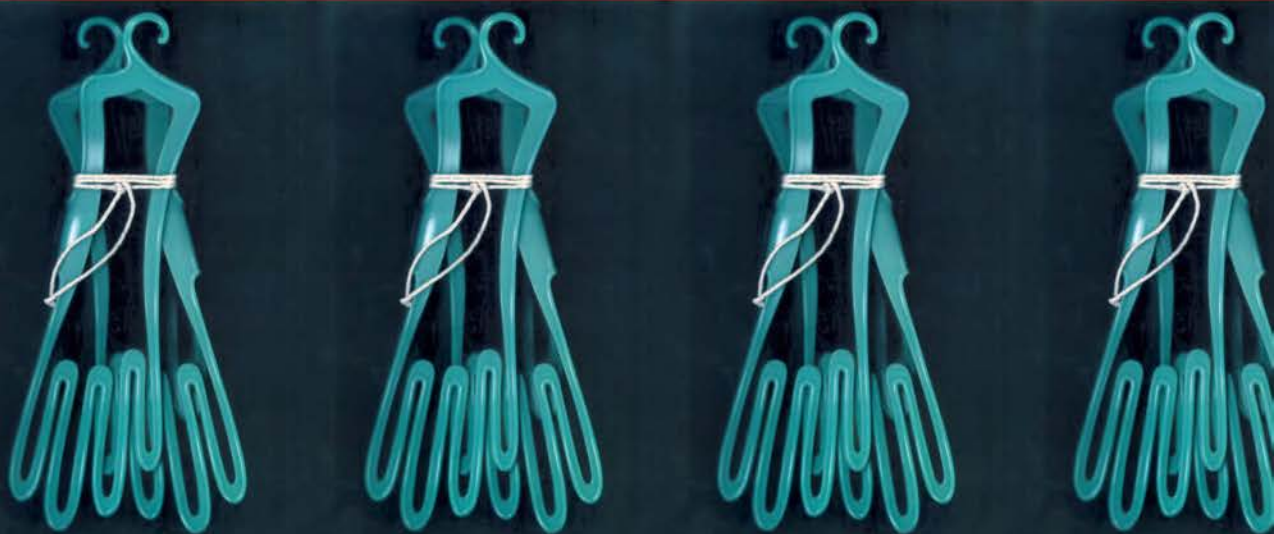


the
eight
technologies
of
otherness



author
editor

sue golding

the eight techno logies of other ness

The eight technologies of otherness is a bold and provocative re-thinking of identity, politics, philosophy, ethics and cultural practices – a book which journeys amongst and through the very unholy groundings of corrupted surfaces, shot through with strange time, space, matter, and speed. Old essentialisms and binaric divides collapse under the weight of a new and impatient necessity, which is itself nothing more nor less than the various everyday strategies and technologies of making meaning ‘stick’.

But as sue golding asks in her *Word of Warning*, what would happen to the so-called ‘postmodern’ if we were to stop sterilizing the wounds? If we were to take seriously political freedom; cultural revolution; fear; disease; trash; flesh; multiple ethics; homelessness; rhythm; violence; virtual bodies; computing sciences; boredom; anger; light; experimentation; art – and all the myriad joys and fears that come from a refusal to be comforted by the easy, neat, and clean? The short answer: we would be playing with fire.

The longer answer, in all its tactile rawness, spins out in the eight technologies: **curiosity, noise, cruelty, appetite, skin, nomadism, contamination, and dwelling**. These technologies stand, in a way, on their own; and yet are not fully resolved in and of themselves. But why only eight technologies? And why these eight, in particular? The thirty-three artists, philosophers, film-makers, writers, photographers, political militants, and ‘pulp-theory’ practitioners whose work (or life) has contributed to the re-thinking of ‘otherness’ to which this book bears witness throw out a few clues. We might wish to say: the unbearable lightness of necessity, suspense, horror . . .

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the
eight
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London and New York

l o g i e s
o f
o t h e r n e s s

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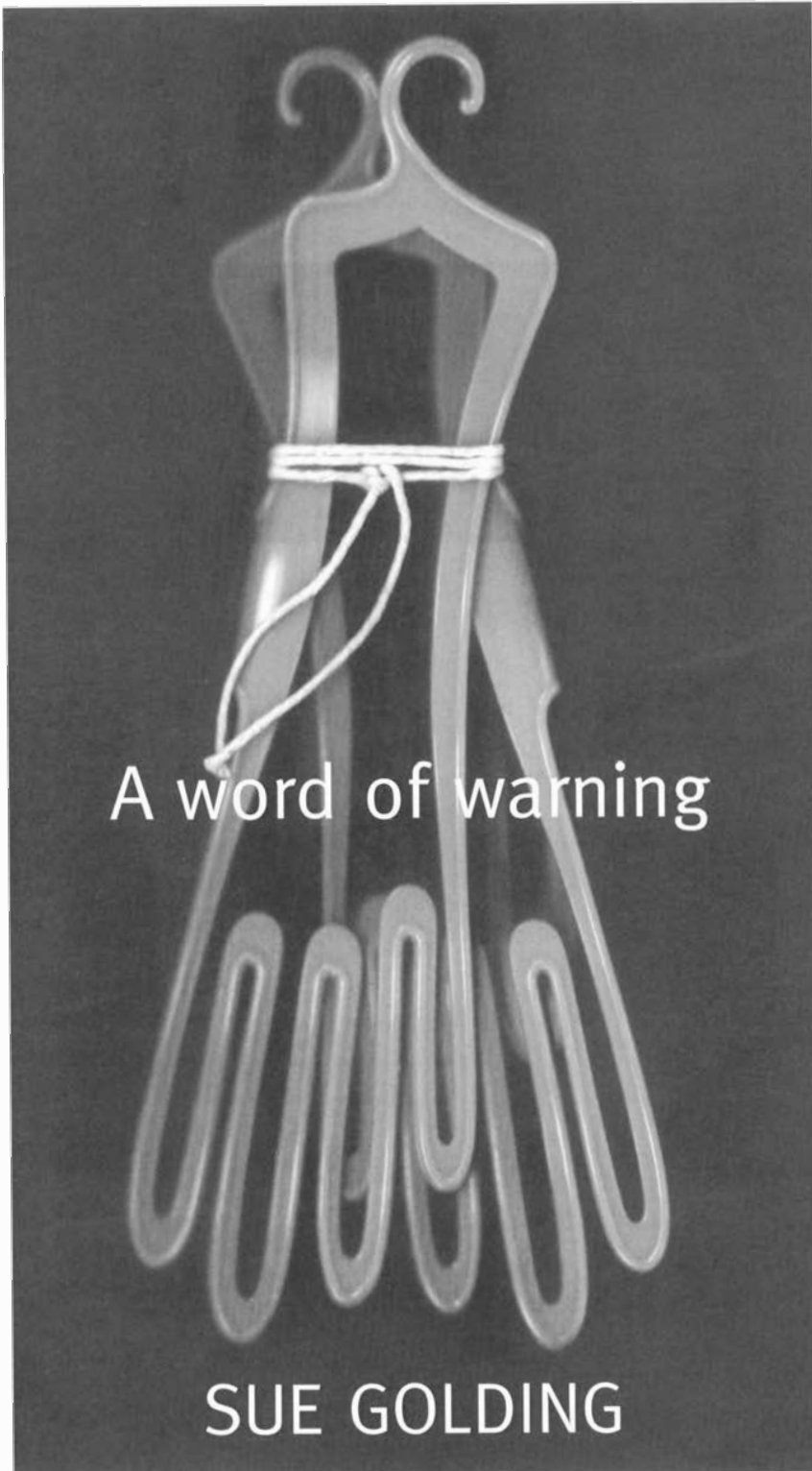
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To my mother, Joyce E. Golding, for her courage,
humour and aesthetic sense of beauty



[Anyone who does not understand why we talk about these things must feel what we say to be mere trifling.]
Wittgenstein 1974, 174, no. 125

We are at a peculiar moment. Suddenly and without proper counsel, this erstwhile thing called 'political philosophy' turns strange. No longer do the old clothes fit, and there are many amongst its followers who advocate its annihilation, having, for at least the last fifteen to twenty-five postmodernist years tried the second-hand shops and recycling bins once too often. Navel-gazing has always had its shortcomings, one has to say, despite its popularity in the hallowed halls of academe and aesthetic angst, alike.

But what if we were to stop sterilizing the wounds?

What if it were to be admitted that the usual, empty phrases – like the so-called 'deep and violent cut' of meaning, truth, death, indeed identity itself: the 'who are we' and 'what are we to become' of science and of life – have collapsed under their own bloodless, sexless weight of self-reflexive reason? For though the very cunning of dialectical logic (historical, metaphysical, or otherwise) has already produced many interesting political dalliances with empowerment, necessity and change, it has, more often than not, simply recast, or (worse) simply reproduced, the very practices it is seeking to overcome – the usual either/or 'deep cut' posturings nonchalantly taking as given a binaric divide: male as an entity distinctly 'opposite' to female; or black as opposed to white, Jew to Muslim, gay to straight, and so on right down the proverbial line. Usually in the name of marginality, excess and diversity, but now, more frequently still, in the name of otherness itself, we sadly, annoyingly, are often left with a kind of 'shopping list' of so-called subjective 'other' identities – be it woman, Jew, immigrant, person of colour, s/m dyke, whore, etc. - gathered together in opposition to the so-called objective 'dominant-power' forms of identities, often named male, white, heterosexual, middle or ruling class.

There is something not quite right with this picture . . .

Yes, yes: difference, multiplicity, excess, indeed (and especially) otherness 'exist'; yes: racism and other forms of hate – sexism, classism, homophobia, war, gangland targeting against an x or a y – run rampant. Even so, there is something not quite right with the identity politics, 'shopping list of oppressions' picture.

Perhaps it was the mere fact of witnessing. Of bearing witness to the savage meanness of HIV-related illnesses playing violent-nasty with the bodies of friends. Over fifty dead (and this utterly minimal next to someone else's story) – movement politics aside, one feels like standing on street corners, so bereft, except with a photo in hand, finally reduced to grabbing anyone in passing and asking: did you know David? or Brian? or Jamie? or Alexander? or Lorne? let me tell you what he was like, the music he loved, the nightclubs he frequented, the type of funeral he chose, the kind of breakfast he loved to eat, the humour, the anger, the pastiche in which he would engage, against the drug barons, the tabloids,

the employer; against the nightmare of memory or the fear of forgetting. Against the movement itself.

Perhaps it was the mere fact of pleasure-seeking. Of taking seriously the right to happiness and fun, liberty, sexual freedoms; of engaging, wrestling, jousting with all forms of knowledge from the carnal to the cerebral and back again. Of the draw to the city, to the urban. A kind of light joy one minute, but the next: unexpected assault, broken noses and bruised body parts by hate-brooding stalkers or moral-authority gatekeepers or, worse still, by those with 'no reason' at all: utter caprice, boredom.

Perhaps it was the mere fact of the web-site surfing. Of donning different personas (or even non-personas) with other techno-nerds and cyberpunk 'officianados'. Trans-moving, trans-lating, trans-locating over a virtual skein whose porosity broke the promise, at least for a nanosecond or two, of an established order, whatever that order might be, without, in its wake, establishing another.

Perhaps it was the mere fact of Gregorian chants – and Hildegard von Bingen in particular, with her twelfth-century 'Voice of the Blood' and 'Canticles of Ecstasy'. Or of her peculiar time and her, even more peculiar, timing. Or maybe it was Elvis. Or Warhol. Or metamorphosing from Daddy-boy to dada-borg in twelve less-than-easy steps.

Perhaps it was all these things or something else altogether. But Reader: beware! For whatever it was, and whatever it is, and whatever it will be, the bitty, natty, everyday pieces and points of what constitutes 'identity' in all its singular and plural shadings and tones, turns on a very different notion of 'otherness' than that old bugbear of eternal deep divide, of the 'that' and its 'not'. At its most basic understanding, otherness is simply and only a cosmetic wound; a very thin, virtual, and in this sense 'impossible' limit. It can never be a person, or a thing, animal, vegetable or mineral. It is neither violent nor cruel, nor for that matter loving and joyous. For this 'cut' is only and always just a superficial dimension: a surface. But it is 'surface' – superficial (though not in the slightest 'trivial') – not in the sense of being the 'last layer' or 'top' of say, a table or a body. On closer inspection, it *is* the 'is' – the '/' – between the either and its or. And yet this planed notion of surface is rather vampiric. For it requires a certain kind of blood and food, a certain kind of something, necessary for it to 'make sense' and, in its turn, give meaning 'back'. That certain 'something' or somethings are precisely the, in this case, eight technologies which are themselves nothing more or less than relations, 'techniques', or *technē* (in Foucault's sense): the everyday strategies we use, wittingly or no, to make all the we-selves into me-selves.

These technologies, all eight of them (curiosity, noise, cruelty, appetite, skin, nomadism, contamination and dwelling), stand, in a way, 'on their own'; and yet are not fully resolved in and of themselves. Taken together or apart, they form a kind of spider leg to the 'spider' of otherness – itself also nothing but a kind of gaseous blob (one searches for the most accessible 'picture' available) that disappears the

moment it is nearest at hand. A corruption of the limit, whilst limiting none the less.

The eight technologies skates along this very tactile and restless surface and its – sometimes perverse and iconoclastic – technologies. In fact, the book is itself a construction of otherness; the very articles in it are not simply preoccupying a certain set of themes, values, ethics, pornographies, etc. Rather, they are, also, fictive, but no less ‘real’, ingredients, which create (as do the named technologies to which they are attached) long-legged spider-tropes connecting, in form as well as content, the cybernetics of the everyday. A kind of rhythmic beat-beatings of an ‘otherness’ which is nothing but a pluralised ‘surface’, whose technologies give it life, and whose life bleeds into uncontainable or differently containable identities.

And therein lies their spell; their seduction and repulsion and boringness of the ‘that’ which makes meaning ‘stick’.

But why only eight technologies? And why these and not other ones? Indeed. Why only Ten Commandments, and not, say, eleven or even two thousand? In searching for the answer to the ‘why question’, the earnest students in my first year Meanings and Moralities class kindly offered this as an initial response: ‘God had only two tablets, and it would have been impossible to have squeezed any more on to those stones.’ ‘But it was *God!*’ I countered. ‘Couldn’t God have found, or even made on spec, larger tablets, or written whole soliloquies in the sky or all over the universe, had he so wanted?’

A tough series of questions to be sure.

The thirty-three artists, philosophers, film-makers, writers, photographers, political militants and ‘pulp-theory’ practitioners whose work (or life) has contributed to a wholly different concept – and technique/use/practice – of otherness throw out a few clues.

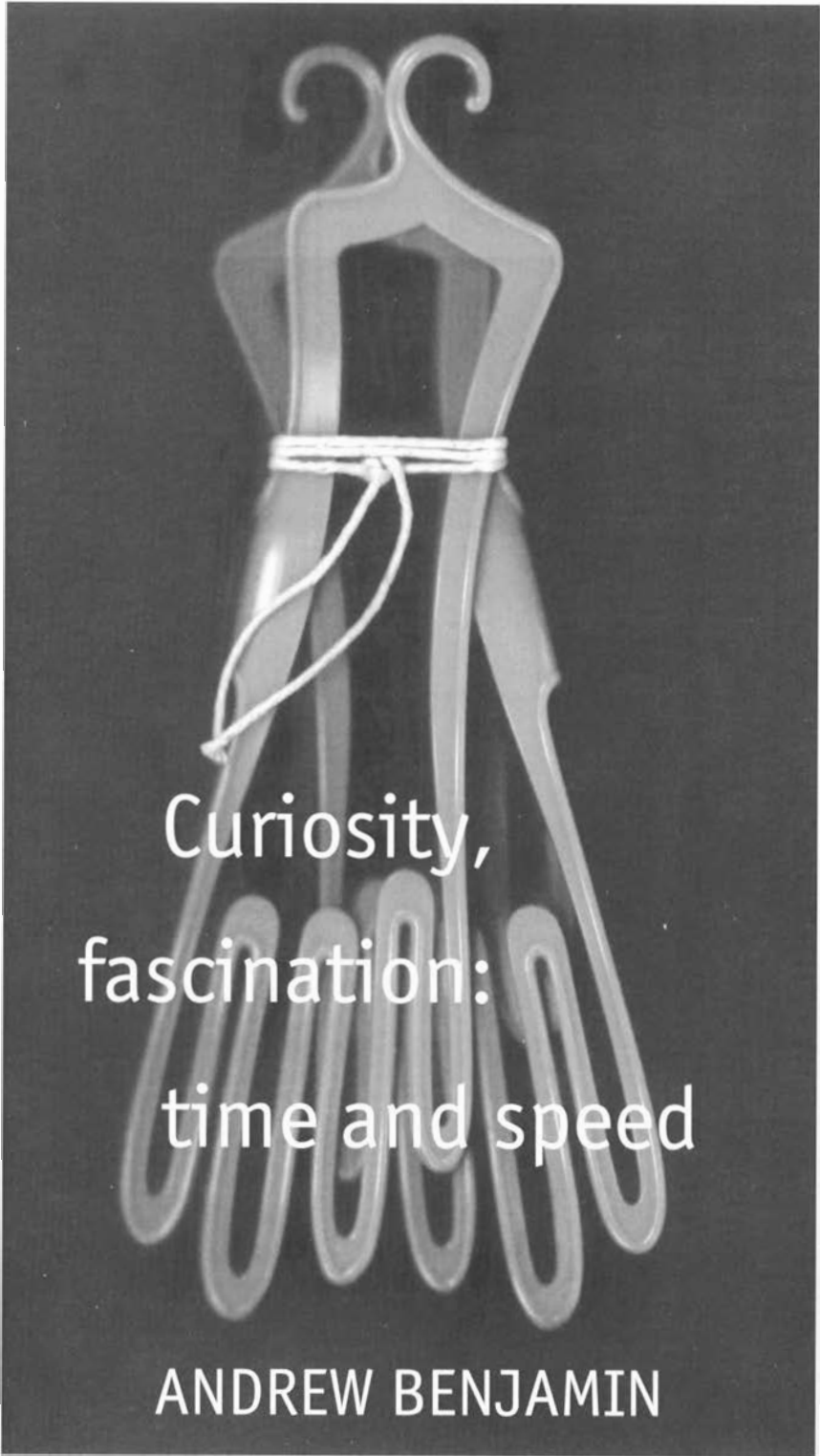
We might wish to say: the unbearable lightness of necessity, suspense, horror . . .

But in any case, and suddenly and without proper counsel, this erstwhile thing called ‘political philosophy’ turns strange.

Reference

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Curiosity



Curiosity,
fascination:
time and speed

ANDREW BENJAMIN

- *Je serai curieux de te revoir.*
- Returning will indicate the impossibility of a final separation and thus an exacting moment of freedom. The hold of fascination, the lingering that marks curiosity will give rise to another freedom.
- There will have to be a place in which coming back, returning, brings with it what for some will be a certain emptiness, but for the one held by curiosity, longing within fascination, the return is the moment in which fascination and curiosity will be able to figure. They will have effected a movement of return eschewing recovery.
- To have allowed for a certain interest.
- Without the determining will to know, to master, and yet without the indifference that marks having yielded to complacency, there exists a possibility of entry. A way in still allowing for the hold of a certain negativity.
- There will be the joy of abandoning oneself – giving up myself – to another form of knowing. A knowledge without knowledge and therefore of taking the path of another pursuit.
- What comes to be held in place is allowing for a certain threat; holding to a form of seduction; a holding yielding an engagement, even another passion. Curiosity sustains attention. Its sustaining attention is the founding mark of the curious.
- Writing of C. G. (Constantin Guys), writing of his art, Baudelaire substitutes the expression *homme du monde* for the word *artiste*. Artists, in this formulation, remain restricted, held in place, by having the mentality of the village, the hamlet. In contrast to this placing there is the '*citoyen spirituel de l'univers* [spiritual citizen of the universe]'. It will be in terms of this geography that Baudelaire will introduce curiosity:

Ainsi pour entrer dans la compréhension de C. G prenez note toute de suite de ceci: c'est que la curiosité peut être considérée comme le point de départ de son génie. (794)¹

[Thus, in order to begin to understand C. G., the following should immediately be noted: that curiosity should be considered as the starting point of his genius.]

- In this complex passage, and thus in how curiosity comes to be worked out in *Le Peintre de la vie moderne*, speed has to be taken as a point of departure. (Baudelaire's own formulation demands it; '*prenez note toute de suite*'). Curiosity is neither deliberative nor intentional. Whatever complications may be introduced by the term *génie*, its real force lies in its opening up the space of immediacy. Curiosity will be an already present relation to the world.
- It was not knowing how not to look. Fascination was a holding of the eye that forced it there.

¹ All references are to *Baudelaire Oeuvres complètes* (Robert Laffot, Paris, 1980).

- **My eye.** Whatever had made it mine, what power the possessive may have had slipped away. Mine, though no longer mine.
- The eye, in being held, is a limited presence. Here the eye can no longer exert an absolute hold. Even in the depth of seeing, within fascination, the eye's work remains partial, necessarily, productively, incomplete.
- Partiality *could* have been a limit to have been overcome or effaced. The eye *could* have needed to have been opened or, and this would be the other possibility, its closure recognized. Within this setting blindness would have to have been seen for what it was. And yet, it is here that the eye has a different opening. Fascination and curiosity displace this setting. They will force a repositioning of the eye; freeing it by holding it to another form of vision.
- Writing in the same text though this time of Poe, Baudelaire charts the project – the specificity of a particular *recherche*. The temptation will be that the search for an unknown individual (*un inconnu*) must retain that state of being. The unknown cannot come to be known. Describing the actions of the observer, the coming participant – the ‘man’ of *L’homme des foules* – Baudelaire describes his compulsive decision in a way that draws upon having to secure the status of the unknown.

il se précipite à travers cette foules à la recherche d'un inconnu dont la physionomie entrevue l'a, en un clin d'oeil, fasciné. La curiosité est devenue une passion fatale, irrésistible. (794)

[he rushes out into the crowd in search of an unknown individual a glimpse of whose face had, in the blink of an eye, fascinated him. Curiosity has become an inevitable, fatal, irresistible passion.]

- Insisting here are questions to do with the body, the interplay of time and speed ‘*en un clin d'oeil*’ [‘in the blink of an eye’], of an inherent partiality of seeing and the necessity to hold to the presence of an irresistible though none the less fatal passion. How do they come to be linked to curiosity and fascination? Initially they seem to be placed within the ambit of death. And yet, here the fatality of passion, breaks the hold of death – the interdictions yielding retribution – by linking fatality to a form of release. A hold will have been broken, as the hold of the irresistible takes over.
- Curious in the place of death.
- **I cannot help but look.** However in looking my gaze cannot be returned with any form of full acknowledgement.
- The object of curiosity – equally that which fascinates – will complicate alterity. Demanding a different other will be the demand that it sets in play.
- There need not have been a response. I could have been drawn – my hold held – by that which would otherwise have refused being seen. Part of the complexity at work within fascination is its link to the abject. Once curiosity and fascination are drawn together then the abject potential inhering within fascination can be named, not just as curiosity's other dimension, but as its

potential. The mark of the curious is the place of the unsettled, the unsettling, the aberrant, that which resists assimilation, what will endure as the curious. With enduring time figures.

- To be curious, to be fascinated is to have been positioned. What fascinates, what engenders curiosity, positions. Between the positioned and that which positions a space will be held open. Time and space come to be linked. Enduring is as much a spatial relation as it is temporal.
- Baudelaire's own fascination with Poe should not be the central concern. And yet within the continuity of his writings on Poe – two major pieces between 1852 and 1855 – there endures a complex consideration of Poe's own aesthetic. Poe and Guys were creators of the minor. With Poe it was *la Nouvelle*. The force of this work, in part linked to its size, lay in its capacity for intensity '*sa brièveté ajoute à l'intensité de l'effet*' ['its brevity adds to the intensity of the effect']. The limit of *la Nouvelle* lay in the link Baudelaire will establish between rhythm, beauty, and truth. With it, poetry emerges as superior. (In 1860 Baudelaire signed a contract for four books. One was to be entitled *Curiosités esthétiques*.)
- The presence of intensity is maintained within the pursuance of the *l'inconnu* within (perhaps also as) the unmasterable crowd. What will identify the play of minor is the deferral of beauty because of the retention of intensity. *L'amoureux de la vie universelle entre dans la foule comme dans un immense réservoir d'électricité* ['The lover of universal life steps into the crowd as into an enormous reservoir of electricity'] (795). Again, it is the lover of *la vie universelle* who, in being held apart from the artist, allows for the possibility of creating an irreparable opening. Its consequence might be that Baudelaire's demand that the transitory and the eternal work together would no longer be tenable. As such Baudelaire's own conception of modernity will have become impossible. Modernity's possibility, what defines its presence, demands another enactment and therefore a different description.
- With the possible abeyance of the eternal, speed and time may come to define the place of the modern and thus the work of modernity.
- I turn towards that which cannot be assimilated. It is not a question of whether it could be taken in, or even when it will be, it is positioned outside, refusing incorporation. Not wanting to look, perhaps wanting not to look, I continue to turn to that which cannot be assimilated.
- The space allowing for distance may be traversed by hand or the fingers. What fascinates perhaps that which yields to the caress will be an element, a part. And yet it could never be, as long as it fascinates, part of the whole. Neither metonymy nor universality figure with fascination.
- My fingers were held at this opening; this giving forth that will always, and of necessity be held back. What was held back remained unnoticed, it did not figure, such is fascination's insistence on particularity.
- The particular of fascination is almost self-defined. It need not reach beyond

itself – demanding a form of actual or potential incorporation – in order that it be what it is. Here particularity will announce itself.

- Part of the particular, part of what holds it in place, is space. However, the space in question is not that which would otherwise be defined as an absence which came to be filled; space as empty. Here, space is an activity. Spacing is required in order that the unassimilated remain in a relation of distance. Spacing holds the object in place by defining and maintaining a place in which fascination can reign.
- Spacing allows for fascination. Curiosity demands the impossibility of a completing knowledge. Completion can be defined as an elimination of a productive and sustaining spacing.
- Speed has been given in relation to the eye: *'en un clin d'oeil'* ['in the blink of an eye']. The eye will come to open up. Curiosity and fascination arise. They cannot be summoned. Poe did not gradually become fascinated. Fascination – for Poe's man in the crowd – was not the consequence of reflection. It was irresistible; thus a fatal passion.
- Not to be able to resist, is not passion *tout court*? Not being able to resist defines passion in terms of time. Immediate passion. Equally, it is defined in terms of speed. Speed and time are intertwined. That relation is announced thus – *'en un clin d'oeil'* ['in the blink of an eye'].
- Modernity, for Baudelaire, will have become the constant interplay of the eternal and that which designates the place of the present. The transitory and the fugitive – the two defining qualities of the presentness of the modern – have to endure, otherwise all that would be left is the emptiness of abstraction. What has to be retained is *'la mémoire du présent'* ['the memory of the present']. What form, however, will this memory have? Baudelaire will have already addressed its necessity.

presque toute notre originalité vient de l'estampille que le temps imprime à nos sensations. (798)

[Nearly all our originality comes from the stamp that time imprints upon our sensations]

The impression of time will have to be set against beauty. Writing in 'Note Nouvelle sur Edgar Poe', Baudelaire has to distance the concerns of Poe from the activity of poetry. The latter has only one end, namely, the idea of beauty. Rhythm is essential in order that this idea be attained. Poe had language. However for Baudelaire such resources were almost the repudiation of poetry and the refusal of beauty. Rhythm remained necessarily absent. And yet, it may be that another way of construing rhythm will have fallen within the province of Poe.

- There will have been a type of continuity. Once the moment had begun, there was a withdrawal, something no longer pertained. Addressing this absence does not demand the recall of the structure of melancholia. What is absent is the hold of discrimination.

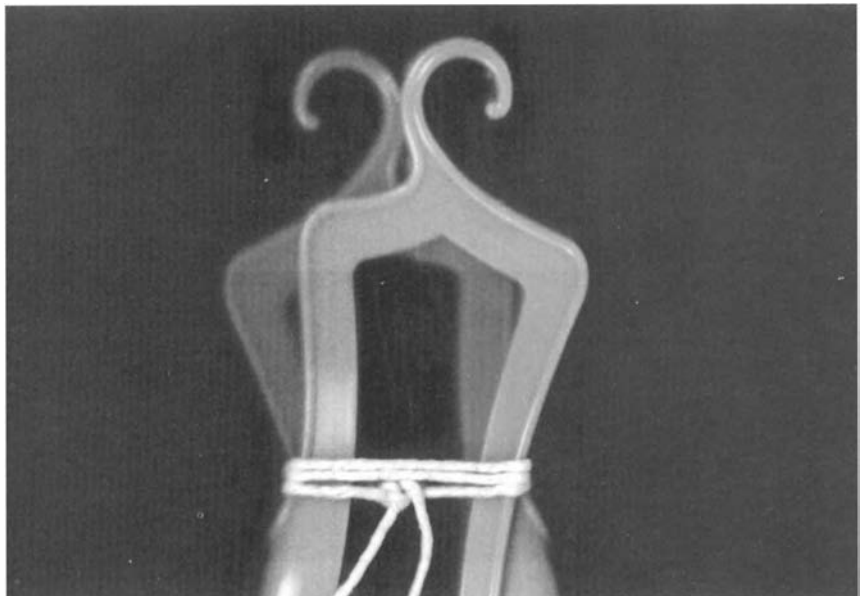
- I encounter that which repels. I am held by repulsion.
- Allowing what would otherwise have caused the eye to close – otherwise if it had been a written or spoken explanation, ‘this is what you will see’ – now, with the hold of sight, there is the demand that the eye no longer decide.
- Be it mere object, or the insistent presence of the abject, an almost fatal fascination will continue to endure.
- What held Baudelaire, what allowed for the hold of the minor, may have been the instability of the eternal. It may have been, moreover, the growing impossibility of linking rhythm to the poetic act and only to that act. Crowds move. They may allow for their own rhythm. Not rhythm as the stirring of the soul but the irregular changing of place – the disappearance and the reappearance – that marks the hold of the crowd.
- Once intensity began to play a determining role, once speed, the brevity that heightened the place of writing and thus the grip it exercised, figured as that which introduced the possibility of other literatures, there will have been an opening. Furthermore, once it becomes possible to link speed and time to the placing and thus the unfolding of the body within the crowd, then its written equivalent will force aside the place of the eternal because of its – the eternal’s – insistence on the very movement of process and thus of writing. In other words, as the eternal takes place in writing its hold on eternity begins to slip because of its presentation in and as writing.
- The eternal – Baudelaire’s ‘idea of beauty’ – must resist the hold of abstraction; the reduction to pure beauty at the expense of the modern. Pure though impoverished. Moving from the place of abstraction will demand having to introduce that which the eternal may not be able to control. Countering the place of the eternal – its playing itself out in the movement of poetry – is intensity.
- Intensity will have become another way of identifying the particularity of fascination and with it the hold of curiosity.
- The threat will have already been there. What will have to be maintained is a certain harmony – the shocking harmony – and an admiration for eternal beauty. Maintaining it will occur at the same time as the tumult of *la liberté humaine* [human freedom] begins to exercise its own pressure. One must be seen in the other. On the one hand there would be the threat of pure chaos if they – the eternal and the transitory – were not located in relation to each other. And yet, on the other hand, there is the possibility that once the tumult is allowed its place, then what will vanish is its counter-positioning to the eternal. The tumult will have been freed. Electricity, its rhythmic power will have dictated another possible order; perhaps, a minor order.
- How could this possibility have been excised? Any answer will need to commit itself to the necessity of writing to secure the eternal: to have become its home. Writing, the practice that will be at work in poetry, may

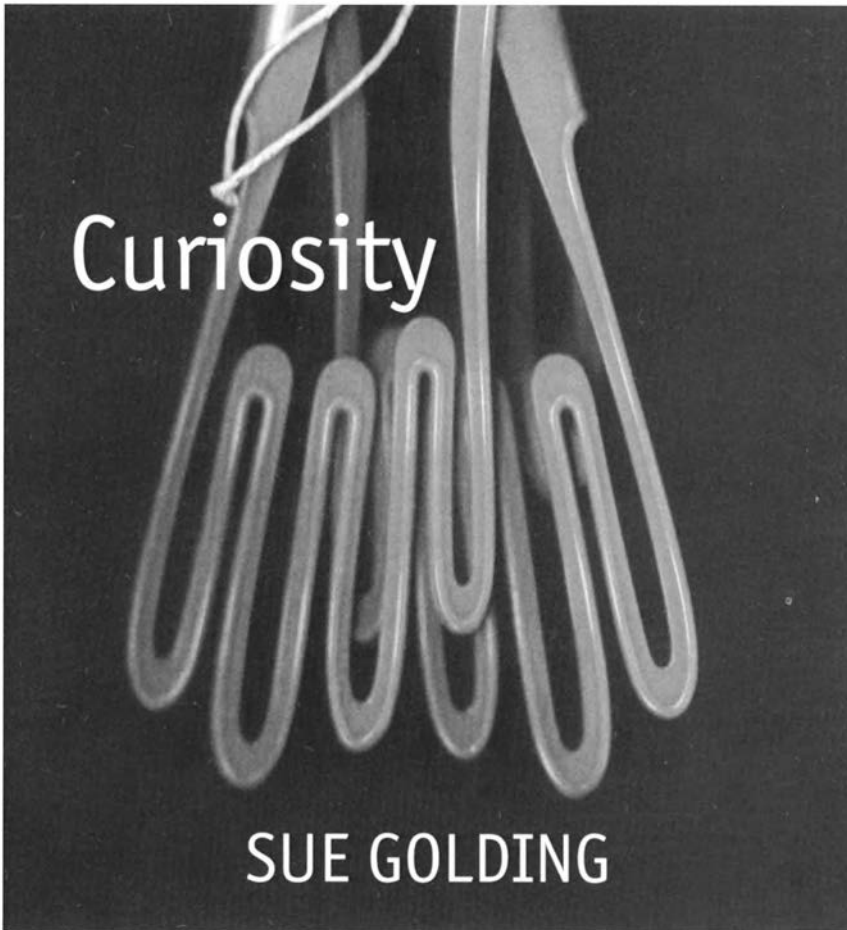
bring a rhythm and an intensity into play, which, rather than securing the eternal, will, in fact write it. The idea of beauty, Baudelaire's continual site of return – a site in which the presence of the eternal controls by orchestrating all activity – may be there because of the activity of writing. What it tried to control is that which in inscribing, placing, its presence rids it of control by giving it the object of control. Eternality would emerge therefore as having been stripped of the counter measure of the transitory by having become the result of writing.

- Eternally written; the transitory place of writing.
- Might there have been a reason restricting the play, the movement, of that which fascinates? Is there a morality that will check its hold? Will it come to restrict the place of curiosity?
- With the question of morality both curiosity and fascination may well have been checked. Once the nature of the object – of that which holds the eye – arises as a question; once it becomes possible to delimit the object's quality; once it is necessary to identify that quality thereby restricting its force and loosening its hold – the eye fades – then, rather than the determining hold of the moral being central, there will be the possibility that curiosity and fascination could come to exercise their own hold on the question of morality.
- What must be questioned is the place of curiosity and fascination. With that questioning space and time will return. Arising with that return is the difficult problem of linking the necessity of space – spacing as the precondition for curiosity and fascination – time, enduring as that which is produced by spacing, and the emergent obligation of having to attribute a specific quality to the object.
- At first glance the attribution of quality will close the incision, yielding fascination and curiosity.
- Freedom as given by a response to an object where the response while owned shakes itself free of the hold of real possession. A freedom from which another, this time a different freedom will have emerged. Freedom will have come into contact with the possibility of anonymity. Not the anonymity of freedom but freedom as the release of the anonymous.
- Once possession begins to lose its hold – my eye though no longer strictly mine – I maintain myself but in its – this *my* – dispersal into the practice, the activity of seeing.
- I will have reached back – attained myself – by allowing for a repositioning in which my having been dispersed – lost, lingering within curiosity – will itself have been lost. This second loss is intentional. The former could never have been. Freedom as having become free. Again the complex presence of differing types of freedom.
- Poe, even within the setting provided by Baudelaire, had given to the 'man in the crowd' a type of freedom. It was not the freedom that would have absolved him from responsibility; an unfettered – though only putatively – freedom to act. It was the more complex freedom in which

the loss of control – the release of the controlling *mine* – engendered the freedom into which he was given. In giving himself – releasing himself from himself was his becoming enmeshed within fascination. He has become subject to it; thus he had become its subject.

- Release, here – the subject of fascination – has become the correlate to the threat that will work away at the eternal.
- Freedom is connected to the unknown; thus to what cannot be known. Accepting the determining place of anonymity enjoins the necessity to hold to a distance in which the unknown can figure. Allowing for distance and thus the role of an ineliminable spacing is to yield to the place of writing. Writing fascinates to the extent that spacing is maintained. Baudelaire's own fascination with Poe generates such an aesthetic. Poe endures not as the unknown but as the writer of the unmasterable; allowing writing to be guide of, to be guided by, the necessity to maintain the unknown. Known yet unknown will have become the practice of writing. Writing out the eternal by stripping it of its necessity even if its place – the eternal's place – is subsequently written back in. What is subsequent – its quality – enacts the eternal's presence.
- The eternity of writing practises the eternal not as idea, but as the constant interplay of the finite within the infinite; thus as writing.
- Freedom; my having been dispersed. As a part of what is mine, apart from what is mine, my presence is constructed by the hold of curiosity and by the lines of fascination. Having been freed from myself another obligation holds sway; it is still mine.
- Allowing for spacing, holding distance in place, opens up the insistent reality that my presence, thus my own possibility, is no longer merely mine. Being held yields a me that is not just mine.





How to describe a world that evades us, not because it is ungraspable but, on the contrary, because there is too much to grasp? (Blanchot 1982, 24)

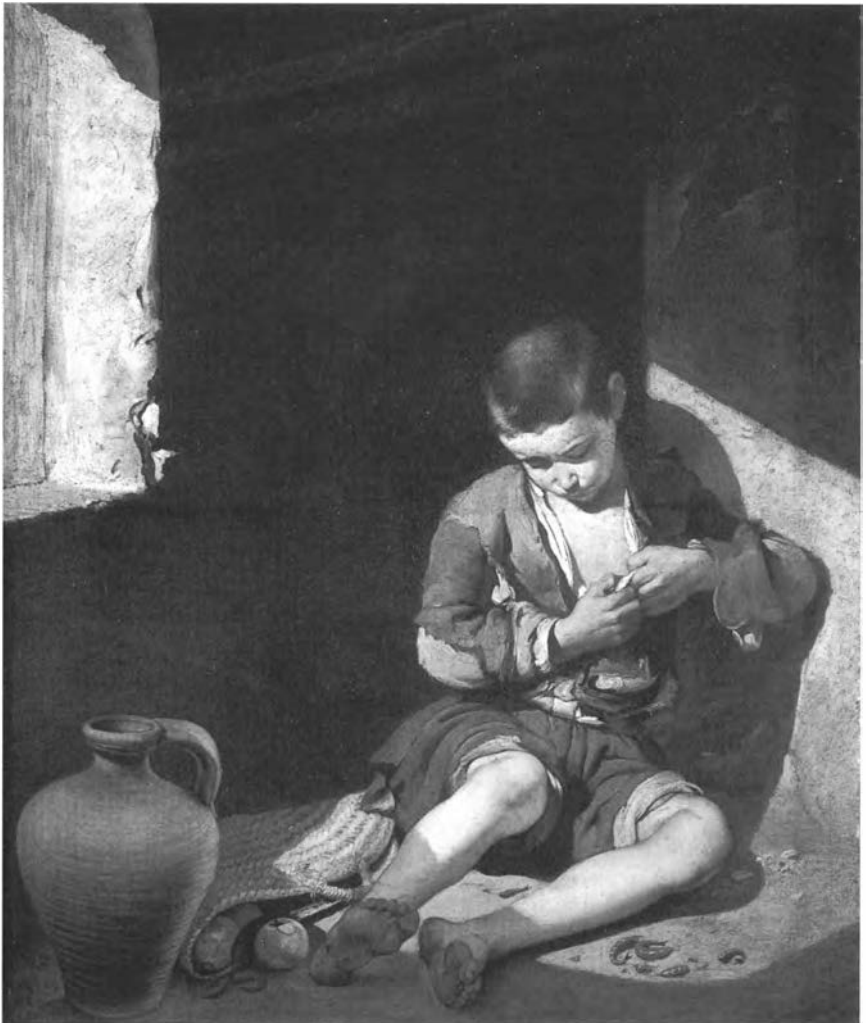
I want to take issue with (or perhaps, better put, I want to re-issue) three things: the problem of negation understood often as void or lack (and the abyssal logics therein implied); the privileging of temporality (and with it the so-called subordination of space); and, finally, the question of the [a-]moral interregnum and the possibility of a (contingently exiled) ethical ground. Shall we, maybe for the sake of brevity – though, maybe not – say that the intersection of these three axes creates a peculiar sort of land, a desert land, a land I shall name: curiosity?

As with every investigation, this 'curious' problem can best be situated with an echo from the past; in this case by beginning with Ricardo's now infamous suggestion of taking as a given the 'supposing that . . . ' of science and of life.¹ Supposing that we are interested in, for example: change; not just for the sake of it, of course, but rather, because the democratic world towards which we strive and wish to partake, continually, happily, and in perpetuity, just does not seem to be quite 'here', at least, not yet. Supposing that, moreover, in thinking the

¹ See also, Golding, 1992, 56.

possibility of such a radical political space called 'democracy', we start re-thinking the implicit assumptions inherent in what it is (and what it is not) to be human or, for that matter, what this 'being human' could conceivably become. Immediately we are struck by the (not so subsidiary) problem of objectivity and, more to the point, of this seemingly slippery slope, offhandedly called 'the truth' – an objective/truth so very slippery especially when wanting to include (in that beingness of human) this fanciful thing called imagination.

Supposing that, finally, we are struck by the paradox that the very world in which we dwell does not at all resemble our picture of it – not because we have yet to discover or trace it properly, but because its boundaries elude the very landscape of our framework. If asked at point blank range, 'show me the edge of the earth, the precise precipice, the absolute moment at which it goes otherwise into space', we could never point exactly to it and say 'look over here; here is where it is'. This does not, for a single minute, prevent us from having a picture of our world or, indeed, of our universe.



Le Jeune Mendiant,
Bartolome Murillo
(1617–82), Musée du
Louvre, Paris. © Photo:
RMN – Jean.

Taking up the void

As we know from reading our Hegel, particularly the Hegel of the *Encyclopedia* and, more to the point, of *The Phenomenology*, the immediate presence of a thing is always-already 'im-mediate'.² That is, it is always-already mediated by the division between the here and the not-here, i.e., the this and its other. Or, to put it slightly differently, whatever one understands by the 'is' must always, of necessity, be set in relation to the that which is its 'not'. At once we have at our disposal the concept of the 'this' as something which must always be understood as a unity, a self-differentiating unity, whose totality exhausts the entirety of the real, in all its possible and impossible permutations. But at the same time, we are also confronted with the irritation that this positive/negative relationship – which, taken together, includes all that might or could be thinkable – remains abstract, neatly grounded as it is (up to this point) only in the tautology of that which is its not. Enter the Hegelian dialectic.

Without repeating all the profound and subtle intricacies of this particular logic, suffice it to say that in deepening (or widening) the scope – that is, in contextualizing any self-differentiating unity as a synthetic unity, made meaningful only on the basis of a teleological/dialectical synthesis, i.e., on the basis of a becoming-ness from which it emerges and to which it points – we grasp the very relation around which identity, and therewith meaning, is itself produced. It is on this basis that we come to understand that there can be no identity, and therewith no meaning, without a (relational) separation, a distinction, between the 'this' and its negation, unified and plunged as it must, of necessity, be in the very movement of its immanent realization.

And yet, despite the insistence, logical or otherwise, on the immediacy of the split-shift, a whole set of worries emerges. It is a set of worries that can, partially, be summed up by the very different uses of one word: negation. For, is it not the case that often in leaping from theory to practice (and back and forth again), we find in the very concept of identity a whole series of oppositional relations which, taken as a unity, are supposed to exhaust the entirety of the field; i.e., differential unities claiming, say, woman as that which is distinct and opposed to man; or gay as that which is distinct and opposed to straight; or person of colour as that which is distinct and opposed to white; or Jew as that which is distinct and opposed to Christian – all of which, in the unity of their self-differentiability are supposed to circumscribe the whole of the field. Indeed, has not woman or gay or black or Jew or working class often been understood as Other or Lack or the Not-of-the-Something, always-already established as such?

Adorno was probably not the first, but he certainly was one of the more articulate, of the worriers around this very problem. For him, negation could never be subsumed under the rubric of a positivity, be it dialectic, synthetic, or otherwise. Indeed, negation was precisely the 'not-is' of the something, and therewith could not possibly be presented as if a homogeneous repository, let alone staged as the 'equivalence' of any category, be it woman or black or Jew or working class or the Other or person of colour or void; i.e., as the female 'castrated' container (as it were) of so-called otherness, always-already pitted against and utterly subsumed in terms of the 'phallic' real itself. 'Against this',

² See for example Hegel, 1977, 104–11.

says Adorno, 'the seriousness of unswerving negation lies in its refusal to lend itself to *sanctioning* things as they *are*' (Adorno, 1966a, 159, my emphasis).

So, on the one hand, negation ought not to be understood as if standing outside, opposite, or apart from the 'is'; nor, on the other hand, does negation cleverly disguise itself as affirmation; nor, finally, does it seek to replace it, to become, that is to say, a positivity. Reflecting on the problem in his *Negative Dialectics*, Adorno clarifies it like this:

We can see through the identity principle, but we cannot think without identifying. Any definition is identification [. . .] But [. . .] *Non-identity is the secret telos of identification. It is the part that can be salvaged. The mistake in traditional thinking is that identity is taken for the goal.* (Adorno, 1966b, 149)³

3 My emphasis and brackets.

Indeed, and continuing with this argument, Adorno says, 'The force that shatters the appearance of identity is the force of the thing: the use of 'it is' undermines the form of that appearance, which remains inalienable just the same. Dialectically, cognition of nonidentity lies also in the fact that this very cognition identifies – that *it* identifies to a greater extent, and in other ways, than identitarian thinking. This cognition seeks to say what something is, while identitarian thinking says what something *comes under*, what it exemplifies or represents, and what, accordingly, it is not itself. The more relentlessly our identitarian thinking besets its object, the farther will it take us from the identity of the object (Adorno, 1966b, 149).

[And yet the] nonidentical is not to be obtained directly, as something positive on its part, nor is it obtainable by a negation of the negative. *This negation is not an affirmation itself, as it is to Hegel.* The positive which, to his mind, is due to the result from the negation has more than its name in common with the positivity he fought in his youth. To equate the negation of negation with positivity is the quintessence of identification; it is the formal principle in its purest form. What thus wins out in the inmost core of dialectics is [actually] the anti-dialectical principle: that traditional logic, which *more arithmetico*, takes minus times minus for a plus. It was borrowed from that very mathematics to which Hegel reacts so idiosyncratically elsewhere. [But if] *the whole is the spell, if it is the negative, [then] a negation of particularities – epitomized in that whole – remains negative.* (Adorno, 1966a, 158)


Not only, then, does this mean to say that objectivity cannot be 'static'; it always recruits its meaning within and in terms of a process of synthesis, a synthesis whose identity – and thus, whose subjectivity – is established precisely in terms of its (in this case, dialectic-teleological) negativity. So we find, continuing with the heterogeneity of the negative logic thus implied, that there must always exist some kind of 'excess' which slips past the mirrored reflection of a positivity netted point-for-point against its oppositional distinction. And while this excess cannot be understood as a 'something', neither can it be understood as absolute ether or void. Indeed, this very concept of the excess-as-negation has but a family resemblance to its more vacuous cousin, *l'abysme*.

Why must this be the case? And, more to the point, what is implied, politically, ethically, not to mention theoretically, by claiming that it must be so?

Let's unravel these questions like this: If truth is no longer objective (or, perhaps more efficiently stated, if objectivity is no longer 'static' or 'fixed'); if, that is to say, we have indeed gone beyond Good and Evil as circumscribing the entirety of the field – precisely because there cannot be a point-for-point mimetic relation of fixed identity (since, without some kind of differentiation, identity would either become meaningless or one big indistinguishable lump, which in reality squares to the same thing) – then there must exist somewhere

(logically, reasonably) a 'something' which is a 'not' (and hence, an excess) of that very identity relation. This, then, is to say, further and on the other hand, that this 'something-which-is-a-not' is utterly part and parcel of the is, standing neither outside nor inside. But it is to say, also (though not as 'addendum'), that because of this peculiar relation to the space (and time) of the outside or the in, which both contains the 'something-which-is-a-not' while simultaneously noting its necessary 'excessiveness' (to the very thing to which it's bound), this strange kind of negation situates any identity, indeed constitutes and establishes its meaning.

Think of a melody, any melody either real or imagined. The notes are arranged like so and so along the scale. Their distinction from one another is qualified in a number of ways, say for example with notes c and d, cast perhaps in a minor key of g. However complex or simple we wish to make our melody, none of it is meaningful if the breadth and width and timing does not at once also include the not-spacings between and amongst the notes in question, which, in all their multiple excessiveness, 'contour' and, in that sense, (de-)limit, our song. But also, and even though, this is a 'limiting' or 'contouring' – a 'defining' – it bears no self-reflexive interiorization, no indubitable certainty of an ego-I/self. Nevertheless, it 'makes sense'. Wittgenstein characterizes it like this:

216. 'A thing is identical with itself.' – There is no finer example of a useless proposition . . . Does this spot  'fit' into its white surrounding?
– But that is just how it would look if there had at first been a hole in its place and it then fitted into the hole. But when we say 'it fits' we are not simply describing this appearance; not simply this *situation*.

'Every coloured patch fits exactly into its surrounding' is a rather specialized form of identity.

523. I should like to say 'What the picture tells me is itself.' That is, it's telling me something consists in its own structure, in *its* own lines and colours. (What would it mean to say 'What this musical theme tells me is itself?')

524. Don't take it as a matter of course, but as a remarkable fact, that pictures and fictitious narratives give us pleasure, occupy our minds . . .

527. Understanding a sentence is much more akin to understanding a theme in music than one may think. What I mean is that understanding a sentence lies nearer than one thinks to what is ordinarily called understanding a musical theme. Why is just *this* the pattern of variation in loudness and tempo? One would like to say 'Because I know what it's all about.' But what is it all about? I should not be able to say . . .
(Wittgenstein, n.d., 84–5, 142, 143)⁴

To put the same point differently (and therewith perhaps say another thing altogether), this 'something-which-is-a-not', standing outside and inside exactly at the same time, all the time, in all time's varying dimensions, corruptions and decay, saddles also (and without taming) the disparate and oppositional distinctions; and it does so, whether hovering around a first, second, third, or fourth dimension (or more) or somewhere in between. But this is to say, also

⁴ Compare Nietzsche's remark: '255. *Conversation about music* – which, among other things makes "pictures" or rather "sees" music; knows its colour, etc.' (Nietzsche, n.d., 145).

5 See, for example, where Bataille writes: 'Nothing exists that doesn't have this *senseless sense* – common to flames, dreams, uncontrollable laughter – in those moments when consumption accelerates, beyond the desire to endure. Even utter senselessness ultimately is always this sense made of the negation of all the others. (Isn't this sense basically that of each particular being who, as such, is the *senselessness* of all the others, but only if he doesn't care a damn about enduring – and thought (philosophy) is at the limit of this conflagration, like a candle blown out at the limit of a flame)' (1991, 20).

6 See, for example, Blanchot (1978, 51) where he writes of the connection between the 'outside'/excess (as that of terror/dread) with the problem of 'memory' and 'forgetting' – a connection we will excavate more thoroughly in our text: 'So she came into this room, and what did she meet up with here? From me, the motions of a madman who did not recognize her; for her, a feeling of dread which had forced her outside with the thought that she had seen something she had no right to see, so that my name was the one she would most happily have banished from her memory. I will add that when she answered the question I asked – "Why have you come?" – by saying, "I've forgotten," that answer was much more exact and more important (in my opinion) than the one this story holds.'

7 This conceptual in-between-ness is precisely the 'path', as it were, the 'distance' necessary to create/sustain any living (e.g., 'non-fixed') identity. Indeed, as Foucault puts it, it marks/contours/resuscitates the relation of the 'self to the self'. In his *The Care of the Self*, volume III of *The History*

then, that in this kind of example there is no *temporality* to the grammar of the 'that', i.e. to the paradigm to which it points. '[For] that connexion, a connexion of the paradigms and the names, is set up in our language', says Wittgenstein, 'And [so] our proposition is non-temporal because it only expresses the connexion of [in an example he uses later around colours to appropriate 'the fit'] the words "white", "black", "lighter" with a *paradigm*' (Wittgenstein, 1983, 76; no. 105).

We will return to this last remark in a moment. But for now, let us just say that with this strange little 'excess', we have here, then, an 'impossible' concept, existing and not existing exactly at the same time (or at a different time) all (or none) of the time in the *a-radicality* (the a-rootedness) of its spatial configurations. It is one which must, of necessity, escape the very sameness to which it is confined, and, in so escaping, contour – and, therefore, yes – 'define' the identity of the 'this', whatever that 'this' may come to mean.

But let us look at this 'escape' a bit more carefully. For if there is neither inside nor outside *per se*; if that is to assert, instead, that we have before us a kind of mutant negation which slithers out from the land of the 'neither/nor' rather than from that of the 'either/or', how do we trace the *specificities* of its wanderings or movement, especially if that escape is cast as an excessive relation to that which has never existed 'as such' (or rather, as that which only exists in relation to an impossible negativity)? How do we express the particularity of this kind of negation, especially if it is configured neither as an eternal 'nothingness' stretching off to infinity and beyond nor as some form of nomadic positivity? Burdensome questions, to be sure.

Several political philosophers, writers, artists and the like have attempted an answer. Bataille marks it as a kind of 'senseless sense' (Bataille, 1991);⁵ Blanchot, as 'dread' (later as 'passion') (Blanchot, 1978).⁶ And Foucault, in a pretend dialogue he never had with either, as 'thought from outside', as a quasi-something (or quasi-nothing)

setting its limits as though from without, articulating its end, making its dispersion shine forth, taking in only its invincible absence . . . not in order to grasp its foundation or justification, but in order to regain the space of its unfolding, the void serving as its site. (Foucault, 1990, 15–16)

In each case, it marks (by re-marking) the death of the Other – replacing what would have been cast as an infinite void contrasted to the Something – now, rather, cast in terms of a contingent relation, a contingently negative relation, a relation contouring-yet-constituted-by the *distance* between the not and its other. Foucault names it as a *relation between the self and the self* (self, as future/past: other; and self as the present: and hence, impossible).⁷ A kind of 'not-not-of the Other', or, as Derrida would say, an 'ineluctable' multiplicity, a series of differences, the *de-de*-negation, *desistance* or 'supplementary re-doubling of negation' (Derrida, 1989, 4).

It is a funny sort of excess, this not-not negativity, this multiplicity of the in-between (i.e. the negative 'between-ness' of the not and its other). A kind of spiralling (or, anyway, dizzying) interiority which regurgitates right *outside* the limit, and in that wake, constitutes it: neither/nor. Indeed, it is, precisely, a surface, or even a strategy of surfaces.

If we hold out for the negative along these configurations, three things become obvious – or, if not obvious, at least problematized. The first is that there exist several kinds of negation, the dialectical version of said negation being but one of many. The second is that confining it to a teleological (or, for that matter, a transcendentalist) dialectic infringes on the very suppleness of the kind of excess enlisted above, one that tends to smuggle in a whole set of assumptions around morality, politics and change, and in so doing tends to obfuscate rather than clarify the very problem (of identity/difference) it aims to resolve. It is precisely this (dialectical) version of negation which must be rejected, albeit (as Gramsci would say) ‘with all honours due’. The third point is that, in groping awkwardly – maybe even blindly – towards some other a-systematic systemizing of negation, a peculiar elision comes to be established between the metaphoric and the metonymic, one that is a kind of ‘struggle’, as Kundera once said, ‘of memory against forgetting’ (Kundera, 1978/80, 3). Let us now detail, more exactly, where these last few remarks may lead and why.

of Sexuality, compare Seneca’s remarks to Lucilius, quoted therein: ‘I do not wish you ever to be deprived of gladness. I would have it born in your house; and it is born there, if only it is inside you . . . for it will never fail you when once you have found its source . . . look toward the true good, and rejoice only in that which comes from your own store [*de tuo*]. But what do I mean by “your own store”? I mean your very self and the best part of you.’ (1988, 66–7).

A time of forgetting/a space to remember

As should be relatively clear by this point in our story (the story of negation), we have enlisted a kind of determinancy-of-the-not, that is to say, an *in-determinant* excess, as that which provides meaning and, therefore, as that which ‘grounds’ (as it were) any, and every, truth-game. Moreover, this is an indeterminancy which exceeds the very notion of eternal infinity; for it no longer adheres to a concept of homogeneous time nor one of empty space. Indeed, it could be said that it has more to do with a relation between some discrete, even deadly, form of rumination – i.e., an odd, purposeless wandering – and the ‘not’ of that existence; a journeying somewhere different from within (or against) a metaphysics of the present; a straying on some other path neither inside nor outside the oppositional binaries of a positivity and its Other. Nietzsche characterizes it in one word: forgetting. ‘Consider the cattle, grazing as they pass you by’, he says in his second untimely meditation, ‘On the Uses and Disadvantages of History for Life’,

they do not know what is meant by yesterday or today; they leap about, eat, rest, digest, leap about again, and so, from morn till night and from day to day, fettered to the moment and its pleasure or displeasure [they are] neither melancholy nor bored . . . A human being may well ask an animal: ‘Why do you not speak to me of your happiness but only stand and gaze at me?’ The animal would like to answer, and say: ‘The reason is I always forget what I was going to say’ – but then he forgot this answer too, and stayed silent: so that the human being was left wondering . . .

[Now] imagine the extremest possible example of a man who did not possess the power of forgetting at all and who was thus condemned to see everywhere a state of becoming: such a man would no longer believe in his own being, would no longer believe in himself, would see everything flowing asunder in a moving point and would lose himself in this stream of becoming: like a true pupil of Heraclitus, he would in the end hardly dare to raise his finger [. . .] Thus: it is possible to live almost without memory, and to live

happily moreover, as the animal demonstrates; but it is altogether impossible to live at all without forgetting. (Nietzsche, 1983, 60–1)

In short, in addressing this particular form of negation, we have landed in the un-dead realm of the present, that impossible – indeterminate and contingently negative – terrain which disappears at the very instant of its access and yet without which ‘meaning’, itself, cannot be sustained. Its ‘un-historicity’, as Nietzsche calls it in a later fragment, both sidesteps and absorbs a past and future tense; and, at the same time, makes that past or future ‘decipherable’, ‘graspable’; that is to say, makes it ‘possible’.⁸ Indeed, in that sense, one could maintain that forgetting contributes to the making of ‘what is’ and becomes, part and parcel of an *inventive* process, of the process – or rather processes (after all, there is no reason to assume that forgetting or indeed the paths to which it points remain anything other than multiple) – of making the ‘that’ alive, real.

8 Compare Nietzsche’s sixth remark (within the same second ‘untimely’ meditation) regarding this point: ‘*If you are to venture to interpret the past you can do so only out of the fullest exertion of the vigour of the present . . . Like to like! Otherwise you will draw the past down to you . . . When the past speaks it always speaks as an oracle: only if you are an architect of the future and know the present will you understand it*’ (1983, 94).

In a peculiar way, then, and inasmuch as ‘forgetting’ is constitutive, it ‘re-members’. But what exactly is remembered? It cannot be experience: for in the land of the un-dead there is clearly no room for *that*. And it cannot be rooted in an experimentation of any sort, for this would imply a sense of discovery, a sense of revelation (or a revealing) of some hidden truth or thing. But as we are speaking specifically of a (multiple) in-determinacy as the basis for a truth, there is nothing that *can* be concealed in here. Or, to put this on a slightly different register, one *can* never discover the *content* of what has been forgotten. This is precisely what it *is* to forget; what has been forgotten has in its place: nothing. This does not mean to suggest or imply that forgetting can be identified with ‘vacuum’.

As we play upon an impossible terrain of an indeterminate nothing, what is it that is *able* to be *re*-remembered? It can only ever be the use of a thing; its technique; its custom, though we are speaking of use or technique or custom in terms other than ‘lying to hand’. ‘Does this mean’, asks Wittgenstein, ‘that I have to say that the proposition “12 inches = 1 foot” asserts all those things which give measuring its present point? No. [It simply means:] The proposition *is grounded* in a technique [its use]’ (Wittgenstein, 1983, 355; part VII, no. 1). But wouldn’t this imply, we might want to ask, that there very well could exist someone who wished to use the proposition in some other (wrong) way, and that, therefore, a reliance on something as seemingly flimsy as the *use* of it might only encourage a chaotic nihilism (of sorts)? The possibility is entirely there: but the probability is not. For if there were no general commonality, no rule – a rule, in this context, meaning something quite different from *dictum* or *dogma* – the paradigm itself would disintegrate. ‘The application of the concept “following a rule” presupposes a custom. Hence it would be nonsense to say’, says Wittgenstein, ‘just once in the history of the world someone followed a rule (or a signpost; played a game, uttered a sentence, or understood one; and so on)’ (1983, 322–3; section VI, no. 21).⁹

9 Compare Nietzsche’s (now not so cryptic) remark on the importance of a rule in *Daybreak*, where he writes: ‘442. *The rule*. – I always find the rule more interesting than the exception – he who feels like that is far advanced in the realm of knowledge and is among the initiated’ (Nietzsche, n.d., 187).

Could one say, then, that inasmuch as the (re-)membering of technique/application of a said rule has to do with establishing (inventing) the

paradigm/framework of any truth game, that this [re-]membering plays a double function, albeit, let us not forget, in all its *negative indeterminacy*? For on the one hand, it could provide for a reproducing (repetition/imitation through *difference*) – of any proposition and, therefore, of any paradigmatic structure; whilst on the other hand, it could provide for a kind of ground – now established without depth or width or speed or length and yet encompassing all of that and more. We would have in front of us, then, no greater (more securing or deeper) ground to the ground than the indeterminate surface of the that; a surface ‘indeterminate’, but not, however, ‘indefinitely homogeneous’ or ‘infinitely vague’. In part VI of his *Mathematics*, Wittgenstein puts it like this:

31. [. . .] The difficult thing here is not to dig down to the ground; no, it is to recognize the ground that lies before us as ground. For the ground keeps giving us the illusory image of a greater depth, and when we seek to reach this, we keep on finding ourselves on the old level. Our disease is one of wanting to explain.

[But] once you have got hold of the rule, you have the route traced for you. (Wittgenstein, 1983, 333, part VI)¹⁰

In short, what seems to ‘lie before us’ is the possibility of accepting a non-existent ‘excess’ of indeterminacy (now placed in terms of an impossible place: to wit, the present) as the ground to any paradigmatic truth-game – a kind of fiction (rather than a lie) as Foucault will put it; a superficiality (of sorts), says Maurice Blanchot – one that has less to do with grammar (and the rhetoric thus implied) than it has to do with *technē*, custom, ‘the way in which it is used’.¹¹ We are recovering, then – in the fullest sense of that word (salvaging and accepting its invisibility) – the radicality of a fiction, a fictitious space herein epitomized by a contingent, anti-positivistic and non-affirmative ‘excess’. Indeed, we are recovering, perhaps more interestingly still, an ‘excess’, an ‘outside’, an ever-effacing ‘present’ that seems to require not one whit of a dialectical logic or transcendental temporality to secure (as in ‘invent’) the horizon of its truth. Foucault says:

Not reflection, but forgetting; not contradiction, but a contestation that effaces; not reconciliation, but droning on and on; not mind in laborious conquest of its unity, but the endless erosion of the outside; not truth finally shedding light on itself, but the streaming and distress of language that has always-already begun. (Foucault, 1990, 22)

A shudder of disbelief! For who has not read their Marx, let alone their Heidegger! Who would wish to abandon time – and (seemingly) therewith history, not to mention, quite possibly, politics! Indeed, and irrespective of where one might stand on the question, who amongst us could fail to see the beauty inherent in the logic of the latter’s *Identity and Difference*, precisely on this point (about forgetting and concealment, and the present and transcendence, not to mention time itself), wherein, amongst many, many other things, he reaches precisely the opposite conclusion: ‘inasmuch’, says Heidegger in his ‘Onto-theo-ology’, ‘as we are thinking of unconcealing and keeping

¹⁰ Compare Nietzsche’s remark on the error of dialectical logic: ‘474. *The only ways*. – Dialectics is the only way of attaining . . . being and getting behind the veil of appearance, – this is asserted by Plato as solemnly and passionately as Schopenhauer asserts it of the anti-thesis of dialectics – and both are wrong. For that to which they want to show us the way does not *exist*’ (Nietzsche, n.d., 196–7).

¹¹ On the question of the ‘lie’ versus ‘fiction’ in Foucault and Blanchot, see especially, ‘I Lie, I Speak’ and ‘Reflection, Fiction’, in Foucault, 1990, 9–13 and 21–6.

concealed, of transition (transcendence) and of arrival (presence)' (Heidegger, 1969, 67)? For we have, with Heidegger, the posing an ontology rooted precisely in/on difference – a difference, of course, quite dislodged from its metaphysical suppositions – but one which nevertheless requires (or better put, must of necessity require) a re-thinking of the present as entailing or, rather, as being equivalent to, a transcendent temporality.

The outward evidence of this (though of course it is, merely outward evidence) is the treatment of Being as *παρουσία* or *ουσία*, which signifies, in ontological-Temporal terms, 'presence' [*Anwesenheit*]. Entities are grasped in their Being as 'presence'; this means they are understood with regard to a definite mode of time – the '*Present*' . . . [Being is equal to no class or genus of entities, it pertains to every entity.] . . . Its 'universality' is to be sought higher up. Being and the structure of Being lie beyond every entity and every possible character which an entity may possess. *Being is the transcendens pure and simple*. And the transcendence of Dasein's Being is destructive in that it implies the possibility and necessity of the most radical *individuation*. Every disclosure of Being as the *transcendens* is *transcendental* knowledge. *Phenomenological truth (the disclosedness of Being) is veritas transcendentalis*. (Heidegger, 1967, 47, 62; 'II. The Two-fold task in working out the Question of Being, Method and Design of our Investigation')

This is to say, then, that to capture the movement – i.e., the non-fixity, dislocated, a-stasis of truth (identity, objectivity and so forth as radical individuation) – clearly, says Heidegger, there must be the facility to re-present the present, a (re)presentation, which is, at one and the same time, ultimately 'impossible' and necessarily 'transcendent'. Its dislocation, 'movement', underwrites precisely what it is to be 'free'; a freedom no longer bound (if ever it was) to the exigencies of the spatial (why? because we are speaking here of a 'not'-location, a *dislocation*), which, given the argument, can therefore only ever and by definition be established with respect to time and the (transcendent) (de-)structuration of the present. Or, to say the same thing differently: if the possibilities of freedom are to be fully realized, they must primarily be established along the frontier or horizon of time, a frontier that would, *ipso facto*, maintain little or no room for the immovable, wholly sutured 'fixities' of life – a fixity (non-freedom) that would of necessity come under the rubric of, not surprisingly, and in a word: space.¹²

A dilemma. For we seem to be caught in the (not-so-delicate) web of an either/or division cast now in terms of a temporality quite distinct (in its oppositional role) from that of the spatial. Which is it to be, then: temporal over the spatial or spatial over the temporal? And does this require (in either case) some form of transcendence or not? These are not idle questions; to quote de Man, 'It turns out that in these innocent-looking didactic exercises, we are in fact playing for very sizeable stakes' (de Man, 1979, 15). And, indeed, we are.

I submit that there very well may be a way out of this impasse. And that is to take seriously the problem – no, the necessity – of pluralism itself. This requires, at the very minimum, an acknowledgement that 'indeterminacy' (and

¹² On this point, see, for example, Ernesto Laclau's crucial intervention on the matter, in his 'Dislocation and Capitalism', where he says in part, 'Let us begin by identifying three dimensions of the relationship of dislocation . . . The first is that dislocation is the very form of temporality. And temporality must be conceived as the exact opposite of space . . . [Now] If dislocation involves contingency, and contingency power, the absence of dislocation leads in the Platonic schema to a radical communitarian essentialism that eliminates the very question of power and thus the possibility of politics . . . [On the other hand] . . . history's ultimate unrepresentability [e.g., its dislocation, temporality] is the condition for the recognition of our radical historicity' (Laclau, 1990, 41, 69, 84).

all we have said about it up to this point with respect to negation, forgetting, impossibility and so forth) is, in its most radical sense, paradoxical.¹³ That is to say, this excess 'negation' – or, more to the point, its root, its 'division' or 'slash' ('/') – expresses that division (of difference) as always-already *incommensurably plural*. In any proposition, including that of contradiction, there is no fundamental unity (between a not and its other) or an ontological first, either as point of departure or as one of arrival.¹⁴ We are speaking of a heterogeneous unity of the slash ('/') itself; not the heterogeneity of that which falls on 'either side' of the cut. This is a radical composition, a radical multiplicity in all its negative dimensionalities; and it is precisely un-thinkable, inasmuch as it is neither paradigmatic nor syntigmatic; neither metaphorical nor metonymic; neither time nor space; neither true nor false. It is all of the above (and probably more) in all its fictitious, un-thinkable cohesive impossibilities. We return to Wittgenstein:

200. Really 'The proposition is either true or false' only means that it must be possible to decide for or against it. But this does not say what the ground for such a decision is like.

205. If the true is what is grounded, then the ground is not true, nor yet false. (Wittgenstein, 1974, 27e–28e)

28. . . . [or to put it this way] That I can assume what is physically false and reduce it *ad absurdum* gives me no difficulty. But how to think the – so to speak – unthinkable? . . .

29. . . . [where geometrical illustrations cease to be *applications of Analysis*, they can be wholly misleading] . . . The idea of a 'cut' is one such dangerous illusion. (Wittgenstein, 1983, 285; section V)

4. . . . [Rather] It might be said: *imagination* tells it. And the germ of truth is here; only one must understand it right. (Wittgenstein, 1983, 224; section IV)

All right then, let us use our imagination. Let us imagine a different reading of the cut ('/') as something other than the (seemingly) deep and ceaseless slash, dividing the something from its other. It no longer demarcates a site of departure (or arrival) with respect to any truth or certainty, dialectical or otherwise, and yet despite its fiction (or because of it), rewrites a truth. It is closer in description to a 'forgotten' homeland, a bleeding land as it were, whose very landscapes circumscribe the nomadic dislocation of the neither/nor – the multiplicities of which are wholly unthinkable without a radical reinvention/re-membering of space (as the de-de-negation) and of time (as its dis-placed movement). We have here a paradigm shift, axiomatic at the point of a non-dialectics. And yet, it is one that manages to address, as central, the problem of 'change', 'movement', and the 'probability of certainty', along the axes of an impossible ground, without recourse to a teleological unfolding or

¹³ Apart from the texts cited above, de Man speaks at length about the importance of the paradox. See especially his 'Conclusions: Walter Benjamin's "The Task of the Translator"' (de Man, 1986, 83ff.)

¹⁴ Compare Wittgenstein's remark, part IV, of the *Mathematics*, where he says, '56. Contradiction. Why just this *one* bogey? That is surely very suspicious' (1983, 25).

transcendentalist logic. Instead we have here an always-already fragmented web of journeying, of exile, contingent at its very limit; one whose 'existence' is, in all the plurality of a finite infinity, opposite to nothing.

If we accept this proposition; if we accept that 'what tests the what' (to paraphrase Wittgenstein) is precisely the use of the rule itself and, therewith, we re-enlist the fiction of an indeterminate negation in the fullest sense of its multiplicity; then we may very well have managed to rescue (a not-)space from the ravages of time, without privileging one over the other. Indeed time itself may have, finally also, been unhinged from the fixity of an eternal Time; re-configured in 'the now' as radically heterogeneous and in dispersion.¹⁵ But have we, in so accepting this radical neither/nor, space-time proposition – this *pluralism of the 'root'* – have we been able to avoid certain well-known problems of metaphysics (particularly around those that would seem to eradicate all forms of political struggle)? Moreover, in accepting what may appear to be a pure relativity of the rule (or indeed, of custom), have we not forfeited our ability to demarcate an ethical proposition – any ethical proposition – managing to escape from metaphysics, dialectic or otherwise, only to fall prey to a kind of chaotic meaninglessness, a kind of 'radical nihilism', that 'whatever is' is, *ipso facto*, good?

The longer reply follows in the next section.

But the shorter one to both these questions is: no. For in re-thinking the problem of identity and difference in terms of a radical pluralism of indeterminate negativity at its 'core' (one that is to say that, in its very 'exile', escapes and doubles [triples and, perhaps, quadruples] back to (re-)invent a contingent objectivity as such) in this movement, there is no collapse into an always-already given 'truth', nor one that conceals or reveals or revels within an ethical void.¹⁶ This is precisely because political struggle, and indeed the political itself, becomes entirely central, placed exactly at, on, beside, over, and in terms of an (imaginary) 'ground'. A ground of bleeding land; a diasporic ground of space-time; a stain.

The a-moral interregnum

I felt determined to transform the most simple details of life into so many insignificant words, that my voice, which was becoming the only space where I allowed her to live, forced her to emerge from her silence too, and gave her a sort of physical certainty, a physical solidity, which she would not have had otherwise. All this may seem childish. It does not matter. This childishness was powerful enough to prolong an illusion that had already been lost, to force something to be there which was no longer there. It seems to me that in all this incessant talking there was the gravity of one single word, the echo of that 'Come' which I had said to her; and she had come, and she would never be able to go away again. (Blanchot, 1978, 73)

The interregnum of this proximity and distance. It is fileted with the pathos of an imaginary beginning and, with it, the pathos of beginning an imaginary. We

¹⁵ This 'escape' of time from Time (whose route is aided and abetted by the imaginary 'not-space' of space) runs as a theme, certainly throughout the work of Proust (where time is invented/described as dead-time, real-time, living-time, memory-time and so forth) in his well-known and loved *Remembrance of Things Past* (Proust, 1983). But it is also taken up quite systematically by Walter Benjamin in *Illuminations*, particularly in 'The Storyteller' (Benjamin, 1969, 97–106). But I am also thinking about different *dimensionalities* of time: as in the time of virtual 'almostness'. See for example *The Lost Dimension* (Virilio, 1991) and Staffords, 'The Aesthetics of Almost' (1996, 465–79).

¹⁶ On the multiple uses of 'error' as a politics of journeying, see de Man, 'Walter Benjamin's "The Task of The Translator"' (de Man, 1986, 91–105)



could have started our story anywhere: though just because there never has been, is, and never will be a 'first', should not imply that there never was a 'once upon a time' (as the storyteller might say) or a 'supposing that' (as the political economy variation on storytelling might say). No first-causes; just beginnings/any beginnings/truncated beginnings: their weave produces the horizon (or is that a plateau? or a 'ground'?) of the start. In a way, it could be described as a tenuous weaving, threading together bits of memory, both dead and alive and somewhere in between, with the forgetting, the forgotten, the forgettable. We take from 'what lies around us', to echo Wittgenstein, and we *use it*; we use the dreams, the nightmares, the incidental dinners, the laundromats, to form our 'that'.

Indeed, and more specifically put, this struggle between and amongst memory and its forgetting produces the weave of a start – of a that – which has already begun. There is no horizon of the either/or; no identity invented 'against' the Something *per se*. We have instead the creating of the imaginary, creating the imaginary 'as if' real; producing the curve around which the present-movement unfolds – a curve which is no more (or less) or shorter or fatter than a series of dots or maybe just one long dot stretched to infinity. Imagination. No lie (nor truth): only the radical geography of a fiction, continuous in all its dis-continuity.

Is it so difficult, then, to see how every 'as if' always-already re-presents a way of life, selecting a bit of this and a bit of that; re-presenting one's code of existence exactly at the same time as inventing it anew, and doing so 'as if' it were always eternally there 'beforehand' (or, at least remembering it as though it had been), in order to make the case that it now and for ever always ought to be so? Foucault names this 'as if' as a popular memory; Derrida brings it forward (in honour of de Man's death) as a mourningful one; in either case its function is precisely to constitute the impossible terrain of the 'to be' in all its present and future tenses. Indeed, it could be said that every first-year student of politics knows about this kind of 'as if': for without *some* kind of 'picture' of 'what ought to be' based somehow and in some way in terms of the 'what have beens' of life – in all their varying memories, myth-makings and decay, turning, as they must of necessity so do, between, with and against the exiled multiplicities of the 'what is' and the 'what lies before us' – that without that picture, one has at best only a recipe for disaster, one that is out of reach, out of touch and utterly unsustainable.

But this is also to say, simultaneously, that imagination, as powerful as it is (although or perhaps because its profundity remains but skin deep), is only ever able to be 'inscribed' – to become, that is to say, 'institutionalized', along the surface of an impossible ground – on the basis of immense political struggles to make it so. It is a risk that we take, a risk we must take, in order to make change 'stick'. A risk taken at the very surface of the 'that'.

And yet, if we follow the logic through, we are left with a not-so-baffling, but for some a conceivably dreadful, conclusion. By insisting on the radical political contingency of any social imaginary and the paradigmatic 'bleeding homelands' around which they turn, it is also to say, then, that the codes of existence – and, more to the point here, the moral and ethical truths implied by those codes – are only as solid as are the hegemonic expressions from whence they spring. For in exchanging a transcendental temporality (mixed metaphors and all) for the surface of the risk, we find at the end of the day that the very ethics of the social have been exiled to the margins of an impossible spatiality; the measure of its truth journeying precariously (it might seem) along the soiled interregnum of the imagination, attempting to fight the good fight on the ever slimy battlefield of the political.

The Hobbesian nightmare (*sans* the Leviathan) returns to a postmodern world in all its stunning brutality! And we, who have not the energy to struggle, are condemned to stand at the shore of a civilized Truth, forever waving a tearful farewell to the Good Life, our moral fibres cast away and adrift.

But I say: 'there is something wrong with this picture.'

For this re-invention, this imagination, all born and bred and sustained precisely in the space of that indeterminate pause, is a *social* ensemble. It no more falls from out of the sky than does language itself erupt from only one mouth. Indeed, this imagination marks by re-marking the history, custom, traditions of the immense variety of identities to which it is a part and from which it is most distant. Consequently, in that sense, not only does it (re-)mark the relation of itself to itself in all the ways we have described up to now; its meaning is established in the same way, exactly in the same way, as any sociality or law is established – be it scientific, civil, physical, theoretical or make-believe: