and Hell for everyone else.

THEY have infiltrated the environmental NGOs and THEY own the EPA, FDA, FCC, and ETC. THEY write legislation and send it to the local, state, and federal legislatures to be rubber-stamped. THEY have armies of lobbyists ready to march at a moment’s notice.

THEY sail the seven seas. THEY’ve got fleets of ships roving to and fro. THEY’ve got rusting, leaking, single-hulled oil tankers registered in exotic places like Liberia and Panama City. THEY deliver sludge to your doorstep. The minute particulars of this worldwide fiasco wash up daily on your favorite beaches. THEY are alchemists and magicians: THEY transmute sticky goo into plastic phones, plastic cards, plastic mesh fences, plastic clothing, plastic toys, plastic cups and plates and cutlery, and plastic bags for you to carry all this plastic junk home in.

## II. THE UNBEARABLE BURDEN OF THEYNESS

THEY have interceded between you and the Real. THEY understand that the Real only ever presents itself as phantasm. What THEY have done, therefore, is turn the economy of the Real into an economy of desire (a super-charged libidinal economy). THEY have not necessarily read Lacan, but THEY understand this situation nonetheless. THEY understand because this situation is an age-old situation. If THEY suspect that you know that THEY know what THEY know, THEY will threaten to go ballistic.

Some say THEY don’t exist, that THEY are a “structural” no-thing. But I’ve seen their McMansions, and their McCars, and they appear from time to time on television or in the papers (lately in handcuffs). THEY’ve got jails for themselves in the countryside where THEY can play golf and network while “doing time”, before setting up a philanthropic foundation to hide their ill-gotten wealth. Some say THEY are us. I’m not sure. I know THEY are out there somewhere.

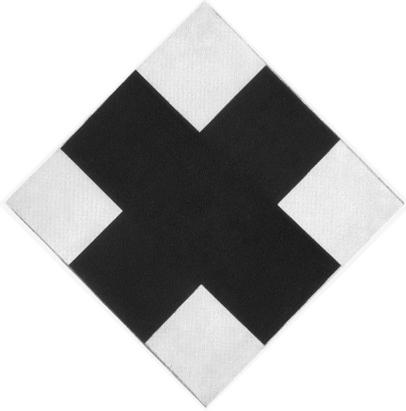
Their spokespersons appear on television every evening at 6 and 6:30 pm to report on the day’s transactions, the day’s casualties, the day’s “collateral damage”. This is the same time of day that THEY are trying to call you to sell you something you don’t want or need. Don’t THEY talk to each other?

THEY think THEY own everything. THEY actually own next to everything, and it’s this “next to everything” that is at stake everyday. As such, what THEY do *not* own is what is so very important. It is this ... this gap in their ownership of almost everything that is *the way out*. Come, then, let us follow The Goat Track toward “S” – toward that Small, Powerful Thing THEY do not control. It leads away to “there”, and, through a secret feedback loop, back to “here”.

Perhaps the words of Massimo Cacciari on the work of sculptor-painter Emilio Vedova bear witness to this age-old problem: “Vedova’s *Carnival* [1977-91] has the following itinerary: to follow, try, probe, with the hands and with all the nerves, one might say, every trace, every flash, every stammering of words in this ‘state of misery.’ To be alert, listening. When will night come to an end? Here, a mask seems to open up to one possible answer – or to invite one not to tire of questioning. What is Carnival, if not the repetition of the invitation to ‘know oneself,’ in the mask and beyond every mask? To put on the mask that always terrifies anew, and to put it down again? Carnival is the culmination of the past-state, but at the same time it is its catastrophe. For the past-state is completed, we can no

longer fear it. But we cannot know if this instant will be able to take shape, to utter the word – if it will be a new beginning or none other than the first moment of repetition of the same thing.” – Massimo Cacciari, “Finally, Vedova’s ‘Carnivals’”, in *Emilio Vedova* (Milan: Charta, 2001)

Dr. Prof. Ing. I.M. Avenarius (January 2003)



# THE YOUNG BRAHMANIANS

[...]

Sometime, somehow, along the way, and always already en route somewhere else, they had all become Brahmanians. It was unclear when they had taken this nominally sharp left turn, but it was clear that it originated within the short windowless Time when the enigmatic gesture of the Real-Real took root; a small seed planted in the soul, then, unfurling its delicate radical and turning, in turn, toward the moist earth of critical and poetical reflection, the soil of that collective state of things reflected in the specular, Pascalian wager regarding *discours naturel*, a nothing much spinning down through the centuries as a mysterious and incomplete *carte de tendre*, consulted here, and consulted there, but most often set aside again for reasons having more to do with the love of abstraction than anything resembling simple facts on the ground.

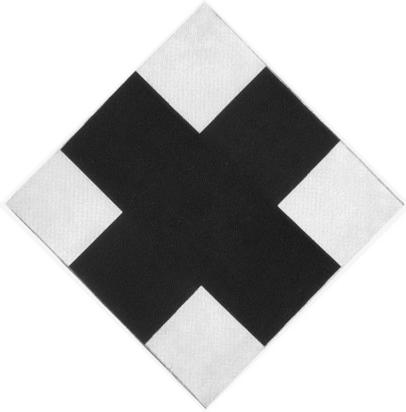
It was, then, *le génie français*' (Pascal's) fault. And yet all those who came afterwards (after the slow-motion avalanche of spiraling, delicate, velvet words inscribed in Time Itself by Time Itself) were somehow complicit – that is to say, those poor souls obsessed with the two infinities and the sublime *Je ne sais quoi* suspended in the elective, echoing void of the imagination were somehow collectively responsible (if that was even possible) for the splendid fixation that developed around the conceptual sign of Hypsos (the Sublime), for the repercussions of having answered its call, and for sketching in delicate arabesques all that it held within the slippery confines of its paratactical contours – the shape of things to come, after all, or things that come and things that call.

This call fell lightly, as a feather floats toward the earth from the nest of the sky, or the rain drifts (is drawn), at dawn, toward the tree-swathed slopes of green hills, not surprisingly because its time had finally arrived, and – marvelous as it may sound – because its call was, after a very long silence, answered, as if Rousseau's plaintive cry in *Émile* had finally found a "home". This "home", echoing down the centuries, yet all but forgotten, was also a "home" without doors or windows, a place that architecture rarely touched, a house that had to be burned down twice before it appeared. It seemed in some way to the Brahmanians that somehow Deleuze had spied it hiding in the curves and twists of his own eccentric and cranky rhetoric, perhaps having come once or twice there, while reading or merely looking at other things, perhaps entering in his own manner that second storey within his Leibnizian story, with Hölderlin, then, walled off from the world to see the world anew, walls plastered with maps, dreaming.

The Brahmanians dreamed the same dream that Thoreau dreamed (at Concord), that Emily Dickinson dreamed (in Amherst), and Joseph Cornell dreamed (on Utopia Parkway) – *the dream of the world*. This dream, always wrapped within the down of its own absent-mindedness, its very own Time (a time marked within the pages of Novalis, Stendhal, Flaubert, Proust, Borges, Calvino, Kundera), was, then, a recurring dream. Within it, the Brahmanians found themselves walking up a stair, turning left, pausing momentarily (and in some cases repeatedly walking up the same stair and turning left to pause, again and again, as if stuck in a Robbe-Grillet novel) seeing before them an empty room, a spectral café, with the night-sky as ceiling and the walls fashioned out of thin air. Pausing, they would all think the same thought, one after another, the same idea sprung up from the same non-place. Here, somehow, they recognized, was the Real-Real (the Irreal) – and in pausing they were, in fact, checking and stamping their own passports before entering the room in which mere thin air and the vault of the heavens lived and breathed; a room that was a passage to /S/ome-where Else.

[...]

GK (June 2004)



# SUBLIME SCARE TACTICS

[...]

Inside I sat, seeking the presence of a God  
 I searched through the pictures in a leather-bound book  
 I found a woolly lamb dozing in an issue of blood  
 And a gilled Jesus shivering on a fisherman's hook  
 – Nick Cave, “Darker with the Day” (Mute Song, 2001)

[...]

PRÉCIS – The following module (auto-tutorial) is a type of survey of the conceptual cipher of the Sublime, as it is deployed today, as both a sign of a possible-impossible Way Out of post-modern nihilism, and as it is often (also) used and abused as a means of frightening anyone so disposed to listen to its call. That said, this “call” calls today for very specific reasons, as detailed below, in both the works of certain neo-Marxist theoreticians (mostly the *Lacanian* neo-Marxists) and nominally non-aligned aspects of recent radical phenomenological analyses and the perhaps parallel agenda of radical empiricism, although the latter seems primarily an embrace of post-modern nihilism versus a so-called Way Out. This Way Out is also the Way Out that has been misused and appropriated time and again for all the wrong reasons, typically leading straight back toward the loading of empty signifiers and the deployment of new totalizing systems. Today, as in the past, the “Great Game” (the chase and the hunt), which usually occurs in language *first*, is a search for the seemingly archaic essence of the Sublime; an essence that only appears to be archaic in the sense that it is also the perennial *radical* gesture par excellence. Herein the conceptual cipher of the Sublime is also presented as the figure of infinity doubled (the doubled figure eight). This gesture opens both forward- and backward-leaning trajectories toward Pascal, on one hand, and Hegel (and Hegel's concept of *Synthesis*) on the other. If anything, the Sublime resides in the conceptual voids of all rhetorical hunts, and, as such, it is (as Jean-Luc Marion has shown) unnameable. (07/18/04)

## THE CALL (2004): DARKER WITH THE DAY

“Babe / It seems so long / Since you went away / And I / Just got to say / That it grows darker with the day.” Two songs on Nick Cave's 2001 release *No More Shall We Part* are virtual odes to the Sublime: 1/ “Sweetheart, Come”; and 2/ “Darker with the Day”. The latter (as above) is, indeed, the darkest. The former is a plaintive cry: “Walk with me under the stars / For it's a clear and easy pleasure / And be happy in my company / For I love you without measure”. Yet, both are sublime love songs.

These lyrics are poetic proof, if that were necessary, that there is always something to be wary of, something always moving in certain aesthetic systems to beware. This something is proto-fascism. From Mazzoni to D'Annunzio to Heidegger runs the threat, even if Heidegger merely donned fascism to become Rector of Freiburg University. Or, in the alternative nothingness (nihilism) noted in Susan Sontag's 1967 essay on Minimalism, “The Aesthetics of Silence” (*Aspen* 5/6), the threat is pietistic silence, self-destruction, abject formalism, or whatever suits the purpose of vacating the premises of spent systems. Sontag mentions Kleist's suicide, Hölderlin's madness, and Nietzsche's self-destruction. Deleuze's jumping from his very own formalistic window on the world seems straight out of Nietzsche's aphorisms: “Better to break the window and leap ...” (Yet dialectical materialists will always point out that Hölderlin suffered from schizophrenia and Nietzsche from tertiary syphilis. Conversely, asymmetrical blame games exist for making the French Revolution the fault of Jesuits, south-German, Swabian Illuminati and/or godless Freemasons, while Napoleon has been blamed on Romanticism, and Nietzsche is the patron saint of Nazism.) Questions remain, to this day (reloaded most recently by Richard Rorty) as to how a right-wing German philological-phenomenological project such as Heidegger's “house of language” could be absorbed into a left-wing French structuralist and post-structuralist critique of culture.

And then there was Helmut Newton crashing his Cadillac into a wall on Sunset Boulevard in Los Angeles, leaving the Chateau Marmont on January 15, 2004, the anniversary of Dalí's death, and killing himself in the process. Close friend of Dalí, and master of the photographic, voyeuristic sublime, Newton answered the call in his own inimitable tragic way – by staging an accident – shortly after donating his entire photographic archive to the Museum für

Fotografie in Berlin. This is all quite apropos of the implicit ideologies of the aesthetic and anti-aesthetic (detailed by Terry Eagleton and Hal Foster), and the eventual outcome of the ultimate confrontation with the Sublime, the Self visited upon Itself.

Regarding this topological (and typological) knot, Sontag reminds us (not for nought) that Rimbaud turned to slave trading in Abyssinia, a very different *saison en enfer* for the author of the sensational “Alchimie du verbe” (1873). Klossowski’s post-Surrealist, pre-existentialist turn in the echoing silences of a Dominican order (and the subsequent Sadean turn) seem similarly disposed. It is not difficult to find innumerable souls up against the wall, not finding the missing “any” (Morelli’s “any”), the proverbial gap in things, through which to escape everything else – that is, all totalizing systems. History is littered with the debris of individuals answering the call of the Sublime, yet responding with forged documents; that is to say, individuals hearing the call of the sublime nothing – Freedom and Love – and providing the opposite.

In the gnostic system the “World” (Lacan’s Symbolic) is ruled by the demi-urge. This image, made most potent in Blake’s figure of the Ancient of Days, is a *dybbuk*, or a phantom. It is the phantasmatic outline of all ideologies in the extended field of representation, “compass in hand”. For Lacan and Derrida this outline is the place held in all systems (vertically or horizontally arrayed) for the Name-of-the-Father, always the *absent* Father. The confrontation with this phantasm, which is also the Freudian Super Ego (but one of the ego’s alter egos), is the last confrontation en route to the call of the Sublime. It is the last test before crossing into this parallel world. For the Buddha, the last temptation was “Heaven”. For Kazantzakis’ Christ it was a normal life with wife and children ...

For the Russian Formalists, before swerving off into Soviet ideology (and until Socialist Realism came calling), the last temptation was to seek presence for the absence they so brilliantly foretold. Many were sent off to prison for the favor. Thus the Nature-Culture divide is “bridged” by ideologies left, right, and center because it is an essentially unstable thing. Dialectics cannot resolve this rupture in things. It is the exquisite and mysterious “nature” within the seemingly archaic *discours naturel*, yet discernible as metaphysics since Pascal, which carries within it the antidote. As antidote, this natural language slips in and out of discourse (discourses). It was sought (and lost) in Vienna, at Cacciari’s so-called Turning Point, c.1900. It was lost and found and lost again within all of the various movements within art and aesthetics throughout the 20th century. That it calls now, at the beginning of the 21st century, is of sublime significance, yet the dangers of it being misrepresented are as potent today as any time past.

Wordsworth’s and Coleridge’s late neo-conservatism (after the French Revolution) is a minor affair compared with the 20th-century manifestations of the failure of nerve before the sublime call. Goethe’s regressions, after *Sturm und Drang*, are insignificant when placed next to the evisceration of natural language underway these past decades within post-modern nihilism. Answering the call by re-loading ideology is as appalling as answering the call with empty, formalistic language games. Hence, then, the necessity of a synchronic, Benjaminian deconstruction and the endless demolition project of modernity anyway, modernity as eternal now, in the face of reaction and – potentially – much, much worse.

The burdens that you carry now  
 Are not of your creation  
 So let’s not weep for their evil deeds  
 But for their lack of imagination  
 Today’s the time for courage, babe  
 Tomorrow can be for forgiving  
 And if he touches you again with his stupid hands  
 His life won’t be worth living

Sweetheart, come  
 Sweetheart, come  
 Sweetheart, come to me  
 – Nick Cave, “Sweetheart, Come” (2001)

[...]

GK (July 2004)

## POSTSCR(Y)PTS (“DIG FOR VICTORY”)

THE NEO-MARXIST SUBLIME (IF, AND, OR) – And, as Alain Badiou points out in various places (but most especially in *Ethics: An Essay on the Understanding of Evil*, 1993), present-day Capitalism Triumphant implies (endlessly) that all other possible political-economic systems represent the “abyss”. Such neo-liberal (neo-imperial) scare tactics typically portrayed the vanquished, twin monsters of 20th-century Facism and Communism (explicit totalitarianisms) as “the enemy”, whereas of late the game has shifted to “The War on Terror”. Yet, according to Badiou, “We live in a contradiction: a brutal state of affairs, profoundly inegalitarian – where all existence is evaluated in terms of money alone – is presented to us as ideal.” Badiou’s quest for his very own version of the Sublime, albeit a *neo-Marxist Sublime* (in concert with his cohort Slavoj Žižek), is essentially a quixotic “hunt” for universal Truths: “For complex reasons, I give the Good the name ‘Truths’ (in the plural). A Truth is a concrete process that starts by an upheaval (an encounter, a general revolt, a surprising new invention), and develops as fidelity to the novelty thus experimented. A Truth is the subjective development of that which is at once both new and universal.” Thus, Badiou (leader of a “Maoist sect” in the 1970s) dissects the “liberal-democratic” portrayal of the two-headed beast, Fascism and Communism, and finds political-ontological *différance* – that is, he exposes the eliding of structural and ideological divergences within what Capitalism would project as the two-faced “face of evil”. “First, liberal capitalism is not at all the Good of humanity. Quite the contrary; it is the vehicle of savage, destructive nihilism. Second, the Communist revolutions of the 20th century have represented grandiose efforts to create a completely different historical and political universe. Politics is not the management of the power of the State. Politics is first the invention and the exercise of an absolutely new and concrete reality. Politics is the creation of thought. The Lenin who wrote *What is to be Done?*, the Trotsky who wrote *History of the Russian Revolution*, and the Mao Zedong who wrote *On the Correct Handling of Contradictions Among the People*, are intellectual geniuses, comparable to Freud or Einstein.” It is the anti-sublime hypocrisy (abject nihilism) of the neo-Capitalist beast that Badiou finds most appalling, today. / All citations (above) from Christoph Cox, Molly Whalen, “On Evil: An Interview with Alain Badiou”, *Cabinet 5* (Winter 2001): pp. 69-74 / And, *mutatis mutandis*, it is (after all) the post-modern Sublime (played out within the circling, swirling pages of post-structuralist exegesis “here” and “there”) that restored (refined and redefined) the putative “post-metaphysical” coordinates for the present-day version of “The Call” ... (07/15/04) ...

THE CHIASMUS & THE WAY OUT – Regarding “Iceland” as a possible-impossible “site” for the premiation of a type of sonic sublime within so-called “trip-pop” music (that is to say, the Sublime re-relocated and/or re-banished to high-romantic “waste-places”), see (hear) the music and music videos of Bjork, Emiliana Torrini, and Sigur Rós ... See especially Floria Sigismondi’s delirious digital work for Sigur Rós. In cinema proper, see Hal Hartley’s *No Such Thing* (2001), most of which was set in Iceland. / Elsewhere: In cyberspace (or “Denmark”), see Netochka Nezvanova @ m9ndfukc.com ... / Needless to say, there are innumerable analogues for this “evacuation” of the cultural coordinates of the Sublime in various arts and letters – most especially Belles-Lettres and Cinema (Kino), and quite evocatively within what passes as “world music”, music marketed by the neo-capitalist machine as “the voice of the Other” ... The “Other”, a conceptual sign associated with post-structuralist and post-colonial criticism, is also (and notably) considered an empty and abstract (morally, ethically bankrupt) concept by voices as diverse as Alain Badiou, Edward Said, and Richard Rorty, as is the equally vague and indeterminate (enigmatic) term “human rights”. What such critics share is an interest in “facts on the ground”, versus new “performative” abstractions ... / As such, it is the encounter with *abject nihilism* (Baudrillard’s “Desert of the Real”) that prompts, in turn, irrepressibly, the countervailing “call (vision) of the Sublime”. What calls, then, from within this call is a perennial Question Mark, the Figure 8 (the doubling of Infinity/Eternity), the principal (perhaps rhetorical) question being, “Is radical empiricism the same thing as radical immanence?”. If yes, then “when” (in what time and horizon) might they converge, and “how” (through what agency)? Additionally, *pace* Nietzsche, “why” do they converge (to what end)? Or, “what” might be the outcome? ... If no, then which of the two holds the “promise” of non-Hegelian, horizontal (syntagmatic) versus vertical (hegemonic/paradigmatic) synthesis (the hoped for “Coming Philosophy” of Walter Benjamin, or the Benjaminian “Coming Community” of Giorgio Agamben)? ... (07/14/04) ...

ONE IF BY LAND, TWO IF BY /S/EA – Topological *jouissance*?: 1/ If radical empiricism (Jamesian, neo-Bergsonian, Deleuzian vitalism) is the Way Out, then what of the pull of poeticized consciousness (Bachelardian surrealistism)?; 2/ If radical immanence is the Way Out, then whence the liberation of “innocent” things from the prison-house of subject/object dichotomies, from the proverbial, age-old(e) metaphysical chains (ideological and otherwise) excoriated by almost every “Overman” (and every *progressive* assault on metaphysics) since the

demolition projects perpetrated by Nietzsche and Wittgenstein? If both radical empiricism and radical immanence (radical phenomenology) turn on the idea of the phenomenologically inspired concept of the “relational” (no ideas without things), or on the specter of an affective Sublime (a sublime aesthetics), is that enough to bring the chiasmus (the divergent narratives/narratologies) of materialist and subjective-idealist thought together “within” a new syncretical, “non-ontological ground”, the merging of milieu(x) and anti-milieu(x)? / Lastly, and returning (again) to cinema, it was Jean-Luc Godard’s *Éloge de l’amour* which most effectively summarized the state of things c.2000-2001 (the turn of the millennium), insofar as Godard utilizes “Normandy” (or was it “Brittany”) as the place where “land” and “sea” intertwine (recalling Proust’s obsession with the same rugged, “meta-geographical” coordinates), time and space dissolving into one another in the sublime spectacle that marks the end of this edgy, elegiac, and other-worldly voyage into the ineluctable nothingness (a dual nothingness/wilderness) marking the passage of post-contemporary Western culture toward god(ard) knows what. Thus, the discursive “space” of cinema seems to prefigure the “non-ontological ground” long sought, long deferred, and (probably) long vanquished by both instrumental and pure reason – that is, the place of the Imaginary (after Kant, and most certainly after Freud/Lacan). It would, therefore, appear that whatever cinema is, it is first and foremost the essential (irreal) poeticized version of the Real endlessly problematized by Lacan as phantasmatic, endlessly anathematized by pragmatists (as doing nothing much useful), and endlessly critiqued (and misrepresented) by rote anti-formalists (as advanced navel-gazing) ... *Sic transit gloria mundi* ... (07/16/04) ...

CONVERSATION WITH THE /S/ELF (THE FAIT ACCOMPLI) – Q: “Which is more real; this world or the other?” A: “Neither.” / Q: “What do you mean?” A: “Both.” / Q: “Which is to say?” A: “Nothing.” ... (07/14/04) ...

Q & A: À PROPOS (DE) LACAN – Q: “In our reservoir of images, is there an adequate image of evil? Is there an image of evil that ‘occupies the very place of the lack of the Image’?” / A: “As to the question of whether there is an image of evil that occupies the very place of the lack of the image. I would say yes, there is. It is what we call a ‘sublime splendor’, ‘shine’, ‘glare’, ‘glow’, ‘aura’. It belongs to the Imaginary register, although it is not an image, in the strict sense of the word; rather it is that which makes a certain image ‘shine’ and stand out. You could say that it is an effect of the Real on our imagination, the last veil or screen that separates us from the impossible Real.”  
 Christoph Cox, Alenka Zupančič, “On Evil: An Interview with Alenka Zupančič”, *Cabinet 5* (Winter 2001), p. 76

...

AND YET – Even “after metaphysics”, there remain two kinds of nothingness: 1/ A sublime nothingness (nominally seen from the “outside”, so to speak, and suggestive of the always absent “Other” and the hauntings of form associated with deconstructivist and post-structuralist exegesis); and 2/ An abject nothingness (experienced from within, as cipher for endless semiosis, and denoting a vast field of depleted signifiers, resonating with the fear and loathing at the dark heart of Existentialism). Whether these two forms of nothingness are, in fact, the same nothingness merely seen from different perspectives (different “subjective” territories) is an open question. And yet, in Kant’s *Critique of Pure Reason* (1781) thought always *accompanies* (crosses) the possible nothingness which the Old Man of Königsberg approaches on tiptoe and turns from perplexed, circling back. It is Jean-Luc Marion’s *Being Given* (2002) that places Kant’s confrontation with Nothingness *in perspective*, insofar as Marion finds in it the crisis implicit in the extreme, formalistic exercises of the Kantian critique itself (within the metaphysical straightjacket itself). Marion brings this crisis to a tentative resolution by suggesting that so-called “saturated phenomena” actually invoke, at once, the two infinities brought over from Pascal’s *Pensées* (1660), in the process, perhaps, re-inscribing (re-writing) the Platonic chora (“place of taking-place”) as a site for a unique condition he calls “givenness”, situating it simultaneously *in the imagination* and *in the world* versus in an ideal, purely atemporal world. It is the self-presentation of the Given (those purely phenomenal things that give themselves, of their own volition, crossing the gaze of “the witness”, through “anamorphosis”) that demolishes the last vestiges of the metaphysical chiasmus represented in thought by the two infinities for over two millennia. As such, these two infinities “meet” in the saturated phenomena of the Given. What remains, then, is a “picture” of the radically immanent “nature” of the world (its sublime “inwardness”/depth) – that is to say, a world of things given without measure (without resort to abstract, disembodied concepts, without ideologies and empty/hollow Master Signifiers, and all without resort to a giver, transcendental or otherwise). “Here” and “now” we see a long-standing promise perhaps delivered; that which animated myth and legend, medieval romances and modern subjective-idealist heresies. This “promise”, essentially, and *with Marion*, is that that thing which tore the world asunder (abstract intellect) may also “one day” heal the world. From Ficino to Rousseau to Goethe to Hegel runs this “mythic” quest for synthesis (the “Rose”). And yet this synthesis must be non-hegemonic and destroy the last vestiges of illicit

forms of metaphysical mayhem utilized (always) to “divide” and “rule” the world. Perhaps, after all, “here” arrives (at last, and on dove’s feet) the negation of negation ... (07/09/04) ...

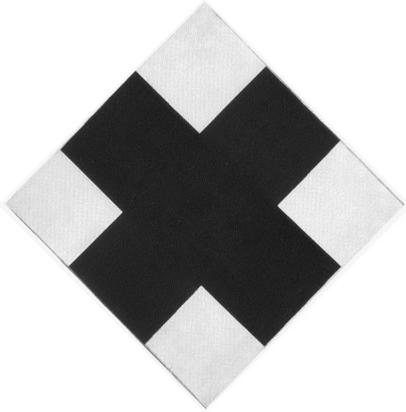
LAMBS TO THE SLAUGHTER – “Sweet Yams in the fields of Harbo. Made me feel better. They took the straw from off the roof. To make the fire catch as it should. They boil the water and they cook the roots. For them it’s new. For me old fruits. But more precious now than it’s ever been. We share the food in the noonday heat. Sweet Yams in the fields of Harbo. The mountains roll. Green on green. The mountains roll. Green on green.” – Bob Geldof, “Scream in Vain” (Sherlock Holmes Music Ltd., 2002) ...

THE WASTELAND – “When they [Adorno and Horkheimer] delineate the contours of the emerging late-capitalist ‘administered world [*verwaltete Welt*],’ they are presenting it as coinciding with barbarism, as the point at which civilization itself returns to barbarism, as a kind of negative telos of the whole progress of Enlightenment, as the Nietzschean kingdom of the Last Men.” – Slavoj Žižek, *The Puppet and the Dwarf* (2003), p. 155 ...

DOUBLE BLACK CAT/THE DREAM – In a dream I rescued a half-starved, emaciated cat and nursed it back to health. It was a double-long, black cat with a patch of flame-orange on its side. It was as if two black cats had been spliced together with an odd bit of a third, orange cat thrown in for good measure. The orange patch reminded me of a semi-wild tomcat I adopted long ago, a cat that arrived out of nowhere and, later, vanished. He used to sit on the mantle of the fireplace like a Staffordshire china cat. Once restored to health, the stretch-limo style cat was velvety-black, wildly elegant and incredibly beautiful. Thus, the mysterious sign of infinity doubled approaches (always) on cat’s paws ... (07/17/04) ...

LAST WORDS – “May it come, may it come, the time of which we’d be enamored.” – Rimbaud, “Alchimie du verbe” (1873) ...

[...]



SUBLIME AESTHETICS – FIRST CIRCULAR 07/26/04

## MIROIR

[...]

Dear Friends, Colleagues, Complete Strangers:

It is high time to go to “war” against present-day creeping, ABJECT nihilism in the humanities, as the humanities (depleted or otherwise) inform the world at large. As such, I invite you to submit an original (previously unpublished) essay to a proposed book (or first issue of a journal) tentatively entitled *Miroir: Sublime Aesthetics* (alternative title, *Miroir: The Anti-Capitalist Sublime*). The proposed publishing project will be shopped around to prospective publishers and an honorarium for your contribution will be sought as part of the package. It is hoped that the book or journal would be published by late 2005, with a projected two volumes to follow (as below).

The publication would be dedicated to the memory of Andrei Tarkovsky, with an introductory note regarding his extraordinary film *Mirror* (1974). All contributing authors would serve as de facto editorial board for the project, and all essays would be circulated amongst participating authors. I would serve as editor of the publication and, at best, contribute a preface (abstaining from a full-blown essay).

Needless to say, this is a project that might embrace various forms of so-called post-contemporary thought, not the least being radical contingency, radical immanence, radical empiricism, and radical phenomenology. In proposing a “sublime aesthetics” as antidote to the WRONG KIND of nothingness, I recognize two, intertwined types of nothingness (arguably, a late-modern corruption of the two infinities of Pascal) that suggest a double topological knot. On the one hand, the situation today “on the ground” suggests a sublime opportunity to refine the rhetoric of relational *jouissance* (diverse forms of intertextual representation within the arts and humanities) “below” (perhaps “beyond”) the paradigmatic, while on the other hand, there exists an apparent, half-open (fast-closing) window that once closed seals the fate for the faltering humanities and signals the conquest of the last frontier (subjectivity itself) for Capitalism Triumphant (with its embodied and disembodied tentacles), the result being (no doubt) the production of cultural anomie as far as “the blind eye cannot see”.

The current orthodoxy (Capitalism Triumphant) resembles nothing less than the old orthodoxy (the Church Triumphant), and the horrors that are unfolding today are not dissimilar to the horrors that unfolded then; that is to say, a new crusade. What is needed, therefore, today (now), is the equivalent of new Cathar heresies.

This is, then, an ethical problem; a problem that enfolds nearly everything, insofar as the capitalist machine seems about to swallow the world itself and extinguish all alternatives. While such a project implies an anti-capitalist sublime, a sublime aesthetics need not be argued purely on deterministic grounds, and it may be simply a case of the wrong kind of capitalism that ails us. It is instructive perhaps to review certain sublime scare tactics deployed by the proponents of the destruction of difference. This is, in a sense, the agenda of the new Inquisition. Toward this end, I point you in the direction of any *moralistic* agenda anywhere today, while suggesting as antidote that which lies on the other side of the proverbial lying mirror, nearly always problematized as monstrous; that is, the troubled concept of the Real and/or the Universal. It was, after all, the proto-anarchic Brotherhood of the Free Spirit that somehow outlasted the Church Triumphant (the Church Militant), as it is the same, today, which will outlast Capitalism Triumphant (Capitalism Militant).

Regards,

GK

N.B.: While the essays are expected to represent operative criticism, it is also hoped that they will offer a variable and voluble prescriptive Way Out. Thus, as we meet on the plains of Mammon to do battle, Pictish blue war paint is optional. The tenor of the project will evolve as an editorial committee forms around the subject. This opening salvo is necessary strident and performatively a “war cry”. And if it is the capitalist hegemon that is in question, it is

possible that this (non)thing may be best dealt with through merely charting alternative and elective ways out within the fold of the humanities. Curiously, it is the term *Humanity* that is most at risk today, as it has been reified beyond all possible contingent expression (deployment). As troubadours of difference, I invite you to construct an elegant song and dance toward bringing this empty concept “down to earth”.

Invited authors random listing (First Circular): Stan Allen, Kaja Silverman, Madeline Gins, Alessandra Ponte, Georges Teyssot, Brian Massumi, Alenka Zupančič, Slavoj Žižek, Jean-Luc Marion, Mark Jarzombek, Gilles A. Tiberghien, Fernand Hallyn, Yve-Alain Bois, Marco Frascari, Kenneth Frampton, Juhani Pallasmaa, Pepe Karmel, Neil Smith, Allen S. Weiss, Sylvia Lavin, Paolo Bartoloni, Erminia Passannanti, Sanford Kwinter, Adrian Forty, Mark Taylor, Jeffrey Kipnis, Rosalind Krauss, Michael Sorkin, Noam Chomsky, K. Michael Hays, Geoffrey Waite, Stephen Bann, Yves Abrioux ...

“And as I was swirled along I heard a voice over my head cry, ‘The mirror is broken in two pieces,’ and another voice answer, ‘The mirror is broken in four pieces,’ and a more distant voice cry with an exultant cry, ‘The mirror is broken into numberless pieces.’” – William Butler Yeats, “Rosa Alchemica” (1897) ...

*The courtesy of a reply (yes, no, maybe) is requested ...*

MIROIR 1: THE ANTI-CAPITALIST SUBLIME

MIROIR 2: DISCOURS NATUREL – TOPOGRAPHIES

MIROIR 3: FORMALISM(S) – MILIEU(X) & ANTI-MILIEU(X)

[...]

# THE HIGH LINE & THE RETURN OF THE IRREAL

[...]

“The High Line is an abandoned 1.5-mile stretch of overgrown railroad viaduct that runs from the Meatpacking district to Hell’s Kitchen – and straight into the imaginations of a growing number of New Yorkers who see it as proof that, even in an urban jungle, the forces of nature are still at work.”(1)

[...]

The explicit coup by Field Operations in winning its second major urban design competition within the span of four years in New York City (the firm also won the Fresh Kills Landfill to Landscape End-Use Master Plan Competition) underscores several points all at once regarding the present-day prospects for new urban landscape.

First and foremost is the paucity of uncontaminated open space in the contemporary city for new parks, while at the same time urban brownfields continue to come up for redevelopment. In the case of the High Line (an ageing elevated rail bed spanning 22 blocks and running just west of Tenth Avenue, from 34th Street, south to Gansevoort Street), the coordinates for contextualizing such a project are quite literally off the map in the sense that this stretch of concrete and steel runs as much through irreal as real territory. Passing through the heart of Chelsea’s fashionable arts district, and situated in a portion of Manhattan that still retains an urban industrial edginess, the High Line is unnaturally given to acts of design provocation.

The four finalist master plan teams (selected from 52 entries) represent various aspects of the professional colonization of a fashionable and somewhat profitable sub-genre within urban design – that is, the re-appropriation of spent infrastructure. The composition of each team, incorporating an array of technical and creative sub-consultants, suggests that the significance of the High Line lies as much in its incommensurate, cinematic qualities (a strip of urban “celluloid”) as in its normative iconic status as decaying urban infrastructure. It is not surprising, then, to find in several of the schemes a version of montage utilized (as in the films of Eisenstein or Greenaway) to register multiple frames of reference and multiple narratives. The Holl- and Hadid-led teams, in particular, indulge in lacerating imagery, fusing time and space through iconic intensity – i.e., a type of architectural gesturalism that implies through snapshots a critically-inflected assault on present-day urbanism.

Yet the winning Field Operations proposal is significantly different than the Hadid or Holl plans, as it is miles from the TerraGRAM plan. The TerraGRAM plan, while citing Archigram and Robert Smithson as spiritual forebears, makes little headway in actual program and much noise about open-ended planning with unfortunate swipes at formalism (“form obsession”). It is the rhetoric of the team that tells the greater tale insofar as the principal excuses for temporizing (e.g., deferring to future processes, inclusive of public charrettes) represent what is past versus what is upon us. Weak design is often the result of design by committee, or abdication on the part of the party ultimately responsible for making sense of the conflicting claims of vested interests (“shareholders”) and the abstract “public”. Whereas the four High Line teams have, in several instances, identical sub-consultants (part and parcel of the game today in assembling the large interdisciplinary teams required), it is the distinct differences between the *lead players* that mark this competition as a signal event on the horizon of contemporary urban design. As a result, the High Line represents a type of suture between the recent past and the near future, both in terms of design and process.

Ever since the Parc de la Villette competition (Paris, 1982-83), the architectonic “anti-nature” of new urban parks has generally foregrounded an anti-pastoral, anti-picturesque anima – notwithstanding the Mau/Koolhaas stab at pastoral scenography for Parc Downsview Park, Toronto.(2) While nature may be fashionable again, today, it remains nonetheless chained to the prison-house wall. Past representations of this mixed legacy, this proverbial tug-of-war between nature and culture (now typically dismissed as a useless dialectical exercise), include the innumerable waterfront redevelopment schemes of the 1980s and 1990s, at which Hargreaves and Van Valkenburgh Associates excelled. Thus, even though both firms are to be found here, we also are fortunate to find Zaha Hadid and Steven Holl in command of two of the four High Line competition teams. Their presence more than proves the point

that multiple agendas are at stake: 1/ formally addressing the aforementioned issue of diminishing returns in public open space planning; 2/ the necessity of highly interdisciplinary teams to tackle the unresolved standoff between so-called formal (active) and informal (passive) urban park design; 3/ countering the lead role played by economic determinism in urban design; 4/ bypassing the entirely ludicrous arguments regarding nature versus the city; and 5/ overcoming the 1990s fetishization of crumbling infrastructure as a type of sublime surplus “after modernism” and after Robert Smithson.(3) If proposals to bury the High Line or the Brighton West Pier in surreal and simulated natural systems are in fact signs of something else dawning in the imaginative labyrinth of urban design (perhaps a tilt toward “purposeless beauty”), such projects may also indicate that it is again acceptable for an urban park (naturalistic or otherwise) to do virtually nothing much at all.

The Hadid-led team is exemplary in its approach to re-envisioning such “useless” form; indeed, it might be accused of “form obsession”. Yet, it is this very obsession that makes the plan compelling. It is Hadid’s open thinking (thinking the complex, versus thinking the reduction or the reaction) that is responsible for her ascendancy this past decade, and it accounts for the seductive folds, twists, and interweavings of the team’s proposal. As in most of the plans presented, Hadid et al. envision the terminus of the line at Gansevoort Street as a type of elevated Piccadilly Circus or event space. Hadid has retained the essence of the radical constructivist and supremacist quest for evocative form while adding the topological inversions (twists and turns) that have recently displaced purely orthogonal, architectonic systems in instances where *architecture becomes site*.

The presence of Olafur Eliasson on the Field Operations/Diller Scofidio + Renfro team is a sign that in compiling its proposal Field Operations looked straight into the looking-glass of present-day installation art for inspiration and talent. Eliasson’s “Weather Project” at the Tate Modern drew record crowds in 2003-2004 with its simulation of a sun shining through an artificial haze within the great void of the Turbine Hall.(4) What is afoot today, inclusive of topological and morphogenetic extravagance (as was on display in the architecture section at the 2004 Venice Biennale), is a powerful re-animation of all the forces bracketed by the abstract and functionalist bias of reductive architectural high modernism.

Field Operations has, therefore, “arrived” in the sense that they acknowledge that the now past, 1990s *neo-modernist* fantasies regarding urban landscape as synonymous with infrastructure (or junk-space) are no longer quite good enough. And, as Fresh Kills proves, urban ecology is as much a spectral thing as it is a scientific undertaking. Brownfields are by nature horrific sites given to the specular, form-haunted gestures of art + landscape + architecture, a new-found hybrid sensibility that does not merely fetishize dysfunctional and decaying urban systems but also critically engages what *is wrong*, what *has gone wrong*, and why it *went wrong* in the first place.

Within the Field Operations plan, urban simulations or unnatural passages quite literally flow through the 1.45 miles of the elevated viaduct, each portion mutating in relation or contradistinction to what is above, below or alongside the rail bed. The transformational grammar of the compositional “field” embraces a form of urban ecology that is as much an artform as a science, wherein the unreal returns. This return, presently well underway in the fine arts as an affective, post-metaphysical Sublime, is now making inroads in landscape + architecture, or in the increasingly significant instances where landscape and architecture overlap and merge. Reloading transcendence in immanence *is the new game*.

Steven Holl’s phenomenologically informed investigations of architectural *mise en scène* (e.g., Kiasma, Helsinki, 1998, with Juhani Pallasmaa) and his poetic turns into “parallax” and “intertwining” (the topological-phenomenal intervals between things) has led, in turn, to a rich panoply of projects that embrace eye and mind, body and spirit, earth and sky. Here, where he looks out his office window everyday to see an actually existing metaphor for all of that, he has also found an actually existing site for his experiments in form to take wing. The chief concern for the Holl team seems to be to puncture, perforate and otherwise accentuate what moves above, below and through the High Line corridor. While many vignettes within the four proposals do just this, Holl’s plan is essentially theatrical and closer to Matta-Clark’s legacy of slicing into things than the TerraGRAM plan is, despite claims otherwise, to the phantasmatic and apocalyptic “ruins” ironicized and romanticized by Robert Smithson.

While Field Operations has managed to fold into its purview the manifold contingencies that come to reside in urban “fields” without converting such things of “purposeless beauty” to mere datascares or information flows – two slightly derelict strategies associated with 1990s Netherlandish urbanism – the question as to whether Landscape Urbanism is the Brave New World remains open.

If Landscape Urbanism is the future, given the rate of urbanization worldwide, it will no doubt be a decapitalized landscape urbanism that includes the imaginative, analogical, and unavoidable processes of change, metamorphosis, and synthesis that move within dynamic systems. Smithson's trademark exploitation of entropy and dissolution was the opposite – a then necessary excavation of the moldering underbelly of modernism and a harbinger of the linguistic tropes of post-modernism. Smithson's appropriation by landscape architects, from the 1970s forward, is a sign that the collective guilty conscience shared by the modern disciplines of landscape architecture and architecture remains in play as both fields remain uneasy with their complicity in the production of static, denatured, inhumane environments.

“Nature” (and an emergent aesthetics that embraces “saturated phenomena”) has indeed returned, but in a post-traumatic and therapeutic sense to haunt and re-colonize our world. That world includes our interior world, our imagination, and that haunting implies (as Rousseau implied in *Émile*) that our collective conscience speaks to us by way of the sigilistic (irreal) language of the natural world.(5)

GK (October 2004)

N.B.: A version of this essay appeared in *Competitions* (Fall-Winter 2004-2005)

## ENDNOTES

1 – “Elevated Visions”, Julie Iovine, *New York Times Magazine* (July 11, 2004): p. 29.

2 – For Parc de la Villette, see: Marianne Barzilay et al., *L'invention du parc: Parc de la Villette, Paris concours international, 1982-1983* (Paris: Graphite Editions, 1984); and Lodewijk Baljon, *Designing Parks [an examination of contemporary approaches to design in landscape architecture, based on a comparative design analysis of entries for the Concours International, Parc de la Villette, Paris, 1982-3]* (Amsterdam: Architectura & Natura Press, 1992). For the Parc Downsview Park competition (1999-2000), see: Robert Somol, “All Systems Go!: The Terminal Nature of Contemporary Urbanism”, in Julia Czerniak, ed., *Downsview Park Toronto* (New York: Prestel, 2002); and “Downsview Park Toronto”, *Lotus International* 109 (2001). For more recent examples of landscape urbanism, see: “Dense Cities”, *Lotus International* 117 (2003); and “Velocità controllate”, *Lotus Navigator* 8 (2003). For Fresh Kills, see Gavin Keeney, “Capitalism's Golgotha: The Fresh Kills Landfill to Landscape Design Competition”, *Competitions* (Summer 2002).

3 – See: Robert Smithson, *Robert Smithson: Collected Writings*, ed. Jack Flam (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), especially “A Sedimentation of the Mind: Earth Projects” (1973), pp. 100-13, “Frederick Law Olmsted & the Dialectic Tradition” (1973), pp. 157-71, “The Iconography of Desolation” (c. 1962), pp. 320-27; and Marianne Brouwer, “To Be Saved is *Passé*: Robert Smithson & the Entropy of Modernism”, *Archis* 6 (1994): pp. 52-61.

4 – “Eliasson has been careful to make us aware of the mechanics, that what he has done is a trick, a thing of smoke and mirrors, and an 18,000-watt bank of sodium yellow streetlight bulbs. You can walk under the sun, and see behind the backlit screen, the weather wafting from the smoke generators. But nor do we forget that a Turner is just paint.” Adrian Searle, “Reflecting on sublime smoke and mirrors”, *Guardian Unlimited* (Web edition, October 16, 2003). “Weather Project” was on view at the Tate Modern October 16, 2003-March 21, 2004. A parallel phenomenon in this regard is the work of Rafael Lozano-Hemmer, inclusive of “Amodal Suspension” (Relational Architecture 8), Yamaguchi Center for Arts and Media (Yamaguchi, Japan), 2003. “‘Amodal Suspension’ uses encoding to make visible this extralinguistic effectiveness: the force of language. This is the variable that is being analogically presented. The display conveys the *feel* of a statement's impact without its meaning. We get the same feel from the firefly's inhuman light show of exoskeletal love. It is impossible to watch them and not get the uncanny feeling that they are ‘talking’ to each other.” Brian Massumi, “On Amodal Suspension”, *Artforum* 42:3 (November 2003): pp. 37-45.

5 – Jean-Jacques Rousseau's *Émile* (1762): “Conscience! Conscience! Divine instinct, immortal and celestial voice.... If [this guide] speaks to all hearts, then why are there so few of them who hear it? Well, this is because it speaks to us *in nature's language*, which everything has made us forget.... It no longer speaks to us. It no longer responds to us. And after such a long contempt for it, to recall it costs as much as banishing it did.” Italics added. Cited in Jean-Luc Marion, *Being Given: Toward a Phenomenology of Givenness* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2002), p. 373. The term “saturated phenomena” comes from Marion's post-phenomenological trilogy that includes *In Excess: Studies of Saturated Phenomena* (2001), *Being Given* (1997), and *Reduction and Givenness*

(1989). Jean-Luc Marion is heir apparent to the triple legacies of Emmanuel Levinas, Paul Ricoeur, and Jacques Derrida.

## POSTSCRIPT

While the High Line appears to represent the immediate future of urban design (the design of so-called “irreal” real estate) and a nominal “return” of what has long been held in suspension (buried below the strained hubris of urban infrastructural systems), the process of the competition clearly represents the past. This process involved *two competitions*, with the first drawing over 700 entries from around the world with an average entry fee of between \$50.00 and \$100.00. This two-phase process also included what one savvy commentator has called “the cultural-architectural-political directorate”, insofar as many of the jurors from round one turned up on design teams in round two. The unofficial excuse for the two competitions (an “ideas” competition and a competition for a “workable” master plan) is that the former was required to generate publicity and options for the project, while the latter was required to formally engender a plan that is implementable (i.e., realistic). As a measure of the combined success of these back-to-back competitions, on October 6, 2004 Mayor Bloomberg announced \$43.25 million (over four years) for the High Line project, toward design and engineering, and pending clarification of ownership and public access. There is, however, no reason why a properly administered ideas competition cannot also produce a “workable” master plan.

[...]

# TO ART-HISTORICAL HELL (AND BACK) WITH HAL FOSTER

[...]

“A distinguished bishop, a priest and a peasant are in a great cathedral. In turn the priest and bishop approach the altar rail, beat their chests and declare, ‘I am nothing, I am nothing’. The humble peasant, moved to imitate, shuffles to the altar and says the same thing. The bishop turns furiously and hisses in the priest’s ear, ‘Who the hell does he think he is?’”(1)

[...]

In the somewhat rarified pages of the delightfully left-leaning *London Review of Books* we currently have the pleasure to read arch critic Hal Foster weighing the “new” MoMA in his golden scales while asking all of the wrong questions.(2) As pulse-taking exercise, we also have the pleasure of watching Foster twist and turn (rhetorically and otherwise) to make it appear that he has, indeed, asked the right questions, such as “Who the hell is John Elderfield, and why is he still aligning modern art with the trajectory of 20th-century ‘positivism’?”, a mostly disingenuous question generally perceived by those in the know, such as Rosalind E. Krauss and Hal Foster, as the principal means of bringing down the purveyors of modern art to the level most given to properly discussing art; that is, to the level of discourse regarding the interpenetrating nature of schools – as schools of fishes inhabit coral and/or man-made reefs (such as sunken ships or jettisoned cargoes) – thus rendering the entire exercise of placing modern art on display in chronologically convenient and pleasing “tableaux mordant” a terrible and tiring charade executed by curators struggling to make sense out of the inherent mess that the production of works of art entails.

Foster first measures the new galleries designed by Taniguchi to see if they betray anything significant regarding MoMA’s intentions to remain valid into the 21st century, as if the gracious spaces spoke a secret language of form that might somehow counter what they contain. Thus, Foster walks into the foyer (“Agnes Gund Garden Lobby”) and up the stairs to arrive in the premier zone of a museum long renowned for a special form of myopia; a zone given over to what Foster calls P&S (Painting & Sculpture), and something implicitly taken to task for its pre-ordained significance amidst all other disciplines – architecture and design, of course, falling outside the purview of the arch-druids at MoMA (guardians of the sacred tree of Fine Art), this latter discipline relegated to the care of Terence Riley, who despite problems of myopia of another sort makes mincemeat of the progression of giants gracing the halls of P&S through carefully crafted exhibits that accentuate a possible synthesis (as far as Architecture, the capitalized version, can ever permit such).

By way of Taniguchi’s elemental architecture and Elderfield’s curatorial vision. Foster assembles a critique of the thing otherwise known as Modernism, yet (with Foster and with MoMA) a thing horribly biased by its presentation as Absolute contingent thing – as eyewash, then ... And, as if that were not quite enough, as edifying (educative) stuff of genius (despite all disclaimers disclaiming that concept, in wall text or actual text/book form) ... One almost suspects that what is at stake between Foster and Elderfield instead (plus Krauss, by association), as telltale disputed terrain separating two intellects, is the small, ungainly something known as Surrealism (and Dada), a something both have tackled and ended up mangling in the process.(3)

The presentation of art as eyewash leads straight into the mess art historians have made of the single most valuable conceptual field missing to this day in criticality itself – that is, of course, “aesthetics”. Given Foster’s anti-aesthetic bias, this word will never be revived in any positive context, or in its foremost context (as Umberto Eco might place it someday soon), within the field of philosophical aesthetics (as it belongs there, and thrives there, anyway), which leads one to the conclusion that Foster is out of step now as he was in step then (in the late-1980s and early-1990s) when nihilism was considered *au courant*.

It is a profoundly unsettling voyage, then, by degrees (and through the bankrupt canon and anti-canon of both MoMA and Foster), this essayistic dissembling before the reconstituted specter of THE Museum of Modern Art ... As Foster points out, in the spacious (vacuous) galleries devoted to P&S and “contemporary” art (whatever that is, and whatever Elderfield or Foster might mean it to be), a something discourteous arrives anyway in the form of

caesuras, or holes that cannot be filled. The first hole arrives in the 1940s, to be filled by Abstract Expressionism, while the second arrives in the 1960s, to be filled with Pop and Minimalism. This dismemberment of the teleological-anagogical heart of the art-historical continuum (which is in actuality *eschatological*) is problematized by Foster as part failure of nerve by MoMA and part proof positive that art proceeds in fits and starts while also undergoing explicit inversions and implosions as it signals its reliance on economic-political capital.

These holes cannot be filled without further bankrupting the entire ideological underpinnings of the museum and its critical community. While Foster bashes away at MoMA and Elderfield, he is also resurrecting many of his own tired maneuvers in defense of a different canon (the anti-canon), a system of criticism equally beholden to the “unfortunate” reduction of artworks to Art. His well-worn slashings at the influence of Clement Greenberg seem out of place these days, since no one takes Greenberg too seriously anymore anyway, just as many have also decided, perhaps too late, that the school of Rosalind E. Krauss is effectively a matter of the past and a matter of a collapse of criticality in the face of self-interest.

Thus, we stand at a crossroads, awaiting something else, and it is best to read Foster these days as instructive of things now spent and on their way to the back catalogue of art criticism. While loading his rhetorical cannon with grapeshot, Foster takes broad aim at the hegemonic, faux iconicity of present-day versions of late-modernism and neo-modernism as well as its variegated host of apologists. Nonetheless, there is a weird echo in all of his words that seems to presage the opening of a chasm and the subsequent rending of the veil which obscures that which flies below the work of art and which only the most subtle critic may find (and which truly hides out “inside” the canvas, sculpture, assemblage as palpitating ur-form).(4) For such critics as Foster, such a view of art suggests “dangerous essentialism”, and it is always automatically dismissed given the misperception (misprision) that it, in turn, signifies the return of transcendence. Such misbegotten bias is also the sign of intellect in service to ideology; and what such a bias neglects is the absolute necessity today to find a way out of the ideological stalemate concerning transcendence and immanence. Elsewhere, should one care to look, already signs of something else may be discerned; yet not at MoMA, and only as discursive gesture (in the negative dialectical sense) in hardcore, dogmatic criticism of the Adorno type (for example, in strenuous commentaries on the painting of Gerhard Richter, the inspired architecture of Zaha Hadid, or the suggestive photography of, say, Thomas Struth). These first signs nonetheless imply that *transcendence within immanence* represents a possible path through the ideological ruins that yet clutter the representational landscape of late-modernity.

Foster rightly highlights the two huge holes at the new MoMA, finding, in turn, that MoMA continues to serve as the flagship “retail” outlet for received opinions about Modern Art proper. Although these holes are hardly concretized by Taniguchi’s “minimalist” modern architecture, Foster still blames architecture for facilitating the charade. It is MoMA’s well-known penchant for chronological snobbery that rubs Foster the wrong way, given that he also laments the lamentable attempt of the recent past to assemble works in thematic constellations, bringing things separate into closer contact, as one does with words or one does with ideas, and as one does naturally in the very act of *living in the world*.

Again and again, then, MoMA tries to overcome itself and fails. It is not MoMA’s fault that it has the unnatural responsibility of propping up a 20th-century version of the Platonic Big Lie. To be modern today has nothing at all to do with Modernism. To be modern today perversely means to say *a-dieu* to all of that.

GK (December 2004)

## ENDNOTES

1 – Christopher Insole, “Kant for Christmas: A Way Out of Some Very Nasty Problems”, *Times Literary Supplement* (December 17, 2004): p.4.

2 – Hal Foster, “It’s Modern But is it Contemporary?”, *London Review of Books*, Vol. 26, No. 24 (December 16, 2004): pp. 23-25.

3 – Rosalind E. Krauss, Jane Livingston, *L’Amour Fou: Photography and Surrealism* (New York: Abbeville, 2002) – Re-issued exhibition catalogue, Corcoran Gallery (September-November 1985) – See Rosalind E. Krauss, “Photography in the Service of Surrealism”, pp. 15-54 / Thus-wise surrealist photography is assimilated to the Marxist dialectical-materialist agenda, the reduction of radical forms of representation to *immanence without transcendence*, and “A” (“aesthetics” as “adultery”) becomes the new/old, reified scarlet letter ... Similarly,

regarding the Merleau-Ponty-inspired rhetoric of “the body in space” (implicated mightily in Krauss’ famous essay “Sculpture in the Expanded Field”) vis-à-vis Man Ray’s photography (especially *The Return to Reason*, 1923), see Rosalind E. Krauss, “Corpus Delecti”, pp. 57-112 ... “The nude torso of a woman is shown as if submitting to possession by space ...” ... This reading of Man Ray is assembled by way of Caillois (famous *dissident* surrealist) and/plus Lacan (famous post-neo-Freudian systematist) ... It (this rhetoric), of course, more or less ignores the fact that “the Real” was, for Surrealism, a powerful and sinister amalgam of all manner of continuous, versus dialectical repressions (as with Lacan) and, hence, no “way out” presents itself ... The Manichean “nature” of Surrealism is lost (and found), here and there, but rarely assimilated within art-historical narratives ... What almost appears, but doesn’t, is the considerable élan (heuristic value) of things *phantasmatic*, a something else always bracketed in such ideologically reductive readings ... As fellow traveler, Yve-Alain Bois has more or less done the same thing with the sculpture of Richard Serra (notably in his majestic essay, with John Shepley, “A Picturesque Stroll Around Clara-Clara”) ... See, however, Georges Bataille, *The Absence of Myth: Writings on Surrealism* (London: Verso, 1999) for a beginning ... Curiously, Bataille’s concept of *informe* carries considerable “economic” weight in Krauss’ argument with Surrealist photography, as it did in the Krauss and Yve-Alain Bois curated Centre Pompidou exhibition “L’informe: Mode d’emploi” (1996) ... For the latter, see Rosalind E. Krauss, Yve-Alain Bois, *Formless: A User’s Guide* (New York: Zone Books, 1997) – In this book, the eternal battle of form and content is synthesized/undermined in the third term “formless” (derived from Bataille’s “informe”). “It is neither the ‘form’ nor the ‘content’ that interests Bataille, but the operation that displaces both of these terms ...” (p.15); i.e., “formless” is “neither a theme, nor a substance, nor a concept.” (Ibid.). In other words, “informe” is a form of “slippage” or perhaps a version of “suture” (as in film studies) and yet another formalist detour “brushing modernism against the grain” (p.16). The origin of Bataille’s terminology is *Documents 2* (1929), wherein he unleashed a mock formal presentation of the “informe” *in action* – albeit, in the form of a dictionary with “redundant entries” to underscore the disrespect intended for language *à la carte* (or language *authorized*); a disrespect that included, famously, Bataille’s definition of architecture as the “expression of the true nature of societies”. Anyway, voila! For *here* is the very picture of radical contingency hiding out in all formalist and neo-formalist *operations*. And a word to the wise (from Bataille by way of Krauss): Materialist operations typically “have [re]situated dead matter at the summit of a conventional hierarchy” (p. 29). And then, there is Yve-Alain Bois’ remarks under the rubric “Threshold”, citing Bataille’s view of architecture (again): “Architecture is another name for system [referring back to Kant’s architectonic metaphors], for the regulation of the plan [which sounds suspiciously like Tafuri’s “ideology of the plan”]. Every monument is a monument of social order, a call to order issued to inspire fear ... Architecture is the human ideal, the superego” (p. 185). Upon reflection, one might come to understand all of this as just another hermeneutic *vicious* circle, given that formalist and anti-formalist agitation is *part of* systematic (abstract) knowledge itself. / Operating, of course (always), in the background, in all such scorching discourses is the ghost of Walter Benjamin ... It is Benjamin’s prophetic vision, of the Coming Philosophy, that underwrites all analytical forays into the dark heart of modernism *as capitalist putsch*.

4 – In this regard, see the extraordinary work of Antonin Artaud, a figure on the edge (fringe) of Surrealism yet miles ahead, beyond, below, above, outside ... Amazingly, MoMA mounted an exhibition of Artaud’s drawings in 1996 ... / See Margit Rowell, ed., *Antonin Artaud: Works on Paper* (New York: MoMA/Abrams, 1996) / Yet, far and away, the very best writing on Artaud remains (to this day) Jacques Derrida and Paule Thévenin’s *The Secret Art of Antonin Artaud* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1998) ...

### IMMODERNITY A LA CARTE @ MOMA (12/23/04)

“*Ces terrains vagues*” (André Breton, “Poem-Object”, 1941) ...

“CONTEMPORARY” GALLERIES: Cy Twombly, *Untitled* (1970), “Oil-based [grey] house paint and [white] crayon on canvas”; Gerhard Richter, *Funeral from October 18, 1977* (1977), “Oil on canvas” ... Last in series of 15-work cycle “October 18, 1977” “depicting scenes from the history of the Red Army Faction”; Andreas Gursky, *Rhine II* (1999), “Chromogenic print” ...

P&S 1: Joan Miró, *Hirondelle Amour* (1933-34), “Oil on canvas”; Salvador Dalí, *Retrospective Bust of a Woman* (1933), “Painted porcelain, bread [baguette], corn, feathers, paint on paper, beads, ink stand, and two pens”; Joan Miró, *Object* (1936), “Stuffed parrot on wood perch, stuffed silk stocking with velvet garter and doll’s paper shoe suspended in hollow wood frame, derby hat, hanging cork ball, celluloid fish, and engraved map”; Joseph Cornell, *Taglioni’s Jewel Casket* (1940), “Wooden box covered with brown velvet containing three rows of four glass cubes resting in slots on blue glass, glass necklace, jewelry fragments, and red, blue, and clear glass chips”; Joseph

Cornell, *Untitled (Bébé Marie)* (early 1940s), “Papered and painted wooden box, with painted corrugated cardboard floor, containing doll in cloth dress and straw hat with cloth flowers, dried flowers, and twigs, flecked with paint”; Joan Miró, *The Birth of the World* (1925), “Oil on canvas”; Vasily Kandinsky, *Picture with an Archer* (1909), “Oil on canvas”; Vasily Kandinsky, *Four Panels (for Edwin R. Campbell)* (1914), “Oil on canvas” ...

### MIXED ANNOTATED BIBLIOGRAPHY / ETC.

John Elderfield, *Modern: Painting and Sculpture from the Museum of Modern Art* (New York: MoMA, 2004).  
 —, *Visions of Modern Art: Painting and Sculpture from the Museum of Modern Art* (New York: MoMA, 2003).  
 —, ed., Hugo Ball, *Flight Out of Time: A Dada Diary* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996).  
 Hal Foster, *Compulsive Beauty* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1995).  
 Sybil Gordon Kantor, *Alfred H. Barr, Jr. and the Intellectual Origins of the Museum of Modern Art* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2003).  
 Rosalind Krauss, *The Optical Unconscious* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1994).  
 Terence Riley, ed., *Yoshio Taniguchi: Nine Museums* (New York: MoMA, 2004) – MoMA, pp. 162-195 (axonometrics, sections, elevations, plans).  
 Charles Rosen, Henri Zerner, “Red-Hot MoMA”, *New York Review of Books*, Vol. LII, No. 1 (January 13, 2005): pp. 18-21 – As the critique of the new MoMA picks up steam, here and there, Rosen and Zerner detail important issues resolved and unresolved by the Taniguchi makeover. These include the “demands” made by certain works of modernist art (and the putative anti-modernist art of the sixties); most notable amongst these being size and scale (which brings to the fore the whole issue of the size and scale of the galleries now and “then”, plus arguments regarding how to hang or position these works). These demands include attempts to shatter the museological model of the so-called modern museum by the sheer force (and, often, *gravitas*) of works produced by artists responding to, and reacting to, “what came before”. Rosen and Zerner also, rightly, point out that MoMA has already maxed out its new space and much of its principal collection remains in storage (certain artists missing altogether, or represented by a single work) – a problem that is simply impossible to solve (given the depth and breadth of the collection), plus a problem that perhaps should not be solved (given that certain canonical works need to go “off the radar” from time to time, or to take a break – literally and figuratively – to remain “canonical”). The authors also take several, sidewise swipes at the Guggenheim and the Whitney, reserving especial animus for the Guggenheim (and its sale of 25 Kandinsky paintings years ago), with a mostly lovely dig at the “director” (unnamed, though everyone knows his name) and his embrace of “entertainment”, versus the (shall we say) mere presentation of art + scholarship (the MoMA model).  
 Yoshio Taniguchi, *Architecture of Yoshio Taniguchi* (New York: Abrams, 1999).

MORE BATAILLE – Georges Bataille, *Unfinished System of Nonknowledge*, trans. Michelle Kendall (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2004) / Georges Bataille, *The Cradle of Humanity: Prehistoric Art and Culture*, trans. Michelle Kendall (New York: Zone, 2005) / Georges Bataille, *On Nietzsche*, trans. Bruce Boone, intro. Sylvère Lotringer (New York: Paragon House, 1993) / Georges Bataille, *The Accursed Share*, trans. Robert Hurley (New York: Zone, 2000) / Georges Bataille, *The Accursed Share: Vol. 1, Consumption*, trans. Robert Hurley (New York: Zone, 1991) / Georges Bataille, *The Accursed Share: Vols. 2 & 3, History of Eroticism and Sovereignty*, trans. Robert Hurley (New York: Zone, 1993) / Georges Bataille, *Visions of Excess: Selected Writings, 1927-1939* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1985) ...

HOMMAGE À CARTIER-BRESSON – Agnès Sire et al., *Documentary and Anti-Graphic Photographs: Manuel Alvarez Bravo, Henri Cartier-Bresson, Walker Evans* (Göttingen: Steidl, 2004) – Exhibition catalogue, Fondation Henri Cartier-Bresson, Paris (September 8-December 19, 2004) – Reconstruction of the 1935 exhibition at Julien Levy Gallery, New York – Levy’s photographic collection is now at the Art Institute of Chicago ...

CORNELL (NOT THE UNIVERSITY)/MIXED AFFECTS – Dore Ashton, *Joseph Cornell Album* (New York: Da Capo Press, 2002) / Deborah Solomon, *Utopia Parkway: The Life and Work of Joseph Cornell* (Boston: MFA Publications, 2004), originally published c.1997 / Diane Waldman, *Joseph Cornell: Master of Dreams* (New York: Abrams, 2002) / Jodi Hauptman, *Joseph Cornell: Stargazing in the Cinema* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999) ...

Regarding Richter and Hadid, plus the *almost something else* prefigured therein, see the critical writings of Hans-Ulrich Obrist and Benjamin H.D. Buchloh ...

FOR EXAMPLE, BUCHLOH – Regarding *Red, Green, Blue*, Ellsworth Kelly (2002), Oil on canvas, three joined panels, 40” x 181” (102 cm. X 500 cm.), see *Ellsworth Kelly: Matrix* (New York: Matthew Marks Gallery, 2003) and the essay by Benjamin H.D. Buchloh, “Kelly’s Matrix” – “I wanted my work to look as if no one had done it ...” E.K. (p. 5) – Exhibition catalogue, “Kelly’s Matrix” (May 10-June 28, 2003) ...

GERHARD RICHTER – Gerhard Richter, *The Daily Practice of Painting: Writings 1960-1993*, ed. Hans-Ulrich Obrist, trans. David Britt (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1995) / Gerhard Richter (photographs), Armin Zweite and Benjamin H.D. Buchloh (text), *Photography and Painting in the Work of Gerhard Richter: Four Essays on Atlas* (Barcelona: Actar, 2000) / Gerhard Richter, Benjamin H.D. Buchloh, *Eight Gray* (New York: Guggenheim Foundation, 2003) ...

MORE BUCHLOH & OBRIST – Benjamin H.D. Buchloh, Bernard Blistene, *Premises Invested Spaces in Visual Art and Architecture from France, 1958-1998* (New York: Guggenheim Foundation, 1998) – Exhibition catalogue / Benjamin H.D. Buchloh, *Neo-Avant-Garde and Culture Industry: Essays on European and American Art from 1955 to 1975* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2001) / Rosalind Krauss, Benjamin H.D. Buchloh and Hal Foster, eds., *October: The Second Decade, 1986-1996* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1998) / Hans-Ulrich Obrist, *Hans Ulrich Obrist: Interviews* (Milan: Charta, 2003) / Louis Bourgeois, Hans-Ulrich Obrist and Marie-Laure Bernadec, eds., *Destruction of the Father/Reconstruction of the Father: Writings and Interviews* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1998) ...

CLEMENT GREENBERG / ARCHDRUID – Robert C. Morgan, ed., *Clement Greenberg: Late Writings* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003) / John O’Brian, ed., *The Collected Essays and Criticism, Vol. 1: Perceptions and Judgments, 1939-1944* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988) / John O’Brian, ed., *The Collected Essays and Criticism, Vol. 2: Arrogant Purpose, 1945-1949* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988) / John O’Brian, ed., *The Collected Essays and Criticism, Vol. 3: Affirmations and Refusals, 1950-1956* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995) / John O’Brian, ed., *The Collected Essays and Criticism, Vol. 4: Modernism with a Vengeance, 1957-1969* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995) / Clement Greenberg, *Art and Culture* (Boston: Beacon, 1971) / Clement Greenberg, *Homemade Aesthetics: Observations on Art and Taste* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999) ...

THE GHOST – Marcus Bullock and Michael William Jennings, eds., *Walter Benjamin: Selected Writings: Volume 1, 1913-1926* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 2004) / Howard Eiland and Michael William Jennings, eds., *Walter Benjamin: Selected Writings: Volume 2, Part 1, 1927-1930* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 2005) / Howard Eiland and Michael William Jennings, eds., *Walter Benjamin: Selected Writings: Volume 2, Part 2, 1931-1934* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 2005) / Howard Eiland and Michael William Jennings, eds., *Walter Benjamin: Selected Writings: Volume 3, 1935-1938* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 2002) / Howard Eiland and Michael William Jennings, eds., *Walter Benjamin: Selected Writings: Volume 4, 1938-1940* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 2003) ...

ADORNO & ALMOST AESTHETICS – Theodor W. Adorno, *Kierkegaard: Construction of the Aesthetic*, ed. and trans. Robert Hullot-Kentor (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1989) / Theodor W. Adorno, *Essays on Music*, trans. Susan H. Gillespie (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002) / Theodor W. Adorno, *Mahler: A Musical Physiognomy*, trans. Edmund Jecicott (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996) / Theodor Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, ed. and trans. Robert Hullot-Kentor (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1998) ...

LAST WORDS – “To the dialectical materialist, any form of idealism is anathema; and ‘realism’ (in the scholastic sense of the word, which is also the Constructivist sense) is regarded as a form of idealism. An art which deliberately denies the self-sufficiency of the phenomenal world is, for such philosophers, as perverse as a religion which assumes a life beyond the grave. But everything in this argument turns, of course, on our definition of the word ‘reality’. The dialectical materialists seem to confine its meaning to the immediate data of sense perception. To the great majority of philosophers that has always seemed a very jejeune attitude. A comparison of these data soon discovers similarities or identities from which emerge, not merely the general laws which constitute the body of science, but universal concepts to which the sense-data always conform, and which therefore may be regarded as the bases of reality. These concepts are not, as the materialist assumes, illusory or idealistic. We cannot have final knowledge about them, but we are aware of their concrete manifestations. They are inseparable from matter:

unimagined outside matter. They describe the forms which matter universally assumes – the way matter behaves.”  
Herbert Read, *The Philosophy of Modern Art* (London: Faber & Faber, 1964), p. 231 ...

[...]

# PASSAGES TO THE SUBLIME

[...]

## NIETZSCHE/MEYRINK

“Strange! So infinitesimally narrow is the threshold between the two realms, and yet no one raises their foot to cross it! The other reality borders on our skin, yet we do not feel it! Our imagination stops here, where it could create new land.” – Gustav Meyrink

## BLANCHOT/DARK GAZE

“Poetic imagination distances itself from reality in order to join this very movement of self-distancing to this reality, to make inside what is, that which is not, and take that as its principle, as absence that makes presence desirable, irreality that allows the poet to possess the real, to have a ‘productive knowledge’ of it.” – Maurice Blanchot

## SCHOPENHAUER/MUSIC

“When music suitable to any scene, action, event, or environment is played, it seems to disclose to us its most secret meaning ...” – Arthur Schopenhauer, *The World as Will and Representation* (1818)

## MORAVIAN SHADOWS

“Cultural shadows are, of course, unstable; they require critical examination – imagination – to appear and disappear. They are non-objective, fleeting formulations prompted by very real, quotidian shadows. Thus they have been called shades, or ghosts, figments, as it were, of the penumbra, the transitional zone between light and shadow. In deep shadow there is nothing. Perhaps this transitional zone is the same place that Lucretius denotes as the domain of the gods, the so-called *intermundia* ...”

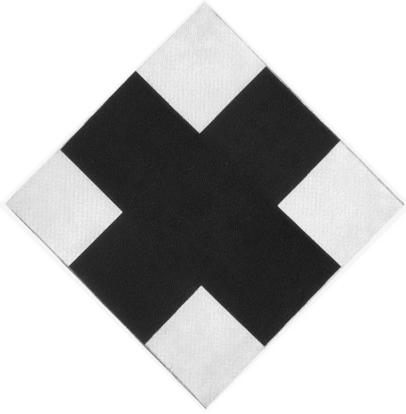
“The implication for architectural and landscape architectural design (and for discursive praxis, or criticism) is profound. Shadow-play incorporates the full scope of theoretical and analytical praxis – viz., to ‘do shadows’ is to theorize depth (the distance implicit and sometimes explicit in all things). In design the shadow comes with the architectonic; it is an effect of the concatenation of forms. Baroque building facades seem to delight in and anticipate the evening, the long angles of the setting sun. In winter these surfaces are alive with creeping patterns of light and shade. The shadowy recesses of buildings massed to dramatic effect suggest tragic interpolations – the arcade or the peristyle suggest zones of spatial intrigue, of conflict and conniving, of secretive and furtive, clandestine and covert activities.”

– Gavin Keeney, “Moravian Shadows”, *Landscape Review* 8:2 (Autumn 2004)

## LACAN/THE REAL

The Real as the Sublime Thing: “In the third and last phase Lacan leaves linguistic theory behind (without ever breaking with it) and begins to utilize topological models which are non-intuitive. A simple example of this is the Moebius strip as a model for the relationship between consciousness and the unconscious. The most famous structure of this period is the Borromean knot; a model of the relationship between the dimensions of the real, the imaginary, and the symbolic.” / “It seems that one of the driving forces for the move towards these highly abstract models for the psyche is the observation that closed systems are never completely closed. Gödel’s theorem, the qualities of numbers, all this indicates that the symbolic itself has a defect, or contains something real which is not symbolizable. This ‘remainder’ in a way causes the return of the repressed and forces Lacan to attempt new theorizations of the field discovered by psychoanalysis, which, not without reason, move from the imaginary to the symbolic and then to the real.” – Jürgen Braungardt, “Theology After Lacan”, *Other Voices* 1:3 (January 1999)

GK (2005)



UPDATED 01/04/05

# VOX POPULI

## MONUMENTS, MEMORIALS, & THE BODY POLITIC

[...]

EVERYONE'S A CRITIC – It's possible to rule out much of the so-called criticism of large, high-profile design proposals as “internecine” squabbling (professional jealousy, etc.), but it is not possible to pass judgement so easily on the increasing public interest in design – especially urban design – and most especially when design includes the now-ubiquitous memorial, monument, or icon gratuitously placed in a prominent “public” space – the Mall in Washington, Hyde Park in London, the Potsdamer Platz in Berlin, or the grave and historic open spaces of Florence, Rome, or Venice.

The WWII Memorial, the proposed WTC Memorial, the Princess Diana Memorial, the Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe, and a new entrance to the Uffizi Gallery in Florence are all cases in point. What they have in common is that *everyone is now a critic*, and this *everyone* transcends the usual authorized mouthpieces of design – architects, historians, journalists, cultural figures, etc. – and includes (tentatively) “the people”.

FEAR OF THE HOI POLLOI – In the case of the WTC process, this has taken the form of informal and formal “pulse-taking” – viz., ad hoc groups supposedly representing the “will of the people”, leading to a statistical take-down of the first six plans from Beyer Blinder Belle and the LMDC (and Port Authority). In the sense that this statistical “consensus” might actually represent “the public”, there is something useful to extract. In the case of the WWII Memorial (and Senator Dole's heavy-handed role in premiating the St. Florian proposal) one can only wonder about representative government. With the brouhaha in Florence (lead by Franco Zeffirelli), over the Arata Isozaki proposal for a new loggia/entrance to the Uffizi Gallery, a different set of problems emerge.

Isozaki's loggia is clearly a bizarre manifestation of post-modernism. It is part neo-rational urban icon and part stage set. Perhaps this makes Zeffirelli an appropriate critic. Isozaki's estranged urbanism – his hyper-conscious sensitivity to form and to the hegemonic essence within such forms – makes his proposal something to look very closely *into*. Is it not somehow, bizarrely, “appropriate”, in the sense that it appropriates a language that aggrandizes the very thing it is critiquing?

Anyway, it is time for architects to get over the fact that the public now cares about such things. Most of these projects either utilize public monies or public resources (including public space) to merely exist. They quite often are gestures of supposed magnanimity as well. That they are thrust into the public sphere at all tells us a great deal about how the icon or the model (or the monument) literally rules (divides and conquers) the landscape of things (that in most all cases is an amalgam of mostly mute signs *avant la lettre*).

RES PUBLICA – It may be time to properly “socialize” the public interest in things public, versus pay that interest lip service. Sure, let the authorities of culture continue to premiate designs, deliberate, and act through the process of the commission, but, at the end of this process, there may be yet another process long overdue. This follow-on process might be the “referendum” where the statistical pulse may be taken without the preliminary selection of the voting members determined by a pre-selection process or a vainglorious fiddling with demographics in pursuit of fake heterogeneity. This referendum might be the ultimate payback for the authoritarian mode of operation – either the so-called public process, or the flipside, the cultural apparatus of the well-heeled and elite. The fake-populism of certain critics and journalists would in this case be overridden by the very real (and no doubt frightening) prospect that the public might simply vote “None of the Above”.

[...]

GK (August 2002)

## OUTTAKES

**WWII MEMORIAL FIASCO** – “The National World War II Memorial will be funded almost entirely by private contributions, as specified in Public Law 103-32. Through the generosity of a variety of giving constituencies, the campaign has received more than \$186 million in cash and pledges, enough to cover current estimated project costs. Support has come from hundreds of thousands of individual Americans, hundreds of corporations and foundations, veterans groups, dozens of civic, fraternal and professional organizations, states and one territory, and students in 1,200 schools across the country.” *National WWII Memorial* ...

**NATIONAL COALITION TO SAVE OUR MALL** – “The Fine Arts Commission; however, rejected architect Frederick St. Florian’s original design for the complex because, the commission said, it was too large and imposing. Critics complained that the massive ring of towering columns proposed by St. Florian were reminiscent of the Nazi-era edifices of Adolf Hitler’s architect, Albert Speer.” *Chicago Tribune* (July 6, 2000) ...

**MEMORIAL FOR DIANA** – “The committee had been unable to choose between [Kathryn] Gustafson, known for her glasshouse at the National Botanical Gardens of Wales, and Anish Kapoor, the Turner prize winning British sculptor, who proposed a dome of water. The committee suggested the two designs should be exhibited for the public to decide. That did not happen.” *Guardian Unlimited* (August 1, 2002) / For a post-mortem, see the interview with KG, *Guardian Unlimited* (October 12, 2004) ...

**UFFIZI IMBROGLIO** – “Florentine film director Franco Zeffirelli, who studied architecture in the city, has labeled the avant-garde design, which won an international competition in 2001, a ‘shameful horror,’ and has appealed to those who love the city to speak up and defend its artistic heritage.” *Wired News* (July 29, 2002) ...

**RED KEN TO THE RESCUE** – Draft London Plan – The Mayor is keen to hear the views of Londoners. There is a consultation period to 30 September and you are encouraged to send us your comments; you may download the consultation response form for formal representations, and the questionnaire that accompanies the summary. There will then be an Examination in Public scheduled for February 2003 which will report to the Mayor who will subsequently publish The London Plan.” / “The Mayor has published ON Magazine, a newsletter that is being widely distributed throughout London. This magazine highlights some of the areas where the GLA has been working to make life better for Londoners.”

**EARLY ISOZAKI** – *Neo-Dada Japan 1958-1998: Arata Isozaki and the Artists of “White House”* (Oita: Oita Museum of Art, 1998) – Exhibition catalogue, essays by Akira Suga et al. – Arata Isozaki, “Imprint of 1960”, pp. 272-275, trans. Yumiko Yamazaki and David B. Stewart; Koji Taki, “Arata Isozaki in the Sixties”, pp. 282-285, trans. Akita Nobuko and David B. Stewart ...

**NEO-FORMALISM, ANYONE?** – See “Progetto/Contesto: Design/Context”, *Lotus* 121 (September 2004) surveying the ongoing controversy surrounding Isozaki’s Nuova Uscita della Galleria degli Uffizi (c.1998), plus other select projects “here” and “there” that are generally raising a ruckus – For the Isozaki imbroglio, see “La Controversia/The Controversy”, pp. 26-37 – The *Lotus* spread includes: plans, elevations, sections, sketches, volumetric-axonometric study, and model view; letters from *Corriere della Serra* c.2002 (e.g., Vittorio Gregotti’s “Isozaki’s canopy is just a caricature ...”, 07/22/02); plus texts by Isozaki describing the project (“Design Concept”, “The Context”, “Architectural Design”, and “The Development up till Today”) ...

N.B.: A version of this essay first appeared in *CounterPunch* (August 3, 2002)

RE-EDITED / UPDATED 01/17/05

**ABENDLAND**

[...]

Soon fish and game slip away.  
 Blue soul, dark wandering  
 Soon parted us from loved ones, others.  
 Evening changes sense and image.  
 – Georg Trakl\*

[...]

HOW do we express in garden-architectural form, if at all, the sensibility of “return”, as expressed by Massimo Cacciari in the essay “Abendland”, *Posthumous People: Vienna at the Turning Point* (1996)? Is it even possible? This sense that “evening” and “twilight” represent a point of critical and momentous departure in Western metaphysics has recently been disclosed in Virgilian études by poet-artist Ian Hamilton Finlay (most recently in the Serpentine Gallery Garden, in collaboration with Peter Coates, in Kensington Gardens, London).

This meditative pose – a state of reflection that turns on questioning subjectivity itself – is carried to the “woodland” edge of poetic language and form, by Finlay, by fleeting, temporal allusions to a very real, and (at the same time) metaphorical twilight and evening. Virgil has been identified by some (Panofsky) as the “author” of “evening” (in its full, occidental poetic sensibility at the least). The departure west – e.g., of the Sun – signals a migration (inward or into the underworld or otherworld) – an introduction of alterity of/by the action of someone/something (e.g., The Sun as Being).

This transit to the edge of and beyond the horizon is linked metaphorically to the eternal return and the mystical (as that which is “unconcealed” or “manifest” but without linguistic signs to indicate its presence); therefore, the perennial quest for a “new language” in literature, art and architecture. But certainly such a “language” – since it is almost pre-linguistic – is not possible in the normative sense. Instead, it is likely that we are at the edge of something else more physical, more real and more of the earth. A language of things made manifest perhaps. Can such things then constitute a garden? And if so, is it not the exact opposite of the Cartesian garden, the Sun’s passage along the great central axis of Versailles empirically validating the reign of the Sun King? Is it more akin, then, to the unbuildable garden of Pascal?

Allen S. Weiss, in *Mirrors of Infinity* (1995) and *Unnatural Horizons* (1998), has suggested that a Pascalian garden would be almost impossible to conceive of (as opposed to a garden based on Cartesian subject/object relations). Not unlike Kleist, we would be seeking (in constructing such a conceit) a long-neglected, perhaps mythical rear entrance to the Garden of Eden. Here, if successful, we would be reconnected to the cosmic strings (the Great Chain of Being), as re-animate marionettes? Again, we would converse with angelic orders? Gods and demons? Perhaps the Renaissance gardens last attempted this as a synthesis (Ficino inspired many such apostrophes). Or is it all a ruse, simply a strategy to recover the lost aura of things and the ostensible reversibility of the diachronic (the synchronic within the diachronic) – Francesco Colonna’s secret agenda?

Metaphysics, as such, would (as Wittgenstein and Nietzsche predicted) no longer exist. Time would slide past Itself. And, according to Cacciari and Nietzsche, what must be passed through in any case is the wasteland of nihilism. The search for the hidden would slowly dissolve into an acknowledgement of the knowable. As such, nihilism would be a transit through the conditions of abject (Cartesian) subjectivity to an altogether new/old state. This state is not a shadowland of the World (as metaphysics). It is a territory that already exists (existed) in the space where metaphysics appeared (was implanted). If it is perceived as a “primordial” condition, it is misconceived. It must be entirely new as a new condition and a new reflexivity. It can be “originary” only in the sense that it always-already existed (as a formal possibility) within the time/space continuum, as an opportunity or possible point of departure. It is of Time, but a creative principle within Being (Time as phenomenal Being-in-the-World). Of Time, such a point of departure need not be determined empirically. Instead, the nature of such a condition is a shift in the seeming a

priori (Kantian) foundation of thought itself. It is not about the limits of Reason. It is not a mirror condition of Wittgenstein's *Tractatus*. Metaphysics is fatally ideological from Day One. A priori conditions are not founded (rooted) in metaphysics, but vice versa. They are, instead, epochal signifiers (the days and nights of Brahma) that can and do undergo "evolutionary" change. These changes may appear epistemic but in fact result from incalculable processes. In this way, Time Itself is implicated in undoing the very teleological sense of development that hides its true essence (face). This essence is evident in the clearest expressions of Body-Mind (Bodhi) as synchronic (as already-always occurring, repeating phenomena). It remains, by nature, unfathomable to the dichotomistic rationalist and sensualist temperaments. There is no Hegelian dialectic involved and no willful drive for the Absolute.

Even if such an evening strategy is wishful thinking, it deserves being thought – A garden of Hesperides? or a garden of Agony? Perhaps neither. But a garden nonetheless, recognizable in nascent form in Dante's *Paradiso* (and Virgil was the guide, there, too). But, by the conventions of the day, Dante could only allow Virgil (the pagan mage) to venture part way. Beatrice as Sophia led Dante to *Abendland* ("into the blue"). The azure and gold of the Russian Symbolists (Blok, Bely, Soloviev, et al.) were the then impressive colors of an iconological threshold for a cultural (poetic) form of *Abendland*. Such things continue, today, to haunt the World-soul.

At the radiant hour, receding  
 Storms we'll hear, we two.  
 Hands clasped, silent, we'll go sailing  
 Far into the blue.  
 – Aleksandr Blok ("Prayers", 1904)

GK (1998)

### SMALL 'BIBLIOGRAPHIE'

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Graeme Murray, ed., *Poiesis: Aspects of Contemporary Poetic Activity* (Edinburgh: Fruitmarket Gallery, 1992).

Giorgio Agamben, *Infancy and History: Essays on the Destruction of Experience* (London: Verso, 1993).

### NOTES / OUTTAKES

Sublime Aesthetics(?) = /S/ = (Rhétorique + Esthétique + Poétique) x Polémique = XXXOX ...

\*Georg Trakl (1887-1914), in Heidegger's *Unterwegs zur Sprache* (1959), cited in "Geschlecht II" ("Heidegger's Hand"), Jacques Derrida, *Deconstruction and Philosophy: The Texts of Jacques Derrida*, edited by John Sallis (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987) – "Heidegger connects: 'The travelers who follow the stranger find themselves immediately separated from 'Loved Ones' (van Lieben) who are for them 'Others' (die für sie 'Andere' sind). The 'Others', let us understand the ruined stock of man.'" (p. 185) ...

Gilles A. Tiberghien, philosophe, spécialiste du paysage – "N'est-ce pas, par des moyens très différents, ce que recherche Ian Hamilton Finlay dans son jardin de Little Sparta, en Ecosse? – A travers une symbolique et une poétique très concrète qui renvoie, par exemple, à des épisodes de la Révolution française, l'œuvre de Ian Hamilton Finlay est le jardin d'un homme, l'expression d'une vie. Le jardin déploie toute une existence, la rêverie souterraine de son créateur. On pénètre à l'intérieur d'une âme humaine. C'est une démarche artistique aussi intime que celle d'un poème. Ian Hamilton Finlay nous ouvre un monde qui renoue en même temps avec l'histoire du jardin, et nous présente ainsi comme le microcosme d'un macrocosme." *Le monde* (December 25, 2001) ...

Jesse Sheeler, Andrew Lawson (photographs), *Little Sparta: The Garden of Ian Hamilton Finlay* (London: Frances Lincoln, 2003) ...

# IDES OF MARCH 2005

[...]

“Notes Toward an (Im)probable Review” ... Or, “Damien Hirst does Gerhard Richter doing Damien Hirst” – “Damien Hirst: The Elusive Truth!” @ Gagosian Gallery (New York) – March 11-May 21, 2005

[...]

AESTHETIC CARNAGE – Thirty macabre, horrifying, stunning, beautiful, monstrous paintings surveying the wreckage of late-modernity ... Surgical strikes (clinically precise and chilling) in paint ... Operating rooms, autopsy tables, two skulls (one out-sized, one crumbling), images collected ostensibly from the vapid stream of contemporary (so-called) news media, transposed into “photo-realistic” paintings (with very large prices attached) ... Eery echoes of Richter’s “Atlas” (1964-) project ... Serial images of the approach of death plus pharmaceutical chic, or exquisite and obsessive paintings of pills as modern-day potions, scalpels, incisions, scenes of disenchantment (de facto “dismemberment”), alienation, and abject-self-visited-upon-abject-self in the form of the hyper-machinic, warped-mirror creatureliness of post-humanism (the condition wrought by the twin agencies, double-headed beastliness, of technological nihilism and hubris) ...

An archaeological survey of death and destruction, then ... Antiseptic (cool, minimal) sketches of the multi-faceted “face” of gemstones with scientific (syn)tag (in French) ... Demure (coquettish) lines tracing a wilful analytic, insofar as they represent another layer of obsession with order teetering at the edge of the abyss (maelstrom) of nothingness of/within all notional, representational orders(1) ... Dark, crystalline matter emerging into light (and super-imposed, by the eye, for the eye ... into the picture-plane, mocking perspectival space) ... Serial patches of color (color charts), arrayed in grids on flat-white surfaces ... Mock-heroic mayhem and chaos in Iraq (mirroring the mayhem and chaos at home, just below the surface of things) ...

Tableaux of the decaying state of things and its perverse aestheticization (through its endless reproduction, dissemination, and replication ... inclusive of in, through, and by the thing otherwise known as “contemporary art”) ... An exorbitant art-for-the-absent-gods’-sake (mutilated “musings”) ...

Painting through (by way of) the crippling lens of the “archival” impulse (*pace* Richter ... *pace* Derrida, after Foucault ... a virulent “Archive Fever” ...) ... Listing to and fro, between the vacuous horror of the everyday and the impossible appeal of the indivisible remainder (as Žižek has disclosed, the very absent center or “Cartesian” subject of all phantasmatic encounters, with the unreal, the real, or otherwise) ...

A close brush with death, brushing life against the grain, countering the calamity of the present-day morasse of creeping determinism (late-capitalism) with the elective *désir* of the mutable-estranged image (anti-milieu) and its provisional “anti-nature” as obstacle/spectacle ... Obstructing the path to the aesthetic with a withering (damning) anti-aesthetic “aesthetic” (again), as one might labor – insistently (in any vineyard worth its salt, “salted with salt”) – to derail any detour into the autistic paths, the puerile gardens of the imagination-which-looks-away (toward personal, “elective” utopias left, right and – significantly – off-center) ... Painting-as-discourse up against the wall and bleeding ... A wholly, preternaturally bizarre, life-affirming dance with death (the *danse macabre* of notational orders) ... Which is why the cover of *Modern Painters* (March 2005) shows the artist reading the newspaper, in his studio in Brixton, in front of a painting of a giant skull, nonchalantly and putatively “oblivious” (photograph by Gautier Deblonde)\* ...

Merci/mercy, Damien ...

GK (March 2005)

## ENDNOTES / ETC.

1 – Géométrie, ou “l’éducation de l’oeil” – “4.6.6. L’expérience de la vie, mais aussi, comme le dit un peu plus haut

Diderot, l'éducation de l'oeil. Ce qui ne nous avance guère. Et cependant c'était deux choses différentes, pour l'architecte, de travailler à main levée ou en s'aidant d'une règle." – Hubert Damisch, *Traité du trait: Tractatus tractus* (Paris: Réunion de Musée Nationaux, 1995), p. 118.

\*The article/interview in *Modern Painters*, pp. 52-59, shows the paintings now at the Gagosian Gallery in the studio of Hirst (in South London) amid the vast, detritus-strewn interior of their "place of their taking-place" ...

The catalogue for "The Elusive Truth!" is forthcoming from Gagosian ... In the meantime, see DAMIEN HIRST / PRESENT-PAST in the form of Eduardo Cicelyn, Mario Codognato, Mirta D'Argenzio, *Damien Hirst: The Agony and the Ecstasy: Selected Works from 1989-2004* (Naples: Electa, 2004) – Exhibition catalogue, Museo Archeologico Nazionale (October 31, 2004-January 31, 2005) / MERCHANDIZING, ETC. – Gagosian is offering about half-a-dozen variations on the book of Hirst drawings *From the Cradle to the Grave* published last year in Europe by Booth Clibborn, including *de luxe* "boxed" versions with a signed drawing enclosed (for maximum dollars). The lowest form of this publication sells for \$330.00, unsigned (ISBN 1-904-21203-4). A signed copy goes for \$560.00 (ISBN 1-904-21206-9). The "limited" edition runs to 7,500 copies (though it is unclear if the upper-upper-level versions are included in this count) ... There is also a black t-shirt with skull available as memento mori (a reminder to die) ...

BACKTRACKING / SUNLIGHT ON FLOWERS – Damien Hirst, Stuart Morgan, *Damien Hirst: No Sense of Absolute Corruption* (New York: Gagosian Gallery, 1996) – Exhibition catalogue (May 4-June 15, 1996) – Interview (by Stuart Morgan), April 2, 1996: "DH: If you have a box of dead snakes and you put a few live ones in, it looks as if they're all moving. / SM: How do you feel about nature? / DH: I've seen better (laughs). There isn't anything else." (p. 4) / "SM: What else do you want to do? / DH: I want people to be frightened. That gets harder. Frightened of themselves." (p. 24) / "SM: Do you feel divorced from nature? / DH: I wish I was. I like it when the outside comes inside. I like sunlight on flowers. I like ashtrays." (p. 26) ...

RECENT RICHTER – Gerhard Richter, Robert Storr, *Gerhard Richter: Doubt and Belief in Painting* (New York: MoMA, 2003) / Gerhard Richter, Robert Storr, *Gerhard Richter: Forty Years of Painting* (New York: MoMA, 2002) / Gerhard Richter, Dieter Schwarz, *Gerhard Richter: Drawings 1964-1999* (Düsseldorf: Richter Verlag, 2000) / Robert Fleck, with Gertrud Koch and Hans Ulrich Obrist, *Gerhard Richter* (Paris: Editions Dis Voir, 1995) ...

## /LU/: BLACK SUN @ MOMA

[...]

“A garden’s silence is made of sounds. Press your ear to a tree and listen.” – Valentina (Signorini Ghirardini), Monica Vitti, in Michelangelo Antonioni’s *La Notte* (1960)

[...]

The thing otherwise known as /LU/ (Landscape Urbanism), an empty signifier signifying merely itself, appears at MoMA’s “Groundswell” exhibition in all of its muted glory, as eclipse, as possible-impossible synthesis of Landscape + Architecture + Urbanism, and (more critically) as an a-critical something large that looms in the architectural imagination as the (un)natural outcome of 10-plus years of advanced work in academies and studios, work effectively obliterating other options (such as an embrace of the “Real”) and presenting the ultimate *fait accompli* – for example, contemporary urbanism as a network of madly interconnected, totally (totalized) synthetic (instrumentalized) pseudo-environments.

Arguably, the current vogue for an advanced synthetical /LU/ was imported to the US from Europe and the UK (by way of the Netherlands and the Architectural Association in London), in the early 1990s, in response to the mostly bathetic (and hopelessly pathetic) state of things landscape-architectural, its arrival signaling a turn into hybrid urban *mise en scène* (as pursued by MVRDV and West 8 in Holland), a purview more or less obsessed with spent infrastructure and, in inept and horribly trenchant ways, renascent (post-McHarg) ideas (however vague) of urban ecology as information flows and so-called datascares. Tied to 1980s urban renewal by the elastic bonds of contiguity (as post-modernism is tied to modernism), and part and parcel of the extreme hubris of that decade (yet somehow post-Paris and post-Mitterrand Grand Projets anyway), Landscape Urbanism was the proverbial phoenix rising from the ashes of the post-industrial city in a decade marked by architectural arrogance masquerading as theory – a post-industrial (and edgy) artifact unto itself, which suggested the return of the amalgam (the constellation, or event) after so much discredited non-sense associated with modernist utopian projects and the polyglot affectations of post-modernism (the latter, despite claims otherwise by its detractors, inclusive of the strident, formalist maneuvers of the rare deconstructivist-inspired operations, surgical and strategic, rarely built but influential nonetheless).(1)

Yet despite this seemingly progressive embrace of a slightly broken set of justifications for collecting the detritus of the shattered modernist city, below the dead and dying operational interventions in cities worldwide lurked an unholy embrace of subtle forms of nonetheless *rampant* exploitation (claws extended), making the so-called progressive maneuvers of landscape urbanists oftentimes synonymous with regressive and/or repressive orders operating increasingly from within the vast dematerialized and de-territorialized “venues” of late-capitalism (and neo-liberalism).

The 1990s version of /LU/ that came over from the Netherlands and the UK owes a great debt to the late-1980s hollow, neo-realist gestures of OMA and Koolhaas, most especially by way of the ridiculous, empty figure of *terrain vague* (foolishly valorized by figures as eminent as Ignasi de Solà-Morales and Massimo Cacciari), a vast indeterminate (often Deleuzian) field of criss-crossing forces and systems wherein nominal existentialist maneuvers might take place (nomadologies), situating a late-Situationist anti-ethos (the anti-spectacle) amidst the muck and mire of de-racinated, leftover bits of urban fabric or forsaken terrain in-between the fully instrumentalized urban *bric-à-brac* that constitutes the contemporary city worldwide. This *terrain vague*, while often (in fact) a “*terroir vague*”, was then perceived as a type of titillating frontier, while after all such fragments of the broken landscape of modernity were always only waiting to be stitched back into the machinic operations of Leviathan (the modern State as colossal economic clockworks).

As all of this is more than self-evident today, it is a marvel to see Landscape Urbanism continue today to embrace the now-obvious pernicious and adventitious machine that is turning everything into something that can be bought and sold (and ultimately controlled and/or voided when necessary). The age-old conundrum of the urban square as place of revolution, insurrection, and (of course) punishment more than attests to the radical potential in such systems that swerve between machine and subject. Georges Bataille’s premonitions regarding such, by way of

backward glances into twisted forms of sinister Parisian urbanism, as Walter Benjamin's "Arcades Project", dovetail ironically with the absent critique today of what is lost below arch-determinism, and what is occluded beneath the irresponsible "realism" of contemporary urbanism flying under the sexed-up sign of morphological innovation.

Thus, the post-industrial thing is also the latest, perhaps most ferocious example of creeping economic determinism (culture as mechanism) and the flattening of the last frontier (which is also the *first frontier*); that is, human subjectivity or human "nature". In the face of a machinic spirit quite literally out of control and running amok (if not on auto-pilot), the world is re-configured every day as perpetual (endlessly re-written) artifact. Surrealism's diagnosis that early 20th-century advertising represented the colonization of the subconscious, registers, therefore, in the annals of operative criticism (given that the Surrealists countered with an equally absurd version of deranged signs) as the penultimate expression of tragic currents unremittingly at play in urban systems.

As the /LU/ juggernaut reaches apogee, it is also likely that its trajectory through the stratosphere will, in turn, sponsor the ejection of modules (satellites) that appear critical while criticality itself belongs "on earth" and "at home", or "at large", and truly on the margins as nascent (and nascent) forms of formalism, or built critique, returning always just in time (on time and in time) – that is to say, an irrepressible something else calls, a both necessary and superfluous something else in the double sense that any avant-garde also must undo all pretensions to reconciliation with authorized narratives and undo at once the pseudo-avant-garde postures of academicians and practitioners wont to claim ownership of discourse, for obvious reasons, obviously, and for spurious reasons, spuriously – both wont to circle the wagons and reclaim autonomy while actually vacating the dire and radical "nature" of that always suspect autonomy anyway (a relic of modernity's ill-conceived quest for transcendence at the expense of everything else).

For the same reasons that people should be human beings first, before they are black, female, handicapped, stupid, or what-have-you, Landscape + Architecture should be grounded (rooted) in the earth first, versus floating off in a virtual paradise or wasteland. To this /LU/ will return, because it must, once it has passed through its very own nihilism (its very own eclipse/nothingness), venturing once again into the ontological soup, or the slippery non-place from which it emerges every moment without fail, whether or not it cares to see or hear (or think) what is real and what is true (and what is "given") – and whether or not it cares to hear the siren song of Earth itself. To abandon the critical coordinates of its own arrival on the stage is to turn those coordinates over to the machinic, programmatic, and virtual mechanisms of the voracious and monstrous steamroller now (and once again) approaching the gates of human subjectivity.

Countering all of that, then, and operative in the allied arts (for example, music, cinema, and the visual arts) but nearly totally absent from architecture, one may hear traces of a song that calls, an Earth that calls, a confluence of the real and the given and its excessive provisionality, all of which remains offstage, offlimits and – essentially – off the map *out of necessity*.<sup>(2)</sup> If MoMA's curators (Peter Reed et al.) missed or chose to ignore the current "twittering in the trees" (that is, other forms and figures of Landscape + Architecture), they cannot be blamed so much as chastised for practicing that special form of myopia that passes for pulse-taking exhibitions, here and there (and especially in Venice every two years), a purblind approach (based in part by adopting elective blinkers) that nearly always misses what is arriving or about to arrive, given that such representations of the state of things are automatically retrospective exercises, exercises clearly aimed at a reasonably obvious audience (the abstract public), and out of step, out of time, and out of sync with that extraordinary process of inversion, implosion, and insurrection that marks the annals and chronicles of architectural and artistic practice. Obviously, MoMA has done (again) what it always does (and does reasonably well), by assembling under the specious sign of "contemporary landscape design" a thematic event orchestrated around an already-spent force.

Better, then, not to mention a single project currently encased in the upper reaches of the Taniguchi re-designed vitrine that MoMA ultimately is and point elsewhere, instead, to things not on MoMA's radar or things about to spring into view from behind the screen (the curtain); things heedlessly out there or nowhere, an out there and nowhere that presents a more fitting present-tense for landscape-architectural production by going willy-nilly outside the authorized parameters utilized by MoMA and the academies, a lost cause aimed nonetheless at fostering an instrumental identity for a profession truly without bounds.

On the near horizon we find Peter Eisenman's Cultural Center for Santiago de Compostela, Galicia (under construction but not on display at MoMA) about to rear its lovely, "proverbial" three heads amidst so much rubbish elsewhere, rising in the public's eye as mirage (as will the Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe, in Berlin, lurch at least momentarily, in May 2005, into the middle of the collective radar). Tracking in reverse earlier forms of building-as-site – such as Raimund Abraham's 1970s neo-rationalist work (consistent with both Eisenman's and John Hejduk's 1970s neo-rationalist excavations), one cannot help be struck by the peculiar presence of two towers at Santiago designed by the late Hejduk, but "built" by Eisenman. If the language games of the faux neo-modernist /LU/ projects at MoMA are to be properly contextualized, or recognized as what they are, they are also to be constellated against and/or in (re)view of the savage marks of the ontological experiments conducted on the ashes and bones of architectures past, acts of contrition (perhaps) by architects working "inside" the tomb of architecture ("belatedly", as archaeologists), digging to pull it (the *discipline as discourse*) up by its own bootstraps and find (as it was quite lost then as now) the origin of the mauling and making of sites. One wants to ask Eisenman, then: "Peter, Santiago, c'est votre vous, mais oui?"

Land Art notwithstanding, /LU/ owes its highly-suspect notoriety to all that has been obliterated by the machine it services, and the anti-humanism at its dark heart (its elective post-humanism) is the darkest portion of its spectacularly (un)natural acts of abject instrumentalization of everything in its path. To punch holes then in this strategic veneer (a black shroud thrown over an otherwise dangerously indeterminate terrain, or Earth itself) is to also save Landscape + Architecture from its current self, and to liberate what always lies within it – its obviously dangerous (and therefore repressed) *sublime potential*.

GK (March 2005)

## POSTSCRIPTS

EISENMAN (NOW & THEN) – Peter Noever, ed., *Peter Eisenman: Barefoot on White-Hot Walls* (Ostfildern-Ruit: Hatje Cantz, 2005); catalogue for the exhibition @ MAK, Vienna, December 12, 2004-May 22, 2005. Peter Eisenman, *Codex* (New York: Monacelli Press, 2005). Mark Rakatansky, ed., *Eisenman Inside Out: Selected Writings, 1963-1988* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004). Andrew Benjamin, Cynthia Davidson, eds., *Blurred Zones: Investigations of the Interstitial, Eisenman Architects 1988-1998* (New York: Monacelli Press, 2003). Peter Eisenman, *Diagram Diaries* (New York: Universe, 1999). *Codex* (due in April 2005) will include essays by Peter Eisenman, plus 300 illustrations, including the code-driven work behind, beneath, and buried within the majestic and magisterial Cultural Center for Santiago de Compostela.

EISENMAN / BERLIN & BEYOND – The Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe is scheduled to open in May 2005 ... A photo-documentary publication will follow (in June), from Lars Müller (with photographs by Hélène Binet and an as-yet-unspecified second photographer), on the implicit nature of the site, the process of construction, and the over-arching epic phenomenon of the project *per se*, inclusive of the Spring 2005 "opening" itself. Regarding PE's "Garden of Lost Footsteps", at Castelvecchio, Verona (June 27, 2004-March 28, 2005), an *hommage* to Carlo Scarpa, see the catalogue for the installation, *The Garden of Lost Footsteps* (Venice: Marsilio, 2004). For "this + that", and other PE effects, in a nutshell, see *Constructs* (Spring 2005), "Faculty News", Yale School of Architecture, p. 25.

THE TOPOLOGICAL SUPPLEMENT – "So in what, exactly, does the difference between Lacan and deconstruction reside? Let me elaborate this crucial point apropos [of] the Derridean couple, 'supplement/centre'. In a way reminiscent of the Foucauldian endless variations on the complex of heterogeneity of power relations (they run upwards, downwards, laterally), Derrida also likes to indulge heavily in exuberant variations on the paradoxical character of the supplement (the excessive element which is neither inside nor outside; it sticks out of the series it belongs to and simultaneously completes it, etc.). Lacan, on the contrary – by means of a gesture which, of course, for Derrida would undoubtedly signal reinscription into traditional philosophical discourse – *directly offers a concept of this element*, namely the concept of the Master-Signifier, S1, in relation to S2, the 'ordinary' chain of knowledge. This concept is not a simple unambiguous concept, but the concept of the structural [topological] ambiguity itself. That is to say, Lacan reunites in one and the same concept what Derrida keeps apart [splits]. In Lacan, S1 stands for the supplement – the trait which sticks out, but is as such, in its very excess, unavoidable; and, simultaneously, for the totalizing Master-Signifier. Therein, in this 'speculative identity' of the supplement and the Centre, resides the implicit 'Hegelian' move of Lacan: the Centre which Derrida endeavours to 'deconstruct' is

ultimately the very supplement which threatens to disrupt its totalizing power, or, to put it in Kierkegaardese, supplement to the Centre itself ‘in its becoming’. In this precise sense, supplement is the condition of possibility *and* the condition of impossibility of the Centre.” – Slavoj Žižek, “The Eclipse of Meaning” (1994), in *Interrogating the Real* (London: Verso, 2005), pp. 209-10 ...

/LU/, NO THANKS – What “sticks out” of urban systems (architectural and landscape-architectural) is the Real Itself (as it always already supplements constructed systems). In the case of the city, this Some-thing Else (often a telluric something else) is always suppressed for structural reasons. It appears spectral as it pulls further and further away (further from Truth). This “Real” is not simply “Nature” (whatever that is); it is also the irreal or spectral thing-in-itself (a post-Kantian thing-in-itself), insofar as the topological knot that all cities ultimately represent represents figuration and representation, as such. The “as such” (or “the given”) is as much the space of the topological knot as anything inscribed within it. Thus all attempts to inscribe difference (while done so, typically, horizontally and/or rhizomatically) fail due to the missing principle embedded in all topological thought; that is, that topological thought contains the traumatic kernel (as Žižek would say) of the Real plus its other (the Big Other or otherwise) – a field, then, of repressions that sponsor the appearance of the phantasmatic (haunted) “nature” contained within urban systems. To excavate the Real is to also “free” it from all such repressions (and reifications as markets, economic flows, datascapes and what-have-you today in the de-natured, new-ish, inter-disciplinary Master-Signifier, Landscape Urbanism). Thus, architecture-as-site remains the principal problem (and the principal “radical” form) of all formalist insurrections. Thus, too, the ontological returns, until the object of architecture is no longer the object *per se* but instead topological thought itself ... (06/12/05) ...

## ENDNOTES

- 1 – The catalogue: Peter Reed, ed., *Groundswell* (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 2005). For an anti-catalogue, see Richard Weller, ed., *Room 4.1.3: Innovations in Landscape Architecture* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004), a survey of landscape-architectural work truly “off the map”, and all but unbuilt.
- 2 – Paul Virilio and François Burkhardt, “Abbiamo Bisogno del Sottosuolo” (“We Need the Below-Ground”), *Domus* 879 (March 2005), pp. 108-12. Regarding Hans Hollein’s unbuilt Guggenheim Museum, Salzburg (competition c.1989): “PV: To my mind, the great success of contemporary art, aside from video installations which interest me a lot, is land art. And what is land art? It is art in the ground. It is the architecturing of a place. It is working with the architecture of the ground. It is about reintroducing art into the earth... Today, through land art and its modernity, this return to a carving of land by sculptors, by architects or by landscape designers is in my view one of the most successful things in the history of art and the one with the biggest future.” *Ibid.*, p. 112.

# ARAKAWA & GINS: ARCHITECTURAL BODY

[...]

PRÉCIS – Madeline Gins & Arakawa’s recent re-launch of their decades-old attempt to transcend boundaries complicit with artificial limits “placed” both on/by so-called environmental and biological necessity has extraordinary potential to upset the architectural applecart insofar as this always incomplete project portends the production of environments that fuse subject and entourage (surroundings) in such a way that one is no longer distinguishable from the other. *Architectural Body* (Tuscaloosa, AL: University of Alabama Press, 2002) re-ignites old controversies, the same that found their retrospective 1997 Guggenheim exhibition, “Reversible Destiny”, rattling the cage of acceptable art-world provocations by way of the structuralization of a possible immortality, by design, traceable to 1981 and their first excursions into the territory of a transformational architecture that fuses being and time into one subtended “chord” under the sign of eternity as infinity, a long-term agenda nonetheless.(1)

[...]

CRITIQUE – “Let our species cease being stunned into silence and passivity ...”. It is the concept of the architectural surround that, in turn, sets the subject on a new trajectory toward re-inhabiting space. “Preexisting those who enter them, architectural surrounds stand as elaborately structured pretexts for action.” Here the possibility of altering or creating wholly new surrounds registers an extreme ambient force in all constructed environments – and it is an always open question as to whether existing surrounds are intentionally conditional or unintentionally conditional insofar as instrumentalized environments exist simply by the addition of a single item (echoing Wallace Stevens): “Putting only a single artifact into an environment will – if someone is around to happen on the scene – turn it into an architectural surround.”

“Architectural surrounds stage architectural procedures. A surround constructed to constrain a sequence of actions presents a procedure to be followed; and as soon as someone sets foot into an architectural surround that constrains action, the architectural procedure it stages gets going.” For this reason alone, perhaps, the de-populated scenes of modern architectural photography are proforma gestures toward a preliminary unfolding of space, in that whoever looks at the image emptied of human presence always-already is its first inhabitant (reading that space through projection).

For this reason, too, the procedures for the construction of an architectural body (the experiencing subject *as architecture*) includes suggestions for constructing multiple vectors within normative perspectival space (something deconstruction has already undertaken in both literature and architecture) while producing *at the same time* a second (third, fourth) space within space. This tilting toward multiple horizons also represents the presence in the archaic self (subject) of multiple senses of time (multiple experiences of time) that automatically de-stabilize the architectural program of built spaces.

In *Architectural Body* this im/possible (im/probable, immanent) agenda takes the form of fabricating “tentative constructings toward holding in place”. As such, “Everywhere one turns: *tentative constructings toward a holding in place*; many *tentative constructings* – and holdings within holdings as latencies and phases – *toward holdings in place*.” The tautological aura of these statements, in fact, is part and parcel of the deconstruction of tautological (so-called “autonomous”) architectural space already underway (here, in *Architectural Body*, and elsewhere, if you look around/away).

“The set of characteristic features for an immensely large architectural surround such as a city will be everything that makes it a city, including all those bustling or ambling through it.” The surround is not amorphous, in-and-of-itself, but bounded and formed by its inhabitants and *informed* by inhabitation. Such readings of already existing architectural surrounds, as well as prescriptive measures for new sites, set in motion the forces usually suspended in the formal logic of architectural representation and architectural objectification. The present-day wager on surface-as-expressive-skin (architecture as half-sublimated information flows), plus the indelicate nihilism associated with

landscape urbanism, begs the question no one seems to want to ask: What is the purpose of too much information?

“Were nothing being apportioned out, no world could form. What is being apportioned out, no one is able to say. That which is being apportioned out is in the process of landing. To be apportioned out involves being cognizant of landing.” The proposition that the world is constructed of a vast array of differential landing sites (and nothing more) leads to the reduction of sentience as organism-person-environment, a complex that prefigures the re-configuration of subject-object dialectics (Descartes’ worldview), or its total elimination. Yet Arakawa & Gins admit we do not know enough about the technical aspects of this constructive complex to stage completely new landings. Both narrow (perceptual) and wide (imaging) landing sites imbricate one another, as varieties of indexing phenomena, perhaps only *almost landing*, while a dimensioning landing site actually “hooks onto the environment to gain traction on it.” It is this plethora of types and conditions that constitutes the perceived complexity of the world: “Landing sites dissolve into each other, or abut, or overlap, or nest within one another.”

The initial critical engagement of this mapping of the world represents “a heuristic device with which to leaf through the universe, never mind that it is unpaginated.” It would seem that once an inventory has been taken of specific sites, here and there, it is the dimensioning landing site that registers most keenly the energetic specificity of conceiving a world as a mutually imbricated affair of “given” and constructed. It is the “given” that is ultimately unreadable in this equation, always remaining but a factor or background function within the mathesis underwriting the re-configuration of the three types of sites. These three “places” – which are never isolatable (and therefore not quite real in an empirical sense) – present architecture with a phenomenologically intensified possible future insofar as the architectural body (subject) returns by way of “sited awareness” (i.e., *as* architectural body).

And, finally, if the unearthing/unveiling of the architectural body does seem to be a case of returning (going forward into the past, or backward into the future), it is due to the inexhaustible foundations of the world – to “ontological questions” – versus any technocratic juggernaut launching a brave new world atop the world we always-already have been given. Elective utopias aside, the re-configuration of subjectivity suggested in *Architectural Body* implies (to borrow/re-write a page from Slavoj Žižek’s *Ticklish Subject* (1999) that the specter haunting present-day architecture is not the Cartesian *cogito* so much as the absence of some-thing else altogether – that is, an unapproachable-sublime excess (always offered up as the redoubtable “Other”). This some-thing else seems to look back at us from within the shadowy background of the half-illuminated, half-submerged “extended field” defined by Rosalind E. Krauss sometime ago, an affective unknown (perhaps a repressed memory, something we have forgotten to remember). In turn, this “extended field” continues to haunt present-day art and architecture as the quintessential map of operational strategies underwriting the complex otherwise known as environmental art.

Yes, echoes of Walter Benjamin’s conceptualization of aura may yet be heard (at this late date). This unnamed non-thing, lurking in the background so to speak, is synonymous/coterminous with “passion” (Lacanian *jouissance*, even); and it is, after all, first and foremost, the performative poetic lashings of language that animate/put flesh on architectural-literary events of the order of *Architectural Body*. Language almost always returns to the poetic/topological foundation of things out of necessity. Architectural language almost always returns to poetic language (the ultimate site of figuration/rupture) when received/authorized forms of architectural expression (and discourse) have instrumentalized/painted themselves into the proverbial corner. It is for this reason that the passages in *Architectural Body* that seem to be “pregnant” with significance have to do with semantic/syntactic correlations between architectural surround and discourse. “Discursive sequences of tactically posed surrounds, constructed as built propositions, marshal existing logical connectives [cognates] and position newly invented ones into the ‘real,’ steering, regulating, and guiding interactions between body and bioscleave [shell/architectural surround] through three-dimensional THEREFORES, BUTS, ORS, ANDS, and built-up WHATEVERS.” This *language on the ground* delivers the ultimatum within the tentativeness of the performative architectural surround – the body is no longer separated from the commandments that form its linguistic-ethical environment. The Other has come home? This Nietzschean ultimatum is explicit. To free one’s self, one must declare one’s freedom. Whether such a declaration amounts to anything substantive, leads out of the labyrinth, is the ultimate wager contained/framed within/by the construction of new subjectivities, architectural or otherwise.

“Historically, the uncertainty and confusion as to how extensive an unknown quantity one is has been a tremendous handicap to an organism that persons seeking to be precise on her or his own behalf. It is exactly because of this confusion (and other related ones) that gods and God succeeded in invading our territory (as us in disguise?).”(2)

And yet (and with Dostoievski), all revolutions will fail that fail to address, undress, and redress the sickly specter of metaphysics today ... As such, what needs to be examined in the critical apparatus supporting Arakawa & Gins' *Architectural Body* is whether or not therein lies buried a re-configured concept of self, or a nominal return to an "archaic" Self (the self-same Self found in anti-modernist demolition projects from Nietzsche to Heidegger to, today, Jean-Luc Marion). This nominal "archaic" self is, after all, not a return but a *turn toward* an always existing state of things (things within their milieux, or a state *in* things), versus an abstracted, fractured, and alienated self (thing) problematized since Descartes as cognizing subject over and against the object. It is perhaps pages 45-47 of *Making Dying Illegal* (Arakawa & Gins' recent 2004 manuscript renewing the procedural measures within *Architectural Body*) that needs to be analyzed line by line, insofar as this passage within the manifesto-like manuscript sings and sings in ways that all other forms of deconstructing subjectivity merely feign.

GK (November 2003/April 2005)

### NOTES: ARAKAWA & GINS (NEW YORK, NEW YORK, 01/17/03)

ARCHITECTURAL BODY/REVERSIBLE DESTINY – First meeting inconclusive. It was a lunch and there was a woman with fluttering eyelashes monopolizing Arakawa's attention. I got on well with Madeline and managed a brief conversation with Arakawa about architecture being about "frame" or how perception and space are relative to perception. Madeline has a more elastic temperament and Arakawa seems purely interested in/obsessed (now) with advanced technological and biological systems (science, technology, economics). It seems that "Reversible Destiny" was very poorly received when at the Guggenheim in 1997. The *New York Times*' Roberta Smith wrote a scathing review. Hence it was not sent elsewhere. I can't really get a grip on the nature of this yet. I felt slightly put off by the anti-phenomenological, pure-body rhetoric. I told Arakawa that many have claimed to destroy the metaphysical and phenomenological thing in the past but that IT keeps coming back. I said: "It will be very hard to get rid of the metaphysicians." Madeline seems to know that the issue of overcoming death also means overcoming conventional subjectivity. But she is also avoiding (like Arakawa) the unresolved dialectic of subject/object. I gave her a package of writings that included "Ontologie" and "Landscape Formalism, Anyone?". She zoomed in on Cacciari in the latter essay (whom she has met), and she's aware of Levinas (who makes an appearance in the former essay). The Cacciari connection must come through Isozaki, as A&G have a permanent exhibition in an Isozaki-designed museum in Japan. Cacciari is a friend of Isozaki and his recent piece in *Casabella*, "Nomads in Prison", is dedicated to Isozaki ("Thanks for the tea-house", if I remember rightly). Isozaki has also designed a controversial new loggia for the "back side" of the Uffizi Gallery in Florence. We agreed that Levinas is a problem, but not on exactly why. The woman with fluttering eyelashes is an architect and teaches something or other at NYU. She spent the time airing sci-fi scenarios; such as an aerial city that travels through the atmosphere at 1000-miles-per-hour (the speed of the spinning Earth?), sometimes tethered, sometimes untethered. Of course it's all "relative".

### POSTSCRIPT

"Arakawa's works have confines that pass through their interiors, at points where the paintings border on the infinite continent of nonspace and nontime, sometimes hidden behind a thin line, at other times buried deep in a blank on the canvas. The edges that run all around the pictures are not so decisive, because they could well move further over, the picture could expand in all directions, could become infinite – I mean infinitely expandable, though limited by its inner discontinuities. The same goes for the mind which hides abysses in its folds." – Italo Calvino, *Artforum* (1985)

### ENDNOTES

1 – See Arakawa/Gins, *Reversible Destiny* (New York: Guggenheim/Abrams, 1997), catalogue for the exhibition, June 25-August 31, 1997 – Frontis: "To what extent do architectural surrounds guide behaviour? Can architectural inflection of thought and feeling be calibrated precisely?" – The projects surveyed at the Guggenheim were in many respects traceable to "The Mechanism of Meaning" (1963-73), a series of 83 semiologically unsettling, mixed-media panels (collages) of a neo-Dada nature (Arakawa x Duchamp) instilling a theoretical trajectory for thought from sense to non-sense to sense by way of inducing the subject (viewer) to respond and re-configure, within the space of the installation, body-mind correlates. These architectural "events" sought to reveal the implicit (repressed) concept of person as mechanism of meaning. – In the catalogue essay "Saving Not", Mark C. Taylor suggests that the ensemble, the installation taken as a whole, is "a philosophico-aesthetic workbook that formulates questions, poses paradoxes, and explores conundrums" (p. 126). This assault on the mind-body takes the form of a

deconstruction of concept-figure and word-image complexes through a strange commingling of aspects of concrete poetics and almost-paranoid semiosis. Taylor's critique focuses on the project "Bridge of Reversible Destiny/The Process in Question", a structure that involves the negotiation of a structured elevated terrain – with obstructions, diversions, implosions – oddly similar to Jean Nouvel's 2002 Guggenheim Museum proposal for Rio de Janeiro. "Bridge of Reversible Destiny" has been around in one form or another for quite awhile. It was part of an exhibition at Ronald Feldman Fine Arts (New York), "Building Sensoriums" (September-October 1990), as a set of floor plans (dated 1973-1989), and appeared in model form as early as 1990. Taylor notes the extreme phenomenological nature of this project: "The place of the bridge is the nonplace of the between where here and now are suspended" (p. 125). Furthermore, Radovan Ivšić and Annie Le Brun's essay "Sites of Reversible Destiny" indicates that this particular project (originally intended for Épinal, France) teeters on the edge of an existentialist abyss: "The site of cleaving is the bridge that gathers together what it holds apart and holds apart what it gathers together. The pain of cleaving is a symptom of the rending caused by reversing destiny. To reroute perception is to re-form the subject" (p. 135). This essay notably references the legendary Mannerist garden at Bomarzo, Italy indicating that much of this architectural agitation resides in a synchronic space within an a-historical dimension denotable, in turn, as the critical-poetic sublime. – Two long-term projects that seem to best illustrate what the self-described "heuristic" installations wish to provoke are: 1/ "Isle of Reversible Destiny, La Certosa, Venice" (1979), with its 365 gardens situated within "articulated terrains" as "a training ground for the architectural body" or a "calendar that perpetuates life"; and 2/ "Sensorium City, Tokyo Bay" (original concept 1995-96), a proposed new city on reclaimed land constructed of self-imbricating modular units of architectural and landscape-architectural forms that auto-complexify, over time, to produce an intensely inter-woven fabric fully embodying the initial urges and desires of the re-configured subject Arakawa & Gins have pursued since the first neo-Dada gestures of the late 1960s. – A second book-long treatment of these projects is Arakawa and Madeline Gins, *Architecture: Sites of Reversible Destiny* (London: Academy, 1994) / Regarding Jean Nouvel's Guggenheim, Rio de Janeiro (2002), inclusive of Patrick Blanc's "Vertical Garden" ("In ancient times the garden was the place of best-kept secrets." – J.N.), see *A+U* 395 (2003:08): pp. 44-50.

2 – Madeline Gins & Arakawa, *Making Dying Illegal* (Unpublished manuscript, 2005), p. 47.

\*All running quotations except 2 (as above) from *Architectural Body* (Tuscaloosa, AL: University of Alabama Press, 2002), passim ...

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\_\_\_, *Making Dying Illegal* (Unpublished manuscript, 2005).

Loredana Mascheroni, ed., "Arakawa & Gins: Living Bodies", *Domus* 879 (March 2005): pp. 100-107. Includes Lisa Licitra, "Arakawa, the Architect" (English text, p. 106; Italian text, p. 102). Projects: "Reversible Destiny Hotel" (New York and/or Atlanta); "Reversible Destiny Lofts" (Tokyo); "Museum of Living Bodies" (Nowhere); "Yoro Park" (Gifu Prefecture, Japan). Published on the occasion of the exhibition "Arakawa and Madeline Gins" at the Galleria Milano (March 9-April 10, 2005; and April 20-May 15, 2005).

María Eugenia Díaz Sánchez, Craig Douglas Dworkin, eds., *Architectures of Poetry* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2004).

Frédéric Ogee, Maurice A. Gérard, eds., "Architecture Against Death" ("Architecture Contre la Mort"), *Interfaces* 21/22 (Worcester, MA: College of the Holy Cross; Paris: Université Paris VII, 2003).

## OUTTAKES

"Stay Alive", by Aaron Kunin, "Gins and Arakawa vs. The Grim Reaper", *Village Voice Education Supplement* (January 15-21, 2003) ...

"For the past few decades, artist-architects Madeline Gins and Arakawa have been saying that people do not have to die. They are, according to their latest manifesto, *Architectural Body* (University of Alabama), 'unconditionally supportive of life.' *Unconditionally* means that they do not accept death as a limit on the human condition. On the contrary, they argue that mortality is not only negotiable but even reversible; as architects, they want to create spaces in which death is impossible.

“They have not been shy about stating this goal. You don’t exactly have to twist their arms to get them to say, in the words of the catalog for their 1997 Guggenheim retrospective, ‘We have decided not to die.’ Their commitment to this project has led them to abandon conventional poetry and painting for a thoroughly unconventional architecture, for example the in-progress Bioscleave House in East Hampton and the Site of Reversible Destiny, a park in Gifu Prefecture, Japan. In an interview with the *Voice*, Gins and Arakawa reveal that they have recently been hired to do a master plan for a 200-hectare island off that country’s coast, and have submitted a proposal to the City of New York for a Museum of the Living Body.

“People often say that they do not understand this project. What they really mean is that they do not believe it. They do not accept the basic premise that they do not have to die. There’s also the assumption that Gins and Arakawa do not believe it either. Surely, when they say things like ‘Death is old-fashioned,’ they must be speaking metaphorically; they must mean something more complicated than what they appear to be saying, which the rest of us do not get.

“In fact, nothing could be more straightforward than the project to which, decades ago, Gins and Arakawa gave the name ‘reversible destiny.’ Or, in a sense, more typical. Isn’t most architecture about preserving life? Architects do not build with the idea that their buildings will be destroyed in terrorist attacks; they design for living. And is eternal life really such an unusual thing for art to promise? Isn’t that, in fact, one of the most traditional values of art? (Certainly that’s the Hollywood theory of what artists are supposed to do—preserving life is Shakespeare’s job in *Shakespeare in Love*, Beethoven’s in *Immortal Beloved* – or am I confusing that with the *Dracula* film in which Gary Oldman also appeared?)

“The difference is that the extension of life that art usually offers is metaphorical life, afterlife, second reality. Gins and Arakawa are much more direct – and for that reason, apparently, much more difficult to understand. They don’t mystify anything. They’re not some kind of religious cult in disguise; they don’t use art as a substitute for having a spiritual life. They’re interested in biological life.

“‘The art world seems to us to be a conservative place compared to what’s coming at us from other fields,’ Gins says. She cites stem-cell biologist Stanley Shostak, at the University of Pittsburgh, whose 2002 book *Becoming Immortal* suggests (among other things) intervening in the immune system of pre-adolescents so that their bodies will be fit for space travel. Arakawa says that Shostak’s research will help lead people ‘as quickly as possible to a state of being transhuman.’

“That’s why it’s misleading, although clever, for art critic Arthur Danto to engage with their work by adapting Pascal’s ‘wager’ argument: ‘I have nothing to lose by going along with you. Should you turn out to be right about reversible destiny, that will be great for me, and if you are not, then I will suffer no worse a fate than would have otherwise befallen me.’ Gins and Arakawa are not running that kind of gambling house; they don’t act like deities who require worship and belief. Unlike a religion, their project can succeed regardless of whether they have a band of followers who believe them; it requires other forms of support, such as ‘enormous sums of money.’

“The rest of us have been a little shy in responding to the claims of this work. We tend to gravitate toward one of two weak readings: either (1) reversible destiny is a reaction against forces in our culture that can be understood, metaphorically or literally, as deathly (e.g., environmental policies that will eventually render the planet uninhabitable); or else (2) by questioning the life-narrative that terminates in inevitable death, Gins and Arakawa are, in effect, creating a wider range of imaginable possibilities. The first reading is based on the familiar premise of Shakespeare’s sonnets: that art preserves some kind of life-energy, and therefore renders both the artist and the model immortal. In the tradition of American poetics following Whitman, the latter reading puts value on possibility itself, rather than on the specific possibility of not dying. Gins and Arakawa recognize the prevalence of these readings, understand that they are motivated by fear, and somewhat reluctantly authorize them as ‘a less radical way, but for some people, we are given to understand, a less terrifying and therefore more inviting way’ into the work.

“*Architectural Body* also makes some provisions for readers like me, whose first response to anything is to laugh at it.

“ANGELA: *That’s hilarious. Your house is shorter than its shrubbery.*

ARAKAWA: *[Laughs] I myself find that surprising. Shall we take a walk around it?*

“This exchange comes from one of *Architectural Body*’s most charming episodes, an extended dialogue in which Gins and Arakawa guide two prospective residents, Angela and Robert, around a house. The building is low because it’s turned to the ‘snail setting,’ at which its surfaces adhere closely to the bodies of its inhabitants, but it later develops that the house can be modified, by means of projecting spines, into a ‘close-to-snail setting’ and a more conventional ‘roomy setting.’ At first, Angela and Robert see nothing that looks like a house; then, when they understand what it is that they are supposed to be looking at, which they take to be a ‘low pile of junk,’ they’re incredulous; when they finally enter the house, they are able to do so only in a playful spirit, guided by Arakawa’s laugh. (Gins and Arakawa do have a sense of humor. One of their privileged antecedents is *Don Quixote*: “Why not build to your own specifications the windmills at which you wish to tilt?” Another is Marcel Duchamp, whom they associate with Frankenstein, ‘doctor and monster in one.’)

“The tone gradually shifts, as Angela and Robert explore the house and start to ask more practical questions (‘Where do people sleep? Or take showers? What about cooking?’). By the end of the chapter, they have been completely converted, revising not only their notions of what a house is and how a person should inhabit one, but also their sense of comfort. In this unfamiliar environment, Angela finds herself acting in a way that’s inappropriately comfortable: ‘What a cozy spot. If you don’t mind, I think I will curl up right here and take a nap.’

“Although their conception of writing books may not be as unfamiliar as their conception of building – *Architectural Body* offers itself up for inspection as an object that appears to be a book – Gins and Arakawa are nonetheless using the book format to perform a related series of explorations. Everything seems to be up for grabs: the cover design, the dedication (‘To transhumans’), even the conventions for handling the book. The chapter ‘Critical Holder’ proposes a set of reading exercises in which the volume and shape of the page alter with each sentence: ‘Now expand [the] page to fit on an 8 x 11 sheet of paper.... Scale the image you are holding up to the height of the tallest tree you can imagine.... Instead, scale the page up to the height of the room you are in. That’s it then. The top line rests on the ceiling and the bottom rests on the floor.’

“Gins and Arakawa never lose sight of their goal. Estranging the act of reading is not conceived as a substitute for reversible destiny, as though a state of critical awareness could stand in for not dying, but registers a more fundamental disruption. Once you give up on the idea that death is inevitable, it’s difficult to take anything for granted.”

# OPERATIVE CRITIQUES (MAY DAY)

[...]

*Harvard Design Magazine* Mixes Things Up – The current issue of *HDM* (Spring-Summer 2005) is a polyglot affair with mixed reports on the state of urban planning, including reasoned, versus scorching critiques of present urban planning initiatives in New York in the form of the Far West Side (including the notorious stadium), and the Brooklyn waterfront (with its inevitable and unenviable gentrification) – all pointing to the main problem; that is, urban planning as rubber stamp for public-private development schemes (with the public paying for the infrastructural upgrades, a practice, and pastiche, notably advocated by Jeffrey Sachs in his recent apologia for neo-liberal capitalism, *The End of Poverty*).

Apparently, the public (meaning governmental agencies, using bonds, tax dollars, and tax incentives, a.k.a. rebates and/or abatements) should fund “systems” best epitomized as power grids, roads, transport, and – perhaps – everything most costly, leaving the rest to the “market”, or private funding mechanisms (venture capital).

In New York, Bloomberg and Doctoroff seem to think that the public should also underwrite any risk associated with the private deployment of new, unnecessary office space and the ludicrously expensive sporting facilities associated with the 2012 Olympic Bid.

Included in *HDM* is a very curious essay by Reinhold Martin (editor of *Grey Room* and Columbia University School of Architecture don) regarding the vicissitudes of theory in the post-theory or post-critical phase architecture now seems hopelessly mired in. Most curious of all is Martin’s dissing of anything resembling or associated with “affectivity” and a rhetorical double-bind vis-à-vis “architectural autonomy” (or formalism) introduced by way of his reading of conceptual terrain otherwise known as “the Real”, a terrain charted in post-Marxist works from Zupančič to Žižek to Badiou ...

That said, Martin does justice (somewhat sardonically) to the current crop of non-sense passing under the sign of spurious, purely “syntactical” (read, *morphological*) operations (plus pragmatism or neo-realism), or architectural design devoid of any signified (any semantic content whatsoever), or the legacy of 1990s accommodationist urbanism typified by MoMA’s “Groundswell” exhibition. Martin’s memorable diatribe weighs in, after all, on the necessity of restoring criticality within the nihilistic ravages of present-day architectural hubris. With nods toward Tafuri’s ghost, and the appropriate noises apropos of useless reifications of “operative criticism”, Martin’s critique suggests (perhaps against his own intentions) that it is only a matter of time before the bugaboo of “affectivity” is seen by unrepentant modernists (and neo-modernists alike) as the necessary “Way Out” of the dialectical stalemate outlined above, a “Way Out” best pictured by the salient and numinous intersection of the contingent and the transcendent axes in architectural representation itself (part and parcel of structuralist readings, and Marxist and neo-Marxist readings especially).

Thus, the spectral nature of architecture’s interiority returns in raw, unbridled form in the current crop of Eisenman books and exhibitions, but most of all in the Cultural Center for Santiago de Compostela and the Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe, in Berlin (scheduled to open in May 2005), two projects unassimilable to the current state of things architectural and architectural criticism *without affect*.

Immodernity, then, “calls” from the wings ... If it calls through “affectivity”, and if it now acts as catalyst for the production of new works of art, cinema, literature and what-have-you, why is “it” all but taboo within the late-capitalist (late-modernist) machinations of architecture per se? Or, more critically, why is the architectural avant-garde all but dead and buried?

GK (May 2005)

[...]

**NOTES / ETC.**

The operative critiques here include: Susan Fainstein, “The Return of Urban Renewal: Dan Doctoroff’s Grand Plans for New York City”, pp. 9-14; Robert D. Yaro, “Plans for Manhattan’s Far West Side: A Portent of New Urban Redevelopment”, pp. 15-19; and Reinhold Martin, “Critical of What?: Toward a Utopian Realism”, pp. 104-109 / The *HDM* issue in question (Spring-Summer 2005) is entitled “Urban Planning Now: What Works, What Doesn’t”

...

Of so-called historical interest, then, is Guy Debord’s 1967 book *Society of the Spectacle* (as well as Debord’s 1973 film *Society of the Spectacle*). What Debord seems to get wrong, at that point along the way at least, is that “irreversible time” (what he identifies as the specific “nature”, or anti-nature, of capitalist production and spectacular forms of urban design, in particular) is not historical in quite the way he suggests, nor is it what needs to be re-appropriated or taken back by revolutionary praxis. Instead, it would seem that another type of time is at stake, a time that is buried inside of so-called irreversible (teleological) time – or, that which has been termed “eschatological time” by Walter Benjamin and others of a more poetic and perhaps apocalyptic persuasion (such as Proust, or Simone Weil, the latter a.k.a. “the categorical imperative in skirts”). For this reason, arguably, Tafuri abandoned his critique of architectural, utopian modernism and de-camped for the curiously synchronic plenitude (abundance) of Mannerist architectures of the late-16th and early-17th centuries, most especially the dark-somatic work of Giulio Romano.

See Alenka Zupančič for post-Žižek, post-Badiou readings of the imperative of present-day philosophy. In particular, see *Ethics of the Real* (London: Verso, 2000) ...

[...]

PROLEGOMENA TO “A PHILOSOPHY OF THE REAL”

## “IMMODERNITY” ITSELF (AGAIN & ALWAYS)

[...]

“The medium must disappear in what we see, in the absolute that shows itself resplendent in it.”(1) – Giorgio Agamben (2004)

“The invisible gives relief to the visible as one gives a title and a fief [territory] – in order to ennoble. From this the first paradox of perspective must be considered before every painting: the visible increases in direct proportion to the invisible. The more the invisible is increased, the more the visible is deepened.”(2) – Jean-Luc Marion (2004)

“The accomplishing of the infinite purpose consists therefore in sublating the illusion that it has not yet been accomplished.”(3) – G.W.F. Hegel

[...]

### NEW YORK, NEW YORK, NEW YORK

Met Umberto Eco at a signing for *The History of Beauty* and *The Mysterious Flame of Queen Loana* and told him that my favorite book of his remains the slight and magisterial *Art and Beauty in the Middle Ages*. He replied that he wrote it at the age of 26 (c.1958) sitting in a military barracks (which sounds about right). It remains in print from Yale University Press after all these years. Asked as well about the central concept of entelechy (or how things arrive out of a greater whole), and how old it was. He said it goes back to Aristotle. I then asked if it was present in present-times. He thought for a moment and said, “No”. I pointed out that it was present in Goethe and he said that it comes and goes through out history when the idea of the organic returns. I asked if it was present in phenomenology and he said he did not think so (though I disagree).

Works of art + architecture (but most especially music + cinema) create (carve out) unique, univocal spaces – new non-Einsteinian Time-Space arrives out of/within Einsteinian time-space. This topology of thought (aural, auratic, figurative, formal, gestural, etc.) is the time-signature of the artwork (and of the real Real, often mistaken as the irreal). Architecture is unique insofar as it also has (retains) the potential to carve out unique environments, actually existing alternatives to normative, authorized time-space (and to hegemonic time-space), such that its long-contested (and long-anticipated) autonomy spells out an architecture (*architectonic*) of sublime affects by way of effects (such that pure and/or raw assemblages might attain and obtain under more promising ‘skies’).

That architecture and works of art do not *fall from the sky*, but instead move the sky (contain it as space) as much as they move the earth (re-locate it, undermine it) is the open secret (the secret that there is no secret). The gift Nietzsche gave remains in play today – that is, that dialectical games are inborn(e), carried within the formal logic of cultural and conceptual systems (and carried, mightily, within the Eternal Return); systems purely invented as often as purely given. And, thus, the game today is to move through the hoped for last (looped) acts of demolition, through the broken field of lapsed and spent signifiers and off the map of pseudo-enchanted nihilism, to an inspired monism (Walter Benjamin’s cosmogonic vision) implicit in the late-modern signifier “Immodernity”, or that thing (ghostly and spectral) traceable to the origins of Modernity proper (and its ontological irruption) in the Renaissance. This wholly “other” time-space is eschatological, versus teleological, and stands on its head all and any forms of utopian or “projective” projects.

Yet the origin of this “thing” (non-thing), Immodernity Itself (viz., what it means to be modern, or what it means to be historical), is not to be found in the re-classicizing poses of the High Renaissance typified by idealized (and sinister) perspectival space. It is to be found, instead, in what Umberto Eco has called the “hollowed out” spaces (imaginary space-time signatures) of Mannerism, where Eternity and Infinity are fused into one thing (in a mystical wedding of heaven and earth, as Meyrink prophesized after Nietzsche); that is, a landscape of putatively “ominous” or “portentous” signifiers brought through time and space to the present moment, by way of Michelangelo,

Caravaggio, Velázquez, El Greco, Poussin, the early and effeminate Picasso (after Klimt, Kokoschka, et al.), grossly ironicized in Dada and Surrealism, secreted within the “dance” between Cartier-Bresson and Giacometti, arrogantly lost in High Modernism (with few exceptions) and then re-found in the ravages of 1960s art + architecture (e.g., Smithson, Matta-Clark), re-formulated yet again with rigour in the studious architectures of Rossi, Hejduk, Eisenman, and Raimund Abraham in the 1970s, all but lost in the vacuous 1980s, and revived timidly in the high-flying 1990s in *fauve* and “cool”/weak architectures (a term Solà-Morales would regret today were he still around to witness its banalization).

Yet, miraculously, such a thing (Immodernity as Transcendence in Immanence) is to be found moving today (again and always) in advanced cinema, music, photography, literature, and architecture, strangely and ineluctably, as a peculiar Anti-Capitalist Sublime (a “communism beyond communism”, as Blanchot might have called it), as a form of new formalism, yet also a philosophically inflected and topologically rich system of inversions, implosions, reversals, incisions, indiscretions, insurrections, and heresies. Post-criticism, then, opens onto Philosophy ...

It is to this spirit that architecture (re)turns, always and in all ways, even as it turns in its grave. It is to this spirit that all architectures that mean anything at all aspire. It is also for this reason that the architecture of the tomb sings the most compelling song of all – a divine siren song (not swan song). Therefore, the question remains, till the bitter end, “*Who comes after the subject?*”

[...]

GK (June 2005)

### PREVIOUSLY ENSCRIBED DATA / NOTES

QUESTIONS(?) – Where?, when?, how? But never who? or why? – The work of art (fire), the aesthetic act (literature, architecture, painting, music, cinema), requires going inside of things (and time) and hollowing such things out, carving up this elemental space (against space) to find (create) and release (drive out) the “spirit-animals” dwelling therein ... “*To drive the cold winter away*” ... Intentionality is implicated, after all ... “It is a valuable notion because it ‘maintains the empirical and the transcendental within a powerfully structured relation.’ This has consequences for both: experience cannot be wholly converted into knowledge, while the transcendental cannot be [re]localized in consciousness or ‘natural reality.’ The transcendental will abide, rather, ‘in the emergence of a network of relations that neither unite nor identify but maintain what is in relation at a distance, and make of this distance recaptured as form of alterity, a new power of determination.’ ... Thus, *thus far*, the sign of another Time (an unreal Time) inside of time ... Or, regarding Blanchot’s “Outside” (“Neutral”) vis-à-vis Husserl’s concept of intentionality, in Kevin Hart, *The Dark Gaze* (2004), p. 158 / Who comes after the subject, then, is never in question ... “This *who*” (question mark always implicit) is a new, elemental and intentional communism ... Simone Weil: “We have to accomplish the possible in order to be able to seize upon the impossible.” (Cited in *ibid.*, p. 156) ... To paraphrase Žižek, then: “To do justice to (to accomplish) this, to seize the revolutionary moment in all things and all times, is paradoxically to do nothing, but instead to prepare the way for the irruption of the Unreal (a.k.a. the ‘Real’).”

NEXT TO NOTHING – The Outside/La Présence – If silence is a type of space, music carves out of that space a second space, an aural landscape or aural architecture ... When you listen carefully to music, its inflections and tonalities establish a threshold that is pure phenomena (the phenomenological reduction par excellence), and a type of ceiling (sky) ... Thought Itself is similar ... There is anterior thought, or “that That” (*That which comes*) before thought ... “It” resembles words (and for this reason, some say, words precede thoughts) ... To carve within space another space (or to sculpt time, as Tarkovsky characterized his cinematic work) is to create or reveal another time, yet another, perhaps anterior “sky” (Blanchot/Mallarmé’s *ciel antérieure*) ... Thus, too, there is endless circular talk asking, “*Who comes after the subject?*” ... Is not the answer, the Nietzschean artist-as-work-of-art, the so-called Dionysian artist (child of “Ariadne” and “Dionysus”)? ... Žižek writes (in *Iraq: The Borrowed Kettle*, 2004) of the necessity of “doing nothing” today, a “Nothing” that prepares the way for true revolutionary activity ... Such a nominal “nothing” irks both left and right, naturally, and suggests that this “nothing” has next to nothing to do with politics per se ... (05/14/05) ... “Poetic imagination distances itself from reality in order to join this very movement of self-distancing to this reality, to make inside what is, that which is not, and take that as its principle, as absence that makes presence desirable, irreality that allows the poet to possess the real, to have a ‘productive knowledge’ of it.” – Maurice Blanchot, on the poetry of René Char, in *The Work of Fire* (1948); cited in Hart, *The Dark Gaze*, pp.

99-100 ...

TIME ITSELF – The Outside – “To live the abolition of time, to live this movement, rapid as ‘lightning,’ by which two instants, infinitely separated, come (*little by little although immediately*) to encounter each other, joining like two presences that, through the metamorphosis of desire, could identify each other, is to travel the entire extent of the reality of time, and by traveling it, to experience time as space and empty space, that is to say, free of the events that always ordinarily fill it. Pure time, without events, moving vacancy, agitated distance, interior space in the process of becoming, where the ecstasies of time spread out in fascinating simultaneity – what is all that, then? It is the very time of narrative, the time that is not *outside* (hors) time, but that is experienced as actually *outside* (dehors), in space, that imaginary space where art finds and arranges its resources.” Maurice Blanchot, “The Experience of Proust”, pp. 11-24, in *The Book to Come*, trans. Charlotte Mandell (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2003), p. 13 ...

YES / AMEN – Ariadne Calling – “Nietzschean distance maintains, to be sure, a relation with the divine, but within onto-theology, on the basis of equivalence. Thus it reinforces the metaphysical idolatry where ‘God’ is defined as a state of the will to power. Within that grade-related function, the ‘feeling of distance,’ far from taking its distance from the metaphysical face of the divine elaborated (and presupposed) by the will to power, radically ignores the distance of God. The Nietzschean distance intervenes only to censure the distance of God, or more, to obliterate it, within the evidence of the text, by substituting itself for it.” – Jean-Luc Marion, “The Collapse of the Idols and Confrontation with the Divine: Nietzsche”, in *The Idol and Distance*, trans. Thomas A. Carlson (New York: Fordham, 2001), p. 77 / “It was necessary that Nietzsche collapse into the divine in order that he might hear his voice say in concert with Dionysus the *Yes* that creates a world at the very heart of nihilism.” *Ibid.*, p. 55. / “Ariadne becomes the place for meeting with Dionysus, a place that only *I*, that is Nietzsche, knows.... Why does Nietzsche not proclaim Ariadne, whom he nonetheless knows? Perhaps because he knows her too well.” *Ibid.*, p. 50. / “Light without shadow allows the world to freeze, or to dissolve – it doesn’t matter which, precisely because a world demands a perspective. Only shadow establishes relief, delimits forms, puts things in place. The true world, now rejected, will project that shadow further along the bias of its grim and low-angled light.” *Ibid.*, p. 39.

RAIMUND ABRAHAM – Telluric Visions – “Abraham returns us to the elemental in more ways than one; not only to the elemental as Gottfried Semper would have understood it; that is, to the universally mythic but material elements of the built process – the primordial telluric and woven compounds of earthwork, hearth, wall and roof – but also to the elemental as a conscious recognition of omnipotent cosmic forces.” / “The theme of resurrection is always implicit in Abraham’s work if only because the physical and temporal continuity of the earth has invariably been an essential part of his architectural imagery.” Kenneth Frampton, “Fragmentary Notes”, pp. 7-11, in Raimund Abraham, *Raimund Abraham Unbuilt* (Bozen: Forum AR/GE Kunst, 1986) – Exhibition catalogue (October 10 through 30, 1986) ...

THE PRESENT-PRESENT – Architecture’s Other – See *Lotus 123* (February 2005), entitled “Merzarchitektur”, including “Neo-Merz 1992-2007” – “Neo-Merz 1992-2007” includes projects by Eisenman, Holl, OMA, Ito, FOA et al., regarding the “*Gesamtkunstwerk*” (after Wagner) – See PE’s essay “*Gesamtkunstwerk* as Open System” (c.2002), pp. 22-27 – “The new and irresistible fascination of the incomplete, with its origins somewhere in the Romantic tradition, certainly does not fit into the twentieth-century formulation, or rather label, of the ‘work in progress.’ It seems instead to be linked to the allure of what cannot be finished, of what is inevitably and intrinsically doomed to the paradoxical apotheosis of failure [or the so-called ‘open’, provisional work].” Pierluigi Nicolini, “Merzbau”, pp. 8-17, *ibid.*: p. 13 / That such (the morphological spirit of contemporary works of architecture) suggests a “return” to architecture’s interiority is also played out in the mostly-(intro)retrospective Eisenman exhibition at the MAK (Vienna), “Barefoot on White-Hot Walls” ... “Over the last thirty years Peter Eisenman’s architecture has consistently relied on some form of generative process, at times highly idiosyncratic, to arrive at architectural form. Although Eisenman deploys morphing techniques in some of his recent projects, it is significant that he is motivated by the desire to uncover a phenomenology of interiority and autonomy within the discipline of architecture by inscribing his own theoretical work within the same tradition in order to disclose the nature of the autonomy that he so wishes to perpetuate. The move is not without a degree of paradoxical relation to its subject matter. Correspondingly, he is consciously involved in the chain of interpretation that includes dialogical [diagrammatical] relations with certain architects from history [e.g., Terragni]. Hence, his work can be characterized as a genetic hermeneutics of architecture. In contrast to genetic systems, a genetic hermeneutics is a generative modality based principally on the interpretation of the sense of interiority embedded within a series or tradition. By

subsequently re-investing the results of its interpretation back into structure, it attempts to maintain and further propagate the unfolding of the series.” Karl Chu, “Archaeology of the Future”, pp. 122-131, in *Barefoot on White-Hot Walls* (Ostfildern-Ruit: Hatje Cantz, 2004), pp. 126-27; an essay previously published as “Metaphysics of Genetic Architecture and Computation”, *Perspecta* 35 (2004) – The MAK exhibition (December 15, 2004-May 22, 2005) was curated by Tulga Beyerle, Emmanuel Petit and Cynthia Davidson – See also, Pier Vittorio Aureli, “Mannerism, or the ‘Manner’ at the Time of Eisenman”, pp. 66-74, *ibid.* – Key projects include: House IV (1971); House VI (1972-75); La Villette (1986); Wexner Center (1983-89); Haus Immendorf (1993); City of Culture of Galicia (1999-2007?); Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe, Berlin (1997-2005) ...

MICHELANGELO MERISI DA CARAVAGGIO – So-called Realism – Nicola Spinosa, et al., *Caravaggio: The Final Years* (Naples: Electa, 2004) – “This is not a creative exhibition; its aim is simply to unite as many as possible of the late works the attributions of which are generally accepted, and it is spectacularly successful in gathering together sixteen of these. It is unusually well suited to the dungeon-like spaces of the National Gallery, where the stark and austere display of comparatively few paintings, each with room to breathe, against dark walls, free from glare, and uncluttered by information, creates an impressively sombre and meditative atmosphere.” Helen Langdon, “Confessions from the Interior”, *Times Literary Supplement* (April 29, 2005): p. 18 – Exhibition catalogue: National Gallery, London (February 23-May 22, 2005); Museo di Capodimonte, Naples (October 23, 2004-January 23, 2005) / LAPSED (K)NIGHT – Regarding what (which late paintings) did not make it to London from Naples, and what (which late paintings) did not make it to Naples from Malta, see Ingrid D. Rowland, “The Battle of Light with Darkness”, *New York Review of Books* (May 12, 2005): pp. 10-13 / Jonathan Harr, *The Lost Painting: The Search for a Caravaggio Masterpiece* (New York: Random House, 2005) / Andrea Bayer, Mina Gregori, eds., *Painters of Reality: The Legacy of Leonardo and Caravaggio in Lombardy* (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2004) / Karen Liebreich, *Fallen Order: Intrigue, Heresy, and Scandal in the Rome of Galileo and Caravaggio* (New York: Grove Press, 2004) / LASTLY – Regarding the legacy of Caravaggio’s paintings in Malta, see M.J. Zerafa, *Caravaggio Diaries: Extracts from Fr. Marius Zerafa’s Diaries*, ed. and transcribed Catherine Sinclair Galea (Malta: Grimand, 2004) ...

PIERO DELLA FRANCESCA – Irrealism – “As faith in perspective’s capacity to convey the truth erodes, reaction against its partisan rule spreads wider. Its hegemony over vision has been linked to various other kinds of dominion and power, hence the increasing resort to terms such as ‘the domain of vision,’ ‘the empire of the gaze,’ and ‘scopic regime,’ drawing politically charged metaphors into the vocabulary used to describe the very thing that is accused of being politically charged. But how do we tell whether this verbal branding is justified? Could it be another episode of iconoclasm?” / “Perspective has for ages been regarded as deceitful. What is so remarkable about the twentieth-century revision of this idea, as developed in German and French criticism, is the reversal of an earlier understanding of its shortcomings. In the eyes of Renaissance commentators, perspective was a deception because it distorted true measure [hence axonometric drawing]; because, that is, it departed from the inalienable truths of Euclidean geometry. In the eyes of many of its twentieth-century detractors perspective is suspect because it imposes Euclid on the way we see.” – Robin Evans, “Piero’s Heads”, pp. 122-177, in *The Projective Cast: Architecture and Its Three Geometries* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2000), p. 78 ...

BRUNELLESCHI – Surface Affects – Writing “pure” space (Modernity *avant la lettre*): Brunelleschi “l’artiste parvient dans cette dialectique subtile à une représentation absolue de l’espace sur le plan, grâce à l’identification des valeurs linéaires et chromatiques; ici l’élément linéaire est épuré de la qualité matérielle du tracé, tout comme l’élément chromatique est épuré de la qualité matérielle de la surface.” ... “La fonction de support se traduit en un équilibre des masses de plein et de vide ...” ... The arcades of the Loggia degli Innocenti (1419-26) “est la suprême manifestation formelle de l’infini spatial.” ... “Et peut-être est-ce la source ‘intellectuelle’ de cette lumière qui, chez Piero della Francesca, n’est plus physique mais spatiale?” – Giulio Carlo Argan, “L’architecture de Brunelleschi et les origines de la théorie perspective au XVe Siècle”, pp. 9-52, trans. Jean-Jacques Le Quilleuc, Marc Perelman, in Giulio Carlo Argan, Rudolf Wittkower, *Perspective et histoire au Quattrocento* (suivi de “La question de la perspective 1960-1968” par Marisa Dalai Emiliani) (Montreuil: Les Éditions de la Passion, 1990), pp. 30-32 ...

DREAM – “Nový Svět” – For whatever reason I’m in the communist-era Czechoslovakia, in glorious Prague (Praha) ... I’m with someone else, at some sort of station where people go to look for work ... My friend has found out how to access “the other side”, where all the best work opportunities are, and which is modern and for the privileged ... We wait in front of an elevator-type door, for it to open, and to dash through, as the fortunate on the other side come through, our way, exiting ... My colleague quickly slips through ... He has a slip of paper in hand

that must be notarized in order for him to go to the city for work ... I'm left on the other side of the door, after his departure ... I have a slip of un-notarized paper ... I'm (again) on the wrong side for some reason ... A little, hunched-over, old lady comes by to inquire ... "Oh, I see", she says ... "I can help you." ... She then disappears ... I don't know where to ... Next, I'm in an old street in Prague that I recognize but it is strewn with rubble; people are just hanging out, doing nothing ... I'm near a subway stop I recognize but it's pre-Velvet Revolution (pre-1989) *disgracieux* ... I follow signs toward a side street and enter ... There are shops along the right side of the alley-like street (a street not unlike the charming Nový Svět in Malá Strana, which does not have shops but houses, on one side, and a high wall, on the opposite side, beyond which lies a park) ... I see a fortune-teller's shop and think, "Ah, that's where she went" ... Instead of entering the fortune-teller's shop, I enter the small shop next door that opens up into an interior world of expressionist, fun-house effects, a distorted mirror-world ... As I walk deeper into the interior (which mirrors the narrow passage of the twisting street outside of the shop) the facades become less and less convincing and it is obvious that the whole thing is a stage set and/or prop of some sort ... Jazzy music is coming from the far end of the passage, but I turn around and exit, noting that the decorative walls have become mere scrawls (as if quickly drawn by children) ... I go back into the city and, then, suddenly, I'm back at the workers' queuing station where everything began ... I have a notarized slip of paper apparently, because I board an old, open-sided, rusting railroad car with others to ride to the train station where pristine, modern rail cars are waiting to take people to work in the better, privileged portion of the city ... I see a sign that says 35 Czech koruna (about \$1.00 US) is required for passage ... I stop ... I realize I don't have the fare with me and turn around to return to the station where the dream began, and ends ... (12/25/03) ...

REVERSING THE GAZE / THOMAS STRUTH – "Audience" – "Audience" is "a new series of photographs taken by the artist at the Galleria dell'Accademia in Florence.... In his new body of photographic work, Struth uses his signature position of precise observation to shift his perspective, providing an epic and panoramic portrait of the audience in relation to art.... 'Audience I-III' were presented in November 2004 at the Galleria dell'Accademia in Florence in a special exhibition in which the contemporary meets the classical. The show, titled *Forms for the David*, was curated by Bruno Cora on the occasion of the quincentenary of Michelangelo's *David* and include[d] works by Struth, Kounellis, Fabro, Baselitz, and Morris. As Struth has long been interested in photographing the art viewing public [or, 'reversing the gaze'] as subject matter [or 'subject-object-subject matter'], this historic occasion of the 500th anniversary of a Renaissance masterwork provided him with the perfect site: that of one of the most recognized sculptures in the world by which the audience is so clearly dazzled that they can be photographed without the photographer being noticed." (Press Release, Marian Goodman Gallery, Spring 2005) ...

LITERARY AFFECTS 2005 – "K" – Regarding Kafka, and a spate of new exegetical titles, see Frederick Crews, "Kafka Up Close", *New York Review of Books* (February 10, 2005), pp. 4-7, with special attention to Roberto Calasso's *K* (New York: Knopf, 2005) – "Calasso's habit is to pass lightly over controversies and to delve directly into an issue so huge and fundamental that specialists rarely perceive it at all. This is the question of how experience feels to people – and what they are accordingly incapable of feeling – when they reside within one or another metaphysical mindset [prison-house], whether archaic-demonic, polytheistic, monotheistic, or rationalist-materialist." And, "In one way or another, all of Calasso's writings have waged a guerrilla war against Western logos. He has never forgiven Plato for disparaging Homer's world of luminous amoral fatality, and he regards theology as a decadent form of reflection, one that already at its origin was headed downhill toward the modern wasteland of denatured 'facts', algorithms, and the banalities of 'public opinion'. This is why he has been drawn to Kafka, whose own philosophical clock, Calasso suspects, has been turned all the way back to animism, before a sense of the undifferentiated power of the cosmos was precipitated into tales about gods and demons."

ARCHITECTURAL "ETERNITY" – Architectural Sweet Nothings – "Eternity can be read in a composition of serene, solid, precisely inserted volumes, *a priori* since long ago, and forever." Jean Nouvel (regarding Nouvel's series of "pavilions" at Expo 2002, Murten-Morat, Switzerland), in *El Croquis* 112/113, "Jean Nouvel 1994-2002" (Madrid: El Croquis, 2002): p. 217 ...

CENTRAL PARK / MAY-JUNE 2005 – The Park – I walked home through The Park at dusk (twilight), truly an amazing bit of urban territory because it is rooted in the earth and you can smell it ... And yet it is completely contrived ... Some of the trees are over 100 years old now ... The illuminated meadows glowed through the darkening trees, hazy and apparitional landscape-architectural "things" ... Walked toward the Promenade, which you cannot see until you align yourself with it since it is hidden in the otherwise naturalistic swirl of the pathways, lawns, irregular plantings, topography, boulder fields ... Read a letter sitting on a bench in the Promenade below a

statue of God knows who, in the lamplight ... There was no bench below Sir Walter Scott ... Walked toward the belvedere and Bethesda Fountain, passing the terminus of Olmsted's classicizing (Romantic-Classical) insertion (the assertive *allée*) turning right and re-entering the swirl of it all, passing through a boulder field to the Boat House, diners sitting on the terrace, haunting the interior, and then to 77th Street and Fifth, and out into the mostly unrelenting grid of the City ... Was asked two days later about the "cotton" (from Poplar trees) wafting about in the air high above 57th and Sixth Avenue, soaring against the skyscrapers, drawn out of the park by the wind ... / VISUAL CULTURE – Rue 57 (57th & 6th), where it's impossible to hold a conversation; that is, a barking-mad Manhattan bistro ... Yet, there's décor that is sublime, in its own manner ... Blood-red lights underlight the bar, illumine the "vitrines" of flora (vases with plant du jour) ... Today Kalmia (Mountain Laurel) ... It is June, yet the buds are not open (remain fast-closed) ... Blonde, bare-midriff barmaid delivers Spanish red wine ... Sushi bar at breakneck speed ... Clamorous, intense clientele (eyewash/visual culture) yell into one another's ear ... At dusk I enter The Park, passing The Pond (tired of Landscape Urbanism, here the Lindens actually have a fragrance) ... Sitting on a boulder, writing this ... Illuminated from within and without by Spanish wine ("with castles") ... Temperature drops within the park (it's no great mystery) ... Endless paths, the spiraling of the Eternal Return (secreted/drawn within the Olmsted/Vaux plan) ... Life as we know it passes in the interstices of the dialectical machinery of thought (happens to us as we are making and unmaking plans) ... "Help save the American Elms. Please keep out." (Yes, we are a danger to the Real) ... Three tourists stroll ahead ... One turns, startled, and apologetically explains as I pass, "I saw a dark figure in the park, a girl behind us!" I keep walking, turning to respond: "A dark figure in the park, that's scary" (in my very best masculine vampyrish voice) ... Exiting at 72nd Street, temperature rising, I find that by way of a secret loop in Olmsted's plan I am on the West Side and not the East Side ... I take the opportunity to duck into Lincoln Center box office and see what's on offer, stroll by Lincoln Plaza cinema, and re-cross The Park at 9:30 p.m., looking for and missing the moebius loop that might take me somewhere else altogether ...

THE ANGEL – Man-Angel – "The only angel that appears at the windows of the Ideal is the reflection of the approaching seeker." – Yves Bonnefoy on Mallarmé, "Baudelaire Speaks to Mallarmé", in *The Act and the Place of Poetry: Selected Essays* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1989), p. 58. From Bonnefoy's lecture presented in Geneva in 1967 ("L'art et la sacré") / "Man-Angel" (c.1996): "Make two wings out of white tulle fabric ..., also leather straps for attaching these wings on your back and fixing them in place. After this, having stayed alone in your room ..., you should put on the wings, and sit completely without anything to do and in silence for five to ten minutes, after which you should turn to your usual endeavours without leaving the room.... After two to three weeks of daily procedures, the effect of the white wings will begin to manifest itself with greater and greater force." Ilya/Emilia Kabakov, *The Utopian City and Other Projects* (Bielefeld: Kerber Verlag, 2004), pp. 339-340 – Exhibition catalogue: Kunsthalle Bielefeld (September 12-November 19, 2004); Kunsthaus Zug (February 27-June 5, 2005); Albion Gallery, London (October 13-December 23, 2005) ...

TIME-SPACE – "Nostalgia" – "Psychic space should not be imagined as a solitary confinement.... Initially this is the space of the play between the child and the mother. Cultural experience is to be located there, and it begins with creative living first manifested in play. Culture has the potential of becoming a space for individual play and creativity, and not merely an oppressive homogenizing force; far from limiting individual play, it guarantees it space. Culture is not foreign to human nature but integral to it; after all, culture provides a context where relationships do not always develop by continuity but by contiguity. Perhaps what is most missed during historical cataclysms and exile is not the past and the homeland exactly, but rather this potential space of cultural experience that one has shared with one's friends and compatriots that is based neither on nation nor religion but on elective affinities." – Svetlana Boym, "Reflective Nostalgia", in *The Future of Nostalgia* (New York: Basic Books, 2001), p. 53 ...

THE IMPOSSIBLE-POSSIBLE – Žižek/Lacan/Hegel – "The 'reconciliation' proper to synthesis is not a surpassing or suspension (whether it be 'dialectical') of scission on some higher plane, but a retroactive reversal which means that *there never was* any scission to begin with – 'synthesis' *retroactively annuls* this scission.... One does not accomplish the end by attaining it, but by proving that one has already attained it, even when the way to its realization is hidden from view. While advancing, one was not yet there, but all of a sudden, one has been there all along – 'too soon' changes suddenly into 'too late' without detecting the exact moment of their transformation. The whole affair thus has the structure of the missed encounter: along the way, the truth, which we have not yet attained, pushes us forward like a phantom [the phantasmatic Real], promising that it awaits us at the end of the road; but all of a sudden we perceive that we were always already in the truth. The paradoxical surplus which slips away [the

spectral ‘nature’ of the Thing], which reveals itself as ‘impossible’ in this missed encounter of the ‘opportune moment’, is of course *object a*: the pure semblance which pushes us toward the truth, right up to the moment when it suddenly appears behind us and that we have already arrived ahead of it, a chimerical being that does not have its ‘proper time’, only ever persisting in the interval between ‘too soon’ and ‘too late.’” – Slavoj Žižek, “Lacan: At What Point Is He Hegelian?” (1988), in *Interrogating the Real* (London: Continuum, 2005), p. 35 / THE TOPOLOGICAL SUPPLEMENT – “So in what, exactly, does the difference between Lacan and deconstruction reside? Let me elaborate this crucial point apropos [of] the Derridean couple, ‘supplement/centre’. In a way reminiscent of the Foucauldian endless variations on the complex of heterogeneity of power relations (they run upwards, downwards, laterally), Derrida also likes to indulge heavily in exuberant variations on the paradoxical character of the supplement (the excessive element which is neither inside nor outside; it sticks out of the series it belongs to and simultaneously completes it, etc.). Lacan, on the contrary – by means of a gesture which, of course, for Derrida would undoubtedly signal reinscription into traditional philosophical discourse – *directly offers a concept of this element*, namely the concept of the Master-Signifier, S1, in relation to S2, the ‘ordinary’ chain of knowledge. This concept is not a simple unambiguous concept, but the concept of the structural [topological] ambiguity itself. That is to say, Lacan reunites in one and the same concept what Derrida keeps apart [splits]. In Lacan, S1 stands for the supplement – the trait which sticks out, but is as such, in its very excess, unavoidable; and, simultaneously, for the totalizing Master-Signifier. Therein, in this ‘speculative identity’ of the supplement and the Centre, resides the implicit ‘Hegelian’ move of Lacan: the Centre which Derrida endeavours to ‘deconstruct’ is ultimately the very supplement which threatens to disrupt its totalizing power, or, to put it in Kierkegaardese, supplement to the Centre itself ‘in its becoming’. In this precise sense, supplement is the condition of possibility and the condition of impossibility of the Centre.” – Slavoj Žižek, “The Eclipse of Meaning” (1994), in *Interrogating the Real* (London: Verso, 2005), pp. 209-10 ...

THE TRIUMPHANT REAL – “Night & Day” – The triumphant triumvirate, Žižek/Zupančič/Badiou, circle the Real ... And yet ... What they fail to properly/fully address (undress), because they wish for it to remain “spectral” (out of Necessity), is German Idealism re-written, though Hegel figures mightily, as the figure of this Spectral Thing (Spirit) ... Finishing up Žižek’s retrospective *Interrogating the Real* (Verso, 2005), one can only hope that the forthcoming *Universal Exception* (Verso, 2005) will finish off the project ... Zupančič’s *Ethics of the Real* (Verso, 2000) moves closer to the “Night” (disclosed by Žižek as the phantasmatic Thing pursued in Idealism and opposed to the “Day” of Enlightenment hegemony); thus, too, “scare quotes” are absolutely necessary (to properly inscribe “Night” and “Day”)... See (if you wish/dare) “Novalis” ... If it is Subjectivity Itself that is pre-figured always by diremptions, disclosures, unveilings, eloquent locutions (*pace* Lacan), it is also Subjectivity Itself that eludes the Signifier and its Author ... Badiou remains the locus of this salutary fire (firing arrows of fire from the late-medieval fortress of thought known, nominally, as Modernity) ... These arrows rain down, on fire (as fire), bringing (back) to mind Artaud ... To this “return” of the real Real all things aspire, as things-on-fire ... Thus, too, this fire remains offstage, underwritten (in all senses/unsensed), unassimilable ... “Far from being opposed to historicity, the Real is its very ‘ahistorical’ ground, the a priori of historicity itself.” – Slavoj Žižek, “The Real of Sexual Difference” (2002), in *Interrogating the Real* (2005), p. 350 ...

MERE FORM? – Abject subjects – Jean-François Lyotard, “Sensus Communis: The Subject in *statu nascendi*”, pp. 217-235, in Eduardo Cadava, Peter Connor, Jean-Luc Nancy, eds., *Who Comes After the Subject?* (London: Routledge, 1991) – “But what might an aesthetical suprasensible be? The *sensus communis*, if we take *sensus* in the sense of feeling, cannot and must not be mediated by a concept. There, in aesthetics, the pure faculty of judgment, the capacity of bringing together the manifold [chaos] without having the rule (concept) nor the law (Idea) of that bringing together – this is the definition of reflexivity – must operate without any additions, within the modesty of an immediate synthesis, the form, that makes the subjective synthesis, the feeling, immediately. In other words, reason in the broad sense, the theoretical faculty of *intellectio*, the practical faculty of *acta*, has no interest in it.” *Ibid.*, p. 223 / “For through this principle, on principle, aesthetics is not susceptible to any interest. Reason, be it popular, practical, or theoretical, can find no advantage in it. Of course this is because it does not obey the impulse, which drives the concept, to extend the register of the domain of application [‘upwards’]. Because this feeling is not in the service of any concept, is not even subject to that kind of conceivable time that is the schema. In the pleasure of the beautiful, feeling is enough, absolutely enough. It announces nothing further. Is of no use to anything. A *go-between* in the process of coming and going, transmitting no message. *Being* the message. A pure movement that compares, that afterward we put under house-arrest in a seat called *sensus*. But this house-arrest is itself only analogical. One that we project on an object when we call it beautiful. But the object is merely an occasion. It is still impossible to capture in a name the capacity for reflection by and for itself, and the objectivity of beauty is still impossible to

establish” Ibid., p. 223-24. / “The essential is this: the sentiment of the beautiful is the subject just being born, the first pairing off of incomparable powers. This feeling escapes being mastered by concept and will. It extends itself underneath and beyond their intrigues and their closure. This is what Kant understands by the ‘natural substratum’ that he takes, deductively, as his beginning. Thus it is a region of resistance to institutions and establishments where there is inscribed and hidden that which happens ‘before’ we know what it is and before we want to make it into anything at all. This pleasure is an inscription without support, and without a code by which it can be read off. Miserable [poor in intellectual intuition and/or concept], if you like. It is the task of literatures and arts, the task of what is called writing, to reinscribe it according to its misery, without overwhelming it, and without getting rid of it” Ibid., p. 235 ...

THE CALL/CLAIM – Echoes – Jean-Luc Marion, “L’interloqué”, pp. 236-45, in *ibid.* – “After the subject, even beyond *Dasein* [radical subjectivity itself], emerges the one who knows how to hear Being’s claim.” Ibid., p. 242 / “This heroic reversal is marked, among other innovations, by the disqualification of *Dasein*’s autarky [autonomy]; since anticipatory resoluteness, as the self’s appeal to itself, runs aground on ontological neutrality, it must submit to an appeal that it neither performs, nor controls, nor decides: ... the appeal by which Being claims *Dasein* as the phenomenological agency of its manifestation.” Ibid., p. 241 / “Being is disclosed to *Dasein* only as a possibility reserved for the one who engages himself by naming himself as an irreplaceable first person [a *time-in/for-itself*].” Ibid., p. 237 / “*Dasein* fails to constitute an object, but exposes itself to manipulation.... *Dasein* has no substantiality [thus the necessity of ‘misrecognition’], but arrives at its own Being only by taking the risk of exposure in person.” Ibid., pp. 237-38 ...

LAST WORDS(?) – Silence – “I hope for nothing, I fear nothing, I am free.” – Nikos Kazantzakis, Epitaph, c.1957 ...

[...]

## ENDNOTES

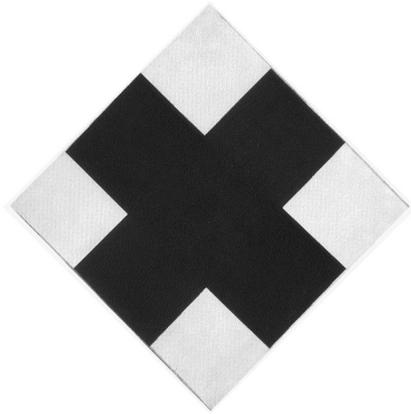
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- 2 – Jean-Luc Marion, *The Crossing of the Visible*, trans. James K.A. Smith (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2004), p. 5.
- 3 – G.W.F. Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, trans. A.V. Miller (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), p. 402; cited in Slavoj Žižek, *Interrogating the Real* (London: Continuum, 2005), p. 35.

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# LANDSCAPE FORMALISM, ANYONE?

[...]

This essay is presented in the form of a *chiasmus* – There are no easy answers.

[...]

## ABSTRACT

*Landscape + architecture = Utopia. Utopia = Hegelian synthesis. Hegelian synthesis = A back door to Paradise ...*

ARABESQUE(S) / ECHOES – Reverse Architectures(s) / Reverse Reifications – Typology can never account for meaning, whereas topology may ... Thought (knowledge) is topological. And while formalisms are a form of topological knotting (knowing), radical formalisms are also discursive antidotes to the outworn and the spent forms of instrumental systems (reason) ... Hence *esthétique + poétique* (Surrationalism ... or, philosophical aesthetics ... ??? ...) – Phenomenologies in architecture (Bataille / Benjamin / De Chirico / Rossi / Abraham / Hejduk / Ando / Holl) – Cinematic architectures (... Vittorio Storaro's *Writing with Light* ...) ... Erasures / archaisms (Robbe-Grillet / Leenhardt) – Žižek/Badiou & Marion (Agamben + Cacciari) – Czech nomads (Loos / Flusser / Koudelka) – Heresies (Bruno / Pascal / Novalis / Brecht / Artaud / Benjamin / Godard / Smithson / Matta-Clark / Noguchi / Cacciari / Isozaki / Derrida) – The Archive of Architecture as tomb (Derrida's *Archive Fever*) / Mirror-writing – Sub-linguistic territories (dust) / Thresholds – Vertiginous black (sublime scare tactics) – “Aura” (milieux and anti-milieux) / Everything Else

## PART I: THUS SPAKE TAFURI

Almost thirty years ago Manfredo Tafuri published *Progetto e Utopia* (Bari: Guis, Laterza & Figli, 1973). If Schlesinger's thirty-year cycles have any cultural (versus economic) validity, an outbreak of Utopian thought ought to be *just around the corner!*

“In the first place, the ‘formal approach to problems of aesthetic communication offered a formidable theoretical basis to the avant-garde movements of the early twentieth century.... In the second place, it must be born[e] in mind that the contributions of Wittgenstein, Carnap, and Frege established almost simultaneously the areas of pertinence relative to grammar, logic, and semiology.”(1)

“The fact is that the discovery of the possibility of inflecting signs devoid of any significance, of manipulating arbitrary relationships between linguistic ‘materials’ in themselves mute or indifferent, did away with any pretense of art as a ‘political’ expression or protest. The only utopia the art of the avant-garde was able to proffer was the *technological utopia*.”(2)

“Through semiology architecture seeks its own meaning, while tormented by the sense of having lost its meaning altogether.”(3)

“Nevertheless, the semantic analysis of the language [of artistic forms] has stimulated a resurgence of the artistic-literary avant-garde.... Furthermore, it should be noted that the artistic conception of indeterminateness, of the open-ended work, of ambiguity raised to an institution, is concentrated – in a large part of the cases – precisely in fields defined by the new techniques of man-machine communication. The case of music *ex machina* is only the most explicit example of this.”(4)

Manfredo Tafuri's caustic analysis, as above, of architectural formalism in the 1973 essay “Architecture and Its

Double: Semiology and Formalism” (5) holds true, to this day, because architecture (+ landscape) has dodged the “political” and the “utopian” since the collapse of modernist architecture just before and/or during the time his essay was penned. That architecture *and* landscape have remained separate was and *is*, in fact, the entire problem. Neo-modernism and systems-driven design then and now may attempt a new “open work” but its language remains, constitutionally, an empty vessel. A revitalization of form – landscape + architecture – would engage the vacated premises of semantic pretense, while giving up the fear of ideology. In landscape *minus* architecture the only persistent form of ideology is *ecology*.

Tafuri’s negative dialectic is played out in neo-modern architecture from Herzog & de Meuron to Rem Koolhaas. Koolhaas’s *terrain vague* (or junk-space) is the ultimate embrace of everything Tafuri despised. The *via negativa* (which always presupposes a *positive* path) of neo-modern architecture is temporally enshrined in the work of architects such as Peter Eisenman and Daniel Libeskind – a scintillating absence. A proleptic formalism was presaged in Frank O. Gehry’s work around the time of Vitra, though now he has veered into neo-expressionism, and by accident appears in certain projects by Eisenman when landscape (or an ambient environmental surplus) is fortuitously incorporated. Gehry’s new Disney Concert Hall in Los Angeles will have a garden because Gehry decided it would be nice to have the colors of trees and flowers reflected in its metallic facade. But presence generally hides amid the vast terrain of “indeterminateness”. Latter-day modernist architects will certainly tell you what they disdain but rarely indicate what they admire (other than their own reputations). That they do not like their own “children” (Koolhaas and Eisenman) and spend much capital denouncing them is a sign that presence waits in the wings. (See the essay “Sublime Potential”.)

In landscape + architecture the formalist agendas of modernism have collapsed and the neo-baroque maneuvers of the L.A. tribe look typically ridiculous in present-day circumstances. These now historical agencies have spawned an illiterate breed of pseudo-design styles. Geometry and empty form have always held sway, appeared *au courant*, when ideas and concepts have depleted themselves. “Connected as they are to capital’s extension of the use of science and automation, these languages are systems of communication that come into being *from a plan of development*.”(6)

Tafuri damns architecture for losing its meaning, while asking what, if any, new meaning it may strive for. By way of a conclusion – an elusive one at that – he formulates a role for architecture *beyond utilitarianism* where objective and subjective means intertwine. The poetic *and* the rational (Bachelard’s *surrational*) holds an ever expansive magic willfulness *within* landscape + architecture and in rare outbreaks produces the semiologically profound figure of architectural redemption – a back door to presence. Colin Rowe broached this secret – through an unacknowledged appropriation of Heinrich von Kleist (in *The Architecture of Good Intentions*, 1994)\* – but failed (as architecture always fails) to take it to the next level where the cultural figures of landscape *and* architecture merge.

“The ‘fall’ of modern art is the final testimony of bourgeois ambiguity, torn between ‘positive’ objectives and the pitiless self-exploration of its own objective commercialization. No ‘salvation’ is any longer to be found within it: neither wandering restlessly in labyrinths of images so multivalent they end in muteness [Hejduk], nor enclosed in the stubborn silence of geometry content with its own perfection [Meiered in Prague].”(7)

That said, Tafuri (like Walter Benjamin) proposes critical operations that expose architectural ideology and, importantly (and unlike Deconstruction, which is a permanent demolition project), retrieve the significant resources of past times (historical forms) abandoned along the way in the positivist quest for an Absolute Architecture (a technological utopia). This cataclysmic conclusion brings with it the complicated rhetoric of the “aura” and “presence”, that which we have come to expect (always problematized by Tafuri) since Hannah Arendt and Walter Benjamin looked modernity in the eye and found it wanting. Benjamin’s lament – found in the duplicitous relationship to the concept of aura – is found in Tafuri, and, as a result, he appears nostalgic but tearless – as one might expect from a post-romantic Marxist. In *Architecture and Utopia: Design and Capitalist Development* Tafuri circles back in his “Problems in the Form of a Conclusion” (via a secret loop within the text) to Chapter One, “Reason’s Adventure: Naturalism and the City in the Century of Enlightenment”; and the book goes on forever.

Tafuri’s analysis of the bourgeois intellectual’s romance with urban chaos (Baudelaire), a cipher for “nature”, unveils several moments – now lost – that were occluded in the radical agendas of the early 20th-century avant-garde movements: 1/ The acknowledgment of Nature as a vast reserve (Other) against which the image of the city is

constructed; 2/ Nature as a semantic preserve within the city (insofar as nature is an idea); and 3/ Games played that might best be denounced as scenography. The latter is the all-purpose condemnation of picture-making versus architecture, utilized by hardened modernists (critic Wilfried Wang on Peter Zumthor), as if nature and “organicity” were but a scenic resource. And Tafuri brings into focus 18th- and 19th-century revolutionary prospects for restructuring the early modern city through ideal plans that systematize nature (and capitalist production) as an ambient and picturesque component (set piece) of utopian *mise en scène*. These pictures – made totally abstract in the 20th century by avant-garde reduction (the equivalent in language is El Lissitzky’s “Prouns”, (1920s) – see also the NYPL exhibition, “Utopia” – are evidence of a romantic clash (a tragic *figura*) or a great slash in the canvas of modernity that is as yet unresolved. (Consider the paintings of Gerhard Richter.)

Landscape + architecture, then, was architecture + landscape. Today, landscape formalism has thoroughly absorbed the picturesque and transformed it into “Graphics” derived from powerful 3D modeling software (see Tom Leader’s remarks in *Juncus* on the Parc Downsview Park design competition). The picturesque is now a “system” – and, as a system, nature as picture is no longer naively presented as a surplus but an integral element of the production of space. The Fresh Kills Landfill to Landscape design competition also proved this “emergent” trend. Pre-revolutionary and revolutionary signs – the gestures of Romanticism(s) encoded in Garden Cities – is now re-absorbed and redeployed in vast, inter-textual games associated with post-industrial sites worldwide (games that include Olympic Games and World Expos) and the near geologic logic of the anti-master plan. The anti-master plan is the proverbial chicken come home to roost (in the city) ... Folded, sculpted, deformed, roiled, excavated, wrapped, and warped nature is the anti-picturesque (Mannerist) spectacle preceding not a new baroque but a new concept of nature (and perhaps, unless it is a mirage, a new Earth).

## PART II: THUS SPAKE CACCIARI

Massimo Cacciari – former Mayor of Venice, former Member of the European Parliament – more than trumped Tafuri with his masterful *Architecture and Nihilism: On the Philosophy of Modern Architecture* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1993). Cacciari, product of the same school of thought as Tafuri (i.e., the School of Venice, established in 1936 by Giuseppe Samona), is also author of *Posthumous People: Vienna at the Turning Point* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1996), a book that delves into the extraordinary cultural cross-currents converging on Vienna at the end of the 19th century. These currents included: psychoanalysis, linguistics, *secessionist* forces in art and architecture, philosophy, music, literature, poetry, and theater.(8) These forces might best be described as *tactical maneuvers*, i.e., attempts, to opt-out of the dicta of bourgeois culture. It was here, at this potent point in time, that the most succinct critiques of modernism were penned. It was also at this auspicious moment, as the Austro-Hungarian Empire imploded, that a heterogeneous admixture of repressed cultural memories overran Western orthodoxy – and it is for this reason that both Tafuri and Cacciari have focused intently on Vienna.

In *Architecture and Nihilism* Cacciari rounds up the usual suspects – including Benjamin and including *Benjamin’s* usual suspects – and settles into a retrospective analysis of the work of architect Adolf Loos. The lynchpin in this set of bruising essays is “Negative Thought and Artistic Representation”.(9) Cacciari identifies de Saussure’s “analyses of the transcendent relation between thought and being” as the beginning of the end, or the beginning of the beginning for language that “does not dominate any *thing*”. Such a language “exists in relation to *nothing*”.(10) Hence, in his analytic, the demise of culture (and he means the culture of Western orthodoxy) is the inevitable outcome, as is the emergence of “rationality” as compensation and its ghosts – *forms of alienation*.

It was in Hegel’s “Lectures on Aesthetics” (c.1828-30) that the principle work of demolition was accomplished regarding “artistic forms and signification”. Hegel, according to Cacciari, had “grasped the fact that artistic representation was condemned to mere ironic dispersion or fantastic individuality”. This damning conclusion opened the door to a physiology of artistic forms first broached in the work of Wölfflin and Company and later absorbed into avant-garde experiments *tout court*.

Hence Tafuri’s (and Cacciari’s) animosity toward the autistic games of the avant-garde and, on the other hand, the fantastic *capriccios* of the alienated soul – e.g., Hoffmann, Kafka, Nezval et al. – or Nietzschean superfluous men. For Cacciari, the fantastic is “the shock that has already assumed a form of self-expression and become a system, a structure: it is the further, decisive maturation of shock within the processes of rationalization that invests the artistic forms themselves, and that these forms integrate in a functional way”.(11) It would seem that alienation – a byproduct of Modernity proper ? – has also produced its most impressive ghosts. This might explain both Tafuri’s

and Cacciari's impatience with Surrealism, etc. (Tafuri called Surrealism "emblems of an intellectual bad conscience") but also the great admiration for Loos, an architect who despised equally the Werkbund syndrome and the hypno-erotic efflorescence known as Art Nouveau or Jugendstil.

It is Loos who bears in Cacciari's presentation the emblem of the Angel – as in Benjamin this is conferred on Karl Kraus – an entirely problematic image given that this Angel is facing the past but moving backward toward the future. In the essay "Loos and His Angel" (12), Cacciari lets loose a torrent of catastrophic prose in praise of the near-deaf Loos as he rails against the rationalist beast taking over the empty shell of post-Habsburg Europe. "Loos is obsessed with renouncing language that claims to be liberated from all presuppositions and to serve as text in itself. He sees in it the diabolical gesture of those who abandon the past, who do not recognize the right that it has over us, and hence persist in desiring its overthrow."(13)

Cacciari positions Loos as a mad prophet *after* the Turning Point ... Loos had utmost admiration for Otto Wagner, even if Wagner was partly responsible for the proliferation of a style of architecture antithetical to Loos' intellectual rigorous planometrics. Loos matched in built form the intensity of his rhetoric by producing Villa Karma (1906) and Villa Müller (1930) – buildings misunderstood to this day as harbingers of functionalism – buildings that in fact *stand outside of Time Itself*.

Cacciari echoes Walter Benjamin's auratic philosophical conundrum in claiming for Loos the project of collecting the shattered and "entering with it into a *sympathy* deeper than all critique".(14) Loos' buildings were in many ways a refusal to engage the modern world. The austere, blank exterior was countered in most cases by a fabulous (even fantastic!) interior life built through a complex articulation of the plan that has come down to us in the form of *raum plan* and entirely at odds with the strenuous formalisms of functionalism – a style that all but eclipsed Loos' experiments with architectural space.

Cacciari closes his survey of architectural nihilism with an extraordinary description of the "radical uprooting" imposed by architectural modernity: "Streets and axes that intersect [and] lead to no place ..." – "The metropolis ... as the great metaphor of the calculating intellect devoid of all ends ..." – "Space and time are a-rithmetically measurable, detachable, and reconstructible ..." – "Nostalgic attempts to charge the products of universal uprootedness with quality, propriety, and values ..." – "Combinatory – consoling hypotheses ..." – "The dream of an order of fully transparent function, of an alert criticism of ideology ..." – and, "Aestheticism of the sign without qualities."(15)

But he goes one step further and claims that attempts to recover the fragments of the shattered experience of the world perhaps require reinvesting utopia with symbolical purpose, "upstream" as it were.(16) The ideal city of the Renaissance included "astrological, hermetic, and magical motifs" all but erased in the transmission of these metaphysical designs into the present. Resisting a "nostalgic *confusio*", Cacciari all but endorses an architecture of resistance – one that might in certain times have to play *formalist games* to re-enact (or renew) the lost, the recondite, and the shattered images of life *with* qualities (beyond the hegemon).

### PART III: THUS SPAKE JAMESON

In *The Prison-House of Language* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1972), Fredric Jameson reported on the maneuvers of the early 20th-century revolution in linguistics and the parallel absorption of much of that radical *matériel* by Russian formalists. Jameson summarized Saussure's project as the "separation of the synchronic from the diachronic, of historical from structural research"(17) in piquant contradistinction to 19th-century academic "philology" (as well as the poetic philology of the German Romantics). "Saussure's originality was to have insisted on the fact that language as a total system is complete at every moment, no matter what happens to have been altered in it a moment before."(18) This re-definition of the significance of language was based on the idea that language actually represents the "perpetual present", and Jameson laid out the now recognizable coordinates of this taxonomic shift: syntagmatic/paradigmatic; horizontal/vertical; and diachronic/synchronic. For Jameson, the synchronic is the "associative", as represented by the imminence of verbs (and in certain uninflected, i.e., English nouns). This latter idea leads directly to the idea of the immanent nature of things.

Russian formalism focussed intently on the "literariness" of early structuralist operations – taking off from both Roman Jakobson's idea of *literaturnost*, or *literature itself*, and Mayakovsky's experiments with visual language. In

the practice of “literariness”, literature becomes self-conscious or hyper-conscious, and what is omitted (or suppressed and/or rejected) is as important as what is admitted. In formalist projects the first moves are almost always negative. For example, Russian formalists attempted to demolish the idea that literature had any philosophical significance, only to re-load *new* significance later. Russian formalism also tried to distance itself from Symbolism by repudiating the notion of “thinking in images”.(19)

The first agitations of formalist agendas are anti-essentialist assaults on convention, or the de-flowering of rhetoric. Most eventually turn toward a phenomenology of one kind or another, slowly re-building that which they first set out to destroy – a *landscape* or *topology of things*. What remains forever anathema to formalism, however, is the return of abstraction or any type of metaphysics. The long-range goal of convening significance in the ordinary, and of accentuating imminence *and* immanence, remains *until the bitter end* (that is, until formalism is undone by a retro-grade movement from within or from without).

Jameson mocked the presumptions of the Russian formalists by frequently quoting Viktor Shklovsky, so-called president of the Society for the Investigation of Poetic Language – a “society” not of the usual type, but a loose confederation (or constellation) of forces shaping the Russian avant-garde of the 1920s. The Society’s rhetoric illustrates how one generation consumes the former – Chronos-like – spitting out unsavory aspects along the way. Shklovsky is cited as the source for the clever notion that “liquidation of one school by another” is carried out “uncle to nephew” versus “father to son”.( 20) A synchronic type of transgression occurs when a new school overthrows that preceding it. The steps are: 1/ Isolation of a pure system; 2/ Production of variables within synchronic operations; 3/ A return to diachrony (between synchronic “moments”); and 4/ The reformulation of the problems of language – this last perhaps summarizing the entire sordid affair.

French Structuralism bears a close resemblance to Russian Structuralism except, according to Jameson, it is less a case of passing “nephew to uncle” than “crossed twins”. French Structuralism – which gave us Structural Anthropology and the entertaining vicissitudes of Semiology – was more acutely concerned with the “sign-system as ideology”, whereas Russian formalism was blatantly anti-system, or anti-political, period. French Structuralism absorbed Existentialism and Western Marxism and only fell, in 1968, when – as it has been said – “structure took to the streets”. It also was rabidly deterministic until post-structuralism came along and re-introduced the long shadows of imagination and subjectivity, something central to Russian formalism and Czech Surrealism despite both’s flirtation with Constructivism.

Karel Teige (1900-1951), exemplar of Czech Surrealism, first cut his teeth as Poetist, a follower of the French avant-garde in the late 1920s. He was a prominent member of the Czech Devetsil group (1920-31) and editor of both *Disk* and *ReD* (founded by Teige in 1927), irregular journals for the artistic-literary movement centered in Prague. This movement sought the integration of art, architecture, photography, and literature primarily through the art of assemblage or collage. The movement’s debt to Russian formalism was obvious, as, too, was the counterpull of French Surrealism and post-Zurich, Hannoverian and Berlin Dada. Teige was mixed up in the promiscuous currents of left-leaning movements, from the East and the West, but eventually jettisoned his troubled relationship with Le Corbusier and Purism. He was a life-long critic of modernist architecture, though he initially embraced Le Corbusier’s revolutionary villas (culminating in 1929-31 with Villa Savoye). The progenitors of the International Style (promulgated in 1932 at MoMA in New York) were to be found both in France and the first Czechoslovak Republic. This did not prevent Teige from vigorously denouncing Mies van der Rohe’s Tugendhat villa (1928-30), in Brno (Moravia). The “radically simplified form” of modern architecture troubled Teige, especially as it became increasingly monolithic, and he subsequently launched a unique philosophical assemblage of sorts by combining radical utilitarianism and “lyrical subjectivity” (or, “Constructivism and Poetism”) – these latter terminologies taken from the *Grove Dictionary of Art’s* gloss of both “Karel Teige” and “Devetsil”.

Teige “jumped ship” in the 1930s, leaving the modernist faction’s fascination with machines and mass-produced commodities behind. His writing and his artistic output in the ’40s and ’50s became strenuously apocalyptic. Somehow Teige survived the Nazi occupation of Czechoslovakia and continued his collaborations with poets and artists. In his unfinished *Fenomenologie umeni (Phenomenology of Art)* (1950-51), Teige unleashed an anti-theory of art, so to speak. This final vision for Teige was fiercely materialistic and anarchic, but it also seemed to echo with a vast array of suppressed signifiers – Jameson’s “associative”? – or the linguistic magic which lies just below the surface of all totalizing systems. As modern architecture and modern art crystallized and hung suspended in time and space – stuck in its own utopian gestures – Teige threw aside caution and perfected the art of erotic

photomontage and high-borne rhetoric that astounds (and confounds) proper, orthodox modernists to this day.

“The Theory of Art is remodeled into a theoretical construction of a broader scope, and imagination is freed from its exclusive dependence on aesthetics.”(21) Teige renounced the pure formalist agenda and pounced instead on a more vague, proto-aesthetic territory perhaps Coleridgean or Borgean in its dimensions. “Transposing the question of the basis and function of art from the metaphysical sphere to the historical ground”, Teige rediscovered the submerged *topoi* of the constructive imagination.(22)

#### PART IV: THUS SPAKE ŽIŽEK

It is in Slavoj Žižek’s reading of Hegel, in *The Ticklish Subject* (London: Verso, 1999), a work aimed at the redemption of the Cartesian subject, that evidence of the serial significance of formalism is unearthed. With this tome, Žižek broke into Hegel’s *Phenomenology of Spirit* and returned with the filched idols (idyls) of metaphysical and abstract thought.

The movement of the spirit toward itself is also the movement of the subject toward the object. For Žižek, however, the subject and the object are synonymous *in the Universal*. When, finally, the dust settles over the defunct, multitudinous forms of post-modernism, the Cartesian subject will stand face to face with itself.

“On a first approach, things seem clear and unambiguous: the philosopher of abstract universality is Kant (and, in Kant’s steps, Fichte): in Kant’s philosophy, the Universal (the moral Law) functions as the abstract *Sollen*, that which ‘ought to be’ and which, as such, possesses a terrorist/subversive potential – the Universal stands for an impossible/unconditional demand, whose power of negativity is destined to undermine any concrete totality; against this tradition of abstract/negative universality opposed to its particular content, Hegel emphasizes how true universality is actualized in the series of concrete determinations perceived by the abstract point of view of Understanding as the obstacle to the full realization of the Universal (say, the universal moral Duty is actualized, becomes effective, through the concrete wealth of particular human passions and strivings devalued by Kant as ‘pathological’ obstacles).”(23) In other words, Žižek claims that Hegel inverted Kant’s theory of the Universal moral imperative – as Karl Marx later reversed the direction of Hegel’s dialectic.

Žižek further problematizes his own insight by adding that there are other ways of perceiving universality: i.e., “positive Universality as a mere impassive/neutral medium of the coexistence of its particular content (the ‘mute universality’ of a species defined by what all members of the species have in common), and Universality in its actual existence, which is *individuality*, the assertion of the subject as unique and irreducible to the particular concrete totality into which he is inserted.”(24) Furthermore, “With regard to the opposition between abstract and concrete Universality, this means that the only way towards a truly ‘concrete’ universality leads through the full assertion of the radical negativity by means of which the universal negates its entire particular content: despite misleading appearances, it is the ‘mute universality’ of the neutral container of the particular content which is the predominant form of abstract universality. In other words, the only way for a Universality to become ‘concrete’ is to stop being a neutral-abstract medium of its particular content, and to *include itself among its particular subspecies*. What this means is that, paradoxically, the first step towards ‘concrete universality’ is the radical negation of the entire particular content: only through such a negation does the Universal gain existence, become visible ‘as such.’”(25)

Žižek traces the movements of the idealist subject as it reaches for the speculative hammer, arguing that the dialectic structure of Hegel’s proto-system is merely provisional “so that he can then propose as the third moment the absolute Idea, the synthesis of subjective logic with objectivity.”(26)

Curiously, Žižek records this dialectical maneuver by sorting through Hegel’s conception of “substance as subject”, wherein the sticky notion of “negation of negation” is central. Žižek finds in Hegel’s argument an “anamorphic stain” – a blind spot, or Lacanian lacuna – noting “the anamorphic stain corrects the standard ‘subjective idealism’ by rendering the gap between the eye and the gaze [of the Other]: the receiving subject is always-already gazed at from a point that eludes his eyes.”(27)

This “haunting” of perception – its doubling – is Žižek’s way of setting the stage for the reappearance of the Greek chorus, so to speak. His goal is to prove that modern subjectivity contains (though it appears to *not* contain) that which it has thrust elsewhere – i.e., above, below, or beyond. Žižek points out that Kant’s *Critique of Pure Reason*

(1781) was, in fact, that which it presumed to instead project – the future of metaphysics itself.

Negation – as a prime element of formalism – therefore is a trick or anamorphic game. In Hegel’s system, the Idea (Logic) can be negated in two ways: “in the guise of Nature as well as in the guise of the finite Spirit”.(28) Finite Spirit (or “active subjectivity”) is the cipher for the alienated, Cartesian subject – the hyper-conscious modern ego standing (as it were) at the gates to Eden, but stuck in the anamorphic distortion of Being There.

Žižek’s idea of reconciliation in the Universal (that which the finite Spirit opposes) sidesteps well-worn metaphors and goes straight to the “logic of the signifier” – a Lacanian terrain, but nonetheless *a propos*. This territory is the “space in which he [the finite Spirit] interacts with other subjects”.(29) Within this “complex” lies hidden the truth that the Self and Other are *the same thing*. Therefore, the formalist agenda of altering social substance through agitation is called into question, given that it attacks itself. Notably, Žižek comes round to noting that Adorno’s *Negative Dialectics* (1966) seems hung up on that very gap, and, perhaps favoring a more elastic temperament, alludes to Walter Benjamin’s insight into the nature of the object (as in the historical relic or moment) that signifies not a specific time or place but a plethora of times and places (opportunities and possibilities), such that the Thing becomes a *memento mori* or self-inflected thought itself. “There is something in the object that forever resists being translated into our conceptual network.”(30) This “excess”, or “that which eludes our grasp in the Thing” is “the traces of *failures*, the *absences* inscribed in its positive existence”.(31)

All of this “action” takes place in the second chapter “The Hegelian Ticklish Subject” (pp. 70-123), beginning with the section “What Is ‘Negation of Negation’?” and culminating in “Towards a Materialist Theory of Grace”. The most telling passage, in-between, regards Hegel’s discovery that “We fail to grasp the Absolute *precisely in so far as we continue to presuppose that, above and beyond the domain of our finite reflected reasoning, there is an Absolute to be grasped* – we actually overcome the limitation of external reflection by simply becoming aware of how this external reflection is inherent to the Absolute itself.”(32)

Detouring through *pro forma*, legalistic arguments regarding law and order, Žižek arrives “home”, at the idea of concrete Universality, unpacking his crate of explosives and setting them before the reader. The grand finale – the fireworks – regards the persistent gap between abstract and concrete reality: “There is no way of escaping formalism within the horizon of modernity.”(33) Here we circle close to Nietzsche’s Master-Slave conundrum by way of a side trip through Lacan’s Master-Signifier conceit. Anyway, the symbolic order of the world is torn asunder by either of two, twin agencies: 1/ The irruption of the Real; or 2/ The gesture of the Sovereign. To this we might add a third means, or synthetic counter-moment – *the formalist moment*. Opposite the symbolic is the Real, pure contingency, or the World Itself. Pure contingency is the foundation of all formalist agendas. First comes “radical negativity” – discarding corrupted forms of expression, genres, what have you – and, later, back flows signification like water, purified of symbolic rubbish and toxins. What is *omitted* is as significant as what is *admitted*!

Landscape formalism, anyone?

GK (May 2002)

## POSTSCR(Y)PTS

If we take Adolf Loos’ remarks to heart, those regarding his well-known diagnosis that architecture is *not* an art, or that it is only an art when it comes to reside in the tomb, we may find a perhaps sardonic summary judgment that architecture primarily services the capitalist machine (the production of things always for sale, or conversely, and perversely, the production of compensatory spectacle), versus doing nominally *nothing* (as art attempts) or serving the future or the Eternal. Thus, Arnold Hauser’s tomb (proposed by Loos in the early 1920s, but unbuilt) speaks out of its own void about the “Other” always betrayed in architecture, an “Other” that finally comes home *to* the tomb (as it always does in Levinas as well, so to speak). That is, intertextual symbolical orders outside / beyond singular, authorized orders contain the principal means (the privileged site) of (for) overcoming the stalemate within instrumentalized (purely rationalized) systems (despite Tzonis & Lefavre’s assertions that even architectural functionalism fudged the results of this quest for rationalization\*\*). This privileged principle, in turn, marks the “surreal” (surrational) *je ne sais quoi* of critical engagement, and, as sign behind all signs (as super-sign, /S/), the proverbial Way Out. In other words, sometimes it is better to light a small candle than to rail against the darkness. (04/04/04) / Tafuri’s criticism of operative criticism notwithstanding, it was Tafuri and his cadre at Venice that

toppled the last pillars of modernist architectural hegemony in the name of *criticism itself* (otherwise known as *history*).

“Topological thought (the ‘topological Self’) has no temperature. It is the ultimate site (taking-place) of ‘cold’ fusion, infinitely and finitely productive of the thing otherwise known as The Fusion Thing.” – Dr. Prof. Ing. I.M. Avenarius, *Bons Mots* (London: Sub-Verso Press, n.d.)

## ENDNOTES / ETC.

TAFURI (AFTER THE FACT) / TOPOLOGICAL THOUGHT – Taking apart ideology (ideality), for ideality’s sake ... Interrogating architectural form (autonomy), for autonomy’s sake ... Denouncing utopian modernism, for Utopia’s sake ... Ripping into operative criticism, for criticism’s sake ... Thus spake (wrote) Tafuri / The foremost retrospective gaze into/through Tafuri’s work occurred in *ANY* 25/26 (2000), with essays by Peter Eisenman, Ignasi de Solà-Morales, K. Michael Hays, Mark Wigley, Georges Teyssot, Kurt W. Forster et al... “Evidence in Tafuri’s research is usually negative evidence: slips, denials, omissions, contradictions, paradoxes. The historian/shrink has to let the subject do the talking – by exposing all the multilayered detail to be found in the archive – and patiently watch for the contradictions, the twists and turns that point to deeper complications. There should be no force, or willful organization, whether it be force by neglect or force by imposing conceptual schemes on the evidence [as in operative criticism, merely one of Tafuri’s famous bugaboos ...].” – Mark Wigley, “Post-Operative History”, *ANY* 25/26 (2000), p.11 / The issue includes “History as a Project: An Interview with Manfredo Tafuri”, by Luisa Passerini ... For a summary of the essays included in this edition of *ANY*, see the essay “Thought Itself” ...

1 – Manfredo Tafuri, *Architecture and Utopia: Design and Capitalist Development*, trans. Barbara Luigi la Penta (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1976), p. 152; translation of *Progetto e Utopia* (Bari: Guis, Laterza & Figli, 1973).

2 – Ibid., p. 153.

3 – Ibid., p. 161.

4 – Ibid., pp. 161; 163.

5 – Ibid., pp. 150-69.

6 – Ibid., p. 151.

\* The author was present, in Ithaca, at the lectures Rowe gave just prior to the publication of *An Architecture of Good Intentions* (1994). These lectures, while strenuously intertextual, as Rowe famously elides various disciplines, never approached the ground itself of architecture; that is to say, Rowe ignored the ontological and remained within the charmed hermeneutic circle of architectural discourse.

7 – Ibid., p. 181.

8 – Massimo Cacciari, *Architecture and Nihilism: On the Philosophy of Modern Architecture*, trans. Stephen Sartarelli (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1993), passim.

9 – Ibid., pp. 56-67.

10 – Ibid., p. 57.

11 – Ibid., p. 59.

12 – Ibid., pp. 143-49.

13 – Ibid., p. 149.

14 – Ibid., p. 147.

15 – Ibid., pp. 199-201.

16 – Ibid., p. 207.

17 – Fredric Jameson, *The Prison-House of Language: A Critical Account of Structuralism and Russian Formalism* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1972), p. 5.

18 – Ibid., pp. 5-6.

19 – Ibid., p. 45.

20 – Ibid., p. 53.

21 – Miroslav Petricek, “Karel Teige: Art Theory Between Phenomenology and Structuralism”, in Eric Dluhosch and Rostislav Švácha, eds., *Karel Teige / 1900-1951: L’enfant Terrible of the Czech Modernist Avant-garde* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1999), p. 326.

22 – Karel Teige, “Osvobozovani zivota a poezie” (1940s), in *Vybor z dila*, Vol. 3 (Prague, 1994), p. 460; cited in *ibid.*

23 – Slavoj Žižek, *The Ticklish Subject: The Absent Centre of Political Ontology* (London: Verso, 1999), p. 91.

24 – Ibid.

25 – Ibid., p. 92.

26 – Ibid., p. 81.

27 – Ibid., p. 79

28 – Ibid., p. 80.

29 – Ibid., p. 81.

30 – Ibid., p. 89.

31 – Ibid.

32 – Ibid., p. 84.

33 – Ibid., p. 114.

\*\*Alexander Tzonis, Liane Lefaivre, “The Machine in Architectural Thinking”, *Daidalos* 18 (December 15, 1985): pp. 16-26.

Regarding formalism in literary criticism, see Paul de Man, “Semiology and Rhetoric”, *Diacritics*, 3:3 (Fall 1973): pp. 27-23 / This seminal essay also appeared in Julian Wolfreys, ed., *Literary Theories: A Reader and Guide* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1999) ...

For a possible way out of the chiasmus (as above), see the essay “Ur-formalism” ...

Regarding ADOLF LOOS, see: Werner Oechslin, ed., *Otto Wagner, Adolf Loos, and the Road to Modern Architecture*, trans. Lynnette Widder (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2002) / Burkhardt Rukschcio, *Adolf Loos* (Vienna: Graphische Sammlung Albertina, 1989) – Exhibition catalogue (2 December 1989 through 25 February 1990) / Burkhardt Rukschcio, Roland Schachel, *Adolf Loos* (Salzburg/Vienna: Residenz Verlag, 1982) ...

### MORE ON KAREL TEIGE

*Rassegna* 53 (March 1993) – “Karel Teige, Architecture and Poetry” – Guest edited by Hanna Cisarova and Manuela Castagnara Codeluppi – See especially, “Surrealism and Functionalism: Teige’s Dual Way”, by Hanna Cisarova, pp. 79-88 ...

Karel Teige, *Modern Architecture in Czechoslovakia* (Los Angeles, CA: Getty Research Institute, 2000) – Edited by Julia Bloomfield, Vladimir Slapeta et al. – Translated by Irena Zantovska Murray – Introduction by Jean-Louis Cohen – Cohen’s gloss of Teige’s “defining moments”, in the introduction, is extremely entertaining. He struggles to encapsulate Teige’s extreme protean activities within an array of international avant-garde movements. Cohen’s greatest error is in marginalizing Teige’s anarchic streak, or dismissing his non-ideological activities as dilettantish – a “failure” to synthesize a “system”. The 400-plus photomontages created by Teige between 1935-1951 cannot be easily dismissed despite his association with rationalist and functionalist architects. Perhaps it is Teige’s architectural criticism that is promiscuous, versus his graphic arts? Cohen describes the photomontages in a manner that is inconsistent with the sober nature of his over-all assessment of Teige’s contribution to the emergence of modern architecture in Czechoslovakia: “Hills and dales transformed themselves into womens bodies; or the same body forms were set against industrial landscapes in a subversive counterpoint” (p. 8) producing a “confrontation between the order of desire and that of the prosaic geometries of the avant-garde”. (p. 11) Needless-to-say, Teige has never been comfortably assimilated into the history of modern architecture because his interests *transcended* architecture.

### MIXED NOTES ON RUSSIAN FORMALISM

Ladislav Matejka, Krystyna Pomorska, eds., *Readings in Russian Poetics: Formalist and Structuralist Views* (Chicago: Dalkey Archive, 2002) ...

**Regarding Roman Jakobson’s lecture, “The Dominant”, delivered at Masaryk University, Brno in 1935:** “Jakobson here sees the new inquiries into the structural characteristics of verbal art as a third stage of Formalist research as opposed to its earlier stage of semantic emphasis and its still earlier form-oriented beginnings. Thus Formalism gradually underwent the conversion to Structuralism through its growing awareness of the delicate relationship between material manifestation and the complex code of normative rules.” – Ladislav Matejka and Krystyna Pomorska, p. xxi ...

**Jakobson on the structuralist concept of “The Dominant” (transferred, by way of strategic insertions, to a provisional critique of architectural hegemony today):** “The dominant specifies the work. The specific trait of bound language is obviously its prosodic pattern, its verse [structural] form. It might seem that this is simply a tautology: verse is verse [architecture is architecture]. However, we must constantly bear in mind that the element which specifies a given variety of language [form] dominates the entire structure and thus acts as its mandatory and inalienable constituent dominating all the remaining elements and exerting direct influence upon them.... We may seek a dominant not only in the poetic [architectural] work of an individual artist [architect] and not only in the poetic [architectural] canon, the set of norms of a given school, but also in the art of a given epoch, viewed as a particular whole.” – Roman Jakobson, “The Dominant” (1935), pp. 82-83 [with insertions] ...

**Jakobson on the “deformation” of ideograms (received forms) in literature and painting:** “Can the question be raised about a higher degree of verisimilitude of this or that poetic trope? Can one say that that one metaphor or metonymy is conventional or, so to say, figurative? ... It is necessary to learn the conventional language of painting in order to ‘see’ a picture, just as it is impossible to understand what is spoken without knowing the language. This conventional, traditional aspect of painting to a great extent conditions the very act of our visual perception. As tradition accumulates, the painted image becomes an ideogram, a formula, to which the object portrayed is linked by contiguity. Recognition becomes instantaneous. We no longer see a picture.

The ideogram needs to be deformed. The artist-innovator must impose a new form upon our perception, if we are to detect in a given thing those traits which went unnoticed the day before. He may present the object in an unusual perspective; he may violate the rules of composition canonized by his predecessors.... The motivation behind this ‘disorder’ was the desire for a closer approximation of reality. The urge to deform an ideogram usually underlies the *Sturm und Drang* stage of new artistic currents.” – Roman Jakobson, “On Realism in Art” (1921), p. 40 ...

**Ejxenbaum on the “past past” and the “present past”:** “Every theory is a working hypothesis fostered by our interest in the facts themselves: theory is essential for sorting out the pertinent facts and ordering them in a system – it is for that and no more. The very need for some particular set of facts, the very prerequisite of having some particular conceptual sign – these are conditions dictated by contemporary life with its specific problems. History is, in effect, a science of complex analogies, a science of double vision: the facts of the past have meanings for us that differentiate them and place them, invariably and inevitably, in a system under the sign of contemporary problems. Thus one set of problems supplants another. History in this sense is a special method of studying the present with the aid of the facts of the past.” – Boris M. Ejxenbaum, “Literary Environment” (1929), p. 56 ...

**Jakobson on the dialectical nature of forms of realism:** “As the tradition equating realism with *C* became established, new realist artists (in the *A1* sense) were compelled to call themselves neorealists, realists in the higher sense of the word, or naturalists, and they drew a line between quasi- or pseudo-realism (*C*) and what they conceived to be genuine realism (i.e., their own). ‘I am a realist, but only in the higher sense of the word,’ Dostoevskij declared. And an almost identical declaration has been made by the Symbolists, by Italian and Russian Futurists, by German Expressionists, and so on and on.” – Roman Jakobson, “On Realism in Art” (1921), p. 43 ...

**Mikhail Baxtin on “hidden and overt” polemic:** “To draw a distinct dividing line between the hidden and the overt, open polemic in a concrete case sometimes proves quite difficult, but the conceptual differences are essential. Overt polemic is simply directed toward the other speech act, the one being refuted, as its own referential object. Hidden polemic is usually focused on some referential object which it denotes, depicts, expresses – and only obliquely does it strike at the other speech act, somehow clashing with it on the grounds of the referent itself. As a result, the latter begins to influence the author’s speech from within. It is for that reason we call hidden polemic double-voiced, although the relationship of the two voices here is special. The other intention does not enter explicitly into the discourse but is only reflected in it, determining its tone and meaning. One speech act acutely senses another speech act close by, one addressed to the same topic, and this recognition determines its entire structure.” – Mikhail Baxtin, “Discourse Typology in Prose” (1929), p. 188 ...

**Mikhail Baxtin on “hidden polemic” and “hidden dialogue”:** “Especially significant and important for our subsequent aims is hidden dialogue (not to be identified with hidden polemic). Imagine a dialogue between two persons in which the statements of the second speaker are deleted, but in such a way that the general sense is not disrupted. The second speaker’s presence is not shown; his actual words are not given, but the deep impressions of these words has a determining effect on all the utterances made by one who does not speak. We feel that this is a

conversation of the most intense kind, because each uttered word, in all its fiber, responds and reacts to the invisible partner, referring to something outside itself, beyond its limits, the unspoken word of the other speaker. In Dostoevskij's works this hidden dialogue occupies a very important place and is extremely subtle and profoundly elaborated." – Mixail Baxtin, "Discourse Typology in Prose" (1929), pp. 189-90 ...

### EVIDENTIARY OUTTAKES (PASSIM)

*Knowledge, knowledge, knowledge / Boom boom, boom boom, boom boom* – Tristan Tzara

### NOTHINGNESS REVISITED

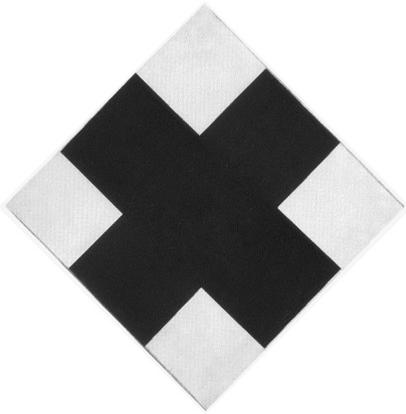
"The Big Nothing" 2004 @ the ICA (Philadelphia) – "Still, I said I was glad to have come across the show, and it was not just because I liked a few works here and there. It was because this show suggests a cheering thought, which may seem like an odd remark to make about a muddle about nothing, except that, as Emily Dickinson put it, sometimes saying nothing 'says the most.' / This is a fundamental lesson of Minimalism, whose intersection with Conceptualism and other radical 1960's movements like Fluxus is the true, poorly articulated heart of this exhibition. What all those movements shared, and what keeps them current, was the idea that in art, as in life, no is often the first constructive step toward yes." Review, Michael Kimmelman, "Artists who just say no. To everything." *New York Times* (June 25, 2004) ...

"Aesthetic programs for a radical reduction of means and effects in art – including the ultimate demand, for the renunciation of art itself – can't be taken at face value, undialectically. These are neither consistent policies for artists nor merely hostile gestures aimed at audiences. Silence and allied ideas (like emptiness, reduction, the 'zero degree') are boundary notions with a complex set of uses; leading terms of a particular spiritual and cultural rhetoric." – Susan Sontag, "The Aesthetics of Silence", *Aspen* 5/6 (1967), "The Minimalism Issue" (Archived by Ubu Web) ...

"Eternity can be read in a composition of serene, solid, precisely inserted volumes, *a priori* since long ago, and forever." – Jean Nouvel (regarding Nouvel's series of "pavilions" at Expo 2002, Murten-Morat, Switzerland), in *El Croquis* 112/113, "Jean Nouvel 1994-2002" (Madrid: 2002), p. 217 ...

### SOME-THING ELSE

"In contemporary architecture, the poetics of de-materialization play on surface mystery, uncertainty of perception, ambiguity and illusion to convey the 'aesthetics of virtual reality' that Jean Nouvel spoke of with regard to his Fondation Cartier [1994], where tall dark glass panels reflect and multiply images and layers. Matter is thus not so much a means of defining the limits of the building as of liberating perception, introducing vibration and a host of changing and fragile readings, opening the way to the invisible and to emotion. In this 'aesthetics of the miracle' as described by the architect, mystery remains entire, the result is present but we are not aware of the means to achieve it, our emotion derives from perception of a building 'set free', which offers itself to our regard like an object, an inhabited painting." Salwa & Selma Mirou, "Oraisons modernes", *L'architecture d'aujourd'hui* 356 (January-February 2005), p. 53 / "The medium must disappear in what we see, in the absolute that shows itself resplendent in it." Giorgio Agamben, *Image et mémoire* (Paris: Desclée de Brouwer, 2004), cited in the "Oraisons modernes" ...



# ALMOST INDEPENDENCE DAY

[...]

If architects (and landscape architects) are primarily little whores (as Philip Johnson admitted, at least with reference to himself), architecture critics (insofar as they service architectural reputations, versus anything substantive, as in ideas) are bigger whores ... Witness the recent *Log 5* (2005), and/or *10 x 10 2* (Phaidon, 2005): the former a more or less needless capitulation to the dark forces of neo-liberalism now haunting architecture (after, alas, Rem Koolhaas) by a normally plucky little architecture journal; the latter a now typical and useless “almanac” of so-called emerging architects worldwide (who should be embarrassed to be included), with vacuous commentary by the architectural-academic illuminati (the “critics”, scare quotes necessary). This horrifying downturn in the fortunes of Architecture proper (the sacred, unfashionable version) represents and references the mere servicing of Capitalism (and architecture as *de luxe* real estate), a state of things on display in the equally bathetic and co-opted architectural press (books and magazines/journals), or a total capitulation to the new “machinic” ordinance (“4 x 4”), the machinic “universal”; that is to say, the production of sexed-up (“Photoshopped”) nothingness replicates itself endlessly as a game stacking the cards against the cards, a game now stalking the planet in the form of monstrously de-natured and hopelessly provisional environments – overall and after all, then, a picture of the New Nothingness Itself. Needless-to-say, the architectural elite are as bankrupt as any other elite.

In this horrific process (the “destruction of experience”, after Agamben) is the slaughter of the Real (after Žižek/Zupančič/Badiou), the slaughter of the “given” (after Marion), and the slaughter of the “as such” (after Kant and Hegel), a wide-ranging slaughter per se, but always already (after Derrida) the elimination of the specular and spectacular thing in/for itself (after metaphysics). The remainder, then (after Schelling), or what’s left, is a fully voided, zero-sum game (rampant nihilism).

“Take one step outside yourself / The whole path lasts no longer than one step ...” – Sussan Deyim

“Not enough sleep again / Thinking of you sinking with dark happiness ...” – Laurie Anderson

“How could I say the things I need to / You’d go away ...” – Lisa Germano

Architecture schools, architecture practice, and architecture publishing does NOT, fortunately, equal (equate) architectural thought. Yet this nothingness-x-nothingness, out of control and applauded as “exuberance”, is architecture-at-present. The answer is AESTHETICS (even if Kurt Forster seems to have forgotten the question) and PHILOSOPHY; that is, the rediscovery of the Real (the Given and its Other, or, paradoxically, “the Given Itself”, as Self/Other, as Marion would not say/write out of decorum).

Architecture as real estate destroys/negates the Real. As such, it is automatically complicit in the furthering of the prison-house of affect/effects (the *residual*, after Jameson, and – sadly, tragically – after Tafuri) of all instrumentalities inclusive of language and metaphysics – a conflation that takes place in language, semantics, and, therefore, a conflation that places language, architectural languages included, in an unholy alliance with twisted ideologies past, present and future. The battle then is to be/is fought IN philosophy (not the “grey”/owlish, pseudo-ontological kind), after theory, and on metaphysical grounds, AT LAST. Architecture today cannot be the site (return to the site) for such without re-formulating the spent premises of its own undertaking (its so-called coming-to-presence).

Therefore, Idealism Itself (not lowly ideology) is the “new black” (as in Hegel’s “Night of the World”). IT remains ineluctably BEYOND all instrumentalities as the spectral THING itself (par excellence, etc.), or as the Categorical (Moral) Imperative *ne plus ultra*. The Moral Law AS “night sky”, if you will (and even if you won’t). The new black is the OLD black. Strangely, we owe this evocation of the Abstract moral law to the post-Marxists currently burrowing away into the subterranean nether regions of repressed, forgotten and deferred metaphysical and onto-theological agendas. Žižek and Badiou are the exemplars of this excavation only at the moment, though it is unclear if anyone is prepared to follow on their timely archaeological project aimed at the future (while clearing the path to the revolutionary potential of the Absolute Present).

It is necessary, then, to pass through and to pass judgment on the tomb of Architecture Itself, passing toward the archaic aether (*philosophy + aesthetics*). It is this spirit that now animates (to repeat/state the obvious) the most advanced of the visual arts (the “moral” arts), a spirit that drifts within/through/beyond the pages of dangerous, small, books (nominally insignificant), “marginal” books/texts; notably books that frame experience, books that contain and condense or condition the bastardized (lamented) “universal”/abstract spirit forced into the wilderness and wastelands of present-day nihilism. Such books litter the night sky of present-day nothingness. As constellations of concepts and explosive/explicit tropes, they form and re-formulate the World Itself (the interior and – sadly – pathetic, yet unnecessarily so, world of speculative and specular particulars ... or words-as-things). Such is, nonetheless (after Nietzsche), the open secret – the foundation of the World (word) as Spirit calls. Alas (and fortunately), there is no other purpose.

[...]

GK (July 2005)

# THE FACTORY OF THE COLLECTIVE NEUROSIS

[...]

“Strange! So infinitesimally narrow is the threshold between the two realms, and yet no one raises their foot to cross it! The other reality borders on our skin, yet we do not feel it! Our imagination stops here, where it could create new land.” – Gustav Meyrink

“Poetic imagination distances itself from reality in order to join this very movement of self-distancing to this reality, to make inside what is, that which is not, and take that as its principle, as absence that makes presence desirable, irreality that allows the poet to possess the real, to have a ‘productive knowledge’ of it.” – Maurice Blanchot

“Ariadne becomes the place for meeting with Dionysus, a place that only *I*, that is Nietzsche, knows... Why does Nietzsche not proclaim Ariadne, whom he nonetheless knows? Perhaps because he knows her too well.” – Jean-Luc Marion

[...]

## I.

*Schmutz* ... He called the hot, sticky weather “schmutz” – saying it was “pidgin Yiddish”; that the pigeons spoke Yiddish, and that you could hear this word on their wings, a parting insult, as they flew off into the toxic urban doom and gloom. They said that he was crazy and didn’t believe in anything. But he didn’t believe them. (He was, then, impressed one mid-July day to see an iconic, Hasid strolling down First Avenue in black hat, long black coat, long brown side locks, unfazed, realizing the difference was the internal difference – an elective *not caring*, or living in another century.)

The doormen waved a collective “surrender with white cloths, wiping the greasy handprints of the haute-bourgeoisie, the plutocracy, off of the plate-glass doors of the High Street boutiques. (All summer long the papers of record were full of “news” of landlords pitching tenants to the wolves under the broken conceptual sign of “re-development” in Little Boho and on the Wild West Side, of eminent domain being used to condemn “blighted” *private property for new private development* – impure capitulation to “the market” – plus the unnecessary, ad hoc post-mortem of the mayor and deputy mayor’s failed plans for the 2012 *Summer* Olympics and a new West Side stadium *which nobody seemed to want anyway*.)

Summer settled in with a vengeance as July rolled onward; the late-capitalist machine gnawed, burped and growled at passersby. And yet, stepping off the unrelenting grid of the urban, Cartesian factory of collective neurosis (the City Itself), into The Park, the temperature dropped, the eyes focused (one’s own upon the other’s), and so-called irreversible time backed off, the Situationist spectacle turning inward.

Once inside the park, Time Itself became *mise en scène* itself (subject elided as object and vice versa, or subject-object *as one thing*). The trees, green swathes, boulder-fields, lakes, ponds, statuary, and architectural fabrique (rustic and Romantic neo-classical debris, really) took on a mesmeric otherworldliness. He recalled, *en passant*, in passing himself on the paths, that the southern portion of the park is often called, by the cognoscenti, “Central Park Memorial Cemetery”. The spell-binding irreality (a dialectical Real/Irreal thing/not-thing) suspended the machinic, diabolical thrust and parry of the monstrous city, momentarily, offering a view to the Real; a “Real” outside the sinister-splendid charms of the concrete and steel nemesis, Mannahatta, premier prison-house/address of World Capital (capital of Capital). While trapped here, he often thought of Dostoevski’s less-than-flattering opinion of Paris, and, of course, of Walter Benjamin’s “Arcades Project”, hidden under the bed of Georges Bataille, in Paris, as Benjamin headed for his rendezvous with God-Knows-What at the Franco-Spanish border in 1940.

Once or twice a day something else sounded an alarm (in-between the car alarms, the wailing sirens, and the incessant buzz and bleat of the cell-phone chewing public). In cafes, cinemas, galleries, and books (dangerous, small things filled with dangerous, small things; that is, words) another possible-impossible world called; a world that persistently, maniacally remains, out of *Necessity Itself*, just beyond this world.

This other world falls in and out of space-time as supplement only insofar as this other world is perpetually driven off, marginalized, scandalized, and appropriated by the other of this other world – as “economic activity”, then (and always); a spectral *dybbuk* haunting and hunting all things purely given (the world that rises each day with the sun). Thus, he was fond of misquoting Thoreau’s “The sun is also a mo[u]rning star”, knowing the added “u” could hardly be detected by the human ear, a phrase expropriated/torn from *Walden* (1854), and a phrase that seemed to mark the transit (extra “u” or not) of the paradoxical, synchronic “moment” when things purely given are seized and turned, again and again (*ad nauseam*, and as artifactual museum of affects) into the all-consuming, disembodied thing known as Capitalism Triumphant. The residual (the remainder that sticks out of this so-called economy of affects, as unassimilable surplus) is also the utmost secret desire of the demonic machine/city (its daemon, and its self-undoing).

The capitalist beast, in its half-conscious “drive” (its endlessly reified, “unnatural” acts of conquest) wants/*craves* this “other”, this maiden/daemon, this excess, a something unobtainable, quite simply out of reach and beyond its scope (tentacles), always lost to it in the curves (legs and breasts, length and breadth) of reversible time; that other time of which it (the beast) can only dream of conquering, subduing, and “owning” *in its very own twilight*, or after its ceremonial, catastrophic self-renunciation.

Thus, his main concern, even while happy in his misery (stuck in the swelter of the City in July), remained the Anti-Capitalist Sublime; that is to say, protecting “the maiden” (to which he often conjoined the mental image of a primordial/archaic “maiden voyage”, a self-disclosing voyage into the interior of time and things and on through the archaic “aether” to the other side, *outside the outside* – recalling Wittgenstein’s aperçu that to improve the world one must improve oneself).

Thus, too (then), began the almost-Arthurian, insane (deranged and doomed) quest for “The Philosophy of the Real” – on the fast-approaching 200th anniversary of Hegel’s *Phenomenology of Spirit* (1807) – a quest for the ur-formal Thing Itself, the Absolute-in-the-Contingent, the mythic phonemic territory of affects beyond the machinic *demi-monde* of a world gone endlessly awry. It was this land of affects that seemed slaughtered every day, though he knew that it was – *ultimately* – beyond the reach of the beast *because it did not exist*.

## II.

“We have to accomplish the possible in order to be able to seize upon the impossible.” – Simone Weil

“The hedonism of postmodern society, far from representing a step out of the framework of what Nietzsche calls the ascetic [anti-aesthetic] ideal, is deeply rooted in this framework [not unlike Weber’s critique of the Protestant ethic]. In order to see this, we must first understand that for Nietzsche, the asceticism involved in the ascetic ideal does not simply involve a renouncement of enjoyment; it involves, above all, a specific mode of articulation of enjoyment.” – Alenka Zupančič

“Make two wings out of white tulle fabric ..., also leather straps for attaching these wings on your back and fixing them in place. After this, having stayed alone in your room ..., you should put on the wings, and sit completely without anything to do and in silence for five to ten minutes, after which you should turn to your usual endeavours without leaving the room.... After two to three weeks of daily procedures, the effect of the white wings will begin to manifest itself with greater and greater force.” – Ilya Kabakov

He was very fond of the Categorical Imperative, *especially when /S/he arrived in skirts*. Thus, as if to prove that the quest for the Absolute-in-the-Contingent could never quite be a bloodless affair, he ran straight into Her one day in the nasty summer of ’05 in the form of a young friend telling him that she (25) had fallen for an older man (51). Being 50, and having coveted this young woman for years, he felt compelled to tell her that a 51-year-old male operates ineluctably from a deep, archaic desire that we normally (nominally) call “lust” (especially when it is directed at someone half his age). In contemplating telling her this, he realized that he would also reveal his own deep, primal desire *in the process*. Nonetheless, after having divulged this possible reason to steer clear or at least be wary of ravenous 51-year-olds, he felt exposed. Having addressed and undressed the Categorical Imperative on the spot, he also felt compelled to elaborate further.

This elaboration took the form of spelling out that THAT dark instinct *combined with Some-thing Else* is exactly what we all secretly seek – that it is the elixir of life. Yet, presumptuously (as it always *is* presumptuous to spell

such things out) he suggested to his 25-year-old friend that it was perhaps her own desire to be conquered that drew her like a moth to the proverbial flame. In saying this he surmised that the double exposure of motives might play out to a less catastrophic end ... That she might enquire into what her own motives were and what possible motives the 51-year-old wolf might also disclose.

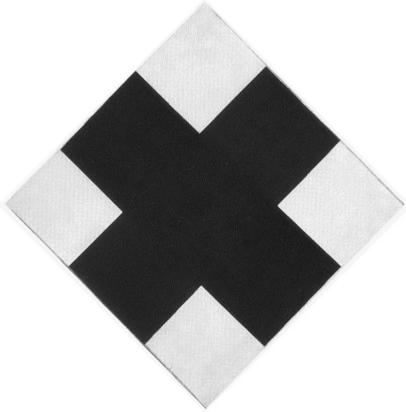
To this end, he disclosed his own motives and received, in compensation, the most beautiful “line” ever dropped in return. This line stopped at the heart and stopped his heart for a moment, while he savored it. It was, after all, from Her (operating *within and through* his young friend). This line opened onto that vista he sought inside of things and inside of experience; as such, the sublime Categorical Imperative, as primordial and preternatural writing-subject, drew an arabesque (utilizing/unwinding her words) against the azure, anterior sky buried within all things, including his own heart.

Having found, then, that “The Philosophy of the Real” was very Real indeed, he resolved to fold more of the personal into the abstract, and vice versa, renouncing grey ontology and grey philosophy forever, as he had already renounced grey scholarship to write endless impenetrable and unpublishable essays on the vacuous torpor of present-day architecture and design – that is to say, vowing to leave (again and definitively) mere textual operations for pure literary space (*imaginary time-space*), a “time-space” that is also the actual taking-place of the Real.

It was this last insight that led him to the earth-shattering conception that all writing is “*literary work*”, even works that appear written in stone or otherwise. As he worked his way further and further into Hegel’s *Phenomenology of Spirit* he realized that this monumental work (dismissed and re-discovered, repeatedly, over its near-200-year trajectory) was also best read as a *literary work* of absolute genius.

He was eager, then, to reach the point in Hegel’s great work where the author drew a line through the name “Byron”, for selfish reasons perhaps, as Heidegger had drawn a line through the word “Being” in the 1960s, well after the well-worn artifact *Being and Time* (1927) had left its emphatic “literary” mark. It was, too, after this encounter with the Categorical Imperative that he vowed to publish his 20,000-word novella (a love letter to Her) back-to-back, come hell or high water (perhaps the same thing), with “The Philosophy of the Real”, as it was the events described within that novella/memoir that seemed to first open the horizon of the Real. This novella, entitled “S”, had caused no small amount of problems with its readers (*mostly young women*) and continued to serve as touchstone for the call that called in ’03, as it called in ’05, merely shifting its axis (like a whirlwind) to gather more and more material unto itself.

GK (July 2005)



# “DAY” & “NIGHT” (“NIGHT” & “DAY”)

[...]

“He only is the Sea, holder of treasures; born many a time he views the hearts within us.... Seven are the pathways which the wise have fashioned; to one of these may come the troubled mortal. He stands in the dwelling of the Highest, a pillar, on sure ground where paths are parted.” – *Rig Veda* (Book X, Hymn V)

“The fashion of the Sublime has the supplementary privilege of being extremely old ...” – Jean-Luc Nancy, “The Sublime Offering” (1990), *A Finite Thinking*, trans. Jeffrey Libbrett (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2003)

[...]

## ŽIŽEK/BADIOU

The triumphant triumvirate, Žižek/Zupančič/Badiou, circle the Real ... And yet ... What they fail to properly/fully address (undress), because they wish for it to remain “spectral” (out of Lacanian Necessity), is German Idealism re-written, though Hegel figures mightily, as the figure of this Spectral Thing (Spirit) ... Finishing up Žižek’s retrospective *Interrogating the Real* (Verso, 2005), one can only hope that the forthcoming *Universal Exception* (Verso, 2005) will finish off the project ... Zupančič’s *Ethics of the Real* (Verso, 2000) moves closer to the “Night” (disclosed by Žižek as the phantasmatic Thing pursued in Idealism and opposed to the “Day” of Enlightenment hegemony); thus, too, scare quotes are absolutely necessary (to properly inscribe “Night” and “Day”)... See (if you wish/dare) Novalis ... If it is Subjectivity Itself that is pre-figured always by diremptions, disclosures, unveilings, eloquent locutions (*pace* Lacan), it is also Subjectivity Itself that eludes the Signifier and its Author (and the Analyst/Analysand) ... Badiou remains the locus of this salutary fire (firing arrows of fire from the late-medieval fortress of thought known, nominally, as Modernity) ... These arrows rain down, on fire (as fire), bringing (back) to mind Artaud ... To this “return” of the real Real all things aspire, as things-on-fire ... Thus, too, this fire remains offstage, underwritten (in all senses/unsensed), unassimilable ... “Far from being opposed to historicity, the Real is its very ‘ahistorical’ ground, the a priori of historicity itself.” – Slavoj Žižek, “The Real of Sexual Difference” (2002), *Interrogating the Real*, ed. Rex Butler and Scott Stephens (London: Continuum, 2005), p. 350 ...

## SCHILLER

Friedrich Schiller, *On the Sublime*, trans. Julius Elias (New York: Ungar, 1966) ...

“The [S]ublime is of a dual sort. We refer it to either our power of apprehension and are defeated in the attempt to form an image of its concept; or we refer it to our vital power and view it as a power against which our own dwindles to nothing. But even if, in the first case or the second, it is the occasion of a painful awareness of our limitations, still we do not run away from it, but rather are drawn to it by an irresistible force. Would this be even possible if the limits of our imagination were at the same time the limits of our power of comprehension? Would we so gladly accede to the remainder of the overwhelming power of natural forces if we did not possess something else in reserve which need not fall prey to those forces? We delight in the sensuously infinite because we are able to think what the senses can no longer apprehend and the understanding can no longer comprehend. We are ravished by the terrifying because we are able to will that which our sensuous impulses are appalled by, and can reject what they desire. We gladly permit the imagination to meet its master in the realm of appearances because ultimately it is only a sensuous faculty that triumphs over other sensuous faculties; but nature in her entire boundlessness cannot impinge upon the absolute greatness within ourselves. We gladly subordinate our well-being and our existence to physical necessity, for we are reminded thereby that it cannot command our principles. Man is in its hands, but man’s will is in his own hands.” Ibid. pp. 198-99.

“Who does not prefer to tarry among the spiritual disorder of a natural landscape rather than in the spiritless regularity of a French garden?” Ibid., p. 204.

“World history appears to me a sublime object. The world, as an historical subject matter, is basically nothing but the conflict of natural forces among themselves and with man’s freedom; history reports to us the outcome of this

battle. As history has thus far developed, it has much greater deeds to recount about nature (in which all human emotions must be included) than about independent reason which has asserted its power only in a few exceptions to the natural law.... Should one approach history with great expectations of illumination and knowledge – how very disappointed one is! All well-intentioned attempts of philosophy to reconcile what the moral world demands with what it actually performs are contradicted by the testimony of experience, and, as amiably as nature in her organic realm is guided, or appears to be guided, by the regulative principles of judgement, in the realm of freedom she as impetuously tears off the reins by which the speculative spirit would gladly lead her.” Ibid., pp. 206-207.

### PASCAL'S TWO INFINITIES

In 1674 the first French translation of Longinus' treatise appeared, penned by Nicolas Boileau-Despreaux. Boileau, according to Louis Marin, developed a slightly different reading of this text, than his predecessors; a reading that presented the effects of *hypsos* (the Sublime) – and, please note, only the effects of the Sublime may be experienced, not the thing itself – as “what delights, enraptures, ravishes, what strikes, seizes, surprises, bewitches, excites”. This energetic reading was offered in contrast or as a supplement to similar, if not less sensational traits enumerated by Tanneguy Le Fèvre (Tanaquillus Faber), author of a Latin translation, published in 1663, equating the Sublime with “grandeur, magnificence, dignity, weight, [and] intensity”. The former, more scandalous terminologies seem to be aimed at a different part of the subject than the latter, in that the subject is the entire point of sublime rhetoric and is to be “weakened” and “dispossessed” by contact with this extreme force in language and nature. Let us guess that Boileau was aiming his pencil at the entire edifice of neo-classical figuration, architecture included.

It is not grandiloquence that matters in sublime rhetoric but *petitesse énergique* (energetic smallness). The experience of “rapture, transport, ecstasy, stupefaction, astonishment, or bedazzlement” (Boileau) brings the subject to the “threshold of indefinition”; and this is the point where Marin makes a bedazzling leap of his own by suggesting that the Sublime is “where” the form encounters the limit that makes it a beautiful form. By most definitions (including Heidegger's), and *pace* Marin, the Sublime is an excess of beauty, a surplus, that resides outside of all forms (and formulations). This is useful to remember (and politely explain) when the Sublime is invoked to describe a mountain range, a woman or a work of art. The Sublime, in fact, does not ever appear and only *shines within something else*, a distant far off “Other” that can never be contained in linguistic or physical form. It is said that music may be the only artform that is truly sublime in itself. This, too, is why Poussin's paintings, which Marin has written at length about, especially in *Sublime Poussin* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1995), are not sublime *in themselves* but are illuminated by the Sublime. (It seems a slippery qualification to pursue, but such is the entire operation of conducting/mounting a search for the Sublime.) The pastoral scenery in Poussin's most renowned paintings have a furtive “interior” life, a metaphysical *je ne sais quoi*, above and beyond anything painterly, allegorical, figurative or simply mimetic. The landscapes are not sublime; they are imbued *with* the Sublime, which is always already outside any system of representation or figuration. Marin is precise in stating that the Sublime marks a “fissure” in representation “exposing the immanent lapsing of the ontological power of language”.

It is here, in this ultra slippery passage regarding traces, gaps and absences, that Pascal makes an appearance in Marin's critique. In Pascal's *Pensées* (1660) the mind encounters “the infinite terms that announce the [S]ublime” within words (e.g., nouns) and within the infinite fields, folds, factors, different conditions, points of view, objects and “what have you” that comprise a singular “nominal” figure of speech or thought (or architecture). This resembles Leibniz's famous remarks concerning the hypothetical worlds within worlds within a simple pond (whorls within whorls within whorls, *ad naseam*, to dizzying effect/affect). Leibniz, then, to save his baroque soul, departs into calculus and produces the ultimate instrumental system for calculating the depth of the world. No such finely calibrated baroque machine, however gorgeous, will do for Pascal. With Pascal an entirely different conclusion is drawn. In Pascal we see the emergence of the language of incommensurability that haunts present-day post-structuralism (or, at least, this is Marin's great rhetorical trick). It would seem that Derrida's conceptual whirligigs – e.g., “*différance*” and “trace” – perhaps originate with Pascal. “This vision of an ever-expanding field of differences works in language just as it does in perspective. Language functions as an open-ended field of differences in which man's being is articulated in acts of meaning, in relations formed by discourse among discrete units in that field. Since the number of potential distinctions and propositions is limitless, the full range of semantic possibility can never be circumscribed. Thus language bears the mark of the same constitutive gap that structures perception – that of the [S]ublime, the infinite.” Here, too, and after all, is the source of much of Jean-Luc Marion's musings on the same subject, transposed into a discussion of “saturated phenomenon” in *The Crossing of the Visible* (2004) and *Being Given* (2002).

According to Marin, it is in Pascal's very famous remarks regarding the two infinities (in "Disproportion de l'Homme", in the *Pensées*) (1660) that an anticipation of Kant's third critique (*Critique of Judgment*, 1790) is evident. The two forms of imagination broached in Pascal's *Pensées* – "reproductive" and "productive" – are established as means of approaching/apprehending the world. "Reproductive" imagination is essentially the oldest game in the book; that is, classical mimesis or imitation. The latter, "productive" imagination, is a superior force that comes to an apotheosis of sorts, in Pascal's estimation, in geometry. Mimesis is considered by Pascal "the mistress of error and falsehood". This is so, no doubt, for the very reason that it may not approach the Sublime. The latter, the "productive", is the realm of *phantasia* (phantasm) and the daemonic (in the Platonic sense). It is, after all, the interior "abstract" compositional traits of Poussin's paintings that adumbrate the Sublime, not the picturesque or archaic landscape, nor the mythological, often tragic subject matter. Pascal eventually gets round to disowning geometry (a preliminary form of abstraction), however, since it cannot but generate new conceptions of "proportionality". The Sublime, by its hidden "nature", must transgress "every perceptual limit of the imagination". Proportionality is a curse that results in "lassitude" and "monotony" (or melancholy). "Here theoretical consciousness encounters its pathos.... The melancholy pathos of the indefinite discovers itself to be geometric knowledge."

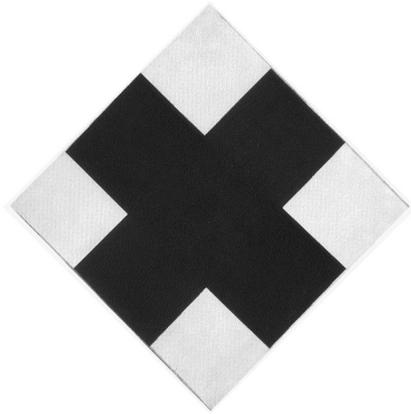
Marin, then, in an exquisite rhetorical *coup d'état*, brings Pascal's greatest revelation to bear: "To 'the art hidden in the depths of the human soul' responds a nature that, enshrouding itself in its depths, never relents as it develops indefinitely its present, yet unrepresentable, infinity: its totality." The two infinities become, in this scenario, a melancholy uber-geometry, a human and divine inexhaustibility, the unbridgeable gap between the product of the theoretical imagination and the inexhaustible production of nature. To escape, pathos yields to ethos, in Pascal's fertile brain. He leaps the fence and discards all instrumental systems (geometry, rhetoric, etc.) "to make reflections that are worth more than all the rest of geometry". This is the *unhinging of language itself* and a stepping out into a virtual landscape of extraordinary indeterminacy. To bring it home, so to speak, in the production of landscape, it would constitute a "sublime writing", as it did for Poussin, but "it" will always be provisional. Here, maybe, is the true meaning of the avant-garde.

There is a glimpse, here, between these towering conceptual peaks, of a great, somewhat mystical hidden art, Pascal's "art hidden in the depths of the human soul". (In Schiller's romantic take on this, what matches the divine sublime, in the human being, is "Will".) Could this sigilistic artform be approached through a utopian landscape architecture? Marin has also written (elsewhere) about utopia as a linguistic (literary) means of unearthing ideology – as a perennial critique of the status quo. Pascal's cryptic claim that "man surpasses man infinitely", suggests, perhaps, that human imagination fails to supply an object to the fullness of the Sublime simply because s/he is a work in progress. Here, then, are echoes (back and forth) with Marion's idea of saturated phenomenon. Yet Marin suggests that we might, in fact, discover in ethics (ana-praxis) a suitable ground for approaching this divine (daemonic) surplus. This is the unavoidable wager, a gambit alluded to by innumerable writings after Pascal, opened up by Pascal's chiasmus. If the instability of signs implies an infinite regress – i.e., signs are essentially empty or retain only a trace of the signified – it is in the nature of language itself that this absence occurs. Might language be renovated toward a rapprochement with the Sublime? Might it not require constant renovation? Marin proposes that this condition of inadequacy is a "strange ecstasy", and in so doing offers a form of compensation – the contemplation of the Sublime as an opening onto other frontiers, perhaps more fruitful and perhaps more alarming than anything instrumental systems or everyday experience may ever offer. Perhaps it is all a fairy-tale, or vain imaginings. Such is the realm of phantasy and redemption. Such may also be the path to the hidden, rumored back door to "Eden" ... (2001/2004) ...

GK (October 2005)

## KANT/DELEUZE

"The judgement 'this is beautiful' is only one type of aesthetic judgement. We must examine the other type; 'this is sublime'. In the Sublime, imagination surrenders itself to an activity quite distinct from that of formal reflection. The feeling of the sublime is experienced when faced with the formless or the deformed (immensity or power). It is as if imagination were confronted with its own limit, forced to strain to its utmost, experiencing a violence which stretches it to the extremity of its power." – Gilles Deleuze, *Kant's Critical Philosophy: The Doctrine of the Faculties*, trans. Hugh Tomlinson (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984) ...



# “THE THING”: FROM KANT TO MARION

## TRANSCENDENTAL APPERCEPTION & ITS OTHER

[...]

“The order and regularity in the appearances, which we entitle *nature*, we ourselves introduce. We could never find them in appearances, had we not ourselves, or the nature of our mind, originally set them there.” – Immanuel Kant, *Kritik der reinen Vernunft* [*Critique of Pure Reason*], First edition, 1781, p. 125; cited in Christopher Janaway, *Self and World in Schopenhauer's Philosophy* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989), p. 42; trans. Norman Kemp Smith from *Immanuel Kant's Critique of Pure Reason* (London: Macmillan, 1929)

“The ‘I think’ must be able to accompany all my representations; for otherwise something would be represented in me which could not be thought at all, which amounts to the representation's being either impossible, or at least nothing for me.” – Immanuel Kant, *Kritik der reinen Vernunft* [*Critique of Pure Reason*], Second edition, 1787, pp. 131-32; cited in *ibid.*

Kant's Transcendental Aesthetic – <http://www.hkbu.edu.hk/~ppp/cpr/aesth.html>

[...]

## SOME-THING ELSE

“The *unity of that will ...* which lies beyond the phenomenon, and in which we have recognised the inner nature of the phenomenal world, is a metaphysical unity, and consequently transcends the knowledge of it, *i.e.*, does not depend upon the functions of our intellect, and therefore can not really be comprehended by it. Hence arises that it opens to the consideration an abyss so profound that it admits of no thoroughly clear and systematically connected insight, but grants us only isolated glances, which enable us to recognise this unity in this and that relation of things, now in the subjective, now in the objective sphere, whereby, however, new problems are again raised.” – Arthur Schopenhauer, *The World as Will and Representation*, trans. R.B. Haldane, J. Kemp, Vol. III, 7th edition, (London: Kegan Paul, 1900), p. 71 ...

“Philosophy's theme must restrict itself to the world: pronouncing in all aspects *what* the world *is*, what it *is* in its innermost nature, is all that it can honestly achieve. Now it is keeping with this that my teaching, on reaching its summit, takes on a negative character, and so ends with a negation. For here it can speak only of that which is denied, given up ... Here is precisely the point where the mystic proceeds positively, and from here on nothing remains but mysticism.” – Arthur Schopenhauer, *The World as Will and Representation*, in *Zürcher Ausgabe: Werke in zehn Bänden*, Vol. I, edited by Arthur Hübscher (Zürich: Diogenes-Taschenbücher, 1977), pp. 715-16; cited in Christopher Janaway, *Self and World in Schopenhauer's Philosophy* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989), p. 320; trans. by E.F.J. Payne, in *The World as Will and Representation* (New York: Dover, 1969), pp. 611-12 ...

“Here (and in conformity with a long poetic tradition) the abyss of infinity is contained in the eye that gazes at us (Hegel called this ‘the night of the world’). But, of course, there is one instance when the two terms, *Auge* [*Auge/n*, eye/s] and *Blick* [gaze], are even more happily united: precisely the notion of *Augenblick* (moment). When, in *Zarathustra*, the theme of eternal recurrence appears for the first time (in the chapter ‘On the Vision and the Riddle’), Nietzsche talks about a ‘gateway’ called ‘Moment’ (*Augenblick*), a point at which two paths meet (as if ‘offending each other face to face’) – two paths that seem to contradict each other, and to stretch for an eternity in opposite directions.” Alenka Zupančič, *The Shortest Shadow: Nietzsche's Philosophy of the Two* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2003), pp. 22-23 ...

Jean-Luc Marion, *Being Given: Toward a Phenomenology of Givenness*, trans. Jeffrey L. Kosky (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2002); first published *Étant donné: Essai d'une phénoménologie de la donation* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1997) ...

Kant: “No language fully attains or makes intelligible the aesthetic idea ...” (Ibid., p. 198) ... Kant: “Representation of the imagination” leads to sensible intuition ... Outside *a priori* categories, beyond metaphysical causes (and effects), the affective, superabundant “thing” “plays perfectly ‘in its free play.’ And this play plays the sublime.” (Ibid., p. 198) ... “For intuition, supposedly ‘blind’ in the realm of poor or common phenomena, turns out, in a radical phenomenology, to be blinding.” (Ibid., p. 203) ... “Bedazzlement begins when perception crosses its tolerable maximum.” (Ibid., p. 206) ... That is, such things do mostly “nothing”, representing the antithesis of the “interactive *commercium*”, the instrumentalization or relative coordinates substituting for anything authentic ... Cut loose, then, freely floating in time (and out), generating a “difference that differs”, generating “historicity” by remaining mostly absent, provisionally inferred in time ... “Absolute, unique, coming-forward” by degrees (Ibid., p. 207) ... /S/aturated, another /S/ word ... “In saturation, the I undergoes the disagreement between an at least potential phenomenon and the subjective condition for its experience; and, as a result, it does not constitute an object.” (Ibid., p. 213) ... “The saturated phenomenon refuses to let itself be regarded as an [abject] object [instead an event] Precisely because it appears with a multiple and indescribable excess that annuls all effort at constitution [assimilation to an abstract concept] ...” (Ibid., p. 213) ... Therefore, avoiding (voiding) objectness versus objectivity (p. 214) ... Or, it escapes the gaze of the transcendental ego (I), as “irregardable” ... “The gaze keeps [needs] objects [things] in an objected state for the I [eye].” (Ibid., p. 214) ... Thereafter, Descartes’ cogito “rules” things, and they cannot “return” (escape) ... The gaze “guards”, “follows”, placing all things in relation to *a priori* conceptual “fields” (coordinates of pure thought), except when confronted with the “exceptional” (saturated phenomenon) ... “In what figure does it appear?” ... The “poor or common phenomenality of objects” is lost, and some-thing else is found (appears, is given) (Ibid., p. 215) ... Hence, there arrives “*counter-experience of a non-object ...*” (Ibid., p. 215, italics added) ...

[...]

GK (October 2005)

# THE FORMALIST MOMENT “NOW”

[...]

## NINE-SQUARE

Staring at a ventilation unit this morning (a concrete block with nine holes, high in the wall of my temporal abode at the edge of the Adelaide grid), I realized why the nine-square was so dear to Hejduk ... It seems to represent the perfect relationship of the subject to the world of representations ... It's perfectly symmetrical and contains the center, kernel in relation (exact relation) to all the other portions ... It is also a Greek cross ... “Geometry is the vestibule of Philosophy” (Plotinus) ... All this while listening to music (Ryan Adams and The Cardinals, *Jacksonville City Nights*, 2005) and drinking coffee (Turkish style) ... In my head, then, “The Formalist Moment” leaps forth (the “Now”, the intersection of the two axes of that “crossing” of world and representation, contingency and abstraction – the formalist moment itself) ... This leads back, into Russian Formalism, and poor Viktor Shklovsky (much ridiculed by Jameson in *The Prison-House of Language*, 1972) feeding books into a stove (echoes of *Doctor Zhivago*, 1965) to stay warm while discussing the phonemic structure of poetic language (see Svetlana Boym's *The Future of Nostalgia*, 2001), on to the sacrificial troubadours Akhmatova and Mandelstam buried in the avalanche of post-Revolution Soviet ideology (the war against bourgeois subjectivity/kitsch), toward the 1950s and the “warming” with Khrushchev (all for obvious, post-Stalin ideological reasons, after all), up through Andrei Tarkovsky and the arrival of “The Thing from Inner Space” (Žižek's 1999 summary of Tarkovsky's “cinematic moment”) ... All prompted, in part (and in turn), by reading about the connections “forward” from Schopenhauer to Nietzsche and Wittgenstein ...

## UNREASONABLE GLOSSES/POST-KANT

Arthur Schopenhauer (1788-1860) – The confrontation of the subject and the world plays out as Will and Representation, the will as a vast primordial darkness, which provides the backdrop for the self (produces the self), which produces endless representations (“till the cows come home”). The self (stuck in the anamorphic stain of Being-There) can free itself (its Self) by giving up all willing and representation. Off then, with Schopenhauer, to “the (well-appointed) hotel at the edge of the abyss ...”

Friedrich Nietzsche (1844-1900) – The self is a necessary illusion. Representations serve the will (the Will to Power). All that matters is doing (willing), making representation an affirmation of this tragic state.

Ludwig Wittgenstein (1889-1951) – The metaphysical subject exists outside the world creating/living in language (that mirrors/represents the world). Language is the umbilical cord connecting monads (metaphysical subjects). Truth is logic (everything else is aesthetics).

Martin Heidegger (1889-1976) – We are thrown into the world, into Being (the world worlds us), our existence is toward negation (freeing ourselves from the law of averages, the levelling). Being toward negation (death) is our primal condition, nullifying being trapped in representations (perspectivism), the folds of the spent metaphysical and onto-theological project.

Jacques Lacan (1901-81) – The Real, the Symbolic, and the Imaginary intersect (interpenetrate) in the modern (post-Cartesian) subject. The Cartesian subject is the subject of all psychoanalysis. The Real always is reflected in a system held in tension by Law, Custom, the Name(s)-of-the-Father, mediated by fantasy (*jouissance*), repression, misidentification, drives. It is phantasmatic ... Acceptance (versus interpretation) of this state leads to transference. The subject is healed but offered no way out of the labyrinth (house of mirrors).

Jean-Luc Marion – The Reduction arrives finally at paradox (revelation), the metaphysical dyad self/other becomes metaphysical-existential “X” (exit) revealing “the given” as pure phenomenon (not of transcendent but absolute contingent origin), without concept and before representation, as Event ... Out of the Thing (the Sublime) and its withdrawal distance is given back, producing the fundamental time-space of the Real, the “Now” (the Present-Present) as the trace of the encounter with saturated phenomenon. Saturated phenomena cause a short circuit in the

metaphysical apparatus of thought. The world comes about out of its own resources (the subject is left staring back at its foremost extension, infinity). The finite then registers the infinite and the apparent broken world dissolves back into One Thing.

[...]

### THEREFORE

Art (and Architecture, if it dare rises to the level of Art) is *ethical, moral, and utopian*; that is, Art is – after all – the “Formalist Moment”, in/for itself, *par excellence* ...

GK (October 2005)

### POSTSCRIPT

THE (IR)REAL THING (09/26/05) – Having arrived at conclusions regarding Architecture (the capitalized version), and circling the Real-Irreal (Irreal-Real) kernel at the heart of representation, it is clear that the Way Out is always the same way out. The Real in the Irreal, and the Irreal in the Real, is this way out. It (a proverbial Nothing Much) comes about (arrives) through Reduction; that is, a set of reductions to things, but also through things and out the other side of things into a cosmogonic landscape of other things (the paradoxical non-place of the Other). One can only find this path through things by living the path, by living within the Great Reduction, a rite of passage to the Real-Irreal “place” buried in the Categorical Everything (the Everything and Nothing in the Here-and-Now). It is this Everything that contains the Too Much and the Too Little, as it contains the Nietzschean chiasmus the Too Soon and the Too Late. This path leads through the mirror, then, and onto/through the flame as well, toward the World-on-Fire (the world as metaphysical-existential anti-milieu, if you will), out into the Night of the World Itself. Thus the Philosophy of the (Ir)Real as the path and as the Way Out (of nihilism). Thus, too, the tomb of Architecture, and Architecture’s spent corpse. Yet the question remains, for Architecture: “Is the end rich, protean ‘humus’ (earth) or a toxic wasteland with an after-half-life of 10,000 years?”

# THE RUINS OF THOUGHT

## ŽIŽEK – FIVE SCENARIOS TOWARD A SHORT FILM

[...]

**SCENE 1** – A Slovenian city ... A film crew is setting up yet another Medieval romance shot in the former East Bloc by dragging carts and driving chickens and oxen into the town square while a truck passes by spraying everything and everyone with a brown goop. The camera zooms in on the passing truck to reveal a payload of offal stirred by a rotating blade. Civilians scatter holding their noses ... The camera pans (utilizing a crude maquette) to wooded hills above the city and a lonely dacha perched on a wooded bluff overlooking an abyss. N.B.: Utilize Brian Helgeland's *A Knight's Tale* (2001) and Jiří Menzel's *Larks on a String* (1969) for "associative affects".(1)

Intercut a second polished/glossy Žižek, in Hollywood, in a glass house high above Los Angeles, reclining in a Barcelona chair, writing. A picture of Aldous Huxley may be seen on the wall ... On the television is Bill Condon's *Gods and Monsters* (1998). Outside is a party ... Intercut scenes of the same from David Lynch's *Mulholland Drive* (2002). On a table are dog-eared copies of Abercrombie & Fitch catalogues with post-its sticking out of them ... A young, blond and androgynous man/woman ("Alenka", as below) delivers a drink on a silver tray with a telegram which Žižek glances at ... Alternately, cut in images of a limousine ascending Mulholland Drive, perhaps cut from Nicolas Roeg's *The Man Who Fell to Earth* (1976). Cut in the window-washing/squeegee scene from the Wachowski's *The Matrix* (1999) and/or Iñigo Manglano-Ovalle's video ode to the Farnsworth House, *Le Baiser/The Kiss* (1999).

Night falls in both the glass house in the Hollywood hills and the woods above the generic Slovenian city ... Inside the rustic dacha Žižek is sitting by an open fire. On the floor are piles and piles of books (the complete works of Schelling, Hegel, Marx, Freud, Lacan, Adorno, Heidegger, Habermas) ... Unspooled VHS tapes litter the floor ... A bank of small Soviet-era, black-and-white television sets and videocassette players encircle the slumped figure wrapped in a colorful crocheted blanket. All of the television sets are on, but with sound off ...

Žižek eyes the dwindling fire, eyes the dwindling stack of firewood, then eyes his broadaxe resting in a corner of the room. Outside the trees all flee (walking hurriedly for higher ground) ... Painted spectral faces peer out of the darkness and vanish, as in Jim Jarmusch's *Dead Man*, (1995).(2)

Inside Alenka (Žižek's "niece") attends to the weary savant/philosopher, bringing him a tray of biscuits and tea with a videocassette ... He picks up the cassette, blinks once and tosses it into the fire ... Alenka protests: "But 'Papa', it's Angelopoulos' *The Weeping Meadow!*" ... He shouts: "Upstream! Nothing that moves upstream can know anything at all. Upstream is Nothingness. Downstream, Alenka! Always downstream! Always historicize!"

Outside the trees have all fled and the darkness of the abyss flows up against a denuded landscape. Inside Žižek looks toward the window detecting the eerie emptiness outside; sniffing it ... He settles deeper into his armchair in front of the fire, Alenka throws a few more logs into the fireplace and retires as he begins to nod off. The camera focuses on a television set playing Guy Debord's *Society of the Spectacle* (*La société du spectacle*, 1973) and then pans slowly outward to the snoring philosopher... (3)

Cut to Barrandov studios Prague where a Medieval jousting tournament is underway ... Žižek is atop a small but sturdy pony with lance in hand. A dark knight approaches from the opposite end of the jousting track atop a black, neighing stallion. The knight in which all knights are black raises his lance ... A horn sounds ... Žižek (consummate knight errant and formidable opponent on the jousting field) looks forlornly toward the stand where "Alenka", the princess who has asked that he lose this round to prove his love, gazes toward him, a wry smile crossing her lips. The black knight charges and delivers a blow to the armour of the normally fearsome knight atop his pony ... (The peasant who loaned him the pony watches from afar, through the hands he is covering his face with in horror) ... Žižek takes the blow, winces, and stands his ground. The black knight delivers repeated blows ... Žižek "stands his ground" (cut in images from the similar scene in *A Knight's Tale*), his armour buckling and pieces flying off and landing with a dull thud on the ground. The black knight charges again, delivers his last blow and wins the

tournament. Triumphant, he removes his helmet ... “Badiou!”, the shocked spectators cry ... Tears cross the face of “Alenka” and she runs for her beloved. Žižek watches with a combination of trepidation and anticipation as “Alenka” approaches, veers off, and embraces Badiou.(4)

**SCENE 2** – An Iroquois longhouse and meeting of the Elders ... The discussion regards the implications 10 generations forward of the invasion of territory controlled by the Iroquois Federation by Jesuit missionaries. Žižek is present, a warrior of outstanding qualities renowned for counting coup in battle (riding into the maw of the enemy, English or French, waving his tomahawk and hooting, then retreating to “higher ground”). The longhouse is illuminated by several pit fires and the rough-hewn log walls are lined with scalps and slaughtered animals. Five figures sit around a fire, wrapped in fur, taking long draws on a pipe, exhaling slowly and contemplating the next day’s activities – to rout the Jesuit interlopers.

The next morning the noble savages attack the missionary encampment. Žižek now decked out in war paint and wearing only an eagle feather in his hair and a deerskin loincloth distinguishes himself in battle ... Pinning a black-robed Jesuit to the ground with one knee he disembowels the poor soul screaming: “Let me see your filthy *jouissance!*”. He polishes off the missionary, collects the scalp, scoops up the entrails and heads for the Iroquois camp at the river’s bend. Large vats have been set up and the rendering of the entrails ensues ... Boiling away in the late evening the vats emit huge clouds of billowing steam, wafting into the trees and off into the descending evening. The moon rises ... The camera pans to the blood-splattered faces and chests of the assembled warriors stirring the cauldrons. Three elders descend from the opposite bank of the river and walk slowly toward the encampment, smiling.(5)

**SCENE 3** – An academic conference in an undisclosed, generic university ... The topic of the symposium is the “Non-rapport of sexual difference” (difference has been inadvertently spelled with an “a” in the conference booklet and an aid is scurrying around handing out errata slips making pro forma apologies) to all.(6) The errata slip says simply, “Derrida is dead” ...

At the head table the panelists are chatting amiably with the exception of Žižek. S/he is wearing a short black miniskirt, black halter top, red lipstick and tiara ... S/he seems distracted and is going over the notes of his/her lecture on Neil Jordan’s *The Crying Game*. Badiou is nearby, but further down the table and s/he is dressed in an Armani power pantsuit, hunched over his/her “programme” (the program simply says “Programme” on its cover) looking for probable suspects to parody while making his/her presentation, through subtle inflections of voice and demeanor such as raising his/her voice an octave or toying with the forelock that strategically falls over his/her right eye at a passage that seems to engage, yet does not, one or another of the assembled academic luminaries. Žižek eyes Badiou, and vice versa ...

Cut to the Q & A session ... Žižek is defending the notion that the only true form of heterosexuality is lesbianism ... The all-male panel dressed in drag breaks for coffee as the all-female audience scurries to the wings to ingratiate itself with the celebrity panel ... Žižek heads for the restroom to freshen his makeup and finds Badiou teasing his hair in front of the mirror. S/he approaches Badiou, who sees him/her coming in the mirror. As Žižek places his hand on Badiou’s shoulder and both smile, looking at one another in the mirror, the mirror cracks, and the toilets, sinks and urinals all flood ... The camera fades to black, plus sounds of dripping water.(7)

**SCENE 4** – A Soviet-era swimming pool somewhere in Central or Eastern Europe ... Žižek and Badiou stand next to one another on the diving board wearing only a black speedo. Žižek dives into the pool ... Badiou follows ... They commence a synchronized swim, a watery ballet somewhat badly executed but none the worse for the effort. The camera pans to the empty stands, coming eventually to rest on a panel of ten judges from the French Theology-without-God camp holding up placards scoring the ballet: 0.0, 0.1, 0.0, -2.0, 0.0, 0.0, 4.1, 5.0, 3.0, 0.0 ... Fade to black with disembodied applause.(8)

**SCENE 5** – The Drawing Center, New York City ... Žižek has just been introduced and the applause has settled. It’s standing room only ... Outside in Wooster Street hundreds of people jostle for a glimpse inside. Žižek is seated in a generic institutional plastic chair on a short platform/dais with a microphone and music stand to hold his notes (which he never refers to anyway) ... He switches off the light the organizers have placed in front of him and leans forward slightly toward the shadowy swathe of the assembled academics and merely curious. He is now backlit and the eyes and glasses of the audience reflect myriad small images of the hunched, dissheveled virtuoso as he begins

to speak. The lecture heads off in pursuit of Saint Paul and the radical kernel of Christianity (intercut scenes from Scorsese's *The Last Temptation of Christ*, 1988) ... Along the way he develops several dozen tangents and to everyone's surprise brings them all to a somewhat problematical resolve/crescendo in the all-purpose figure of the empty Universal ... A few tortuous questions are asked, but he deflects them deftly and scratches his head while awaiting another of the same uselessness. Someone asks about Paris 1968, the last time "structure took to the streets" ... He pauses a moment before beginning to answer. Intercut scene of Žižek in "any American university" posting "office hours" on his office door and then filling in all of the slots with characters taken from American, French, and Russian novels ...

Outside a ruckus can be heard ... The doors burst open and several dozen young women flail their way into the gallery space where the symposium is being held. They are all wearing NYU t-shirts and their wild, unkept locks and darting eyes betray their intoxicated state. Žižek looks in their direction and he freezes ... They descend upon him, he vanishes beneath the flailing arms, patches of clothes, flesh, and bones fly through the air. The audience flees ... Chairs are overturned, the academics tear and pummel one another in the race to get out the door. They flee into the SoHo night, up Wooster Street ...

The camera returns timidly to the scene of the *melée*, first through the door now half off its hinges, then round and through the vestibule. One or two horror-stricken officials of the Drawing Center stand aghast as the last of the NYU bacchantes bolts for the door with a piece of Žižek's clothing in hand ... Sirens sound ...

The camera returns and slowly follows the walls of the gallery space, works of art dimly emerging from the duskiess of the dimmed, now silent space. The sound of chirping crickets inexplicable emerges from the images on the wall, a selection of sketches by Antonin Artaud ... (Intercut psycho-therapeutic horrors from Charcot to mid-century electroshock treatment) ... As the camera pulls back (itself now mimicking a shocked "interloper" backing out of the gallery slowly), one step backward after another, trembling slightly, a dark pool of blood appears midway through this reverse path surrounded by fragments of bone and flesh ... The camera stops ... It returns to the pool by slowly moving in its direction again, this time straight ahead, calmly without erring. The debris field slowly turns into a landscape, the fragments and remains gaining definition as the camera approaches ... "Alenka"/Eurydice's face appears in the pool ... (Music comes up ... "Always On My Mind" ...) ... The camera closes in and comes to a full stop on a small dacha at the edge of the pool of blood, perched in the landscape of flesh and bone ... The camera spins *Vertigo*-like.(9)

**THE CREDITS** – "Always On My Mind" plays over the credits ... The titles roll against a black background inhabited by phantasmatic images from the film proper (distorted, free-flowing fragments of previous scenes cut free from their narrative mission) ... The credits end as the music ends.

**CODA** – Silence (plus crickets) ... We are back in the dacha in the hills above the Slovenian city. Žižek rustles in his chair, opens his eyes, gazes toward the window, blinking ... He leans forward and picks up Freud's *Civilization and Its Discontents* (1930) and opens it. The first page he encounters is blank. Flipping through the book, slowly at first and then more rapidly, he finds that the book has no content ... Every page is blank. A crash and breaking glass is heard ... (Intercut quick, sequential images of the giant phallus from Kubrick's *A Clockwork Orange*, 1971) ... Setting the book down, he goes to the window ... Looking down he finds a brick with a note attached. The note says simply, "Yours truly, 'The Irreal Real' ..." ... Looking out the shattered window, outside is the protoplasmic "sea" from Andrei Tarkovsky's *Solaris* (1972).(10)

GK (November 2005)

## ENDNOTES / NOTES ON PRODUCTION VALUES

1 – This vignette might be constructed by intercutting "Medieval" street scenes from Brian Helgeland's *A Knight's Tale* (2001), starring Heath Ledger as Sir William Thatcher/Sir Ulrich von Lichtenstein of Gelderland and Shannyn Sossamon as Lady Jocelyn, or the PBS "Mystery!" series "Cadfael" starring Derek Jacoby as Brother Cadfael, plus the scene in Jiří Menzel's *Larks on a String* (1969) where a passing truck sprays the buildings and any passersby of a small Czech town with whitewash in preparation for the visit of a Communist party dignitary. The dacha might be any number of small, remote country "summerhouses" (cabins) located in "the wilds" of the Czech Republic or

Slovenia, while the pan to the hills recalls the relationship of the castle and the town in Tim Burton's *Edward Scissorhands* (1990) ...

2 – The surround of black-and-white television sets might be playing a mélange of films by Hitchcock, Buñuel, Fellini, Lynch, Gilliam, Greenaway, Burton, Saura, and such – that is, classic “Hollyweird”-type films plus the more nuanced “art-house” fare of Krzysztof Kieślowski et al., including Godard's *Histoire(s) du cinéma* (1988-98) perhaps, Chris Marker's *La jetée* (1962), and/or Debord's *Society of the Spectacle* (1973) ... The fleeing trees suggest Peter Jackson's walking trees in the second film of *The Lord of the Rings* trilogy, *The Two Towers* (2002) and might allow a direct expropriation, while the spectral faces peering out of the night-time gloom might be taken directly from Jim Jarmusch's *Dead Man* (1995) ...

3 – Godardian jumpcuts might be utilized between scenes within scenes, deploying repeatedly or in variation (e.g., German, French, English, Russian, Slovene versions) the singular some-thing (question mark) or “quelque chose” from Godard's *Éloge de l'amour* (2001).

4 – This scene should be shot in the internal streets of an abandoned abattoir in half film-noirish manner plus an aura of blissful innocence, versus the mock-heroic manner typical of the Medieval, Arthurian typology common to Hollywood. John Boorman meets Ridley Scott meets Peter Weir meets Carlos Saura ... Slaughtered cows/bulls might hang in the stands amidst the spectators. See the opening scenes of Saura's *Goya in Bordeaux* (1999) ...

5 – The descending elders might be three versions of the same figure, i.e., the same actor times three (viz., the Imaginary, the Symbolic, and the Real) ...

6 – The inadvertent “typo” forms the opening gesture of this scene, and the apparent pause in action is caused by the necessary distribution of the errata slips. Hence everyone is dawdling (temporizing) ...

7 – The flooding of the toilets, urinals, and sinks is based on an installation by Nicholas Folland at the Experimental Art Foundation, Adelaide, SA, October 7-November 5, 2005, called “Doldrum”. “The ocean doesn't function as a theme in these works, still less as a symbol or metaphor; rather, it is perceptible only as a kind of force, a *perpetuum mobile*, a principle of turbulence and erasure, totality and nullity. The ungovernable ocean erases all journeys, real and imagined. And though the age of exploration is over, the ocean remains, perhaps, the only place where the maps are still blank.” – Russell Smith (EAF).

8 – This scene is quite short and Badiou and Žižek should be smiling at one another as they proceed with the watery ballet ... The indoor pool should be in a somewhat decrepit state with peeling paint and piles of rubbish here and there (based on the crumbling Sarajevo library in Godard's *Notre musique*, 2004) ... Books from the French “theological turn” might be floating in the pool (intercut scenes from Peter Greenaway's *Prospero's Books*, 1991) ... Braziers might light the shadowy recesses of the stands, fuelled by burning books (intercut scene of Dr. Yuri Zhivago/Omar Sharif feeding books into a stove from David Lean's *Doctor Zhivago*, 1965) ... Light should enter through high windows casting rays through the dusty interior and penetrating into the water. Several shots should be taken from underwater of the ballet illuminated by this one-directional light ... The panel of judges should be standing amidst ruined bleachers, partly in shadows, wearing mortar boards and ceremonial gowns.

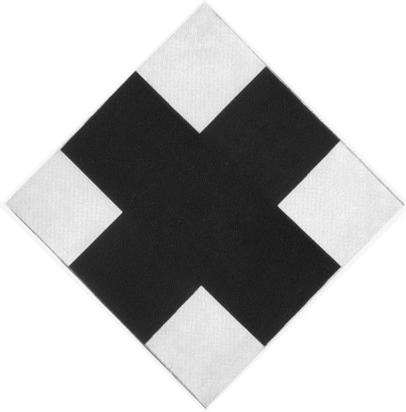
9 – This scene should be shot at the Drawing Center and extras should include faculty from NYU, Columbia, Parsons, Cooper Union, and Fordham. The bacchantes should all be young, gorgeous and half-dressed young women in the fashionable manner of the undergraduate vixen (Lolitas, so to speak). Scenes from Andrei Tarkovsky's *Nostalghia* (1983) and/or *Stalker* (1979) might be interwoven in the closing, spectral landscape of blood, bone, and flesh ...

10 – Tarkovsky's *Solaris* (1972) was a response to the antiseptic, technological vision of Stanley Kubrick's *2001: A Space Odyssey* (1968). This final scene conflates the two films by way of the empty Universal form of the book (emptied of all specific content) and the protoplasmic sea as spectral, protean “brain” of that same Universal. Žižek's essay “The Thing from Inner Space” takes Tarkovsky's film as representative of the persistence of the Lacanian phantasmatic thing insofar as it permeates the Symbolic and renders the world “uncanny” at times when this “other” inhuman thing approaches the human.

**SOUNDTRACK** – Orchestral music from Wagner's “Der Ring des Nibelungen (Ring Cycle)” by Sir Georg Solti (Wiener Philharmonic) or Herbert von Karajan (Berlin Philharmonic) might be used to stitch the five scenarios together (e.g., “Magic Fire Music” for the opening scene) ... “Always on My Mind”, written by Wayne Carson Thompson, Johnny L. Christopher Jr., and Mark James (EMI Music Inc), has been recorded by figures as diverse as Elvis Presley (1972), Brenda Lee (1973), Willie Nelson (1982), Floyd Cramer (1988, 1997, etc.), the Pet Shop Boys (1988), the Stylistics, and Ryan Adams and The Cardinals (the latter appears as a bonus track on *Jacksonville City Nights*, Lost Highway, 2005) ...

**MISE-EN-SCENE** – “Suture” should be used throughout to underscore the slipperiness of the interlocking scenarios, such as the recurring motif of the mirror was used in Tarkovsky’s *Mirror* (1974), or Lake Geneva was used in Godard’s *JLG/JLG: Autoportrait de décembre* (1995); that is, something should come repeatedly to fill the camera to present “the Other” (the Thing that sticks out, the “indivisible remainder”, the Real/Irreal syrrhesis) always repressed or lurking in the present moment, and this something should serve as passage to/from scenes within scenes. See Slavoj Žižek, “The Thing from Inner Space: On Tarkovsky”, *Angelaki*, Vol. 4, No. 3 (December 1999).

[...]



# SINISTER PERSPECTIVES/DANGEROUS ESSENTIALISM

[...]

“Monotheism of reason and the heart, polytheism of the imagination and of art, that is what we need.” – G.W.F. Hegel (and/or F.W.J. Schelling), c.1797

[...]

Arata **ISOZAKI**: *Neo-Dada Japan 1958-1998: Arata Isozaki and the Artists of “White House”* (Oita: Oita Museum of Art, 1998); exhibition catalogue, essays by Akira Suga et al.; Arata Isozaki, “Imprint of 1960”, pp. 272-75, trans. Yumiko Yamazaki and David B. Stewart; Koji Taki, “Arata Isozaki in the Sixties”, pp. 282-85, trans. Akita Nobuko and David B. Stewart ...

Isozaki (c.1962): “Might it be possible to change concepts of architecture so much it would amaze people?” Arata Isozaki, “Imprint of 1960”, p. 273 ...

“Space surrounds our bodies as we pass through it and at the same time permeates them. As we enter a building, our bodies begin to respond to the space occupying that site.” Ibid., p. 274 ...

“Different levels of signs.... Let us define signs as both able to represent and activate our imagination, while at the same time bearing contradictions and multiplicity. The basic configuration of a work of architecture derives from these different capabilities of signs. In the case of the N. residence, its abstract form is cubic, based on the conceptual notion that a cube is the largest space defined by a minimal number of points. The geometric approach this suggests has freed space from the natural world and its physical laws, thus opening it to a more subtle, sensual apparition. This in no way cancels the discrepancy between the layout of functional spaces and the distribution of natural light. What I refer to in such a work as the different levels of signs does not have the ordinary, semiological meaning. Rather, these are seen as offering an ideological style in which an architect’s thought may be developed. In this phase of his career, Isozaki thought almost entirely in terms of a geometric model. This abstraction provided an arena for his material, as well as his spatial images to take form.” Koji Taki, “Arata Isozaki in the Sixties”, in *ibid.*, p. 284 ...

“For Isozaki, the actual architecture may materialize out of matter, light, or color, however, the ideal architecture of thought, is represented by the matrix, which is non-symbolic. In other words, Isozaki has selected a trope for each building according to the different capacities inherent in signs.” Ibid. ...

Raimund **ABRAHAM**: Raimund Abraham, *Raimund Abraham Unbuilt* (Bozen: Forum AR/GE Kunst, 1986); exhibition catalogue (October 10-30, 1986); essay by Kenneth Frampton, “Fragmentary Notes”, pp. 7-11 ...

“Abraham returns us to the elemental in more ways than one; not only to the elemental as Gottfried Semper would have understood it; that is, to the universally mythic but material elements of the built process – the primordial telluric and woven compounds of earthwork, hearth, wall and roof – but also to the elemental as a conscious recognition of omnipotent cosmic forces.” Frampton, “Fragmentary Notes”, pp. 7-8

“The theme of resurrection is always implicit in Abraham’s work if only because the physical and temporal continuity of the earth has invariably been an essential part of his architectural imagery.” Ibid., p. 8

“Ten Houses”: “Suspended in the metaphysical landscape of an aftermath (1971-73)”; “Each of these houses was, in effect, an earthwork, cut into the devastated planet. Abraham’s work during this period took the form of a somnabulant archaeology, revealing both a formal syntax and a metaphysical meaning capable of interpretation at many levels. Irrespective of whether these partially ruined undercrofts were depicted bulwarks or tumuli, they were, in any event, destined to be the sites for new beginnings.” Ibid., p. 9 ...

“Abraham distinguishes himself by virtue of his insistence on an ontology which antedates Humanism. This ontological approach in no way pre-supposes a rejection of modern technology just as it does not depend upon the exclusion of traditional materials. It seeks instead an articulate delineation of tectonic elements in which ... old and new, machine-made parts and hand-crafted materials, co-exist in an articulate continuum.” Ibid., p. 11 ...

**PIERO DELLA FRANCESCA:** Robin Evans, *The Projective Cast: Architecture and Its Three Geometries* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2000); “Piero’s Heads”, pp. 122-77 ...

“As faith in perspective’s capacity to convey the truth erodes, reaction against its partisan rule spreads wider. Its hegemony over vision has been linked to various other kinds of dominion and power, hence the increasing resort to terms such as ‘the domain of vision,’ ‘the empire of the gaze,’ and ‘scopic regime,’ drawing politically charged metaphors into the vocabulary used to describe the very thing that is accused of being politically charged. But how do we tell whether this verbal branding is justified? Could it be another episode of iconoclasm?” Ibid., p. 124 ...

“Perspective has for ages been regarded as deceitful. What is so remarkable about the twentieth-century revision of this idea, as developed in German and French criticism, is the reversal of an earlier understanding of its shortcomings. In the eyes of Renaissance commentators, perspective was a deception because it distorted true measure [hence axonometric drawing]; because, that is, it departed from the inalienable truths of Euclidean geometry. In the eyes of many of its twentieth-century detractors perspective is suspect because it imposes Euclid on the way we see.” Ibid. ...

**PERSPECTIVE TRUTH” & “ARID FORMALISM”:** See Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *The Visible and the Invisible* (1968); Lacan and M-P agree (accordingly) that “all classical geometry was implicated in an attempt to capture and colonize the way we see [the gaze].” Evans, *The Projective Cast*, p. 125; see Nelson Goodman, *Languages of Art* (1976) ...

“Piero’s reputation has waxed while perspective’s has waned. The twentieth century is the period of his critical apotheosis as it has been the period of perspective’s critical demise.” Evans, *The Projective Cast*, p. 142; see Piero della Francesca, *De prospectiva pingendi* (treatise on perspective) and *Libellus de quinque corporibus regularibus* (treatise on Platonic solids); Berenson to Baxandall, or Piero’s dialectical struggles with “expression and expressiveness” in painting (Evans, *The Projective Cast*, p. 143); Idealizations (more “Real” than real ... Ideality as Irreal ...); see Piero della Francesca, *De prospectiva pingendi*, ed., Giusta Nicco Fasola, 2 vols. (Florence, 1942, revised 1984) ...

**BRUNELLESCHI/ALBERTI:** Giulio Carlo Argan, Rudolf Wittkower, *Perspective et Histoire au Quattrocento* (suivi de “La question de la perspective 1960-1968” par Marisa Dalai Emiliani) (Montreuil: Les Éditions de la Passion, 1990) ...

**ARGAN,** “L’architecture de Brunelleschi et les origines de la théorie perspective au XV<sup>e</sup> siècle”, pp. 9-52, trans. Jean-Jacques Le Quilleuc and Marc Perelman ...

**WITTKOWER,** “Brunelleschi et la ‘Proportion dans la perspective’”, pp. 53-76, trans. of “Brunelleschi and ‘Proportion in Perspective’”, in Wittkower, *Idea and Image* (New York: Thames & Hudson, 1978), trans. Jean-Jacques Le Quilleuc and Marc Perelman ...

**ARGAN,** “De re aedificatoria (de Leon Battista Alberti)”, pp. 77-96, trans. Fra Marcello ...

**EMILIANI,** “La question de la perspective 1960-1968”, pp. 97-117, trans. Fra Marcello, from *L’arte* 2 (1968) ...

Erwin **PANOFSKY**, “Die Perspektive als ‘symbolische Form’”, in *Vorträge der Bibliothek Warburg, 1924-1925* (Leipzig-Berlin, 1927), pp. 258-330; *La perspective comme forme symbolique* (Paris: Éditions de Minuit, 1975); Pierre Francastel, “Espace génétique et espace plastique”, in *Revue esthétique* IV (1948), pp. 349-80; art-historical arguments throughout the sixties, always referring back to Panofsky’s “rigoureux et troublant” essay (Emiliani, p. 98) “La nature est la forme de la réalité, dès lors qu’elle la révèle et la rend tangible dans sa pleine complexité: les

lois de la forme sont les lois de la nature, et le processus mental à travers lequel nous parvenons à la conception de la forme, c'est-à-dire à l'art." Argan, p. 11 ...

\*"La perspective est l'expression d'une loi commune à la nature et à la forme artistique... La perspective n'est pas seulement un règle d'optique qui peut *aussi* s'appliquer à l'expression artistique, mais un procédé particulier à l'art, qui a sa fin unique et logique dans l'art. La perspective est l'art lui-même dans sa totalité: aucune relation n'est possible entre l'artiste et le monde si ce n'est par la perspective. De même, aucune relation n'est possible entre l'esprit humain et la réalité hors de cette conception de la nature – sauf à se rabattre sur l'antithèse médiévale du conceptualisme et du nominalisme. De là découle l'identité de la peinture perspective et de la science, clairement affirmée par les théoriciens du Quattrocento." Argan, pp. 11-12; "Alberti affirme que le visible est le domaine du peintre ..." Ibid. p. 13 ...

"La nature, conçue telle une expérience sensorielle pleine et lucide, présuppose cette conception morale de la personnalité; c'est une réalité déjà saisie et comprise claire et transparente au point que la personne humaine, suprême exemple et image parfaite de la création divine, peut s'y voir comme réfléchi dans un miroir." Ibid., p. 14; Place for a deployment of a "succession de tels moments", or the 'opening' of ideality ... "une conception systématique du monde" Ibid. p. 15; The Renaissance interpretation of the antique is the "régénérescence de l'antique (re-naître, au sens chrétien, éthique du terme)" Ibid., p. 15; "*Virtus* opposée à *fortuna*" (e.g., Petrarch/Dante) Writing "pure" space (modernity *avant la lettre*): Brunelleschi "l'artiste parvient dans cette dialectique subtile à une représentation absolue de l'espace sur le plan, grâce à l'identification des valeurs linéaires et chromatiques; ici l'élément linéaire est épuré de la qualité matérielle du tracé, tout comme l'élément chromatique est épuré de la qualité matérielle de la surface." Ibid., p. 31; "La fonction de support se traduit en un équilibre des masses de plein et de vide ..."; The arcades of the Loggia degli Innocenti "est la suprême manifestation formelle de l'infini spatial." Ibid., p. 30; "Et peut-être est-ce la source 'intellectuelle' de cette lumière qui, chez Piero della Francesca, n'est plus physique mais spatiale?" Ibid., p. 32 ...

Carlo **GINZBURG**: *Wooden Eyes: Nine Reflections on Distance*, trans. Martin Ryle and Kate Soper (New York: Columbia University Press, 2001); translation of *Occhiacci di Legno* (1998) ...

Irreality: "On the one hand the 'representation' stands in for the reality that is represented, and so evokes absence; on the other, it makes that reality visible, and thus suggests presence. Moreover, this opposition can easily be reversed: the representation is present in the former case [self], even if only as a surrogate; in the latter case it ends up recalling, in contrast to itself, the absent reality [Self] that it is intended to represent." Ginzburg, "Representation: The Word, The Idea, The Thing", pp. 63-78, in *ibid.*, p. 63 ...

"After 1215, the fear of idolatry begins to lessen. Ways are found of domesticating images, including those that have come down from pagan antiquity. Among the fruits of this historical change is the return to illusionism in sculpture and painting: only the disenchantment of the image made possible the work of Arnolfo di Cambio, Nicola Pisano, Giotto. 'The idea of the image as a "representation" in our modern sense of the word,' to which Gombrich refers, was born at this moment." Ibid., p. 77; "Monotheism of reason and the heart, polytheism of the imagination and of art, that is what we need." Hegel (and/or Schelling), c.1797 (Ginzburg's epigraph to "Style: Inclusion and Exclusion", pp. 109-38, in *ibid.*); Vasari's "Historical perspective" (viz., the proto-modern teleological, art-historical continuum); New cognitive model, "logosformeln" (after the German) ...

\*Marilyn Aronberg **LAVIN**, ed., *Piero della Francesca and His Legacy* (Washington, DC: National Gallery of Art, 1995); symposium proceedings, "*Monarca della Pittura: Piero and His Legacy*", Center for Advanced Study in the Visual Arts, December 4-5, 1992 ...

PERSPECTIVE "SCIENCE": \*J.V. Field, "A Mathematician's Art", pp. 177-97, in *ibid.* ...

HUMANISM & ITS OTHER: \*Albert Boime, "Piero and the Two Cultures", pp. 255-66, in *ibid.*; see \*Roberto Longhi, *Piero della Francesca*, in *Opere Complete*, 14 vols. (Florence: 1956-1985); see 3:25 regarding the "enigma" or "congiunzione misteriosa di matematica e di pittura" (in the *Flagellation*, 1450-60); Carlo Ginzburg: "archival 'detective'" (Boime, "Piero and the Two Cultures", p. 261), and Baxandall's "dancing merchant savants", in Michael Baxandall, *Painting and Experience in Fifteenth-century Italy* (1983) ...

Michael F. Zimmerman, “Die ‘erfindung’ Pieros und seine Wahlverwandtschaft mit Seurat”, pp. 269-301, in Lavin, ed., *Piero della Francesca and His Legacy*; see \*Bernard-Henri Lévy, *Piero della Francesca* (Paris, 1992); see Maria Mimita Lamberti and Maurizio Fagioli dell’Arco, eds., *Piero della Francesca e il novecento; Prospettiva, spazio, luce, geometria, pittura murale, tonalismo 1920/1938* (Venice, 1991), exhibition catalogue, Museo Civico, Sala delle Pietre, Sansepolcro; and \*Henri Focillon, *Piero della Francesca* (Paris: 1952) ...

\*Rosalind E. **KRAUSS**, “The Grid, the True Cross, the Abstract Structure”, pp. 303-12, in Lavin, ed., *Piero della Francesca and His Legacy*; see \*Louis Marin, “La théorie narrative et Piero peintre d’histoire”, pp. 55-84, in Omar Calbrese, ed., *Piero: Teorico dell’arte* (Rome: Gangemi, 1985) ...

Agnes **MARTIN**: Krauss: Regarding the “abstract sublime” vis-à-vis Agnes Martin, “The ‘abstract sublime’ consideration of Martin’s art implies that *atmosphere* or *light* are a given of the paintings, which, like a certain kind of landscape subject – clouds, sea, fields – can simply be observed from any vantage one might take on them. In this reading, the landscape subject, no matter how reduced or abstracted [rarified], simply defines the work, is an objective attribute of it, like the color blue, or red.” Krauss, “The Grid, the True Cross, the Abstract Structure”, p. 308 ...

(POST)STRUCTURALIST MIRROR GAMES: The modern self and not-self; see Hubert Damisch, *Théorie du /nuage/: Pour une histoire de la peinture* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1972) regarding Brunelleschi’s “showing the sky”: “And if the /architectural/ came to symbolize the reach of the artist’s ‘knowledge,’ The /cloud/ operated as the lack in the center of that knowledge. The outside that joins the inside in order to constitute it as an inside.” Krauss, “The Grid, the True Cross, the Abstract Structure”, p. 309; see also Rosalind E. Krauss, “The /Cloud/”, in *Agnes Martin* (New York: Whitney Museum of American Art, 1992), exhibition catalogue; Krauss, n. 13 “In the formal notation of semiological analysis, the placement of a word between slashes indicates that it is being considered in its function as [pure] signifier [signifying *only itself* ...]” Krauss, “The Grid, the True Cross, the Abstract Structure”, p. 312 ...

Carlo Ginzburg, *The Enigma of Piero: Piero della Francesca* (new edition), trans. Martin Ryle and Kate Soper (London: Verso, 2000); translation of *Indagini su Piero* (Torino: Einaudi, 1994) ...

Alberto **PEREZ-GOMEZ** and Louise Pelletier, *Architectural Representation and the Perspective Hinge* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1997) ...

Regarding Piero and Luca Pacioli: “Pacioli ... depicted models of solid and hollow geometric bodies [in *Divina proporzione*, 1509].... Pacioli insists on the importance of this solid geometry and of stereometry (the practical rules to calculate volumes) as a key to the precise cutting of stone for all architectural elements, and therefore as crucial for the success of building ...” Pérez-Gómez and Pelletier, *ibid.*, p. 249; “Proportional relationships” or, “The ontological basis for all human creation that aspired to the status of true knowledge.” (*Ibid.*, p. 251); see “Bibliography”, pp. 456-97 ...

Erwin **PANOFSKY**, *Perspective as Symbolic Form*, trans. Christopher S. Wood (New York: Zone, 1997); “Die Perspektive als ‘symbolische Form’”, in *Vorträge der Bibliothek Warburg* (1927), pp. 258-330 ...

Note 64a: “It is especially interesting how [Giordano] Bruno, in order to establish his own concept of an infinite space against the Aristotelian and high Scholastic view, seizes consciously upon the pre-Socratic fragments, especially the teachings of Democritus. In a certain sense – and this is actually typical for the Renaissance – one antiquity is played off against another, and the result is in all cases a new, third antiquity: the specifically ‘modern.’ A most striking contrast to Bruno’s beautifully formulated definition of space as a ‘*quantitas continua, physica triplici dimensione constans*’ (‘a continuous mass existing in a three-fold physical dimension’) is the medieval representation (in the Baptistry of Parma) of the personifications of *four* dimensions, parallel to the four Evangelists, the four rivers of Paradise, the four elements and so forth.” Panofsky, *Perspective as Symbolic Form*, p. 139 ...

Section III: Regarding the transition from the late Medieval to the Renaissance; “The vision of the universe is, so to speak, detheologized.... No wonder that a man like Giordano Bruno now outfits this world of the spatial and infinite ... with an almost religious sublimity of its own; he ‘invests it, along with the infinite extension of the Democritan *kenon* (void), with the infinite dynamic of the neoplatonic World-Soul’ [Olschki, ‘Giordano Bruno’]. And yet this

view of space, even with its still-mystical coloring, is the same view that will later be rationalized by Cartesianism and formalized by Kantianism.” Ibid., p. 66 ...

Hubert **DAMISCH**, *The Origin of Perspective*, trans. John Goodman (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1994); “Perspective, a Thing of the Past”, pp. 22-40; “The Question of the Origin”, pp. 74-86; “Geometry Made Real”, pp. 142-55, see \*Figures 19 and 20 (Brunelleschi’s second experiment with the plan of Piazza della Signoria); “Distancing Maneuvers”, pp. 198-234; “De prospectiva pingendi” (Piero della Francesca), pp. 314-75; \*”The Loci of the Subject”, pp. 376-447, regarding Velázquez’ *Las Meninas*, a “representation of representation”, or “That representation whose various forms and signs are enumerated in the painting: images (the paintings within the painting, though their function is thwarted, insofar as they’re illegible save to knowledgeable specialists), portraits, looks, gestures, etc. – while the scene he [Velázquez] describes sustains itself, in its scenic existence, only by means of the references it imposes to another scene [represses, then], facing it and thus invisible, but whose trace or echo is found in the painting’s center, in the form of the mirror and the two figures reflected in it.” Ibid., p. 427; see Leo Steinberg, “Velázquez’ ‘Las Meninas’”, *October* 19 (Winter 1981), pp. 45-54 ...

Jean-Luc **MARION**, *The Idol and Distance*, trans. Thomas A. Carlson (New York: Fordham University Press, 2001); “The Collapse of the Idols and Confrontation with the Divine: Nietzsche”, pp. 27-78; originally published as *L’idol et la distance* (Paris: Editions Grasset, 1977) ...

Yes/Amen: “Nietzschean distance maintains, to be sure, a relation with the divine, but within onto-theology, on the basis of equivalence. Thus it reinforces the metaphysical idolatry where ‘God’ is defined as a state of the will to power. Within that grade-related function, the ‘feeling of distance,’ far from taking its distance from the metaphysical face of the divine elaborated (and presupposed) by the will to power, radically ignores the distance of God. The Nietzschean distance intervenes only to censure the distance of God, or more, to obliterate it, within the evidence of the text, by substituting itself for it.” Ibid., p. 77 ...

#### LOST PAINTING(S)

The mystery of Piero della Francesca’s second-to-last painting (*Madonna and Child with Two Angels/The Senigallia Madonna*, 1478-80), as described in detail by Marilyn Aronberg Lavin (“In the End a Mystery: Piero’s Last Paintings”, pp. 287-312, in *Piero della Francesca*, 2002), is not its lost-and-found tale but the fact that the two angels and the Christ child are from the “East”, “Indian”, Asiatic faces, as if to say the “irrational” space of the painting (held by the architectural frame and the painting’s frame in/for itself as portable altarpiece), a place Piero arrived at quite late after his own disquisitions/ flirtations with perspectivism, guards a secret place (“other” times).

Cutting off perspectival space implies what? If it is not the same game in Caravaggio (and the “meta-religious” fact of Caravaggio’s painting, both last and lost paintings), it is at least the very same “sign” – i.e., syntactical gesturalism – that prevails ... Symbols are also “things” ...

And thus, Slavoj Žižek rides forth on his “armoured charger” to demolish the last vestiges of post-modern nihilism (the wrong kind of nothingness), and to defend diabolical/dialectical materialism by way of elaborating the contours and splatters of the human condition, the so-called inescapable anamorphic stain (in *The Parallax View*, 2006).

As if synaesthesia were at stake, one hears in the gaps of Piero’s very last painting (*The Nativity*, after 1483) Punjabi ghazals (by Kirin Ahluwalia, even), time being of little consequence. And if in these alien songs one contacts the “archaic”/primordial ground (Schopenhauer’s tonal subterranean “world as will”), it is Einsteinian dark matter that holds this ground, against all incursions – dialectical and/or otherwise.

Roberto **LONGHI**: *Piero della Francesca* (1927, con aggiunte fino al 1962) (Florence: Sansoni, 1963); from *Opere complete*, Vol. 3 ...

Maurizio **CALVESI**: *Piero della Francesca* (Milan: Fabbri, 1998); “Gli scritti, la poetica e il pensiero”, pp. 68-81; “Madonna di Senigallia”, pp. 220-22; “Fortuna critica di Piero della Francesca”, pp. 227-35; see M. Dalai Emiliani et al., “Piero della Francesca tra Arte e Scienza”, Arezzo Congress (Arezzo, October 8-11, 1992; Sansepolcro, October 12), tracing influences, optics/transmission of light, etc.; “Bibliography”, 1470-1998, pp. 236-49; see Calvesi, *Caravaggio* (Florence: Giunti, 1986); see Stefania Macioce, ed., *Il Caravaggio: Dal corso del Prof.*

Maurizio Calvesi, *storia dell'arte moderna* (Rome: Bagatto Libri, 1987), essays by Mia Cinotto, Roberto Longhi, Maurizio Calvesi ...

[...]

GK (January 2006)

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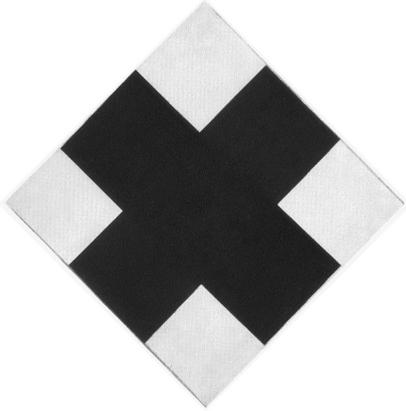
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# GOOD MO(U)RNING/FROZEN CITY

[...]

## I. SNAPSHOT/OTHER TIMES

Wednesday (12/21/05) – Winter Solstice, New York, New York (Capital of Capitalism) ... Utopia Café, 56th Street, 10 a.m. ... Second day into the transit strike (buses and subway halted) and the capitalist beast has merely “broken a nail” (claw) ... The mayor, however, is howling – baying at the Transit Workers Union while the tabloids blare, “Traitors!”, and rampant Christmas falters ... Amidst the mid-morning stillness of the City, police on OT (millions upon millions, “\$10 million a day”, *they say*) wave traffic through silent, ghostly north-south avenues (four passengers per car, below 96th Street, 8 to 11 a.m.) ... Time-and-a-half for diligent (vigilant) workers elsewhere ...

Strange birds ... A gilded damsel in gilded cage (striking a striking pose, head cocked) stares from Bergdorf’s Fifth Avenue glassed aviary – bestiary/reliquary of desire checked (surplus time held in thrall/enthralled), “glamour” stalled, each Cornell-inspired, Surrealist-Dada vitrine suspended in time, cocoons for lost fetish-time (pensive schemes abstractly mirroring the contingent assault on worker pensions/passions, etc. by the MTA, source and farce of/for the catastrophe, cat fights left and right, clawed and clawing anyway – a strategic strike at the heart of the dark beast nonetheless) ... Everywhere phantasmatic commodities adrift, aloft, amok, awry, aloof hang in thinning air ... Auguries of nothingness – stuffed zebra as couch, giant ostrich gawking, winged sirens (mannequins) under glass (crystallized/frozen) ...

Coiled, undaunted, myriad-eyed – waiting, re-negotiating “Hell on Earth” ... Bestly and bestial ... Thousands upon thousands of workers (wage slaves) trapped in the outer boroughs, lower circles, spiraling penury ... Rapt, marginal existence(s), pondering the zero-sum game ... The subject/object (master/slave) divide (*eternal* dialectic) uncoiled, unfazed grinds time to dust ... Moment upon malicious moment ticks by (New York minutes, t-minus and counting ... tricks and cons) ... Banks yawn ...

Desire springs into action, winter closes in, the present spins a finer web, rampant, ruthless, ravenous – irrepressible appetites tightening ... Twin(ning), empty stone cornucopias at Grand Army Plaza ... A mountain of Christmas trees adorns the tiers of the empty Pulitzer fountain ... High above the tumult, a buff and near-bare “Pomona” (“goddess of abundance”) gazes toward the Plaza Hotel (up for grabs, under conversion/scaffold to de luxe condominiums, and new-capital adventures) then looks away, resuming her striptease for idling tourists ...

Cabs fly, limousines circle, out-bound trains crawl ... “Zoned cabs” sting passengers \$20 per person (head) per zone, multiple riders, \$5.00 each to cross zones ... Many have fled (flown away, boxed and FedExed themselves elsewhere ... North, south, east, west), others have bolted the door, while others still wander slowly (dazed and stunned) through a city holy becalmed by morning, log-jammed by mid-day – a standstill on the shortest day, temperatures in the 30s – a small, wintry scene caught/reflected inside a silvery, slight day, wrapped in ravenous Time ... Would that it would snow ... Times swirl into other times – “Down falls scarce audibly ...” ...

By dark day and low light, the “time” of spectacle (Guy Debord’s spectacle) unfolds/unwraps itself as odd (sinister) gift – teleological, irreversible, irrepressible, remote, unbroken servitude ...

Mammon wields an ice axe – not Father Time, not Chronos, not unkindly ... Other times await/beckon (bracketed, forgotten, driven inward) – the eschatological “spring” wrapped in azure (beyond the “sky”), sloe-eyed, yet overwrought, now glowering, then sultry ... The “river/source” of dreams (unparalleled) calls ...

Dream/gift ... *She dreams*, waits, hanging at 777 Madison (eyeing/fingering expensive lingerie) ... Half-starved, skin and bones (flesh and blood), growling, hungry tigress ... All-consumed, fallen time-angel – Promethean spirit (sibyl/sigil) ... Scantly-clad, ragged thing of the Imaginary Realms, long-legged, astute, promising ... Deferred, perfumed, preferred ... Some-thing else, indeed ...

Not far (near), Epiphany (Russian Christmas, the 9th of January, twelfth-tide) ... In-between the “Too Much” and the “Too Little”, glimmering light at the end of the tunnel as a large rat crosses silent, bare tracks ...

Downstream/down-time ... Aristotle/Theophrastus ... Problem XXX, I: “Why is it that all who have become eminent in philosophy or politics or poetry or the arts are clearly melancholics?” Mark Hutchinson, “Under the Black Sun”, *Times Literary Supplement* (December 23 & 30, 2005): p. 3 – Review of the exhibition “Mélancolie: Génie et folie en Occident” (Galeries Nationales du Grand Palais, Paris, curated by Jean Clair et al.) ... A “murky confluence of clinical psychology, totalitarian ideology, and art ...” *Ibid.*, p. 5 ...

Up-time/upstream ... “Treated exclusively as an object, man is also mistreated and misconstrued. It is not that the truth would wound or be unworthy of him. But the very emergence of the human within being is the interruption of the being that perseveres in its being, along with the connotation of violence in that notion of perseverance and *conatus essendi* – the dis-interestment possible through the human, awakening thought to an order higher than knowing. We are human before being learned, and remain so after having forgotten much.” – Emmanuel Levinas, “Preface”, *Outside the Subject* (1987), trans. Michael B. Smith (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1993), p. 3 ...

[...]

## POSTSCRIPT(S)/VIA TABLOIDS

THE TWU BLINKS – After being threatened with jail time for the union leaders, the TWU blinked and voted to call off the strike mid-day 12/22, without a new contract ... The “radical” wing of the union cried foul, suspecting secret deals to spare the union the \$1-million-a-day fines levied by the courts ...

COOKED NUMBERS – “The union’s three-day strike stranded millions of daily riders and cost the city and businesses an *estimated* \$1 billion” (*italics added*). The notoriously anti-union *Daily News* (Wednesday, December 28, 2005), p. 4 ... The TWU = “33,700 bus and subway workers” *Ibid.* ...

\$\$\$ (A.K.A. “BARRED SPIRIT”) – “When MTA chairman Peter Kalikow and the TWU president Roger Toussaint met at the Grand Hyatt hotel last week to negotiate ... Kalikow had 444 public relations workers ready to relate to the public, and 700 highly-skilled human resource workers ready to resource every last human. No wonder there’s no money left for a raise for the already well-paid transit workers.” The notoriously “cheeky” *New York Press* (December 28, 2005-January 3, 2006), p. 5 ... Pataki-appointed Kalikow later “stepped down” as head of the MTA, the first head to roll so-to-speak ... His term was to expire, anyway, in June 2006 ... Meanwhile, the MTA has “\$22 billion in debt”, a “fleet of chauffeured vehicles”, and “of the agenc[y]’s 1,248 non-union employees, roughly one quarter make at least \$100,000 [a year].” ... Not to worry, “Kalikow has a nice job awaiting him at his company, H.J. Kalikow, a Park Avenue-based real estate development firm.” *Ibid.* ...

CIRCA 01/23/06 – TWU members voted down the proposed new contract by seven votes ... The radical wing of the union seems poised to “take flight” (if not to fly in circles) ... The rank and file want the 1.5 percent contribution to health-care eliminated or made a flat \$23 per family, the rate enjoyed by management ... They object to the MTA’s privilege to “adjust” (raise) the rate at will (willy-nilly) ... The dispute is likely to be sent to PERB (Public Employment Relations Board), a *state* agency ... / Tuesday, January 24, 2006 ... The *Daily News* (or was it the *New York Post*) featured a photo of a sleeping subway booth attendant, at mid-day no less, in non-editorial pages, with accompanying/appropriate inflammatory text ... A letter to the editor from a TWU worker thanked them for being *for* the proposed contract settlement so he knew that he should vote *against* it ...

[...]

## II. DOWN-TIME

Thursday, 12/29/05 ... Cruel and artistic treatment – Art is inhuman (inhumane) ... It fingers (points to/probes) the transcendental, the artist as transcendental subject (pure “I”) ...

Stopped by Zabriskie Gallery (Fuller Building, East 57th) after begging a catalogue at La Perla, now almost at 69th St (803 Madison), in exchange for a half-completed copy of the (this) essay (“Frozen City”) ... The salesgirl gave me a dirty look at first, until I explained, and then a wry smile ... I scored (in turn): 1/ a Joelle catalogue (Autumn-Winter 2005), “Lingerie da notte” (a single blonde model throughout, except on the cover); 2/ La Perla Prêt-à-Porter (Pre Collezione) 2005 Fall-Winter Collection; 3/ a soiled La Perla Fall-Winter 2005 lingerie catalogue (last copy, with annotations); and, *coup de grâce* (off with his head), 4/ a copy of *LP* (the in-house “magalogue”), Numero 1 (Fall-Winter 2005), “Sexy Vision”, etc., including a fashion shoot with Rianne Ten Haken at the Grand Hotel (Suite n. 109), Venice, entitled “Atmosfera Grand Hotel” (pp. 10-23), by Michelangelo di Battista (with runway shots following), and featuring “lingerie-joaillerie, a seductive liaison that La Perla has created between underwear and preciousness ...” (p. 8) ... As bonus (folded within), Colette’s “Monologue du Gardénia” (pp. 32-40), with dueling French-Italian text ...

Zabriskie was closed, but I spied a few items related to/advertising the current William Zorach exhibition (“Sculpture, Drawings and Watercolors”) ... “Open” Tue-Sat, 10 a.m.-5:30 p.m., though it was closed at 11 a.m. anyway ...

Instead, as compensation (to/for no one), I recalled the tales told out of school regarding Zorach, related by the former owner of Robinhood Marina, in Robinhood, Maine (where the Zorachs summered) ... Particularly vivid is the story of his burial at sea ... His wife (Marguerite) is said to have often served the distinguished New York artist breakfast in bed ... She was also an artist, though perhaps less distinguished ... William was catered to ... “Breakfast in bed” was in fact breakfast in bed for Zorach and whichever of his young models at the time shared his bed ... When William (1889-1966) died, his ashes were placed in a small stone box he had prepared (sculpted) in advance and dropped at a secret location off Robinhood (exact coordinates known only to the accommodating storyteller, then owner of the marina) ... When Marguerite (1887-1968) died, her ashes were installed in a massive, brooding, barely moveable stone box (also designed by William and also dropped into the sea) ... I cannot remember the punchline – that is, if Marguerite’s “urn” was dropped at similarly secret but *different* coordinates ...

Walked past the just-opened Abercrombie & Fitch store on Fifth at 56th ... The windows are currently blocked/“shuttered” by horizontal wooden “siding” (inside the glass), the interior totally obscured ... Throbbing music escaped the front door as hot young things passed one another, darting within and darting forth (out into the rainy-grey gloom of mid-day, mid-town, late-December Manhattan) ...

Off to see Sugimoto at the Japan Society before/after a pass through the NYPL looking for El Lissitzky ...

[...]

### III. LOOP D LOOP

The M2 dropped me at 42nd and Fifth and I congratulated the driver on the recent strike ... He thanked me (“the public”) for my (“our”) support ...

Found El Lissitzky well-represented at the NYPL, diving into the Nancy Perloff and Brian Reed edited *[Re]Situating El Lissitzky: Vitebsk, Berlin, Moscow* (Los Angeles: Getty Research Institute, 2003) and Sophie Lissitzky-Küpper’s *El Lissitzky: Life, Letters, Texts*, trans. Hélène Audwinckle, Mary Whittal (London: Thames & Hudson, 1968); that is, well-represented insofar as [re]situating means [re]defining the ambiguous; viz., the dance between “radical aesthetics and political experience [Soviet propaganda]” (at least) ... It is, however, his maneuvers apropos of “spatial representation” that sing(e), with appropriate homage paid by Leah Dickerman to Yve-Alain Bois and Jean Clair in “El Lissitzky’s Camera Corpus” (pp. 153-176) in the GRI treatise (a book based on the collegium “Interpreting Lissitzky: New Perspectives” at the Getty art-historical monastery in the Brentwood enclave of Los Angeles, CA, in December 1998) ... Apparently the warp and woof of El Lissitzky’s oeuvre plays out through indefinable “things” – e.g., his assault on perspectivism (and perhaps humanism) and his volatile spatial constructions in 2- or 3-D (“Prouns” included) ... The recourse to axonometry, montage, “X-ray” (in photography), etc. seems to signal the assault of the Divine Imaginary on the merely representational (Panofsky nodding assent, if not nodding off with reference to “K[unst] und Pangeometrie”, 1925) ... While Bois and Clair represent the middle period of re-appropriation (1978-1990), Dickerman et al. (especially with the second coming of Dada, arriving in New York at MoMA in mid-2006, after Paris), perform the rite of the “new spring” for pure conceptual fire by

rounding up the Zürich, Berlin, Hannover, Cologne, New York, and Paris manifestations of *Dadaisme* for/toward the Present Moment (the un-timely “Now”) ...

[...]

#### IV. NAME-DROPPING

Headed toward Turtle Bay via 46th and dropped into Gotham Book Mart (the new/old literary haven/mecca for browsing high literature, more or less, new and used) ... Went upstairs and found an array of used books organized to one or another rhyme and/or reason (shelves of Russian novels in English, yes, shelves of Zen and such as well – a patch of Kabbalah, a stretch of Gurdjieff and Ouspensky) ... Found many sly volumes awaiting a buyer – Bachelard’s *The Psychoanalysis of Fire*, Hegel’s “Preface” to the *Phenomenology of Spirit* with running commentary, no Schelling, Bataille upon Bataille, Cavell upon Emerson, Emerson by himself, a pile of Thoreau nowhere near Emerson, lots of Joyce, bits of Roth, some Derrida, one Agamben, no Kazantzakis, a rack of Merton, a batch of Beat, one Lacan, one Žižek, a Dominique Aury first-edition paperback on mostly “19th-century” literary genius (Proust, Chateaubriand et al.) ... She (authoress of *O*) is reported to have re-read Proust every year (though it’s unclear/unlikely that she re-read *all of Proust* every year) ... Her commentary on Proust’s letters left nothing to write home about ... She found them lacklustre and prosaic ...

Downstairs a full rack of Green Integer titles, NYRB reprints, no Pushkin Press, a raft of Modern Library cloth editions; that is, presses mining the out-of-copyright world of now-classic modernist literature ... Or, playing safely with fire ...

The iconic Gorey section left an impression, especially the limited-edition prints for sale for modest sums, while the artist-published (author-published) imprints begged the question “Why?” ...

Slipped into the Japan Society, after almost entering a church by accident, and pinched a copy of the “Hiroshi Sugimoto: History of History” catalogue (oddly without any images whatsoever) ... The \$12.00 admission fee scared me off for the time being ... The show opened on my birthday in September and closes on my sister’s birthday in February ...

Stepped out into the semi-darkness of the late-afternoon and headed to Lexington and 51st to catch the 6 train ... “Sundown longing ...”, etc....

[...]

GK (January 2006)

#### POST-POSTSCRIPT(S)

RX – Sunday, 01/01/06 ... Prescription for a New Year (1909 perhaps): Drink wine (Spanish red, with castles); find the *Wall Street Journal* in the trash; read the *Wall Street Journal* to keep track of the capitalist beast (viz., find rubbish, scan rubbish, return to rubbish); look for El Lissitzky, Kandinsky et al. (e.g., safely dead “red” and “blue” artists); laugh/growl at the beast ...

LE “PAIN” QUOTIDIEN/EPIPHANY – Friday, 01/06/06 ... “The I, absolute and pure, to which the noetic-noematic life [the life of thought itself] goes back and whence it springs, undergoes and doubtless withstands the supreme methodological test, the *Transcendental Reduction*, through which Husserl returns to thought, untainted by the ‘things of the world,’ which have only to ‘keep quiet,’ so to speak, to be and to appear, to show themselves plainly and directly without even the shadows that might be projected by them onto the pure and impassible Me or I.” Emmanuel Levinas, “Outside the Subject” (1987), *Outside the Subject*, trans. Michael B. Smith (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1993), p. 155 ...

RUSSIAN CHRISTMAS – Monday, 01/09/06 ... Black, paint-splattered shrouds have dropped within the Bergdorf windows (awaiting “what’s next”, or trunk shows), with legs of ladders and mannequins visible ... And, after checking the interior of Abercrombie & Fitch, the wooden siding blocking the windows from the outside, yet inside

the glass, is permanent (lending the inside a nightclub atmosphere and wall-to-wall shelf space) ... / Ravenous appetite(s) ... Throwing boulders on the scales (instead of feathers), judgment (im)possibly impaired, thinking of invading Russia in Winter ... Never say “No” (instead deflect) ... Say only “Yes” (twice) ... Da, da ...

### MISCELLANEOUS OUTTAKES / ETC.

La Perla – <http://www.laperla.com/>

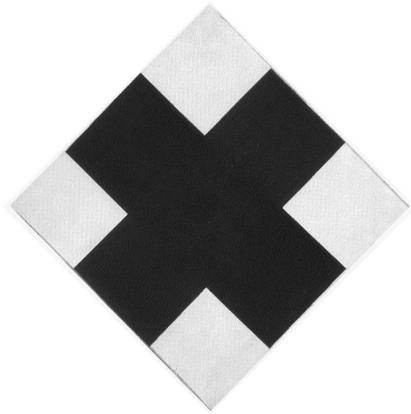
Rianne Ten Haken – <http://supermodels.nl/riannetenhaken>

Michelangelo di Battista – <http://www.managementartists.com/>

“Génie et Folie” – <http://www.museesdefrance.com/produits/details/EK194880>

Dada @ MoMA – <http://www.moma.org/exhibitions/2006/dada.html>

Japan Society (New York) – <http://www.japansociety.org/>



SMALL APPURTENANCES – UPDATED 11/19/05

## MARK TANSEY: INTO THE BLUE

[...]

“Archaic smile – *n*: An expression that resembles a smile and is characteristic of early Greek sculpture”(1)

“Appurtenance – *n*: An incidental right (as right-of-way) attached to a principal property right and passing in possession with it 2: A subordinate path or adjunct < the ~ welcome is fashion and ceremony – Shak. > 3 *pl*: Accessory objects: APPARATUS”(2)

Mark Tansey @ Gagosian Gallery (New York, New York), November 6 through December 18, 2004

[...]

CRITIQUE – Mark Tansey’s ultramarine series stretches things further – things he first investigated (embedded *and privileged*) in his seminal paintings from the late 1980s exposing the volatility of the post-modern worldview, a worldview underwritten (suffused) with a possible-impossible, aching “endlessness” and circularity (an archaic smile); a synoptic overview of the ravages of deconstructivism (a form of post-modernism after all) and the post-structuralist anti-project, both signs of that pre-eminent time (the tumultuous 1980s) and the “setting of the sign”, or the so-called end(game) of Modernity proper, plus the attendant/contentious arrival of a de-centered, radical sallying-forth *into and toward* someplace else altogether.

This somewhere else (a some-*thing* else) has turned out, as then suspected, to be a deferred Romanticism, insofar as Romanticism is yet suspect terrain, and insofar as the post-Romantic stain (the hapless, nihilist fear of the “knee-deep abyss”) compounds the artistic neurosis that inhabits the field of modern art from Surrealism through Abstract Expressionism to the stillborn quiescence of various minimalisms and post-minimalisms during and after the various artistic insurrections of the 1960s. Thus, Tansey’s recent work contains that essentialist quest now bracketed, while at the same moment it gestures toward the ultimate state of things (the mad, fluctuating heart of matter and memory, signs and representational systems) by way of a suggestive tour of seemingly deranged landscapes (on very large canvases) depicting metempsychosis, anamorphosis, and semiosis as a vast complex of irreducible and elemental processes (figural tropes and anti-tropes) informing the cultural-intellectual-aesthetic *tableau vivant* that is life itself. Liminal landscapes, then, haunted by cultural detritus – or, apparent things composed of other things, representations only apparently gone off the rails, yet productive of a type of cultural vertigo that does not so much induce a psychic implosion as a radically finite tear in things revealing other things.

Thus Karl Marx’s head as snowball, en route to becoming a snowman, rolled across a wintry landscape, snowguns blazing, trees plastered white, a pair of crossed skis forming eyes and brow, the composite image forming a “wintry eye”. Or James Joyce’s face stretched sidewise, lost in the wake of a passing Styxian ferry, crossing the upper-middle picture plane, while a party of merry-making, 1920-somethings (*bon vivants*) drink (ignoring Chiron and the passing ferry), inhabiting the far left, lower corner of the watery-blue canvas, hung out over the precipice of the painting’s anaesthetic abyss (with soccer ball floating by).(3) Elsewhere, through another blue window, an arctic expedition trudges into the snow-glazed haze of a monstrous, mountainous “landscape”, Nietzsche’s upside-down, distended profile darkening the frozen, bleak nothingness, smaller heads dotting the mountain peaks – an arctic pantheon – while Wittgenstein’s head slices diagonally, also upside down, pulled from chin to crown by invisible forces, vanishing into darkening crevices (the cracked, ultramarine fissures of the middle ground).

In other words, picture-making as echo-less vortex ... A severe silence falls over the “wintry” *carnivale* (sensory cavalcade) of ideas lost and found, represented and double- or triple- torqued (upwards, sideways, backwards) – and thus, over all, a topologically twisted and distended aesthetic vision emerges picturing what Jean-Luc Marion has called the stigmata of the invisible, portraying landscapes as haunted (fecund) fields recalling the ultimate secret that landscape signals a language of deferred signs (memories), whether or not one cares to pay attention (remember).(4) In the warped and dizzying gaps between what is nominally at hand (here) and what is secreted in all things, or putatively “singular” (“over there”, so to speak), what passes as thought may also be found (*always as supplement*) as finite, material artifacts – that is to say, matter locked into time and engraved or etched into memory, painted into

place with precision by hand and/or eye. Thus the (im)material/immemorial (unforgettable) force of ideas comes “home” in purely tectonic works from Michelangelo to Donald Judd (arguably, the trajectory of Modernity), yet also in works of literature, philosophy, and painting (or, in aesthetic vision *per se*).

As most everyone else speaks louder and louder to say less and less, most especially the blue-jowled, cell-phone-chewing “public” (a useless abstraction at best, today), Tansey begs off, and backs off, into the ethereal-blue nether regions where souls travel to and fro, forward and backward in time, biding time and perhaps carving Time itself out of a provisional nothingness in the process.

GK (December 2004)

### ENDNOTES

1 – *Webster’s New Collegiate Dictionary* (Springfield, MA: Merriam & Co., 1975), p. 59.

2 – *Ibid.*, p. 56.

3 – Mark Tansey, “Wake” (2003), Oil on canvas, 85 ½” x 96”.

4 – Jean-Luc Marion, *The Crossing of the Visible*, trans. James K.A. Smith (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2004).

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Mark C. Taylor, *The Picture in Question: Mark Tansey and the Ends of Representation* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1999).

Patterson Sims, *Mark Tansey: Art and Source* (Seattle, WA: Seattle Art Museum, 1990).

Mark Tansey, Roland Mönig, *Mark Tansey* (Bielefeld: Kerber Verlag, 2005) – Includes the ultramarine series ...

Miles Unger, “Mark Tansey”, *New Art Examiner* 22 (September 1994): p. 46 – Critique of the Tansey exhibition (with reference to “The Enunciation”) at the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston.

Tansey @ Gagosian, New York (images) – <http://www.gagosian.com>

FLÈCHES D'AMOUR

# THE COMING PHILOSOPHY: SUBLIME AESTHETICS

[...]

“If we reflect how long the belief in disguises survived – how farce throughout the ages, Shakespeare’s high comedy, and even the detective story of the late nineteenth century found it quite unproblematic to work with the confusions that result from disguises – it must be a matter of considerable astonishment to see how reluctant people are to accept such devices in more recent times. When it comes to disguises, they refuse to see the joke, and in the modern novel such mistaken identities are frowned on. Yet this dogged insistence on the unmistakable, unique singularity of the body comes at precisely the moment when philanthropists, the disciples of Proust, and psychoanalysts assure us that all possibilities dwell within each of us, and that nothing could be more out-of-date and philistine than the belief in the unity of the personality. What can be behind this?”(1) – Walter Benjamin, “Milieu Theoreticians” (1929)

[...]

## I. OVER AGAIN (AFTER WALTER BENJAMIN)

When one finally dives into Walter Benjamin, after reading around his works for ages, the effect is to be tossed about upon the cross-currents of the second half of 19th-century Europe and the ravishing, swirling revolutionary syrrhesis of early 20th-century, pan-European cultural and political agitation. First and foremost, in this regard, is his *literary* criticism – the essays on Baudelaire, Goethe, and Proust – but also his appreciation (no matter how measured) of Surrealism. To be present, through his works, at the outset of the inter-war years is to be present at the beginning of “the end”. And, now – in 2003 – what is left but the wreckage of this maelstrom foreseen in the burgeoning of a vast infrastructure associated with the explosion of the middle class and attempts by practitioners of radical aesthetic and radical anti-aesthetic agitation to reach down into the substrata of experience to retrieve primordial resources subsistent, but most often lost, in language – or, lost most succinctly in instrumentalized forms of language and practical reason.

Benjamin’s allegiances are manifold – and it is Hannah Arendt’s introduction to *Illuminations* (1968) that has conditioned the reception beyond Germany and beyond Frankfurt-School auspices of Benjamin’s theoretical and luminous discursive coordinates.(2) Yet, outside of this presentation resides a wider array of conflicting and apparent warring interests, insofar as Benjamin’s radar encompassed the collapse of humanism and the onslaught of mechanistic, even diabolical, forms of post-humanism (including fascism, capitalism, and totalitarianism). Arendt’s conceit that Benjamin was a “pearl diver” has been rightly questioned – yet, the intermediary position between Benjamin and Heidegger that Arendt might be said to represent continues to go uninvestigated or unresolved, proving a schism in thought itself for those still conditioned by a presentation of Benjamin as simply a Marxist materialist or a messianic, neo-vitalist theoretician. The troubled concept of *aura* – derived from Baudelaire, Proust and Proust’s Bergsonian persona (and inflected with East European, Jewish mystical tendencies) – seems the key to Benjamin’s philosophy of history, while also his chief problem (complaint) with Heidegger, given that Heidegger’s concept of historicity rang false for Benjamin. Benjamin seemed more interested in the timely (and timeless) irruption of repressed and revolutionary forces, suggesting an eschatological, versus teleological, spirit at work in *his* work; the same presentiment that permitted him to remark that the Surrealists seemed – en masse – to signal a type of time (dream time) epitomized by a permanently ringing alarm clock.

Within all of Benjamin’s most acute writings (versus those written to appease his handlers in the Frankfurt School) is the endless wake-up call issued between the wars by Europe’s imperiled intelligentsia. It is not the canonical Benjaminian motifs that seem most attuned to this alarming call, but, instead, the waves that crash between essays and the least publishable surveys of cultural arcana – a surreptitious some-thing that seems to arrive on the heels of his admiration for Aragon, Proust, even Goethe – despite his requisite dialectical summary judgments regarding apostasy in the works of one-time radical poets and thinkers. This apostasy is typically the dialectical fuse that

allows Benjamin to walk away from one thing, and to embrace a portion, versus the totality, of any one source, moving always toward some-thing else embedded there nonetheless. And it is this illuminating intellect (which verges on the surreational spirit of the best writers of this generation) that brings to light not a tableau of bright and shiny, utopian signifiers, but a landscape of intense inter-penetrating signs and images run through by tragic currents, privileging that some-thing else prefigured in his idea of the Coming Philosophy (the return of revolutionary cosmogonic eros), avoiding assiduously metaphors and allegories, always looking for the real Real behind the phantasmatic world of structure and superstructure. Perhaps an aesthete of milieu (and a connoisseur of ennui), Benjamin rightly deserves to be liberated from the annals of Marxian rhetoric and placed in the Pantheon of post-romantic thought, next to a wide array of ur-revolutionary thinkers – poets, artists, novelists – versus theoreticians and epistemologists. His *métier* was/is language; an illuminated language, and it is to poets that he turned his most appreciative side in words and in inarticulate gestures of his heart and spirit (typified by his intimacy with Brecht). It is for this reason that Benjamin was liberated from the grey annals of German philosophy and became the patron saint of late-modern theory. And, now, as theory is under harvest, and the preparations for something else are self-evident, it is time to wrest Benjamin from the clutches of cultural-analytical discourses and place him in the critical-poetical realm of the poet-thinker (one who thinks poetically), or, under the new-old-new conceptual sign of the Coming Philosophy (a.k.a. a sublime aesthetics, viz., an aesthetics of the Sublime).

“The great art of making things seem closer together. In reality. Or from where we are standing; in memory, “Ah! que le monde est grand à la clarté des lamps! / Aux yeux du souvenir que le monde est petit!” This is the mysterious power of memory – the power to generate nearness. A room we inhabit whose walls are *closer* to us than a visitor. This is what is homey about home. In nurseries we remember, the walls seem closer to each other than they really are, than they would be if we saw them today. The sight of them tears us apart because we have become attached to them. The great traveler is the person who passes through cities and countries with anamnesis; and because everything seems closer to everything else, and hence to him, since he is in their midst, all his senses respond to every nuance as truth. The distanced Romantic is as ignorant of this as the Positivist.”(2)

If Benjamin’s work can be (retrospectively), in some way, interpreted as “harvesting the 19th century”, then – today – it is our collective critical-poetical task to harvest the 20th century, inclusive of Benjamin’s writings and those works that he appropriated and expropriated for his foremost project of foretelling the Coming Philosophy. The coordinates for such a philosophy of immanence are forever shifting – and they have shifted yet again, since Benjamin’s death in 1940. Needless to say, these coordinates reside *temporally* within the superstructure and base privileged by Frankfurt School ideology, and, as Ian Hamilton Finlay once wrote in a letter requesting an intervention on his behalf (in response to a fairly absurd misreading of a project of his by a partisan of late-dialectical nonsense), “Must everything be Marcused and Marcused and Marcused *ad nauseam*?”

Benjamin’s harvesting of the 19th century took place as those structures that epitomized the rise of the bourgeoisie fell into tatters and as the last vestiges of Romanticism disappeared in the ironic and bitter intellectual warfare of the inter-war years. For this reason alone he deplored Expressionism ... Benjamin’s own romanticism was conditioned by his finding in the works of Romantic authors a distance that led to disengagement and alienation insofar as the Romantic project was premiated upon reading (and re-writing) the language of the world (and in transcending, through individual, heroic effort, the stultifying strictures of conventional hegemony, firing if at all possible a revolt in the lowest, most-oppressed classes). Hence the great Romantic novel or novella (viz., Goethe, Schiller, Novalis, Stendhal, Flaubert et al.) Yet Romanticism is said to have reached its pinnacle (apotheosis) with the wide-ranging campaigns of Napoleon, who betrayed that project by imposing a new empire. In his criticism, Benjamin shook each work to free its component parts from a matrix of specific, everyday remnants of failed encounters with the Sublime while retaining in the resultant “image” the imprint of those times.

Benjamin’s inordinate admiration for Goethe’s pansophism, stemming from Benjamin’s earliest years reading (it was Benjamin’s 1924 essay on Goethe’s *Elective Affinities* (1809) that brought him out of obscurity, and he was far more forgiving of Goethe’s later conservatism than most Marxists) is matched by his detection in the works of Baudelaire of an aesthetic of “shock” countering his own predisposition to the world of disembodied concepts – a world that he found terribly polluted and corrupted in works that failed to ground in concrete particulars (serviceable images) the radical some-thing else he detected fast receding and fast evaporating as the cultural apparatus of post-war Weimar Germany sank into a bankrupt form of idealism perhaps best called “abject idealism” (see his comments on “war novels”). The inflationary spiral of the mid-to-late 1910s called into question the viability of re-deploying German idealism whatsoever, an idealism essentially hijacked by right-wing apologists for high imperial

Germany, and an idealism betrayed once again by (and at this time “rump”) forces of Empire, “Empire” being, in Benjamin’s Marxian lexicon, a synonym for “Capitalism”.

As late as 1930, Benjamin was constructing a parallel program to his philosophical and political agenda (“Program for Literary Criticism”) that included caustic measures blasting free from compromising settings the intellectual fire-power he seemed to worship. And not for posterity (as far as he could determine, as he despised the concept of posterity). This included remarks to the effect that it was the task of the critic to *criticize*: “There is fine art in giving praise. But it is also a fine art to bring out the importance of something apparently peripheral through negative criticism.”(3) Benjamin could demolish the edifying pleasure of “merely reading” (as he generally accused the public) by finding often, in the remains of his own critique, proof that narrative was, *in itself*, a form of criticism. That he mostly spared Proust (and he spent an inordinate portion of his sojourn in Paris, in 1930, discussing Proust and meeting acquaintances of Proust), while merely noting in passing a sadistic element in his prose, suggests that Benjamin’s intellectual fire was aimed primarily at those who wrote (produced) works that circled (tip-toed around) the structural and infrastructural nightmare of early 20th-century Europe without reaching the bedrock of experience, the ur-formalist language that informs all experience. And he blamed the publishers more than the authors of these books. Traces of this desire can be found everywhere in Benjamin; traces of his idealism and his Romanticism, yet traces transfigured by the necessity of bringing to fruition (to ground and *to history*) the revolutionary spirit that haunted his every move.

As with all revolutionists, Benjamin could denounce one version of one thing while offering another version; in this sense, aesthetics as *an-aesthetics* is just such a thing. His ire spared not a single instance of re-loading 19th-century aesthetics, after Romanticism. His own aesthetic world was formed in the crucible of dialectical operations – not this, not that – until, *voilà!*, there appeared a phoenix (a “fire-bird”), image of the irrepressible beauty burning in all things. His apparent aesthetic of retrieving aspects of the so-called out-moded rings true in the sense that Benjamin listened intently to the interior of things while playing along with the orchestra of Marxian agitation and rhetoric. Such was his need to find even the most marginal niche to remain “alive”, both to his times and to the expectations of some-thing else .

The Coming Philosophy came out of this fire, and its coordinates were highly provisional (temporal). To resurrect this idea (this conceptual sign of fire), today, means to *re-write* its coordinates – as they are already being re-written anyway. This Coming Philosophy is the *philosophical* aesthetics that was endlessly bracketed in the time that Walter Benjamin first detected and later promulgated this eternal thing in all things; some-thing, arguably, thrown out in the formalist games of the early 20th century. His dialectical-materialistic worldview was not all encompassing. In fact, this worldview contained precisely the types of holes and caesuras that he worshipped in the works of Baudelaire and others (and the inversions and “perversions”, in Baudelaire, Rimbaud, and Proust, that served as shots across the bow of the bourgeoisie and the State). It was just that he could not fully escape the orbit of the one all-purpose, fire-breathing alternative in that extraordinarily demanding time – i.e., dogmatic Communism and Marxism. The other options (Zionism, Nationalism, Democratic Socialism) were all unpalatable to his ecumenical, internationalist, but decidedly “fiery” spirit. The Coming Philosophy merely appeared to him as what always resides within such anarchic fervor, and for once – by the mere name he supplied to it – he seems to have realized the time was not right. It is now the time (insofar as we re-re-define “time” as an ur-form moving within – perhaps the “ur-content” of – an aesthetics of the Sublime).

## II. FUTURITY ITSELF

“The sight of immediate reality has become an orchid in the land of technology.”(4) – Walter Benjamin

Perhaps the most canonical of Benjamin’s canonical works is the oft-quoted “The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction” (published in 1936), most cited just after, or just ahead of, “Theses on the Philosophy of History” (published in 1950, but completed in spring 1940, or just before his untimely death in Port Bou). Both of these essays close, in succession, like two shots fired from a single cannon, Arendt’s controversial re-presentation of Benjamin in *Illuminations*.

And what is at stake in the former essay is – exactly – a type of aesthetics (something signaled indiscreetly by the opening quotation, or epigraph, from Paul Valéry regarding “the profound changes . . . impending in the ancient craft of the Beautiful.” It is this sea-change that Benjamin examines, primarily through film and its effect on mass culture,

while he also swoops down into “architecture” by way of admitting that aesthetics must be lived, must become second nature. And if he rightly eviscerates the aestheticization of politics on the right, he also raises the proverbial flaming sword for politicizing art, on the left, insofar as his aesthetic concept of aura (a troubled, double-edged approach to aura) provides him with a ready-made image of immanence versus transcendence (or transcendence through, by way of, immanence); a *complex* that illumines his thought, here and there, all the while leading to what seems the ultimate hammer he might employ in fashioning a sublime aesthetics – i.e., the recourse to apperception (a highly charged Kantian term), as the locus of any future aesthetics. As such, Benjamin’s most prescient works seem, *today* (if they did not *then*), calculated to address previous or contemporaneous parallel works – as his *The Origin of German Tragic Drama* (1928) more than incidentally recalled Nietzsche’s *The Birth of Tragedy* (1871), and his “On the Program of the Coming Philosophy” might be seen as an aggressive assault on Kant’s *Prolegomena to Any Future Metaphysics* (1783), the latter being – intentionally – Benjamin’s shot at post-Kantianism as much as Kant’s critiques in and of themselves. For Benjamin, Kant’s world seemed the very image of a type of “insanity”, a milieu given to a highly developed form of rationality, which he saw as the root cause of the destruction of experience. His vociferous antipathy to the so-called autonomy of art is a central theme in his ongoing project of demolition, while his desire to politicize art might also prove a long-term cipher for politicizing aesthetics.

Apperception, typically defined as “conscious perception” (an affect of the assimilation of things through thought), underscores Benjamin’s highest respect paid *forward* for “seeing” things in the broadest sense; for thinking in images, and for building a new, better world out of living, grounded concepts. His remarks regarding technical aspects of film production suggest that he was more worried about its narcotic effect on the masses (as cinema) than its ability to represent other possible worlds. It is the poet-filmmaker who came later that might have better impressed Benjamin than the earliest progenitors of this astounding, technological innovation. Nevertheless, compared to his troubled reception of photography and film, his words on architecture seem positively astonishing: “Architecture has never been idle. Its history is more ancient than that of any other art. Buildings are appropriated in a twofold manner: by use and by perception – or rather, by touch and sight. Such appropriation cannot be understood in terms of the attentive concentration of a tourist before a famous building. On the tactile side there is no counterpart to contemplation on the optical side. Tactile appropriation is accomplished not so much by attention as by habit. As regards architecture, habit determines to a large extent even optical reception. The latter, too, occurs much less through rapt attention than by noticing the object in incidental fashion. This mode of appropriation, developed with reference to architecture, in certain circumstances acquires canonical value. For the tasks which face the human apparatus of perception at the turning points of history cannot be solved by optical means, that is, by contemplation alone. They are measured gradually by habit, under the guidance of tactile appropriation.”(5)

This assessment signals Benjamin’s insistence that changes in the superstructure bring changes in the everyday physical world (the base) – and, after all, improvements in the structure of humanity *as it is lived out* in day-to-day experience. Benjamin’s sensibilities lead him to the inalienable rights of citizens to *inhabit* space – something that no doubt haunted him when he later became stateless. This radical agenda is – profoundly – a preliminary sketch for an aesthetics of the Sublime, as it is writ large in the world *as the world*. This idea inhabits all high-structuralist and all high, post-structuralist meanderings that deal with the troubled issue of what constitutes “representations”, versus the Real (a something-as-nothing that also brought back into “discourse analysis” the shimmering idea of “distance”, no matter how salient/small, a perhaps more apt and updated, less mystical encounter with aura). It is highly probable that Benjamin saw this lived fact more in Paris than in Berlin, given his love of Paris and his ascerbic descriptions of post-imperial Berlin. It was in Paris, as well, in 1930, that he almost gave away one of his most valued ideas, while idling in a bookshop and chatting with the proprietress, Adrienne Monnier. “But I then found myself fascinated to see how eagerly she leaped to the defense of photography.... But when I went on to call this kind of preoccupation with art impoverishing and nerve-racking, she resisted.... In this way I exchange a photograph of the *vierge sage* of Strasbourg, which she had promised me at the beginning of our conversation, for a theory of reproduction that may be even more valuable to me.”(6) It is in reference to Paris that Benjamin deploys his appreciation for the 19th-century *flâneur*, that idea of “enlightened” idling so dear to Baudelaire and Nerval; that idea of inhabiting space on one’s own apparent “lackadaisical” terms, choosing (if one so wishes) to walk with a turtle in the Bois de Boulogne (or, in Gérard de Nerval’s case, a lobster).

“What is aura, actually? A strange weave of space and time: the unique appearance or semblance of distance, no matter how close it may be. While at rest on a summer’s noon, to trace a range of mountains on the horizon, or a branch that throws its shadow on the observer, until the moment or the hour become part of their appearance – this is what it means to breathe the aura of those mountains, that branch.”(7)

Benjamin's conceptual circling of the nature of aura within the "contradictory and mobile whole" of his written works is the here-again, gone-again keystone to the architectonic of his critical-poetic universe. One moment he banishes metaphor and analogy, and the next he brings it back. As above, in 1931, he could describe aura in loving terms, yet still qualify a performative destruction of aura insofar as it liberated things from bankrupt aesthetic strictures of outmoded cultural politics. His relation to aura (by way of photography and film) is, however, by 1936, much changed in that the technical, revolutionary aspects of photography have already been turned to both counter-productive political and nihilistic, purely commercial purposes. Eugène Atget's photographs of Paris, situated at the turn of the century and representing for Benjamin "the Pole of utmost mastery", may indeed have "initiated the emancipation of object from aura" (a signature motif taken up by Man Ray and the Surrealists), yet at the same time this "tearing" at the veil succeeds in a second illumination more dear to Benjamin than the polluted atmosphere of outmoded aestheticism. And, if the Surrealists "set the scene for a salutary estrangement between man and his surroundings", Benjamin's claims for photography are purely polemical such that they give "free play to the politically educated eye, under whose gaze all intimacies are sacrificed to the illumination of detail."<sup>(8)</sup> Such sentiments mirror the materialist notion that mid-day is preferable to evening; that mid-day is the moment of absolute clarity (when shadows recede). Such, too, is revolutionary rhetoric, while in the shaded workshops of revolutionary artists (alchemists) aura is kept in a secret drawer below the iconic tools of their trade, to be re-loaded – in time – purified and distilled.

In many discrete ways, Benjamin resembles another figure of the European avant-garde, at this same time, i.e., Karel Teige. Teige, "*enfant terrible* of the Czech avant-garde", was at first (in the 1920s) a practitioner of Poetism (a movement with ties to early Surrealism and to Apollinaire's famous passage through Prague), and later a critic of modern architecture and functionalism. His own bitter last days (post-WWII) include a turn toward a type of "cosmogonic eros" of his own making in the form of hypno-erotogenic collages – landscapes of intense, disembodied forms that correlate with his unfinished *Phenomenology of Art (Fenomenologie umeni)* (1950-51) – which seem to carve out from *within* themselves a visionary, impersonal space; a landing site for some-thing else (prepared in the alchemical furnace of phenomenology, a variant, after all, of structuralism). It is Prague that seems closer to Paris than Berlin or Vienna, in the 1920s, as it resided in the inter-war years in a makeshift republic carved from the ruins of the Habsburg empire. And it is Prague that served as a "magic carpet" for so many wayfaring intellectuals and artists en route to/from Moscow. Situated here, too, was Josef Sudek, a photographer somewhere in-between Atget and Man Ray – a photographer whose work encompassed both commercial and artistic principles (including Surrealist tendencies), and an artist whose work carries an inordinate surplus of auratic magic in the sense that he sought, and found, the "space" in things that sings wordless songs (sings of things as ideas); an ontological ground trapped in-between representations and the thing-in-itself.

If George Steiner seems ultimately Benjaminian in his own ability to extract the movements of thought within texts, to poke his finger into the ellipses and caesuras of literary works of art, it is worth trusting his judgment that Benjamin's Coming Philosophy was "Lurianic" *in spirit* – i.e., mystical and gnostic, the image of a devouring technological spirit also a possible modern image of the demi-urge, as early manifestations of the Industrial Revolution also appeared in William Blake's apocalyptic worldview. The fact that "On the Program of the Coming Philosophy" was written in or around 1916 and not published until after Benjamin's death also seems to indicate that it remained buried in his personal archive, undergoing its own slow metamorphosis toward a statement of "futurity" proper within his more (un)timely works. It is, no doubt, also quite probable that this singular thing (this text) would have had – out of necessity – to be suppressed, as he made his way into/through the dialectical machinery of Marx. To suppress it, however, was not to automatically disown it. But, more importantly, this document "from the future" resided in a space he reserved, always within himself, and a space that he privileged in his criticism of Baudelaire, Proust, and Kafka, a space in thought itself intimately related to "memory" and "anamnesis" (Platonic remembering), or "conscience". This space is the doubled space of revelation, and, if his borrowed "cosmogonic eros" is an obvious pseudo-archaic affectation, this doubled space is nonetheless the ideal sign of immanence or image of the "shrinking distance" in things that also brings everything so very close. But only so close as to "see" in the World-Soul everything struggling toward freedom, and, to see in the world of Spirit, the world of free representations, which we might inhabit every day (versus authorized and militantly enforced forms of enslavement); and in those representations a possible new, better world. For Benjamin, on the path to that world, along the way and as part of the journey, we find a "politicized" revolutionary poetics.

A possible “cosmogonic eros” is always already situated in a unique phase within time itself ... In Benjamin’s worldview it is problematized as “memory”(9) or what resides in the Present-Past, the locus of futurity itself, in the manner of Ernst Bloch’s admission that everything thought is also already immediately past (a present-past versus the immense field of ruins known as the past-past). Hence Benjamin’s infinite regard for Proust’s ability to live a literary form of anamnesis ... This latter, “unhandsome” past-past is the fallen nature of edifying systems that sustain both life and enslave Spirit (thus, Schelling’s search for an archaic individuality and freedom, a.k.a. Self, or, Žižek’s ghostly “indivisible remainder”, extracted from his readings of Schelling). It is not things themselves that are to blame for fallenness per se; it is – instead – the misuse of things that engenders the prison-house of spent forms that encircles things. The world ensouled is the world of language that has not yet fallen into this prison-house, a world of language that is so easily corrupted. To think means to “see” ... And to see means to “think” ... This double movement in consciousness is the space of the critical-poetic Sublime. And this sublime thing is what is present in every act or work that signifies freedom – pursues freedom – from/within the Piranesian prison-house of the Past-Past.

The echo in Agamben’s *The End of the Poem* (1999) is “the world as such”, as the echo in Hegel’s *Phenomenology of Spirit* (the end of history) is “the world as such”; i.e., the world freed from the ruins of history. To “harvest” Walter Benjamin is to rescue him from the past-past, for the revolutionary present-past (and futurity itself), from the reflexive prison-house (apparatus) of philosophy and cultural studies, and for the critical-poetical, sublime task inherent in every moment. The “world as such” is the sublime some-thing else buried in everything else. The echo in Benjamin’s works is the sounding of this distance, the near and the far distance in everything, and a very blue horizon insofar as it is almost always kept at a maximum distance by antithetical, nihilistic forces (and materialist dialectics) pandemic in imperial-capitalistic systems (all peremptory, totalizing systems). A sublime aesthetics is also an anti-capitalistic aesthetics ... Hence, to politicize poetics *en route*, is to demolish the prison-house. A sublime aesthetics (that which is always coming) is – after Jacob Rogozinski’s remarks in “The Gift of the World”(10) – the schematization of freedom itself.

GK (September 2003)

A version of this essay appeared in Gavin Keeney, *“Else-where”: Essays in Art, Architecture, and Cultural Production 2002-2011* (Newcastle upon Tyne: CSP, 2011).

[...]

## POSTSCRIPT

Benjamin’s take on most forms of mysticism, as misbegotten elective utopias, accounts for his harsh words for various cultural and religious movements of his era. His damning pronouncements regarding the conservative cult of Stefan George underwrite his own presentiment that such intuitions must be grounded socially, if not politically. His critical view of Rudolf Steiner’s Anthroposophy is, in some respects, ill-informed insofar as he hardly knows what he, in turn, condemns as proto-fascism, seeing Steiner’s second Goetheanum (1928) in Dornach, Switzerland (near Basel) – the first was burned to the foundations reputedly by reactionary Catholic agencies – as a factory for quasi-mystical, aesthetic socialism. Benjamin found certain concepts of mysticism too valuable (too insightful) to ignore, and he sought to steal from the right what he thought should belong on the left. The Marxian mistrust of elective, personal utopias resides uneasily in Benjamin’s work as another example of cross-currents, but also as a type of rip tide within his thought. (We can observe a similar cross-fertilization currently in the work of neo-Marxists Terry Eagleton and Slavoj Žižek, and, in Žižek’s case, in the 2003 work entitled “The State of Emergency Called Love”.) Here, too, we might discern the grey outlines of Habermas’ denunciation of Derrida’s “Jewistic mysticism” ... Benjamin’s eschatology was revolutionary and theological, however, in the sense that his impatience with the slow march of Socialism through institutions meant – in his estimation – the survival of high-capitalist hegemony by another name, viz., civil society. The concept of civil society rests upon intermediary forms of cultural activity and associations that soften the path of the infernal machine otherwise known as “the market”, working hand-in-hand with “government”. Václav Havel, former president of post-communist Czechoslovakia (and, then, the newly fashioned Czech Republic), is a notable proponent of the humanistic concept of civil society, but he is also, in his more abstruse reflections – see *Summer Meditations* (1992) – a late-modern Heideggerean. Today, Benjamin might be less inclined to condemn elective forms of mysticism (as in Western Buddhism), if only because – as territories of the imaginary – they form a type of “wilderness” (as Michel de Certeau has illustrated) wherein heretical and a-

typical gestures toward a new, better world are cultivated and (perhaps) launched.<sup>(11)</sup> That said, Benjamin's materialism was not a red herring, but – instead – a reality check leveled at all attempts to circumvent the irreducible communal nature of the Coming Philosophy.

[...]

## ENDNOTES

- 1 – Walter Benjamin, “Milieu Theoreticians”, trans. Rodney Livingstone, in *Walter Benjamin: Selected Writings, Vol 2, 1927-1934*, ed. Michael W. Jennings, Howard Eiland, Gary Smith (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 1999), p. 249.
- 2 – Hannah Arendt, “Introduction: Walter Benjamin: 1892-1940”, pp. 1-55, in *Illuminations*, trans. Harry Zohn (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1968). Essays selected from *Schriften: Walter Benjamin, Illuminationen: Ausgewählte Schriften*, ed. Siegfried Unseld (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1955); and Walter Benjamin, *Angelus novus: Ausgewählte Schriften*, Vol. 2 (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1966).
- 3 – Walter Benjamin, “Program for Literary Criticism” (1929), trans. Rodney Livingstone, in *Walter Benjamin: Selected Writings, Vol 2, 1927-1934*, p. 292.
- 4 – Walter Benjamin, “The Great Art of Making Things Seem Closer”, trans. Rodney Livingstone, in *ibid.*, p. 248. The citation within the citation is from Baudelaire's “Le Voyage” (1859).
- 5 – *Ibid.*, p. 242.
- 6 – Walter Benjamin, “Paris Diary” (1930), trans. Rodney Livingstone, in *Walter Benjamin: Selected Writings, Vol 2, 1927-1934*, p. 348.
- 7 – Walter Benjamin, “Little History of Photography” (1931), trans. Edmund Jephcott and Kingsley Shorter, in *ibid.*, pp. 518-19.
- 8 – *Ibid.*, pp. 518-19, *passim*.
- 9 – Perhaps it is in Benjamin's 1931 essay “Karl Kraus”, trans. Edmund Jephcott, in *ibid.*, pp. 433-58, that we detect his true intellectual coordinates vis-à-vis of a practitioner of “the hair-raising meticulousness” of pressing all vainglories to a maximum-strength criticism in service to announcing “The End”. Kraus, the satirist, appears on Benjamin's radar as a self-damning, superfluous man, a symptom of his own times. Here, too, in this essay, are the recurrent figures central to Benjaminian thought: 1/ “a new blossoming of paradisaic, cosmic humanity” (*ibid.*, p. 440); and 2/ aura, in this case the aura within language (words). Accordingly, Benjamin and Kraus see high capitalism as de-flowering virtually everything in its path (and technology, as subsumed by capitalism, as producing a landscape of extraordinary banality). Kraus, like Diogenes, prefers abject lowliness as a form of protest against the vacuous middle landscape of bourgeois Vienna; abject lowliness as an affect of “self-reflection and the hellish state known only to a writer for whom every act of gratification becomes at the same time a station of his martyrdom, a state experienced, apart from Kraus, by no one as deeply as by Kierkegaard” (*ibid.*, p. 442). “Nothing is understood about this man [Kraus] until it has been perceived that, of necessity and without exception, everything – language and fact – falls, for him, within the sphere of justice.” *Ibid.* p. 443. “His charge: high treason of the law against justice. More exactly, betrayal of the word by the concept, which derives its existence from the word: the premeditated murder of imagination, which dies of the absence of a single letter and for which, in his ‘Elegy on the Death of a Sound’, he has sung the most moving lament.” *Ibid.*, p. 444. Kraus' “Elegie auf den Tod eines Lautes” (1915) may be found in Kraus, *Schriften*, ed. Christian Wagenknecht, vol. 9: *Gedichte* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1989), pp. 40-44. It is somewhere in all of this agonistic, self-parodistic shape-shifting that traces of Zurich Dada and German Expressionism are redeemed, only insofar as they traced the same trajectory of cultural rubbish through to its unnatural end. And Kraus was active – as critic – from at least 1900 ... Benjamin's statement, “This guilt will always lead to Expressionism” (*ibid.*, p. 445) resembles Manfredo Tafuri's later judgment of Surrealism as “emblems of an intellectual bad conscience” (*Architecture and Utopia*, 1976). For Tafuri, “All things float with equal specific gravity in the constantly moving stream of money. All things lie on the same level and differ from one another only in size of the area which they cover.” Manfredo Tafuri, *Architecture and Utopia: Design and Capitalist Development*, trans. Barbara Luigi La Penta (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1976), pp. 87-88. Kraus did not wish to see the monstrous perpetuated in serviceable forms of art and alienation so much as to see the whole thing (capitalistic, bourgeois culture) shoved off the precipice and into the abyss. “A word never tells an untruth at its origin” (Benjamin, “Karl Kraus”, p. 451) qualifies for Benjamin (as he is quoting Kraus) the always-necessary plunge toward the origin (*Ursprung*), the same thing reified into nothingness by idealism in service to ideology (the State). Benjamin's reading of Kraus' poetry finds an interpenetration of language and eros, a prefiguring of the cosmogonic eros, the communal restoration of “paradisaic, cosmic humanity” that lies below all the

revolutionary antics of both Benjamin and Kraus (and shall we admit – finally – all *post-romantic* Romantics). Indeed, Benjamin quotes a highly telling passage from Kraus regarding Communism: “God preserve it [communism], so that this rabble who are beside themselves with brazenness do not grow more brazen still, and so that the society of those exclusively entitled to enjoyment, who believe they are loving subordinate humanity enough if they give it syphilis, may at least go to bed with a nightmare! So that at least they may lose their appetite for preaching morality to their victims, take less delight in ridiculing them.” Ibid., p. 456.

10 – Jacob Rogozinski, “The Gift of the World” (1988), pp. 133-56, in Jean-François Courtine et al., *Of the Sublime: Presence in Question*, trans. Jeffrey S. Librett (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1993).

11 – Michel de Certeau, *The Mystic Fable: The Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries*, trans. Michael B. Smith (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1992). First published *La fable mystique: XVIe-XVIIe siècle* (Paris: Gallimard, 1982).

# ARGUMENT WITH A DEAD MAN

[...]

Isaiah Berlin, *The Roots of Romanticism* (Princeton: NJ, Princeton University Press, 1999) – 1965 A.W. Mellon Lectures in the Fine Arts, National Gallery, Washington, D.C.

[...]

## I.

Floundering about in the historical record (acknowledging its necessity, but also noting its inability to “account” for the uprising/insurrection of Romanticism), Berlin dismantles French Rationalism (Rousseau included) to find Germany and Protestant Pietism as source and place of the revolt ... Tracking Herder (ignored in Paris by the French illuminati), Berlin ransacks nonetheless the precursors to High German Romanticism (Idealism), focusing on Hamann and little-known literary moments en route to Kant ... Hume is noted (a vast influence on Kant), while Voltaire and the Encyclopedists are dismissed as sophists ... What remains unsaid (or only inferred) is that it is, after all, the pursuit of Truth (metaphysical “fire”) that moves all forms and variants of Romanticism, from the elegiac to the pathetic to the monstrous (the divine, inhuman), and that such is the actual “place” (non-place) Berlin fails to locate/access in the historical record, because it is simply never to be found there “as such” (there is no “It” without the primordial fold/division) ...

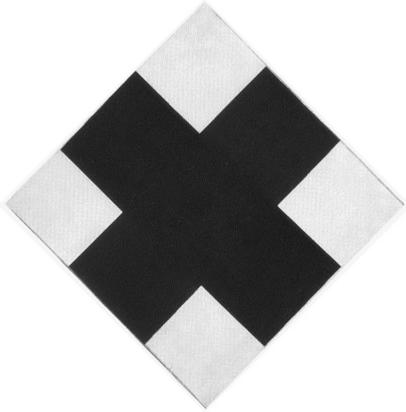
Notably encountering Kant, friend of Hamann (a deranged, Northern “mystic” in Berlin’s estimation/“book”), the facts of Romanticism dissolve away, into a rarified “space” (the rational-irrational *a priori*) always at stake in insurrectional/titanic turns toward what might be known and what remains obscure (what might be known without quite knowing “it”) ...

## II.

When Berlin discusses/dismantles 18th-century French rationalism (neo-classicism) we *hear* but do not see the paintings of Jacques-Louis David, perhaps referencing, in passing, the (unseen and unmentioned) paintings of Poussin ... “Just as mathematics deals in perfect circles, so the sculptor and the painter must deal in ideal forms.” (“The First Attack on the Enlightenment”, p. 28) ... For Berlin, such first appeared in the arts and, then, pervaded ethics and politics (p. 25) ... What is of merit in painting is the severe (rational) geometric *parti* underlying pictorial works (the devastating “interior”), or that which is *not* lost on the Romantics, most surely, in fact, the main point (perspectival and *otherwise*) with Kant’s three critiques ...

Berlin indulges scholarship (a form similar in spirit to the Annales school) wherein a masterful mélange of historical material is amassed to determine the outcome of the inquest ... In itself “rational”, it is also given to a type of art-historical journalism that verges on gossip (Nerval’s lobster, Novalis’ blue flower, etc.) ... To amass tales, quips, judgments is to concede defeat in advance, insofar as criticism is wholly otherwise, and it is criticism that lies at the vanishing point of all romanticisms – criticism of two worlds, and why they are not one world ...

GK (December 2006)



# SUMMARY JUDGMENTS/ PARAPHRASES

[...]

“Struggles Between Art + Architecture”, Marco de Michelis, IUAV, Venice, 04/04/07 @ Columbia SOA

[...]

“Something [Some-thing] is always missing ...” – Ernst Bloch (1880-1959) to Theodor W. Adorno (1903-1969), re Utopia and the 20th century ...

Dostoievski’s aperçu c/o Berdaiev: “All revolutions will fail that are not ‘spiritual’ as well ...”

ARCHITECTURAL ARROGANCE(S) – Tracking the tussle between Art + Architecture (*minus* Philosophy?), curiously, De Michelis resorts, in setting up his argument, to poet, linguist, architect, cryptographer Alberti (1404-1472), mathematician/Franciscan friar Pacioli (1445–1514/1517), and poet-orator Cicero (106 BC-43 BC), by way of Cicero’s “lineamenti” as origin of “drawing”, therefore re-visiting the times (moments, historical and art-historical) when artists were also architects (and/or vice versa), and – implicitly – when architect-artists were also philosophers (geometricians? and/or patrician geometricians?) ...

Platonism will never fade away; it always returns as the measure of/for measuring broken worlds, mere rhetoric – measuring the depth/death of the cave (labyrinth), if not the depths within shadows ... The eXit, what is “missing”, is the mental journey beyond mere appearances and toward Truth (Dostoievski’s point?) ... Sphere and Labyrinth, if you wish (will) ...

Concept and project (built or not?) – or, the troubling distance between what is needed (Architecture) and what is useless (Art) ... Boullée (1728-1799): “I, too, am a painter ...” ... Hence, again, the Total Work of Art – but *Gesamtkunstwerk* as interstitial, intertextual, inter-discursive, inter-disciplinary (heedlessly *promiscuous*) thing (synaesthetic thing) of Art writ large as World ...

Léger (1881-1955) and Giedion (1888-1968): “Monumentality springs from the eternal need of people to create symbols ...” ...

Theo van Doesburg (Christian Emil Marie Küpper) et al.: “To overcome the supremacy of the individual [bourgeois subject] and establish communitarian forms ...” Technique + rationalism (mechanism takes command) ... Behrens (for whom the “Total Work of Art” included designing his wife’s clothing), etc ...

Dan Graham, Matta-Clark, Aldo Rossi ... 1960s-1970s, and the Fall (1990s) – All playing in the sandbox of Representation (Andre, Lewitt, Judd) ... Forward to the “new” nothingness (total flow/Capitalism Triumphant) ... Aperçus without apperception, autonomy up against and through (nailed to) heteronomies – back to Loos’ tomb (for Max Dvorak?) ... Into and through the ashes (again) of Architecture, never to return “inside” (without apologies, but with bad wine) ... Tafuri (missing again) ...

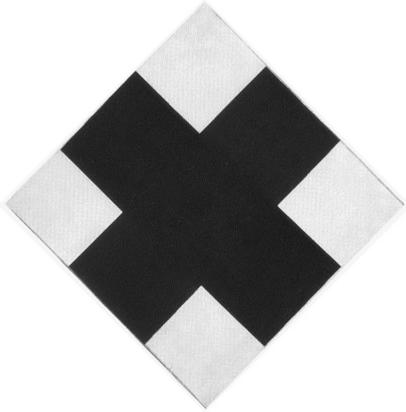
[...]

GK (April 2007)

[...]

## ENDNOTES

a·per·çu – French, from past participle of apercevoir, *to perceive*: a-, *to* (from Latin ad-; see ad-) + percevoir, *to perceive* (from Old French perceivre; see perceive)



A SERIAL ESSAY – MUTATIS MUTANDIS 07/16/07

## THE SO-CALLED TROUBLE WITH NIETZSCHE

[...]

“He only is the Sea, holder of treasures; born many a time he views the hearts within us.... Seven are the pathways which the wise have fashioned; to one of these may come the troubled mortal. He stands in the dwelling of the Highest, a pillar, on sure ground where paths are parted.” – *Rig Veda* (Book X, Hymn V)

[...]

OUR initial research shows a series of “troubles” with Nietzsche and Nietzschean-ism: 1/ The Big Lie; 2/ The Double Code; 3/ The Master/Slave Thing; 4/ The So-Called Secret Agenda; 5/ The Will to Power; 6/ The Hellenic Thing; 7/ The Migraines and the Pain; and 8/ The Proto-Postmodernism.

Initially, WE have looked into Geoffrey Waite’s masterful tirade against the Nietzscheans, in *Nietzsche’s Corps/e* (1996), and Pierre Klossowski’s (infamous *Nietzsche and the Vicious Circle* (1969). Findings, thus far, are provisional but the damning evidence of a misappropriation of Nietzsche (most tellingly by post-structuralists and the Left) is fairly conclusive. It seems there was a very famous symposium in July 1972 at Cerisy-la-Salle (Normandy) attended by the illuminati of the French structuralist-poststructuralist camp – that is, Jacques Derrida, Jean-Luc Nancy, Klossowski et al. – and that Klossowski first broached his idea of the “secret” Nietzsche in this setting.

Waite’s book is a demolition of this edifice constructed by the French illuminati and a denunciation of Nietzsche Himself by way of a high-rhetorical romp through the drug-like nature of Nietzsche’s thought: “Nietzsche is a *type* of H/Meth, arguably the major type of post/narcotic ‘quiver between history and ontology.’” Waite is quoting Avital Ronell’s “Our Narcotic Modernity” from *Rethinking Technologies* (1993) and setting the stage for his investigation of how Nietzsche’s writings insinuate themselves into consciousness without necessarily being processed by the rational vectors of the brain. Waite’s premise is that Nietzsche indeed, *pace* Klossowski, encoded a subliminal message into his work. *The Genealogy of Morals* (1887) and *The Gay Science* (1882) – plus *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* (1883-85) – are the principle examples of this narcotic prose style.

Perhaps the most rewarding portion of Waite’s book is the section “Nietzsche’s Esoteric Semiotics”, wherein he takes on Klossowski’s reading (and thereby the post-structuralists *en masse*) and goes about the ravishing analysis of the secret agenda. Nietzsche, it would seem, is the true avatar of post-modernism (nihilism and/plus relativism) and purposely buried his message in the paradoxical, ironic posturing of his works. His message is, in Waite’s reading, proto-deconstructivist and attempts to condition all possible futures. Nietzsche has become second nature to our collective postcultural selves – essentially self-deconstructing selves – underwriting almost every discourse that pretends to demolish power in the name of heterogeneity. Perhaps Waite is at his best when he is positing what has been lost; i.e., a possible communism and/or a possible utopian project called “enlightenment”. Nietzsche, in other words, demolished all pretexts that might underwrite such an agenda.

Instructive, here, is Gilles Deleuze’s *Nietzsche and Philosophy* (1962) and especially the section on the concept of *ressentiment*. This concept relates to Nietzsche’s dyadic idea of Master and Slave and embodies “a typology of forces, an ethic of the corresponding ways of being”. *Ressentiment* is the condition of the Slave, who conceives of a non-ego (to oppose) in order to posit self. This non-ego is the so-called Adversary and is the shadow of the unhappy state of the Slave. The Slave invents the Adversary to justify his/her misery. Deleuze describes the state of the Slave as an outcome of a double negative (think, here, perhaps of the cunning world of negative dialectics): “The negative contains the essential and the positive only exists through negation.” The Slave embodies the principle of non-action or reaction without effect, while the Master (the Adversary) is the progenitor of meaning and value. Thus, the Slave is also the critic that would demolish without creating.

Waite's idea that Nietzscheanism is the pervasive force of a negative double bind is therefore – at least – the condition of the oppressed (and the condition of the left who have set themselves up as the spokespersons of the oppressed). The left, as a result, has fallen into the trap of *ressentiment* and inaction. Criticism is not enough unless it also leads to construction. The ideal (Hegelian) world of Spirit is demolished in such a double bind and history succumbs to the ideology of the Slave. The Master (the neo-capitalist, today) is content to have the left sink into its own swamp of negative dialectics and remain impotent. It may, as a result, continue to construct its master narrative while co-opting anything that smacks of anarchy or revolution simply by converting it to a thing that may be exploited (or attacked). Such things are the products (crude commodities) of the subculture that exists only as a subclass of the master narrative.

According to Deleuze, “The one who is good is now the one who holds himself back from acting.” He is also the one who “desires little from life”. What is fascinating is that this very condition is the system of things exposed by Nietzsche as the running sore of culture itself. His famous *anima contra* the idea of culture is based on the unearthing of this dubious double bind and its stealth technocratic edge. To Waite the “City of Refuge” for the disenchanting is also “the blueprint of the Nietzschean ‘city’ [that is] so complex, it is both necessary and possible to describe it using *otherwise incompatible discourses*.” Curiously, Waite describes this “city” as the nexus of architecture and video (the videodrome). It is in this virtual reality that the most pernicious forms of the master narrative hold sway. One thinks immediately of the Wachowski brothers film *The Matrix* (1999) (or any of the vast number of violent video games) and other post-utopian nightmare scenarios. That architecture has so solidly embraced the virtual is evidence that the luscious nature of this virtual world is perceived as a refuge from the world of physical artifacts. Nietzsche foresaw this turn toward high artifice as perhaps the most vicious form of programming and mind control due to the conditions of his own time when capital (and culture) was becoming abstract and highly malleable.

The mis-appropriation of Nietzsche is – at least – two-fold. On one hand, the left has valorized his demolition of the master narrative and seized on the relativism that underwrites the discourses of heterogeneity (multi-culturalism). On the other hand, the nihilist interpretation only goes so far, as Nietzsche developed his philosophy of the Overman as a response to his own terror with the nihilist abyss. Klossowski suggests that Nietzsche was so shaken by the idea of the Eternal Return (the Vicious Circle) that he inverted the idea of the inexorable and produced a virtual set of makeshift principles in the form of his transvaluation of all values – an unwritten work but something that runs through all the work.

Nietzsche, in fact, inverted so much of his own thinking that any appropriation is automatically problematic because an appropriation is usually selective and intentional (has an agenda of its own). To appropriate Nietzsche's nihilism is to take only his own morbid fear of the meaninglessness of everything and stop before the gate of the creative Nietzsche, who would re-enchance the world and re-colonize thought with an ultra-quixotic transfiguration of the subject (self). Nietzsche's manic side countered his depressive side – and Klossowski's high-structuralist reading of this process is the point of the entire operation of his analysis of Nietzsche's psychic states, not so much as the typical manic-depressive is whipsawed by his own mood swings but as a pre-emptive strike on his own fatalistic interpretation of the world. (As with Wagner, Nietzsche first embraced and then denounced Schopenhauer.) The inversions in Nietzsche's thought make it impossible to excise a moment or an article of faith and re-deploy it without essentially violating the nature of the origin of the concept. Nietzsche apparently feared that he was – in his own right – a slave, a victim of *ressentiment*, and struggled to overcome this pessimistic contagion by constructing a joyous art of the fabulous. A curious prerequisite for most appropriations of Nietzsche, from the left, is that the appropriating party be none other than Nietzsche's double (or “the most interesting men”) – i.e., the sick and the enfeebled. (Conversely, appropriations from the right tend to be those of Nietzsche's Adversary – i.e., the arbitrary masters and dead souls of the ruling hegemony.) His game was to suggest an alternative to remaining sick and enfeebled (or dead and in charge) by becoming “superhuman” (superfluous) – and he did so through the strenuous, hilarious, despotic, and crazed figure of Zarathustra, prophetic fool and/or King Lear on mescaline.

Perhaps at the heart of Klossowski's overwhelming critique of Nietzsche's anti-system (and its origin in Nietzsche's struggle with his own descent into madness) is that the target of all of it is/was subjectivity itself, or the self-conscious subject, which, according to Nietzsche, is the ultimate fabrication. The singular may be required to accomplish or will life but it is a phantasm that has risen above a sea of drives and suppressed other histories and other selves. The gregarious and the singular are Nietzschean terms that vouchsafe the eternal struggle between the

species and the individual, and illustrate a mostly useless struggle that exists in the face of the Vicious Circle – the ultimate origin and end of all things. The return of the revelation of the Vicious Circle in the rounds of any one person’s lives and deaths is the point of renunciation of the self and its illusions and the reconnection to the catastrophic vision of the Eternal Return. This revelation – too powerful to sustain – will always disappear into the makeshift realities of the day-to-day experience of the world and the life-to-life rounds of the so-called individual until it resurfaces at a later stage to savage and destroy the pretexts of the erstwhile provisional systems. This ravaging process is Nietzsche’s embrace of the inexorable or what Klossowski has indicated is the *fond* (ground) – “the unexchangeable depth” or “the unintelligible depth” illuminating all of Nietzsche’s literary antics.

Perhaps the only appropriate appropriation of Nietzsche is from *above*, versus *below* (left or right). The essence of Nietzsche’s elitist philosophy is that it is ideologically promiscuous and cannot be rightfully utilized by Master or Slave. This strangely mirrors the mythos of the Mahatma (Great Soul) or *even* the bizarre manifestations of the self-same in the form of Ascended Masters and such on the far side of the New Age. Nietzsche’s philosophy of the Higher Man is not for the making of higher men; it is *for* the superhuman race he foresaw (however polemical this vision ultimately was meant to be). In many ways, this super race resembles the Hellenic pantheon of anointed ones – gamboling about in the clouds above Olympus and interfering in human affairs as whim and/or caprice. Nietzsche denounced Socrates for revealing the nature of the Greek gods and the nature of the master narrative that produced them. He was (perhaps) annoyed with Socrates for pulling back the screen that covered the whole daemonic other world and revealing the game. He might also be deemed jealous of Socrates for accomplishing what he himself sought – to condition all possible futures – albeit, in Socrates’ case, by exposing the extra-subjective nature of the divine drama.

[...]

GK

“To see the Moment means to stand in it.” – Martin Heidegger, *Nietzsche*, Vol. 2, trans. David F. Krell (New York: Harper & Row, 1984), p. 57; cited in Geneviève Lloyd, “The Past: Loss or Eternal Return?”, *Being in Time: Selves and Narrators in Philosophy and Literature* (London: Routledge, 1993), p. 115 ...

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“Where our religion still makes room for sensuous representations, where it accommodates poetic imagery, there it is – Oriental.” – Johann Gottfried Herder, *Sämmtliche Werke*, Vol. 3 (Berlin: Weidmannsche Buchhandlung, 1881-1913), p. 398 ...

VERTIGINOUS BLACK – The cover of René Girard’s extraordinary book *I See Satan Fall Like Lightning* (2001) is a “variation” on Parmigianino’s painting *The Conversion of Saint Paul* (c.1528) ... The landscape has been totally removed ... The “ground” beneath Saint Paul’s feet (to which he has fallen) is erased, and the whole becomes a hole, a vertiginous black abyss ... GK (05/08/06) ...

NIETZSCHE / THE MADNESS – “In certain unedited writings just before his final breakdown, Nietzsche escapes the twin errors of the positivists and the nihilists, and he discovers the truth ... In the Dionysian passion and in the Passion of Jesus there is the same collective violence. But the interpretation is different: ‘Dionysos versus the Crucified’: there you have the antithesis [antidote]. It is not a difference in regard to their martyrdom – it is a difference in the meaning of it. Life itself, its eternal fruitfulness and recurrence, creates torment, destruction, the will to annihilation. In the other case, suffering – the ‘Crucified as the innocent one’ – counts as an objection to this life, as a formula to its condemnation.”\* (p. 172) ... “Nietzsche had to trick himself to avoid clearly seeing this. To escape the consequences of his own discovery and persist in a desperate negation of the biblical truth of the victim, Nietzsche resorts to an evasion so gross, so unworthy of his best thinking, that his mind could not hold out against it.” (p. 173) – René Girard, “The Twofold Nietzschean Heritage”, in *I See Satan Fall Like Lightning*, trans. James G. Williams (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2001), pp. 170-81 ... *Je vois Satan tomber comme l’éclair* (Paris: Editions Grasset & Fasquelle, 1999) – \**The Will to Power*, trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Vintage, 1967), pp. 542-43 ...

See Thomas Mical’s “The [Convulsive] Enigma of Eternal Recurrence in de Chirico’s ‘Architecture’”, *Perforations* (1998) ...

Clément Rosset, *Joyful Cruelty: Toward a Philosophy of the Real*, trans. David F. Bell (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993) – “In *Joyful Cruelty*, Clément Rosset attempts to formulate a philosophical practice that refuses to turn away from the world and thereby accepts a confrontation with reality (what he calls real) in all of its immediacy. Such a direct confrontation, in the absence of all mediating theories or representations, is cruel because it destroys all illusions. It exposes one to the full, unmitigated violence of the real and allows neither reassuring distance nor space for retreat. And yet it gives rise to a sensation of joy, of approbation for what exists. Nietzsche’s philosophy provides a fertile ground for exploring the joy at the heart of Rosset’s practice. Beginning with the Nietzschean notion of beatitude, Rosset offers an interpretation of Nietzsche that goes against the grain of modern and postmodern philosophical critique and negativism or a postmodern nihilism. In a surprising and original twist, Rosset shows how Nietzsche’s thought revolves instead around an acceptance of the real as the only source of experience without illusion.” (Oxford University Press) ...

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Alenka Zupančič, *The Shortest Shadow: Nietzsche’s Philosophy of the Two* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2003).

[...]

## SELECT OUTTAKES

For Edward Said on Nietzsche’s “Untimely” in Beethoven, see *The Nation* (September 1, 2003) ...

For a review of Waite’s *Nietzsche’s Corps/e*, by Ricardo Dominguez, see *The Thing* (August 23, 1996) ...

“ThingReviews” – <http://www.thing.net/~rdom/augrev.05.html> ...

TITILLATING TITBITS – Yes/Amen: “Nietzschean distance maintains, to be sure, a relation with the divine, but within onto-theology, on the basis of equivalence. Thus it reinforces the metaphysical idolatry where ‘God’ is

defined as a state of the will to power. Within that grade-related function, the ‘feeling of distance,’ far from taking its distance from the metaphysical face of the divine elaborated (and presupposed) by the will to power, radically ignores the distance of God. The Nietzschean distance intervenes only to censure the distance of God, or more, to obliterate it, within the evidence of the text, by substituting itself for it.” – Jean-Luc Marion, “The Collapse of the Idols and Confrontation with the Divine: Nietzsche”, in *The Idol and Distance*, p. 77 / “It was necessary that Nietzsche collapse into the divine in order that he might hear his voice say in concert with Dionysus the *Yes* that creates a world at the very heart of nihilism.” Ibid., p. 55 / “Ariadne becomes the place for meeting with Dionysus, a place that only *I*, that is Nietzsche, knows. . . . Why does Nietzsche not proclaim Ariadne, whom he nonetheless knows? Perhaps because he knows her too well.” Ibid., p. 50 / “Light without shadow allows the world to freeze, or to dissolve – it doesn’t matter which, precisely because a world demands a perspective. Only shadow establishes relief, delimits forms, puts things in place. The true world, now rejected, will project that shadow further along the bias of its grim and low-angled light.” Ibid., p. 39 . . .

TIME ITSELF – “Granted, we live in time, but every moment opens onto a neutral realm [the Real], a time with no arrow, that we cannot master because no dialectic can get a foothold there, and that we cannot undergo because with respect to it there is no ‘I.’” – Kevin Hart, *The Dark Gaze: Maurice Blanchot and the Sacred* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004), p. 75 / “Presence is sacred.” (“The Impossible”, *ibid.*, p. 84) / And yet, the Real is *not*, apropos of Bataille, “pebbles along a path, or a gleam in the water”. Ibid., p. 84 . . . “It” is, instead, simultaneously *in* and *outside* of every nominal thing (named thing). Therefore, “it” (the Real) is an indefinable some-thing else, only apparently “archaic” . . .

ENJOY YOUR SYMPTOMS! – “The hedonism of postmodern society, far from representing a step out of the framework of what Nietzsche calls the ascetic [anti-aesthetic] ideal, is deeply rooted in this framework [not unlike Weber’s critique of the Protestant ethic]. In order to see this, we must first understand that for Nietzsche, the asceticism involved in the ascetic ideal does not simply involve a renouncement of enjoyment; it involves, above all, a specific mode of articulation of enjoyment.” Alenka Zupančič, *The Shortest Shadow*, p. 47 . . .

AFTER GOD – Review of Rüdiger Safranski’s *Nietzsche: A Philosophical Biography*, trans. Shelley Frisch (New York: Norton, 2002) – “Perhaps the most important question about the influence of the life on the work is how much Nietzsche’s ideas may be understood – rather like Freud’s – as a response not only to the universal condition but to the specific, extraordinarily repressed conditions of his era. Many critics have complained that Nietzsche offered no new values to put in place of those that he aimed to destroy. Yet it could be argued that his master plan to spring the cultural trap and release the darker instincts – aggression, sex, power – would have not only lent these instincts honest shapes but restored the virtues that had been so long debased by the pretenses of bourgeois life. It is from the most powerful, and those most capable of evil, that Zarathustra demands, ‘I want the good from you.’ It is their strength that makes their goodness valuable, because it is freely chosen.” *The New Yorker* (April 8, 2002) . . .

Oguz Erdur, “Nietzsche and the Body of Knowledge” – Abstract: “*The point*: One says ‘I,’ whereas it is the body that *does* the ‘I’ that speaks. . . . The same holds for those other bodies of knowledge called the ‘disciplines.’ In either case, the voice that speaks on behalf of the body is always-already ontologically justified by the body itself. This self-referential semiotic matrix, even when it produces self-doubt or a self-critique, is a performance of the body, through which the conflicting energies of that very body are ritualistically reaffirmed and reunited. Reflexivity thus is more about functionality and instrumentality than about truthfulness.” *Stanford Journal of Archaeology* 2 (Spring 2003) . . .

“The judgement ‘this is beautiful’ is only one type of aesthetic judgement. We must examine the other type; ‘this is sublime’. In the Sublime, imagination surrenders itself to an activity quite distinct from that of formal reflection. The feeling of the sublime is experienced when faced with the formless or the deformed (immensity or power). It is as if imagination were confronted with its own limit, forced to strain to its utmost, experiencing a violence which stretches it to the extremity of its power.” – Gilles Deleuze, *Kant’s Critical Philosophy: The Doctrine of the Faculties*, trans. Hugh Tomlinson (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984) . . .

Regarding the Apollinian-Dionysian dyad: “The Apollinian, like the Christian martyr but unlike the Dionysian, turns away from this world and looks to another: ‘The Greek knew and felt the terror and horror of existence; in order to be able to live at all, he had to interpose between himself and life the radiant dream-birth of the Olympians.’ To the extent that the ‘terror and horror of existence’ are affirmed, they are affirmed not ‘for themselves,’ but rather – like

the martyr's torments – for sake of the visions they make possible.” Alan White, “Apollinian Veil”, in Alan White, *Within Nietzsche's Labyrinth* (London: Routledge, 1990) ...

*Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, ed. Robert Pippin, trans. Adrian Del Caro (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006) – “Nietzsche regarded ‘Thus Spoke Zarathustra’ as his most important work, and his story of the wandering Zarathustra has had enormous influence on subsequent culture. Nietzsche uses a mixture of homilies, parables, epigrams and dreams to introduce some of his most striking doctrines, including the Overman, nihilism, and the eternal return of the same. This edition offers a new translation by Adrian Del Caro which restores the original versification of Nietzsche’s text and captures its poetic brilliance. Robert Pippin’s introduction discusses many of the most important interpretative issues raised by the work, including who is Zarathustra and what kind of ‘hero’ is he and what is the philosophical significance of the work’s literary form? The volume will appeal to all readers interested in one of the most original and inventive works of modern philosophy.” (Cambridge University Press) ...

07/05/08

## IPSEITY, YOU SAY?

### PRELIMINARY NOTES ON THE REDEMPTION OF THE SUBJECT IN FILM

*ipseity* – n., selfhood

[...]

There seems to be a blurry line in the eye/mind of the cinephile between exploitation films and films that *resemble* exploitation films (or, more to the point, *sexploitation* films). The latter, of which a significant batch has emerged in the late '90s, suggests that, despite the genre-bending exercises of would-be auteurs, the fundamental positions assumed in these edgy, often mock-noir films is a product of the edgy and mock-noir times in which we find ourselves. The shock value of sex and/or mayhem is not, however, the main event in the genre-bending films of the last few years. Many of these films are exploring, instead, the inner limits of subjective rebellion (in many cases brought on by a crisis or catastrophe consistent with the archaic precepts of tragedy).

A director's restrained handling of the melange of sex and gore in exploitation films may be the first sign of secondary intentions in such a film. But in the case of the *apparent* exploitation film the handling of sex and gore is the paramount sign of *primary* intentions. Tarkovsky certainly did not need any such flimsy apparatus to prop up his extraordinary opus *Sacrifice* (1986). He did, however, have to burn down the house (twice, as it turned out). Neither did Kubrick's swan song, *Eyes Wide Shut* (1999), actually require gratuitous sex and lurid scenes of picturesque depravity to score its points regarding the Master-Slave narrative (even though many so-called critics decided to aim their barbs at the weakness of this very element!). The larger critical structure, that which seems to run like a red thread through the high-brow party scenes and the sordid world depicted in the marketing of flesh or the re-victimization of victims, was clearly Kubrick's prime concern. The shiftiness of the characters is sufficient only insofar as they barely understand their own roles in the unfolding tragedy, and they surely pull back just in time to prevent *being exposed*.

Ipseity and alterity, the now classic post-structuralist dyad describing subject-object relations, is, here, the critical nexus – the switching mechanism – that situates such films within a larger, comprehensive narrative regarding the *proprietary nature* of intersubjectivity. The mechanisms that rule social orders are often pushed to the extreme limits of exacerbation to *bring on the psychosis* – viz., the plunge into the inner world of demons and the exceptional encounter with one's self as demiurge. This collapse occurs through an explosive refusal of *one or the other*, in the subject-object continuum, to continue to play "by the rules". In many cases, the rules often are broken simply to break out of the game itself and – instinctively/paradoxically – destroy/rebuild the structures (psychological and social) that fix the Master-Slave dialectic *in time and space*.

This psycho-social complex (and its collapse) is played-out in innumerable, mind-numbingly *bad* films as well – hundreds and hundreds of times more so than with those few/rare films that bring the same tragic complex to closure. "To closure" – or *to* integration – renders the tragic and apocalyptic scenarios of such occasions somehow redemptive (or, paradoxically, "irredemptive"). This occurs either on the battlefield of contemporary society (strewn with innumerable victims/casualties) or in the individual psyche (strewn with the rubbish/phantasms of an out-moded way of being). Here *The Mahabharata* is the penultimate cipher for this game (Peter Brook's film and stage version no less than the ancient text itself). The battlefield is the psyche-as-image-of-the-world (the world-as-image-of-the-psyche). It is important to point out, however, that this construct is not an image of pathetic, garden-variety solipsism. It is, *instead*, an image of the fragile nature of intersubjective relations and the socially constructed phantasms of war, poverty, and anomie. If the world "outside" and the world "inside" are one and the same thing, there is no excuse whatsoever for *not* picking up your bed and walking.

Film noir is the eternal return of the always-already marred psycho-social matrix. This is because the hidden structures of domination (and damnation) must remain hidden. It is not permitted, in noirish nightmares, to reveal the source of the soiled laundry of the world. If a window is opened, it is quickly shut again. (This is especially true

in the soiled and sordid noirish world of politics.) Redemption is glimpsed, but always shut down. If somehow that window stays partly open, and redemption leaks in, a glimmer of hope (light) weakens the noir atmosphere/ambiance. Asia Argento falling in love, in *Scarlet Diva* (2002), is such a flaw. This cursory refusal of redemption – even marred redemption – is but one luminous point that distinguishes the standard exploitation film from the recent rash of genre-bending films that appear to be exploitation films but are, after all, altogether different. Of course it is Hollywood’s love of the proverbial happy ending that ruins so many otherwise serviceable noirish films – films that might shine an at-the-least dim light on the demented machinations of our collective capitalist prison-house. You can’t really blame David Lynch for unloading the bleak and sinister *Mulholland Drive* (2002) onto an otherwise anesthetized public when all around us we see the schizophrenic meltdown of an empire of dreams.

Lars von Trier’s *Breaking the Waves* (1996) literally blew people away, and, in a way, opened the floodgates for a new wave of auteur-driven vehicles. It did so by appropriating the same Deus ex Machina as Tarkovsky’s *Sacrifice*. The protagonists in both of these films willingly descend into madness/Hell (depravity and self-annihilation) to save *not*-themselves. They make a pact with God to undo themselves – to do themselves in – to save someone else. The Self-Other divide collapses. In the cathartic moment when they seal their own fate, the act of self-destruction becomes an act of redemption. Kubrick steered clear of redemption by allowing *Eyes Wide Shut* to close in on itself and end where it began. This was the deferred tragedy. The implication is that, beyond the last frame of the film, these same events/situations will return again and again until they implode. The endless cycle of social anomie is the amalgam that substitutes for the almost-always deferred *singular* instance of breaking the cycle.

[...]

GK (August 2002)

## NOTES & OUTTAKES

“*Iipseity and Alterity* will address issues involving the analysis and representation of the self and the other in literature, philosophy, psychology, and the human sciences. Is it ever possible to understand the individual person without reference to other persons? Are ipseity and alterity necessarily co-defined? To what extent does personal identity depend on differences between persons? Is interpretation of the other person ever complete? How is the other constituted within imperfect communicative practices? To what degree do certain psychopathologies involve failures of intersubjectivity? To what extent does theory of mind depend upon language and narrative? We seek papers written from various perspectives and in various disciplines. Cognitive approaches, critical theory, developmental studies, feminist theory, literary analysis, phenomenology, philosophy of mind, psychology, semiotics, etc.” – “Reading Ipseity” (*Canisius*) – Preview of *Iipseity and Alterity: Interdisciplinary Approaches to Intersubjectivity*, Shaun Gallagher, Stephen Watson, eds. (Rouen: Presses Universitaires de Rouen, 2002) ...

“The pre-reflective-self, often termed ‘ipseity’, is not supposed to arise by some subtle process of self-reflection: it is non-relational, and cannot correspond to any introspective process. But then how can it relate in any manner at all to external input? In so doing it would be polluted by content. How can it help create the ‘qualia’ of experience if it itself has no content?” “Through the Looking Glass” (*Science & Consciousness Review*, 06/2002) ...

## CINEMATIC FORMS/ANALOGUES

LARS VON TRIER’S **BREAKING THE WAVES** (1996) – “Over a colour-enhanced panoramic view of a Skye bridge, David Bowie sings the opening lines of ‘Life on Mars’: ‘It’s a godawful small affair, to the girl with the mousy hair.’ This moment, when director Lars von Trier is, in his own words, ‘striving for a grand gesture’, is one of several featuring 70s pop songs in *Breaking the Waves*, which many feel should have won this year’s Palme d’Or in Cannes. But such moments (designed to ‘expose a greater banality’) are pauses in an otherwise harrowing and realistic tale about a woman driven to self-destruction by her passion for her paralysed husband. Though this need to seek relief from extreme emotion was considered a flaw in his earlier work, now he has successfully worked it into a searing drama about the power of faith.” “Interview with Lars von Trier” (*Sights & Sounds Magazine*, 1996) ...

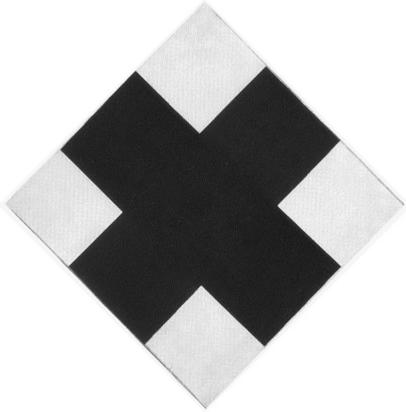
MICHAEL HANEKE’S **LA PIANISTE** (2001) – “A modern day tragedy, this film is difficult to watch and left this reviewer feeling emotionally drained. It is sparse, it is bleak, it isn’t particularly heart warming. It is however beautifully filmed with an at times spine tingling use of music and Huppert’s portrayal of self-loathing and

emotional detachment is a wonder to behold.” Review – “Interview with Isabelle Huppert” (*Guardian Unlimited*, 2001) ...

CORALIE TRINH THI & VIRGINIE DESPENTES’ **BAISE-MOI** (2001) – “Based on codirector Despentes’ novel of the same title, the film follows the adventures of Manu (Raffaella Anderson) and Nadine (Karen Bach), two bored, beleaguered, sexually aggressive young women. Manu is an underage porn star; Nadine is a prostitute. ‘There’s no work in France,’ one of them says, and we can believe it as we watch aimless youth and the not-so-young wandering the streets, setting up cheap dope deals, smacking each other around, loitering in pool halls, and generally running (make that slouching) amok. This is not exactly Paris in the Spring.” “Review” (*Lip Magazine*) ...

ASIA ARGENTO’S **SCARLET DIVA** (2002) – “Indeed, having starred in several of her father’s iron maidens, the brooding, swollen-eyed Argento may be world cinema’s premier gamine victim, but now she’s become her own persecutrix. *Scarlet Diva* is ’60s-style lurid-and-cool, executed with unmistakable need. The movie’s seemingly artless title corresponds to its triple-threat self-flagellation, an organic spectacle of subjective ordeal in which the 26-year-old star splays herself across the bloodied altar of international show business and fame-privilege backdraft.” “Review” (*The Village Voice*, 08/07/02) ...

CATHERINE BREILLAT (2001/2008) – “Interview”, *Guardian* (November 23, 2001) / “Interview”, *Telegraph* (April 5, 2008) ...



# AGAMBEN: MAN WITHOUT CONTENT

[...]

“By opening to man his authentic temporal dimension, the work of art also opens for him the space of his belonging to the world, only within which he can take the original measure of his dwelling on earth and find his present truth in the unstoppable flow of linear time.” – Giorgio Agamben, “The Original Structure of the Work of Art”, pp. 94-103, in *The Man Without Content*, trans. Georgia Albert (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1999), p. 101; or, *L'uomo senza contenuto* (Milan: Rizzoli, 1970; Macerata: Quodlibet, 1994)

“The essence of nihilism coincides with the essence of art at the extreme point of its destiny insofar as, in both, being destines itself to man in the form of Nothingness. And as long as nihilism secretly governs the course of Western history, art will not come out of its interminable twilight.” – Giorgio Agamben, “A Self-Annihilating Nothing”, pp. 52-58, in *ibid.*, p. 58

“Since the goal is already present and thus no path exists that could lead there, only the perennially late stubbornness of a messenger whose message is nothing other than the task of transmission can give back to man, who has lost his ability to appropriate his historical space, the concrete space of his action and knowledge.” – Giorgio Agamben, “The Melancholy Angel”, pp. 104-15, in *ibid.*, p. 114

“Arts are also called ‘beginnings’, and of these especially the architectonic arts.” – Aristotle, *Metaphysics* V, 1013a; cited in *ibid.*, p. 10

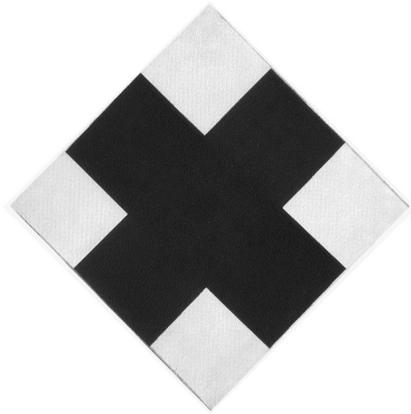
[...]

Plato, Aristotle, sometime Leibniz, Kant, sometimes Schelling, Hegel, Marx, Nietzsche, Heidegger, Benjamin, and *always* Kafka ... This is Agamben’s path through Western philosophy and rationality (metaphysics), productive and reductive at once ... Hölderlin, too – and only to say that the Greeks were right; that art is *poiesis* (world-making, bringing to presence something that “was not”) ... But most of all, *The Man Without Content* is an analytical tour through nihilism – and past, except Agamben can never say just what is this path out of the time of “law without signification” (*Homo Sacer*) ... At best, it (the secret of art) is “transmissibility” itself ... But of what? The answer is Nothing, insofar as this “transmissibility” is, in Hegelese, “in/for itself”. Agamben never says, though he imputes “it” (this in/for itself) is consistent with formal, moral law, and “it” is always without content, which is why nihilism (and especially Nietzsche’s “positive nihilism”) is a necessary rite of passage ... Transmissibility implies a force in Art that is without measure, though as Art it represents measure (law) ... It is not Hölderlin so much as Kant that returns in this gesture, but Kant without the utterly abstract payload of the Moral Law per se (rationality as “eclipse” of sun and moon/all contingency) ... It is the pure aesthetic “whatever” (devoid of rational precepts), the “X”, that *qualifies* the Moral Law – it is, after all, *Moral Law and Starry Sky* (or *Moral Law as Starry Sky*, and vice versa) that is Kant’s great gift ... Agamben cannot say/write this, because it is always a futural task (deferred) until it is actually understood, as he writes (after Kafka), as “unnaturally given” (always already here and now, there and then).

GK (July 2008)

## POSTSCRIPT

“There are in fact two Agambens. The one holding onto an existential, fated and horrific background, who is forced into a continuous confrontation with the idea of death; the other seizing (adding pieces, manoeuvring and building) the biopolitical horizon through an immersion into philological labour and linguistic analysis: here, in the latter context, Agamben sometimes almost looks like a Warburg of critical ontology. The paradox is that these two Agamben[s] always live together and, when you least expect it, the first re-emerges to darken the second, and the gloomy shadow of death spreads over and against the will to live, against the surplus of desire. Or vice versa.” Antonio Negri, trans. Arianna Bove, *Il Manifesto* (July 26, 2003) ...



TERMS OF ENDEARMENT – UPDATED 08/16/08

# HOMMAGE À GODARD

## In Praise of Obscurity II

[...]

*Notre musique* – Jean-Luc Godard

Wellspring Films, 2004 – 79 minutes – Written and directed by Jean-Luc Godard – Produced by Alain Sarde and Ruth Waldburger – Directors of Photography: Julien Hirsch and Jean-Christophe Beauvallet – With Sarah Adler, Nade Dieu, Rony Kramer, Simon Eine, Jean-Luc Godard, Juan Goytisolo, and Mahmoud Darwich – English, French, and Spanish ...

“Je suis qui je serai et deviendrai. Je me construirai moi-même et choisirai mon exil. Mon exil est l’arrière-plan de la scène épique. Je défends le besoin des poètes de gloire et de souvenirs, et défends des arbres qui habillent les oiseaux de pays et d’exil, une lune encore apte à un poème d’amour, une idée brisée par la fragilité de ses défenseurs et un pays enlevé par les légends.”(1) – Mahmoud Darwish

CRITIQUE – Godard. Therefore, the usually troublesome criticism (grousing) – that is, “ponderous, lachrymose, unsteady, undisciplined, formalist, disjointed, annoying”. And, as counterpoint, the latterday hallelujah chorus – “poetic, humanistic, sublime, evocative, heartfelt” – or in other words the long *adieu*, one way or another ... Again and again until JLG is gone.

And yet ... *Notre musique* soars above a terrain littered with refuse, cinematic and otherwise – the debris field of history, and cinema’s complicity, or history as carnage and the extermination of the so-called Other. Levinas turns up here (in the form of visual and textual references to *Entre nous*) (1991), implicated in the philosophical quagmire, an exquisite etude circling the nature of doubling. One, indeed, divides into two. Olga (Nade Dieu) converses with her Self – through the agency of herself – in time drowning in/by herself.

In a time marked (and pockmarked) by impatience with abstract thought – that is, *these times* – a much more horrific situation presents itself; the complete impasse between thought and ethics. It is only natural that Godard would repeatedly impose a vertiginous reading of the decaying superstructure (intellectual coordinates) of the fast-moulting humanist worldview, a chaosmos of effects (montage and superimposition coupled with dissolving narrative lines) and affects (the plausible paucity of answers to all manner of unanswerable questions posed by a machinic civilization clawing at itself, mutilating itself). Mapping the monstrous, a wasteland then, and perhaps in turn validating the division of the film into a medieval triptych – Hell, Purgatory, and Heaven. Godard presents the latter as no paradise as such, but, as with all such elective visions of the afterlife, as yet another temptation, and one to which Godard assigns the anti-privilege of a defensive perimeter and United States Marine guard. An idyll already colonized by vacuous signs of empire.

It is Olga’s eyes, then, that betray the radical undermining of the rhetoric of the film’s pretensions, as they meet and merge with the Levinasian Other (nominally, here, presented in the form of Palestinian poet Mahmoud Darwish) – and, too, Godard undoing *himself*, unleashing himself, hounding himself. Olga, Russian-Israeli documentary filmmaker, attempting to fathom (divine) the fathomless (hellish) abyss of Sarajevo after the Bosnian war. Olga staring at herself as Other, as all do who come to the edge of things one day looking for the possible-impossible (impossible-possible) antidote.

Following the Medieval logic of the structure of the film, the antidote appears in the form of an aesthetic base, an entelechy, constellated today by the depleted weft of abstract thought, or what’s left of what has gone awry. After the much-vaunted Enlightenment (and contra Habermas) comes Living Midnight, with its (ir)rationalist topology – a terrain in-between here and there haunted by dispossessed spirits, hungry ghosts, and ruined architectural mise en scène. Thus Sarajevo. There, Godard projects Living Midnight as the dark imagination of spent cinema, past and

present, spliced together from bits left on the editing room floor. Thus the film opens in Hell, using a torrent of newsreel and vintage footage of the grotesque history of war in the 20th century. There are echoes of *For Ever Mozart* (1996) in *Notre musique*. Godard, as no one else, knows that cinema cannot be saved except by going through the looking glass into the minefield of the imagination – toward the *poetic*. Sarajevo serves as the sinecure for history as battlefield – yet it is the conflagration of ideologies that has provided the most picturesque ruins, always. The past = After. The future = Before.

Godardian dialogue is a patchwork of forces and fields held in tension, scanned and projected, noted in passing, figural gestures, swipes, or wildly thrown signboards burned into the black interstices of the film, brutally. Victimization and the nobility of the victim come forward in the conversations about Palestine and Israel, en passant. It is the scorched imagination that is on parade in *Notre musique*. “Did you dream of the Nazis while in the Resistance?”

The (re)construction of metaphysical artifacts (those that have plagued humanity past) fall across the screen in shards of conversation, never so wildly as during the visit to a library that is a ruin and to which Sarajevans amble to return a book or two to a heap of books cast on the floor while a librarian notates their return. Godard serves up a landscape of scars that is essentially metaphysical and he delivers the *coup de grâce* in the form of Olga’s fate, and in the delivery of news of her fate by phone, to himself in his garden packed with petunias and begonias.

Godard appears and disappears, inserting himself and excising himself. He delivers a lecture to students at the writer’s conference (the middle portion of the triptych) on text and image by showing pairs of photographic images that represent the unresolvable, botched nature of duality (cinematic point and counterpoint) emptied of any significance, as an indictment of the fracture that runs through film as much as it runs through the heart of Europe, into the Balkans, and on to the Levant.

Thus we see Sarajevo through a lens that is, indeed, cracking under the spell of the history of cinema as much as the history of unresolved conflicts between East and West. And too, we see Sarajevo going about its everyday business, its reconstruction, becoming again a bazaar for its weary inhabitants – shopping (in the Koolhaasian sense) as compensatory diversion. Thus Godard arrives and leaves Sarajevo, with the various interlocutors, by way of the most pure of antiseptic places – the airport, where each time he frames the shot he includes a giant question mark in the form of the information kiosk.

Godard exits in the strategic manner of returning to a garden full of gaudy plants, somewhere in France, we suppose, while Olga returns to Jerusalem to confront her tragic decision to attempt to make a difference. The final sequence – Heaven – answers a fear she has enunciated earlier to her uncle (Godard’s translator at the Sarajevo conference) in the form of why death frightens her. It is the unknowable nature of the afterlife that is her major concern, while it is the pain of dying that worries her next. To arrive in Heaven and find it occupied by American Marines and American culture is the last insult en route to the nowhere Godard prescribes as the future, given the present state of things.

GK (November 2004)

## ENDNOTES

1 – Mahmoud Darwish, “Hommage à Edward Said: Contrepoint”, *Le monde diplomatique* 610 (Janvier 2005), p. 28.

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J. Hoberman, “Two or Three Things He Knows”, *The Village Voice* (November 24-30, 2004), p. C68.

“Critique”, *Libération* (05/19/04) / Godard, Levinas, Blanchot, “Liste Blanchot”, *Libération* (May 15, 2004) / See also “Week-end au Havre”, an article in *Cahiers du Cinéma* (Decembre 2004), featuring Godard, “critique, découvreur, oracle ...”

**ELOGE DE L'AMOUR / ETC.**

ÉLOGE – “*Éloge de l’amour*, c’est d’abord du vrai noir et blanc comme on n’en fait plus. Et il y est question de quelque chose de l’amour, de l’amour de quelque chose. L’amour de la résistance, de la mémoire, du cinéma, de la langue française, de l’histoire...” “Eloge de l’amour”, *Le monde diplomatique* (May 2001) ...

HISTOIRE(S) – Regarding *Histoire(s) du cinéma* (1988-98), see Alexander Horwath, “The Man With The Magnétoscope”, *Senses of Cinema* (1998) – “For a lack of better comparisons, Godard’s method in the *Histoire(s) du cinéma* is often explained through literary ‘affinities’ – with reference to the most prominent meta-literature by Proust or Joyce. With the same sense of helplessness, but in honor of 1920s Austro-modernism and linguistic criticism, I would also like to add: Robert Musil – ‘The before and after is not obligatory, progress is only intellectual and spatial. The content disperses in a timeless way, everything is really always there at once.’ Ulrich, Musil’s *Man Without Features* [*Man Without Qualities*] also has a Godardian idea: that history consists of unfinished, incomplete, suddenly interrupted sentences.” / *Histoire(s) du cinéma* (Paris: Gallimard, 1998) ...

À PROPOS OF ALL OF “THAT” – “Musil’s extreme, intellectually-charged (unfinished) novel *The Man Without Qualities* (*Der Mann Ohne Eigenschaften* rendered almost meaningless through translation, and meaning – in George Steiner’s estimation – ‘The Man Whose “I” Is in Search of His “Me”’) seems poised in/at that place where an aesthetics of an exorbitant beauty (and price) might rise, only if ... only if ... only if ‘self-possession’ has any currency whatsoever, now and then, versus the empty gesture of autonomy such a term implies in a philological ‘landscape’ devoid of fiery perturbational, critical-poetic hyper conceits on the path to the Some-thing Else.” – See the essay “Sublime Aesthetics” ...

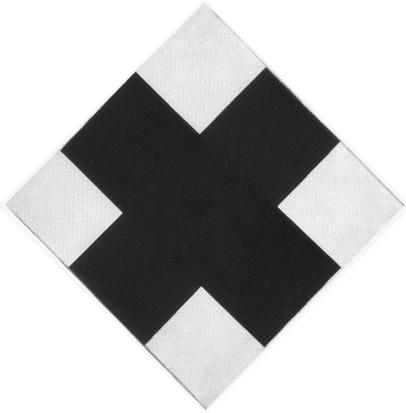
I do not hate people.  
I steal from no one.  
However  
If I am hungry  
I will eat the flesh of my usurper.  
Beware beware of my hunger  
And of my anger.  
– Mahmoud Darwish

“Adieu, Mahmoud Darwish”, *Guardian* (August 11, 2008)

**FOREVER GODARD**

James Williams, Michael Temple and Michael Witt, eds., *For Ever Godard: The Work of Jean-Luc Godard 1950 to the Present* (London: Black Dog, 2003) – “For the last 50 years, Jean-Luc Godard’s work in cinema and video has innovated, provoked and inspired. Reviewing this key film and video maker of the twentieth century, *For Ever Godard* provides a new context for his work. / In the last couple of years Godard’s recent work on film and video has featured strongly in debates about audio-visual art and culture. Especially regarding questions of historical memory, technological change, and the future of cinema in all its forms. This historical moment provides the perfect opportunity for a critical reassessment of Godard’s entire corpus and its key role in culture. *For Ever Godard* addresses new issues like; Godard as an experimental multimedia artist; the importance of voice and music in his work; the influence of Benjamin and Blanchot; and new aspects of production and representation. Godard’s work is considered within the context of the history of film, *For Ever Godard* is providing a new essential view to anyone interested in cinema.” (Black Dog) ...

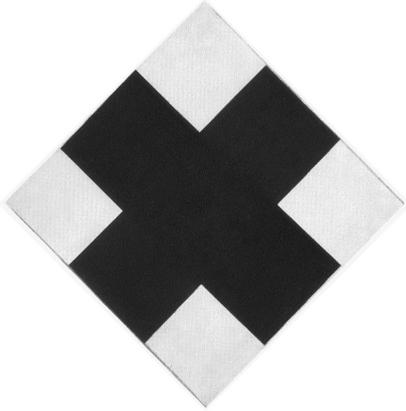
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Excerpts from the

# ANTI-JOURNAL

2001-2002



UPDATED 05/03/02

# SARASOTA DREAMING

## SCHIZOID IN SARASOTA

[...]

Miami-based architects Duany Plater-Zyberk & Company's "New Urbanist" Comprehensive Plan (with Sarasota architects Cardinal, Carlson & Parks) to salvage Sarasota, Florida's bayside downtown includes the provocative suggestion that the City sponsor a St. Tropez-style hotel on the waterfront that – at first blush – seemingly contradicts the goals and intentions of the Commissioners and the plan itself, especially given that it would be plunked down in one of the last bits of open public space along the waterfront.\* However, a hotel styled on the St. Tropez, Côte d'Azur model (the *Tatler* recently called St. Tropez the "millionaire's Ibiza, with barking Lamborghinis, thumping nightclubs and disorderly beach bars") might, upon reflection, compensate for the more conservative gestures in zoning and design ordinances to be imposed on the core of the City, while also assuaging the split psyche of Sarasota with its small town ambience and cosmopolitan ambition.\*\* Furthermore, St. Tropez hotels are modest in stature unlike the monstrosities currently under construction in Sarasota.

Sarasota is schizophrenic as a result of its heritage clashing with its desire to be a mecca for arts and the trans-Atlantic plutocracy. Its dual self-image is in part conditioned by the St. Armand Key de luxe residential and retail model across the Ringling Causeway, the high-rise luxury condominiums on Sarasota Bay (built in the 1980s), and the quaint "retro" Main Street with its one-storey texture and stylized storefronts and restaurants. The vacuous zones in-between – Five Points and the Civic Center – add to the collective anxiety about the future of a city once known for its mediterranean style architecture (inclusive of John and Mable Ringling's former residence, the Cà d'Zan, a 1920s Venetian Gothic palace) and the elegant, spare low-rise modern architecture of the Sarasota School of the '40s and '50s (typified by City Hall). Sarasota is a place of contrasts – languor and high energy are both part of its persona – the latter embodied in the annual Suncoast Offshore Grand Prix speedboat races in Sarasota Bay and "G(r)ucci" 4th of July fireworks. The languor is a result of the seasonal quietude that descends in liquid form and drives off the upper classes – i.e., the well-heeled, mobile portion of the populace.

DPZ's plan seeks to intervene between the high-rise edge and the heart of the city by fixing building volumes and types and by specifying aesthetic matters (a design code is not a foregone conclusion) through officially promulgated guidelines and incentives. The shoreline, now dotted with condominium and hotel towers, is to be dragged back to the city by extending the street grid and adding a layer of intermediate texture (faux-mediterranean blocks). Pedestrian and auto traffic is to be renegotiated to favor the former and divert or slow (suppress) the latter. The \$100 million Ritz-Carlton complex (270 hotel rooms/130 condos), "a splendid oasis of style and sophistication on Florida's Gulf Coast", now being erected alongside the Intracoastal Waterway at 101 N. Tamiami Trail (a.k.a. 1111 Ritz-Carlton Drive), may not be the last such imposition on this fertile tableau but the heyday of such monolithic objects should be behind Sarasota and its frightened citizenry. As of 2000, \$650.3 million worth of commercial and residential development was on the drawing boards or underway in the downtown area. This figure includes the \$75-100 million Renaissance tower complex (100 hotel rooms/350 condos, etc.) at 750 N. Tamiami Trail, in the Five Points "wilderness". Notably (or ignobly), the so-called New Town portion of Sarasota, where the lower classes live, is not part of the Comprehensive Plan. Situated just north of 10th Street, and the discriminating leading edge of the Plan, New Town will, however, continue to supply inexpensive labor for the "economic miracle" alongside Sarasota Bay.

These waterside towers are in themselves stylistically "retro", but a sign of '80s grandiosity nonetheless. The true history of Sarasota is in its horizontality and fecundity, with these erect, tumescent towers a passing flirtation. But the City desires both the largesse of these erections and the recumbent, chaste gentility of its maritime and agricultural past. DPZ wishes to have it both ways, and they are probably as right (or wrong) as Freud when it comes to split personas – given that the origin of desire is somewhere anterior to the pleasure principle but virtually untameable and unnameable. Sarasota's pre-Oedipal, Edenic status is as much mythic as it is historic. DPZ seems to know this and has proposed that the analysand and the analyst make an effort to sublimate the entire question for

purposes of reintegrating the collective split persona of the City.

[...]

GK (July 2000)

## FOOTNOTES

\*Sarasota is situated on the southwest Gulf Coast of Florida, the so-called Sun Coast, just south of Tampa and St. Petersburg. Sarasota was settled in the 1700s and has a population of about 51,000. It is billed in travel and tourist literature as a “beach resort and art community”.

\*\*For those not steeped in architectural culture (always start with cold, fresh water and bring to a rapid boil), New Urbanism is the phantom vision of an architectural faction opposed to most modern architectures and – more critically – to *heterogeneity* (the “barking Lamborghinis”) and *cultural frisson* (the “thumping nightclubs”). With its roots in retro, traditional and neo-traditional building styles, New Urbanism is quite often a secret means of saving and fixing real estate values in towns and cities on the verge of losing their historic charm. It is also deployed in inner cities to revive desperate city housing projects dating to 1960s urban renewal. In this latter scenario, the anathematized HUD housing towers of urban America are typically replaced by low-rise, “tactful” housing tracts (with front gardens or lawns) that mimic suburbia or gentrified neighborhoods elsewhere in or outside the city. New Urbanism has also been applied to creating New Towns – *ex nihilo* (as it were) – for corporate clients with deep pockets (e.g., Disney’s Celebration, Florida). The paranoid aspect of this latter vision was but one subtext of the Peter Weir film, *The Truman Show* (1998). The film was shot in Seaside, Florida (a DPZ designed New Town). As a footnote to this footnote, *The Economist* recently reviewed two new books on Celebration – “American Life: Mouse and Garden” (June 10th, 2000) – citing “urban elitism” as the spirit animating most critical “journalistic literature about the town”. Never to be overtly partisan, *The Economist* noted the “Orwellian aspects” of life in Celebration are more “humorous” than threatening. “When the ‘pixie dust’ starts to wear off” residents realize that the elective nature of the community requires that they bracket their desire to misbehave.

## POSTSCRIPT

And, in the spirit of free association, Seaside (in Peter Weir’s *The Truman Show*) seemed eerily reminiscent of the village/prison in the 1967 British television series *The Prisoner*. Truman’s attempts to escape his staged life were in some respects an homage to this famous TV series starring (and produced by) ex-Secret Agent Patrick McGoochan. As a potential renegade agent imprisoned in a charming but sinister English village surrounded by mountains and sea, McGoochan (Number 6) frequently engaged in botched attempts to escape – usually foiled by a huge, bouncing balloon that rose up out of the sea and routed his carefully crafted excursions. His memorable escape/release, in the final episode of the series, and memory is if anything unreliable, was filmed as a passage through a kaleidoscopic tunnel, to the Beatles’ anthem “All You Need Is Love” (*Magical Mystery Tour*, 1967) – a tune that opens with a rousing snippet of the “La Marseillaise”, a theme also incorporated into Peter Tchaikovsky’s “1812 Overture”, for whatever reasons musicologists may care to cite. Freedom and enslavement are the twin peaks of modern subjectivity. The latter often comes in forms, architectural and otherwise, that otherwise liberated souls embrace, which brings us full circle to Sarasota and its imagined old Florida charm. Bring on the “barking” Lamborghinis!

## OUTTAKES

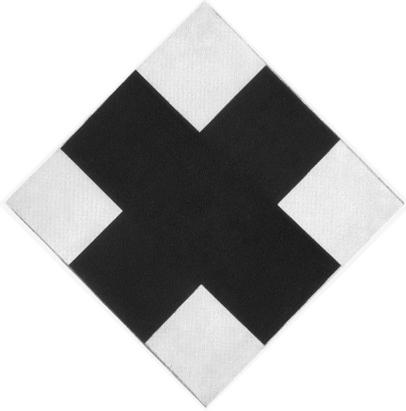
For the first big challenge to the Downtown Plan by developers, see Case No.: 02-1016GM – “On March 4, 2002, a petition was filed challenging the determination of compliance that was issued by the Florida Department of Community Affairs regarding this amendment. The petition was filed by the law office of Icard, Merrill, Cullis, Timm, Furen & Ginsberg, P.A. on behalf of the Association of Downtown Commercial Property Owners, Inc.; Argus Foundation, Inc.; Gulf Coast Coast Builders Exchange, Inc.; Remark Sarasota Quay, Inc.; and Wynnton Sarasota II Limited Partnership.” (Downtown Master Plan Related Comprehensive Plan Amendment, City of Sarasota)”

Visit John and Mable Ringling’s Cà d’Zan, now part of the Ringling Center for the Cultural Arts – “Recognized as the Art Museum of the State Of Florida, its campus encompasses an internationally recognized museum of Western

European and American art; a Museum of the Circus; Cà d'Zan, the Ringlings' thirty-room mansion; the historic Asolo theater from Venice, and over 60 acres of landscaped grounds and statuary." – Wandering through the Cà d'Zan's art collection, one cannot help form the impression that Mr. Ringling was fleeced by dealers during his art-buying days. He has one of everything – Old Masters included – but notably works of "questionable attribution", or works demoted in recent times to "School of", as in "School of Rembrandt", etc. Perhaps the most bizarre evidence of the "smallness" of this vast collection of stuff is in the landscaped garden, where a neo-classical "Laocoön" – way too small to make an impression – all but vanishes below a large array of shrubs, receding (in a sense) into the vortex of anamorphic nothingness. Better perhaps to take the plunge and drive to the Salvador Dalí Museum in St. Petersburg; there superficiality is a virtue and the anamorphic stain is worn with pride.

For information on relocating to Sarasota, visit Michael Saunders & Co. ("Licensed Real Estate Broker"), who reports: "The new Ritz-Carlton, Sarasota Hotel recently opened its doors to welcome the world to Sarasota. The sophisticated masterpiece of elegance is crowned by 48 incredible residences, which Michael Saunders & Company sold out within 18 days. Construction has begun on the adjacent Tower Residences at The Ritz-Carlton, which offers an additional 80 opportunities to live amidst the legendary service and amenities. The annual Michael Saunders & Company holiday party was one of the first events to be held at the magnificent new hotel." – Preconstruction prices for the second batch of high-profile condominium units start at \$660,000 and reservations require a \$25,000 refundable deposit. The property is likely to appreciate by 30 percent in the time between pre-sale and occupancy, and "investors" are expected to scoop up a large percentage of the 80 unbuilt units.

[...]



MUTATIS MUTANDIS 12/24/04

## NEO-NEO-MODERNISM

[...]

“Reality changes; in order to represent it, modes of representation must change.”(1) –Bertolt Brecht

[...]

WHAT IS IT that makes modernists, neo-modernists, and post-modernists clamor to dispel the metaphysical chains (claims) that bind architecture while unwittingly endorsing the very premises of the age-old metaphysical project?

Take for example the modernist claim that architecture is not an art, a fine art, or an applied art. Against all claims to the contrary, architecture is – to such pragmatists – the art of construction and/or language games. This has been the argument since the first stirrings of the modernist project in architecture and this argument underwrites all of the materialist, structuralist, and nihilist operations of the last century. In the case of constructivism and functionalism this claim was the high-water mark of the deluge initiated in post-WWI Europe and transferred to America by architectural refugees in the run-up to WWII.

Odd, that the extreme positions of purism, constructivism, and functionalism found solace in quoting American vernacular and industrial architecture – and, oh yes, steam ships, airplanes, and locomotives. The machine-age romanticism that runs throughout modern architecture is yet another sign of its specific time frame – despite all attempts to define it as universal or timeless.

Indeed, this feigned timelessness still underwrites authorized readings of modern architecture. The so-called “pure classicism” of high modernist architecture is an always-already useless gesture resorted to by the apologists for the *rest of* modern architecture.

The anti-metaphysical bite of this circular logic is undermined when one takes into account ideology. Architecture has always been a form of built ideology, whether of Empire imperialism or machine-age empiricism. Curious that Karel Teige, *bête noire* of late-1920s early functionalism, found some periods of Empire architecture edifying. These examples, in *Modern Architecture in Czechoslovakia* (1931), seem (to Teige) to foreshadow the pure plasticity of purism and the inspired-elementalism of constructivism.(2) The buildings he valorizes are chosen expressly because they are not neo-classical and not apparently ideological. This is, of course, a selective reading (as all readings, such as Giedion’s) and Teige was appropriating these “non-ideological” buildings from the 19th century for purely ideological reasons. Sic transit all appropriations.

Metaphysics, since God knows when, has utilized an architectonic structure. Kant is the best example. His trio of critiques is built on a superstructure of metaphors and inferences that are structural. Such is the “art of memory”. Nietzsche’s acts of demolition were the inverse of this – he was the wrecking ball of metaphysical pretensions. Wittgenstein simply rounded up the minimalist program for this project and issued the brilliant *Tractatus* as a summary. In the *Tractatus* we have the Russellian project as apotheosis – the end of metaphysics and the substitution of logical, structural, and materialist figures for ideology and metaphor.

To denounce metaphysics requires inquiring into “which” metaphysics. A once-and-for-all bracketing of abstract (*a priori*) signifiers is essentially a pipe dream. Phenomenology almost always circles back to the dyadic conundrum of absence and presence – the metaphysical *Je ne sais quoi* itself. That which can be excised (exorcised) is simply the *historical detritus* of signifying systems. The precise determination of metaphysical coordinates lies outside structuralist operations. Bourdieu’s extraordinary analyses stopped short of analyzing structure itself. Braudel and colleagues simply sailed into the vast sea of archival documentation and economic data (*re* Baxandall’s quixotic and exotic “dancing merchant savants”). Hence, too, Tafuri’s lack of interest in Annales-style research.

Architecture cannot escape its putative Being-*for*-the-World characteristics. This is not to say, however, that architecture is without a transcendental aspect (and by “transcendental” is meant the Kantian “transcendental”, or

the Emersonian, versus anything religious and/or eschatological/teleological). The magic epicycles of architectural formalism – the on-again-off-again tinkering with the structural dynamics of expressive systems – are a type of proof that even in the most inward manifestations of architectural science and the art of memory the impress of synchronic, signifying chains may be found.

**HYPSOS – ATHOS – ECOS – ETHOS – PATHOS – EROS – BATHOS – CHRONOS – MYTHOS – TYPOS – HIPPOS – ANTHOS**

The peculiar situation of modern-day (present-day) architecture is that it has come full circle to face *Itself*. Architecture *Itself* is the architecture of immanence. The architecture of immanence is the architecture of things plus *that which the thing contains*, and *that in which the thing swims* (its milieu). Within the thing itself is the entire apparatus suppressed by useless attempts to transfigure, denature, and/or limit architecture. There is a long tradition of imposing limits (mostly as a rhetorical operation aimed at objectifying a discipline). Architects, today, stand at the edge of an abyss – staring straight into the depths. In those depths are all the suppressed, repressed, excised, exorcised, torn, ripped, denatured, discarded forms and figures removed from the practice of architecture over millennia.

Chief among these lost figures is the idea of the idea. Chief among the insidious reductions of modern aesthetics to pragmatics is the dishonorable idea that architectonics is nothing more than construction. Architectonics is the articulation of formal ideas through structural (synthetic) innovation. Here is the abject (empty) signifier of neo-functionalism – indeed of all isms. The noble destruction of pseudo-historicism notwithstanding, the graveyard in which modernism and neo-modernism operate is spectral, *haunted* territory. Neo-modernism is not precisely the reification of functionalism, but it still retains the signature/mark (the surgical/operational scars) of the brush with nothingness within its conceptual apparatus that distinguishes all forms of mere empiricism.

The possible return of all of the above, repressed signifying subjects through an architecture of immanence is quite simply the rewriting of the language of architecture. The next wave, wherever it may arise, will address this absence through a synthetical realization of the inwardness and waywardness of things, and through a dynamic and utterly electrifying rapprochement with both milieu(x) and anti-milieu(x) (Landscape + Architecture + +).

As I have stated elsewhere, “As long as the object of architecture is the architectural object, I object.”

Dr. Prof. Ing. I.M. Avenarius (July 2002)

## ENDNOTES

“There exist *mute* edifices – constructions and lodgings; and there exist edifices that speak; but there are others still – and they are the most rare – which *sing*.” – Massimo Cacciari, “Eupalinos or Architecture” (1980)

1 – Bertolt Brecht, “Against Georg Lukács”, trans. Stuart Hood, *New Left Review* 84 (March-April, 1974), p. 51.

2 – Karel Teige, “The End of the Century”, trans. Irena Zantovska Murray, David Britt, *Modern Architecture in Czechoslovakia* (Los Angeles: Getty Research Institute, 2000), pp. 60-62.

## POSTSCRIPT(S)

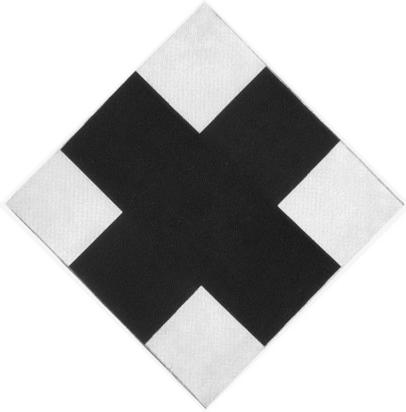
O AUTONOMY !!! – “As it is, art is always already there, addressing the thinker with the silent and scintillating question of its own identity. However, through constant invention – its metamorphosis – art dismisses whatever the philosopher has to say concerning its own self.” – Alain Badiou, “Art and Philosophy”, *Lacanian Ink* 17 (2000) ...

O PURISME !!! – “Whether it be through such an enlightened fundamentalism [of the Tendenza] or the fundamentalism of a Richard Meier, repeating over and over the linguistic tropes of twenties purism, those responses, for all their good intentions, amount to nothing more than historicism.” – Ignasi de Solà-Morales, *Differences: Topographies of Contemporary Architecture* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1997) ...

## SOME OTHER THINGS

NOW UNDER CONSTRUCTION (12/26/04) – “Architectural Loft Residences” ... “Undulating, Provocative, Abstract, Reflective, Iconic, Curvaceous” ... \$3,200,000 to \$12,000,000 – “Sculpture for Living” / Gwathmey Siegel & Associates – Astor Place (445 Lafayette St.), New York, New York, New York ...

For the mostly pathological, half-hearted gestures of neo-modernist architectures (in Berlin, in the 1990s), see Raoul Eshelman, “Performatism in Architecture: On Framing and the Spatial Realization of Ostensivity”, *Anthropoetics* 7, No. 2 (Fall 2001-Winter 2002) ...



MUTATIS MUTANDIS / RE-EDITED 04/10/05

## REVIEW OF REVIEWS DEPARTMENT

[...]

**Dasein in the Dark** – Giorgio Agamben’s *The Man Without Content*

[...]

“Dasein in the Dark” is the title of Espen Hammer’s review of Giorgio Agamben’s *The Man Without Content* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1999) in issue 104 (November-December 2000) of *Radical Philosophy*. Struck deaf, dumb and blind by the scope of the review (and the reviewed book), the reader may find herself groping in the blackness for a grip on the meaning of aesthetic experience in these, putative, late-modern times.

Agamben is perhaps best known for his brilliant critique of modernity and its attendant philosophy of history. His foremost venture into the former may be his *Infancy and History: Essays in the Destruction of Experience* (London: Verso, 1993); the latter is tackled obliquely in *Potentialities: Collected Essays in Philosophy* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1999). All of his various works seem to circle round the same hole in the earth – the “diremption” in thinking about what it means to exist, or the massive loss that occurred in the experience of the world round about the middle of the 17th century when, accordingly, “the conception of art then underwent a drastic reshaping.” This reshaping is the bigger-than-life, all-consuming vacuum that has come to be known as modern aesthetics.

Hammer notes Agamben’s quest for a return or recovery of something authentic in our collective relationship to the world actually involves a movement into a zone within time and space (beyond self-reflective narcissism) to where “the work of art must be grounded in what [Agamben] calls the original event of *poiesis* – that is, in an original temporal dimension in which ‘the poetic status of man on earth finds its proper meaning.’” This remark conjures an encounter with the beautiful, gnomic book published by the FruitMarket Gallery (Edinburgh), in 1992, called simply *Poiesis: Aspects of Contemporary Poetic Activity\**. This book contains a montage of source material, most critically perhaps, the work of contemporary artists working with words and images related to land and sea – e.g., poet-gardenist Ian Hamilton Finlay, land artist Hamish Fulton, photographer Thomas Joshua Cooper, and conceptualist-minimalists Lore Bert, Pieter Laurens Mol, and David Austen.

The term *poiesis*, and most especially its modern deployment, involves a reflection on the Arendtian “space of appearance” or the Platonic “chora” – a zone where things appear, come to being and are brought up out of darkness in an almost Orphic transposition from “there” to “here”. George Baird’s *The Space of Appearance* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1995) is just such a Hannah Arendt-inspired foray into architectural theory. The Alberto Pérez-Gómez edited series *Chora*, from McGill University (Montreal), is a similar collage of essays exploring the ground of cultural representations. Indeed, in this factory of Arendt scholarship, Giorgio Agamben, himself, has launched a critical-political broadside on the necessity of territory vis-à-vis the nonstatus of refugees in post-modern, post-cold war Europe. For this and other dicey matters, see “Every Form of Art Has a Political Dimension”, an interview with Chantal Mouffe in *Grey Room* 02 (Winter 2001), or see the various works on the so-called uncertain state of Europe by Massimo Cacciari. But back to Hammer/Agamben: “Now, since the early modern diremption of art categorically implied the separation of genius, and thus *poiesis*, from taste, it follows for Agamben that any candidate for a non-autonomy-based conception of art must satisfy the condition of uniting *poiein*, in the sense of bringing something into being or presence, with the experience of art.” Presence and absence, those very stylish words, make their appearance in almost every discursus circling round this diremption and its privileged or not privileged presentation.

It is enough to drive one mad. Agamben is to be praised for uncovering one of the most contentious set pieces of modern aesthetics – autonomy, with its Kantian categorical imperative – and countering with the habitual insinuation of something else. That something else is extraordinarily slippery because it does not so much inhabit language as *haunt* language. Therefore, Agamben’s analysis is in itself highly poetic and given to elisions and metaphors. “As it stands, this account is potentially tendentious on several fronts. For one thing, Agamben’s

ontology of rhythm [a key component of this non-art art] seems worryingly uninformed by any actually existing works of art [...] The problem is rather that given his nihilism thesis, *no* such work can exist: its very existence would completely contradict his view that art has vanished in the night of reflection.” Hammer, here, is a bit too heavy-handed. Agamben does not point to works as such for an obvious reason; if one did so they would no longer be outside the description of art itself. Instead, what is really at stake is the defense and fortification of the “sacred” realm implied by the analytic – the place where art is not art by any definition we are now comfortable expounding.

Here, in this walled off area, it is safe to bring up the unacknowledged secret. Such an art as Agamben has sketched does exist – It is landscape. *Pace* Ian Hamilton Finlay, this realm must be defended from the art establishment. *Pace* Robert Smithson, this realm must be prefigured (again) in remote, uncanny places (on paper or in the wilderness *of the imagination*). There have been totally amusing episodes in the past several decades to raise landscape to the level of modern art. All have failed. Indeed, there was even a mostly agonistic essay published in (was it?) the *British Journal of Aesthetics* pontificating on why “gardens” are not art. The main reason, posited there, was (was it?), “Gardens are not original works of art”.

Granted! Gardens *are not* original works of art. They do not have the autonomy of the order of the Kantian imperative. They *are* incredibly (*naturally and unnaturally*) intertextual and heterogeneous. By the questionable standards of modern aesthetic experience, therefore, they do not “qualify”. And for that we should be grateful.

The Editors

\*Graeme Murray, ed., *Poiesis: Aspects of Contemporary Poetic Activity* (Edinburgh, The Fruit Market Gallery, 1992) ...

UPDATED 05/08/06

# LANDSCAPE + ARCHITECTURE ABOUT ALMOST NOTHING

[...]

THE PRESENT-PAST / MERCI BUTTERCUPS – Useless Beauty – “For the buttercups grew past numbering, in this spot which they had chosen for their games among the grass, standing singly, in couples, in whole companies, yellow as the yolk of eggs, and glowing with an added luster, I felt, because, being powerless to consummate with my palate the pleasure which the sight of them never failed to give, I would let it accumulate as my eyes ranged over their golden expanse, until it became potent enough to produce an effect of absolute, purposeless beauty; and so it had been from my earliest childhood, when from the tow-path I had stretched out my arms towards them before I could even properly spell their charming name – a name fit for the Prince in some fairy-tale – immigrants, perhaps, from Asia centuries ago, but naturalised now for ever in the village, satisfied with their modest horizon, rejoicing in the sunshine and the water’s edge, faithful to their little glimpse of the railway-station, yet keeping nonetheless like some of our old paintings, in their plebeian simplicity, a poetic scintillation from the golden East.” –Marcel Proust, “Swann’s Way”, *Remembrance of Things Past*, Vol. 1, Pléiade edition, trans. C.K. Scott Moncrieff, Terence Kilmartin (New York: Vintage, 1982), p. 183 / Proust’s elegant evocations of “useless beauty” notwithstanding, perhaps it is Flaubert’s desire to write a novel nominally “about nothing” that echoes here in the provisional and elective nature of *Landscapes About Almost Nothing*, an almost nothing that is, indeed, /S/ome-thing Else, a something else that is, in turn, a type of “nothing” only in the sense that such an almost nothing passes through phenomenological reduction (the formalist moment) toward *everything else* (everything repressed in the normative, present-day deployment of landscape architecture *as a singular, professional discipline*) ... Therefore the call and allure of Landscape + Architecture (+ +), until the cows come home, so to speak ...

[...]

PRÉCIS – Not so much about Burle-Marx as /S/ome-thing Else, the material presented herein is intended to underscore the irrepressible élan of *formalism + phenomenology*, the twin peaks of modern artistic experience, as represented in the fusion of landscape + architecture. This compilation is intended as an adjunct to the essay Landscape Formalism, Anyone ???, where a return to a *type of* formalism is rehearsed.

Formalism + phenomenology is not to be confused with *mimimalism*, which is a game unto itself. Landscape formalism is not landscape minimalism, and *landscape + architecture about almost nothing* is not a return to the serial excesses (flapdoodle) of mid-century modern landscape architecture (something which, in fact, persisted well into the 1980s). Instead, this amalgam (which is essentially synchronic and *approaches the universal*) is in many ways the synthesis of what Hal Foster has noted as the unresolved Constructivist-Surrealist dilemma – or a “cultural” duplicity – that rises and falls on subject-object problems associated with perception and ideation. As architecture moves away from *fixity* – buildings frozen in time and space – landscape moves closer to architecture and the *amalgam*. When this amalgam (perhaps a *just-milieu*) is also infused with hermetic *utopian* characteristics, then, and only then, is the fusion of the sign and the signified accomplished.

## 1/ BURLE-MARX TIME

The gardens and parks of Roberto Burle Marx (1909-94) constitute one of those rare moments in landscape architecture when things take precedence over the clamour of sensibility (aesthetics) – or when landscape architecture becomes nearly an index (inventory) of “almost nothing”. By “almost nothing” is meant nothing less than the Real versus the Symbolic.

The work of Burle Marx has remained influential to this day *because of this incipient universality* – because his work is not *overloaded* with the stylistic (syntactic) apparatus (detritus) of a time and place, and because within this *almost nothing* there are signs of pure desire, a quest for configuring radical contingency – the well-worn and

tiresome reference (recourse) to Cubism by scholars, to explain Burle Marx, is, in fact, an unintended red herring. Yes, Burle Marx returned from Paris, in the 1920s, infused with enthusiasm for formalist games – but he did not merely transcribe those games within the circle of then contemporary landscape architecture. A dispassionate look at his work indicates that he inscribed within the horizon of garden design a *passion for the autonomy of things* that is belied (vigorously concealed) by the geometric intricacy of his designs.

What betrays this artistic agenda, however, is the *expansiveness* of Burle Marx landscapes. Even within the more modest outlays of land or territory – such as Sítio Roberto Burle Marx (1941-) – the vectors of his design apparatus swerve away off/into the anamorphic hinterland of perception (the gap in-between Self and Other) illuminating *along the way* the superb isolation of things, or the primal authority and autonomy of the object. This in-betweenness is not the same thing as that thing which haunts architectural discourse today – i.e., the in-between thing of architecture + landscape, or the inside-outside thing of dematerialized architecture (inclusive of the digital vortex). This time, or in Burle Marx time, the in-between is more like that in-between time that is registered in the paintings of Gerhard Richter – the eerie, preternatural time inside of/illuminating the constitutional myopia of the Symbolic as it fails to register accurately (i.e., without re-ordering/disfiguring) the object of contemplation – and, as it ultimately fails to comprehend and contain the thing it sets out to encompass. (It is no coincidence that Burle Marx was also an accomplished painter.) This failure, when inverted, becomes *artfulness itself*, or the seeing of the other as an autonomous subject – to be revered – in the liberation of things from duplicity and the still-born canons of *authorized* sensibilities.

[...]

### HIGHLY SELECT BIBLIOGRAPHY

Roberto Silva, *New Brazilian Gardens: The Legacy of Burle Marx* (London: Thames & Hudson, 2006).

Marta Iris Montero, *Burle Marx, jardins lyriques* (Paris: Actes Sud, 2002) – “Paysagiste, peintre, musicien, sculpteur, architecte, le Brésilien Roberto Burle Marx (1909-1994) aimait avant tout la nature et les plantes. Ses parcs publics et ses jardins, tout en pleins et déliés, colorés de grands aplats monochromes ondulants, s'inscrivent en douceur dans la ville ou le paysage. Pour lui, chacune de ses créations devait faire coexister en harmonie monde végétal et vie humaine. Ce livre, écrit par sa collaboratrice-complice, est l'un des rares consacrés à cet artiste, qui révolutionna pourtant dès les années 30 l'art des jardins.”

Christopher Bradley-Hole, *Jardins contemporains* (Paris: Flammarion, 2001) – “Lignes fluides et dépouillées, plantes sculpturales, couleurs en demi-teintes, le jardin de style minimaliste inspire calme, sérénité, énergie. Contemporain, ses racines piochent dans les religions méditatives de Chine et du Japon, et dans les proportions géométriquement pures de l'architecture de la Renaissance italienne. Moderne, il refuse les pastiches du passé, se construit en accord avec les nouvelles technologies et l'écologie. Ce livre nous propose un passionnant tour du monde d'œuvres minimalistes par un adepte de cette philosophie.”

Rossana Vaccarino, with William S. Saunders, Eric Kramer, eds., *Roberto Burle Marx: Landscapes Reflected, Landscape Views 3* (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 2000) – This book, an outgrowth of Rossana Vaccarino's researches of Burle Marx's legacy, while at the Harvard GSD, contains essays by Silvio Soares Macedo, Lelia Coelho Frota, Rossana Vaccarino, and Anita de la Rosa de Berrizbeitia. Berrizbeitia's essay is significant in that it undoes much of the damage done by “scholars” attributing Burle Marx's “aesthetic” to his association with European modernism. Berrizbeitia's essay argues that the work of Burle Marx was, in fact, *endogenous* – her critique of Parque del Este (in Caracas, Venezuela) resists the opposing contemporary discourses of “critical regionalism” and the reductive, formalist historiography of modern art and architecture. “Endogenous”, in this context, means “growing from within” Burle Marx himself and Venezuela itself – a hybridization of forces that is unique versus categorical.

Anita Berrizbeitia, *Roberto Burle Marx in Caracas: Parque del Este, 1956-1961* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004).

Ivo Mesquita, ed., *Roberto Burle Marx: Landscape Architect* (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 2004).

[...]

**2/ MORE ABOUT ALMOST NOTHING**

**WTC PARK?** – *New York Times Magazine* (May 16, 2004) – Vision plans for a possible World Trade Center (Ground Zero) park ...

**TIME OUT OF TIME** – Funerary Monument for Commemorating the Dead at the World Trade Center – “An important emotional aspect of this proposal arises out of the fact that it is immersive. The immersive level of involvement (which has the power to change the way people feel) has been an efficacious impulse since prehistoric times – occasioning elegant sacred mounds and evocative funerary temples. This experience was aptly demonstrated to me on my visit in 1995 to a prehistoric immersive funerary space built atop a small hilltop in Ireland called Newgrange. Newgrange is a stone and turf mound about 280 feet in diameter and 44 feet high (in restored form) which contains a thin passage leading to the central apse-like burial chamber. Entry into its inner space was arduous. It was not a long passage, but a difficult one, because one must slither through a very narrow passage corridor before reaching the pivotal opening.” Joseph Nechvatal (New York, New York) ...

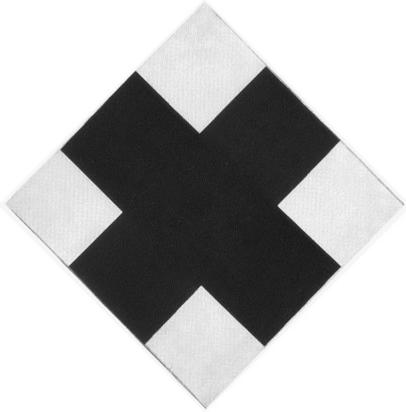
**THE ABSENT FATHER** – “Things are forever misleading us ... They feign singularity when in fact they are the result of manifold factors and forces ... Nothing is simply black and/or white ... The work of architecture, as it stands alone and mired in singularity, effaces the entire spectrum (the spectral nature) of its being ... All architecture is haunted by its own mythic reserve ... its own repressions and sublimations (continuous or dialectical ...) ... It must, in fact, be addressed as a person ...”

**“WINTER” AND MAYBE “SPRING” IN BERLIN** – “Duration is experienced by a descent into self. Each instant is there; nothing is definitive since each instant remakes the past.” Emmanuel Levinas / Peter Eisenman’s Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe ...

**WAVE GARDEN** by Yusuke Obuchi @ Storefront for Art & Architecture, May 16 through June 29, 2002 – “Wave Garden is an electrical power plant that floats off the coast of Central California, and derives energy from the movement of ocean waves. Yusuke Obuchi’s installation, Wave Garden, features what he refers to as a *drawing machine* – a 4’ x 6’ floating membrane made of 1734 articulated panels suspended by a system of 3468 counter weights and over 8 miles of fishing line.” – “For most viewers the immediate parallels for the *Wave Garden* will be the Earthworks of the 1960s and ’70s, but it sits uneasily in this genealogy. It might be reminiscent of another California dream, the *Running Fence* of Christo, but it is the *Running Fence* with brains that retain a social substance [...] The Wave Garden is wondrously altruistic in comparison with such projects.” Hal Foster / “Wave Garden” was published in *Archiprix International* (Rotterdam: 010 Publishers, 2004), pp. 66-67 ...

**MISCELLANEOUS TREES** – Takenosuke Tatsui, ed., *Garden Views IV: Tree and Moss Gardens* (Tokyo: Kenchiku Shiryo Kenkyusha, 1991) – A short, exacting survey of very small, mostly residential modern gardens in Japan, based on traditional precepts, utilizing *zoki* (“miscellaneous trees”, deciduous species grown in the Kanto plain with “calculated abandon”) and supplemented by carefully-crafted plantings of moss, ferns, bamboo, azalea, and grasses architecturally accentuated with elegant stone walks, walls, occasional stepping-stones, and splashes of water – The premiere moss-gardening territories in Japan are, therefore, the provinces of Kansai and North Honshu ...

**DILLER & SCOFIDIO** – Blur Building – See “Water + Architecture + Water” for a review of the Van Alen Institute exhibition “Architecture + Water” (2002) – The Blur Building (plus several other Diller + Scofidio projects) was published in *Prototipo* 006 (Lisbon) – Also, on the *Prototipo* website, you will find “Jump Cuts” and “Bad Press”, two disquisitions on the discursive architecture(s) of Diller + Scofidio – The Blur Building was part of Expo 2002 (Yverdon-les-Bains, Switzerland) ...



UPDATED 08/06/08

# THE NOVALIS COMPLEX

Georg Philipp Friedrich von Hardenberg

“The blue flower is also red ...” – Gaston Bachelard

[...]

BRETON, RE ARTAUD BY WAY OF NOVALIS – “Each time I happen to recall – nostalgically – the surrealist rebellion as expressed in its original purity and intransigence, it is the personality of Antonin Artaud that stands out in dark magnificence, it is a certain intonation in his voice that injects specks of gold into his whispering voice ... [...] I know that Antonin Artaud *saw*, the way Rimbaud, as well as Novalis and Arnim before him, had spoken of *seeing*. It is of little consequence, ever since the publication of [Gérard de Nerval’s] *Aurélia* [1855], that what was *seen* this way does not coincide with what is *objectively visible*. The real tragedy is that the society to which we are less and less honored to belong persists in making it an inexpiable crime to have gone over to *the other side of the looking glass*.” – André Breton, “A Tribute to Antonin Artaud”, in *Free Rein*, cited in Jacques Derrida and Paule Thévenin, *The Secret Art of Antonin Artaud* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1998) ...

DERRIDA, RE ARTAUD BY WAY OF Nerval – “Necessity of a *logomachy*. That is to say beyond the becalmed politeness of a cultured language, the war with words, the drilling and maddened destruction of a language policing and reigning over its subjectiles. In this conflagration of words, against words, the guardians of language will denounce a logomachy; they will require that discourse conform to pedagogy and philosophy, indeed to dialectic. But logomachy aims at taking breath back from them, in a war of reconquest.” – Jacques Derrida, “To Unsense the Subjectile”, in *The Secret Art of Antonin Artaud* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1998) ...

## SELECT BOOKS / IN ENGLISH

1/ Gaston Bachelard, *La Psychanalyse du Feu* (Paris: Librairie Gallimard, 1938) – Gaston Bachelard, Alan C.M. Ross (trans.), Northop Frye (preface), *The Psychoanalysis of Fire* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1968)

2/ Andrew Bowie, *Aesthetics and Subjectivity* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2003)

3/ Friedrich von Hardenberg, Jane Kneller (trans.), *Novalis: Fichte Studies* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003)

4/ Géza von Molnár, Jochen Schulte-Sasse (foreword), *Romantic Vision, Ethical Context: Novalis and Artistic Autonomy* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1991)

5/ Jochen Schulte-Sasse et al., *Theory as Practice: A Critical Anthology of Early German Romantic Writings* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997)

## OUTTAKES / WWW

“Osokin looks round, and suddenly an extraordinarily vivid sensation sweeps over him that, if he were not there, everything would be exactly the same.” – Petr Demianovich Uspenskii, *Strange Life of Ivan Osokin* (1947)

Novalis’ *Fichte Studies* (as above) – “This volume presents the first complete translation of *Fichte Studies*, a powerful, creative and sustained critique of Fichtean philosophy by the young philosopher-poet Friedrich von Hardenberg, who under the pen-name Novalis went on to become the most well-known and beloved of the early German Romantic writers. Anyone interested in the fate of German philosophy and literature immediately after Kant will find this collection of notes and aphorisms a treasure-trove of original contributions on the nature of self-consciousness, the relation of art to philosophy, and the nature of philosophical inquiry. There are also the

beginnings of a strikingly contemporary-sounding semiotic theory. The text is translated by Jane Kneller, who also provides an introduction situating the Fichte Studies in the context of Novalis' life and work." (Cambridge University Press) ...

MIXED NOTES – The links from Novalis (and High Romanticism) to Post-Structuralism have to do with the idea that representation is in fact an inter-subjective some-thing that points always back to the subject versus the object. Language and art (*as complex*) becomes a sublime “inter-discursive translation” for Novalis, instead of a prison-house. The passage from Novalis to Post-Structuralism is marked from Peirce to Jakobson to Barthes ... Or, from Structuralism (linguistics) to Post-Structuralism (contextualized discursive praxis) by way of Symbolism (poetic image as hieroglyph). Novalis was primarily re-working Fichtean idealism (A=A, I=I, etc.), without the dogmatic Absolute (A=A, I=I) as the end result. He confirms that Kantian “transcendental apperception” (everything known that is not *of the object*) is, in fact, as others have indicated, “backed up” by language (every thought is informed by another language, or circles back to an ur-language). Hence Novalis’ poetical sublime language games that combine Theoretical Reason and The Categorical Imperative (without becoming merely moralistic). Here, “Theoretical Reason” (the horizon of the world) and “The Categorical Imperative” (the conceptual horizon of subjective idealism) merge in *poesie* (*poesie* = écriture + “the way out”). Hence the intense inner-focussed transcendental aesthetic that was brought into French and Russian Symbolism (by way of American Transcendentalism?), and also taken up by semioticians and, later, post-structuralists. Novalis fused art and philosophy by way of a poetic negative dialectic leading back to the primordial concept of Self, versus the idea of Ego (nicht-Ich, versus Ich). This is the subject-object divide deconstructed, wherein the object is “a being outside of being within being”. Kant’s gift, “the idea of the autonomous nature of artistic production”, is, therein, investigated for signs of Some-thing Else. This all leads to a universal, revolutionary aesthetic. See “Logologische Fragmente” (1798). – Extracted from Géza von Molnár’s *Romantic Vision, Ethical Context: Novalis and Artistic Autonomy* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987/1991), and *Novalis Fichte Studies: The Foundations of His Aesthetics* (The Hague: Mouton, 1970) ...

RECENT TITLES (ENGLISH) – Veronica Freeman, *The Poetization of Mystical Constructs in the Work of Novalis* (New York: Peter Lang, 2006) / Irena Nikolova, *Complementary Modes of Representation in Keats, Novalis, and Shelley* (New York: Peter Lang, 2001) / Margaret M. Stoljar, *Novalis: Philosophical Writings* (Albany: SUNY, 1997) / Novalis, *The Birth of Novalis: Friedrich Von Hardenberg’s Journal of 1797, with Selected Letters and Documents*, trans. Bruce Donehower (Albany: SUNY, 2007) / Katie Terezakis, *The Immanent Word: The Turn to Language in German Philosophy, 1759-1801* (London: Routledge, 2007) ...

“True *collaboration in philosophy* then is a common movement toward a beloved world – whereby we relieve each other in the most advanced outpost, a movement that demands the greatest effort against the resisting element within which we are flying.” Novalis, *Logological Fragments* (I.2), in *Philosophical Writings*, trans. Margaret Mahony Stoljar (Albany: SUNY, 1997), cited in Katie Terezakis, *The Immanent Word: The Turn to Language in German Philosophy, 1759-1801* (London: Routledge, 2007), p. 191 ...

Michael Hofmann, “Nonsense Is Only Another Language” – It is hard to know where to begin to praise the book. First off, I can think of no better introduction to the Romantic era: its intellectual exaltation, its political ferment, its brilliant amateur self-scrutiny, its propensity for intense friendships and sibling relationships, its uncertain morals, its rumors and reputations and meetings, its innocence and its refusal of limits. Also, *The Blue Flower* [1995] is a wholly convincing account of that very difficult subject, genius. It is something Penelope Fitzgerald is interested in and has written about in earlier books – Jonathan in *At Freddie’s*, Dolly in *The Beginning of Spring*. But here it is present in the whole younger generation of Hardenbergs, in their curiosity and abruptness and the way they imitate and learn from one another. Fritz’s dissident understanding, his odd mixture of intellectual calm and excited curiosity (“Why not? Nonsense is only another language”) is latent, made clear in the exchanges with his brothers and sisters in a way that is beyond what any biographer could achieve. Things written by the historical Novalis arise here naturally and seamlessly from the character of Fritz – for instance, “We could not feel love for God Himself if He did not need our help.” – Review of Penelope Fitzgerald’s *The Blue Flower*, *New York Times* (April 13, 1997)

...

**THE ENDANGERED SPECIES RESTAURANT**  
2001 Buttes Bluff  
Jackson Hole, Wyoming

## À LA CARTE MULTINATIONAL MENU

1/ Appetizers:

USDA Pig Fetus on Genetically Altered Corn

Cheney Fried Chicken Hearts

Globally Warmed Arctic Oysters (w/ dollop of collagen)

Soup:

American Watered Crust Down

Salad:

Greenhouse Aspice (w/ depleted ozone dressing)

2/ Entrées:

Bushmaster Fillets (always in season)

Dated ABM2 Flambé

First Strike Bombe

JDS Uniphase Soufflé (w/ stock options)

WTO "Ghoulash" (served w/ boilermaker)

Compliments of the house:

Pepper spray and saltpetre (condiments) provided upon request

Iced Yucca Mountain water w/ traces of arsenic, copper, and lead (FDA tested and approved)

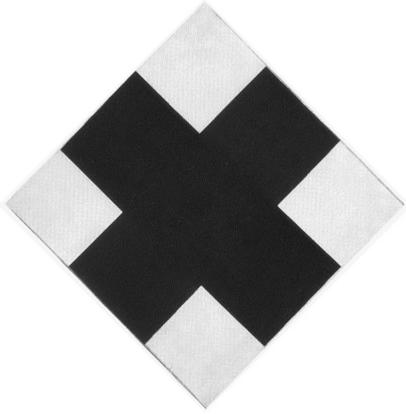
3/ The Dessert Table:

Rogue Isolationist Sorbet

European Uneasy Cake

Dictator's Delight (changes daily)

GK/HG



THE ENDANGERED SPECIES RESTAURANT  
2001 Buttes Bluff  
Jackson Hole, Wyoming

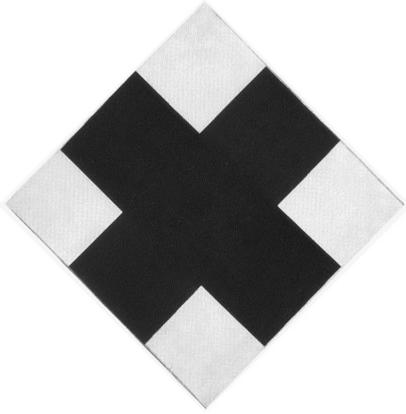
## OUR COMMEMORATIVE EARTH DAY 2002 COCKTAIL\*

YOUR FAVORITE VODKA W/ ANY OR ALL OF THE FOLLOWING:

Benzene, tetrachloroethene (PCE), trichloroethene (TCE), vinyl chloride, ammonia, phosphorus, organo chlorine compounds, phenol, cyclic aromatic compounds, cyanides, chlorobenzene, 1,2,4-trimethylbenzene, 1,3,5-trimethylbenzene, xylenes, polychlorinated biphenyls (PCBs), polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbons (PAHs), semivolatile organic compounds (SVOCs), volatile organic compounds (VOCs), hydrogen chloride, hydrogen sulphide, disiloxane, thorium, arsenic, zinc, lead, mercury, heptachlor, lindane, chlordane, aldrin

\*One cocktail per customer (FDA approved)

GK/HG



**THE ENDANGERED SPECIES RESTAURANT**  
2001 Buttes Bluff  
Jackson Hole, Wyoming

## ENDANGERED SPECIES MENU

1/ Appetizers:

Invertebrate Specialties:

Alamosa Spring Snails (in a thick agave sauce)  
Oahu Tree Snails (par boiled in extra virgin olive oil)  
Cumberland Pig-Toe Mussels  
Giant Kangaroo Rat Tails (served on a lush bed of Palos Verde Blue Butterfly wings)  
Siberian Crane Croquettes (thermo-basted in Afghanistan)

Pate:

Aleutian Canadian Goose

Salad Bar:

Aged agave, Bakersfield Cactus blossoms, Barneby Reed Mustard leaves, Clay's Hibiscus, Garret's Mint, and Prairie Bush Clover served on a bed of Eureka Dune Grass surrounded by Western Prairie Orchids sprinkled with sub-Saharan sand

Soup:

Great Sea Turtle (in-the-shell option serves eight)

2/ Entrées:

Mammalian Entrées:

Ocelot Flank Steak (char broiled)  
Sonoran Pronghorn (redwood smoked)  
Baby Kit Fox (oven roasted)  
Carolina Northern Flying Squirrel (wings clipped)  
Amargosa Vole Sushi  
Dugong Loaf (serves two or more)  
Jacarundi Broil  
Miscellaneous entrails with sea biscuits

Fowl:

Attwater's Greater Prairie Chicken  
Brown Pelican Stew (served in beak)  
California Condor  
Mallard Mariana  
Spotted Owl (w/ old-growth moss garnish)  
(All dishes served w/ complimentary Bald Eagle feathers)

Fish:

Golden Trout  
Pallid Sturgeon  
Irradiated Coho Salmon  
Aged Blue Whale Blubber (in Champagne broth)

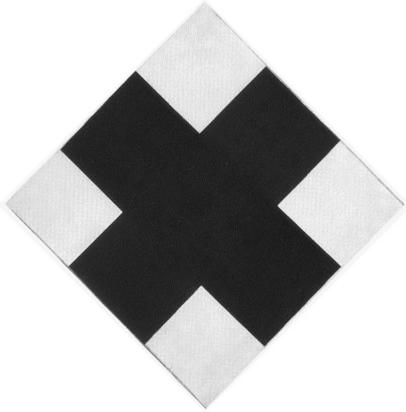
Reptile Delights:

Baby New Mexican Rattle Snakes  
American Alligator Tails  
Road Flattened Musk Tortoise  
Sand Skink In A Basket

3/ Dessert:

Baked Alaskan Sludge Bars (served on parchment tort)

GK/HG



THE ENDANGERED SPECIES RESTAURANT  
2001 Buttes Bluff  
Jackson Hole, Wyoming

## WINE LIST

1/ **Genoa Blood-Red Chianti, 2001**

Full-bodied, curious coagulants, redolent of teargas and buckshot

2/ **Quebec Cabernet Sauvignon, 2001**

Furious palette cleanser, olde-world aura, secretive and cryptic  
aftertaste

3/ **Bohemian Sekt, 2000**

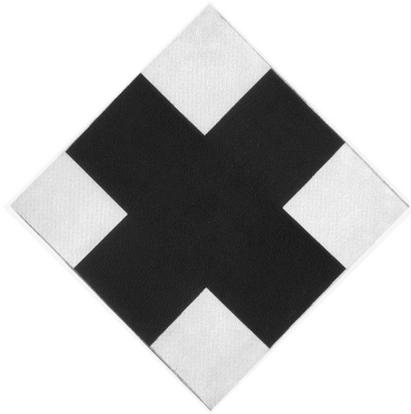
A sparkling white, haunting effervescent allure w/ traces of  
burning tires and a barely discernable rumble of paramilitary  
operations

4/ **Seattle 'Johannesburg' Riesling, 1999**

All-satisfying Rhineland bouquet, excellent w/ irradiated salmon  
and poached triple-yolk eggs on a bed of synthesized lettuce

5/ **Sarajevo Modoc Surprise, 1999**

A rare blend of Albanian and Montenegrin grapes, handpicked by  
Croatian virgins, brutally squeezed by Serbian police officers,  
unusually sweaty aroma, best served late at night (House Wine)



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