Convivia
FILTH

knowledge. Whatever the cause of madness, the symptoms are the same. The madman eats FILTH and throws off his clothes. FILTH is listed as meaning excreta, mud, frogs: 'the eating of FILTH by madmen is like the FILTH of death, those faeces are the corpse'. EIGHT

Yes, so much the worse, he knows it is a voice, how is not known, nothing is

tutes. On the 'common side' impoverished debtors were shack led together in tiny cells, 'covered with FILTH and vermin,' as one report put it, 'and suffered to die, without pity, of hunger and jail fever'. TEN

The mundus: a sacred or accursed place in the middle of the Italiot township. A pit, originally — a dust hole, a public rubbish dump. Into it were cast trash and filth of every kind, along with those condemned to death, and any newborn baby whose father declined to 'raise' it (that

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Vera Bühlmann, Riccardo M. Villa, Cris Argüelles (Eds.)

Convivia Filth

Journal for Architectonics

CONVIVIA FILTH

Vera Bühlmann
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Foreword:
Architectonics of the Case

RICCARDO M. VILLA
VERA BÜHLMANN
CRIS ARGÜELLES

"Thinking is a feast that consists in exhausting oneself on striving not to 'consume' any of the abundant dishes one finds set on the table." This phrase has appeared on the Research Unit of Architecture Theory and Philosophy of Technics homepage since its foundation in 2016. The following pages take up the challenge of this motto by proposing a journal in the form of a banquet, or rather a banquet in the form of a journal. Inspired by one of Dante Alighieri's lesser-known works,[1] *CONVIVIA* aims to multiply the analogy between thinking and feasting and subtract the first from the rampant logic of consumption and production. Similarly to its Greek kin, the symposium, a convivium puts into relation nutrition

1   *Il convivio* is an unfinished work written by Dante Alighieri between 1304 and 1307.

and celebration, everyday necessities, and exceptional contingencies.[2] *CONVIVIA* involves the Pythagorean comma—something that evades exhaustiveness and yet makes it possible to have enough; something that provides for the possibility of a notion of proportionate moderateness: open and indefinite, situative. It is a proportionateness that, however, is not absolute: instead, it is both moderate and immense at the same time, an architectonic bridging that provides a scale for incommensurables.

A banquet, then. Yet, it is not just a matter of feeding or drinking. The word suggests it: *Convivium* involves "conviviality," which can be translated as "living together" without falling into multiple individuals or a unifying identity. Life, articulated and conjugated, finding ever new "fittings" in particular living formations, provides for pulse and heartbeat, harmonization as well as discordance. Life can hardly be attended to if it does not also involve its negative—death; it is what "feeds on negative entropy," a famous Viennese physicist answered to the question at the heart of one of his most popular books.[3] Negentropy was to become a way for quantifying information mathematically, an ever-impure something that all things in the universe send, receive, store, and process. *Non vita, sed convivium*: A cosmic feast, in which the world—the totality of what is—cannot be exhaustively defined once and for all, out of necessity, but has instead to be articulated, transcendentally sculpted out via a kind of immanence provided by code.

2   Contingencies that can, sometimes, start to bloom from accidental getting-in-touch (*tingere*, lat. for "happening; touching"). As Angelus Silesius knew, "The rose is without 'why'; it flowers because it flowers."

3   Erwin Schrödinger, *What Is Life? The Physical Aspect of the Living Cell* (Cambridge, New York: Cambridge University Press, 1992).

To quote another notable Viennese figure, the world is "all that is the case."[4]

Each issue of *CONVIVIA* articulates a miniature cosmos, or a small set of cosmic constellations, precisely by making cases upon a determined pretext. Case, from Latin *casus*, is a matter of falling (that still echoes in the German *Fall*). But *case* is also quite an ambiguous term: On the one hand, it shares a certain kinship with chance (in Italian, both terms are translated as *caso*) and, on the other, it stands as a prerequisite for the determination of "domains of causes" for which no orientation is preset—what appears to be falling "down" could actually be in the course of being "lifted up," as if by the hands of winds or other circular currents. In such circuitous domains, *casual* and *causal* thus appear as two faces of the same coin. *CONVIVIA* proposes to look at such motion by considering its "climatic" nature. If there is no fall without inclination—no case without *clinamen*—the opposite also seems to be true: In grammar, cases allow for declension; here, "cases" allow for different "inclinations" of a single noun.

Not only causes and chance: The categorical nature of cases is able to join particular and universal. In *La categorie des cas*, Louis Hjemslev writes: "There is perhaps no grammatical category whose immediate aspect is so clear, so coherent, so symmetrical, so easily accessible as that of cases. On the other hand, if we look closely, the system of cases is in many languages of enormous complexity, posing at the same time all the fundamental problems of grammar."[5] By means of declensions and

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4   Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, trans. D.F. Pears and B.F. McGuinness (London: Routledge, 1974), 5.

5   Own translation. Louis Hjemslev, *La catégorie des cas. Étude de grammaire générale* (München: Wilhelm Fink Verlag, 1975), 1.

particular endings, the case manages to transport nouns from the sacred domain of names (*onomai*) to the public one of discourse and language (*rhemata*, *logoi*). The "obliqueness" or the "inclination" of such declensions happens similarly to a *contrapposto*, as stances that are giving and catching at the same time. "If the phenomenon of cases is an essential feature of the *logos*, the case is also the category that distinguishes the main *merē tou logou* [*the "part" of the logos, nd*]. The *onoma* is characterized as a case-sensitive part of speech, and the *rhema* as a non-case-sensitive part of speech. This means that cases retain their place in antiquity as the primary category of the noun. The declension par excellence is the declension by case ".[6]

CONVIVIA is a journal, and as such, it has something to do with accounting and the keeping of time. It does not do so as a "chronicle"—as a day-by-day recollection—nor as a mere partitioning of a circle; the time of *CONVIVIA* is analogous to the one that passes at the crossing between the ecliptic—the imaginary plane that accommodates the Earth's orbit around the sun—and the equator. The different cases can be compared to the different astrological "houses," meeting points that form constellations, places of encounter between linear passing and eternal recurrence.

A recurrent question arises at this point: What does all of this have to do with architecture? If it is true that, as Ludwig Wittgenstein said, the world is whatever is the case, it is also true that cases are not just "there." They are not ontological or epistemological objects waiting to be discovered. One must always *make* a case; thus, cases always involve a crafting. Making cases is an art, a *techne*, that entails rhetorical craftsmanship and mathemat-

6   Ibid., 2.

ical precision—Vitruvius' *fabrica* and *raciotinatio*. The *tetractys* format which the Roman architect gave to his ten books is the archetypical template for case-making as we have just described it: Two incommensurable domains—two legs of a Platonic *lambda*—weaved together by a rhetorico-mathematical invention that proportions each figured-out instance as a case. *CONVIVIA* is a journal for architectonics: it is not a journal about the "art of building" (*Baukunst*) but a journal for the *techne* involved in what pertains to the architecture of the cosmos.

Today this may sound far-fetched, and yet, is not the millenary tradition of architectural treatises, from the *Libri Decem* to *S, M, L, XL*, precisely about such an art of case-making? Aren't architectural orders precisely a way to connect sacred and public domains? And could we not understand the various volumes on architectural orders—Vignola, Palladio, Serlio, Scamozzi, and so on—as different "declensions" of a number of cases? To preserve order and continuity (Vitruvius called the orders *genera*, from *genus*, in tune with the idea of a family lineage, something that endures through time and in spite of individual mortality) in a way that is always mindful that this can be done not just in epistemic terms, as an apodeictic placing, but in architectonic, i.e., proportional terms, by means of an analogy that—as Simone Weil reminds us—is always performed thanks to the absent presence of something "negligible," of a residue.[7]

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7   "Contradiction essentielle dans notre conception de la science : la fiction du vase clos (fondement de toute science expérimentale) est contraire à la conception scientifique du monde. Deux expériences ne devraient jamais donner de résultats identiques. On s'en tire par la notion de négligeable. Or le négligeable, c'est le monde... / Il en est ainsi de la plus simple technique. On la choisit pour modèle. / La notion d'analogie, de rapports identiques, est centrale chez les Grecs. Pont

Perhaps on this note, the "pretext" for this issue can be best introduced: Being antinomic both to property and to propriety, *filth* is precisely what escapes and exceeds a neat definition of things. In this regard, filth can be likened to *dirt*—a term that has recently met quite some success, also in the field of architecture theory. Differently from dirt, filth entails a quasi-moral dimension that the notion of dirt carefully "washes" off from itself. In this sense, filth is not merely "matter out of place" but also has some spiritual substance.

The first two essays of this issue make a case for it: Michael R. Doyle's "Masks of the Genius Loci: Towards a Phenotechnics of Place" picks up Norberg-Schulz's famous notion by relating the "spirit of the place" with a "technics of detachment." Such a relation is mediated by a notion of the mask that has to do precisely with filth as a mismatch between the rational and the real. In Andrea Kopranovic's essay, "Grace—Filth—Gravity. Being Attentive to the In-Between," filth is something to be attentive to instead, an in-between gravity and light in which grace can emerge. Love—son of Poros and Penia—is one of the "masks" of such an in-between. The erotic theme is also at the center of Emmanuelle Chiappone-Piriou's essay, "Onanistic Engenderings." Here, it is precisely the masculine marking of the proper name to be not only questioned but turned against itself, from a logic of reproduction—of spreading and continuation of the name—to an onanistic one of self-complementation. Chiappone-Piriou alchemically turns the "filthy" character of masturbation into one of intellectual fertility. The "feminist" take is echoed by Selena Savic: in "Facing Mud. On Matter-Informational Building and Writing,"

entre le fini et l'infini." Simone Weil, *Cahiers*, in *Œuvres complètes*, tome VI, Vol. II (Paris: Gallimard, 1997), 547.

she encodes filth in terms of a matter — mud — which is pre-specific to standards, yet it can engender them. On this side of the spectrum, filth reveals itself in terms of waste. Klaus Spiess brings our attention from waste at large to a rather organic kind of waste: his essay, "Redefining Waste: A Review of Fecal Matter Inspiring Novel Life Forms," focuses on feces and on the intelligent life that it enshrines. In "Cosmetics of Hospitality: A Question of Limits," Jordi Vivaldi brings, in turn, the theme of waste to a cosmic dimension through the analogy between waste (*immunditia*) and world (*mundus*). Such cosmic character assumes finally an apocalyptic yet parodistic take in Georgios Tsagdis's essay on "The Parody of Matter: Bataille, Pu'iito, Tlazolteotl, and the Filth to Come."

The Kitchen ought to be neither just under the Noses of the Guests, nor at too great a Distance; but so that the Victuals may be brought in neither too hot nor too cold, and that the Noise of the Scullions, with the Clatter of their Pans, Dishes and other Utensils, may not be troublesome. The Passage through which the Victuals are to be carried, should be handsome and convenient, not open to the Weather nor dishonoured by any Filth that may offend the Stomachs of the Guests.
— Leon Battista Alberti, *De re aedificatoria* (1485)

Contagion, after all, and as with contract, indicates not only a form of generation but also of relation and subjectivity. As in the contractual, contagion implies a kind of contact. Yet, as François Delaporte has noted, contagion (as well as contamination) "are words derived from the Latin for 'contact with filth'" whereas contract, I would add, signi-fies the making of a bargain or drawing together.
— Angela Mitropoulos, *Contract and Contagion* (2012)

Cleanliness is a national virtue in America. No filth, no dust. Sea breezes incessantly sweep through the limpid maritime sky. The offices are clean; the bath tubs, the shops, the glistening hotels; the dazzling restaurants and bars. The immaculate personnel, in shirt sleeves, is shining white. Food is wrapped up in bright cellophane. There is no more real dust than there is symbolic dust, everything is new and spotless, including the collegiate Gothic of the universities. [...] People who wash their shirts, paint their houses, clean the glass in their windows, have an ethic different from those who cultivate dust and filth. To prove that they possess an age-old culture, the latter preserve the cracks in the walls, the patina, and what is worse, they have even established the taste

Masks of the *Genius Loci*:
Towards a Phenotechnics of Place

MICHAEL R. DOYLE

The Position from which Architecture Starts

When asked in an interview in September 2021 about his position on architecture, the architect Ricardo E. Bofill of the Barcelona-based firm RTBA replied, "Place should be the position from which architecture starts ... place should be the beginning of the story."[1] Many architects today would probably agree with that statement and would also nod when Bofill pays homage to Norwegian architect and historian Christian Norberg-Schulz's introduction of the term *genius loci* or "spirit of place" into common parlance in architecture.

1   Ricardo E. Bofill, "What is Architecture?" 2021: https://www.whatisarchitecture.cc/ricardo-e-bofill (accessed December 9, 2021).

In his 1980 publication, *Genius Loci: Towards a Phenomenology of Architecture*, Norberg-Schulz reacts with a kind of horror to the rapid post-war transformation of the European and North American landscapes: "The qualities which traditionally distinguished human settlements," he writes, "have been corrupted or have got irreparably lost."[2] He saw in the built environment an increasing monotony and lack of character. Without geometric variety that stimulates the senses, he claimed, cities are no longer imageable, no longer have, as Kevin Lynch had observed in *The Image of the City* (1960), "a high probability of evoking a strong image in any given observer."[3] He does not fault Modern Architecture for this loss—he credits the Modernist movement in architecture for having called for a return to things, to the individual, to nature, to daily life, and to freedom from dogma and authority.

The problem for Norberg-Schulz was that the openness of the Modern dwelling was projected onto the urban scale. The international style offered a series of principles to be followed everywhere, one of them being Mies van der Rohe's dictum of "less is more." In *Complexity and Contradiction*, published in 1966, architect Robert Venturi accused Mies of justifying "exclusion for expressive purposes," going on further to argue that such an architecture can "exclude important considerations only at the risk of separating architecture from the experience of life and the needs of society."[4] This "architecture of

2   Christian Norberg-Schulz, *Genius Loci: Towards a Phenomenology of Architecture* (New York: Rizzoli, 1980), 189.

3   Kevin Lynch, *The Image of the City* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press, 1960), 9.

4   Robert Venturi, *Complexity and Contradiction in Architecture*, The Museum of Modern Art Papers on Architecture (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 1977), 17.

exclusion," Norberg-Schulz writes, "mainly told us that the modern world is open; a statement which in a certain sense is anti-urban. Openness cannot be gathered. Openness means departure, gathering means return."[5]

"Gathering" is a term Norberg-Schulz borrows from Martin Heidegger's 1954 text *Building, Dwelling, Thinking*. For Heidegger, the alarming aspect of the post-war transformation of cities—the "real plight of dwelling"[6]—was not a question of a lack of housing but rather of the human condition's innate homelessness. The act of *building* is, at the same time, one of *learning to dwell*. Building *is* dwelling and is, therefore, not simply construction. Dwelling preserves what Heidegger calls *the fourfold* [*das Geviert*]—the earth, the sky, the divine, and the mortal—in *things*, that which is "kept" in building. This keeping is both an active process of "gathering" as well as the place where it is kept—the "thing."[7]

Heidegger's thinking provides Norberg-Schulz with a conceptual language for addressing both tangible and intangible aspects of place: "A place," he writes, "is a space which has a distinct character. Since ancient times the *genius loci*, or 'spirit of place,' has been recognized as the concrete reality man [*sic*] has to face and come to terms with in his daily life. Architecture means to visualize the *genius loci*, and the task of the architect is to create meaningful places, whereby he helps man [*sic*] to dwell ".[8] The "spirit" of which Norberg-Schulz speaks is of Ro-

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5   Norberg-Schulz, *Genius Loci*, 195.

6   Martin Heidegger, "Building Dwelling Thinking," in *Poetry, Language, Thought*, trans. Albert Hofstadter (New York: Harper & Row, 1975), 156.

7   Heidegger points out the shared etymology of the words "gather" and "thing." Heidegger, "Building Dwelling Thinking," 141–60.

8   Norberg-Schulz, *Genius Loci*, 5.

man origin, the idea that every place has its guardian spirit (*genius loci*), which in antiquity was considered to "own a place, look after it, and imbue it with sense and meaning."[9] The role of architecture is not to describe analytically and to fix the qualities of a place, but rather to evoke its character poetically and symbolically: "to protect and conserve the *genius loci* in fact means to concretize its essence in ever new historical contexts."[10]

Architecture preserves the *genius loci* in a way similar to how building and dwelling preserve the fourfold by anchoring it in a location that is not an abstract space but a concrete place. For Norberg-Schulz, "gathering implies that natural meanings are brought together in a *new* way, in relation to human purposes."[11] He does not propose an empirical method to do this, aligning himself more with Heidegger's hermeneutic approach, by which one's ability to dwell poetically is the ability to "read" the "revealing of the things which make up our environment."[12] In fact, Norberg-Schulz sees scientific reasoning as part of the problem: "Everything else [other than that which we receive through the senses], such as atoms and molecules, numbers and so kinds of data, are abstractions or tools which are constructed to serve other purposes than those of everyday life."[13] His starting point is that of "being-in-the-world," which in the phenomenological approach he proposes for architecture implies a pre-reflective state in which one's sensory experiences are

9   Norman Crowe, *Nature and the Idea of a Man-Made World: An Investigation into the Evolutionary Roots of Form and Order in the Built Environment* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press, 1995), 75.

10   Norberg-Schulz, *Genius Loci*, 18.

11   Ibid., 169.

12   Ibid., 169.

13   Ibid., 6.

closer to the real than theoretical or abstract reasoning. Learning to dwell, for Norberg-Schulz, involves a return to the way in which the world is revealed to the individual in an intuitive (rather than reasoned) sense. One must be able to identify with the *genius loci* — "become friends with a particular environment" — in order to develop a sense of belonging to a place, which is the source of "true freedom."[14] Architects need to understand "the 'vocation' of the place"[15] in order to find out (to propose a variation on Louis Kahn's famous statement) what it *wants* to be.

Norberg-Schulz's phenomenological theory of place is poetic but could appear obscurantist in its existential anti-scientific position, more interested in evocation than in description or explanation. It could appear that the "spirit of place" cannot be reasoned — that it is too complex to be addressed mathematically or scientifically. This conclusion is easy to draw but not so easy to defend. There is an overarching context in which the ideas of the *genius loci* in architecture and its Heideggerian roots were evolving during the 20th century.

Appropriation: Identifying with the Spirit of Place

The scapegoat of Norberg-Schulz's theory of place is scientific abstraction, that which deals with what cannot be experienced by the senses and which is meaningless for everyday life. He appears to be picking up an old prejudice against forms of mediation that sees symbolic forms such as writing or mathematics as obstructions to the subject's access to the "real." In *Ces préjugés qui nous encombrent*, the mathematician and philosopher Gilles Dowek argues that the roots of this prejudice lie

14   Ibid., 21.
15   Ibid.,23.

in a historical rejection of technics and writing.[16] He draws from the French philologist Georges Dumézil's functional division of Indo-European cultures into the religious (the clergy), the militaristic (the aristocracy), and the productive (commoners) functions. Writing, Dowek reminds us, did not originate in the religious function, but rather in the productive function, among scribes and accountants. Demonstrating its relevancy for today, Dowek observes that those who occupy the religious and military functions try to elevate themselves above those perceived as commoners whose arts (*technè*) are considered inferior to rational scientific knowledge (*épistémè*) because technics are thought to be blindly executed without thought.

Those who occupy the religious function try to separate themselves from the productive function (and its association with practical applications) by claiming to deal with something whose value cannot be calculated. The religious function surrounds itself in an aura of the sacred. Dowek provides the example of the arts, which during the Renaissance, began to dissociate artistic objects from utility. This is one of the origins of the myth of artistic genius, which elevates artistic practice above mere utility. It corresponds with what sociologist Max Weber called the charismatic form of authority, by which political leaders or groups legitimate their power as having been divinely accorded (being "chosen" to lead).[17]

The militaristic function separates itself from the productive one on the grounds that it does not blindly accumulate riches through labor but is oriented towards action and results. Dowek observes this prejudice at

16   Gilles Dowek, *Ces préjugés qui nous encombrent* (Paris: Seuil, 2009).

17   Max Weber, *Les catégories de la sociologie*, trans. Julien Freund et al. (Paris: Plon, 1995).

work in the pragmatism of capitalism, by which money is made on capital accumulation and on the work of those who occupy the productive function (factory laborers, for instance). How things work is not important, provided they perform well and produce results that maintain competitiveness in the market. Technics and the abstraction of writing are acceptable, provided they contribute to but do not hinder action.

Dowek argues that the religious and military functions tend to appeal to a conception of knowledge of the world that is unmediated, that is "directly" lived and experienced, and not theoretical or abstract. The impacts can be observed in the philosophy of science when Heidegger and his contemporaries were writing from the mid-19th to the middle of the 20th century. If the Enlightenment was a time when the prejudice towards writing and abstraction significantly waned (with the birth of modern science), it reappeared, Dowek notes, with German Romanticism. Heidegger's concept of *Dasein* or of "being-in-the-world" follows the romantic philosophy of existentialism's suspicion of abstract theorizing, giving prevalence instead to the immediacy of bodily experience and embodied (pre-reflective) forms of knowing.[18] A similar orientation appears in the work of the logical positivists in the Vienna Circle, who tried to minimize, if not completely remove, appeals to abstract concepts that could not be verified by experience. As Vladimir Tasić points out in *Mathematics and the Roots of Postmodern Thought*, "the fictional constructs of mathematics—points, space and the infinity of arithmetic, to mention only the milder ones—stub-

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18   Charles Guignon, "Existentialism," ed. by Edward Craig, *Routledge Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (New York, Routledge: 1998), 2643–52.

bornly resist being brought down to experience."[19] The
history of mathematics tells us that this project failed,[20]
but logical positivism's offshoot, logical utilitarianism
(also called "pragmatism"), accepts fictional constructs
or theoretical abstractions provided they have practical
utility in the construction of knowledge.[21]

   We find these prejudices reiterated in Nor-
berg-Schulz's theory of place when he opposes "abstract
scientific theory" and the "deeper roots" of Heidegger's
phenomenology. He places immediate and embodied
forms of knowing as original and more authentic than
mediated and disembodied ones. At first, this aliena-
tion story seems to contrast with his previous work. In
Intentions in Architecture, published first in 1962, Nor-
berg-Schulz sought to develop an empirical and ana-
lytical theory of architecture that could harness insight
from psychology and sociology. Architecture's "purpose"
lies beyond simply responding economically and effi-
ciently to the needs of the client: It can influence the
behavior of human beings.[22] His analytical method seeks
to elucidate this influence in establishing architecture's
purpose. However, it turns away from abstract reasoning
towards the behaviouralist emphasis on that which can
be empirically observed and measured.

19   Vladimir Tasić, *Mathematics and the Roots of Postmodern Thought*
(Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 27.

20   Eric Temple Bell, *The Development of Mathematics* (London:
McGraw-Hill, 1945); Robert Blanché, *L'Axiomatique* (Paris: PUF, 2009).

21   Émile Durkheim, *Pragmatism and Sociology*, ed. by John B. Allcock,
trans. by J. C. Whitehouse (New York: Cambridge University Press,
1983); Richard Rorty, *Consequences of Pragmatism: Essays, 1972–1980*
(Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1982).

22   Christian Norberg-Schulz, *Intentions in Architecture* (Cambridge,
Massachusetts: MIT Press, 1992).

The objective is not to dismiss the thinking of Norberg-Schulz (nor of Heidegger) because of these prejudices[23] but rather to see what trying to dispel them might reveal for understanding the "spirit of place." The *genius loci* is, on the one hand, something that can be experienced, and yet our understanding of such a "spirit" cannot be entirely reduced to our ways of experiencing it in a mere bodily fashion. We are "drawn" towards places in an empathic fashion while also reasoning our experience through abstract symbols. Where Romanticist paradigms generally saw the move from experience to abstraction as a source of alienation, art historian Wilhelm Worringer argued already well over a century ago that abstraction formed part of a general and naturally human artistic volition. His dissertation, *Abstraction and Empathy*, published in German in 1911, was a reaction to 19th-century art history's tendency to see abstraction in art forms as limited to more advanced societies ("a history of ability"[24]) and to reduce aesthetic expression to a subjective one of empathy. The drive towards abstraction, his research showed, was not absent in premodern societies. Where the urge to empathize is the projection of the "contemplating self" into the contingent object, the urge to abstraction is the drive to purify the object of its contingency and elevate it to the realm of law and necessity. Artistic volition is predicated, for Worringer, upon an individual or society's relationship to the world: Empathy emerges from a "happy pantheistic relation-

23   In fact, one cannot live without prejudices, "not only because no human being's intelligence or insight would suffice to form an individual judgment about everything … but also because such a total lack of prejudice would require a superhuman alertness." Hannah Arendt, *The Promise of Politics* (New York: Schocken Books, 2005), 99.

24   Wilhelm Worringer, *Abstraction and Empathy: A Contribution to the Psychology of Style* (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 1997), 9.

ship of confidence" while abstraction is the "outcome of a great inner unrest." Abstraction is not limited to the rational or scientific but also translates in a religious sense to "a strongly transcendental tinge to all notions."[25]

Forms of abstraction move the object or phenomena to a state of objectivity by removing it from its contingent and mutable state as perceived by the individual or group. In Heidegger's philosophy, the pre-reflective state of poetic existence is the more authentic form of existence than that of rationalism, where a priori intuitions are distrusted in favor of reasoned understanding. Romanticism and existentialism give precedence to empathy in its proximity to the intuitive and pre-reflective pole of aesthetic experience. Ernst Cassirer, also a German philosopher and contemporary of Heidegger, challenged the argument that the nature of things can best be understood by how they appear to our intuition. In his analysis of a famous debate between the two German philosophers in Davos in 1929, Gordon notes that Cassirer saw the "subjective-pragmatic ('ready-to-hand') modes of spatiotemporal understanding" as provisional and as only a starting point for human knowledge. Cassirer sought to understand the symbolic forms that constituted the "higher sphere of objectivity,"[26] one that was "beyond the existentiality of 'being-there.'"[27] Symbolic forms, he maintained, stabilize meanings that exist in the world rather than create them ex nihilo. Meaning is not applied to inert objects. The sensory does not

25   Ibid., 15.

26   Peter Eli Gordon, *Continental Divide: Heidegger,Cassirer, Davos* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2010), 158.

27   Ernst Cassirer, *The Philosophy of Symbolic Forms III* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1977), 169; cited in Gordon, *Continental Divide*, 158.

precede the cognitive, but rather there is a revealing of a "knowing" in the "sensory material itself."[28] Language and mathematics are not antithetical but are different symbolic forms that both stabilize meanings that are invisible to perception and yet improve the richness of our understanding. The complexity or unpredictability of a phenomenon does not mean that it is impervious to mathematical formalism[29] but rather the opposite. Symbolic forms have yet to be worked out that could place a "particular body in an extraordinarily rich and finely articulated complex of relations."[30]

The *genius loci*, as formulated by Norberg-Schulz, celebrates an empathic relation of the individual to place. Its abstraction relies on a symbolic form that tends more toward myth than scientific reason. His "spirit of place" is refractory to analysis. This is a sharp contrast to *Intentions*, in which he enthusiastically promotes a "new synthesis of logic and empiricism."[31] However, he remains committed to this project when he turns in *Genius Loci* to a psychological explanation and justification of the importance of the "spirit of place" for individual and collective existence.[32] It may be helpful to recall that psychology historically sought to distinguish itself from psychoanalysis (which deals with the subconscious) by adopting the logical positivist credo of formulating

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28 Ernst Cassirer, *The Philosophy of Symbolic Forms I* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1953), 110.

29 Dowek in *Ces préjugés qui nous encombrent* raises this issue with regard to a commonplace in the social sciences by which "wicked problems" are too complex for mathematical thinking; see especially Horst W. J. Rittel and Melvin M. Webber, "Dilemmas in a General Theory of Planning," in *Policy Sciences* 4, no.2 (1973): 155–69.

30 Cassirer, *The Philosophy of Symbolic Forms I*, 109.

31 Norberg-Schulz, *Intentions in Architecture*, 82.

32 Norberg-Schulz, *Genius Loci*.

the objects of scientific research in terms accessible
to empirical methods, notably in terms of observable
behaviors and verbalized explanations of action.[33] The
"spirit of place" became expressed as "place identity" and
then was described as a property of personal or cultural
identity.[34] In environmental psychology, it is thought of
as "an overlap between one's sense of self and place"[35]—
the recognition that places are integral to one's "personal
and communal identity and self-worth."[36]

This bond is at the core of the concept of place at-
tachment. As evidenced by a review by Scannell and Gif-
ford, the concept tends to be employed by researchers
seeking to understand a dynamic system of person and
place with cognitive, affective, and behavioral process-
es.[37] The interest of architects and urbanists in these
studies is to understand what supports or affords (to
borrow a word from psychologist J. J. Gibson[38]) a feeling
of attachment or belonging to places in order to create
places for which people will feel a sense of ownership

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33   Alexander Rosenberg, *Philosophy of Social Science* (Boulder, Colo-
rado: Westview Press, 2012).

34   Harold M. Proshansky, Abbe K. Fabian and Robert Kaminoff,
"Place-Identity: Physical World Socialization of the Self," in *Journal of
Environmental Psychology* 3, no.1 (1983): 57–83.

35   Robert Gifford, "Environmental Psychology Matters," in *Annual
Review of Psychology* 6, no.5/1 (2014): 560.

36   David Seamon, "Place Attachment and Phenomenology," in *Place
Attachment: Advances in Theory, Methods, and Applications*, ed. by Lynne
Manzo and Patrick Devine-Wright (New York: Routledge, 2014), 17.

37   Leila Scannell and Robert Gifford, "Defining Place Attachment:
A Tripartite Organizing Framework," in *Journal of Environmental Psy-
chology* 30, no.1 (2010): 1–10.

38   James J. Gibson, "The Theory of Affordances," in *Perceiving, Acting,
and Knowing: Toward an Ecological Psychology*, ed. by Robert Shaw and
John Bransford (Hillsdale, New Jersey: Lawrence Erlbaum Associ-
ates, 1977), 67–82.

and for which they will take responsibility. Addressing the *genius loci* primarily in psychological and psychometric terms seeks less to understand the transcendental and timelessness of the "spirit of place" than to learn to operate the dynamics of an organism – environment mechanism. The way in which place identity is understood through a psychological and anthropocentric encoding and the way in which statistical correlations are instrumentalized for decision-making resembles the militaristic function that rejects the existentialist (but conceptually rich) approach of Heidegger for one that is oriented towards utility and to tangible results. It shifts from one preconception (symbolic abstraction as ineffective for understanding complex phenomena) to another (symbolic abstraction as ineffective for meaningful action), skipping over the *genius loci* as a symbolic form and (impersonal) subject along the way.

Communicating with an Impersonal Subject: From Attachment to Detachment

The *genius loci*, as a "spirit" or "sense" of place, was explored by human geographers as relative to a particular geographical location in space.[39] Norberg-Schulz similarly associates the spirit with a unique settlement unit, a particular place where people live or that they experience regularly. The degradation of the environment that he observed was on a local scale, where planning ideologies did not correspond with nor care for the local character. His interest in the *genius loci* was fas-

39   David Manuel-Navarrette and Michael Redclift, "The Role of Place in the Margins of Space," in *The International Handbook of Environmental Sociology*, ed. by Michael Redclift and Graham Woodgate, 2nd ed (Northampton, Massachusetts: Edward Elgar Publishing, 2010), 334–48.

cination—through his reading of Heidegger—with a noncausal power of place,[40] but one which could evoke an emotional and aesthetic experience for people.

French philosopher Michel Serres observes with a similar horror the impact of human actions on the world. For him, however, the degradation that Norberg-Schulz observed is not on any one place in particular but on the scale of the planet. Humanity, he observes in *Le contrat naturel*, published in 1990, has become a natural force able to destroy the very conditions of possibility for life on earth.[41] The violence that is discharged over local territorial disputes tends to be directed toward the planet itself. As Serres's intellectual companion René Girard observed, the mass production and consumption of goods whose lifecycle ends only as waste in the ecosystem may be able to temporarily calm the desire for each to have his or her own place just like everyone else, but it comes at great cost.[42]

In contrast to Norberg-Schulz, Serres neither blames scientific reason nor does he call for a return to nature or pre-technological or pre-modern ways of living. In fact, the tendency to personify Nature—to oppose what is *biologique* (organic) and the scientific practices of *biologie* (biology), to fear chemistry or biotechnology—is symptomatic of the freneticism of times of crisis by which the terms that are used collectively to make sense of the world begin to lose all distinction. This loss leads to a speechlessness that has become usurped by the media, which have adopted the religious function of sorting

40   Edward S. Casey, *The Fate of Place: A Philosophical History* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997).

41   Michel Serres, *Le contrat naturel* (Paris: Flammarion, 2009).

42   René Girard, *Je vois Satan tomber comme l'éclair*, (Paris: Grasset, 2001), see the chapter "Le triomphe de la croix."

good from evil and engaging in evangelistic publicity of paths to salvation, even if it comes in secular terms such as saving the planet, saving our cities, or saving the spirit of particular places.[43]

As Serres argues in *Le contrat naturel*, "if our rational could wed the real, the real our rational, our reasoned undertakings would leave no residue; so if garbage proliferates in the gap between them, it's because that gap produces pollution, which fills in the distance between the rational and the real."[44] The problem is one of equipollence—equality in power and degree—of the rational and the real. Our collective relationship with the planet is mediated by objects whose scale is equal to that of the planet: ballistic missiles for space, satellites for their rotational speed, nuclear residue on par with geological time, and the atomic bomb for energy and heat. For Serres, the fact that with these world-objects we communicate on the scale of the planet is the major paradigm shift that no previous era knew.[45] This communication is, for Serres, an externalization of our reason, not a by-product. It is not a prosthesis: It is the way in which human reason meets the artificial intelligence of the world.[46]

Serres's thinking is thereby closer to that of Ernst Cassirer than to Heidegger. Although he sees a danger-

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43   Serres's focus is on the deification of Nature and of the religious gesture of "ecology," see Michel Serres, "Le concept de Nature," in *Études* 400, no.1 (2004): 67–74.

44   Michel Serres, *The Natural Contract* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1995), 24–25.

45   Michel Serres, "Trahison: la thanatocratie," in *La traduction, Hermès 3* (Paris: Éditions de Minuit, 1968), 73–103.

46   This is where Serres's understanding of technology differs from that of Gilbert Simondon, see Michel Serres, Martin Legros and Sven Ortoli, *Pantopie: de Hermès à petite poucette* (Paris: Le Pommier, 2014).

ous power in science, it is through the scientific enter-
prise's attempts to bridge the singular and the universal
that humanity can collectively defuse the internecine
violence that characterized pre-modern societies. Math-
ematics provides a language that can, in principle, be
learned by anyone. No vernacular language can claim
ownership over the technics by which the world is rea-
soned. The symbolic forms that Cassirer observed in
his philosophy of human culture are part of the way
in which the world is experienced. He insists that "the
illusion of an original division between the intelligible
[*idealism*] and the sensuous [*empiricism*], between idea
and 'phenomenon' vanishes."[47] Unlike Enlightenment
thinkers, who thought that nature was written in the
language of mathematics like an *open book*, mathematics
is, for Serres, a *cipher* by which one tries to approximate
both the code and the key (ordering mechanism) of a
world written in cipher text.[48] This double articulation
is situated between the rational and the real that calls
for a finesse by which human intelligence learns through
both experience (by being plunged into the contingent
world of objects) and reason (by abstracting such con-
tingency into law-like necessities, however provisional
and open to critique and testing).

Unlike Cassirer, however, Serres does not situate
the locus of cognition solely with the human subject.
Humans are not alone in thinking: "Because information
circulates universally within and between the totality
of all existing things," Serres writes, "we really cannot
say that we are as exceptional as we think we are. What
is thinking, if not at least carrying out these four oper-

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47 Cassirer, *The Philosophy of Symbolic Forms I*, 111.
48 Michel Serres, *La naissance de la physique dans le texte de Lucrèce:
fleuves et turbulences*, (Paris: Éditions de Minuit, 1977).

ations: receiving, emitting, storing, and processing information like all existing things?"[49] Cassirer's neo-Kantianism means that the invariance of the experienced object lies in the human subject, which is the subjective transcendental that characterizes the Kantian tradition of subject philosophy. Our scientific understanding of the world, for Serres, allows us to understand how "the formal characteristics of objects determine the formal conditions of possibility of experience and knowledge."[50] For Serres, "There is meaning [*sens*] in space before the meaning [*sens*] that signifies."[51] The transcendental of Serres is an objective one. It is akin to saying "It thinks" like one would say "It rains": It is an impersonal subject.

The *genius loci* could be thought of, in a secular sense, as an impersonal subject. It becomes, like the planet, a symbiont—not our adversary to be mastered and possessed. In *Le parasite*, Serres ponders the tendency in the animal world to take without giving anything in return. The parasitic gesture is one in which what is "One's own [*le propre*] is what is clean [*le propre*]," and it is directly rooted in the idea of property [*la propriété*] that claims ownership by making something proper only for oneself or for the members of one's community and improper (dirty [*impropre*]) for everyone else.[52] To mark one's ter-

49   Michel Serres, "Information and Thinking," in *Philosophy After Nature*, ed. Rosi Braidotti (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2017), 13–20.

50   Anne Crahay, *Michel Serres: La mutation du cogito: genèse du transcendantal objectif* (Bruxelles: De Boeck, 1988), 27.

51   Michel Serres, *Rome: le livre des fondations* (Paris: Éditions de Minuit, 1983), 22–23, author's translation.

52   Michel Serres, *The Parasite*, trans. Lawrence R. Schehr (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1982), 144.

ritory through forms of appropriation means literally to "take as one's own" from *ad-* and *propriare*.[53]

The word "property" is also used to assign attributes to things in analysis and classification, which can lead to confusion in the description of what something "is" with the enumeration of what something "has." Defining being in terms of properties, Serres maintains, reduces a thing's identity to an abstract class by which it can be associated with other things having the same properties. This confusion is one between "belonging" (*appartenance*) and "identity," where one confuses properties, which form the classes to which a thing belongs, with the identity of the thing itself. Speaking to the reader, Serres writes, "But who are you then? ... Let's say your identity. The only true response: you and only you."[54] Identity, he reminds us, is represented by the mathematical symbol $\equiv$ that defines a thing tautologically ($A \equiv A$). It is not an equality sign. Equality implies an identity relation that is worked out through equation.[55] Belonging is represented by the symbol $\in$ and means "element of." It implies an inclusionary relationship in a set, the set to which one belongs based on the properties one has. When the separation between belonging and identity is not maintained, identification becomes a form of appropriation. However, if we follow Serres, to identify with something is not to posit a relationship of stability or of property but rather to establish a relationship of alterity that can-

53   Douglas Harper, "Appropriate," *Online Etymology Dictionary*, 2021 http://etymonline.com/index.php?allowed_in_frame=0&search=appropriate (accessed December 17, 2021).

54   Michel Serres, *L'incandescent* (Paris: Le Pommier, 2003), 144.

55   See Vera Bühlmann, "Equation (Mathematical Thinking)," in *Posthuman Glossary*, ed. Rosi Braidotti and Maria Hlavajova (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2018), 133–38.

not leave the self [*le moi*] unchanged as it becomes the host of actively invited alterity.[56]

Following this line of reasoning, place identity is *not* synonymous with the attachment by any one individual or group of individuals to a place. The identity of a place is the tautology of its being itself and only itself — or, inversely, of being not every other place. If the *genius loci* is an impersonal subject, then it is perhaps the Other with which one can identify. But it is not about claiming ownership nor guardianship over this subject. Even if there could be potential positive or negative psychological effects of a sense of belonging in the identification with places, it is mediated through symbolic forms. In thinking the relation of equipollence between the real and the rational, perhaps it is more appropriate to talk about the way in which place attachment can emerge from one's ability to *detach* from the *genius loci* — to withhold the tendency to confuse one's own identity with a particular place.

Masks of the *Genius Loci*: Embracing a World in Which Things Do Not Fit

To summarize, we began with Bofill's statement about place being the position from which architecture should start. For Norberg-Schulz, this starting point is the *genius loci*, the character or atmosphere of that place. When humanity knows how to dwell in such a place, it will know how to build as to preserve the *genius loci*, how to gather, following Heidegger, the temporary (the mortals), the eternal (the immortals), the celestial (the sky), and the terrestrial (the earth). From there, we encounter two di-

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56   See especially the section "La vie et le moi comme œuvre," in Serres, *L'incandescent*, 123–25.

rections that the "spirit of place" or "identity of place" has taken: the romantic existentialist one for which a return to place is a return to the pre-reflective—a relationship to place that is semi-religious, in a kind of poetic, bodily communion—and the other, positivist or psychological, for which a return to place is the embracing of a mechanism in which one's "identity" is inseparable from the "identity" of place. Both approaches address the *genius loci* from the standpoint of the human subject whose perception of place is clouded by abstractions that are either scientific or mythical in nature. They implicitly adopt the thesis that the empathic and empirical relationships by which one is plunged into the sensible world are the authentic ones to which our relationship to place ought to return. However, as we saw with Worringer and Cassirer, we should not be too quick to accept such a claim dogmatically. Abstraction is an opposite but complementary pole of artistic volition and a way that humanity comes to terms with an incomprehensible world. This relationship to the world is mediated by symbolic forms of which language and mathematics are different types of abstraction. These symbolic forms are not applied to the world but arise from it. Technological objects encapsulate and externalize the nexus at which a subjective form of cognition meets an objective form of cognition. The destructive power of human reason is no longer limited to the scale of a single settlement and single "rationalist" planning body but has extended to the planetary scale—it challenges us to establish relationships of equipollence between the rational and the real. To presume a "direct," unmediated link between the two would be to repeat an anti-intellectual misconception about abstract forms (in Dowek's account) and to risk, for Serres, in not accounting for the *immondices*

("filth" or pollution) that such a transparentist ideology releases into the world.

To follow this line, learning to dwell would mean learning to live with the impersonal subject that is the *genius loci*. It would mean learning to articulate a relation of equipollence between the rational and the real. The symbolic forms that mediate between the two are not the sole property of subjects nor of objects but emerge in the finesse of their mutual communication. They are both *persons* embarked upon a *milieu* that holds them together at the same time they are held apart. The word *person* carries in its etymology the Roman (Latin) sense of the mask by which one articulates their voice in public — that through which (*per-*) one's voice propagates ("sounds," *sonare*).[57] As such, the subject that is the *genius loci* "sounds through" in the character (*personnage*) of place. Place becomes a kind of mask of the *genius loci*. It is, in this sense, both technical and physical. However, it is by no means meaningless: The masks are symbolic forms that stabilize meanings that are already in the world, even if they appear at first indecipherable by the human intellect. The human subject also learns to stabilize meanings via masks, which are also technical and physical, even as he or she enrolls the body as perhaps a first symbolic form. There is no form of existence in which all masks can be removed.

The *milieu*, which is a between place (*mi-lieu*), would be the realm in which these soundings propagate. This does not mean that the human world is reduced to one of pure signals: Humanity has learned to modulate this communicational milieu in ways that certainly surpass

57   Douglas Harper, "Person," *Online Etymology Dictionary*, 2021 http://etymonline.com/index.php?allowed_in_frame=0&search=person (accessed December 17, 2021).

most organisms of the biosphere. Perhaps learning to dwell is learning to tune the masks by which we sound into the *milieu* with those of the way the *genius loci* sounds into this same *milieu*. If there is something like an ability to "attach" to place, it would not resemble possession or belonging but the instrumentation that allows a ship to orientate and propel itself on the open sea. In the ethical stance, one can glean from Serres's writing that attachment is, at the same time, detachment.[58]

In lieu of a conclusion that might arrive somewhere where everything fits, this article will end with the precise opposite — embracing a necessary lack of fitting. In *The Sympathy of Things*, published in 2011, architect Lars Spuybroek offers *sympathy* as a third "pole" (perhaps an equator) in Worringer's dual polarity of abstraction and empathy. It concerns "the resonance of two things and the synchronization of two activities."[59] To pick up the naval metaphor, where empathy would lead to love or hate of the sea and abstraction would lead to a translation of oceanic phenomena into abstract forms or terms, sympathy is the sailing of the ship by which wind, waves, the positions of the land or the color of the sky are brought into a delicate harmony with the ship itself by its captain and crew. Two behaviors are synchronized, like "two people dancing, or two stars orbiting around each other."[60]

In *Grace and Gravity*, published in 2020, Spuybroek offers an account of the *milieu* in which things resonate, which he brings from the sonic metaphor from *The Sympathy of Things* into the domain of light and radiance.

58   Michel Serres, *Détachement: apologue* (Paris: Flammarion, 1983).

59   Lars Spuybroek, *The Sympathy of Things: Ruskin and the Ecology of Design* (New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2016), 108.

60   Spuybroek, *The Sympathy of Things*, 121.

Rather than thinking, with Heidegger's phenomenology, in terms of appearances that register only with the mind, Spuybroek proposes to conceive of appearances as a shining forth. He, therefore, does not abandon the masks of appearances but does not try to get behind them as Heidegger does. He, instead, takes them as the things they give themselves, for instance, as halos: "a thing does not have a halo, it *is* a halo ... things shed as much light on us as we on them."[61] He proposes to call this phenotechnics and to contrast it with phenomenology. Whereas for Heidegger's phenomenology, the fourfold emphasizes vertical stability in a place (*topos*), Spuybroek's phenotechnology operates and emphasizes the figurative dance, a turning or *tropos* that "operates both on the vertical and the horizontal."[62]

The "turn" accounts for the fact that "we and things do not—and should not—fit, for it is in the gap between habit and inhabitation that the figure appears."[63] Habit and inhabitation, the vertical and the horizontal, like the rational and the real, are held together by being held apart. To eliminate the gap between them would be to reduce one to zero (its death) and the other, unchecked, to potential infinity: Norberg-Schulz witnessed disfigured settlements; Serres witnessed a wounded planet. Learning to dwell is perhaps learning to preserve this gap, to reduce neither the real to the rational nor the rational to the real. It is learning to dance with the *genius loci*, knowing neither the steps nor even the body whose limbs we are to set into motion.

61   Lars Spuybroek, *Grace and Gravity: Architectures of the Figure* (London: Bloomsbury Visual Arts, 2020), 72.

62   Ibid., 99.

63   Ibid., 23.

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for patina, the love of the old, and because of that they hammer out modern 'wrought iron' and soil the new wainscoting of their apartments with bistre.
— Le Corbusier, *When the Cathedrals were White* (1937)

Here we might recall someone else who sympathized with and defended dirty children: Fourier, whose 'phalanstery' was not only a socialist utopia but a pedagogical one as well. Fourier divided the children in the phalanstery into two main groups: the *petites bandes* and the *petites hordes*. The *petites bandes* were assigned to gardening and other pleasant duties. The *petites hordes* had to perform the unwholesome tasks. Each child was free to choose between the two groups. Those who chose to join the *petites hordes* were more highly honored. No work was undertaken in the phalanstery until they had begun it; cases of cruelty to animals were under their jurisdiction; they had miniature ponies on which they tore through the phalanstery at an impetuous gallop; and when they assembled for work, the gathering was marked by a deafening cacophony of trumpet blasts, steam whistles, bell ringing, and drums. In the members of the petites hordes, Fourier saw four great passions at work: pride, shamelessness, insubordination, and-most important of all — *le gout de la salete*, the joy in filth.
— Walter Benjamin, *Understanding Brecht* (trans. 1998)

Evil is equivalent to life, which we don't know how and don't want to define so as not to admit that life is equivalent to this violence that kills, in the long term, by mutation, selection and adaptation, that kills, daily, for dietary survival, that kills, lastly, in order not to die by being eaten, that kills, additionally, for pleasure sometimes. How, consequently, can we free ourselves from evil without

Grace—Filth—Gravity.
Being Attentive to the In-Between

ANDREA KOPRANOVIC

Sculpture is subject to gravity and revealed by light. Here is the primary condition.[1]

Sculpture can be described in manifold ways—one might think of three-dimensional figures made from wood or stone, sacred or profane objects, the molding of plastics, ceramics, and vases. As a delimitation of what it is not, sculpture thus finds itself in an enduring rivalry with painting, dedicatedly contested since antiquity in the *paragone delle arti*, which were famously retraced by Leonardo in his *Trattato della Pittura*. Yet when assessing such genre demarcations in the recent past, sculpture and painting are not the two dominating poles of comparison. Art, in general, has been thoroughly recon-

1   William Tucker, "The Condition of Sculpture: A Selection of Recent Sculpture by Younger British and Foreign Artists," in *Gravity and Grace: The Changing Condition of Sculpture 1965–1975*, exhibition catalog (London: Hayward Gallery (The South Bank Centre), 1993), 35–36.

sidered and marketed in terms like *conceptual*, *feminist*, *happening*, *land*, *minimalist*, *op*, or *pop*—especially since the 1960s and 1970s and predominantly in the USA and Europe. One of these categories was literally dubbed "poor art" by the late art critic and curator Germano Celant. This was not solely due to the use of ordinary, every day—so-called poor—materials, such as wood, stone, earth, iron, or rags. But it came primarily from the artists' radical stance against established value systems: "...the concept of 'impoverishing' each person's experience of the world."[2] *Arte Povera* was conceived in Northern Italy and quickly became known internationally. It was an activating label, one not only of poverty but of plenty at the same time.[3] Concerned with "contingency, events, ahistoricism, the present" and a "disregarding of all visual univocal and coherent discourse,"[4] *Arte Povera* was dedicated to the exploration of the senses and of perception rather than the continuation of the dominance of vision; it tried to reach a unity between art and life, to transform the experience of the self as a public subject

2   Carolyn Christov-Bakargiev, "Survey," in *Arte Povera*, ed. Carolyn Cristov-Bakargiev (London: Phaidon, 1999), 25.

3   Something that has been said about Love (Eros) as well, referring to Diotima in Plato's *Symposium*, to her explication on the origin of the spirit of Love.

4   Germano Celant, "Arte Povera. Notes for a Guerilla War," trans. Paul Blanchard, in *Arte Povera*, ed. Carolyn Cristov-Bakargiev (London: Phaidon, 1999), 194. Celant's vision for *Arte Povera* was to be understood as a sort of guerilla tactic against the stereotypical usurpation of the artist figure in society. His artist-as-guerilla-warrior "prefers essential information," an unmediated, direct way of being in the world a-systematically, stripped of expendable attributions of meaning. For a fresh take on Celant's practice as a curator, see Lara Conte, "Germano Celant: Archive as Practice," in *Critique d'art*, nr. 55 (2021): 205–221; http://journals.openedition.org/critiquedart/68157 (accessed December 14, 2021).

into the medium; and, most importantly, it refused one formally distinguishable style and singular authorship.[5] In their intrinsic way of encompassing language as well as community, the natural and the artificial, the works of *Arte Povera* may be considered articulations of an in-between. Not only do they fulfill the primary condition of sculpture, i.e., being subject to gravity while being revealed by light, but they transcend from it gracefully. Let us first establish what this transcendence refers to.

"It was painting that had the monopoly of the supra-physical world of angels and gods," writes Jon Thompson in his riposte to William Tucker's proposition of conditioning sculpture (which we quote at the very beginning of our text). Both Thompson's and Tucker's essays were printed in an exhibition catalog about the condition of sculpture from 1965 to 1975. It was titled "Gravity and Grace" after Simone Weil's influential, posthumously published anthology. In it, Thompson maintains that only painting, not sculpture, could incorporate "all the transcendental qualities" as well as "the material transformations of realism."[6] Sculpture remained earth-bound, materially confined to the limitations of gravitational space — until after the end of WWII.[7] With *Arte Povera*, sculpture's physical and conceptual bound-

5   Carolyn Christov-Bakargiev, "Survey," in *Arte Povera*, ed. Carolyn Cristov-Bakargiev (London, Phaidon, 1999), 17–28 and 46.

6   Jon Thompson, "New times, new thoughts, new sculpture," in *Gravity and Grace: The Changing Condition of Sculpture 1965-1975*, 11.

7   Thompson starts his investigation by quoting Charles Baudelaire's famous saying that sculpture "was something that you fell over when you stepped back to look at a painting." This devaluation of sculpture compared to painting wouldn't be fully cast off until the 1960s, when, in Thompson's understanding, the writings of Umberto Eco about the openness of information allowed for a characterization of then-contemporary art as breaking with bounded, i.e., institutionalized or traditional patterns. See Thompson, *Gravity and Grace*, 24–34.

edness became a stasis from which grace could be, if not achieved, then at least cultivated. The work of art became "transparent... hiding nothing," shifting the authority of interpretation from the artist themself to the viewer, an active agent.[8] Herein lies the bridge to Simone Weil and her writings in "Gravity and Grace." How to find grace in poverty? Grace can only be approached, yet never truly grasped or acquired, by stripping oneself of all material possessions. "We must give up everything which is not grace and not even desire grace,"[9] according to Weil, who argues for an indirect way to grace via compassion.[10] Poverty, detachment, the acceptance of a void — whatever name we give this gesture — it is the key to understanding not only *Arte Povera* but many similar circumscriptions of attentiveness to an in-between.

What follows is an attempt to address the commensurability of bodies — bodies of thought as well as bodies in a material sense. It is not about their physical or metaphysical boundaries or their categorical differences but about entropic lines which manage to accommodate everything that is between two poles: the inside and the outside, as well as the concealed and the explicit. We want to propose an active attentiveness towards the invariances of these lines, in their flickering in between death and light, an oscillation process so radiant and all-encompassing that we cannot escape it. Radiance emerges from the gap, "that fundamental room between us and things which allows those things to appear," as

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8   Thompson, *Gravity and Grace*, 34.

9   Simone Weil, *Gravity and Grace*, trans. Emma Crawford and Mario von der Ruhr (London-New York: Routledge, 1952), 13.

10   Ibid., 117.

Lars Spuybroek has defined it.[11] The gap thus becomes an anchoring of sorts, an incalculable, irrational space of the in-between. Although submitted to gravity, it is in constant transformation, never still, always moving. And where there is movement, there is sweat. The in-between is messy, hard to pinpoint, filthy at times. We want to dig up the dirt and become attentive to the filth at its center.

Of Angels, Spirits, and Supernatural Love

> Between designates precisely the space in which angels operate, the angels who create links between networks: between freeways and channels of sounds and image... goat paths and computed circuits... rich magi and shepherds... the balm of death, myrrh, perfumes the new-born child! As beings with a double nature, pedagogues, guides and cherubim enable us to see the differences between worlds, and in so doing they stitch together the unity of the new universe.[12]

Michel Serres's angels are messengers or bridge figures of an in-between state, linking different entities.[13] They work within communication and operate therein as transmitters, "invisible — but ... capable of becoming visible. They appear and then disappear."[14] And they must disappear so as to not bear too much importance

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11 Lars Spuybroek, *Grace and Gravity: Architectures of the Figure* (London: Bloomsbury, 2020), 139–140.

12 Michel Serres, *Angels: A Modern Myth*, trans. Francis Cowper (Paris-New York: Flammarion, 1995), 165–166.

13 Serres invented several bridge figures in his writings, ranging from Hermes to the Parasite, Thumbelina to Ulysses; all of them affirm certain identities by way of multiplication of their legal statuses, names, and movements.

14 Serres, *Angels*, 7.

of their own.[15] Before engaging in thoughts about their being and working, let us focus for a moment on the space they claim.

Serres's angels are the inhabitants of the realm of the gap. They, at the same time, live in and constitute it, and we might therefore approach them indirectly through a liminal space, the philosophical concept of *metaxy* (Greek) or *interval* (Latin).[16]

The Greek term *to metaxu* can be translated as intermediary or mediator (as a subject or object) or middle ground (a space or place). It bears a notion of distance or separation within its translatability but, at the same time, holds aspects of connectedness.[17] Grammatically, it conveys neutrality in gender; in music, it stands synonymous with the interval (*diastēma*).[18] First appearing in Plato's "Symposium" in the form of *Love*, metaxy has since been modulated by different voices: Pier Vittorio Aureli talks of the *infra* space as "a constituent aspect

15   Ibid., 99. We should care about angles today, following Serres, "[b]ecause our universe is organized around message-bearing systems, and because, as message-bearers, they are more numerous, complex and sophisticated than Hermes, who was only one person, and a cheat and thief to boot. Each angel is a bearer of one or more relationships; today, they exist in myriad forms, and every day we invent billions of new ones." Ibid., 293.

16   The Latin version of a similar concept is known as an interval (from *intervallum*), referring to the in-between space of two rows of fortifying walls in Roman military architecture. We will focus on the Greek term metaxy for now, as it is richer in its expression.

17   Peter Mahr derives both notions from prepositional and adverbial substantivations in the roots of the word's components. Peter Mahr, "Das Metaxy der Aisthesis: Aristoteles' 'De anima' als eine Ästhetik mit Bezug zu den Medien," in *Wiener Jahrbuch für Philosophie 35*, (2003): 25–58.

18   Alistair Ian Blyth, *The Seductiveness of the Interval*, 2009, https://dialognaporoge.blogspot.com/2009/06/seductiveness-of-metaxy.html (accessed November 11, 2021).

of the concept of form" which cannot be thought of by itself, but which materializes "as a space of confrontation between parts;"[19] Gilles Clément develops the idea of a third landscape, an intermediate, unattended space overcoming the chasm between nature and culture;[20] Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari give their plateaus the role of the in-between, as to form or extend rhizomes;[21] Jean-Luc Nancy describes metaxy as an interval which could bridge into a new form of *communitas*; Paul Virilio articulates a preference for light rather than space and time when reconsidering hyper-accelerated intervals; and Gernot Böhme follows the trajectory of Japanese philosophy and unfolds explications of atmosphere as one form of metaxy.[22] Reaching back into antiquity, Aristotle in *De Anima* considered metaxy as a medium, standing in-between sense and the sensible. It is in the air when sound or smell are transported, connecting every sense and every experience. Dynamically moved and moving in its whole and in parts, it may be thought of not only as an angel spirit but maybe even as an artistic instrument.[23] Different as all those approaches may seem, they evolve around the same characteristics, according

19 Pier Vittorio Aureli, *The Possibility of an Absolute Architecture* (Cambridge-London: MIT Press, 2011), 27.

20 Gilles Clément, *Manifeste du Tiers Paysage* (Paris: Éditions Sujet/Objet, 2004).

21 María del Carmen Molina Barea, *Rhizomatic Mnemosyne: Warburg, Serres, and the Atlas of Hermes*, 2018, https://www.contempaesthetics.org/newvolume/pages/article.php?articleID=812 (accessed November 14, 2021).

22 Mahr, "Das Metaxy der Aisthesis," 43.

23 Ibid., 43–46.

to which metaxy is neither a void nor a possibility, but an actuality, existing within the material, real world.[24]

But what's *Love* got to do with it? As Diotima, the character of a knowledgeable woman in Plato's *Symposium*, who speaks through Socrates's recitation, explains: Love "is a great spirit (*daimon*), and like all spirits, he is intermediate between the divine and the mortal." She continues to explain that the spirit interprets

> between gods and men [as in humans or mortals], conveying and taking across to the gods the prayers and sacrifices of men, and to men the commands and replies of the gods; he is the mediator who spans the chasm which divides them, and therefore in him all is bound together, and through him the arts of the prophet and the priest, their sacrifices and mysteries and charms, and all, prophecy and incantation, find their way. For God mingles not with man; but through Love. [...] Now these spirits or intermediate powers are many and diverse, and one of them is Love.[25]

Love is a bridge figure. It is nourished by the tempers of its father and mother alike, plenty (Poros) and poverty (Penia). Penia, the goddess of poverty, was feared and disliked by many yet taught the invaluable quality of humility. Poros, the god of plenty, was drunkenly se-

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24   Ian Blyth quotes passages from Plutarch, who writes of the in-between in the Latin form of "interval" rather than the Greek notion of "metaxy": "Far from being void, this interval is filled with air (*aēr*, "lower air," as opposed to *aithēr*, the "upper air," "aether," or "heaven"), which, were it removed, would destroy the consociation (*koinōnia*) of the universe. The lower air is also the abode of the intermediate race of daemons (*daimonōn genos*), whose function is interpretative, hermeneutic, and without whom man would either be severed from the gods altogether or subject to the confusion of unmediated contact with them (*De defectu oraculorum*, 416e–f)." Ian Blyth, "The Seductiveness of the Interval."

25   Plato, *Symposium*, trans. by Benjamin Jowett, The Internet Classic Archive, http://classics.mit.edu/Plato/symposium.html (accessed July 24, 2023).

duced by Penia on the night of Aphrodite's birthday, both becoming parents to Eros, the god of love.[26] Michel Serres writes about it:

> Who is Love? Look at him well. He is a relation; he is the intermediary, *metaxu*, he is the passage again, the pass; he is, what passes, quasi-object, quasi-subject, as I said before. … Love is the third; it is third, between two. It is exactly the included third. Always between, between science and ignorance, neither indigent nor wealthy, neither dead nor immortal, it is placed without precision and with rigor in the laws of the logic of the fuzzy; it lives in the fuzzy area of the threshold, homeless and near the door.[27]

In Serres's argument, we understand that metaxy refers to both subject/object and space/place. Metaxy stands in full power between the two, on a threshold that it itself constitutes. Let us, therefore, introduce the in-between in a three-fold manner: as an *agency or driving force*, as a *space or place*, and as that *form or figure*, performing as a subject/object.

The origin of *Love*, as we have reconstructed it above, resonates in this first manner with the concept of supernatural love in Simone Weil. As a type of love that can appear in every empty place that exists between the soul and God, supernatural love bears witness to complete detachment from idols — detachment as poverty, which we referred to earlier in this text, leading to grace. Supernatural love is perceived as a third dimension, and as such it is closely connected to Simone Weil's profound considerations on metaxy:

26   For a more detailed analysis of the characteristics of Love and its origin, see Jason M. Rhodes, "What is the Metaxy? Diotima and Voegelin," 2013, http://www.lsu.edu/artsci/groups/voegelin/society/2003 Papers/Rhodes.shtml (accessed July 24, 2023).

27   Michel Serres, *The Parasite*, trans. Lawrence R. Schehr (Baltimore-London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1982), 241–242; see also 246.

> The essence of created things is to be intermediaries. They are
> intermediaries leading from one to the other and there is no
> end to this. They are intermediaries leading to God. We have
> to experience them as such. ... Only he who loves God with a
> supernatural love can look upon means simply as means. ...
> What is it a sacrilege to destroy? Not that which is base, for that
> is of no importance. Not that which is high, for, even should
> we want to, we cannot touch that. The *metaxu*. The *metaxu*
> form the region of good and evil. No human being should be
> deprived of his *metaxu*, that is to say of those relative and mixed
> blessings (home, country, traditions, culture, etc.) which warm
> and nourish the soul and without which, short of sainthood, a
> *human* life is not possible.[28]

In-between good and evil, heaven and earth, grace
and gravity, we receive nourishment from all *metaxu* —
the personifications of in-between itself, its figures.
The force of supernatural love gives a form to metaxy
and relates as such to Michel Serres's bridge figures. In
Simone Weil, we encounter this love as an active agent
that performs not in an abstract but in a natural way. It
is encoded in and codes all "mixed blessings" in an at-
tempt to balance and counterbalance their surrounding
framework.[29] We can only embrace those figures through
supernatural love, and in return, they sustain us with
supernatural bread or "geistige Nahrung."[30] The space

28   Weil, *Gravity and Grace*, 145–147. Important to note here is the
value Weil ascribes to the necessity of a temporal, which needs to stay
separate from a spiritual. The temporal can take the form of a bridge
leading to the spiritual, making it a *metaxu* — which themselves are
"true earthly blessings."

29   *Counterbalance* is an essential part of Weil's conception of society
and politics to which she attributes the same function as the scales
of justice, but it also relates to her understanding of time: Only when
being locally rooted might one strive for the universal. This is a refusal
of an absolute presence and a projected future but stays in conversa-
tion with the past.

30   In the New Testament, we find the untranslatable adjectival attri-
bution "*epiousios*" when speaking of bread; the term was traditionally

to do so must again be found in metaxy itself, as it is "a space of tension between two static extremes, [and] it is only the existence of the metaxy that enables the possibility of ambi-directional movement, thereby creating a medium of communication."[31]

Mechanics of Dis/Appearance. The Figurate

After we have gained sensibility towards their existence, how do we recognize all these forms of spirits and bridge figures? How might their appearance and disappearance in the realm of the in-between work? They seem elevated, pure, naïve even, yet we must take their workings at face level to encounter necessary and important noise and filth. The turning point or fulcrum in our endeavor to attend to the in-between lies within itself. We have seen up until now that we cannot attend to it directly, but we must employ vicarious figures, emerging between two poles from which we can operate. The manifestation of the in-between's appearances can take manifold forms, but what they all share as a common can be described as a *figurate*. Via the figurate, we may grasp a mechanics to identify its workings, to understand the

adopted to mean "daily," yet there is another version that tries to link it etymologically to mean "supersubstantial" (cf. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Epiousios; accessed February 2, 2024). I propose that this is close to Weil's supernatural bread, a nourishment that goes beyond substance and may be described as a material transubstantiation of light—realizing oneself through exhausting oneself, similar to photosynthesis in plants.

31   Ian Blyth, "The Seductiveness of the Interval." For a further discussion of the notion of "media" connected to the metaxy discourse, see Emmanuel Alloa, "Metaxy oder: Warum es keine immateriellen Medien gibt," in *Imaginäre Medialität—Immaterielle Medien*, ed. Gertrud Koch, Kirsten Maar, Fiona McGovern (Paderborn: Wilhelm Fink, 2019), 13–34.

perpetual movement of the in-between as a double, re-
ciprocal one, which does not long for closure, resolution,
or a telos. All it "does" is eternal appearing and disap-
pearing, ambi-directionally and elusively, detached from
progress but rooted in circularity.

The figurate is a concept developed within a "phe-
notechnology of spirit," as per Lars Spuybroek, accom-
modating both mimesis and physis in an adjectival re-
lationship that is contrapuntal.

In *Grace and Gravity*—yet another book by the same
title in a clear reference to Weil, although invertedly
so—Spuybroek outlines the *phenotechnical*[32] as the con-
scious capability to enable figures to appear in a mate-
rial sense via radiance. Phenotechnically charged and
exposed by radiance, figures (deliberately confused
with things in Spuybroek) appear for themselves. They
are in constant movement, one of absorption, leakage,
percolation, twisting, and turning. Spuybroek consid-
ers these "gymnastics" a self-othering, as "just enough
otherness to enable the Self" is a condition for grace to
manifest.[33] *Absorptive mimesis* is the term used for this
process, an acknowledgment of the other by absorbing it
into the self.[34] While Weil develops her considerations on
gravity and grace around the notion of a double descent
of grace—simultaneously "a sensorial descent and a
spiritual rising," as grace ascends from gravity to descend

32   *Pheno-* from to the root **bha-*, in Sanskrit bhati "shines, glitters;"
Greek *phainein* "bring to light, make appear." https://www.etymonline.
com/search?q=*bha- (accessed July 24, 2023).

33   "Are we moving them or are they [appearances] moving us? …
Grace works exactly there where that question cannot be answered
anymore, because between the Self, Other, and spirit a gift cycle starts
to get going that makes the figure simultaneously an interior and an
exterior appearance." Spuybroek, *Grace and Gravity*, 157f.

34   Spuybroek, *Grace and Gravity*, 123.

by a second degree[35] — we find it further differentiated in Spuybroek. His riposte is constructed from the etymological base of gravity's root, *-gwere*, which besides meaning "heavy," can also mean "to favor," connecting it strongly to grace.[36] His ambition is to develop Weil's purely vertical stances of descent and ascent further by introducing a horizontal movement, thereby creating a mechanics of the contrapuntal. We remember that there needs to be a gap, a disconnected point, providing space for the appearance and disappearance of all figures. Within it, we find a lever which is the contrapuntal, a fulcrum of entropic lines. Rather than in contrapposto, the balanced axial-angularity in classical sculpture, the contrapuntal is a soft spot, a weakness rather than an elegance.[37] Spuybroek constructs his "grace machine" around this softness: the two fundamental poles of the machine are *habit* on the one side and *inhabitation* on the other. Habit is a temporal wheel, whereas inhabitation embodies a spatial structure; the two can only be bridged by grace, appearing in the gap. The appearance occurs due to "two zones of influence, with (a) on one side, the input of rhythm" and "(b) ... the vertical axis of gravity."[38] The machine works "backwards in time toward memory" and has "a fundamental question mark at its heart."[39] Twisting and turning in perpetual movement, the workings of the machine are complex and manifold.

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35   Weil, *Gravity and Grace*, 150.

36   Spuybroek, *Grace and Gravity*, 375.

37   Spuybroek, *Grace and Gravity*, 15. "How does the human body stand gracefully? ... 'By standing weakly.' We stand contrapuntally, i.e., *in contrapposto*, i.e. *in counterpoise*, with the *what* and *how* of standing in direct contrast."

38   Ibid., 16, 20.

39   Ibid., 32–33.

Thus, let us consider the metaphor of the puppet and the puppeteer or, in reference to Aristotle, *tōn thaumatōn tautomata* to address the circular looping of the grace machine in a more approachable manner.

The phrase *tōn thaumatōn tautomata* has several possible translations, ranging from "coincidences of nature" to "self-moving puppets" or "self-moving wonders." The two terms *automata* and *thaumata* were already connected in Hesiod and Homer, yet were further developed in Aristotle, who refers back to Plato. The latter made use of *thaumata* when speaking of the shadows cast in the wall of the cave in his *Republic*; the former formulates the above phrase in his *Metaphysics*, meaning self-moving marvels.[40] When the celestial marvels turn to earthly puppets by the elasticity of etymology, we become spectators of a special performance. Dynamically moved and moving in its whole and in parts, puppets or marionettes, as well as their puppeteers, are both "simultaneously active and passive, or sending and receiving," joining into the round of absorptive mimesis together. A reciprocal engagement of stillness and movement, hanging and standing, lightness and heaviness elevates and grounds them in loops of self-othering. Going from movement to stillness, we may encounter grace; in the other direction, from stillness to movement, we find beauty. The grace machine works in such a way precisely to "make appearances appear."[41]

But those appearances lack the role of the in-between—in them, we do not encounter bridge figures, spirits, angels, or love. Although birthed and deceased

40   For a distinction of the usage of *thaumata* in Plato and Aristotle and the latter's concept of the "Unmoved Mover," see Goeff S. Bowe, "Thaumata in Aristotle's Metaphysics A," *Acta Classica* 60 (2017): 50–72.
41   Spuybroek, *Grace and Gravity*, 215–221.

within the grace machine, Spuybroek's figures are faux statues; they are not proper bridge figures, but mannered ones, as they do not connect to a material world but appear out of a void. Their "realness" is lined and fed by an infinite number of images pouring down through the metaphorical portal of "anachronical correspondences." In this sense, they are automated, self-moving puppets, played by their puppeteer but never truly, consciously aware. They are sterile, as the void from which they rise and into which they descend is, by definition, devoid of matter and, therefore, of filth; the gap is empty rather than full.[42] Spuybroek's *phenotechnical figurate* works outside of communication and is only sustained by external forces. Without noise, remnants, or invariances to tarnish the setting, we keep turning to perfection, abstracted from the poorness; we need to accommodate an active attentiveness towards the in-between.

Coda: *Nous* and Noise

Let us turn to Plato and Aristotle one last time. As Ian Blyth summarizes poignantly,

> Aristotle (*Metaphysics*, 987b) reports that his teacher [Plato] admitted an "in-between" (*metaxu*) class of things, in the interval between things perceptible to the senses (*ta aisthēta*) and the Forms, or Ideas (*ta eidē*), knowable by the mind; these are the

42   Grace creates a void, while at the same time it needs one to be present; but leading to it there must be matter. To speak again with Weil: "Like a gas, the soul tends to fill the entire space which is given it. A gas which contracted leaving a vacuum—this would be contrary to the law of entropy. It is not so with the God of the Christians. He is a *supernatural* God, whereas Jehovah is a natural God. Not to exercise all the power at one's disposal is to endure the void. This is contrary to all the laws of nature. Grace alone can do it. Grace fills empty spaces but it can only enter where there is a void to receive it, and it is grace itself which makes this void." Simone Weil, *Gravity and Grace*, 10.

objects of mathematics, eternal and immutable like the Forms, but unlike them multiple. The interval is therefore necessarily a space of multiplicity, participating in both the immutability of the eternal and the plurality of the temporal.[43]

We experience, and we process those experiences — our attentiveness is, therefore, entangled with the in-between of the senses and *nous*. *Nous,* as the intuitive faculty of thought, is a divine entity in Plato; it stands in opposition to *dianoia*, its analytical counterpart. Plato refers to the latter as an "Abbild" of *nous*, operating on the level of discourse, in-between ratio and opinion.[44] Self-othering, as we encountered in Spuybroek, is at play here too; Eric Voegelin put it quite aptly in this analysis of Plato's metaxy:

> Once the truth of man's existence had been understood as the In-Between reality of noetic consciousness, the truth of the process as a whole could be restated as the existence of *all things in the In-Between of the One and the Apeiron*.[45]

We would suggest that *dianoia*, the discursive materialization of ideas and forms, is in our setup a bridge figure, i.e., the in-between as a subject/object, while *nous* would take the role of supernatural love, i.e., the in-between as an agency. Where they meet (i.e., the in-between as a place or space), we become aware of the true mixing and mingling of matter, a process of multiplication. Being many, the in-between cannot be of a pure essence then, such as the one that Anaxagoras ascribes to his concept of *nous*.[46] It must be filthy, holding

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43 Alistair Ian Blyth, "The Seductiveness of the Interval."

44 Lloyd P. Gerson, "What are the Objects of Dianoia?," *Plato Journal* 18, (2018): 45–53. https://doi.org/10.14195/2183-4105_18_4 (accessed July 24,2023).

45 Jason M. Rhodes, "What is the Metaxy?"

46 Anaxagoras believed that the world in its origin and workings were deployed by a universal mind, which he referred to as *nous*. "All

invariances and remnants of past, present, and future multiplications. In this sense, we approach what Michel Serres has defined as noise and the parasite—a constant interruption of communication via interference:

> Noise destroys an order, the order of discourse; it also announces another order. Disorder is the end of order and sometimes its beginning. Noise turns around, like a revolving door. The beginning or the end of a system for the former; an entrance or exit for the latter. Exclusion, inclusion. The logic of the parasite, on the side of the noise, remains coherent with the logic of the door by which enter the parasites who are going to drink or who have already drunk.[47]

Noise is the fulcrum at the center of all communication and the in-between. It is circular, continuously excluding and including the figures it creates, allowing them to appear in a space that is inherent to them. Identities, places, forms, and figures meet and mix in the in-between. With our newly found attentiveness towards it, we can come back to where we started: the sculptures of *Arte Povera*. Being stripped of superfluous matter and therefore referencing the minimalistic quality of "poverty," these works of art foreground the value of plenty. They are anchored in gravity while simultaneously transcending its physical limitations towards grace. They move us and are moved by us in a reciprocal manner. And at last, their appearance makes us aware of the subtle noises of grace, gravity, light, space, spirits, angels, and love.

other things are mixed together: Nous alone is unrestricted and pure and self-ruling. … Nous is the most tenuous of all things and the purest: it has universal knowledge and the greatest strength, having power over all living things, great and small." Stephen Toulmin and June Goodfield, *The Fabric of the Heavens: The Development of Astronomy and Dynamics* (New York, Harper & Row, 1961), 69.

47   Serres, *The Parasite*, 244.

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abandoning life itself since it entails death, entropy, filth and crimes?
— Michel Serres, *The Incandescent* (2003)

Prophecies.—In Egypt. Pugio Fidei, Talmud. 'It is a tradition among us, that, when the Messiah shall come, the house of God, destined for the dispensation of His Word, shall be full of filth and impurity; and that the wisdom of the scribes shall be corrupt and rotten. Those who shall be afraid to sin, shall be rejected by the people, and treated as senseless fools'.
— Blaise Pascal, *Pensées* (1670)

At the very height of England's industrial squalor, when the houses for the working classes were frequently built beside open sewers and when rows of them were being built back to back-at that very moment complacent scholar writing in middle-class libraries could dwell upon the 'filth' and 'dirt' and 'ignorance' of the Middle Ages, as compared with the enlightenment and cleanliness of their own.
— Lewis Mumford, *Technics and Civilisation* (1934)

We can take for one illustration the death ritual of the Nyakyusa, who live north of Lake Nyasa. They explicitly associate dirt with madness; those who are mad eat filth. There are two kinds of madness, one is sent by God and the other comes from neglect of ritual. Thus they explicitly see ritual as the source of discrimination and of knowledge. Whatever the cause of madness, the symptoms are the same. The madman eats filth and throws off his clothes. Filth is listed as meaning excreta, mud, frogs: 'the eating of filth by madmen is like the filth of death, those faeces are the corpse'.
— Mary Douglas, *Purity and Danger* (1966)

Yes, so much the worse, he knows it is a voice, how

Onanistic Engenderings

EMMANUELLE CHIAPPONE-PIRIOU

Man's only "passion," therefore, is being.
Yet if this is the garden man cultivates,
where is the soil?[1]

In her 2021 video *Dead Fingers Talk*,[2] presented in an
exhibition entitled "Onanism sorcery,"[3] the artist Lau-

1   Luce Irigaray, *Speculum of the Other Woman* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press,1985 [1974]).

2   *Dead Fingers Talk* is borrowed from William S. Burroughs, at once
the title of a chapter of the *Soft Machine* and of the eponymous book
(published in 1963). This latter book exemplifies Burroughs's "cut-up"
technique and its relation to chance. The book was composed by the
assemblage and edition of previously existing passages, published
alongside new texts, which points to an understanding of authoring
and invention as a process of copy and re-articulation rather than the
production of novelty.

3   *Dead Fingers Talk* was part of the "Onanism Sorcery" exhibition
at 40mcube, Rennes (29.05.2021 – 28.08.2021). The series prolongs the
explorations in the post and the transhuman, in enhanced bodies
and necropolitics that have been at the heart of Gozlan's oeuvre for a
decade. I would like to thank Laura Gozlan for the discussions around
the themes raised in her work, which have nurtured this text.

ra Gozlan portrays MUM, a feminine character with a
grave, ambiguous voice. MUM is old, unsound, and yet
her lascivious poses denote great strength and over-
whelming appetite. Smocking a sort of decoction from
a water pipe — something between a zombie drug and
an elixir of eternal youth — MUM is masturbating; she is
masturbating hard, fast, and at length; she is high in all
possible ways. She flaunts her vivid desire and parades
her libidinal autonomy all over the place, a devastating
force that illuminates her deformed face and saturates
the air[4] as if amalgamated with the smoke and the heavy
breath of the movie heroine. MUM appears as an archaic
mother, who watches over creatures to come, creatures
that would be the fruit of a complex and obscure process
of transubstantiation and would go on to live an auton-
omous, detached, almost fleeting life. *Once you get out of
the mud, you have a name,* she whispers in her cavernous
yet hegemonic voice in the course of her onanist ritual.
The sentence takes the form of an assertion, that of the
cutting or interruption of the paternalistic lineage of
the father's name.

The sexual act performed by MUM does not involve
any mating nor copulation, only mud and cyprine. Her
creatures originate from a sudden, unmediated birth
rather than from a gradual bringing into fullness of life
or being. Such an engendering opens the possibilities of
other genealogies, interrupting the masculine marking
"of the product of copulation *in his own name*,"[5] which
Luce Irigaray describes as the trademarking mechanism
at the heart of the process of anonymization and sub-

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4   Laura Gozlan's other exhibited works appear as material itera-
tions of this libidinal force, rendered sensible, almost palpable, as if
frosted under the viscous and fleshy surfaces of the sculptures.

5   Irigaray, *Speculum of the Other Woman*, 23.

sequent substitution of the origin that is the feminine productive labor. MUM's onanistic engendering does indeed break with the preservation of fathers' names, which operate by means of encodings of blood lineages in letters and sounds. The fact that a name is nevertheless acquired when getting out of MUM's mud does not so much point to the negation of the phallocentric understanding of the subject as it introduces a possible re-orientation away from the masculine narcissistic process founded upon the affirmation of the primacy of self-identity (by means of specular duplication and repetition of man as the same, in Irigaray's words), towards a non-anthropocentric self-othering.

If we invoke MUM here, as well as other artistic, mythological, and literary figures, it is with the hope that they can help us approach inventively some non-human forms of engendering that we today regularly encounter in the realm of information technologies and, as they rapidly gain momentum, beyond: that of the hyper-fertile machine learning processes, generally grouped under the label of generative artificial intelligence (GenAI). If this text borrows from domains that may seem distant from architecture, it is out of the conviction that it is by reconnecting to these shared repositories of images and tales that one can start attending to and reasoning with the omnipresent, abstract powers at play in technology today. It trusts that the feminine figures summoned, including that of MUM, can, individually and as a group, lend corporeality to these intellectual and informational processes of self-engendering, thus avoiding the technocratic and instrumental views, as well as the demonstrative or argumentative discourses that mostly surround such informational processes. The figures that populate this article share *strange* manners to procreate, which

we would like to consider under the guise of onanism. Expanding on Irigaray's untying of the *old dream of symmetry*, onanism is to be understood loosely as a process capable of interrupting interpretative projections that reduce generative processes to a specular production of sameness in order to recognize forms of alienation at play. By alienation, we do not mean that artificial intelligence is to be understood as anything other than human-made. Yet, said alienation may be encountered, discovered, or even remembered when restoring the severed "profound relationship to the imaginary,"[6] what onanist exploration permits; that is, when one accepts to consider the symbolical and logical processes of rational formalization of thought beyond any morally based questions of efficiency and truthfulness. The strange form of fertility explored along the text's meanders is, however, not dependent on, or rooted in, any natural form of femininity—as the figures invoked are at once bodies, personages, patterns, and algebraic beings—not even on a bodily capacity to incubate, but stands for the profound intrication of rationalism, fantasy and an active material reality (in the case of MUM, in the combination of mud and feminine fluids).[7]

6   "We can assume that any theory of the subject has always been appropriated by the masculine. When she submits to (such a) theory, woman fails to realize that she is renouncing the specificity of her own relationship to the imaginary." (Irigaray, *Speculum of the Other Woman*, 133). Irigaray writes against the Freudian idea of the masculinity of auto-eroticism and its necessary abandonment by the little girl, as a sign of the victory of the (so-called) masculine sexuality that is the appropriation of the specular, or speculative, process/trial. See Irigaray, *Speculum of the Other Woman*, 77–78.

7   Here, the conservation of the organicity of reproduction against the cyborgian autonomy of the replicative process (as proposed by Donna Haraway) does not imply the abandonment of the gender-abolitionist perspective and any subsequent affirmation of a binary sexual

Naming the Inert: On the Univocality of the Specular Disposition and of the Growth of the *Logos*

The sentence muttered by MUM, *Once you get out of the mud, you have a name,* refers to the hallucinated process described in the last chapter of William S. Burroughs's *The Soft Machine,* in which death, decay, sex, and (de) generation are intertwined in a muddy, filthy feast.[8] The mud invoked by the poet is very different from the *primal mud* from which the known etymology and commonly accepted double symbolism derives; at once filthy and fertile, fertile because filthy, but still of a passive form of fertility. The dirtiness that characterizes it is inscribed in its Welsh roots, from the term *Bawa,* which will give

differentiation (including the naturalization of a feminine identity). Rather, it maintains such perspective (following Xenofeminism) and couples it to the possibility of a *diversity* and the many transitions that can be imagined amongst it. On how a trans-feminism and its invention of "a relation to what language has not already ordered" could fit within the spectrum of Irigaray's discussion of procreation, see Jules Gill-Peterson, "The Miseducation of a French Feminist," *e-flux Journal* 117, (April 2021), https://www.e-flux.com/journal/117/382426/the- miseducation-of-a-french-feminist/ (accessed December 21, 2021).

8   "We waded into the warm mud-water, hair and ape flesh off in screaming strips, stood naked human bodies covered with phosphorescent green jelly, soft tentative flesh cut with ape wounds, peeling other genitals, fingers and tongues rubbing off the jelly-cover, body melting pleasure-sounds in the warm mud. till the sun went and a blue wind of silence touched human faces and hair. When we came out of the mud we had names... We moved to keep out of our excrement where white worms twisted up feeling for us and the white worm-sickness in all our bodies... I pulled the skin over my head and I made another man put on the skin and horns and we fucked like the animals stuck together and we found the animals stuck together and killed both so I knew the thing inside me would always find animals to feed my mouth meat." William S. Burroughs, *The Soft Machine,* 1961, "Cross the Wounded Galaxies," para.2, http://index-of.es/zoro-Repository-2/Cyber/04%20-%20Fiction/WSB/Burroughs%20William%20Seward-The%20Soft%20Machine.pdf (accessed December 9, 2021).

the French *boue;* its dirtiness and moisture is more pre-
cisely captured in the German *Mudde*, the Dutch *modde,*
and the Greek *mydos*. Hence in Burroughs's mud, pus
foam, blood, hairs, worms, flesh, shit, and sperm mingle
indiscriminately, almost joyfully, in an infamous mix-
ture granted with a transformative capacity, by means
of which the tale's characters are metaphorically engen-
dered. Such process, in which infection[9] merges with
insemination, exemplifies the fertility associated with
the impurity of the component, its generative capaci-
ty. Water and soil, including excrements that together
compose mud, enhance and transform each other: As
soil is fecundated by water, so is water fertilized by soil.

Burroughs's "warm mud-water,"[10] however, is not a
mere *substratum,* that which — etymologically — *spreads
underneath,* constituting the basis upon which another
substance is coated or fabricated, supporting the attrib-
utes of another material reality. Rather, it appears as an
active matrix whose materiality is simultaneously com-
municational — as the contagious spreading to all bodies
suggests. There is, indeed, no passivity in Burroughs's
mud; the infectious, warm compound is by no means
the characterless substance that has been symbolically
and religiously connected to engendering. Tradition-
ally, engendering has been considered as a giving birth
that is a *giving form* and a *naming* that occurs without
copulation, whether in the biblical episodes of the ap-
pearance of the Adamic man or the terrestrial fauna or in
the Greek mythological origination of the first woman.

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9   Burroughs evokes a "white worm-sickness." Burroughs, "Cross
the Wounded Galaxies," para. 4.

10   Burroughs, "Cross the Wounded Galaxies," para. 2.

In the Coran,[11] as well as in Genesis, God creates Adam from mud: "And the Lord God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and man became a living soul."[12] And as Adam could not be left alone, so God used a similar process to create animals and trees, again from mud:

> And out of the ground the LORD God formed every beast of the field, and every fowl of the air; and brought them unto Adam to see what he would call them: and whatsoever Adam called every living creature, that was the name thereof.[13]

The ontological promotion enacted by the process of naming performed by the first man delegated under God's authority operates precisely, as noted by Irigaray, because of the failure of the first matter to be defined or predicated. The mythological episode of the forming of the first woman, as told by Hesiod in *Works and Days*, supposes a similar original lack of agency and potency; the All Endowed, namely Pandora, is fashioned on Zeus's orders from earth mixed with water. Modeled in "the fair lovely form of a maiden" itself modeled upon "the immortal goddesses aspect,"[14] she is endowed with enchanting appearances by each of the gods of Olympus, thus bringing the worst sufferings to men in the most charming light. Taking off the lid of the amphora she carries—a gesture she performs in the absence of men, as she is instructed to by Zeus—she releases evils and plagues across the earth, causing the appearance of

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11   Amongst the different wordings of the Qur'an 37:11, Adam was created from "Tîn lâzib," a sticky mud or clay composed of earth (or a quintessence of it) and water.

12   Robert P. Carroll and Stephen Prickett, *The Bible: Authorized King James Version* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), Genesis 2:7.

13   Carroll and Prickett, *The Bible*, Genesis 2:9.

14   Hesiod, *Works and Days* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), 39.

storms, sicknesses, and, most importantly, bringing the knowledge of man's own finitude—the "price for fire" stolen by Prometheus. In operating as a divine instrument, Pandora appears as a purely passive, artificially created belly—as passive as the mud or clay out of which she was made, which requires to be inseminated with *sperma* just like the ground also needs to be inseminated with *sperma* (the seed of plants, or wheat, in Ancient Greek).

Yet, as her second name Anésidora suggests, she is also the one who makes presents emerge from the deep, a goddess of ground presiding over fecundity. Symbolizing the profoundly ambiguous human nature,[15] she stands simultaneously as a power of life and destruction. Her dual nature also stems, however, from the duality of her materiality: In her, woman and soil—both matrixes—are intertwined domains upon which gods (or man) erect their stature. It is precisely the predication of the weakness of the feminine material origin that establishes said material origin, in Irigaray's specular disposition, as an indefinite basis for the ontological promotion of living things. "She (the first matter) is both radically lacking in all power of logos and offers, unawares, an all-powerful soil in which the logos can grow."[16]

Of the (Correlative) Solitude of Technical Matrixes

What if, however, one affirmed such (at once) materially active and rational power to autonomously support and nurture *logos* in a manner that requires no ontological validation, much less from any exterior authority? In

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15   Jean-Pierre Vernant, *Pandora, la première femme* (Paris: Bayard Presse, 2006).
16   Irigaray, *Speculum of the Other Woman,* 162.

other words, what would it imply to refuse the univocality of the link that ensures specularization, that is, to interrupt the subsuming of the *all-powerful soil* solely to an exterior fertilizing power? Burrough's and Gozlan's material-communicational matrix may here offer a counter-model not only to the "old dream of symmetry" implied by the specular duplication of "the same"—and subsequent to the corresponding burial of feminine sexuality—, as described by Irigaray, but also to a correlated modern artistic and literary myth, that of the possible interruption of such symmetry by means of a refusal of procreation.[17] In modern art, such myth manifested in the cyclicality of the *machine célibataire* (bachelor machine). The closed circuit of the Bachelor machine—the solitude of technique—may have indeed symbolized a refusal of procreation, yet it did so, as highlighted by Harald Szeemann, at a time when it was still possible for such renunciation to contain a concept of life by dint of a correspondingly sublimated geometry of eroticism, a time when it was possible to state something complex by means of a "simple" mechanical device; a time when a three-dimensional bachelor mechanism assumes an "adventurous, mostly female" fourth dimension as a relativization of viewpoints, in order to resist the temptation

17   Bazon Brock analyses the 19th-century naturalization of the disappearance of aristocracy in terms of the bourgeois myth that celebrated a "bloodless, direct, unconditional form of procreation," as exemplified in the extreme form of the Männerbund. Brock proposes that such mythology underlined (and still does) a bourgeois notion of emancipation as the individual exit from the collective (differing, as such, from the Greek hero, whose actions are valued only with regard to their dedication to the community). See Bazon Brock, "Parthenogenesis and Bachelor Machine," in *Le Macchine Celibi / The Bachelor Machines,* ed. Jean Clair, Harald Szeemann, (New York: Rizzoli, 1975), 75–82.

provided by once again surveyable circumstances with all the suffering they bring.[18]

The coexistence of a dimension superior to that of the geometrical in the technological realm may well be reappraised today in terms different from those proposed by Szeemann. Rather than a form of relativization, or escapism, of what would be considered a tangible reality, this superior domain—opened by artificial intelligence and fantasy[19] (with the use of distributive, convolutional, and recurrent neural networks)[20]—may well appear in a new light if one was to question the mechanism through which it establishes communication with the other domains. Specifically, we propose that the articulations between the different domains be understood as *hinges* through which non-direct access can be established. Such an approach may invite us to rethink emancipation, as brought about by technological ration-

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18 Harald Szeemann, "The Bachelor Machines," in *Le Macchine Celibi / The Bachelor Machines,* ed. Jean Clair, Harald Szeemann (New York: Rizzoli, 1975), 9.

19 The term "fantasy" is here preferred to that of "imagination," in order not to reduce the discussion to the production of images. The reflexion however shares much with the work developed by artist and researcher Gregory Chatonsky on "artificial imagination," notably "L'imagination (de l')artificielle" in *Plastik, Créations, cerveaux, infinis,* 08, https://plastik.univ-paris1.fr/limagination-de-l-artificielle/ (accessed March 8, 2019).

20 Burroughs's and Gozlan's predilection may invite us to think specifically about "recurrent" neural networks, which deal more effectively with text and language, but we may as well consider "convolutional" neural networks and their performances with images. To approach such artificial intelligences from a philosophical perspective, see Vera Bühlmann, "A Ventriloquist's Vernaculars," in *Chimeras: Inventory of Synthetic Cognition,* eds. Anna Engelhardt and Ilan Manouach (Athens: Onassis Foundation, 2023), 304-06.

alism,[21] by articulating it to a non-anthropocentric take on technology,[22] connecting a materialist perspective with a feminist one.

Although non-reproductive, the mechanical-erotic game designed, but never fully completed, by Duchamp for *The Bride Stripped Bare by Her Bachelors, Even (The Large Glass)* does offer keys to reflect upon such emancipation with regard to the hyper-fertile forms of self-engendering that characterize the digital today. Established upon the "architectonic base"[23] of the geometric world of the bachelors, the Bride flaunts her visceral-mechanical non-Euclidian components: the *Wasp* or *Sex Cylinder*, the flesh-colored *Milky Way* and the draft pistons, the filament substance, etc., all live outside the realm of perspective, in the domain of "the approximation of the 'always possible.'"[24] Fleeting in the fourth dimension, she is inscribed in a discontinuous closed circuit—operating alternatively—and fueled by two sources: her own "love essence"[25]—the 'secretion of (her) sex glands'[26]—and the "illuminating gas" and corresponding electric sparks produced by the Bachelors' eroticism. Her "splendid vibrations" are caused by her complete, double expo-

21 Laboria Cuboniks, "Xenofeminism: A Politics for Alienation," 2015, https://laboriacuboniks.net/manifesto/xenofeminism-a-politics-for-alienation/ (accessed November 2, 2019).

22 As Catherine Malabou indicates, the challenge that humanity is faced with regarding the rise of AI is its capacity to create a community of men and machines.

23 Marcel Duchamp, "La Mariée mise à nu par les célibataires. 2 éléments principaux : 1. Mariée 2. Célibataires," in *Notes autographes pour "La boîte verte,"* ensemble, 1912–1915, Centre Pompidou MNAM-CCI, AM 1997–96, 32.

24 Duchamp, "Par la perspective...", 27. Author's translation.

25 Duchamp, "La Mariée. Squelette," AM 1997–96, 32.

26 Duchamp, "La Mariée mise à nu par les célibataires,"

sure, under both external and internal forces: she is
first stripped bare *electrically* under the effect of the
transmission of the Bachelors' desire (sourced among
other things from the "small wasted energies"[27] such as
the masturbation by the *eros' matrix* of the *Mâlic molds*).
The illuminating gas produced by the Bachelors' sexual
activity, sublimated, spilled, and splashed by the *Oculist
Witnesses*, reaches the Bride to fuel her. She subsequent-
ly proceeds to strip herself in a *voluntary-imaginative*
gesture, stimulated, so to say, by the potency of the de-
sire she generates. Both developments collide and con-
cile into her blossoming "without causal distinction,"[28]
Duchamp writes, causing her fluorescence.

Although excited by the Bachelors, the Bride re-
mains, in Duchamp's words, a "white desire,"[29] the
"apotheosis of virginity;" albeit affected and materially
transformed, she stays physically untouched; only gaze
as energy reaches her, inducing a phase transition that
precisely breaks any symmetry between the states. The
Bride is thus not the *Koré,* the *young virgin* whose desire
must be veiled and preserved as value in a patriarchal
exchange, conserved, in Irigaray's view, in her *powerless*

27   Duchamp, "Transformateur destiné à utiliser les petites éner-
gies…," in *Notes autographes pour "Inframince," "Le Grand Verre," "Projets"
et "Jeux de mots," ensemble, 1912–1968*, Centre Pompidou MNAM-CCI,
AM 1997-98, 187.

28   Duchamp, "La Mariée mise à nu par les célibataires. 2 éléments
principaux : 1. Mariée 2. Célibataires." Duchamp describes the Bride's
blossoming as being "unanalizable by logic."

29   We favor the French term *désir blanc*, literally *white desire*, over
the English translation *blank desire* (Michel Sanouillet, Elmer Peter-
son, *The Essential Writings of Marcel Duchamp: Salt seller, Marchand du
sel* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1975), 39. The "white" could point
not only to the color traditionally associated with virginity but also
to the promise of endless possibilities—such as white light, which
potentially contains all possible colors.

capacity to offer an identical reflection to whom may mirror *him*self in her. Nor is she to be understood, as suggested by some,[30] as existing solely by means of the objectivation by the male gaze, stripped from her autonomy by libidinal and voyeuristic scrutiny of her most intimate mechanisms. She simply subtracts herself from the retinal. The only visual contemplation established between domains is neither direct nor specular—and replicative—in the first degree: Indeed, Duchamp's "mirrorical return" operates as the transmission towards a continuum of different dimensions, according to which a part of the light is absorbed and transmitted across the *hinge*[31] that articulates the two domains—the projective geometric planarity of the Bachelor and the topological continuum of the Bride. What appears to us viewers as a series of lines, or separations, on the two-dimensional *Glass*—the *Bride's Garment*, the *Region of the Gilled Cooler (isolating plates)*, and the *Horizon*—are in fact, projections (or shadows, and shadows of shadows) in n-1 dimension of a *limen,* a *hinge*[32] operating in the depth of the work,

30 Herman Parret, "Preface" in *Les transformateurs Duchamp,* eds. Jean-François Lyotard and Hermann Parret, (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 2010), 32–45.

31 "Perhaps make a *hinge picture* (folding yardstick, book...) develop the *principle of the hinge* in the displacements 1st in the plane 2nd in space. / Find an *automatic description* of the hinge. / Perhaps introduce in the Pendu femelle." Marcel Duchamp, "Peut-être faire un tableau de charnière," in *Notes autographes pour "La boîte verte,"* ensemble, 1912-1915, Centre Pompidou Mnam-Cci, AM 1997-96, 27. As translated in *The Essential Writings of Marcel Duchamp*, 27. The notion of "hinge" is at the heart of the essay that Lyotard dedicates to Duchamp's work.

32 For the parallelisms between Duchamp's hinges and Henri Poincaré's notion of cut-across continuums of one or several dimensions, see Frédéric Migayrou, "Henri Poincaré: Marcel Duchamp en phases," in *Marcel Duchamp: la Peinture, Même,* eds. Cécile Debray (Paris: Centre Pompidou, 2014), 238–247.

that allows for a crossing between both worlds. As noted by Jean-François Lyotard, the "mirrorical" operation differs from the specular one, for it operates topologically rather than semantically.[33] Where the specular relation subsuming a term to another implies a (forced) commensurability amongst such terms,[34] Duchamp's mirrorical relation opens concurrently to the possibility of transformation across the geometrical (metric, as the 2-dimensional plane of the glass, and projective, as the realm of the Bachelors) and topological domains (the purely qualitative domain of the Bride)—in other words, to algebraic invariances through variation—, and to the impossibility of homeomorphisms across n-dimensional spaces.[35] In the depth of Duchamp's *glass,* the indissociable algebraic transformations and material transmutations undergone by the Bride happen within an uninterrupted energetic exchange—a continuous circulation that amounts to an infinite *peaking*—a mixture of exterior fueling and autonomous, controlled delaying of orgasm, or pleasure.[36]

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33   Lyotard, *Les transformateurs Duchamp*, 132.

34   Note that for Duchamp, the principal forms of the bachelor apparatus are *mensurated,* while in the Bride, there is no longer a mensurability of the forms *in relation to their destination.*

35   Migayrou, "Henri Poincaré, Marcel Duchamp en phases", 246. Migayrou cites Duchamp: "Around AB as a hinge, let us turn the flat surface ABCD. This will generate a volume. A finite continuum with 3 dim... A finite continuum of 4 dim. is thus generated by a finite continuum of 3 dim. rotating around a finite hinge of 2 dim."

36   As noted by Duchamp: "Pleasure = decline? The last state of this nude Bride prior to the pleasure which [*brings about her fall, scratched out*] would graphically bring about her fall, necessity to convey [...] this *blossoming.*" Lyotard reads such declination as that which would endow the Bride with an identity "that of 'her' sex; and thereby endows the man with 'his.'" (Lyotard, *Les transformateurs Duchamp*, 135). In such a

We propose to view the *Large Glass,* with its trans-formational (mirroreal) *dispositif*, as an invitation to think of relations that diverge in two different man-ners from mimetic reproduction and self-engendering, by confronting us with two different forms of onan-ism — in the guise of the Bachelors and the Bride. Such forms may not be reduced to masculine and feminine models playing into gendered dialectics, an opposition that would imply simultaneously the impossibility of reconciliation and of correspondent diversification.[37] Taking into consideration the two condemnations that have historically fallen on onanism — the biblical critic of the interruption of inheritance and the Enlighten-ment moralist criticism of pleasure — might shed light on the idea that a specific form of onanist engendering is at work in our contemporary processes of transcription and translation of our sources of information into *stocks* of data — as exploited by generic technological matrixes

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light, the delay, or peaking, preserves the Bride in a mythological state, ambiguous and potentially infinitely transformable.

37   In the Xenofeminist perspective, a gender abolitionist approach is "not code for the eradication of what are currently considered 'gen-dered' traits from the human population. Under patriarchy, such a project could only spell disaster — the notion of what is 'gendered' sticks disproportionately to the feminine. But even if this balance were redressed, we have no interest in seeing the sexuate diversity of the world reduced. Let a hundred sexes bloom!" Laboria Cubon-iks, *Xenofeminism,* "Parity," 0x0E. This perspective rejoins Catherine Malabou's proposition that, with regard to artificial intelligence, a strategy of control (and relative rhetoric of dispossession) should be replaced by the discovery of hybridity that interrupts the logic of identity predicated upon strict positions: "ours" and "theirs." See Catherine Malabou, "Foreword," *Métamorphoses de l'intelligence, Du QI à l'IA,* (Paris: PUF, 2021).

–, one that redefines *mimesis* in relation to a non-specular / other-than-human fantasy.[38]

Coitus Interruptus: Of Inheritance and Fantasy

The Bachelors' onanism *vibrates* across their entire domain: in the *litanies* of the chariot, in the repetitive movement of the glider, in the autonomous grinding of chocolate, and in the splashes of illuminating gas. Duchamp's machine has at its very heart an (inhuman) determination to interrupt any principle of conservation, the entropic process of the *coitus interruptus*, of which it (the machinery) nevertheless manages to exploit the *wasted energies.* If onanism, named after Judah's son Onan whose story is told in Genesis, is presented as a sin, it is less because of a potential immorality of the act of self-gratification *per se* than because of the refusal of the law of the Levirate[39] and the conservation it ensured, a refusal to which the spillage by Onan of his fertile seed on the soil amounts. Taking its name from *levir*—*lege vir*, the *in-law*, the husband's brother—this custom law obliged the male next-of-kin of a dead man

38   The consideration of fantasy is to be understood in relation to the history of computation as pertaining to a universal form of intelligence, being equated to the abstract formalization of inference and proposes a move away from the subjection of simulation and cognition to a purely logical approach at the source of the development of artificial intelligence. For a chronology, see Frédéric Migayrou, "Corrélations, les intelligences simulées," in *Neurones, Les intelligences simulées,* eds. Frédéric Migayrou and Camille Lenglois, Mutations Créations, exhibition catalogue, Paris, Centre national d'art et de culture Georges Pompidou (Orléans: Editions Hyx, 2020), 55–69.

39   Still encountered very rarely in certain parts of the world, the Levirate is mostly known through the tale that the bible tells of it. For a thorough bibliography on the matter, see Steffan Mathias, *Paternity, Progeny, and Perpetuation, Creating Lives After Death in the Hebrew Bible* (London: Bloomsbury, 2020).

to marry his childless-widow. In its original form, such a law ensured the conservation of lineage and inheritance through time.[40] The perpetuation of a family's line could, therefore, not be broken by the death of an individual, as the family name prevailed over any personal name. The Levirate implied a particular and limited game of substitution: The newly-wed brother would operate as a proxy for the deceased, taking his place biologically but neither legally nor symbolically.[41] So tells the Bible: "And Onan knew that the seed should not be his."[42] The children who may be born from this new alliance would indeed still be legally regarded as those of the dead husband—the eldest son would inherit the goods and the name of the dead. The *levir*, the in-law, therefore, operates as a placeholder; the authoritarian *lieu* of the patriarch left fundamentally empty, the *levir* comes to occupy it without owning it in any manner, that is, outside of any property title or foundations.[43] According to the Bible,[44] the fact that the firstborn conserves the

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40   In its weak form, the Levirate has been considered as a concern for the woman's rights—the widow being taken care of by her husband's family.

41   Only at the price of such substitution could the Levirate be considered an exception to the laws of incest (as stated in *Leviticus* 18:16): "You shall not uncover the nakedness of your brother's wife; it is your brother's nakedness." (Carroll and Prickett, *The Bible*). The widow's nudity is neither discovered nor consumed by the *levir* in person, but only transitively so.

42   Carroll and Prickett, *The Bible,* Genesis 38:9.

43   The Halitzah, the Jewish ritual whereby the Levirate is broken, had to be performed in a codified manner, which included, amongst other actions, the removal of the sandal from the *levir*'s foot by the widow. This removal amounted to the refusal, on the part of the *levir,* to take possession of his property—as real property (immovable) was claimed by walking on it.

44   Deuteronomy 25:5-10.

name of the defunct patriarch ensures that such a name will not be erased from Israël. By breaking this pact, Onan simultaneously offenses his God, his family, and, more largely, his people. Knowing *the seed should not be his*—in other words, refusing to renounce his individual posterity—Onan spills it on the ground, thus breaking the principle of conservation that is indispensable to the reproductive process and to inheritance, in a gesture analog of Duchamp's Bachelors' refusal of procreation.[45]

The biblical episode would come to constitute the pedestal for the naturalistic, moral condemnation of masturbation. The best developed of these condemnations is found in Samuel Auguste Tissot's epistemology, specifically in his physical dissertation[46] on the many sicknesses produced by masturbation. The naturalistic approach of the famous Enlightenment physician indexed sexual activity to a form of biological necessity that, as the satisfaction of other physical needs, he considered to be the purest form of preservatives of health. He indeed regarded a healthy life as having to be ruled by need and occupation—that breed "natural pleasures" and "natural usages"—rather than by imagination.[47] In his view, healthy sexual activity, as observed

45　Following Jacques Monod's concept of reproduction, Onan can be said to interrupt the transmission of the content of invariance that is equal to a quantity of information passed on from a generation to the next—a quantity that ensures the conservation of a specific structural norm and the degree of order that characterizes the familial structure.

46　Samuel Auguste Tissot, *L'onanisme ou Dissertation physique sur les maladies produites par la masturbation* (Lausanne: Imprimerie d'Antoine Chapuis, 1760). See the article by Fernando Vidal, "Onanism, Enlightenment Medicine, and the Immanent Justice of Nature" in *The Moral Authority of Nature,* eds. L. Daston, F. Vidal, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004).

47　Citing Sanctorius, Tissot remarks that: "coition, in a moderate degree is useful, when it is solicited by nature, but when it is excit-

in peasants—the epitome of natural men—rather than in urban dwellers,[48] only flew from necessity and reproductive urge, depending on mechanical and quantitative factors,[49] rather than debauched and luxurious inventions, that is, on workings of the mind. Physical, as much as moral, degeneration was, for Tissot, largely engendered by sexuality: Onanism, more than any other type of sexuality, as the subversive fruit of fantasy, threatened not only physical health but also the moral normativity with which Nature was endowed by Tissot. Human physical nature was understood by him as having to be in a state of equilibrium, or moderation, in obedience to Nature. Such a state was to be ensured by the constant, mild production and circulation of fluids through the nervous irrigation of the body; excess, minima, and maxima, intensity, or scarcity were to be avoided

ed by the imagination it enfeebles all the faculties of the mind, and particularly the memory." Samuel Auguste Tissot, *Treatise on the Diseases produced by Onanism* (New York: Collins & Hannay, 1832), 46. The English translation retains the French term imagination; however, we would like to propose that in Tissot, the term "imagination" does not solely refer to the capacity to represent or form images but more largely to "fantasy," as a capacity to *make appear.*

48   Tissot develops a critique of intellectual work as responsible for the weakening of the body and, by means of a circular response, of the spirit itself. His "literary man" is not different from the onanist: "Nothing weakens so much as this continual excitement of a mind always intent on the same thing. A person addicted to this habit, experiences the same ill effects as does the literary man who fixes his attention wholly on one subject." Tissot, *Treatise on the Diseases produced by Onanism,* 47.

49   In particular, the evacuation of bodily fluids depends, for Tissot, on the quantitative workings of the body; desire is excited by Nature only in order to balance the organism and works as an instigator of the discharging of said fluids. Imagination vexes these mechanisms; it debilitates the body by kindling desire regardless of any biological necessity and can introduce unhealthy habits that substitute to the natural workings.

at all costs. "Our bodies are constantly wasting," Tissot
writes, "and if this waste were not repaired we should
soon become extremely weak."[50] Of all possible losses,
that of semen was regarded as the worst: for it implied a
radical quantitative misbalance of the bodily fluids, an
excessive squandering of valuable substances (that is,
beyond necessity), fired by fantasy. Far from Burrough's
vitalist celebration of chemical upheavals of homeostasis
as initiators of new sensoriums and life forms, Tissot
thus regarded onanism as amounting to self-destruction
by means of subjection to imaginary needs, a suicide not
different from a self-inflicted gunshot or a voluntary
drowning.[51] Such equilibrium could, however, be re-
stored, individually—through the coming into reason
by means of recognition of one's crimes, and collectively
so if man, and in particular the *gens de lettres*, the lit-
erate, would "forget the existence of the sciences and
books... and become what Nature made men, a peasant
and a gardener,"[52] that is, return to nature not in its wild
spontaneity, but in its perfected state. Nature, in Tissot's
thought, derived its normative and legislative moral
legitimacy—the sole source of human moral—from
necessity; onanism's unnecessary character explained
its dangerousness and justified its condemnation. Dis-
tanced from the biblical disapproval, the moral connota-
tion of Tissot's "physiological" condemnation lies in the
argument that masturbation abstracts from the physical
necessity that rules over the moral normativity of nature

50   Tissot, *Treatise on the Diseases produced by Onanism,* VI.

51   Tissot, *L'onanisme ou Dissertation physique sur les maladies produites
par la masturbation,* 21.

52   Tissot, *De la santé des gens de lettres,* (Lausanne: François Gras-
set, 1768), 221. Cited by Fernando Vidal, "Onanism, Enlightenment
Medicine," 260.

and—like excesses in literacy—refuses to comply with its injunctions.[53]

The Quasi-bodies of Data

Conversely, an anti-naturalist perspective on onanism that reclaims simultaneously the religious idea of pollution, the moralist condemnation of imagination (*as* fantasy), invites us to consider AI and technological engendering under the light of a different rationalism, one that, in Xenofeminist words, is to be considered a feminism. We would like to propose the myth of *Eurōpē* as a last lever for thinking about this through the prism of a doubling of origin that the myth explores.

Greek mythology famously tells the story of the Phoenician princess who was abducted and raped by Zeus, having taken on the features of a bull. Following the forced mating with the master of the Olympus, Eurōpē gives birth to a lineage of princes and her name to a continent. It is in the specific version given by the poet Moschos that the myth is linked for the first time with the name of the continent, in a gesture that would be followed by Horace and Ovid. Yet Moschos's poem differs from the successive versions in that it describes the premonitory dream that Eurōpē has the night before her rapt, a dream that carries the justification of the geographical value of the name *Europe*. Prior to engendering her own biological lineage, the Phoenician princess dreams of another fantastic one, according to which she is no longer the daughter of a king but of two mothers, two lands, and two continents. To the East stands Asia,

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53 Tissot believed in an essential link between God's will and natural laws: "As subjects of God's law, we must study in His works the principles of our conduct."

Asida, her biological mother, who is assimilated to her native land; to the West rises another woman, the *antiperen* (the opposite), a land with no name. The princess makes an oneiric choice: she breaks with her original Phoenician descent and decides, *ouk aekousan, without resistance,* to follow the other woman. By choosing the unnamed continent, Eurōpē gives her name to it: The abducted princess names one of her own mothers as she is named herself, becoming twice a daughter as well as twice a mother as she crosses the Aegean Sea. This non-natural process is doubled by the biological engendering of the new lineage of princes, which also implies a non-naturality: At its heart lies the fundamental qualitative transformation of a godly power —Zeus's— into human form—the human descendance—that is, a non-identical process of reproduction through mutation. In Moschos's tale, however, this first *trans-material* engendering is hinged on the symbolic transmission of Eurōpē's name to her unnamed mother, through which the princess engenders herself and her land. Eurōpē's myth herein affirms a double gesture of displacement and translation, diffracting the very notions of origin and identity across different dimensions.[54]

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54   There is another aspect of the miniature epic that is Moschos's Eurōpē that points towards this possibility of a feminine lineage, as Françoise Létoublon points out. In his text, Moschos tells of Europa's golden basket: This basket not only has a premonitory dimension, as it is decorated with the scene of Io navigating the sea, transformed into a cow by Zeus to allow her to mate with him while escaping Hera's jealousy. Moschos draws inspiration from the description of Helen's basket in the Odyssey, literarily inscribing Eurōpē in a fictitious lineage, but the author also tells of the transmission of this object and gives the list of the women who have possessed the basket before Eurōpē, starting from Telephassa. As indicated by Létoublon, Moschos's description breaks with the tradition of the genealogical exposes and catalogs of objects' possessors, which until then had been solely masculine. In

Through such reading, Eurōpē's myth offers an alternative to a comprehension of (godly/human) engendering as being merely a manifestation of power by means of a (human/feminine) material mediation. It can shed light on the contemporary narrative, which crystallizes in the critiques of the black box problem[55] and in the talks about machine intelligence; such narrative enforces a univocal understanding of AI as being subsumed to anthropocentric efficient and final causes, which leaves, circling back to Duchamp, the *Bride* simultaneously stripped bare and fully (specularly) covered up. But most importantly, beyond discourses, what an onanist key can offer if appraised in terms of intellectuality in a manner as to "interlace our daily lives with abstraction,"[56] is an original understanding of the process of engendering, whereby said process is diffracted, so to say, and opened to more than to the sole biological necessity of mating. A feminist take on synthetic and artificial generation conjugates intellectual existence with non-appropriative principles of conservation and transmission, making the

Eurōpē's case, the basket draws a purely feminine lineage, of which it is the genealogical exposes. Moschos, according to Létoublon, puts the epic tradition in a feminine key.

55   The concerns voiced by many scholars and activists against the inaccessibility of digital matrixes and the attempts to dissolve the opaqueness of machine intelligence have given rise to XAI, or *explainable artificial intelligence.* We do not mean here to negate the discrimination and liability issues that accompany such opacity. The conditions in which our (barely commensurable) stocks of data are treated (organized and classified) have to be scrutinized and democratically discussed. Yet, in the effort to devise methodologies to formalize models and manners to diversify and structure data, it would be salutary to widen the spectrum through which AI is considered in order for other possible worlds and effects to emerge.

56   Laboria Cuboniks, *Xenofeminism,* "Zero," 0x00.

"nameless potency"[57] of (material and informational) fertility appear.

This requires adjoining intelligence with fantasy in a manner that considers the latter as an artificial faculty, productive rather than reproductive, whose mimetic relation to its human counterpart should be complexified in favor of the recognition of mutual retroactions. The acknowledgment of a difference, currently covered by the specter of a resemblance,[58] would make usefulness rejoin uselessness, as invariance would variation, copulation disconnection, and looping projection. Alchemic engenderings such as that of Burroughs and Gozlan can provide materialist counterparts to the technical algebraic ones, which come in the guise of computational recursivity, with their capacity for continuous and contingent variability and transformations. By breaking with the "metric geometric"[59] dimension of the specular, a feminist perspective on digital fertility, or hyperproduction, requires considering how the "anonymous" nature of artificial fantasy—the fact that it stems from recursive processes of infinite translation and transcription of anonymous data into multiple synthetic *others*—introduces a profound shift in the manner in which the notion of *autoritas* has been conflated with that of authorship *as* the expression of individual expression and,

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57   Irigaray, *Speculum of the Other Woman,* 163.

58   On the incommensurability between human and artificial intelligence and on the exploitation of their apparent similarity (masking a dissimilarity) by strategies of conquest and domination, see Malabou's preface to the 2021 edition of *Métamorphoses de l'intelligence,* I–XV.

59   The term is derived from Henri Poincaré's notion of "metric geometry," complementary to "projective geometry" and "Analysis Situs" (topology), as exposed in H. Poincaré, "Why Space Has Three Dimensions," in *Mathematics and Science, Last Essays,* trans. John W. Bolduc, (New York: Dover Publications Inc., 1963 [1913]), 34.

in Irigaray's view, as the masculine determination for oneself of "what is constituted by "origin.'"[60]

More fundamentally, for the generative potentiality of digital transcription to be embraced *per se* requires a reevaluation of the criteria of conformity through which existence is approached. Such an understanding demands that the monopoly of the scholastic tradition of truth as *adaequatio intellectus et rei* be abandoned—that is, truth as conformity, or fidelity, between the (sensible) thing and what the intellect can express of it—in favor of the recognition and nurturing of other forms of knowledge. Today, we can still identify a logic of identity at play in the affirmation of two prominent positions, which, although opposite, paradoxically produce similar effects: the celebration of the (illusionary) transparency of AI, which would supposedly stem from the possibility of absolute automation of human knowledge as *truth,* on the one hand, and, on the other, its fierce critique as a source of delusion and subjection (due to subjective biases). The latter appears to prolong the situationist critique—according to which the *spectacle* was to be regarded as nothing more than the realm of *the false* and of the relative *turning upside down* of our existence—by other means; it revives the metaphysical trial of technically produced realms in the wider context of a "post-truth era," while ignoring Lyotard's lesson on the postmodern combined logic of legitimation and performance.[61] Each in their own way, these positions lead to the undermin-

60   Irigaray, *Speculum of the Other Woman*, 23.

61   Lyotard highlighted how, in the wake of the crisis of *legitimation* of knowledge in postmodern societies, power relies on operativity and performance of technological systems, two criteria that have "no relevance for judging what is true or just." Jean-François Lyotard, *The postmodern condition: a report on knowledge,* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984).

ing of (all or part of) what is considered as an *alternative reality;* they nurture a form of reduction, neglect, denigration, or complete rejection of the workings of AI and of *all* that such workings can produce, foreclosing the aesthetic, sensible and political forms of subjectivation that an artificial fantasy and technologically induced alienation could bring.

Here, we would like to borrow Jacques Rancière's articulation of the "suspensive existence" of literature and literary beings[62] to extend it to our tentative articulation of the generative domain constituted by artificial intelligence and fantasy. Big data and machine learning today indeed evade classical, analytical setups in favor of purely probabilistic workings: all possible patterns can be identified and proposed, regardless of whether they produce "meaning" in human terms. We would like to suggest that the denigratory position that treats artificial

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62   We expand on Rancière's reflection on the continuous circulation of literature and books and on the disorder it creates in the understanding of the social as being predicated on unity, as exposed in his text "La chair des mots," in *Poésie* 77, (1996): 80–92. Rancière rejects "a certain philosophical wisdom with regard to literature: the Searlian wisdom of the convention of suspension of conventions that founds the sharing of fiction as the emission and reception of 'non-serious' statements," proposing rather that "the world is not only made up of experienced sensible qualities, it is also made up of books, not of conventionally shared 'imaginary,' but of a continuum of books and attestations of the existence of what they speak of." The notion of *lie* or falsity is rejected as is rejected its intellectual (Platonic) counterpart: The theological idea that the word should be incarnated, should acquire a body, and unite in truth—the primary unity of a body and of senses. Instead, the continuous circulation undoes the neat and legitimate social divisions that rest on the unity of a name, a body and a time, or, as we understand it, on a logic of identity. Rather, it evades the possibility of incarnation in favor of a form of diffraction: The disordered materialization of quasi-bodies, that is, of *any-body's* capacity to "seize any written word to replay it." Rancière, "La chair des mots," 87-89.

fantasy in terms of "non seriousness," or of mendacious-ness, is postulated on the belief that what such fantasy lacks is a capacity to be unitarily incarnated. The refusal to regard artificial modes of existence for what they are, that is, fundamentally probabilistic, hence deprived of meaning *per se,* leads to regarding the domain as being af-flicted by incapacity and, consequently, disregarding the riches that it may bear. This, we would like to propose, can be countered by the granting of a quasi-corporeality to artificial beings, corporeality that gets transformed throughout the continuous circulations that constitute it. In Rancière's terms, the quasi-bodies measure the distance, the interval that separates the contingent, ma-terial manifestation of books (a plurality of copies) from that of the Verb (a unique origin). Far from celebrating a self-referential, autonomous "almighty fantasy,"[63] the conceptualization of a continuous crossing from inside to outside of both realms, that is, of a circulation of posi-tions, inducing reciprocal influences amongst the parts involved, diffracts current epistemic approaches to AI to multiply the manners in which to communicate and coexist with it. Recognizing its fundamental variability invites us to engage in the multiple worlds populated by potentially infinite numbers of onanistically engen-dered quasi-bodies, as well as to affirm the coinciding artificiality of the articulative position (enunciation).

Through the evocation of Eurōpē's myth, the ap-praisal of artificial fantasy as being hinged to, yet not predicated upon or valued according to, an external

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63   Rancière rejects what he characterizes as the "theology of the literary divinity" that works through the romantic concept of "al-mighty (literary) fantasy" as the fruit of the *autoritas* of the writer. The quasi-corporeality of literature relies, henceforth, on the inversion of positions that allow a specific access to such fantasy by the random reader. Rancière, "La chair des mots," 91.

reference not only allows to reclaim an expanded no-
tion of knowledge (*savoir),* including all that produces
semantikos rather than circumscribing it to a notion of
truth;[64] it also opens to another play of emancipation,
that avoids mirroring the paternalistic asymmetric dis-
tribution of capacities, in favor of the recognition of an
equivalence in the capacities to embrace the mutual
incommensurability of different forms of knowledge
and *sensoriums.* In such a perspective, the rationality that
characterizes forms of narrative knowledge, specifically
(occidental forms of) myth, can shed light on how we
could allow the recursive nature of artificial fantasy to
affect us in order to establish forms of more-than-human
collective action. Myth intermingles dimensions of mul-
tiplicity, ambiguity, and polarity, diverging from a logic
of identity in favor of mechanisms of metamorphosis
and substitution to engender hybrid characters, as are
the probabilistic quasi-bodies of data. Manifesting in its
themes as in its linguistic variety and enunciator posi-
tions,[65] the fundamental uncertainty of the mythological
narration sustains an equally fundamentally uncertain
type of knowledge that evades any totalizing or limiting
view.[66] In such an economy of continuous translation lies

64   As Lyotard points out, Aristotle, in the *Organon,* considers knowl-
edge to reside in, and be expressed only by, the *apophantikos,* or *prop-
ositions,* the only sentences that have "truth or falsity in them." See
Jean-François Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition,* 91.

65   Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition,* 21.

66   In his oeuvre, Jean-Pierre Vernant has captured the correlation
that exists between the polysemic dimension of the symbol and the
fundamental uncertainty that resides at the heart of the story carried
by myth in relation to its transformative capacity to operate across
different levels of the "real," producing non-exclusive versions that
escape any totalizing or limiting view. "A true symbol is worth by
itself, by its internal dynamics, its power of indefinite development,
its capacity to put an aspect of human experience in resonance with

a profound counter model to the paternalism with which the discourse of emancipation that is underpinned by the reversed logic of the spectacle (as liberation from a fallacious reality) is embedded.[67] For Rancière, "an emancipated community is a community of narrators and translators,"[68] a community of "lonely people," those who "only form a community through the circulation of these quasi-bodies, through the play of these experimental devices that are called literature and democracy."[69] The apparent dismissal of words *as only words* to which such a claim is articulated is to be confronted with the theological-social fantasies of the word made flesh, fully incarnated and revealed (by a patriarchal figure). Instead, it is a double process of poetic translation and singular counting[70] that sustains the possibility of a political existence *at the risk of disorder.* Rancière proposes

the whole of the universe. It is this power of expansion of the symbol that gives it a vocation to translate, in a form that is always necessarily limited, that which escapes limitation, the totality and the infinite," author's translation of Jean-Pierre Vernant, *Œuvres. Religions, rationalités, politique* (Paris: Seuil, 2007), 792–793.

67   In his discussion on the asymmetry of theatre and of the relative position of the audience, in *The Emancipated Spectator,* Rancière proposes that the framing of emancipation *as* revelation and reversal of the separation of reality induced by the spectacle and of the subsequent recovery of a relation to the self that would have been lost or obscured by said separation implies an external—paternalistic—position: that of the director, capable of revealing the separation to the audience. Such a point can be expanded to the wider discussion on the constitution of a political community.

68   Rancière, *The Emancipated Spectator*, trans. Gregory Elliott (London: Verso, 2009 [2008]), 48.

69   Rancière, "La chair des mots," 92.

70   For Rancière, this singular accounting differs from, and superimposes itself to, the "count of social bodies and social functions" that substantially establishes an order of bodies *in their place*. If this *one-more (un-en-plus)* institutes a community, it is suspensively so

that such existence is established as a "mode of subjectivation" that works through *any-body's* capacity to seize the circulating words (or aggregations of data) in order to gift them with quasi-bodies—bodies that require to acknowledge more than the competence of the sole emitter, that is, that of the interpreter, too.[71] Circling back to our feminist take on artificial intelligence and fantasy, we would like to propose that a feminist form of emancipation requires the development of a rationalism that makes room for (an other-than-human) fantasy and establishes an egalitarian distribution of the capacity to *engender,* onanistically so, virally so, symbolically and materially so, through a universal right to exchange positions and so to "speak as no one in particular."[72]

only through the circulation of the quasi-bodies (of literature and, we would add, of data).

71   Such a view rejoins Lyotard's account of scientific knowledge as requiring the sole competence of the enunciator; scientific knowledge is, as such, founded solely on the denotative dimension of knowledge as truth, differently from narrative knowledge that supposes the vicariousness of positions.

72   Laboria Cuboniks, *Xenofeminism,* "Zero," 0x04.

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is not known, nothing is known, he understands nothing it says, just a little, almost nothing, it's inexplicable, but it's necessary, it's preferable, that he should understand just a little, almost nothing, like a dog that always gets the same filth flung to it, the same orders, the same threats, the same cajoleries.
— Samuel Beckett, *The Unnameable* (1953)

In the 1720s, one of the things that most scandalized the British public when conditions at debtors' prisons were exposed in the popular press was the fact that these prisons were regularly divided into two sections. Aristocratic inmates, who often thought of a brief stay in Fleet or Marshalsea as something of a fashion statement, were wined and dined by liveried servants and allowed to receive regular visits from prostitutes. On the 'common side' impoverished debtors were shack led together in tiny

cells, 'covered with filth and vermin,' as one report put it, 'and suffered to die, without pity, of hunger and jail fever'.
— David Graeber, *Debt* (2011)

The mundus: a sacred or accursed place in the middle of the Italiot township. A pit, originally — a dust hole, a public rubbish dump. Into it were cast trash and filth of every kind, along with those condemned to death, and any newborn baby whose father declined to 'raise' it (that is, an infant which he did not lift from the ground and hold up above his head so that it might be born a second time, born in a social as well as a biological sense).
— Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space* (1974)

A living species, ours, is succeeding in excluding all the others from its niche, which is now global: how could other species eat or live in that which we cover with filth? If the soiled world is in danger, it's the result of our exclusive appropri

Facing Mud.
On Matter-Informational
Building and Writing

SELENA SAVIĆ

This text postulates mud as a host and a source of three architectonic thoughts. Suspending immediate judgment about the value and potentiality of muddy matter, these architectonic thoughts offer figurations of mud that slip between inappropriate and necessary, between generosity and exploitation. The three aspects of mud depicted in the figurations characterize different informational processes: standardization, communication, and augmenting. Informational processes encoded in mud traverse dichotomies such as discreet-continuous, soft-hard but also dirty-clean. In terms of the communication theory of the French philosopher Michel Serres, this text offers an account of mud as a noisy matter, at once the channel and a part of the message, host and parasite, a capacious potentiality that circulates through

and even determines urban infrastructures and architecture. The treatment of mud, therefore, aspires to be inventive of images and techniques to work with its noisy composition.

Mud is a mixture of inorganic and organic matter, such as sand, clay, microorganisms and decaying plants, and water. The more water, the muddier. Mud can host many things, including living organisms, the growth of plants, walking steps, anthropogenic pollution, or precious stones. We do not have to go far looking for mud: It sticks to the soles of hiking shoes and wheels of bicycles riding off-road, it coats riverbanks and flows when moved by abundant rainfall. Mud forms wherever water dissolves soil.

Mud and water are easily formed into media for writing and building.[1] Mud is shapeless, wet, and uncountable. This mixed matter is molded and baked into bricks to construct buildings and bridges. Mud hosts different forms of life but also pollutes and makes dirty. Mud-like substance thickens and transforms into nacre, the mother-of-pearl. These figurations will be depicted in detail in this text, weaving in the aspects of mud that characterize its potentiality, instrumentality, and objectivity. The figurations extend far back in time to saturate the view with artifacts and practices of the past and tease out specificities of informational processes traceable in mud. Other depictions of mud are possible. The three selected aspects—construction, mediation, and adornment—form a contingent setup that extend

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1   While I discuss mud and clay here, more specifically, as a material for the construction of buildings, we should not forget that writing and symbolization manifested in its early form as clay tokens and clay tablets, such as in Sumerian civilization. On early symbolization and the invention of writing, see, for example, Denise Schmandt-Besserat, *How Writing Came About* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1996).

the reflection on mud into three dimensions. Building and writing are continuously considered modes of leaving traces in and with mud.

Constructing with Mud: Standard Bricks

In the myth of the foundation of Rome, "the burning and cutting of trees was the first and decisive inscription of history in the landscape, the inaugural act in the construction of human institutions."[2] The fire of burning wood heated the kilns, in which mud was baked into durable and solid bricks.

Bricks are mud formed into a replicable shape; they are dry and countable. Many of the earliest known cities along river valleys of ancient Egypt and Mesopotamia were built with air-dried bricks made from mud. The technique dates to the building of the Neolithic city at Jericho through to Sumerian cities. Fired bricks, massively produced a few thousand years later in Ancient Rome, proved to be more robust and adaptable to construction techniques. Bricks were a dominant construction material in much of the Roman Empire, either alone or in combination with stone. The Roman Empire spread city-ness and bricks across a wide range of climates.

Archaeological research on Roman bricks is rich and conclusive, suggesting that bricks were manually produced, inform of near-square plates, 30 by 30 or 40 cm and in thickness of 2.5 to 6 cube centimeters. Roman bricks were porous and rough, and they were often strengthened with additives such as fiber or coarse aggregates. Water could percolate through their cracks,

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2   Paulo Tavares, "Forest," in *Posthuman Glossary*, ed. Rosi Braidotti, Maria Hlavajova (London, Oxford, New York, New Delhi, Sydney: Bloomsbury Academic, 2018), 162–67.

but they adhered well to the lime mortar used to fix one to the other.

Following the fall of the Roman Empire, brick use in Europe faded. Fired bricks continued to be central to Byzantine masonry as well as on the territory of today's Italy. While brick was in use in much of Europe during the Middle Ages and Renaissance, it was the Industrial Revolution that brought bricks again back to their full capacity as a popular, efficient, and economical choice for construction.

The design of the brick helps to standardize buildings and labor. Ernst Neufert, known for the influential handbook on measures and standards in architectural design, first published in 1936 the *Bauentwurfslehre* (English translation is titled *Architect's Data*), and he was active throughout the 1930s, 40s, and 50s designing ways to render architectural design and building more efficient, and more systematic. Architecture historians Nader Vossoughian and Anna-Maria Meister compared Neufert's work on the standard brick with the successful efforts of the German *DIN* to standardize paper in 1922, drawing on the work of the group *Die Brücke*, most notably Wilhelm Ostwald's research assistant, Walter Porstmann.[3] The *DIN A* format became a standard to regulate a wide bureaucratic system, from paper size to books, to bookshelves, as well as files and filing cabinets, extending to desks and the office itself. Neufert's work on brick standardization had similar ambitions, partly realized through his Octametric system, propagating back to

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3   Anna-Maria Meister, "Ernst Neufert's 'Lebensgestaltungslehre': Formatting Life beyond the Built," in *BJHS Themes* 5, (2020): 167–85; Nader Vossoughian, "Standardization Reconsidered: Normierung in and after Ernst Neufert's Bauentwurfslehre (1936)," in *Grey Room*, nr. 54 (January 1, 2014): 34–55.

updated editions of his handbook, termed "The Neufert," which is still widely in use in architecture offices today.

Neufert studied architecture with Walter Gropius and later taught the Rapid Design course at the *Bauhochschule* Weimar.[4] In line with the efforts of his contemporaries, such as The Bridge Institute (*Die Brücke – Internationales Institut zur Organisierung der geistigen Arbeit*), the German Institute for Standardisation (*Deutsches Institut für Normung*, or *DIN*), as well as the Bauhaus school, Neufert was fascinated with industrialization and the potential of standardization to improve industrial processes.[5]

During World War II, Neufert worked for Albert Speer, architect and Minister of Armaments and War Production during the Third Reich as an expert on standardization. Based on this work, Neufert published with Speer a second "Lehre" compendium: the *Bauordnungslehre*, in 1943. Around the same time, Neufert started working on his grand standardization project, the Octametric system for bricks. Although Neufert did not draw a specific parallel to standard paper formats in his own writing, there is evidence that he was inspired by the *DIN* A paper series that starts with A0, one square meter in surface, and produces smaller formats of equal proportions as half-folds of larger ones.[6] He intended the Octametric brick to be similarly deducible from a 1-meter measure: The width of the brick would fit eight times in one meter, the height sixteen times, and the length four. This gives a brick of nominal dimensions: 24 x 11.5 x 5.2cm to fit into a matrix, with separations of approximately 1cm filled with mortar. Although the Octametric brick was developed during WWII, it was

4   Meister, "Ernst Neufert's 'Lebensgestaltungslehre.'"

5   Vossoughian, "Standardization Reconsidered."

6   Ibid.

propelled to massive use by the Allied forces during the
European-wide reconstruction effort. Neufert was hired
as a Professor at the University of Darmstadt to chair
design and standardization in the building industry and
urban planning. Octametric proved to be such a conven-
ient system that over time, Vossoughian observed, edi-
tions of "the Neufert" adapted bodily measurements to
fit the brick size, notably across 1956 and 1978 editions.[7]
Octametric brick is truly generic and communicative: "it
permits one to estimate the dimensions of a given space
by counting the number of bricks that run vertically or
horizontally across it,"[8] providing precision and syn-
chronization with outer systems (furniture, extensions).
Vossoughian emphasizes the mediality of bricks: "Neu-
fert's hope was that octametric bricks would become
the preeminent 'medium' of design and construction."[9]

Neufert's work on standardization, Vossoughian
claimed, has a profound, two-fold effect on the archi-
tectural profession: It normalized the use of standards
in design practice, and it helped advance the practice
of rapid design — relying on a catalog of standards in
a design process. In teaching and in design, Neufert's
interest was to make architectural practice both more
routine and more accessible through his studio methods
(Rapid Design) and learning resources (*Bauentwurfslehre*).
"The Neufert" advances standardization of architectur-
al knowledge more broadly: "Its coverage of building
types is encyclopedic, which simplifies the research pro-
cess. [...] Its contents are classified typologically, which
eases the task of translating the program into form."[10]

7   Ibid.
8   Ibid., 47.
9   Ibid., 48.
10   Ibid., 43.

Vossoughian went as far as relating it to Vitruvius's "art of building" in its ability to "compute" or calculate and organize the components of the building process. Anna-Maria Meister studied Neufert's work as a life-formatting effort and generalized this gesture across the three "Lehre" projects: The already discussed *Bauentwurfslehre* and *Bauordnungslehre* and an unpublished treatise *Lebensgestaltungslehre*, a collection of indexed entries of Neufert's thoughts in diary form. Meister suggested that we should understand this work as that of formatting: "What produced Neufert's Lehren (both published and not) was the very act of formatting itself: of paper, of architecture and of subjects."[11]

According to architecture historians, Neufert's efforts in standardization can be read in a continuum with contemporary phenomena of digital design — algorithmic design processes mediated by computation and communication technologies. Vossoughian considers the gesture of standardization intimately tied to what Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri termed "informatization."[12] Hardt and Negri discussed informatization interchangeably with post-modernization as a new mode of becoming human: The role of industrial machines in people's lives is replaced with cybernetic intelligence of information and communication technologies.[13] Domination of industry has not replaced agriculture; it had industrialized it.

Similarly, Hardt and Negri observe that today, all economic activities are affected by informatization. Their post-Marxist critique of imperialism engages with the

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11   Meister, "Ernst Neufert's 'Lebensgestaltungslehre,'" 172.

12   Vossoughian, "Standardization Reconsidered."

13   Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Empire* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2003).

mediacy of matter such as bricks in an absolute fashion: "Having achieved the global level, capitalist development is faced directly with the multitude, without mediation [...] Capital and labour are opposed in a directly antagonistic form."[14] Their view on technology is principally economic, encoded in terms of labor. Information and communication technologies are understood in terms of the market, addressing the problem of demand and supply. Most problematically, computing and computation are discussed as cases of immaterial labor, propagating the myth of immateriality while simultaneously falling into the trap of comparing the Internet to roads. This focus on human labor cannot bring clarity to the materiality and mediacy of Neufert's standard brick, which in their theory can only matter as part of an imaginary information highway. If we were to take informatization seriously, we would have to focus on the way in which the act of giving form to matter is indeed informational. Bricks baked from mud are a regularity in communication, perhaps even communication channels themselves, communicating optimization of a construction process that works equally well across different ideologies, materials, and construction experiences. This process, however, is not completely universal, as bricks always bring along the muddy contingency of matter they are made of and the material intentionality of the building process.

Octameric bricks, as well as bricks more generally, are essentially about compatibility. The brick is a generic informational unit with which architecture can be expressed. In Michel Serres's philosophy of natural communication, information is encoded differently from simple circulation through human networks. In her extensive engagement with Serres's philosophy, Vera

14   Ibid., 237.

Bühlmann demonstrates the peculiar way in which it is relevant for architecture: "Serres' philosophy is animated by a particular maxim: It is the demand that philosophy must be capable of factoring in state-of-the-art science and mathematics, as a real and factual, material as well as formal *'puissance'* with which it must come to terms."[15] She puts emphasis on the capacity of this communication philosophy to distinguish architecture from any form of dogma. Mastering compatibility, Neufert aspired to encode architecture as a method and mediate it through simple means of forming noisy matter like mud. The informatization that Neufert's brick propagates should not be only read in terms of standards and norms that claim universality. The novelty of this work should be appreciated in terms of its capacity to propagate information in space and time and not in the simple process of optimizing labor. For this, Assyrian architecture already had some interesting solutions to encode information in bricks in the form of stamps that instructed workers on their placement in complex constructions.[16]

I propose a different reading of Neufert's contribution: To read the spectrality of this system in terms of information and natural communication rather than informatization. While Hardt and Negri's informatization flattens the notion of brick's application to labor and thus only gives us the possibility to appreciate its

15   Vera Bühlmann, "Vicarious Architectonics, Strange Objects. Chance-Bound: Michel Serres' Exodus from Methodical Reason," in *Architectural Materialisms: Nonhuman Creativity*, ed. Maria Voyatzaki (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2018), 267.

16   Pierre Chabat, *La brique et la terre cuite : Etude historique de l'emploi de ces materiaux, fabrication et usages ; Motics de construction et de décoration choisis dans l'architecture des diférents peuples* (Paris: Ve A. Morel et Cie Libraires-Editeurs, 1881).

efficiency, the brick also gives rise to a limited but generative language of construction, which should actually be the focus of more severe criticism: The oppressiveness of the Octametric system is precisely in the minimalist suggestion to articulate architecture within the three dimensions of the brick. Mud can have much more to say. But in order to speak, it has to be decoded, and the Octametric brick is but one way of doing that.

Mediating Mud: Sticky Nature of Dirt

The increase in the concentration of carbon dioxide (CO_2) in the atmosphere due to fossil fuel emissions constitutes anthropogenic pollution and contributes to global warming. Many have suggested ways to measure the levels of pollution and equate them with a tax or monetary investment. The proposition of a Global Carbon Budget[17] is described and discussed each year at different national and international levels, from local policies to the United Nations Climate Change Conferences (COP). Subscribing to an economic metaphor of budgeting, an accounting system for anthropogenic fossil fuel emissions was developed and proposed since the 1980s. The concept of the global carbon budget is a way of mediating between scientific knowledge and policymaking.[18] That the budget is global is important: It paints the world united and cumulatively measures emissions. But the global budget is not directly equitable to the temperature increase, and climate scientists challenged this direct translation in the 1990s. One decade

17   Pierre Friedlingstein et al., "Global Carbon Budget 2021," preprint (Antroposphere — Energy and Emissions, November 4, 2021), https://doi.org/10.5194/essd-2021-386 (accessed February 24, 2024).

18   Bård Lahn, "A History of the Global Carbon Budget," in *WIREs Climate Change* 11, nr. 3 (May 2020): 1–9.

later, scientists began to consider budgeting the most robust and scientifically constrained measure of permissible emissions. Finally, in the most recent shift, political aspects of the global carbon budget have received more attention, renewing the image of carbon budgeting as a way to speak truth to power and reaffirming a strong boundary between science and policy spheres.

What might we learn by relating worldly pollution with mud? Any act of polluting is, at the same time, an act of appropriation. Michel Serres wrote about the co-incidence of polluting and appropriation in his book *Malfeasance*,[19] which demonstrates different ways anthropogenic pollution communicates power and hegemony. Speaking on the contemporary ecological crisis Martin Savransky uses another image put forward by Michel Serres as the opening of his *Natural Contract*: Two duelists with cudgels plunged in quicksand.[20] The image is Serres's reading of a painting by Francisco Goya, "Fighting with Cudgels," from the 1820s, with which Serres began his treatise on our always parasitic relationship to Earth and the world. He proposed to consider a "natural contract" with the world as a synthesis of the social contract and natural laws.[21] *Natural Contract* follows Serres's trilogy of the beginnings of all things, starting with *Rome. The First Book of Foundations,* in which he examines the movement from war and violence that shadows Roman history from its mythic beginnings to a

19   Michel Serres, *Malfeasance: Appropriation through Pollution?*, trans. Anne-Marie Feenberg-Dibon (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2011).

20   Martin Savransky, "After Progress: Notes for an Ecology of Perhaps," in *Ephemera: Theory & Politics in Organization*, nr. 1 (2021): 267–81.

21   Michel Serres, *The Natural Contract* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1995).

democracy of thought and action.[22] In *Rome* as well as in *Natural Contract*, Serres recounts how Rome and civilization, more generally, are founded on violence that is in human "nature," while civilization requires "leaving the state of nature to form society."[23] The social contract is our capacity to establish peace as well as economy across humanity. Natural laws are outside human formulation yet always articulated through reason, reducing nature itself to either history or reason. But the world is always our host: Instead of placing ourselves at the center just like we used to place Earth at the center of the Universe, we should reserve the center for things:

> The Earth existed without our unimaginable ancestors, could well exist today without us, and will exist tomorrow or later still, without any of our possible descendants, whereas we cannot exist without it. Thus, we must indeed place things in the center and us at the periphery, or better still, things all around and us within them like parasites.[24]

In the characteristic gesture of suspending judgment, Serres proposes to articulate a natural contract and to transform the relationship to the world from master–slave to symbiont: an organism in a symbiotic relationship with the world. The worlding with, or as Dona Haraway suggested in *Staying with the Trouble*,[25] "sympoiesis," is a way to extend this gesture in action. The natural contract should add to the exclusively social contract an attention and sensitivity towards reciprocity:

> our relationship to things would set aside mastery and possession in favor of admiring attention, reciprocity, contemplation,

22   Michel Serres, *Rome: The First Book of Foundations* (London, New Delhi, New York, Sydney: Bloomsbury Academic, 2015).

23   Serres, *The Natural Contract,* 34.

24   Ibid., 95.

25   Donna Haraway, *Staying with the Trouble: Making Kin in the Chthulucene* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2016).

and respect; where knowledge would no longer imply property,
nor action mastery, nor would property and mastery imply
their excremental results and origins.[26]

In Serres's proposition, the establishment of reci-
procity would require humans to give back to nature
however much nature gives to humans. Nature would,
by this contract, become a legal subject in a more-than-
human society. For Serres, communication is a contract:
A preliminary contract, spoken or unspoken, stipulat-
ing the use of a common code. The quicksand in Go-
ya's painting is the "third," which has to be excluded. It
swallows us: It is the pollution, the common enemy we
are ignorant of while fighting each other. When Martin
Savransky revisits Michel Serres's proposal for a natu-
ral contract, he notices that "what renders abstract the
space in which the duelists fight is not their ignorance
[...nor] their desire for victory [... but] the progress they
are making with every step they take."[27] Savransky in-
tentionally uses the term "progress" to articulate it in
two directions, as development and as sinking further
down. Entangled with colonialism, extractivism, and
complicit in the devastation of people and environments
around the world, progress is more than an idea; it has
the character of quicksand. It compares to a world-plow-
ing machine. This corresponds to the way Michel Serres
speaks of polluting: We dominate and appropriate the
world in this way, colonizing the planet with dirt: "such
is the shared philosophy underlying industrial enter-
prise as well as so-called disinterested science [...] Our
fundamental relationship with objects comes down to
war and property ".[28] We appropriate through polluting,

26   Serres, *The Natural Contract*, 38.
27   Savransky, "After Progress: Notes for an Ecology of Perhaps," 270.
28   Serres, *The Natural Contract*, 32.

with own dirt, or "mal propre."[29] We burn fossil fuels, release toxins in the water, and saturate markets with products we do not need at below-manufacturing prices, commercial brand-appropriate objects they sell us with their logos. We make the world "human" by polluting it with anthropogenic mass.

Mud can be a host, or it can be polluting. Shannon Mattern engages with this in her book *Code + Clay... Data + Dirt*,[30] specifically the polluting capacity of mud as floods and mudslides, which might be preserved in the ancient name for the city of Paris, Lutetia, most likely derived its name from *lutum,* the Latin term for mud. In the chapter on Mud, Media, and the Metropolis, in which she also revisits Neufert's bricks, Mattern discusses mud and its transformation from pollution that has to be drained to a construction material that can be formed to a writing medium that can receive inscription. In a sweeping gesture over wall-writing historical transformations, Mattern shows how writing on walls is a legal and extra-legal activity that is always political. She recounts how walls were used for writing, to make public the juridical order in Mesoamerican cultures as well as in Ancient Greece; for spiritual Buddhist inscriptions in India; and as integral part of political processes and religious services in Ancient Rome, extending to colonial practices of Iberian monarchs in the New World, appropriated by Peruvian villagers, percolating into contemporary graffiti practices.

29   "Propre" in French refers to property, being one's own, as well as to the state of being clean; Serres uses this wordplay in the original French title of his book on *Malfeasance*: Michel Serres, *Le mal propre: polluer pour s'approprier ?* (Paris: Édition le Pommier, 2012).

30   Shannon Mattern, *Code + Clay... Data + Dirt: Five Thousand Years of Urban Media* (Minneapolis; London: University of Minnesota Press, 2017).

Macs Smith also discussed how walls in Paris, made of bricks or concrete, become host to different practices of parasitic inscription.[31] In *Paris and the Parasite*, Smith focused on Paris because of his situated interest in the linguistic specificity of the term "parasite," which can be explored through pathologizing urban planning approaches historically traced, as well as the noisiness of the term preserved in the French language. Smith picked up Serres's concept of the parasite and its three avatars: the disease, the noise, and the other, and located them in Paris. From Hausmann to Corbusier, "The task of the architect was clearly defined as the task of keeping out parasites, whatever form they might take,"[32] part of an ideology of immediacy, which identifies transparency in architecture with a moral good. Smith's interest in the mediacy of the city is not a negation nor an affirmation of immediacy but a way to show what it means to require immediate communication. Smith points out how the city is always mediated, and there can be no direct knowledge of it—contrary to how the anti-parasitic, "informatic urbanism" attempts to eliminate noise from the networks, conceiving the media city along the

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31   Macs Smith, *Paris and the Parasite: Noise, Health, and Politics in the Media City* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press, 2021).

32   Smith, *Paris and the Parasite: Noise, Health, and Politics in the Media City*, 42.

lines of Claude Shannon's theory of communication.[33]
Smith proposes *literarity* as "a conceptual framework for
an urbanism that does not distinguish between hosts
and parasites,"[34] which erodes the distinction between
meaning and noise.

This brings us to the fundamental paradox of what
Smith discusses as anti-parasitic architecture: "to create
a wall is also to create a writing surface."[35] In the chapter
on the "Wall," Smith focuses on the *mediaticity* of the
façade. Attempting to refute narratives of revolution-
ary discoveries of architecture as a medium, such as in
critiques of 1940s wall inscription activities in Paris or
Victor Hugo's contrary claim that the book would kill
the cathedral, Smith showed how different practices of
writing on walls allowed us to see the *mediaticity* of the
wall. This, Smith continues, is a state of hypermediacy:
"Whereas in the logic of immediacy mediation effaces
itself, so that we feel that we are in direct contact with
the message, in hypermediacy multiple media clash and
become layered."[36] Street art is a parasite, and it creates
"a kind of visual static that allows the viewer to see the
wall not as a container or support for other media, but as

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33   Claude Shannon's theory of communication is foundational for
information theory which informs the operation of contemporary
information and networking technologies. It was first published in
the article: Claude E. Shannon, "A Mathematical Theory of Communi-
cation," in *The Bell System Technical Journal* 27, (October 1948): 379–423,
623–56. It treats noise in a significantly different way from Michel
Serre's information theory, namely, it postulates it as a possibly cor-
rupting element of the communication channel, while for Serres,
noise, in a way, is the channel, or at least it is a part of the message.
See, for example N. Katherine Hayles, "Two Voices, One Channel:
Equivocation in Michel Serres," in *SubStance* 17, nr. 3 (1988): 3–12.

34   Smith, *Paris and the Parasite*, 18.

35   Smith, *Paris and the Parasite*, 59.

36   Ibid., 77.

a medium in its own right."[37] The political capaciousness of parasitic inscriptions on street walls is in the expropriation of the façade as a popular forum rather than its appropriation as a channel for personal expression.

Appreciating Mud: Decorative Augmentation

Mud is present in the etymology of the word mother, in its meaning of concreted, thickened scum. The name refers to a now obsolete meaning of "mother" as "dirt" or "filth," from PIE *meu- which designates concreted scum and is still present in the Dutch word for mud: *modder*. In the English language dictionary by Noah Webster, published in 1832, he wondered whether the name of a female parent originated in a word expressing matter, mold.[38] Webster speculated on the connection between the soil of the earth, as the producer, and the process of shaping, fitting as a mold for castings. He suggested that the name could also be connected with the opinion that the earth is the mother of all productions.

The double meaning is preserved in the term mother-of-pearl and the associated practice of making jewelry and decorative objects from the nacreous inner layer of the shell of some species from the gastropod and bivalve families. The moist, soft mud-like substance is secreted by a mollusk and thickens to form the nacre, the inner layer of the shell. The nacre is continuously deposited onto the inner surface of the shell, the iridescent nacreous layer. The nacre is part of the armor system mineralized by the mollusk as a way to protect its soft tissues from predators and other mechanical aggres-

37   Ibid., 85.

38   Noah Webster, *A Dictionary of the English Language* (London: Black, Young and Young, 1832).

sions. Nacre's strength and toughness are far superior
to the ceramic it is made of, which can be of interest to
material scientists who study the mechanical proper-
ties of this solid material.[39] From the architecture of the
composite, engineers aspire to learn how nature builds.
They take natural patterns as an instruction to come up
with design guidelines for composites mimicking nacre
so as to synthesize matter in certain ways, mimicking
nature. Nature is addressed as a book of techniques to
read and reproduce.

In addition to the claim of constructive strength,
nacre is visually very attractive. This has been addressed
by historians of art in different ways. The shimmering
"mother-of-pearl" quality of skin in 17th-century paint-
ings by Peter Paul Rubens remains controversial for the
aesthetic judgment it puts forward. According to Shawon
Kinew, an art historian researching the Baroque (itself
thought to owe its name to the pearl, an irregular or a
flawed one), Rubens's paintings establish a clear hierar-
chy of beauty that is color coded:

> Pale flesh [...] is "universal" in its pantochromatic ontology,
> and therefore constitutes the nucleus of this heliocentrism.
> Browns are middle colors, secondary, forming a second circle.
> These colors include brown flesh tones. [...] The outer circle,
> a third sphere, is reserved for "the colors of magnificence"—
> the red, blue, yellow, and so on of magnificent draperies
> and some birds.[40]

Such treatment is clearly problematic for its pretext
of skin-color hierarchization, white skin having superi-
or quality in the artist's rendering of it. White skin was
ingrained in the painterly technique of Rubens, while

39   Barthelat et al., "On the Mechanics of Mother-of-Pearl."

40   Shawon Kinew, "Sedlmayr's Mother-of-Pearl: Further Notes on
Rubens and Flesh Color," in *Selva*, nr. 2: Reactionary Art Histories
(December 3, 2020).

Black subjects posed a challenge to the artist. Kinew measured this against the work of art historian Hans Sedlmayer, known for his work on Rubens, as well as for his support of the Nazi regime. "The especial beauty of Rubens's rendering of white skin is treated by Sedlmayr as if the artist's handling of paint somehow undergirds the superiority of white skin, laying bear a racist Kunstwollen."[41] Sedlmayer evoked mother-of-pearl as a metaphor for white bodies and wrote on the shimmering mother-of-pearl quality of Rubens's treatment of pale flesh. Kinew offered a critique of Sedlmayer and his racism, by extension, for having: "a predilection for the round, for order, for the bureaucratic administration of figures passed for facts, for a neat hierarchy that radiates outward, the periphery cushioning the interior goo."[42] Kinew also questioned how color names (black, white, red) as words are imprecise for "a concept as ineffable as skin color in language."[43]

The color brown in Rubens's paintings is also a base color, like the brown of the earth and of creatures who have brown fur. Brown is the color of mud. The process of secreting minerals in self-defense gives rise to a shiny, radiant surface that concretes from scum from the organism's mud.

What is the mediacy of this scrotum, and in what ways it augments the mollusk and our understanding of mud? It is about secretion, or as Vera Bühlmann proposed: "We should use 'secrete' as the verb for this fourfold and universal activity: nature *is* the activity of secretion, of something setting itself apart from itself,

41   Ibid., 91.

42   Ibid., 92.

43   Ibid., 89.

from *cernere*."[44] When observed as informational, this is a constructive process: Simple sedimentation, without disturbance, is just the layering of matter on top of an existing layer; form is determined by the shell and its sediments that sediment. Writing with the sedimentation of pearl-like matter is either about this precious material or what stories it tells. What is in the beauty that we can articulate as an architectonic case, to stand up and out of the background of filth: The secretion or filth of the slimy mollusk transforms into sedef. Everything can be seen as productive in its reproductive transformation of matter and life liquors.

Synthesis: Noisy Images

The treatment of mud as a concept and matter articulates a way to extend thinking into opposing polarities, mud as dirt and fertile, mud as formless and form. The three images of different notions of mud: The brick-making mud, the polluting mud, and the concreting, precious mud of the nacre proceed in transformative schematics of informational processes in matter and in human mastership (brick-making or polluting) of matter. The images and their stories propose to find back our face in the dirt, through dirt, rather than attempting to remove it. They are an effort and method to foreground the mud and bring it to our attention.

This text has aimed to position mud as a source or a host to different architectonic thoughts. I am interested in articulating growth and sedimentation as informational processes that render visible the form and urban social relations through ceaseless attempts to exclude

44   Bühlmann, "Vicarious Architectonics, Strange Objects. Chance-Bound: Michel Serres' Exodus from Methodical Reason."

noise and dirt; these attempts are never fully successful; our cities are alloys of mud and reason.

While mud on Earth can lend itself to the three figurations discussed here, the concept of mud is still difficult to appreciate unless we imagine not having it. In the video footage NASA released in February 2021, we see the view from the cameras of its robot rover, Perseverance, approaching the ground of planet Mars.[45] Different from Earth's surface, which appears blue from afar and is largely covered by water, the surface of Mars appears red due to the prevalence of iron oxide in its ground. It looks like mud, but it is not. No water exists in a liquid state on Mars's surface due to atmospheric pressure a hundred times lower than on Earth, but its two polar caps are covered in ice. The rocky surface of Mars can, therefore, hardly host life. This imaginary trip to Mars serves to take distance and appreciate Earthly conditions.

Another detail worth disclosing in consideration of the lack of mud is that the quicksand in Goya's painting discussed by Michel Serres and Martin Savransky might actually be an artifact of restoration, and it was not of the painter's original intention to depict the "third" which swallows us while we focus on conflict.[46] There is one important way in which the difference between grass and sand matter to this text. Grass grows out of the soil, while sand that sinks swallows life, infertile as the soil on Mars. Martin Savransky emphasized the insufficiency

45   Perseverance Rover's Descent and Touchdown on Mars (Official NASA Video), https://mars.nasa.gov/mars2020/multimedia/videos/?v=461 https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4czjS9h4Fpg (accessed May 18, 2022).

46   González de la Fuente and Santiago Sevilla Vallejo, "Tres hipótesis de 'Duelo a garrotazos', de Francisco de Goya. Acercamiento político, etnológico y mitológico," in *Revista de Folklore*, nr. 457 (March 2020): 71–89.

of the model of transparency to deal with mud or pollu-
tion: "Knowledge alone won't clean the mud off our bod-
ies."[47] The problem, he stressed, is not the lack of knowl-
edge on mud but that we cannot stop making progress.
This text suggests pausing and considering mud archi-
tectonically, beyond its mechanical or biological proper-
ties, mud as an image, as a host, and as a world on its own.

47   Savransky, "After Progress: Notes for an Ecology of Perhaps," 269.

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ation of things. So forget the word environment, commonly used in this context. It assumes that we humans are at the center of a system of nature. This idea recalls a bygone era, when the Earth (how can one imagine that it used to represent us?), placed in the center of the world, reflected our narcissism, the humanism that makes of us the exact midpoint or excellent culmination of all things. No. The Earth existed without our unimaginable ancestors, could well exist today without us, will exist tomorrow or later still, without any of our possible descendants, whereas we cannot exist without it. Thus we must indeed place things in the center and us at the periphery, or better still, things all around and us within them like parasites.
— Michel Serres, *The Natural Contract* (1990)

Thus alchemy is involved, more than modern science is, in a system of moral values. It is alchemists' souls that are engaged in the work of alchemy, the object of their meditations receiving every value. One who handles the skimmer must indeed have a moral ideal. By their art, alchemists must separate 'the stains and filth of the three general principles; furnishing them with a matter, a place, or a vessel more fit than is that in which nature operates, which is full of dirt and a myriad kinds of foulness'. Their art takes away 'the dirt and grossest parts from the salt, the superfluous aquosities from the mercury, and the adustive parts from sulphur'. This purification is, as we see, performed with more of a moral than a scientific ideal. Its tone is not that of the purification of substances in modem chemistry. It despises what it rejects. Those handling the skimmer do so with an expression of disgust on their faces.
— Gaston Bachelard, *The Formation of the Scientific Mind* (1938)

Redefining Waste:
A Review of Faecal Matter
Inspiring Novel Life Forms

KLAUS SPIESS

In this article, we describe how human "shit," often overlooked as waste, serves as a valuable "commons." In the past, feces were used as a fertilizer and as an enema to treat diarrhea during war. With the development of smart feces, which are probiotics and psychotropic medicines developed from feces, the recycling of feces has gained renewed importance. These biopsycho pharmaceuticals work by transferring behavioral patterns and emotions through the transfer of fecal microbes from donors to recipients.

The debate over feces ownership between private property and common good is renewed today, as valuable fecal bacteria are now widely collected from individuals in medical "feces banks."

The use of valuable natural or synthetically produced fecal microbes in emerging industries raises questions about the immaterial labor of non-human beings, as commons are now defined to include non-human beings. The ability of fecal microbes to thrive in the environment, whether naturally or artificially, makes them an "exemplary organism." This organism bridges between different species, bodies, and the environment and between organic and inorganic matter. Departing from "mock copy shit" and extended semiotic selves, it potentially creates new synthetic organisms at the markets. Overall, feces play a crucial and multi-layered role that goes beyond their perception as waste and has implications for various industries and ethical considerations for society. Fiction writers, in particular, have explored the relationship between engineered and recycled feces and the desymbolisation of language, revealing a perspective on the limits of the commercialization of the human body.

"Shit" as an Externality Within— Perspectives on Nature's Intimacies

For centuries, "shit" has been viewed as a passive and inferior substance compared to living organisms. It was considered incapable of movement, apparently lacking intelligence or sentience, and embodied the concept of disgusting waste.

This negative perception was reinforced by a lack of understanding about the sentient and decision-making abilities of the microbial inhabitants of feces. It is only with the advancement of microbiological knowledge that we can now appreciate feces as crucial extended

habitat for the microbes that reside in the human body, leading to a new perception of it.

The unique composition of feces as a material substance is highlighted by Dave Praeger in his book "Poop Culture," where he describes how each individual fecal sample represents a distinctive combination of nutrition, metabolism, and environment that will never exist again. Praeger likens feces to snowflakes in their uniqueness.[1]

As philosopher Timothy Morton emphasizes, in today's society, with the pressing issues of climate change, environmental destruction, and biodiversity loss, it is essential to see nature as an intimate process that occurs within ourselves.[2] Karen Barad uses the example of a hybrid organism, the Brittlestar, which communicates with its environment through material interactions.[3] When the Brittlestar loses one of its limbs, it does not sever itself from the environment, raising questions about whether the severed part belongs to the Brittlestar or the environment. Based on these considerations, we can interpret fecal microbes as an "internal externality" or "intimate outside."

In contrast to the Western emphasis on the visible totality of the body, judged by its external contours and "beauty," "shit," as an organism with quasi-entity, exhibits emergent intelligence through its effects and interactions within its habitat, which also is the human

1   David Praeger, *Poop Culture: How America Is Shaped by Its Grossest National Product* (Port Townend: Feral House, 2007), 17.

2   Timothy Morton, *Ecology Without Nature: Rethinking Environmental Aesthetics* (Cambridge & London: Harvard University Press, 2007); and "Queer Ecology," *PMLA* 125, nr. 2 (2010): 273–282.

3   Karen Barad, "Invertebrate Visions: Diffraction of the Brittlestar," in *The Multispecies Salon*, ed. Eben Kirksey (Duke University Press, 2014), 221–241.

body. The way in which these newly recognized entities challenge the traditional separation of inside and outside is indicative of their unique intelligence.

In this article, we explore the role of feces and its microbial components in connecting the external environment with the internal environment of the body. We will illustrate this through two assertions: First, their fertilizing function for the surrounding soil, and second, their "fertilizing function" for the human central nervous system and brain. We will reflect on various mediating factors between the outside and inside, including the concept of "institutionalized feces" in medical feces banking systems and language.

In order to comprehend the diverse capacities of feces and expand the horizons of their applications, we will examine selected geographical and historical contexts. Our definition of the scope of feces will encompass physical transplantation as well as the immaterial work of fecal microbes from a contemporary perspective. Finally, to highlight the hidden potential of "shit," we will consider forms of synthetically engineered and artificial feces for new commercial markets.

The Fecal Microbiota as an Intelligent Ecological Commons

The human fecal microbiota constitutes a significant proportion of human feces, accounts for thirty percent of the total volume, and contains an astonishing ninety percent of the genetic diversity of the human body.[4]

Because the microbiota is genetically alien to its host, it plays a crucial role in a new "posthuman" expe-

4   Alison M. Stephen and J.H. Cummings, "The microbial contribution to human faecal mass," in *J Med Microbiol* 13, nr. 1 (1980): 45–56.

rience by accurately representing our shifting boundaries and fluid identities.[5] From this perspective, it may seem useful to consider the capabilities of these microbial symbionts.

Microbes inhabiting human feces far surpass their human hosts in their capacities for sexual metamorphosis, cooperativity, and boundary crossing: compared to human cultures, they tend to reproduce more in collectives, as noted by Wloch-Salamon et al.,[6] and they are able to adapt to changing environmental conditions much faster than humans due to their greater adaptability through rapid mutations. Biologists are just beginning to apply various genetic hybridization techniques that prokaryotes have used for billions of years, as Lynn Margulis points out.[7]

In addition, microbial metabolism and sexual reproduction are very sensitive to environmental changes, especially pressures associated with industrial profit motives, leading to rapid changes in microbial community life and sexual behavior, with prokaryotic microbes switching from asexual to sexual replication to ensure their DNA diversity.[8] "Programmed cell death" also represents an interesting model of the collective intelligence of microbial communities: A group of cells in a

5   Scott F. Gilbert, Jan Sapp, and Alfred L. Tauber, "A Symbiotic View of Life: We Have Never Been Individuals," in *The Quarterly Review of Bioogy 87*, nr. 4 (December 2012): 325–341.

6   Dominika M. Wloch-Salamon, Roberta M. Fisher, and Brigitte Regenberg, "Division of Labour in the Yeast: Saccharomyces cerevisiae," in *Yeast* 34, nr. 10 (2017): 399–406.

7   Lynn Margulis, *Origins of Sex – Three Billion Years of Genetic Recombination* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990).

8   R.Craig MacLean and Ivana Gudelj, "Resource Competition and Social Conflict in Experimental Populations of Yeast," in *Nature* 441, nr. 7092 (2006): 498–501.

culture dies whenever environmental conditions require a reduction in the culture's resource consumption.[9]

In its communication with the environment, the fecal microbiota displays previously overlooked abilities for information processing, learning, memory, and communication with the environment. It continuously interprets information from its environment and responds to challenges in remarkably nuanced and complex ways, providing an alternative understanding of environmental intelligence.[10] As Buzzini points out,[11] microbes thus play the crucial role of mediators between humans and the ecosystems that surround them. These microorganisms have evolved sophisticated mechanisms to attract vector species, making them true cosmopolitans.

Applied architectural considerations of "shit" aside,[12] the fecal microbiota also exhibits molecular features that warrant its study as a model for an immanent semiotic system of language and money. As Nobel laureate Lederberg (2006) suggests,[13] circulation is as crucial for microbes as it is for language and money.

9   MacLean and Gudelj, "Resource Competition and Social Conflict in Experimental Populations of Yeast," 498–501.

10   Fabrice Caudron and Yves Barral, "Mnemons: encoding memory by protein super-assembly," in *Microb Cell* 1, nr. 3 (2014): 100–102.

11   Pietro Buzzini, Marc-André Lachance, and Andrey Yurkov (eds.), *Yeasts in Natural Ecosystems: Ecology* (Berlin: Springer, 2017).

12   Lydia Kallipoliti, *The Architecture of Closed Worlds: Or, What is the Power of Shit?* (Baden: Lars Müller Publishers, 2018).

13   Joshua Lederberg, "The Microbe's Contribution to Biology – 50 Years After," in *International Microbiology* 9, nr. 3 (2006): 155–156.

Enriching the Soil, Nourishing the Mind

Enriching the Soil

The process of fertilizing and enriching the soil through composting is not only a means of promoting the growth of plants and other organisms but also involves complex social and cultural dynamics in relation to human feces.

Fertilizers, whether natural or synthetic, are substances that are used to enhance the growth of plants by supplying essential nutrients to the soil. Compost, which is a fertilizer created through the decomposition of plant and food waste, is a rich source of plant nutrients and beneficial microorganisms like bacteria, worms, and fungal mycelia. Compost acts as a soil conditioner, increasing the humus or humic acid content of the soil and introducing beneficial microbial colonies that help suppress harmful pathogens in the soil. Bacteria in compost play a crucial role in breaking down carbon and nitrogen and releasing nutrients such as phosphorus and magnesium that are vital for the growth of plants and other organisms. Most importantly, these bacteria are capable of continually collecting information about their environment.[14]

The use of human feces as fertilizer has been a common practice in many countries, including Japan. In Tokyo, compost dealers used to collect feces from individuals and sell them to farmers until the 20th century. The feces of wealthy individuals were sold at higher prices due to their better diet, which resulted in higher

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14   Jingtao Li et al., "Rhizosphere Microbiome: The Emerging Barrier in Plant-Pathogen Interactions," in *Froniers in Microbiology*, October 29, 2021; DOI: 10.3389/fmicb.2021.772420.

nutrient content in their feces.[15] This practice also had social and spatial dynamics, as the hierarchical relationship between the landowners and the feces donors became an issue. In some communities, poor individuals who did not own land would fertilize the land of the wealthy landowners with their feces, resulting in the landowners appropriating the feces of the poor for their own benefit.[16]

The process of fertilizing highlights the interconnectedness between the social wealth of humans and different elements of the ecosystem.

Nourishing the Mind

It is now well known that microbial biodiversity and human cultural behavior are intertwined at many levels.[17] Particularly urban areas have seen a decline of fifty percent in both human and soil microbiota diversity compared to native rural communities.[18] Microbial habitats like the soil or the human gut are negatively impacted by

15   Patricia Ebrey and Anne Walthall, *Modern East Asia: A cultural, social, & political history* (Boston & New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 2006), 337.

16   Assa Doron & Ira Raja, "The cultural politics of shit: class, gender and public space in India," in *Postcolonial Studies* 18, nr. 2 (2015): 189–207.

17   Egija Zaura and Alex Mira, "The Oral Microbiome in an Ecological Perspective," in *Frontiers in Cellular and Infection Microbiology*, July 1, 2015; Gao L., Xu T., Huang G., Jiang S., Gu Y., Chen F. (2018). "Oral microbiomes: more and more importance in oral cavity and whole body," in *Protein Cell* 9(5), pp. 488–500; Dassi, Erik, Ferretti, Pamela, Covello, Giuseppina, Bertorelli, Roberto, Denti, Michaela A., De Sanctis, Veronica, Tett, Adrian and De Segata, Veronica "The short-term impact of probiotic consumption on the oral cavity microbiome," *Scientific Reports* 8: 10 (2018), 476.

18   Clement Jose C. et al., "The microbiome of uncontacted Amerindians," *Science Advances* 1, nr. 3 (2015): DOI: 10.1126/sciadv.1500183.

factors such as high caloric intake, antibiotics, hygiene, fertilizers, and dehydration, preserving microbial diversity is crucial, and it is essential to restore microbial flora through the administration of appropriate strains.

Stool transplants, an ancient and effective medical therapy, were historically used on soldiers with severe diarrhea who showed visible recovery after receiving a stool transplant from a healthy comrade.[19]

Surprisingly, these transplants have revealed that eating habits and mental characteristics are transmissible through feces.

Recent research has shown that fecal bacteria transplanted from a donor can impact emotional behavior and related neuro systems of the recipient, indicating that the microbiota has the potential to influence affect and cognition.[20] In fact, fecal transplantation studies have demonstrated that bacteria can even transmit behavioral traits, such as depression or addiction, from one person to another because bacteria are the producers of neurotransmitters such as serotonin and the pleasure-stimulating dopamine.[21] A growing body of scientific literature has emerged on this topic, introducing terms such as "psychobiotic" or "melancholic" microbes, suggesting that humans are under strong control of the trillions of microorganisms that inhabit them. This new understanding has led to a paradigm shift in psychop-

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19 Jiunn-Wie Wang et al., "Fecal microbiota transplantation: Review and update," *J Formos Med Assoc.* 118 Supplement 1 (2019): 23-31.

20 Zaura and Mira.

21 de Groot P.F., Frissen, M.N., de Clercq N.C., Nieuwdorp M. (2017). "Fecal microbiota transplantation in metabolic syndrome: History, present and future," in *Gut Microbes.* 4;8(3):253-267; Evrensel, Alper and Ceylan, Mehmet Emin (2016) "Fecal microbiota transplantation and its usage in neuropsychiatric disorders," in *Clinical Psychopharmacolgy and Neuroscience* 31;14(3): 231–7.

harmacology, with the recognition of the therapeutic potential of microbial behavior modification.[22] Psychobiotics, which are live microorganisms used as remedies, are being promoted for their potential benefits on the human central nervous system by improving or restoring the microbial flora in the gut.[23] Consequently, there are speculative papers that explore how microbes may even encourage their human hosts to perform certain rituals that promote microbial transmission and replication.[24]

Despite having been a highly effective therapy, fecal transplantation was condemned and forgotten in the modern age of hygiene hysteria characterized by the overuse of antibiotics, excessive use of detergents, and immunological surveillance, and the new insights into stool transplantation have challenged our understanding of immune defense, revealing a more nuanced relationship that includes symbiotic relations with foreign substances. Fecal transplantation has compelled a rewriting of the history of immune defense, which was previously understood as a largely hostile response to foreign substances.

Other-than-humans Acting in Feces

In Western high modernism, the idea of "alien" or non-human forces controlling human behavior "from

22   Mayer E.A., Knight R., Mazmanian S.K., Cryan J.F., Tillisch K. "Gut microbes and the brain: paradigm shift in neuroscience," in *Journal for Neuroscience* (2014), 34:15490–15496.

23   Jennifer Abbasi, "Are Probiotics Money Down the Toilet? Or Worse?" *Journal American Medical Association*, Vol. 321, nr. 7, February 19, 2019: 633-635; Dassi et al.

24   Alexander Y. Panchin, Alexander I. Tuzhikov, and Yuri V. Panchin, "Midichlorians – the biomeme hypothesis: is there a microbial component to religious rituals?" in *Biology Direct* 9 (2014): 14.

within" has been viewed as negative, even tragic. However, the new-found understanding that gut microbes, although not human, not only control our behavior in their own interest but also manipulate our pleasure by secreting neurotransmitters challenges this perspective and calls for a re-evaluation of mutual benefits between species. It suggests that humans are no longer the sole masters of their own bodies, and this shift in agency is not a failed goal but rather the loss of a futile illusion.

From a post-anthropocentric perspective, the question of who is acting in this situation becomes complex.

As humans themselves become a milieu for microbial life and change, the concept of *milieu* as a medium for the development of individuals is challenged, giving way to the idea of microbial "shit" as an operative space.[25] Just like the inside of a cell, the environment in which an organism resides is not just a place for resource consumption but also becomes an integral part of the organism itself. In Haraway's words,[26] the human being becomes humus, serving as compost for others.

Fecal Bankers, Operative Spaces, and New Subjectivities of Value

When considering the valuable bacteria in fecal matter in our society, the question of ownership arises: To whom do the fecal bacteria or the cloud of bacteria surrounding our bodies belong? These composites of fertilizers consist of numerous, often unknown species with the potential to produce unique or undiscovered

25   Gilbert Simondon, *Du mode d'existence des objets techniques* (Paris: Aubier, 2001).

26   Donna J. Haraway, *Staying with the Trouble: Making Kin in the Chthulucene* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2016).

enzymes or to be manipulated in various ways to enhance enzyme multiplication, making them valuable for commercial interests.[27]

In the midst of significant changes in ecology and economics, also non-human life forms such as microbes today have become commodities. As the diversity of microbes in habitats, including the human body, declines, each microbe becomes a precious resource. This knowledge has prompted the establishment of numerous stool banks with the goal of collecting and preserving as many fecal samples as possible to conserve the diminishing diversity of microbes.[28] Stool banks aim to provide high-quality donor fecal solutions that are ready-to-use for the treatment of patients with recurrent or refractory diarrhea and intestinal damage. Several successful biobanking projects, such as the American Gut Project, have emerged, which involve sequencing, comparing, and archiving stool bacteria from participants. Purified feces, containing only relevant bacterial species without potentially pathogenic ones, not only offer a wide range of applications in the bioindustry but also represent a form of recycling of human waste in its most primal form.

The emergence of stool banks and the practice of fecal transplants challenge the traditional Western notion of the human body as a discrete, individual entity. In this new paradigm, the body is no longer solely governed by the host, as it becomes a thriving ecosystem of microbial activities. As a result, the body cannot be easily

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27   Industrial Enzymes Market Report 2023, https://www.marketsandmarkets.com/Market-Reports/industrial-enzymes-market-237327836.html (accessed April 19, 2023),.

28   Clement Jose C. et al., "The microbiome of uncontacted Amerindians."

categorized as mere property of the host or a shell for microbial activities.

This shift in perspective transforms the body into an ambiguous space. As Maria Fannin suggests,[29] the body becomes a blank canvas that belongs to no one, blurring the boundaries between the self and the microbial community within. Biobanks, therefore, represent a novel form of life that transcends individuality and highlights the interconnectedness of diverse communities. This transformation also challenges conventional notions of subjectivity, objectivity, space, territory, and the public sphere.

The Pleasures of Defecation — "Defecation Euphoria"

The topic of the pleasure associated with defecation is often overlooked from a scientific standpoint. However, there are several plausible physiological reasons why people may physically enjoy the act of defecation.

One major factor is the role of the vagus nerve, a cranial nerve that sends signals between the gut and the brain. The vagus nerve has two main functions: sensory feeling and motor muscle movement. It helps to regulate muscles in the throat, heart, stomach, and bowel.

The strain of pushing during defecation triggers a signal to the brain, which can stimulate nerve responses such as goosebumps and other muscle signals that control heart rate. Additionally, changes in the shape of the rectum during defecation can result in an effect known as "defecation euphoria." This term describes the feeling of excitement or satisfaction that some people experi-

29   Maria Fannin, "Revisiting a Bodily Common: Enclosures and Openings in the Bioeconomy," in *Releasing the Commons: Rethinking Futures of the Commons*, ed. Amin Ash and Philip Howell (London: Routledge, 2016), 177-191.

ence when their rectum muscles and content pushes on their vagus nerve. This sensation is supported may by the lowered heart rate and blood pressure that occurs when the vagus nerve is stimulated during defecation.

The pleasure of defecating leads to several suggestions concerning the pleasures of talking while defecating.

Double Pleasure: The Intersection of Defecating and Talking

The act of defecation is a unique experience that connects the human body with its environment in a sensual way, and the connection between talking and defecation can be seen in various cultural practices and contexts. We here describe how the understanding of the physiological aspects of the pleasure associated with defecation may provide meaningful explanations for the observed association between speaking and defecation. The involvement of the vagus nerve, which plays a role in both defecation and vocalization, could potentially explain why some people may feel the urge to speak or vocalize during or after defecation. Furthermore, the psychological relief and satisfaction that comes with elimination may also contribute to this association.

Rohinton Mistry's novel *A Fine Balance* depicts how Indians from impoverished backgrounds squat on railway tracks and engage in discussions about the techniques of "shitting" on the tracks, including knowing the train timetable better than the station master themselves. Their embodied sense of space and time allows them to safely navigate the dangers of their surroundings. "There's only one problem with squatting on the track," said their long-haired neighbor. "You have to

stand up when the train comes, whether you're ready or not. The railway has no respect for our open-air sundaes." "Tell me, O great Goo Guruji, do you recommend that we buy a timetable if we are to squat on the tracks every morning?" "There is no need, my obedient disciple. In a few days, your stomach will know the train times better than the stationmaster."[30]

In the film *Le Fantôme de la Liberté,* directed by Buñuel in 1974, there is a scene at a dinner where the guests are seated around a table on the toilets. They politely discuss various issues around defecation while appearing to use the toilets they are sitting on. However, if a guest is hungry, they excuse themselves and retire to a private booth to eat.

This juxtaposition of speaking and defecation in different cultural contexts shows defecation as a unity of physiological and social, which will be emphasized even more in the next section.

There also is an ecosexual dynamics involved, as Paul Preciado points out in his term of anal compost,[31] especially with the orifice through which compost exits the body and enters the earth. The anus is threatening to patriarchal capitalism, though, precisely because it is sexy and reproductive — as long as anal sex is understood as sex and feces is understood as manure from which new life grows. On the other hand, Moshfegh compares the process of writing with self-fertilizing, producing, and feeding her own compost.[32]

30   Assa Doron, Ira Raja, "The cultural politics of shit: class, gender and public space in India," in *Postcolonial Studies* 18, nr. 2 (2015), 199.

31   Elvia Wilk, "This compost-erotics of rot," in *Sex ecologies*, ed. Stefanie Hessler (Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press, 2021), 45–57.

32   Ottessa Moshfegh, "How to Shit," in *The Masters Review Blog*, October 20, 2015, https://mastersreview.com/how-to-shit-by-ottessa-moshfegh/ (accessed April 20, 2023).

Does the Desymbolisation of Language Reveal
the Limits to Engineered Feces?

A more critical perspective on the relationship between feces (recycling) and language comes from Margret Atwood, who describes the effects of engineered feces recycling on language, in particular, the de-symbolisation of language as an indication of the limits of capitalist growth. In her dystopian narrative *Oryx and Crake* (2003), the protagonists feed exclusively on their own excrement, which results in their inability to experience feelings and conflicts, as their communication is limited to concrete references from the material world. Atwood portrays a precarious relationship between the material and the symbolic in the context of "posthumanism." From a semiotic point of view, this exuberant materiality damages the iconic and symbolic capacities of language and even renders language itself indexical, where every bodily utterance and its relation to bodies becomes a mere causal signifier of the signified. When Atwood foresees a flattening of language in contrast to the expected beneficial increase in microbial diversity through the transmission of microbes via feces, she describes the influence of feces on the brain early on, anticipating current scientific understanding of fecal bacterial neurotransmitters.

Atwood's dystopia leads to our next sections, in which we describe a society that discovers feces as a new operational space that gains value by extending the capabilities of natural fecal microbes to synthetic and artificial fecal matter.

The Immaterial Labor of Fecal Microbes

The concept of "immaterial labor" covers a wide range of activities that create value under neoliberal capitalism. We apply the concept to feces because they perform biological labor. A particular role has been played by manipulated E. coli, a species of microbe that is commonly found in human feces and has a leading role in the production of various medical agents.

Through synthetic manipulation, E. coli has become a "workhorse" that can not only produce important medical cures such as insulin and other drugs in the lab but also digest plastics, break down pollutants, produce biofuels, and generate electricity. This process illustrates that biology is no longer being replaced by machines but is becoming so interwoven with technology that the boundaries between biology and technology are becoming blurred.

What is remarkable in this context is that the source of value creation in this industry is not human labor but the work of enzymes and genes as biomedia. This "life activity" of biomedia represents a form of labor that is not tied to human subjectivity but acts as a non-human, autonomous force. This leads to the interesting questions posed by Eugene Thacker:[33] He ponders whether exploitation and/or alienation can still exist in a scenario where there is no longer a human subject and, instead, waste cells do the work. Thacker's perspective challenges traditional notions of labor and subjectivity by highlighting the agency and productivity of non-human entities in the production process. The immaterial labor of feces mediated through biomedia presents a

33 Eugene Thacker, "Biomedia," in *Critical Terms for Media Studies*, ed. W.J.T. Mitchell and Mark B.N. Hansen (University of Chicago Press, 2010), 123.

novel paradigm that encourages us to rethink our under-
standing of labor, value, and exploitation in the context
of contemporary capitalism. It challenges us to rethink
our assumptions about labor as exclusively tied to hu-
man agency and instead consider the multiple ways in
which immaterial labor can manifest itself in the inter-
connected world of biological and technological systems.

Mock and Copy "Shit"—Fecal Microbes
Expanding the Organism

Microbial organisms possess the ability to connect with
their environment through non-arbitrary signs, to tran-
scend the boundaries of their organismal existence, and
to change their environment. These eco-semiotic rela-
tionships show that all organisms perceive and modify
their environment by modeling and interpreting both
their internal processes and their external environment.
Certain forms of such "niche construction" can lead to
the emergence of an "extended organism" in which en-
ergy, matter, and waste associated with microbes do not
accumulate in their cells, but the environment itself is
manipulated to store energy, matter, and waste in a way
that benefits the microbes.[34] As a result, the environ-
ment itself becomes a reflective source of information.[35]

Thomas Sebeok goes further by describing the be-
havior of insects that adapt their environment to their
own advantage by creating mock copies of themselves to

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34 J.Scott Turner, *The Extended Organism: The Physiology of Ani-
mal-Built Structures* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard Universi-
ty Press, 2000).

35 See Turner, *The Extended Organism* and F.J. Odling-Smee,
"Niche-constructing phenotypes," in *The role of behavior in evolution*,
ed. Henry C. Plotkin (MIT Press, 1988), 73–131.

attract the attention of predators to one of their copies.[36] The agency of mimetic organisms is not limited to the boundaries of their primary bodies but extends beyond their organismic boundaries to form an extended "semiotic self." These semiotic processes create organic niches for living beings. Cultural signs such as money or language can also be seen as indicators of this extended "semiotic self" or represent an extended "semiotic self."

Through communicative processes, perceptual and sign complexes that exist in the subjective world of the receiver are translated into physical properties of this mimetic organism. This creates a non-arbitrary link between meaning and sign since the traces of subjective perception are direct effects of the physical properties.

When microbes create copies of themselves by using the functions of cultural signs,[37] this process is often accompanied by symbiosis, manipulation, or deception. In contrast to the mimetic operation referred to above, this mimicry disrupts the original-copy relationship and becomes acausal to the extent that the adapted systems mutually change through non-causal mimicry.[38] In this "biomimicry" process, microbes adapt environmental and the aforementioned cultural sign systems, such as language and money, to their own needs. However, the basis of similarity is not specific forms but meanings.[39]

36 Thomas A. Sebeok, "The Semiotic Self," in *A Sign is Just a Sign* (Indiana University Press, 1991), 36–40.

37 Sebeok, "The Semiotic Self."

38 Andreas Becker, Martin Doll, Wiemer Serjocha et al., "Einleitung," in *Mimikry: Gefährlicher Luxus zwischen Natur und Kultur*, ed. Andreas Becker, Martin Doll, Wiemer Serjocha et al. (Schliengen: Edition Argus, 2008), 7–27.

39 Timo Maran, "Semiotization of Matter: A Hybrid Zone Between Biosemiotics and Material Ecocriticism," in *Material Ecocriticism,* ed.

Ontomutation of Fecal Matter

In the realm of fecal microbes, perception, and existence, as well as sexuality and metabolism, are inextricably interwoven. For microbes, substance and form, materiality and intelligence, being and knowledge are interdependent because they do not adhere to fixed boundaries of metabolism, sexuality, or migration. They embody the malleability of matter within themselves and experience their perceptual relationship to the environment as lived materiality, as Barad also explains.[40]

The boundary between organic and inorganic matter cannot always be clearly drawn when both types of matter exhibit characteristics of both. In particular, the question arises of how humans can operate cultural signs as part of their own biochemical processes through their microbiota. Luciana Parisi, following Lynn Margulis's ecology of symbiogenesis, calls this sensory perception of information between organic and inorganic matter "symbiosensation."[41] Symbiosenation represents a state of constant overlap between information and perception, with new media ecologies serving as a model.

When this techno-ecology of perception extends from the realm of organic matter to non-organic states of matter, it leads beyond the biological fusion of dif-

Serenella Iovino and Serpil Oppermann (Indiana University Press, 2014), 141–154.

40 Karen Barad, *Meeting the Universe Halfway: Quantum Physics and the Entanglement of Matter and Meaning* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007).

41 Luciana Parisi, "Technoecologies of Sensation," in *Deleuze/Guattari & Ecology,* ed. Bernd Herzogenrath (Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 182—199.

ferent entities to an "ontomutation" of microbiota, in our case, of the feces themselves.[42]

These considerations lead to pragmatic questions regarding the bioanalogical properties of feces. What responses to the environment, growth and change, replication and homeostasis, consistent with some but not all definitions of life might faeces actually exhibit? These include neural network-based artificial intelligent faeces and the development of a simple, self-sustaining, self-organising and self-regulating distributed "organism" as an operationally closed system that could meet basic criteria for life.

Towards a Faecal Microbiota-Inspired New Life Form: The "Shitoid"

Finally, we now speculate on useful applications of the artificial life forms described in the previous section, referred to here as "shitoid" in reference to the concept of the plant-based robot "Plantoid" by Barbara Mazzolai.[43]

Applied "shitoids" offer some capabilities over biological life. These capabilities could include monitoring the replication and adaptive behavior of its own organism, as well as environmental monitoring for pollutants. Shitoids have the ability to sense and respond to various environmental stimuli as they slowly move through the environment. Their enhanced sensory abilities allow them to develop specific growth responses to changing external biotic and abiotic conditions and to transmit

42   Erich Hörl, "Introduction to General Ecology," in *General Ecology: The New Ecological Paradigm*, ed. Erich Hörl and Burton James Edward (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2017), 1–74.

43   Barbara Mazzolai, "Plant-inspired growing robots," in *Soft Robotics: Trends, Applications and Challenges*, ed. Cecilia Laschi et al. (Berlin: Springer, 2017), 57–63.

and receive information to and from other feces, humans, plants, animals, or fungi, leading to the development of complex adaptive behaviors. This process would generate data with which the "shitoid" could then be fed. Based on their technical equipment and potential controllability as artificial intelligence, they have some evolutionary capabilities. These advantages include a more objectifiable precision of perception, a greater speed, a direct transmission of characteristics to the offspring, and the associated potentially unlimited lifespan.

Applications are also in the medical field, where shitoids strategies can inspire the development of new forms of transplantation.[44] Public fecal banks can be more communally regulated via decentralized, non-fungible fecal tokens in the service of sophisticated "shit commons" banking.

Building such "shitoids," with their enhanced sensory actuation mechanisms and behavior in time and space, would certainly require an interdisciplinary approach that goes beyond traditional manufacturing methods and incorporates knowledge from fields such as biology, materials science, engineering, and robotics.

The "shitoid" can ultimately also be used as an educational platform to give new defecating generations a better understanding of how their real "shit" works. A "shit-literate" bot can teach people to view their "shit" as a complex organism in its own right, fundamentally endowed with sensory capabilities, a special form of intelligence, and adaptive abilities that foster respect for its potential and capabilities that are often overlooked.

44   Barbara Mazzolai, Lucia Beccai, and Virgilio Mattoli, "Plants as model in biomimetics and biorobotics: New perspectives," in *Frontiers in Bioengineering and Biotechnology* 2, (2014): 2.

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What's vilest in the world if not the Mind? It is the body that recoils from filth and crime. Like the fly, the Mind settles on everything. Nausea, disgust, regrets, remorse are not its properties; they are merely so many curious phenomena for it to study. Danger draws it like a flame and if the flesh were not so powerful would lead it to burn its wings, urged on by a fierce and fatuous lust for knowledge.

— Paul Valéry, *Analects* (trans. 1956)

Loathing an item of food, a piece of filth, waste, or dung. The spasms and vomiting that protect me. The repugnance, the retching that thrusts me to the side and turns me away from defilement, sewage, and muck. The shame of compromise, of being in the middle of treachery. The fascinated start that leads me toward and separates me from them. Food loathing is perhaps the most elementary and most archaic form of abjection.

— Julia Kristeva, *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection* (1980)

Lord! said the Partridge, Cock, Puet, Snite, and Quail,/
Pigeons, Larks, my Masters, why d'ye rail?/
You're kept from Winter's Cold, and Summer's heat,/
Are taught new Tunes, and have good store of meat./
Having a Servant you to wait upon,/
To make your Cages clean from filth, and Dung:/
When we poor Birds are by the dozens killed,/
And luxuriously us eat, till they be filled:/
And of our Flesh they make such cruel waste,/
That but some of our Limbs will please their taste./

— Margaret Cavendish, *A Dialogue of Birds* (1664)

Violations of conventional values (immorality) by others are included here. For example: "Seeing crude sexual behavior." "Drinking, breaking the law."

Cosmetics of Hospitality:
A Question of Limits

JORDI VIVALDI

"Inmundo," "inmundicia," from the Latin term *inmunditia*, without purity or order.

When conceived in light of its etymology, the Spanish translation of the term "filth" reveals a subtle yet significant association: It connects physical uncleanness, dirtiness, and noisomeness to *inmunditia*, a deprivation from the Roman *mundus*, a lack of the universal systematics articulating the Greek *cosmos*. To be filthy would thus mean to be void of *kosmetikhe* (cosmetics), to be untouched by the *techne* providing order and decorum to the universe. It is the announcement of an exodus and exile: The abandonment of the *mundus*, a civilized realm governed by harmonic regularities and neat identities, in order to land in a worldless territory, a marginal province populated by all sorts of unorderable miscegenations.

By amalgamating beings and flesh conventionally indexed to different realms, today's acknowledgment of our zoe/geo/techno natures has brought about a new

situation. Chatbots, robotic rays, driverless cars, or synthetic landscapes appear as filthy entities whose enigmatic mixedness makes their worldness quiver — not by distancing them from a given *mundus*, but by engendering multiple forms of cosmetics. In its overlapping of multiple habitational tempers, this scenario questions the notion of home. Constructed of literal and metaphorical walls, the home has conventionally made sense as an architectural apparatus by erecting boundaries that, in parallel to the architecture's distinction between interior and exterior, segregate order from chaos, *civitas* from *barbarie*, and safety from peril. Culture from nature. However, in light of today's acknowledgment of the hybridization between these pairs, I propose to think of the question of the home in terms of hospitality, the *raison d'être* and leitmotiv of this essay. Hospitality, the Greek *xenia*, is a form of pact, a contract, a play of hide and seek, care and generosity towards the figure of the unknown, the foreign, the *xenos*, but also an opportunity for inventiveness and oxygenation that extends to the community, to the generation, to a genealogy today including multiple zoe/geo/techno regimes. How to conceive the notion of hospitality with respect to such multinatural constellations? Is it possible to think of it in terms that are affirmative or inventive rather than prescriptive or compassive? What could it mean to do that? And why try? How to imagine such hospitality with respect to today's amalgamation of modes of inhabitation involving beings of human and non-human affiliation? How to let them come, to let them arrive? How to cultivate figures of hospitality in which habits do not engulf or fortify us but leak into more active, more spectral, and perhaps even more exuberant manners of living well together today?

The following pages accommodate and attend to these questions by circling around the notion of limit. If inhabitation implies the articulation of spaces within spaces, aren't limits playing a cardinal role with respect to the question of hospitality? Doesn't their conceptual nature consist precisely in holding flesh together in their difference? I propose to interweave hospitality with the limit's differential sameness and autoreferential difference by foliating it into three codifications: the limit-contour (Where does something end?); the limit-action (How far does the power of something go?), and the limit-milieu (What might be opened within the limit itself?). The numerous turns, overlaps, collisions, angles, jumps, and intertwinings operating between these three limital codes orchestrate the *cosmetics of hospitality* proposed in this essay: Articulations of habitational techniques (*techne*) seeking to collect everything that can be considered yet without exhausting it all (*cosmos*). To this end, I suggest lodging ourselves into the enigmatic yet decisive Roman ceremonies of the *inauguratio*; in their cosmological vocation, the foundational rites of Roman cities constitute a promising camping ground and shifting land from which to experiment with new lines of flight regarding hospitality, coming into resonance with our times by articulating four figures of hospitality based on the notions of transmutation, triangularization, tuning, and *matryoshka*.

Hide and Seek

A lively excursus on Greek decorative painting is the folkloric scenario in which, for the sole time in his *De Architectura,* Vitruvius mentions the Greek term

xenia.[1] In this short yet colorful paragraph, generously seasoned with details on all sorts of customs regarding Greek hospitality, Vitruvius surreptitiously places, almost in passing, a revealing note: "it is only when the Greeks became more luxurious, and their circumstances more opulent, [that] they began to provide dining rooms, chambers, and store-rooms of provisions for their guests from abroad."[2] Luxury and opulence; in the imaginary of the foreign traveler, the host's house embodied the promise of a nurturing space of pleasure and refinement, a civilizing fortress safe from the perils of the outer forest (*foris*). Through its walls, floors, and ceilings, the home conventionally appears not only as a biological, climatical, and even spiritual interruption of planetary flows but also and "above all, [as] the insertion, the addition, the arbitrary introduction of a different space-time, other, supernumerary."[3] To establish a home thus means to pierce the planet, to embed in it another atmosphere, another light, another temperature, but also to install in it other moods, other gestures, other rhythms, to set up a bounded space existing to keep the outdoors out, while guarding humanity within its interior.

This distinction is perhaps the architecture's gesture par excellence: since the dome of the Pantheon, the concept of architectural space is "almost indistinguishable from the concept of hollowed-out interior space,"[4] thus

1   In Ancient Greece, *xenia* was the moral principle of giving gifts to foreign acquaintances, later absorbed by the ethical precept of hospitality.

2   Marcus Vitruvius Pollio, *The Ten Books on Architecture*, trans. Morris Hicky Morgan (Toronto: Harvard University Press, 1980), 15.

3   Emanuele Coccia, *Filosofia della casa: Lo spazio domestico e la felicità* (Milano: Giulio Einaudi editore, 2021), loc. 896.

4   Christian Norberg-Schultz, *Existence, Space and Architecture* (London: Praeger Editorial, 1971), 12.

creating, "in a way no other art can, enclosures for us in which the vertical middle axis is not physically present but remains empty."[5] The home is thus traditionally read as a place constructed of literal and symbolic walls.[6] It is certainly a physical device installing boundaries between interior and exterior, but it is also a conceptual apparatus implicitly overlapping onto the latter's formal distinction, a more or less neat differentiation between safeness and peril, *civitas* and *barbarie,* order and chaos, culture and nature. However, reducing the home to a hermetically sealed spaceship with an interior and an exterior risks ignoring an obvious fact: The home is embedded in, exposed to, and even composed of the very same ingredients as the planet, and thus it necessarily acts, interacts and even "intra-acts" with the latter. For it is precisely at home where the more diverse beings and flesh of the Earth come together, and it is certainly there where our bodies softly extend into places whose materiality is necessarily always already traversed by the planet's telluric forces. The home is thus an amphibian being: It is a geyser erupting a spatio-temporal regime independent of its surroundings, but it is also the locus and site of all sorts of planetarian miscegenations, a platform accommodating multiple forms of biospheric connectivity.

Frequently defined as "the historical moment when the Human has become a geological force capable of affecting all life on this planet,"[7] the Anthropocene has

5   August Schmarsow, "The Essence of Architectural Creation," in *Empathy, Form, and Space: Problems in German Aesthetics, 1873–1893* (Los Angeles: Getty Center for the History of Art and the Humanities Editorial, 1993), 288–289.

6   Stacy Alaimo, *Exposed* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2016), loc. 430.

7   Rosi Braidotti, *The Posthuman* (London: Polity Press, 2013), 5.

reinforced this domestic ambivalence. By dissolving Linnean epistemic taxonomies, the Anthropocene amalgamates beings and flesh commonly indexed to the cultural or natural categories that typically propel the architectural distinctions between interior and exterior. Although the geological reference and the generic "anthro" seem to delimit the Anthropocene's semantic field to a simple equation composed of "man" and "rock," I would like to consider this equation as a particular case of a more general logic, one that expands the etymological boundaries of the term "Anthropocene" in order to encompass the various zoe/geo/techno hybridizations characteristic of our times. Traditionally disqualified due to their situation between Linnaean categories, the epistemic filthiness evoked by this intense transversality might become affirmative and inventive once we foliate the semantic field of the term *immunditia*, the Latin for "filth." The Anthropocene might certainly be defined as *inmundus* since its zoe/geo/techno miscegenations no longer fit within the pre-established and classificatory order of the modern *mundus*—a *mundus* that delimits and controls according to fixed categories, a *mundus* that is identified as an absolute ground for foundation. However, this *immunditia*, this misfit, is not a negative force simply sedimenting as the specular opposite of the notion of *mundus*. It is certainly in exodus and exile regarding the hierarchical and absolute character of the latter, but this retreat is not in pursuit of passively resting within the latter's mirrored absolute—that is, the relativism of a *tabula rasa*. In its production of unfamiliar forms of transversality, the Anthropocene's filthiness opens up space for conjuring the notion of *immunditia* as an engendering force, which, precisely by resisting ascription to a delineating and pre-established *mundus*, is

perhaps capable of reconceiving the latter's overarching systematics as forms of *kosmetikhe* (cosmetics): A set of techniques (*techne*) concerned not so much with reproducing a given *mundus*, but with engendering conductive forms of order and decorum seeking to collect all what can be considered (*cosmos*) and capable thus of hosting various and unexpected forms of living well together.

Hosting various and unexpected forms of living well together: Hospitality, the Greek *xenia*, which is a pact, a contract, a "tract or trait or draft that tightens and pulls."[8] The welcoming accommodation of the other within one's domestic space is certainly a revealing episode with regard to the notion of home. Hospitality's tense and, at times, the uneasy intertwining of intimacy and remoteness is perhaps the most exact manifestation of the aforementioned home's ambivalence since the interplay between hosts and guests is nothing but a domestic dance in which the alleged alterity of the home with respect to the planet is confronted with the latter's inevitable pervasiveness. Hosts and guests play thus *hide and seek*. Although despite their belonging to the outer planet, guests might be warmly and even lovingly accommodated within the host's home, the latter's alterity is rarely fully assimilated by the guests since this would cancel out the home's singularity with respect to the planet. Within this context, hosts and guests do not aim at representation but at resonance—that is, they do not aim at grasping each other but at practicing with each other, at complicity, at care and generosity, at experimenting with intimate forms of remoteness leading to a pleasurable accommodation void of epis-

8   Michel Serres, *The Natural Contract*, trans. Elizabeth MacArthur and William Paulson (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1995), 103.

temic colonization. However, hosts and guests do not
dance in isolation. Although as a contract of hospitality,
the Greek *xenia* was certainly forged between two pres-
ent individuals, its pacts were a genealogical entente:
Various familial ramifications, including past, present,
and future actors, were involved, thus shaping a collec-
tive endeavor granting equal importance both to pres-
ence and absence. This was not a case, however, of the
straightforward extension of a solitary right, opening out
to the family and subsequent generations a right initially
granted to the individual.[9] Rather, from the beginning,
the *xenia* implicated two households, two lines of de-
scent, and two ethnic groups; it was a collective endeavor
invoking both a synchronic and a diachronic form of
human togetherness. Reciprocity, permutability of roles,
absence and presence, the figure of the unknown, a syn-
chronic and diachronic "we;" ingredients coming from
the ritualized hospitality of the Ancient World and that
today intertwine with other lines of flight since, within
the Anthropocene, it seems reasonable to speculate on
forms of hospitality transcending the folkloric human
scene of a remote foreigner being candidly lodged in
the warmth of a welcoming home. Thus, rather than a
social contract, the *xenia* today would be closer to Michel
Serres's natural contract: A commitment of human and
non-human affiliation deployed through a "system of
cords or traits, of exchanges of power and information,
which goes from the local to the global, and the Earth
answers us, from the global to the local."[10] Within this
context, the Greek *xenia* and its interplay of remoteness
and intimacy would also involve dynamic and flicker-

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9   Jacques Derrida, *Of Hospitality*, trans. Rachel Bowlby (Stanford:
Stanford University Press, 2000), 55.

10   Serres, *The Natural Contract*, 109.

ing constellations of zoe/geo/techno compounds, thus invoking pacts in which the human being is not always the sole ingredient: Pacts nested at multiple spatio-temporal scales; pacts articulating permutable complicities with the unfamiliar, the strange, and the figure of the unknown; pacts overcoming restrictive alliances with neighbors, alikes, and the figure of the compatriot; pacts involving non-contiguous or even remote beings and flesh; pacts, thus, concerned with a basic question: Which forms of hospitality could be engendered by, yet not limited to, the zoe/geo/techno confederations of the Anthropocene? How to provide them, to provide us, with spaces of inhabitation that are hospitable enough to accommodate a pleasant coexistence? In brief: How do we set in motion *cosmetics of hospitality* in order to live together well?

In its ambivalent interplay of intimacy and remoteness, the question of hospitality is, above all, a *question of limits*. "The question," writes Blanchot, "is the desire of thought."[11] And limits might certainly be the desire of architectural thinking: Characterized by the Barcelonian philosopher Eugenio Trías with the expression "differential sameness and autoreferential difference,"[12] the limit invokes an ambivalent yet not ambiguous formulation in which the home's amphibious nature might find accommodation; since the limit is in itself and by itself internal differentiation, it necessarily joins and disjoins, or, more accurately, it joins what it disjoins: At the very moment where the limit marks the frontier of what it limits, it necessarily certifies the existence of the

11   Maurice Blanchot, *The Infinite conversation*, trans. Susan Hanson (Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, 1992), 12.

12   Eugenio Trías Sager, *Los límites del mundo* (Barcelona: Ariel Filosofía, 1985), 382.

beyond to which it refers. And it is precisely by codifying
this ambivalence as a contour that traditionally limits
that "big gesture" of architecture: The demarcation be-
tween an inside and an outside, which frequently goes
hand in hand with the demarcation between safeness
and peril, *civitas* and *barbarie*, culture and nature. Within
this delineating approach and as typically represented
by the pacts of the Greek *xenia*, hospitality inevitably
implies a crossing: someone traverses a limit. *Il se passe
quelque chose*; something happens because something
trespasses, a crossing intertwining distant beings while
distancing undesired intertwinings. The primary meth-
odological trait of this limit's codification consists thus
in installing a classificatory dispositive that is exterior
to what it (dis)joins and that assumes the ambivalence
characterizing the notion of home by adjusting its per-
meability between interior and exterior. That adjust-
ment, today, in light of the Anthropocene's miscegena-
tions, might certainly result in a limit whose contours
are more porous, a limit whose implementation in the
world is airier and more buoyant, lighter, a limit whose
sponginess definitely favors new and intense forms of
traversability within domestic contexts. A profound per-
meabilization that, nevertheless, leaves the limit code
intact; despite being deployed under different criteria
and rhythms, the limit retains here an exterior position
regarding what it joins and disjoins, and thus its primary
concern is still the same: classification. And given that
the oscillation that it prompts between traversability
and non-traversability is necessarily present in any form
of hospitality, it would be extremely difficult—if not
impossible—to approach hospitality, excluding this cod-
ification. However, Trias's understanding of the limit as
differential sameness and autoreferential difference can

potentially host various manners of codifying the limit, leaving room for codifications that differ from the one described here. And if, in its ambivalence, hospitality is, indeed, a question of limits, the introduction of these codifications within the context of the home could certainly be fruitful; it might help us to offer, conduct and celebrate more manners of thinking about pleasurable forms of accommodation, new variations and unknown resonances capable of carrying out unforeseen cut-outs of unquestioned continuities while giving rise to novel figures of hospitality.

It is thus within this context that I would like to introduce two more codifications for the limit: In addition to a limit-contour (Where does something end?), I propose to conjure up a limit-action (How far does the power of something go?) and a limit-milieu (What might be opened within the limit itself?) By no means are the numerous turns, angles, clusters, jumps, pressures, collisions, and penetrations between these three codifications meant to serve design in any direct manner since they don't establish or even suspect what specific spatio-temporal configurations might come to trigger. However, they are not devised as a means of reading, representing, or interpreting space: Rather, they are a means of living in space, thus conceiving the hide-and-seek of hospitality as a practice *in* space and *of* space rather than *on* space. Consequently, the cosmetics of hospitality proposed through the interplay between these three codifications do not compose a guideline whose application would aim at representing or even stimulating possible practices of hospitality. They are, in themselves and by themselves, already a form of hospitality. Although these three codifications are considered as limits due to their common commitment to Trías's

"differential sameness and autoreferential difference," each one offers a different spatial code, which is, in turn, correlated with what Henri Lefebvre defines as a system of knowledge: "an alphabet, a lexicon and a grammar together within an overall framework."[13] Thus, they should be read more as hosting what they conceive rather than as revealing what belongs to what since they do not aim at capturing but at offering. In other words, they do not aim at revealing an original "archi-hospitality" but at proposing more conductive forms of order and decorum concerning hospitality.

Precisely because of this intermittent yet involved generality, the interplay between these three manners of encoding the limit is not well conveyed if presented as a user's guide—an idealized list of items, tempos, and steps to be later sedimented within a specific context. But it would also be misleading to corset them within the particularity of an image since this would betray their pervasive scope. What they contain cannot be depicted, but it needs to be sung and danced in order to be caught red-handed, in action, and in movement, not because this is the most adequate mode for capturing it, but simply because it does not exist anywhere else. In that sense, I would like to affirm and deploy the interplay between these three limit codifications not through the detachment characteristic of a manual of instructions or the concreteness associated with a case study but through the universal yet embodied vocation of a *cosmology*: An engendering articulation that, despite being located, seeks to address everything that can be considered. To this end, I propose to lodge ourselves into a stratum that is well known not only for intertwining beings and flesh

13   Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith (Cambridge: Blackwell, 1991), 65.

that are conventionally indexed to different worlds but also because it is kindred to the notions of hospitality, limit, and cosmology: the ceremonies of the *inauguratio*, the foundational rites of Roman cities.

A Cosmology of Limits

Although it might seem counterintuitive to address our times by pitching camp on a stratum that sedimented more than 2,000 years ago, the four rites of the *inauguratio*—limitation, divination, relic burial, and quartering—offer a propitious territory to disclose novel figures regarding today's hospitality; since "the performing of the rites actually fixed the physical shape of the city,"[14] they not only equip us with a vast inventory of spatial techniques connecting the notion of limit to the production of pleasurable forms of accommodation between different habitational arrangements, but they also pursue this enterprise in light of a cosmological framework, an embodied model that aims at addressing everything that can be considered. By overlapping Roman, celestial, and barbarian modes of existence, this cosmological disposition resonates with the tendency of today's habitational spaces to attend to the various zoe/geo/techno regimes traversing the Anthropocene's beings, regardless of their human or nonhuman form. It is thus within the cosmological temperament characterizing the *inauguratio* that I would like to find an advantageous site from which to deploy and experiment with the lines of flight, potential movements, and intersecting opportunities that a cosmetics of hospitality might offer us today through the notion of limit. By connecting

14   Joseph Rykwert, *The Idea of a Town: The Anthropology of Urban Form* (London: Faber and Faber, 2011), loc. 844.

the Roman *inauguratio* to hospitality's hide and seek and its labyrinthic interplay of presences and absences, the notions of transmutation, triangularization, tuning, and *matryoshka* are proposed as *figures of hospitality* articulating the cosmetics of hospitality presented here. They constitute accommodative devices whose presence is neither mutually exclusive nor permanently operative, but intermittently deployed in the territory by conjugating, in various manners and rhythms, the three aforementioned limit codifications: the limit-contour, the limit-action, and the limit-milieu.

Divination—An Alchemical Transmutation

Surveyors of the celestial vault and highest representatives of the Roman priestly magistracy, the augurs excelled in the colorful yet enigmatic ritual of the *divinatio*, the establishment of good *auspicium* initiating the foundation of most Roman cities. Since the benefits of a site "were usually revealed to the colonists as an arbitrary gift of the gods,"[15] the augur invoked the celestial realm to unveil which location would be more hospitable in accommodating the newcomers' settlement. This supernatural communication finds its cornerstone in the *cuntemplatio*, the demarcation, and observation of a quadrangular area of the sky (*templum*) in order to unravel the *auspicium* confirming the site's suitability for hosting the new city. Since the classificatory borders of this celestial delimitation were set remotely by the augur from the ground and were thus exterior to the sky itself, they were closely kindred with Plato's *peras*:[16] a limit cod-

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15   Rykwert, *The Idea of a Town*, loc. 932.

16   This association was not made by the Romans themselves, since they were not familiar with Euclidean geometry.

ified as a perimeter and thus concerned with limitation, that is, a *limit-contour*, a *terminus* attending more to how something ends rather than what something is.

By dividing the sky into sectors, the augurs established the celestial meridians *cardo* and *decumanus*, then projecting the demarcated zone of the sky under observation onto the ground in order to trace the earthly *templum*, the germinal seed of the imminent settlement. Projection; from the Latin *proiectionem*, throwing forward. Architecture is certainly familiar with the term since its drawings "are projections, which means that organized arrays of imaginary straight lines pass through the drawing to corresponding parts of the thing represented by the drawing."[17] However, the augurs' projection of one realm over the other was alchemical rather than representational, for it was meant to reconstitute — rather than illustrate — the cosmos on Earth. Due to this alchemical character, the augurs' projection differed from the *proiectionem*, being more closely related to the *projeccioun*, an alchemical term referring to the act of transmutation carried out by casting a powder onto the molten metal. By overlapping celestial and terrestrial dimensions, this transmutative act is an act of reconstitution that recalls not only today's zoe/geo/techno regimes and their engendering miscegenations but also the aforementioned amphibian character of the home. Conceiving the Roman cities as cosmologies rather than as cosmograms implies understanding them as earthly enclaves differing from the celestial cosmos in which they are inscribed and as earthly transmutations of that cosmos. The rites of the *inauguratio* were thus pacts of hospitality: Through them, the newcomers found an

17   Robin Evans, "Architectural Projection," in *Architecture and its Image*, eds. Eve Blau and Edward Kaufman (London: MIT Press, 1989), 19.

accommodation enabling them to translate, in their own terrestrial terms, the cosmos in which they were hosted by the gods. This might lead us to interpret hospitality's hide and seek as an alchemical transmutation: Within this figure of hospitality, to offer the guests — whatever their form may be today — a pleasant stay means providing them with the conditions of possibility for reconstituting the environment in which they are hosted. An alchemical transmutation conceived as a common project by hosts and guests and which, within the ritual of the Roman *divinatio*, participates within the constitution of a cosmetics of hospitality through the interplay of limits emerging from the earthly *templum* — the diagram drawn on the ground by the augurs as a result of the vertical projection of the celestial *templum*.

Although the particular shape of the augur's diagram is still subject to debate, "it certainly had an outline."[18] Conceived as a direct projection of the celestial *templum* on the Earth, the classificatory tracing of this outline on the ground was conceived as exterior to the territory's materiality, thus codifying it as a limit-contour. However, the alchemical *projeccioun* was not solely entrusted to the earthly *templum*'s outline, but also to the *limit-action* emerging from the latter and horizontally deployed "by the words of incantation, by *verba concepta* which drew a magical net round the landmarks the augur named."[19] The limit-action thus appears as a limit expressing the power of the being it limits; it is a limit that touches and feels, a limit that sacralizes space by installing incantation, a limit that, despite being driven by the celestial

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18 "The insistence on a purifying enclosure of lands is characteristic of Roman religious thought," here cited in Rykwert, *The Idea of a Town*, loc. 1499.

19 Rykwert, *The Idea of a Town*, loc. 1538.

power stemming from the augur's diagram, finds material accommodation within specific earthly beings. In augury words: "This tree, wherever it may be, which I name to myself exactly, let it mark the boundary of my *templum* and *tescum* to the left; that tree, wherever it may be, which I name to myself exactly, let it mark the boundary of my *templum* to the right."[20]

It may nevertheless be quite difficult today—if not impossible—to appreciate the power of such augurial words. They are the language of incantation, *verba concepta* taking the place where they are used out of the normal influences acting on it and inserting into it the divine power emanating from the earthly *templum*. But how far does this power reach? "You are walking in a dense forest, you're afraid. At last you succeed and little by little the forest thins out, you are pleased. You reach a spot and you say, "whew, here's the edge." The edge of the forest is a limit. Does this mean that the forest is defined by its outline? It's a limit to the action of the forest, that is to say that the forest that had so much power arrives at the limit of its power, it can no longer lie over the terrain, it thins out."[21] Deleuze's famous depiction of the Stoic's limit might be helpful to visualize today the affirmative vigor of the limit-action, an expansive liveliness departing from the ideal figuratively of contours and instead celebrating the power of incarnation—that is, the radical exposure to the territory across which it extends. That exposure, as occurs with today's intimate interconnections between the human and the nonhuman, nurtures forms of trans-corporeality within our

20   Marcus Terentius Varro, *De Lingua Latina*, Book VIII, section 8.

21   Gilles Deleuze, *Sur Spinoza*, Cours Vincennes, 1991, available online: https://www.webdeleuze.com/cours/spinoza (accessed July 24, 2023).

post-anthropocentric landscapes "in which bodies extend into places and places deeply affect bodies."[22] The limits of Patricia Johanson's pathways in the "Leonhardt Lagoon" (Dallas, United States, 1986) can certainly be depicted through the sinuous, reptilian contours of the thin bridges that capriciously dance through the swamp, but it is their limit-action that, by propelling the accommodation of animal and vegetal species together with human activity through the production of shadows, accesses and nutritive surfaces, fuels the reconstitution of the site by unexpected newcomers.

The question thus is not only where Johanson's art-project ends but how far its transmutative power arrives—that is, how far does it propel the capacity of the guest's species to reconstitute the host's territory (or vice versa), a spatial endeavor whose reach certainly differs from the geometric footprint of the bridges. Where the limit-contour is a spatial device concerned with limitation, the limit-action is a spatial device concerned with limitrophy,[23] a limit nurturing and nurtured by the labyrinthic pathways it limits, thus attending to desire itself rather than to the desire of traversing a boundary.[24] A question about power and action that, coming back to the context of Roman cities, only the augur could respond to. By renewing the archetypal gesture of some mythical ancestors, the augur was capable of deploying the sacred power of the earthly *templum* on the territory in order to install the religious boundaries of the urban area. It is to this end that, after projecting

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22   Stacy Alaimo, *Exposed* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2016), loc. 145.

23   From the Greek term *trepho*, meaning "nutrition."

24   Amanda Núñez, *Gilles Deleuze: Una estética del espacio para una ontología menor* (Madrid: Arena Libros, 2019), 162.

on earth the celestial *templum*'s outlines, previously codified as limit-contours, the augur recodified them as a limit-action, a limit that is dynamic and affirmative, a limit that is danced and sung, a limit "where heaven and earth were united."[25] United, yet distinct. Differential sameness, autoreferential difference. Ambivalence and the amphibian nature of the home, hospitality and the reconstitution of the host's environment by the guest; the deployment of an alchemical transmutation that, once the *divinatio* was concluded, sedimented into the *sulcus primigenius* through the subsequent foundational ritual: the *limitatio*.

Limitation — A Triangular Permutation

If the earthly *templum*'s power was deployed on the territory by expanding the former's limit-contour as a limit-action during the ritual of the *limitatio*, this "magical net round the landmarks the augur named" was sedimented by recoding the limit-action back to various limit-contours: the *sulcus primigenius*, the *pomoerium,* and the defense wall. However, the border which was sacrosanct was the *sulcus primigenius,* the initial furrow flanked by the *pomoerium*, a narrow area located within the inner side of the furrow's trajectory and containing the defense wall. By instrumentalizing a bronze plow to which a white ox and cow were yoked on the outer and inner side of the boundary,[26] the *sulcus primigenius* was dug to mediate between *civitas* and *barbarie*.

Since the location of this initial furrow was expanded over the years, the *sulcus primigenius* remained in move-

25   Rykwert, *The Idea of a Town*, loc. 3853.

26   The positioning of a white ox and cow on different sides of the furrow that was being ploughed symbolically incorporates the interior/exterior distinction within the tool itself.

ment and transit, but its trace was never entirely left; its fixedness and referentiality were never completely dissolved. However, whereas the earthly *templum*'s limit-action was desiring, affirmative, and incarnated in terrestrial elements such as trees or rocks, its sedimentation within the *sulcus primigenius* retained this sacred value while reanimating the classificatory vocation of the limit-contour. Rather than cutting the terrain as a butcher would cut meat—that is, conditioning the cut primarily to its bounds, fibers, and ligaments—material factors of the site, such as resources, economy, or hygiene, were always transmuted into mythical terms. By addressing parts and extensions through the production of divine, and thus ideal, ends and molds, the *sulcus primigenius* recoded the limit-action emerging from the earthly *templum* as a categorical cut that was independent of the territory's materiality since it presupposed homogeneity in the subdivision of space. As the Stoics argued regarding Plato's *peras*, the contour of something is where that something no longer is,[27] and thus, contrasting with the limit-action, the limit-contour measures and treats the being by way of the non-being, leaving us uninformed regarding the being of that entity itself. However, its exteriority regarding the two limited elements necessarily calls for a third parameter: the exterior location from where the limit is posited. The *sulcus primigenius* instrumentalized this triangularization by operating along two different axes: It invoked a horizontal axis mediating between civilized and barbarian populations, but it also conjured up a vertical axis mediating between the territory in which the furrow was dug and the celestial kingdom from where the gods determined its trajectory's coordinates.

27   Deleuze, *Sur Spinoza*.

Since, in light of this triangulation, the *sulcus primi-genius* joined and disjoined the permutable positions between two terrestrial collectives under the influence of a celestial one, the adequate crossing of the furrow by one collective towards another in pursuit of a hospitable accommodation inevitably involved the gods. This could lead us to conceive of hospitality's hide and seek as a *triangular permutation*, a *ménage à trois*. Within this figure of hospitality, the act of offering the guests—whatever their form may be today—an agreeable stay within the hosts' environment demands consideration of a third instance in relation to which hospitality takes place. In its exteriority with respect to hosts and guests, this instance contextualizes the permutability of roles concerning their interaction within a third medium, thus assuming that hospitality does not occur *in a vacuum*. In the Roman context, this role is played by the gods, whose presence traverses all dimensions of the Roman settlement, including the crossing of the boundaries mediating between *civitas* and *barbarie*. That dichotomy is underpinned by a parallelism between the distinctions interior/exterior and nature/culture, which, today, by conceiving the home in a symbiotic relationship with the beings it houses and with the planet it tempers, might certainly be questioned. However, this intense connectivity does not eliminate our need to differentiate: In its amphibious vocation, the home is not only a reconfiguration of the same (in)organic substances conforming the planet, it is also an interruption of the latter's flows in order to install not only other hydrothermal environments but also other moods, tempos, and behaviors. Consequently, the home necessarily implies a distinction—that is, the idea that "two (or more) entities, whatever their similarities/forms of overlap may be, are

not the same in some epistemically relevant respect."[28] It is precisely because this distinction is not conceived as a hierarchical dualism that hospitality can conjure up a cosmological transmutation, a reconstitution that today overlaps various zoe/geo/techno beings and flesh and that necessarily starts with a crossing, an interpenetration among mediums occurring under the gravitational field of another.

Since the Roman colonizers were aware that their settlement would become a suffocating territory if it enthroned its order and did not give way to difference and novelty, they were inclined to be hospitable to foreign travelers and merchants. However, hospitality demanded an adequate crossing of the *sulcus primigenius* since the safety and the sacred, untouchable character of the latter symbolized the union of heaven and earth: "Anyone crossing over the place where [both] were united was an enemy of the life which that union had guaranteed."[29] The famous death penalty that Romulus imposed on Remus in order to punish the latter's jump over the former's furrow eloquently signals, in a rather categorical manner, that any hospitable co-existence between Romans and barbarians necessarily demands forms of traversability that are adequate to them by conjuring up a third instance: the Roman gods. In pursuit of this purpose, the continuity of the *sulcus primigenius* was broken at certain points in which the plow (*urbs*)[30] was taken out of the ground and carried (*portare*) over the span of the city's future gates (*porta*). Consequently, the whole wall

28   Lena Gunnarsson, *The Contradictions of Love: Towards a Feminist-realist Ontology of Sociosexuality* (London: Routledge), 14.

29   Rykwert, *The Idea of a Town*, loc. 3855.

30   By invoking the act of plowing a border, the Latin term *urbs* associates the notions of limit and urbanization.

was holy except for the gates, which were subject to civil jurisdiction and, therefore, open to the bidirectional transit of people and merchandise.

Hospitality, thus, might certainly demand traversability, but not any form of traversability is effective. This is particularly palpable in today's post-anthropocentric landscapes since the accommodation on Earth of beings with different zoe/geo/techno valences often demands sophisticated and permutable forms of interpenetration between hosts and guests. The glassy limit-contours containing the air-filled underwater domes of the Ocean Reef Group's "Nemo Garden" (Noli, Italy, 2016) separate the hydroponic farming space from the outer sea environment while propelling a form of traversability whose selectiveness is crucial for this transmedium reconstitution: The transparent domes protect the inner space from the salty water while permitting the entrance of sunlight and the stabilization of temperatures provided by the sea. It also permits the evaporation of the sea's salt water (the bottom of the dome is open for human access) and its condensation into freshwater for the plants. Thus, although the act of entering through a "gate," whatever its form may be today, constitutes the very first pact of hospitality between multispecies hosts and guests, the "Nemo Garden" cannot be reduced to an affair between guests and hosts: The habitation of earthly beings like thyme, marjoram, basil, tomatoes, strawberries and lettuce within an underwater environment occurs through a classificatory limit-contour that is formally and materially exterior to hosts and guests, thus constituting hospitality as a triangular permutability that includes the human being and its need to cultivate in areas where land agriculture is impossible.

In its permutability of roles, the limit-contour's exteriority drives, in the context of a cosmetics of hospitality, a triangularization that, coming back to the Roman *limitatio*, converts the crossing of the *sulcus primigenius* not only into "an act of covenant with those inside the walls through which the gate leads,"[31] but also into an act involving the gods since it is by implicating them that the city's foundation could be conceived as the alchemical transmutation of the cosmos. However, the *sulcus primigenius* was plowed in synchronicity with the constitution of another codification of the limit that entailed a decisive part of the foundational rite: the relic-burial, the digging of a *mundus*.

Relic Burial—A Tuning of Voices

In parallel to the rituals of the *limitatio* and situated with respect to the *cardo* and the *decumanus*, a hole called a *mundus* and considered "the hearth of the town"[32] was dug in virgin soil. Due to its underground emplacement, its consecration to infernal gods, and its usual formalization as a vaulted chamber, it is safe to affirm that "the *mundus* was, among other things, the mouth of the underworld."[33] The metaphor of the mouth is particularly revealing here since it inevitably evokes the notion of limit. In fact, the *mundus* has often been identified[34] as another altar of *Terminus*, the Roman god protecting boundary markers. However, since the *mundus* was an inhabitable chamber encircled by a stony limit-contour

31   Rykwert, *The Idea of a Town*, loc. 7482.

32   Ibid., loc. 3636.

33   Ibid., loc. 1739.

34   Eugen Täubler, *Terramare und Rom* (Heidelberg: Universitätsbibliothek 1932), 44–45.

and frequently lodging "first fruit, or unspecified and enigmatic good things, and or earth from the settlers' home country,"[35] its vocation was twofold: The *mundus* was, first, a border mediating between the world and the infraworld and, second, a medium populated by terrestrial beings such as soil, food, or objects coming from the various geographic origins of the newcomers. The *mundus* was thus a *limit-milieu*, a recodification of the limit in which the limit-contour takes on thickness and becomes a land in itself, a territory of (dis)encounters that is inhabitable, susceptible to colonization, cultivation, and worship.

However, the *mundus*'s limit-milieu was not conceived as a form of in-betweenness—that is, it was not located between the terrestrial and divine realms—rather, it *belonged* to the former while *referring* to the latter. In its belong/refer structure, the limit-milieu is thus a spatial device primarily concerned with liminality[36] (passage) rather than with limitation (circumscription) or limitrophy (nutrition). Instead of being codified as a symmetrical device in which both extremes, in their pure external negativity, are completely identical, it causes a reflection that is, in fact, a failed reflection, a reflection that it is not specular, an asymmetrical reflection. The limit-milieu thus does not produce terms that are completely identical in their own contradiction; rather, its liminality shows a fundamental asymmetry integrated within the limit itself; its space is always in

35   Rykwert, *The Idea of a Town*, loc. 1726.

36   According to Victor Turner, during the rituals of passage, liminal individuals are neither here nor there, but in transit from here to there; they are "betwixt and between the positions assigned and arrayed by law, custom convention, and ceremonial." Victor Turner, *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure* (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1991), 95.

passage, unbalanced, and in tension. In its propensity towards something that is not itself, the limit-milieu is, in fact, not as fascinated with traversability as it is with inclination: By accommodating the gods within the *mundus* and the temple, the Roman limit-milieu appeared as a distorted space, a daemonic territory of (dis) encounters whose magnetized state stemmed from the fact that the presence of the hosted gods was, despite their intense resonance with the humans, always tangential and unstable, never fully revealed, never fully established on site.

An intimate yet remote accommodation that might lead us to conceive of hospitality's hide and seek as *a tuning of voices*, a syntonization of sounds and rhythms that does not capitalize on empathy and its insistence on epistemic occupation but on a subtle calibration of tones and behaviors. Within this figure of hospitality, the act of providing guests—whatever their form might be today—with an agreeable stay would not be tied in with what it means to be *as* the other (empathy) but to what it means to be *with* the other (tuning). As noted by Vinciane Despret, empathy nurtures a subject–object relation in which the subject feeling empathy is transformed, but in an extremely local manner,[37] since, as opposed to hospitality's transmutative vocation, it does not stimulate the permutation of the object's role in order to be activated as a subject. By putting themself in the other's position, the empathic hosts end up totalizing the guests (or vice versa) by claiming that they have been understood, that "what stands under them" has been grasped and revealed, that their *terra incognita* has been colonized. Within this context, the limit-milieu's

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37   Vinciane Despret, "The Body We Care For: Figures for Anthropo-zoo-genesis," in *Body and Society 10*, nr. 2/3 (2004): 128.

liminality shifts the focus from empathy and its fantasy for cognitive conquest to tuning and its embrace of operative complicities — tuning as the momentary yet systemic concordance of voices, tuning as the transitory and subtle calibration of rhythms and sounds, tuning as a form of hospitality based on behavioral resonances among beings and flesh, whatever habitational patterns might they deploy today. The imbricate platforms and paths of the living root bridges located in the Shillong Plateau (India) emerge from these intense yet non-exhaustive tunings, accommodating the mobility needs of the Jaintia peoples in the north-eastern Indian jungle through the *Ficus elastica*'s aerial roots. There is no colonization, occupation, or totalization between these long-lasting multispecies consonances. The humans' transmutation of the forest in which they are hosted consists precisely in encouraging the growth of the trees' aerial roots while folding, twisting, and joining them to constitute liminal structures whose limit-action expands through the forest's paths that they join. However, these living bridges are in themselves a form of limit, a limit-milieu: By overlapping completely different habitational patterns, they engender passages and areas in tension and in transit since, in their common reverberations, the presences of host and guest are operative, but never fully comprehended by one another, never fully disclosed and revealed.

In its conjugation as a limit-milieu and within these cosmetics of hospitality, the limit is thus not codified as a boundary to be crossed but as a prairie to be inhabited, a territory in which hosts and guests search for a pleasurable coexistence that is not based in knowing, understanding, or grasping each other, but in tuning their voices, in looking for resonances and common re-

verberations, in finding shared rhythms and pulsations. Although this limit's codification is certainly more connected to liminality than to limitation or limitrophy, by no means does its deployment negate the latter two. Not "this or that," and not even "between this and that," but a multidimensional and mobile overlapping that becomes evident if we turn back to the Roman foundational rites since it is not rare "to find the making of the *mundus* confused or identified with the opening of the *sulcus primigenius*.[38] In fact, the limit-milieu of the *mundus* and the temple was frequently encircled by a limit-contour: While the temple had a fence that was broken at one point when conceived as a *templum minus* and thus permanently fixed, the *mundus*'s vaulted space was habitually separated from the soil in which it was buried by a thick stone wall.

However, the limit-action deployed by the *mundus*'s power was not meant to stop at its chamber's stone contour. Paradoxically, it is precisely in the filthy and thus *inmundus* intertwining of divine, gastronomic, geological, and ornamental flesh coming from different sections of the cosmos that the *mundus* found traction to become an engendering force aiming at transmuting, in urban terms, the same cosmos in which it was inscribed. By deploying a movement in systole and diastole, the *mundus* appeared as a motor working in cycles, an expansive force nurtured by what it engendered and deployed in two perpendicular dimensions. Observed from the vertical plane, the *mundus* was the intersection point between the *inferi*, the *tellus*, and the *caput*. This was most evident when the *mundus* was situated at the crossing of the *cardo* and the *decumanus*, which—like most of the boundaries populating the Roman city—were "never drawn without

38   Rykwert, *The Idea of a Town*, loc. 3629.

reference to the order of the universe."[39] However, at the ground level — that is, on the horizontal plane — the vaulted *mundus* was both a passage to the underworld and a spring of fertility, the source of the town's existence, a matrix constituted by the very same substance that it gave off. Within this context and through a process of quartering, the *mundus* established the axis from which the cadastral grid was drawn, radiating all the force of its ritual consecration towards the surrounding space to be immediately civilized.

Quartering — A Matryoshka Working in Cycles

When the rituals of the digging of the *mundus* were finished or about to finish, the surveyors took over the site and traced the streets and the building plots as though they were emanating from the expansive power of the *mundus*. The deployment of the latter's limit-action across the terrestrial realm was thus carried out by measuring and gridding the land according to the quadripartite division established by the *cardo* and *decumanus*, marking with stones or low walls the resulting plots and distributing them by lottery (*sortitio*) among the newcomers.[40] The deliberate arbitrariness mediating between the bounded spaces of the cadastral grid and its future occupants again invokes the exteriority characteristic of the limit-contour, while the *sulcus primigenius* was independent of the site due to the exteriority of the celestial realm from where its location was decided, the boundaries of the Roman dwellings were exterior to their inhabitants due to the randomness guiding the

39   Hyginus Gromaticus, *Constitutio Limitum*, (London: Thulin, 1913), 123.

40   Angelo Brelich, *Die Geheime Schutzgottheit von Rom* (Zürich: Rhein-Verlag, 1947), 49-56.

association between the former and the latter. Since the purpose of these divisions was to register and fiscalize possessions, what mattered to the surveyors was neither the materiality of those lots nor their potentialities, but their *extensio* and their belonging.[41]

Coding the limit according to Plato's *peras* was thus certainly useful: It enabled the surveyors to treat space as an inert expanse empty of tensions, ready to be framed within ideal molds in order to be counted, compared, and distributed. The limit-action of the *mundus*'s limit-milieu thus expanded across the new-born city by deploying on the land a constellation of limit-contours articulated through the quadripartite division established by the *cardo* and *decumanus*. The three codifications of the limit presented here were thus instrumentalized at the same time, superimposing on the territory a polyphony of habitational arrangements in which the urban area was both sacralized by the *mundus*'s irradiation of the gods' powers and neutralized by the surveyors' treatment of the territory as a *tabula rasa*. This spatial simultaneity and its consequent defiance of stable hierarchies and univocal cartographies were connected to the fact that the *mundus* was not a unidirectional source of power but a motor working in cycles—a pendular movement of systole and diastole mixing and re-boosting Roman, barbarian, and divine substances.

Within this ambivalent context, gods and Romans grafted their accommodation onto one another by con- forming a reciprocal *matryoshka*: While the Roman set- tlement was accommodated by the gods through the

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41 "Jupiter, knowing the avarice of men, ordered, when taking over the land of Etruria, that camps and fields should be set out with visible boundary stones and publicly acknowledged," in Rykwert, *The Idea of a Town*, loc. 3346.

terrestrial reconstitution of the cosmos in which the city was hosted, the city hosted the gods in return within the *mundus* and the temples devoted to them. This reciprocal and multi-scalar interplay of hosts and guests conceives hospitality as a trans-local model of cohabitation — that is, a form of coexistence in which the Roman, barbarian and divine inhabitants are identified with more than one location at the same time. This might lead us to conceive hospitality's hide and seek as a *matryoshka working in cycles*; within this figure of hospitality, to provide the guests — whatever their form might be today — with an agreeable stay would mean to foster mutual forms of accommodation in which hosts and guests are not only mutually grafted onto each other but also hosting and hosted by other beings and flesh operating on different spatio-temporal scales.

This suggests that hospitality can hardly be systematized under one single province, demanding instead to jump and take turns, to deviate and run at angles, to traverse and slide through various habitational patterns and their overlapping zoe/geo/techno regimes. Despite the solitary look of the dunes emerging through the zig-zagging concrete slabs of Pierre Huyghe's "After A Life Ahead" (2017, Münster), its space accommodates and is accommodated by an intense yet evanescent carousel of overlapping habitational arrangements. Colonies of bees hosted within globular towers of packed clay, clusters of patterned-shelled snails, incubated cancer cells, algae formations in puddles of water, augmented reality arrangements, or wandering peacocks are not merely contained within the limit-contours of this old ice rink; their various habitational regimes are grafted ones inside the others, converting the ice rink into one more of the layers constituting this habitational *matryoshka*.

The soil emerging through the cuts in the concrete floor, the sunrays coming through the façade's large windows, and the rain intermittently passing through the ceiling panels of the old infrastructure nurture habitational patterns characterized by hosting and being hosted on different spatio-temporal scales. In Huyghe's words: "Each pattern has its own capacity and potential for change, its own unintentional variations. Because there are so many in proximity, they affect each other; they deregulate or re-regulate. They synchronize as well as engage in conflicts or dilemmas."[42] While Huyghe's reference to the term "synchronization" recalls the aforementioned tuning of voices, the notion of proximity summons the limit-action and its attention to power and desire. This question brings us back to the Roman *mundus* and the irradiation of its civilizing power since its deployment of the cadastral grid along the *cardo* and *decumanus* did not stop within the threefold interplay of limit-contours established during the ritual of the *limitatio*.

Although the defense wall, the *sulcus primigenius,* and the *pomoerium* were conceived as the legal and religious contours of the city, one might be tempted to approach the *pomoerium* as a limit-milieu since it appeared as a territory rather than as a dug or walled line. However, in contrast with the limit-milieu of the temple and the *mundus*, the *pomoerium* was not conceived as a space of coexistence: Since it was frequently forbidden to build in that area, the main concern of the *pomoerium* kept being traversability, making it closer to a territorial contour than to a limit-milieu. All three limit-contours were thus

42   Pierre Huyghe, "Interview with Emily McDermott," 20 December 2018, https://elephant.art/pierre-huyghe-indiscernible-unpredictable-irrational (accessed July 24, 2023).

traversed by the *mundus*'s civilizational power since the surrounding agricultural lands were also usually quartered according to the *cardo* and *decumanus*.

A question thus inevitably arises: How far does the *mundus*'s limit-action extend? The answer is, in fact, surprisingly predictable: "the *mundus* irradiated all its power to the whole *orbe* by will of Jupiter and the god Terminus, [...] aiming at arriving at the whole *oecumene*."[43] In its cosmological vocation, the civilizing power of Roman cities could neither dissolve at their own contours nor in the centuriated fields around them. It aimed to encompass the whole *oecumene*, that is, *everything* that could be considered. Its radiation thus expanded until the very borders of the Roman Empire, installing in those confines another interplay of limits: The *limes*, an enigmatic territory flourishing between the Roman Empire and inhabited by the *limitanei*. Rather than a clinical edge or a border wall, the Roman *limes* was, like the *mundus* or the temple, a limit-milieu, although in this case, it was also traversable. It was thus an inhabitable land, a narrow and oscillating territory that, as a *matryoshka* of sorts, repeated and scaled up the city's *pomoerium* by configuring an isthmus of conflict and alliance whose bustling diversity of agencies by no means could take place within the infinitesimal nature of the Euclidean line. Situated at the intersection between law and anarchy, and fluctuating between world and mystery, the *limes* constituted a spatial oxymoron and a territory of friction: a land whose horizon was always threatened by the otherness of the barbarian armies, whose incursions insistently wove and re-wove the *limes*'s limit-action by foliating it into a plethora of limit-contours such as

43 Florencio Hubeñak, *Roma—El Mito Político* (Buenos Aires: Ediciones Ciudad Argentina, 1997), 132.

low walls or palisades. Thus, under the *limes*'s uncertain
jurisdiction, the *limitanei* culminated the expansion en-
gendered by the *mundus*'s limit-milieu by, paradoxically,
inhabiting another limit-milieu. However, *mundus* and
limes, respective mediators between humans and gods
and between *civitas* and *barbarie*, had something else in
common: They constituted, in two different planes, the
very last confines of *all that could be considered*.

Conclusion: Homemaking as a Motionless Journey

If the figures of hospitality introduced here can be
defined as "cosmetic" (*kosmetikhe*), it is because their
various articulations (*techne*) offer forms of order and
decorum seeking to collect everything that can be ad-
dressed yet without exhausting it all (*cosmos*). Although
a different motor powers each figure, and thus it might
certainly deploy its own colors, rhythms, and shades,
they intersect in at least one point: the understanding
of hospitality as a play of hide and seek, a labyrinth of
presences and absences connected to the home's am-
phibian vocation. However, by spatializing this approach
through the notion of limit, the cosmetics of hospitality
presented here fuel another conjugation of the home's
ambivalence: Thinking of hospitality as an *alchemical
transmutation* (the guests' reconstitution of the environ-
ment in which they are hosted), *a triangular permutation*
(the consideration of a third instance in relation to which
hospitality's permutability takes place), a *tuning of voices*
(the resonant and non-empathetic interaction between
hosts and guests) and a *matryoshka working in cycles* (the
grafting of guests and hosts onto each other on various
spatio-temporal scales) could lead us to conceive home-
making as a *motionless journey*.

This conception is, in fact, inscribed within the Roman *inauguratio* itself. Since the latter's cosmological purpose "was to set the general order of the sky in a particular place,"[44] the homemaking led by the Roman newcomers became "an intergalactic cruise heading to another atmosphere, another ecosystem, towards another population, another time,"[45] a trip in which the colonizers became cosmological migrants. However, since "the great temple of the sky was first condensed into the ideal form of the augur's diagram and then projected onto the tract of land,"[46] the spatial coordinates designating the departing and arriving point of this "intergalactic cruise" were the same, orchestrating thus a journey without geographical displacement, a journey void of movement, a motionless journey. The cosmetics of hospitality deployed in this essay conduct the ambivalence of this "dynamic immobility" by spatializing it through another ambivalence: The limit's differential sameness and autoreferential difference, a conceptualization imbuing all the limit codifications.

Within this context, the limit-contour, the limit-action, and the limit-milieu appear neither as firm positions nor as perspective views but as complementary characters: Embodied codifications which, as in any novel or theatre play, set the plot in motion through their exchanges. Both in the Roman *inauguratio* and in the architectural excursus presented here, these codifications deploy numerous spatial interactions in which they embrace, thicken, project, expand, replicate, scale up, sediment, interrupt, or even cancel each other. The ambivalence of these overlaps defies hierarchies

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44   Rykwert, *The Idea of a Town*, loc. 1533.

45   Coccia, *Filosofia della casa,* loc. 1604.

46   Rykwert, *The Idea of a Town*, loc. 1545.

and historical privileges by practicing the confusion of simultaneity, but they also stand up in order to offer novel vectors of thought. By expanding the limit's usual architectural role of enclosure through three codifications conceived as cosmological characters rather than as hardened milestones or volatile perspectives, the cosmetics of hospitality proposed here might offer and conduct further motionless journeys within other times and geographies: They might drop their anchors in other docks and harbors in order to reactivate lost paths or uncover unknown resonances regarding the cosmological art of setting in tune pleasurable manners of accommodation.

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"Anyone who displays bad habits publicly irritates all." "Disgust over filth and smut." "Disgust with human nature and people." These responses reflect trends mentioned previously: moral punitiveness, cynicism, the tendency to seek out, and to find, immorality in the world (especially in out groups) rather than in oneself. Finally, we find responses in which hostility toward friends and morality figures (parents, relatives, social authority, and the like) is implied though not explicitly stated or recognized.

— Theordor W. Adorno, *The Authoritarian Personality* (1950)

De conversione's graphic image of digestive troubles is not passed over lightly; if somebody saw his clothes, Bernard continues, smeared with repulsive spew and the filthiest of filth, would he not rip them off vehemently? But the soul cannot pull itself off, however smudged the memory. The clogged and defiled memory is then left

cliff hanging while Bernard proceeds to the body, the will, and a range of other significant topics. But it is not allowed to slip into oblivion. In the passage about the soul's consideration of itself, a tableau is presented of memoria viewed through the eyes of reason. Memoria is here presented as completely soiled, with an abundance of filth flowing into it from all sides, with the windows to death gaping and unable to close.

— Mette B. Bruun, *Parables: Bernard of Clairvauxs Mapping of Spiritual Topography* (2006)

For the overflowing of Rivers and Rains generally leaves mud upon level Grounds, which by degrees raises the Earth higher and higher, which still increases, if through Negligence the Rubbish and Dirt, which gathers every Day be not removed. Frontinus the Architect used to say, that several Hills were risen in Rome in his Time by the continual Fires. But we in our Days see

The Parody of Matter: Bataille, Pu'iito, Tlazolteotl, and the Filth to Come

GEORGIOS TSAGDIS

> It is clear that the world is purely parodic, in other
> words, that each thing seen is the parody of another,
> or is the same thing in a deceptive form.[1]

Whole libraries could articulate their volumes on the hinge of this sentence; writers like Jorge Luis Borges and Walter Benjamin know intimately. George Bataille, however, opening his "Solar Anus" to the salvo of clarity will waste no time to clarify parody's provenance and stakes, to clarify its clarity. He will not clarify what prevents parody from encroaching upon clarity and revealing the latter as deception. For, if it is clear that the world is parodic, that parody is a universal or mondial condition, the clarity of the world is also in jeopardy. Before things become things, and as soon as there is world, clarity will prove deceptive. Accordingly, Bataille's open-

1   Georges Bataille, "The Solar Anus," in *Visions of Excess: Selected Writings, 1927-1933*, ed. Allen Stoeckl (Minneapolis: Universtity of Minnesota Press, 1985), 5.

ing sentence exhibits its deceptive clarity as an act of self-consumption. It is an act of ouroboric cannibalism, in which the tail of the sentence eats the head, and the anus devours the mouth. Not only does the latter stand for the former, but it also performs its function. From the start, a parody of parodies invites a contemplation of the solar anus. It invites a meditation on filth.

Bataille the Parodist: Base Matter
contra Matter as Base

Should one entertain the perverse fancy of considering filth, few beginnings would be more propitious than Bataille's work on base matter, a matter "so repulsive that it resisted not only the idealism of Christians, Hegelians, and Surrealists, but even the conceptual edifice-building of traditional materialists."[2] The "heterogeneity" of this matter constitutes its capacity to parody.

Before turning to this heterogeneity, therefore, the function of parody needs to be probed, for it is unclear whether parody should be distinguished from satire, travesty, caricature, or pastiche and more generally from figures such as synecdoche and metalepsis, in a word: metonymy. Perhaps one thing can stand for another, yet why, in what sense, should this standing be distinctly *parodic*? What is this poetic side street (*para + odos*) that worlds the world, that connects every destination to every other departure?

If only perhaps with caution, it is nonetheless possible to interpolate into Bataille's semantics of parody nuances such as Nabokov's: "satire is a lesson, parody

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2   Allen Stoekl, "Introduction," in *Visions of Excess*, xi.

is a game."[3] Indeed, matter does not teach a lesson, or if it does, it is a lesson in a limited, cruel sense. Rather, the parody of matter shows the game of the world, or in a different light, it shows the feast of the world, the feast upon which being itself feeds, without "feedback," without "feedforward."

All the same, such semantic nuances, significant— literally and figuratively—as they are in themselves and within given contexts, fail to account for Bataille's broader gesture in figuring matter as parody. Bataille invokes and utilizes the term "parody" with little circumspection because of a perceived urgency; "parody" is the hammer that offers itself most readily for the task at hand, the demolition of hierarchies. It is in a similar gesture that Mikhail Bakhtin interchanges the term "parody" with "travesty" when writing, for example, that there "has never been a genre without its own parodying or travestying double."[4] Another implement might have been used to show the inherent instability of every theoretical edifice that claims to be self-identical, self-sufficient, and transcendent, beyond subversion.[5] Bataille, like Bakhtin, chooses parody—and the effects of this choice, semantic and tactic, will be significant. But these effects did not and could not have pre-determined the strategic-functional exigency of the destabilization of the world.

Indeed, this destabilization gives itself to laughter as it does to violence, disgust, and terror. One quickly loses

3   Alfred Appel and Vladimir Nabokov, "An Interview with Vladimir Nabokov," in *Wisconsin Studies in Contemporary Literature* 8, nr. 2 (1967): 138.

4   Mikhail Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981), 53.

5   Leslie Boldt-Irons, "Bataille's 'The Solar Anus' or the Parody of Parodies," in *Studies in 20th Century Literature* 25, nr. 2 (2001): 355.

oneself in the labyrinth of signs where the theriomorphous awaits. This is the fear invoked by the archontic orders of Gnosticism, the dead serious parody of Platonism that Bataille adopts and adapts. In Gnosticism, Bataille discovers matter as "an *active* principle having its own autonomous existence as darkness (which would not be the simple absence of light, but the monstrous *archontes* revealed by this absence), and as evil (which would not be the absence of good, but a creative action)."[6] The same logic that leads Plotinus to condemn matter and later Proclus to recover it merely as a *parhypostasis*, the quasi-substance afforded as the last, unavoidable emanation of the One, propels Gnosticism to celebrate in matter the obscure and the formless. An inversion of hierarchies is at work in the most literal sense. In the archontic forms of the despot and the beast, an "illegitimate" principle becomes operative, which philosophy, morality, and the state cannot allow to constitute an *arche*. Yet from such an obscure principle, summed up in the indefinite figure of matter, Bataille draws solace in the surrounding darkness.

Importantly, this solace is not a future-oriented hope. For a time, surrealist automatic writing will provide Bataille with a means to do away with goals and with the "vision of the future," which thought and language assert, in order to replace the present that remains inaccessible to them.[7] This solace is in and of the present; it is the solace that darkness gives to the light. In a late work like Maurice Blanchot's *The Madness of the Day*, this

6   Georges Bataille, "Base Materialism and Gnosticism," in *Visions of Excess*, 47.

7   Georges Bataille, "Surrealism and How It Differs from Existentialism," in Georges Bataille, in *The Absence of Myth* (London: Verso, 1994), 65–6.

experience resolves into a tranquil joy in the cool of the night. But in these early writings of Bataille, the play of light and darkness is provocative, visceral, filthy.

Texts such as the "Solar Anus," "Rotten Sun," and "The Pineal Eye" do not merely unmoor representation from its aspirations, but they dissolve the visible and vision itself into radiant presence. The figure of the solar annulus, the ring of light around the sun during an eclipse, which concludes the "Solar Anus," combines, as Leslie Anne Boldt-Irons observes, the two principal motions that the essay establishes: circularity and palindromic linearity. The first corresponds to the Hegelian movement of the idea and of all-encompassing love, the second to the syncopated movement of life, or alternatively *eros*, the back-and-forth of sexual motion. Bataille uses the figure of the locomotive to drive the co-implication of the two movements: The wheels' unending rotation precedes and succeeds, conditions, and is conditioned by the intermittent thrust of the pistons.[8] The locomotive, a virile-virulent figure of industrial-technical progress and of the future at large, is replaced then, at the close of the essay, by the solar annulus: "this image of a black center surrounded by a brilliant circle of light suggests that the sun has been penetrated by a shaft of darkness. Circularity has been broken by a linear stroke, but the ray of blackness at the center is encircled by light."[9]

Darkness and light, filth and the sublime, punctation and enchainment. Bataille's project does not merely exchange the hierarchic positions of these figures, nor does it attempt to synthesize them: "filth does not 'replace' God: there is no system of values, no new hierarchy."[10]

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8   Bataille, "The Solar Anus," 6.

9   Boldt-Irons, "Bataille's 'The Solar Anus,'" 372.

10   Allan Stoekl, "Introduction," xiv.

Base mater is precisely what breaks (with) the system by contaminating that which it elevates; like the big toe supporting the erect body, it constitutes the indelible reminder of muddied, revulsive beginnings.[11] As such, matter is always base, the self-undermining base of every reality.

Indeed, the ideas of deconstruction and self-deconstruction already germinate in this casting of matter as a third term,[12] a term which escapes both the original and the inverted order and shows their insufficiency.[13] As a materialist, Bataille reveals what is problematic in materialism,[14] in a movement of thought caught up between wariness against mere inversion and the tactical, if not strategic, necessity of undoing idealism but also dislodging the residual hierarchic idealizations of most materialisms.[15] In effect, Bataille's matter exists only as that "*nonlogical difference* that represents in relation to the economy of the universe what crime represents in relation to the law."[16] In its criminal instability, matter does not lend itself to a Marxist structure and super-structure articulation, but rather remains in flux — a torrential flood of base subversion.

Understanding matter as what parodies and subverts hierarchies as well as what subverts their subversion will help us approach two indigenous divinities of the Amer-

11   Benjamin Noys, "George Bataille's Base Materialism," in *Cultural Values* 2, nr. 4 (1998): 500.

12   Julian Pefanis, *Heterology and the Postmodern* (London: Duke University, Press, 1991), 4.

13   Jacques Derrida, *Positions* (London: The Athlone Press, 1987), 41–2.

14   Pierre Macherey, *The Object of Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 113.

15   Georges Bataille, "Materialism," in *Visions of Excess*, 15.

16   Georges Bataille, "The Notion of Expenditure," in *Visions of Excess*, 129.

icas: Pu'iito and Tlazolteotl. Bataille, the thinker of myth, does not discuss either, but thinking with Bataille, we can carry these figures into the future, not as a promise, but precisely as abiding, salvaging subversion.

"How People and Animals received their Anus:" Pu'iito the Subverter

In 1905, Theodor Koch-Grünberg recorded an origin myth told among the Taulipang Indians of Guiana which relates the story of Pu'iito, in Koch-Grünberg's appraisal, "undoubtedly the weirdest personification of which we have record."[17]he weirdness of the myth—as a whole—indicates, perhaps, a second-order subversion; first, however, we must attend to the fable, worth recounting at length:

> In the deep past, animals and people lacked an anus with which to defecate. I think they defecated through their mouths. Pu'iito, the anus, wandered around, slowly and cautiously, farting in the faces of animals and people, and then running away. So the animals said: "Let's grab Pu'iito, so we can divide him up between us!" Many gathered and said: "We'll pretend that we're asleep! When he arrives, we'll catch him!" So that's what they did. Pu'iito arrived and farted in the face of one of them. They ran after Pu'iito, but couldn't catch him and were left trailing behind.
>
> The parrots Kuliwaí and Kaliká got close to Pu'iito. They ran and ran. Finally they caught him and tied him up. Then the others who had been left behind arrived: tapir, deer, curassow, Spix's guan, piping guan, dove. They began to share him out. Tapir eagerly asked for a piece. The parrots cut a large piece and threw it to the other animals. Tapir immediately grabbed it. That's why his anus is so huge.

17 Eduardo Viveiros de Castro, "Immanence and Fear: Stranger-Events and Subjects in Amazonia," in *HAU: Journal of Ethnographic Theory* 2, nr. 1 (2012): 31.

> The parrot cut a small, appropriately-sized piece for himself.
> The deer received a smaller piece than tapir's. The doves took
> a little piece. Toad arrived and asked them to give him a piece
> too. The parrots threw a piece in his direction, which stuck on
> his back: that's why even today the toad's anus is on his back.

> That was how we acquired our anuses. Were we without them
> today, we'd have to defecate through our mouths, or explode.[18]

Indeed, the weirdness of the myth cannot be dissoci-
ated from the fact that it presents itself as offering a solu-
tion to what does not purport to be a problem — humans
and animals lack an anus, but they are not debarred from
defecation; the lack of an anus is not in any way con-
strued as a problem. Indeed, the incentive that propels
the animals to pursue, capture and dismember Pu'iito is
not the affliction of digestive discomfort or metabolic in-
capacity but a comic irritation with Pu'iito's farcical farts.
The anatomy of the anus is the resolution of a bad joke.
Nonetheless, the fear of explosive constipation lurks at
the edges of this text, as does the tacit approbation of, if
not disgust with, oral defecation.

Reading the fable through *Anti-Oedipus*, Eduardo
Viveiros de Castro discovers in it the pre-organized, or
pre-organic, co-existence of animals who have not yet
been fully speciated, their bodies not fully territorialized
since their organs are still only partial, loci of alternating
repulsion and attraction.[19] For Deleuze and Guattari, "it
is the collective investment of the organs that plug de-
sire into the socius," a desire that modern societies have

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18   Sérgio Medeiros, *Makunaíma e Jurupari. Cosmogonias ameríndias*
(São Paulo: Perspectiva, 2002), 57; E. Viveiros de Castro, "Immanence
and Fear," 30.

19   Eduardo Viveiros de Castro, "Immanence and Fear," 31.

sought to regulate through the privatization of organs—
the first privatized organ being the anus.[20]

This interpretation might indicate that this myth,
the letter and transmission of which cannot be queried
at present, points to the time before the "binding" and
apportioning of Pu'iito, when every animal, as much as
every human, would not, in fact, defecate through their
own mouth, but all life defecated through Pu'iito. Or,
rather than challenging the form of the myth, a different
reading might be probed. Indeed, not only are different
species explicitly distinguished in the text, but their
form, traits, and character determine their role in the
capture of Pu'iito and in his apportioning. It might be
countered that the absence of humans in the allotment
of the anus is a corollary of the generalized anthropo-
morphism of the animal world, making the presence
of humans superfluous both on the narratological and
ontological level. Indeed, if animals are like humans in
all apparent regards (they speak, deliberate, plan, and so
on), speciation is not so much an incomplete process as
it is a condition and an impossibility at once: Receiving
a segment of the anus is called to determine the animal
which was already a tapir and will remain "human."

Nonetheless, an event does take place—the fable of
Pu'iito is a parody in Bataille's sense. It does not so much
confirm the necessity of the speciated, albeit perhaps
not yet individuated, possession of an anus as it dest-
abilizes the certainty of this necessity and invokes an
originary time pre-dating it, a time when the necessity
of the anus was unnecessary, the mouth being both the
origin and destination of nourishment, as much as the

origin of the fable. Indeed, the story shows Pu'iito as the third—neither a human, nor an animal, but a spirit, albeit a quasi-mortal one—a poor parodist with limited powers. As spirit, Pu'iito, the "divine anus," connects the in-corporated rectum with the privileged mouth and opens up the immanence of nourishment and waste into a circuit. Pu'iito, the runner who could not escape, sets the economy of digestion into motion. Even when captured, he remains the errant member that continues to unsettle this economy and its by-products, for his capture might signal for humans and animals the end of the insult of being mere receivers of farts, but not without replacing it with the shame of being their authors. Henceforth, humans and animals will carry the responsibility for Pu'iito's parody since they will carry a tatter of his body on theirs.

We conclude this section with two vignettes of divide parody which hinge on nothing more than the errancy that the passage across languages can never avoid. Nonetheless, or precisely because of this, they carry forward the mouth-anus economy that Pu'iito's myth sets in motion. The first comes from Bataille's appropriation of Gnosticism—he writes:

> Thus the adoration of an ass-headed god (the ass being the most hideously comic animal, and at the same time the most humanly virile) seems to me capable of taking on even today a crucial value: the severed ass's head of the acephalic personification of the sun undoubtedly represents, even if imperfectly, one of materialism's most virulent manifestations.[21]

The ass steps into the fray to configure an asininely theriomorphic god and, in doing so, subverts two intertwined expectations: That the sun-god and the ass should retain their respective places and their heads;

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21   Georges Bataille, "Base Materialism and Gnosticism," 46.

instead, in this exchange of heads, this capital exchange, the acephalic sun receives a severed part of the ass, who is thereby deified. In absolute parody, but also in absolute phonetic and noematic fidelity, one discovers the anus in the English "ass." An anus-headed god would have been a step too far for the Gnostics: Their parody of a predominantly Hellenic world-image is brutally serious. But this is precisely what we are called to think with Bataille—the point where the mouth and the anus meet—the point before Pu'iito's capture. The moment of originary explosion.

Here opens the second vignette. In the name of *sol invictus*, the invincible sun, whose head the Gnostics were keen to sever and replace with that of an ass, echoes the Latin word of nourishment, *victus*, the victual. In an etymological and semantic parody, "*sol invictus*" signifies accordingly the inedible or indigestible sun. But if the sun cannot be metabolized, it is because his head is not yet that of an ass. Beyond the scope of myth, the need for the sun to obtain an anus corresponds to the need to extend the thermodynamic gradient of solar energy into a metabolic structure that can negentropically hold on to and articulate helio-power. The "solar anus" encapsulates the free passage from celestial dissipation to terrestrial dissemination. Myth anticipates this passage.

Divine Filth: Tlazolteotl the Converter

"Holy Shit!"—the exclamation constitutes, as Cecelia Klein notes, a profane oxymoron for occidental sensibility.[22] Dante's flatterers are not accidentally placed in the eighth circle of Hell, "dipped in excrement that seemed

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22   Cecilia F. Klein, "Teocuitlatl, 'Divine Excrement': The Significance of 'Holy Shit' in Ancient Mexico," in *Art Journal 52*, nr. 3 (1996): 20.

as it had flowed from human privies."[23] For Christianity, the mere insinuation of an infringement of filth upon the divine constitutes profanity. Modernity's triumph of biopolitical hygiene seems thus less of a break with a pre-modern paradigm of life as its fulfillment. "Cleanliness is next to godliness" might have come into vogue as godliness waned and cleanliness waxed, but this does not indicate the abandonment of an onto-theological paradigm, as much as it indicates its transformation: purity remains the uncontested, incontestable value.

The Mesoamerican civilizations took a different course. The figure of Tlazolteotl remains enigmatic and fascinating in equal measure: Here is a divinity whose name is often rendered into "Goddess of Filth," but which can also be read as "Divine Filth," or even "Divine Excrement," indeed, "Holy Shit." The name does not originate from the Nahuatl word for excrement or *cuitlatl* but from *tlazolli*, which denotes primarily an "old, dirty, deteriorated, worn-out thing," but also connotes filth, garbage, and human feces.[24] The implications of this wider semantic scope are important, and they might be in part attributable to the provenance of the Goddess. Before its adoption by the Aztecs, Tlazolteotl was worshipped by the Huastec, a people of Mayan descent, conquered and subjugated by the Aztec empire. What little survives from the Huastec is doubly mediated and distorted by the Aztec and later Spanish conquerors, which further complicates the tantalizingly complex figure of Tlazolteotl. The following pursues only a few of the threads that weave the fabric of this divinity and the socio-religious context that drew on and made her worship possible among the Aztecs.

23   Klein, "Teocuitlatl," 20.
24   Klein, "Teocuitlatl," 21.

One of the most troubling difficulties in the cultural mediation of Tlazolteotl is her casting as the "patron" (indeed "matron") goddess of the wayward and the sinful (prostitutes, sodomites, and so on). Not only is patronage a Roman practice absorbed into Christian hagiology, but the parallels of Tlazolteotl's role to that of the Virgin Mary are too numerous and suspicious to ignore. Indeed, the very translation by the Catholic priests and administrators of *tlazolli* into "sin" (rather than "filth" or "waste") anticipates an impossible identification: Tlazolteotl is made to serve the same function as Mary while "inverting" the immaculate persona of the latter into a photographic negative of depravity. A final touch in this syncretic portraiture is the confession that sinners were expected to make to an Aztec priest, in order to be absolved from the from the impurity Tlazolteotl had herself germinated in them. With enough circumspection, however, differences might be set into relief:

> The Aztecs are well documented as having believed that a last-minute "confession" to Tlaelquani [one of Tlazolteotl's personas] of one's sexual transgressions could stave off the imminent threat of physical danger or death. Such "pentitents" reportedly not only removed their clothes so as to expose Tlaelquani to their "evil odor," but swallowed their own stench, their own filth, as well. They did this because, in Aztec thought, filth could be used to ward off or offset filth, restoring both moral and physical equilibrium.[25]

There is no divine economy that leads Tlazolteotl to engender vice, in order, in turn, to redeem it while she herself remains untainted by the surrounding muck. Tlazolteotl's power to absolve or purify is not simply "uncontaminated" by filth but originates in it. Unlike Mary, Tlazolteotl is not the intercessor of absolution but its conductor—the impassive converter of purity

25   Klein, "Teocuitlatl," 22.

and filth. This bivalence runs throughout Aztec social and religious life. When for example, boys and girls were assigned to the *calmecac* (school of priests and the elite, equally open to both sexes), they were instructed and expected to abstain from vice and filth.[26] Nonetheless, upon entering the priesthood, one was expected to embrace filth:

> Physically and psychologically divorced from his family unit, an Aztec priest was the human intermediary with a hostile and foreboding force, which required constant appeasement with gifts of blood. Dedication to priesthood was an appalling reality in which priests were permanently marked with the filth of their duty. Forbidden from combing or cleaning their hair, occupied in private and in public with violent rituals, the priests were covered with both their own and their victims' blood. Their hair was matted with the blood that dripped from their ears, pierced where they had offered themselves as a sacrifice.[27]

Bedecked in encrusted blood and ceremonial soot (bitumen pours out of Tlazolteotl's mouth and was thus smeared by priests on their mouths and the rest of their bodies), these figures find perhaps their closest counterparts in those executioners, who, from the European Middle Ages to Edo Japan, formed hereditary castes of untouchable outcasts. Called upon to waste life and spill blood to ensure the purity of the body politic, their own lives were contaminated by the filth they vanquished. One can see this vilification carry over into the racial-economic pariahs that undertake the sanitation of modern life, thought of and even at times named by the rest of the public with monikers that denote garbage or

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26   Caroline Dodds Pennock, *Bonds of Bloods: Gender, Lifecycle and Sacrifice in Aztec Culture* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2008), 85.

27   Pennock, *Bonds of Blood*, 75.

waste.[28] Although, in both instances, the vocation taints the one who fulfills it, the Aztec priest occupies a position of absolute eminence, a state of exception on the antipode of the despised executioner and the submerged sanitation worker.

The logic of the bivalence of filth that informs priesthood extends to all aspects of Aztec lay life. During an eighty-day period of mourning, widows do not wash their clothes, face, or head "and the dirt, mingling with their tears, cake[s] their skin in a thick layer."[29] This temporary ordeal gives their mourning form and brings them into proximity to the gods. At the conclusion of this period, the casting aside of filth constitutes a relief and a recovery;[30] however, once again, this is not a recovery *from* filth but a recovery *due* to it; henceforth, death lets life live.

Bataille calls this "letting" a "laboratory," as it constitutes a reaction and transformation, a conversion: "in history as in nature, decay is the laboratory of life."[31] It is no surprise then that in one of her figurations as "Eater of Ordure" in Thelma Sullivan's rendition, Tlazolteotl-Tlaelquani functions as a mother goddess, reigning over both humanity and the earth. Whereas the Greeks saw in childbirth "the filth that distances man from the gods,"[32] the Aztecs entrusted this filth to the goddess,

28   The treatment of Roma, in that regard, in Romania, is telling. Cf. Elana Resnick, "The Limits of Resilience: Managing Waste in the Racialized Anthropocene," in *American Anthropologist*, 123, (2021).

29   Pennock, *Bonds of Blood*, 159.

30   Ibid.

31   Georges Bataille, "The 'Old Mole' and the Prefix Sur in the Words *Surhomme* [Superman] and *Surrealist*," in *Visions of Excess*, 32.

32   Louis Moulinier, *Le pur et l'impur dans la pensée des Grecs d'Homére à Aristote* (Paris: Libraire C. Klincksieck, 1952), 70. Translated by Pennock in Pennock, *Bonds of Blood*, 63.

who was able to convert it to life. Humanity procreates *in* filth *because* of filth, just like the earth brings forth a fecund harvest from the mud or humus that the Aztecs considered as filth (*tlazollalli*),[33] aided by its own rotting products and animal excrement. Indeed, the Aztecs collected human feces and urine (seen as akin to rainfall) from public toilets along major roads to use as fertilizer for the earth.[34]

It comes then perhaps as less of a surprise that Aztecs also understood gems and minerals as excrement. Gold, the most precious metals for the Aztecs that was also used for medicinal purposes, was called Tonatiuh, "the excrement of the sun," being deposited by the latter in the earth during his passage through the underworld.[35] But the Aztecs could already perceive what became painfully apparent after the arrival of the Spanish, namely that gold could also become an "instrument of torment," a "deadly thing," and a "deceiver."[36] This link of excrement to deception, what Bataille would call parody, is integral to the Aztec understanding of filth, something that the Spanish generals and merchants could not fathom as they wallowed in excremental gold. They would be the new *teuhio* (dirty) and *tlazollo* (filthy), words previously reserved for deceiving Aztec rulers.

Deception, the final nexus in the weave of sense that holds the figure of Tlazolteotl together, allows us to reappraise the relation of excrement to sexuality and the cycle of life. If, for example, an unknown woman appears in the Codex Telleriano-Remensis (pl.11) holding excrement while she weeps or bleeds from the eyes,

33   Klein, "Teocuitlatl," 21.

34   Ibid., 22.

35   Ibid., 25.

36   Ibid., 26.

under the name Inxetli, meaning "Ashes [in the] Eyes" this might be understood as punishment for her sexual transgressions (having "gathered flowers"); it might be equally well understood as absolution from their burden, for although sex is filth and thus the cause of blindness (the extremity of deception), it is also filth that will cure this blindness.[37]

It is difficult not to cast Tlazolteotl into a dispenser of the *pharmakon* of filth. The conversion of poison to remedy is ubiquitous: One finds, for example, in the Codex Borgia (pl.12) a squatting man swallowing his own excrement while he empties at the same time his bowels into a blindfolded deity identified as Tezcatlipoca-Ixquimilli, "a male deity of night and punishment, whose name means roughly 'Smoking Mirror with Covered Eyes.'"[38] The same scene also figures in Codex Vaticanus B, but this time the squatting man is also urinating on the receiving god below him.[39] Clearly, an economy of filth is here at work, an economy in which excrement, rather than being a mere metaphor, is "invested through metonymy with real power," a power capable both of disrupting and restoring health and harmony.[40] Bataille called this metonymic power "parody," which encompasses both the subversion of the high into the low, but also the conversion of the low into the high. Pu'iito stands thus on the one end of the spectrum as the subdued god of subversion, while Tlazolteotl emerges as the glorious goddess of conversion.

37 Ibid., 23.
38 Ibid.
39 Ibid., 23–4.
40 Ibid., 25.

The Filth to Come: Radical Metabolics as Quotidian Practice

The schematism of subversion-conversion embodied by Pu'iito and Tlazolteotl remains, however, insufficient both in itself and in the face of our techno-environmental predicament. The market machine has incorporated both divinities: The Pu'iito of advertisement farts on our attention and runs—we strive to relieve the irritation by grabbing a piece of the brand; meanwhile, the Tlazolteotl of the by-product economy converts nauseating waste to golden excrement, consecrating them with a logo—one wears proudly a recycled this, handles a repurposed that.

Neither irony nor monetization of waste will keep the tide of filth at bay. For in truth, the filth to come has already arrived. Perhaps it has always been here. Yet whereas filth would in the past accumulate at the heart of the empire, in Rome, for example, or London, it is now carefully relegated to the margins, invisible to all except those that inhabit these margins. Since, in more than one sense, trash is "matter without place,"[41] in the era of radical waste, the earth is transformed into a network of non-places. It is a matter of environmental justice, not only because of the national, class, and race divides, but first and foremost, because of the divides of the space itself. Insofar as filth becomes a matter of distribution, a politics of space will be unavoidable. Such a politics will, however, never be able to undo its premise, confined to debating the *where* of these non-places instead of querying their *why* and *whether*.

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41 Greg Kennedy, *An Ontology of Trash: The Disposable and Its Problematic Nature* (New York: State University of New York Press, 2007), 7.

The statement "man is a wasting animal"[42] is, at its heart, antinomic. To be human means to be exemplarily wasteful; indeed, it means to continuously resignify the meaning of waste. At the same time, to be human is to be like everything that metabolizes: To have to proliferate biological entropy for the sake of local negentropic metastability. Caught up in the most extreme and perilous moment of this antinomy, our task is not simply to re-appropriate and invest what is filthy or foul, which, inflected through the German *faul*, means equally lazy or unproductive, into new chains of consumable objects.

We must begin with parody in order to destabilize unremittingly the logic of the by-product. We must observe patiently the wisdom of the foul cat that licks its fur nearly half of its waking time to appraise the stakes of our hygiene regimes. We must contemplate the flow of the river, which depends, precariously, on both the liquid quickness of its water and the solid topology of its bed. We must understand that filth is a correlate of its environment—urban sweat does not smell like tropical sweat. Taking pride in Pu'iito legacy and hailing Tlazolteotl's miracles, we must enter an onto-epistemology of radical metabolics which effects a conversion of matter, and by the same token (*meta + ballein*), the subversion of the order that pre-configures it.

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42   John Capie Wylie, *The Wastes of Civilization* (London: Faber, 1959).

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it in a Manner quite buried under Ground with Filth and Rubbish. In the Dutchy of Spoletto, I have seen a small ancient Temple, which at first was built in a Plain, that is now almost wholly buried by the raising of the Earth; that Plain reaching to the Foot of the Hills. But why should I mention Buildings that stand under Mountains?

— Leon Battista Alberti, *De re aedificatoria* (1485)

At the end of the Quest there waited thus not a revelation but a riddle. The anthropologist seems condemned either to journey among men whom he can understand precisely because his own culture has already contaminated them, covered them with "the filth, our filth, that we have thrown in the face of humanity", or among those who, not so contaminated, are for that reason largely unintelligible to him. Either he is a wanderer among true savages (of whom there are precious few left in any case) whose very otherness isolates his life from theirs or he is a nostalgic tourist "hastening in search of a vanished reality ... an archaeologist of space, trying in vain to repiece together the idea of the exotic with the help of a particle here and a fragment of debris there." Confronted with looking-glass men he can touch but not grasp and with half-ruined men "pulverised by the development of Western civilisation", Lévi-Strauss compares himself to the Indian in the legend who had been to the world's end and there asked Questions of peoples and things and was disappointed in what he heard. "I am the victim of a double infirmity: what I see is an affliction to me; what I do not see a reproach".

— Clifford Geertz, *Interpretation of Cultures* (1973)

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Convivia is a journal that is interested in thinking
what architectonics is or could be in the twenty-first
century. Pre-specific to architecture, architectonics
deals with the real in an abstract, yet edifying manner.
Under architectonics, the indeterminacy brought by
contemporary science is assumed as a liberation
from ontological and epistemological principles, and
welcomed as a fortunate occasion to understand
and embrace the stating of any principle as an 'art'
in itself—autonomous, yet not automatic or autarkic.
Architectonic deals with the real in terms of a
communicational physics, through articulations that
are concrete yet reasoned in abstractive and projective
manners. The journal aims to set the table for a series
of banquets—of *convivia*—in which courses do not
respond to mere needs or inconsequential delights
of 'consumption'. We focus on architectonic alloys
of necessities and contingencies: necessities are
bounded by contingencies, and contingencies are
engendered through 'figuring out' what is necessary.
Convivia's interest is to 'make cases'.

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under their jurisdiction;
they had miniature ponies
on which they tore through
the phalanstery at an
impetuous gallop; and

itself since it entails death,
entropy, FILTH and crimes?
FIVE

Prophecies.—In Egypt.
Pugio Fidei, Talmud. 'It is a
tradition among us, that,
when the Messiah shall
come, the house of God,
destined for the dispensa-
tion of His Word, shall be
full of FILTH and impurity;
and that the wisdom of the
scribes shall be corrupt
and rotten. Those who
shall be afraid to sin, shall
be rejected by the people,
and treated as senseless
fools'. SIX

At the very height of

Convivia
FILTH

The Kitchen ought to be neither just under the Noses of the Guests, nor at too great a Distance; but so that the Victuals may be brought in neither too hot nor too cold, and that the Noise of the Scullions, with the Clatter of their Pans, Dishes and other Utensils, may not be troublesome. The Passage through which the Victuals are to be carried, should be handsome and convenient, not open to the Weather nor dishonoured by any FILTH that may offend the Stomachs of the Guests.ONE

Contagion, after all, as and with contract, indicates not only a form of generation but also of relation and subjectivity. As in the contractual, contagion implies a kind of contact. Yet, as François Delaporte has noted, *contagion* (as well as *contamination*) 'are words derived from the Latin for 'contact with FILTH'' whereas *contract*, I would add, signifies the making of a bargain or drawing together.TWO

Cleanliness is a nationalvirtue in America. No FILTH, no dust. Sea breezes incessantly sweep through the limpid maritime sky. The offices are clean; the bath tubs, the shops, the glistening hotels; the dazzling restaurants and bars. The immaculate personnel, in shirt sleeves, is shining white. Food is wrapped up in bright cellophane. There is no more real dust than there is symbolic dust, everything is new and spotless, including the collegiate Gothic of the universities. [...]
People who wash their shirts, paint their houses, clean the glass in their windows, have an ethic different from those who cultivate dust and FILTH. To prove that they possess an age-old culture, the latter preserve the cracks in the walls, the patina, and what is worse, they have even established the taste for patina, the love of the old, and because of that they hammer out modern 'wrought iron' and soil the new wainscoting of their apartments with bistre.THREE

Here we might recall someone else who sympathized with and defended dirty children: Fourier, whose 'phalanstery' was not only a socialist utopia but a pedagogical one as well. Fourier divided the children in the phalanstery into two main groups: the *petites bandes* and the *petites hordes*. The *petites bandes* were assigned to gardening and other pleasant duties. The *petites hordes* had to perform the unwholesome tasks. Each child was free to choose between the two groups. Those who chose to join the *petites hordes* were more highly honored. No work was undertaken in the phalanstery until they had begun it; cases of cruelty to animals were under their jurisdiction; they had miniature ponies on which they tore through the phalanstery at an impetuous gallop; and when they assembled for work, the gathering was marked by a deafening cacophony of trumpet blasts, steam whistles, bell ringing, and drums. In the members of the *petites hordes*, Fourier saw four great passions at work: pride, shamelessness, insubordination, and-most important of all — *le gout de la salete*, the joy in FILTH.FOUR

Evil is equivalent to life, which we don't know how and don't want to define so as not to admit that life is equivalent to this violence that kills, in the long term, by mutation, selection and adaptation, that kills, daily, for dietary survival, that kills, lastly, in order not to die by being eaten, that kills, additionally, for pleasure sometimes. How, consequently, can we free ourselves from evil without abandoning life itself since it entails death, entropy, FILTH and crimes?FIVE

Prophecies.—In Egypt. Pugio Fidei, Talmud. 'It is a tradition among us, that, when the Messiah shall come, the house of God, destined for the dispensation of His Word, shall be full of FILTH and impurity; and that the wisdom of the scribes shall be corrupt and rotten. Those who shall be afraid to sin, shall be rejected by the people, and treated as senseless fools'.SIX

At the very height of England's industrial squalor, when the houses for the working classes were frequently built beside open sewers and when rows of them were being built back to back-at that very moment complacent scholar writing in middle-class libraries could dwell upon the 'FILTH' and 'dirt' and 'ignorance' of the Middle Ages, as compared with the enlightenment and cleanliness of their own.SEVEN

We can take for one illustration the death ritual of the Nyakyusa, who live north of Lake Nyasa. They explicitly associate dirt with madness; those who are mad eat FILTH. There are two kinds of madness, one is sent by God and the other comes from neglect of ritual. Thus they explicitly see ritual as the source of discrimination and of knowledge. Whatever the cause of madness, the symptoms are the same. The madman eats FILTH and throws off his clothes. FILTH is listed as meaning excreta, mud, frogs: 'the eating of FILTH by madmen is like the FILTH of death, those faeces are the corpse'.EIGHT

Yes, so much the worse, he knows it is a voice, how is not known, nothing is known, he understands nothing it says, just a little, almost nothing, it's inexplicable, but it's necessary, it's preferable, that he should understand just a little, almost nothing, like a dog that always gets the same FILTH flung to it, the same orders, the same threats, the same cajoleries.NINE

In the 1720s, one of the things that most scandalized the British public when conditions at debtors' prisons were exposed in the popular press was the fact that these prisons were regularly divided into two sections. Aristocratic inmates, who often thought of a brief stay in Fleet or Marshalsea as something of a fashion statement, were wined and dined by liveried servants and allowed to receive regular visits from prostitutes. On the 'common side' impoverished debtors were shack led together in tiny cells, 'covered with FILTH and vermin,' as one report put it, 'and suffered to die, without pity, of hunger and jail fever'.TEN

The mundus: a sacred or accursed place in the middle of the Italiot township. A pit, originally — a dust hole, a public rubbish dump. Into it were cast trash and filth of every kind, along with those condemned to death, and any newborn baby whose father declined to 'raise' it (that is, an infant which he did not lift from the ground and hold up above his head so that it might be born a second time, born in a social as well as a biological sense).ELEVEN

A living species, ours, is succeeding in excluding all the others from its niche, which is now global: how could other species eat or live in that which we cover with FILTH? If the soiled world is in danger, it's the result of our exclusive appropriation of things. So forget the word environment, commonly used in this context. It assumes that we humans are at the center of a system of nature. This idea recalls a bygone era, when the Earth (how can one imagine that it used to represent us?), placed in the center of the world, reflected our narcissism, the humanism that makes of us the exact midpoint or excellent culmination of all things. No. The Earth existed without our unimaginable ancestors, could well exist today without us, will exist tomorrow or later still, without any of our possible descendants, whereas we cannot exist without it. Thus we must indeed place things in the center and us at the periphery, or better still, things all around and us within them like parasites.TWELVE

Thus alchemy is involved, more than modern science is, in a system of moral values. It is alchemists' souls that are engaged in the work of alchemy, the object of their meditations receiving every value. One who handles the skimmer must indeed have a moral ideal. By their art, alchemists must separate 'the stains and FILTH of the three general principles; furnishing them with a matter, a place, or a vessel more fit than is that in which nature operates, which is full of dirt and a myriad kinds of foulness'. Their art takes away 'the dirt and grossest parts from the salt, the superfluous aquosities from the mercury, and the adustive parts from sulphur'. This purification is, as we see, performed with more of a moral than a scientific ideal. Its tone is not that of the purification of substances in modern chemistry. It despises what it rejects. Those handling the skimmer do so with an expression of disgust on their faces.THIRTEEN

What's vilest in the world if not the Mind? It is the body that recoils from FILTH and crime. Like the fly, the Mind settles on everything. Nausea, disgust, regrets, remorse are not its properties; they are merely so many curious phenomena for it to study. Danger draws it like a flame and if the flesh were not so powerful would lead it to burn its wings, urged on by a fierce and fatuous lust for knowledge.FOURTEEN

AN ASSORTMENT OF VICTUALS

1. Leon Battista Alberti, *De re aedificatoria* (1485)
2. Angela Mitropoulos, *Contract and Contagion* (2012)
3. Le Corbusier, *When the Cathedrals were White* (1937)
4. Walter Benjamin, *Understanding Brecht* (trans. 1998)
5. Michel Serres, *The Incandescent* (2003)
6. Blaise Pascal, *Pensées* (1670)
7. Lewis Mumford, *Technics and Civilisation* (1934)
8. Mary Douglas, *Purity and Danger* (1966)
9. Samuel Beckett, *The Unnameable* (1953)
10. David Graeber, *Debt* (2011)
11. Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space* (1974)
12. Michel Serres, *The Natural Contract* (1990)
13. Gaston Bachelard, *The Formation of the Scientific Mind* (1938)
14. Paul Valéry, *Analects* (trans. 1956)

Nº1

Loathing an item of food, a piece of FILTH, waste, or dung. The spasms and vomiting that protect me. The repugnance, the retching that thrusts me to the side and turns me away from defilement, sewage, and muck. The shame of compromise, of being in the middle of treachery. The fascinated start that leads me toward and separates me from them. Food loathing is perhaps the most elementary and most archaic form of abjection.FIFTEEN

Lord! said the Partridge, Cock, Puet, Snite, and Quail,/
Pigeons, Larks, my Masters, why d'ye rail?/
You're kept from Winter's Cold, and Summer's heat,/
Are taught new Tunes, and have good store of meat./
Having a Servant you to wait upon,/
To make your Cages clean from FILTH, and Dung:/
When we poor Birds are by the dozens killed,/
And luxuriously us eat, till they be filled:/
And of our Flesh they make such cruel waste,/
That but some of our Limbs will please their taste./SIXTEEN

Violations of conventional values (immorality) by others are included here. For example: "Seeing crude sexual behavior." "Drinking, breaking the law." "Anyone who displays bad habits publicly irritates all." "Disgust over FILTH and smut." "Disgust with human nature and people." These responses reflect trends mentioned previously: moral punitiveness, cynicism, the tendency to seek out, and to find, immorality in the world (especially in out groups) rather than in oneself. Finally, we find responses in which hostility toward friends and morality figures (parents, relatives, social authority, and the like) is implied though not explicitly stated or recognized.SEVENTEEN

De conversione's graphic image of digestive troubles is not passed over lightly; if somebody saw his clothes, Bernard continues, smeared with repulsive spew and the filthiest of FILTH, would he not rip them off vehemently? But the soul cannot pull itself off, however smudged the memory. The clogged and defiled memory is then left cliff hanging while Bernard proceeds to the body, the will, and a range of other significant topics. But it is not allowed to slip into oblivion. In the passage about the soul's consideration of itself, a *tableau* is presented of *memoria* viewed through the eyes of reason. *Memoria* is here presented as completely soiled, with an abundance of FILTH flowing into it from all sides, with the windows to death gaping and unable to close.EIGHTEEN

For the overflowing of Rivers and Rains generally leaves mud upon level Grounds, which by degrees raises the Earth higher and higher, which still increases, if through Negligence the Rubbish and Dirt, which gathers every Day be not removed. *Frontinus* the Architect used to say, that several Hills were risen in Rome in his Time by the continual Fires. But we in our Days see it in a Manner quite buried under Ground with FILTH and Rubbish. In the *Dutchy of Spoleto*, I have seen a small ancient Temple, which at first was built in a Plain, that is now almost wholly buried by the raising of the Earth; that Plain reaching to the Foot of the Hills. *But why should I mention Buildings that stand under Mountains?*NINETEEN

At the end of the Quest there waited thus not a revelation but a riddle. The anthropologist seems condemned either to journey among men whom he can understand precisely because his own culture has already contaminated them, covered them with "the FILTH, our FILTH, that we have thrown in the face of humanity", or among those who, not so contaminated, are for that reason largely unintelligible to him. Either he is a wanderer among true savages (of whom there are precious few left in any case) whose very otherness isolates his life from theirs or he is a nostalgic tourist "hastening in search of a vanished reality ... an archaeologist of space, trying in vain to repiece together the idea of the exotic with the help of a particle here and a fragment of debris there." Confronted with looking-glass men he can touch but not grasp and with half-ruined men "pulverised by the development of Western civilisation", Lévi-Strauss compares himself to the Indian in the legend who had been to the world's end and there asked Questions of peoples and things and was disappointed in what he heard. "I am the victim of a double infirmity: what I see is an affliction to me; what I do not see a reproach".TWENTY

Indifferent to the climate, except during their vacations when they rediscover the world in a clumsy, arcadian way, they naively pollute what they don't know, which rarely hurts them and never concerns them. Dirty species, monkeys and motorists, drop their FILTH fast, be cause they don't live in the space they pass through and thus let themselves foul it. Once again: who decides? Scientists, administrators, journalists. How do they live, and, more important, where? In laboratories, where the sciences reproduce phenomena to define them better; in offices or studios. In short, indoors. The climate never influences our work anymore.TWENTY-ONE

His writing is of [such] a barbarous, irregular, rough, and unsuccessful style that it nauseates those who read it. Certainly, if beneath such verbal FILTH there were not such beautiful and useful [mathematical] discussions, his work would not be worthy of publication. As such, he who studies his opus can really say that he gathers gems from garbage, as Virgil said with regard to Ennius. He mixes Latin phrases with vernacular ones, and mangles both. His writing, even his native Borghese [from Borgo Sansepolcro], which is in and of itself ugly and hateful, is mixed with Venetian and all the worst Italian vernaculars. This, I believe, is caused by his never having devoted much time and effort to the study of literary Latin and vernacular writing, always having been immersed in mathematical study. It is no surprise that those who do not put effort into those arts do not acquire them. Part of the blame, however, also should be laid on his century: a time in which, even although Latin was among one of the highly refined goods, the vernacular was still quite buried in mud. His having been a friar may also have been a reason for this sort of [linguis- tic] barbarity, as we see how cloistered people who are separated from secular life show little grace in secular literature.TWENTY-TWO

What one "doesn't do" — what one would never do — there you have the portrait of a personality. My profile, that is to say, my inner profile, the ground-plan of my Ego, is drawn by declarations such as: "I'd never eat such FILTH! Why I'd rather die than do that! Never would I have had such an idea on my own. How can anyone possibly sleep on his back? Believe such nonsense? Read that awful book?" We are a bundle of taboos, but many are not permanent — all of us end one day by sleeping on our backs.TWENTY-THREE

K. Edw. Weep'st thou already? list a while to me,
And then thy heart, were it as Gurney's is,
Or as Matrevis', hewn from the Caucasus,
Yet will it melt ere I have done my tale.
This dungeon where they keep me is the sink
Wherein the FILTH of all the castle falls.
Light. O villains!
K. Edw. And there, in mire and puddle, have I stood
This ten days' space; and, lest that I should sleep,
One plays continually upon a drum;
They give me bread and water, being a king;
So that, for want of sleep and sustenance,
My mind's distemper'd, and my body's numb'd,
And whether I have limbs or no I know not.
O, would my blood dropp'd out from every vein,
As doth this water from my tatter'd robes!TWENTY-FOUR

One god in several persons, then, Mars calls war what the first two call competition: the pursuit of military operations by other means-exploitation, commodities, money, or information. Even more hidden, the real conflict reap pears. The same schema is renewed: by their ugliness and by the FILTH they accidentally spread around, chemical factories, large scale livestock raising, nuclear reactors, and supertankers bring on objective global violence once again, with no arms other than the power of their size, no end other than the common and con tractual quest for domination over men.TWENTY-FIVE

In his notes on *The Unnamable*, Adorno asserts that the novel takes the 'philosophy of the remainder' (Residual-philosophie) at its word. In his essay on *Endgame*, he defines philosophies of the remainder as those philosophies that aim to subtract the temporal and the contingent from life and to retain only that which is 'true and immutable'. In *The Unnamable*, Beckett pursues this reduction to its limit, revealing that it leads not to a self-certain, self-preserving ego, master of itself and its world, but rather to an absolutely alienated subject: 'The sovereign ego cogitans is transformed by the *dubitatio* into its opposite. And that is what it always was –' And what that subject always was, according to Adorno, is 'less than nothing'or 'FILTH' (Dreck).TWENTY-SIX

15. Julia Kristeva, *Powers of Horror : An Essay on Abjection* (1980)
16. Margaret Cavendish, *A Dialogue of Birds* (1664)
17. Theodor W. Adorno, *The Authoritarian Personality* (1950)
18. Mette B. Bruun, *Parables: Bernard of Clairvauxs Mapping of Spiritual Topography* (2006)
19. Leon Battista Alberti, *De re aedificatoria* (1485)
20. Clifford Geertz, *Interpretation of Cultures* (1973)
21. Michel Serres, *The Natural Contract* (1990)
22. Bernardino Baldi, *Le vite de' matematici* (1600)
23. Paul Valéry, *Analects* (trans. 1956)
24. Christopher Marlowe, *Edward the Second* (1592)
25. Michel Serres, *The Natural Contract* (1990)
26. Shane Weller, *"Adorno's Notes on The Unnammable* (2010)

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