

MQU [Project Mimique]
EXEGESIS 2006-2009
ONTOPOLOGY / CHORA /
THE SUBLIME

MQU is pleased to republish these short essays on contemporary aesthetics and representational praxis. After Victor Burgin (1986) we regard this as a form of politicisation rather than a contribution to art theory itself. As such, this publication constitutes a form of 'second publicity' or parallel (Pernecky) released in the context of historic tragedy, but not seeking the glare of media or artistic spotlight. Rather, we request that those seeking to exploit human miseries – and they are multiple – for their own shallow pleasures, stay away.

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With sincere thanks to **Steve Dowding** @dowdinsk and **Bhavesh Hindocha**

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These thoughts were written in October 2006. At the time, multiculturalism was being contested – strongly – in liberal media. A rupture had emerged in an established (but remarkably brief) regime of truth pivoting around questions of ‘race’ and ethnicity. The image was no longer working as regulative power. John Tagg (1988: 172), after Foucault, elaborates:

It is not a question of struggle for ‘truth’ but rather a struggle around the status of truth and the economic and political role it plays. What defines and creates truth in any society is a system of more or less ordered procedures for the production, regulation, distribution and circulation of statements. Through these procedures ‘truth’ is bound in a circular relation to systems of power which produce and sustain it, and to ... effects of power which it induces and which, in turn, redirect it.

Michel Foucault (1972: 185) suggests that it is in the interplay of science and knowledge that relations of ideology are established. Thus, one might say that multiculturalism as discourse has been produced by the political sciences and apparatus in their relation to a multiracial polity. This shifting conception gained hold of the discourse of governance when these institutions set to work on matters of (equality of) representation (thus institutionalising procedures of classification and measurement). In relation to photography, Tony Bennett remarks on a conception shared by Louis Althusser, Pierre Macherey and Terry Eagleton, that the aesthetic mode is a form of cognition midway between the knowledge of science and its misrecognition in ideology. We find here the ‘positive image’ and its variant, the social marketing image, but also wider conceptions of the multicultural: as simulation (Baudrillard) or surface form of the social. As discursive practice, implicated in processes of reproduction, the neofunctionalist image operates by archotyping (revision of stereotype), manipulation of consent, and recuperation, and thus it has entered into controversy with Black film makers, anti-racist activists, and academics. Coward and Ellis (1977) point to Freud and Lacan: the notion of the Imaginary relies on image production (a spectacular construct); multiculturalism becomes distortion revealed as a wish.

The positive image itself was strategic offensive: part of a campaign by metropolitan authorities in the early 1980s to eradicate racism and confront ‘more subtle, less identifiable’ ‘institutional racism’ (Carmichael 1968). The concept seems heavily influenced by US studies of gender and race stereotyping on TV and the influence of this on children (Schuetz and Sprafkin 1978: 69–71). One might situate the ‘positive image’ within the crisis of self-representation of the ‘new urban left’ paradoxically at the height of its power and popularity, but deeply threatened by wider policies of the Thatcher administration and media stigmatisations. The campaign paralleled incorporation of anti-racist teaching in London schools. Pioneer of the positive image in the UK, the Greater London Council (GLC) soon found itself contesting its own legitimacy. Somewhat remarkably, the GLC anti-abolition campaign became a popular cause, in part because the metropolitan authority had attempted progressive intervention. GLC anti-racist initiatives are noted retrospectively as among the metropolitan authority’s most successful endeavours.

From memory, initial GLC anti-racist campaign images were artfully lit, but reproduction of tokenist mandate of multi-racial representation effected reduction of the particular to a bland (and in their much repeated imitation, often degrading) universal or social. Such images were almost uniformly rigid, and avoided foregrounding or perspectival play that might have enlivened their reception.

Productivity of power and a strategy of containment are both clear when the positive image is placed in the context of structural-functionalist conceptions:

Conceptually, the norm is kernel of order since it emerges first, from ... recognition by the individual of the role he or she is expected to play by other individuals or institutions, and, second, from conformity to that expectation ... to gain approval from others (Cooke 1983: 88–89).

The late 1980s witnessed an attack from the political right on anti-racism’s conception, terminology and policy framework, along with stigmatisation of local authority anti-racist training and work of the Commission for Racial Equality. Culture supplanted pigment as key referent of the ‘New Racism’ in later years of the Thatcher administration, foreclosure of ‘culture’ and ‘nation’ forcing an exclusion of those from ‘non-nativist’ cultural, ethnic or racial backgrounds (Solomos 1989: 35). An ‘English’ nativism was extolled by former Bradford headteacher Ray Honeyford and enshrined in the 1988 Educational Reform Act (Back 1996: 9). References to a notional ‘British way of life’, much in evidence in official pronouncements after the July 7 2005 bombings in London, resonated with this discourse from the late 1980s. Here as fabrication of liberties in the face of social and international conflict, and the Thatcherite notion of the ‘enemy within’, an element of fascist ideology that might well have been lifted straight from writings of Nazi philosopher Carl Schmitt.

By the end of the 1990s, there emerged in local government a social marketing paradigm (a dissimulation, reflex, still largely hegemonic) that, while recuperating contestation of the positive image’s rigidity, mandated the photographer to pay attention to compositional dynamics, skin colour of subjects, and power relations internal to image and in relation to camera and reader. Subjects were cropped closer to enhance their effect. Poverty, misery, destitution and challenge were all out of the question in these clean functional pictures. In international development, images of poverty were branded a pornography of suffering equated (falsely?) with a rhetorical function similar to that of the semi-nude woman in postwar advertising. Self-reliance, happiness and learning epitomised this new social marketing image, a neoliberal shift in rhetorical disclosure which became the sign of a ‘progressive’ institution, yet marked a closure of crisis for the left (at the time, felt as abject defeat). Despite its institutional popularity, as with the GLC’s imagery of the early 1980s, there is a loss of particularity of the subject, the genre reflexes back to mass as image, the realist convention of subject as typical (Engels); conflict, disparity and containment are removed from the frame. The paradigm exhibits an ideological inflection similar

to liberal falsities around employment: the subject of the image is portrayed as free being (despite often carceral situations) and the state is promoted as beyond conflict and critique.

By now, 'multiculture' had entered into the public sphere as social regulation, a restructuring and responsive principle derived from anti-racism of the segmented-corporatist Labour local state in conflict with the nationalist (but culturalist) enclosure of the new right. This, we would argue, was part of a corporate offensive of the sign restructuring both state and nongovernmental bureaucracies within a neoliberal framework.

II

Rosalind Coward and John Ellis (1977: 67) argue that:

The production of an ideological *vraisemblable* which is effective precisely for the reason that it appears as 'natural', 'the way things are', is the result of a practice of fixing or limiting of the endless productivity of the signifying chain. This fixing is the result of the limiting of certain signifiers to a certain signified or meaning. Limitation does not rely on the imposition of a system of ideas on a natural pre-given sign, but on the construction of a certain subject in relation to a discourse; a subject who becomes the place of its intelligibility.

Reception is built by this technique: the positive image and its social marketing variant effect a reduction of content to the extent that the image (devoid of all but the most bland intrinsic signification) is really all that there is. Recipients are implicated in communication of the message. There is a one dimensionality involved. The socialised recipient provides the message with every repetition of (re)encounter (McLuhan in Guiraud 1971: 17); a moment of narrative stability in a heterogeneous media flux (itself a process of containment), fixing the recipient as spectator and as benignly affirmative.

Multiculture with its base in the image also obscures another process by which consent is manufactured (and authority functions): by primary deferral to extant social formation. This is a realist strategy which as Coward and Ellis assert, limits productivity of the signifying chain, and at the same time synchronises the subject with the social-democratic or segmented-corporatist state. Rather than dissolve with mirage of power or strategies manifest, multicultural effects both power and the subject (a simulation in the affirmative). Meanwhile, the 'Absolute Subject', the 'Social' and the 'State' are confirmed as contingent on crisis and multiple surface mediations, that is, as decentred.

In Husserlian terms, 'multiculture' as with 'culture' as self-defining essence (the essentialist self-conception of the emigré combines with colour/culture-neutral sense of self of the white), becomes a 'deductive generality', a positing of what is essential and constitutive in our cognitive relation to the world, a misrecognition of a 'stream of experience' as intentional structure.

III

Ideological strategies of concealment effect a topology polarised by the neofunctionalist paradigm of multicultural and organicist constructions of race and culture. Race, defined by Foucault (and taken up by Gilroy 2004) as technology of the biopolitical state, is revealed as a chimera. Stuart Hall states 'race' as open political construction, Robert Miles an ideology of its own with regulatory power, a 'paper tiger'. Michael Omi and Howard Winant have a more prosaic construction: race is simply a product of political and legal relations defining race categories and social meanings of equality, racism and ethnicity. Paul Gilroy views race as complex and unstable product of racism itself.

Crucially, in discussions of multiculturalism, Homi Bhabha (1987 in Cross and Keith 1993: 23) asserts that 'understanding of the postcolonial subject leads to a notion of identity "opposed to the relativistic notions of cultural diversity, or the exoticism of the diversity of cultures"'. 'Culture' as multiculturalism becomes a racialised categorisation implicated in regulation, yet effecting denial of racism, distributional inequities and discrimination. Susan J Smith (1993) points to conflation of 'race' and 'culture' in a process of denial; Les Back (1996) states that 'European racism demands this distinction be maintained'; a repressive function.

Culture itself is a highly volatile conception, premised on contestation and criticism (Williams 1958/1973); site of struggle as much as assumptions of how individuals think and act (Smith) or ideological ways-that-things-are-done. Smith herself points to fallacies of essentialist conceptions of minority culture. Notions of subcultural semiology (such as refusal or *bricolage* [Hebdige 1979]) and transfusion (Back *ibid*) unsettle essentialist conceptions, including that of white nativism, and can be utilised as radical, yet these never approach force of stabilisation implicit in centrality of the image to neofunctionalist governmental techniques.

This topology reveals a process whereby regulative interest in the body (signified by 'race', 'a taboo vestige of colonial and neocolonial expansion'; [the unsaid?] of the organicist episteme), is substituted by the image (spectacular, simulation, and implicated in the postfordist state's 'perfection' of social supervision). It marks displacement from the spatial and moral containers of organicism (place, community, family and nation) towards a dimension of comfort defined by voice, gesture and colour, aspects of the Freudian sign; as well as a de/reterritorialisation. This is the effect (dimension or space) Julia Kristeva defined as semiotic 'chora', marked provisionally in semiotisable material by resistances and facilitations of Freudian drives, according to the pleasure principle. The chora precedes (but is grouped with) thetic positionality of the mirror phase.

Elizabeth Grosz (1990) discussing Kristeva's work describes the chora as relegation for women as providers of this space, reduced to maternity, 'in which case they remain the silent underside of patriarchal functioning'. Drives articulating the chora are arranged according to constraints imposed by family and social structures; the mother's body mediates symbolic law organising these social relations and becomes organising principle of the chora. Regulation's displacement into processes of the semiotic chora is an incredible co-option of motherhood as trace, along with the subtleties of existence – comfort, sensitivity, softness, chromatic intensity, declarative tone, difference – despite Kristeva's insistence that the chora itself is also on the path of destruction, aggressivity and death. Much like the organicist categories, the chora can be a volatile place, structured as it is by oral and anal drives. But one feels that motive force here is toward consumption pleasure rather than expulsion *per se*. However, expulsion itself hinges on the pleasure principle, as Kristeva argues.

One might term multiculturalism a regulative intervention into thetic positionality (in Kristeva's schema, the thetic encompasses both formation of semiotic chora and mirror phase). The chora precedes predication, the thesis, making multiculturalism, in effect, always already there. The Act of Recognition (Lacan) of the mirror phase between six to 18 months, dissolved with advent of the oedipus complex – recognition of absence of the mother by the child – is accompanied by desire for an identificatory image of its own stability and permanence (and an eventual propulsion towards language) by which it hopes to fill the lack. From the thetic phase on, the child is constituted within the Imaginary, that is, the order of images, representations, doubles and others, in its specular identifications (Grosz: 35), a process of misrecognition. Spatial intuition is regarded as byproduct of the mirror stage. This is interesting when considering claims toward 'race' and spatial anxiety.

IV

One might say that 'multiculturalism' is the site where the city of contradiction gets written over; that multiculturalism has been written into the 'symbolic order' (Lacan) of the city, that is, into languages and narratives of its (polarising) constitution. Malcolm Cross and Michael Keith (*ibid*: 9) suggest that: 'Race is a privileged metaphor through which the confused text of the city is rendered comprehensible.'

Urban policy has a contradictory relation to race and culture – at times co-opted to effect a pathology (closure of signification, fixing the subject in official and media discourse), at others, rejecting such an ideological process in favour of structural (economic and social) concerns. Werner Bonefeld (1987) defines the left local-state paradigm as 'segmented-corporatism', a sophisticated social intervention that he describes as 'a growing into society' in a

'direct attempt to homogenise its interests' by the 'flexible' integration of 'social segments' (ethnic particularities are a case in point). Bonefeld charges that this enables a less expensive, more flexible and repressive operation of social policy, reinforces attempts to depoliticise social problems and transforms politics into public relations 'without losing control over ... restrictive means for integrating society'. Bonefeld characterises postfordist state management as 'perfection of social supervision', superseding Fordist, postfascist techniques.

As culture is promoted via urban policy directives and funding withheld or streamlined via ethnicised criteria in competition, so culture, as a racialised phenomenon, becomes a social problem in itself. Funding for social and creative projects by ethnic particularity and with urban and social policy directives in mind is a standard of postfordist crisis management, and is regarded as antithetical to anti-racist activism (Black as political category), effecting division among previously solidarist Black and Asian organisations (Jeffers 1993; Sivanandan in Cross and Keith *ibid*: 23). Between 1997 and 2010, mainstreaming of EU funding and the Blair government's adhesion to Durkheimian functionalism framed cultural funding priorities. Hesmondhalgh et al (2014: 3) note (after McGuigan) 'a shift in ... [Blairite] cultural policy ... towards economic and social goals: "competitiveness and regeneration"; "an implausible palliative to exclusion and poverty".' Funding of minority organisations by the public sector has confirmed economic development as one of the defining technologies of social-democratic governance.

Urban and social policy with welfare state redistribution effects define the terrain where racism attempts to structure power in a locality, and where identity of the individual is defined as subordinate to the state and others (via the welfare/legal relation). Culture becomes the terrain of identity contestation (Back). Government initiatives such as Sure Start, which embody a renewed conception of cultural pathology (derived from antecedent racist US notions of the underclass), and the history of policies to counter escalations of subculture – for instance, around drug use – clarify such a process. In its encounter with urban and social policy, the subcultural, a rearticulation of the (at times multi-) cultural paradigm, re-emerges through marginalisation, stigmatisation, alienation and poverty.

V

Susan J Smith (*ibid*) charges that the repertoire of a racially segregated geographic and cultural imaginary has at differing moments contributed to the racialisation of migration laws, settlement and culture.

Smith asserts that there has been a conflation of the term 'migrant' to the euphemism 'colour', using the fact of migration as testimony to the 'fact' of racial differentiation. This, she says, allows problems rooted in white racism, and eliciting Black resistance, to be defined as consequence of the immigration process itself. Migration becomes seen as racialised and Black migration is restricted. Racialised migration laws and racialised conceptions of the inner city exist in reflexive relation.

[R]acialisation of residential space has, through the imagery of racial segregation, been important in legitimising political management of Britain's economic crisis. Once these broader socio-economic problems, encapsulated ... in declining inner urban areas, had been recast as socially and spatially discrete and technically ... race-related problems, they were amenable to management through a variety of short-term panaceas rather than through any more fundamental realignment of mainstream policy (Smith: 136).

Smith argues that (in the UK) racial segregation is media construction rather than lived experience. However, one might point to effects of negative equity amid economic recession in 'racialised' districts of Oldham, Bradford, Burnley and Keighley – the product of racist mortgage criteria, earlier ringfencing by estate agents and discrimination in council allocation procedures (Webster 2003: 104) – as similar to that of segregative effects of US zoning laws. However, crucially for this paper, Smith maintains that: 'Political imagery associated with the organisation of residential space has, through its role in initiating and legitimising policy change, contributed to [the essentialist construction of multiculturalism, that is] the racial categorisation [and subjugation] of groups and individuals according to who they are, where they come from, where they live, and how they act or what they are presumed to think' (*ibid*: 129). She comments (*ibid*: 137):

The racialisation of culture is not a new phenomenon, but in a decade dominated by the euphemisation of 'race' – by what Reeves (1983) terms the deracialisation of political discourse, and by the ascendancy of what Barker (1981) calls the new racism – it is playing an increasingly important part in deflecting attention away from [B]lack people's disproportionate experience of material disadvantage in Britain's economic 'new times' ... [T]he politics of racial segregation have been crucial in negotiating ... popular legitimacy of this process.

VI

London is fortunate that its C21 population is founded on displacement and migration, a plurality of minorities and diaspora; a city representative of what Jacques Derrida (in Bhabha 1996) terms 'a new internationalism', avoiding the postcolonial, post-Cold War xenophobia that 'haunts the history of the present'. Derrida demands radical disjuncture of ontology of national belonging, commending (much like Manuel Castells' dissolution of the urban) mass media as public sphere for disturbance of what he terms a 'national ontopology' ('that is, the specific binding of identity, location and locution/language that most commonly defines ... particularity of an ethnic culture').

In the event of postmodern media dislocations, historical culture or ethnic 'affiliation' must now be thought through a problematic break in the indigenous, even endogenous, link between 'the ontological value of present-being – the political subject or cultural citizen – and its situation in a stable and presentable determination of locality ... *topos of territor[ali]ty, native soil, city*'. Derrida suggests that ... displacement anterior to the imaginary of national rootedness counteracts the ontopological tendency. For the 'imagined community' of nationhood 'is rooted first of all in the memory or anxiety of a displaced – or displaceable – population' (*ibid*: 191).

Homi Bhabha turns this on its head, developing a thesis of trauma, as refugees and minorities remediate nativist ontopology, or as he states it (*ibid*: 191):

the transient intersection where ... claims to ... national culture within the ontopological tradition (the presentness of the past and stability of cultural or ethnic ontology) are touched – and are translated by – the interruptive and interrogative memory of the displaced or displaceable populations that inhabit the national imaginary – be they migrants, minorities, refugees or the colonised. At this conjuncture, the sign of 'cultural difference' or ethnic 'location' accedes to a kind of social and psychic anxiety at the heart of national-cultural identification.

This forces a retroaction, reinvention of the 'nation' yet also ethnic identity through new (and absolutist) restabilisations of 'culture' (including 'multiculture'), effecting the refunctionalising of dominance through patriarchal and biopolitical codes of being and order.

Noninstitutional white racism becomes cathexis of the epidermal (the 'terminal signifier' [Hall]), while anxiety and projective violence exhibit a paranoid schizoid mechanism; terror of the surface combining with contestation of space (fear of loss, the projected calamity). This space is a space of representation (Bhabha), and a function of conceived and entrenched privilege, not only ontological anxiety.

Bhabha (*ibid*: 192) makes an analogy between structure of anxiety and process of ontopological crisis. It is, he suggests, 'a space informed by the unconscious (... something there already)' – that is, latent, irruptive, performative. Following one of Freud's theses, he asserts that (separation) anxiety (like ontopology) is a 'cathexis of longing ... a defensive reaction to the felt loss or displacement of the object'.

The structure of anxiety participates in ... an iterative and uncanny articulation: anxiety works through an 'expectation of the trauma' and 'repetition of it in ... mitigated form' ... Anxiety keeps visible and present both the moment of nativity (or nationality) as trace and the displaced state of its objectless-

ness. In this sense, anxiety is a moment of transit or transition, where strangeness and contradiction cannot be negated, but have to be continually negotiated and 'worked through' ... Anxiety stands as a borderline; a frontier post that provides a space of representation ... strategy of reading that 'no longer concerns ... distance rendering this or that absent, and then ... *rapprochement* rendering this or that into presence'. What occurs is a laying bare of the substitutive structure itself, so that the moment of ... ontology of cultural identity comes obliquely face-to-face with the anxiety and memory of its displacement.

Other forms of trauma can be argued to be influential in spatial policy and social assertion, notably phobia (one thinks of fear of the mob that motivated Victorian highway 'improvements', and clearance of slum districts).

VII

Drives of the semiotic chora and mirror phase are deeply implicated in displacement of the object, this process of initial and traumatising loss. Julia Kristeva (1984: 182) writes:

Rejection, in its excessive renewal of scission, destroys presence and annihilates the pause; as a result, there is neither ob-ject nor sub-ject, neither ... 'contrasting' nor a 'subordinate' position, only the motility of the chora. Any ob-ject that may appear and be represented is nothing but the movement of rejection itself.

Projective aggression precedes the formation of anxiety. Coward and Ellis (ibid: 140) suggest: 'the movement that establishes the object in a position of alterity, separated from the body and therefore signifiable, is seen to be part of the pleasure principle', a pleasure derived by separation from the mother, which coincides with a loss. For Coward and Ellis (ibid: 140-141),

[t]his pleasure is the excess which is attacked by the destructive drives, aiming at equilibrium, and projected onto the outside. It is this [that] provides the model for *jouissance* ... [a] resolution of the desire or tension in the moment where the death drive emerges at the surface.

This pleasure is projected onto the displaced object. Renata Salecl (1993: 102) quotes Jacques Alain Miller: 'Hatred of the Other is hatred of the Other's enjoyment, of the particular way the Other enjoys.'

Freud argued that permanent aggressivity was essential component of libidinal economy, and Kristeva regarded expulsion as 'semiotic mode of a permanent aggressivity and the possibility of its position and therefore its renewal' (Coward and Ellis: 140), although with Freud she locates expulsion with primary narcissism and oedipus complex ('parallel to the alienation and aggression of the mirror-phase, in that symbolicity necessitates this definitive separation of the subject from the object' [ibid: 142]). Pertinent to the question of racism is her work on abjection (1982). Kristeva describes abjection ('at the crossroads of phobia, obsession, and perversion' [ibid: 45]) as precondition of narcissism (ibid: 13), 'a crisis' (ibid: 14) with sources in both primary and secondary repression, the subject, always haunted by the Other, 'repelling, rejecting; repelling itself, rejecting itself. Abjecting. This struggle fashions the human being' (ibid: 13).

Kristeva (1982: 9) argues that *jouissance*, that visceral pleasure, brings the abject forth as alienation, and described this relation in colonial terms:

It follows that *jouissance* alone causes the abject to exist as such. One does not know it, one does not desire it, one joys in it. Violently and painfully. A passion. And, as in *jouissance* where the object of desire, known as object a, bursts with the shattered mirror where the ego gives up its image in order to contemplate itself in the Other, there is nothing either objective or objectal in the abject. It is simply a frontier, a repulsive gift that the Other, having become *alter ego*, drops so that the 'I' does not disappear in it but finds, in that sublime alienation, a forfeited existence.

For Kristeva, an 'archaic economy' is brought into play as strategies of rejection and separation find a symbolic existence, and arguments, demonstrations and proofs ('the logic of the symbolic') are forced into conformity. Later, Kristeva (ibid: 45) suggests that 'the subject of abjection is eminently productive of culture. Its symptom is the rejection and reconstruction of languages'. Of the abject as scapegoat, Kristeva looks toward Oedipus Rex. She comments (ibid: 84-85):

The mainstream of tragedy lies in ambiguity; prohibition and ideal are joined to signify that the speaking being has no space of his own but stands on a fragile threshold as if stranded on account of an impossible demarcation.

And in reference to the work of Bataille, she comments: 'By means of a system of ritual exclusions, the partial object becomes a scription – an inscription of limits – an emphasis not on (paternal) law but on (maternal) Authority through the signifying order' (ibid).

VIII

Phobic anxiety is defined as response to changes in environment or 'unrecognised factors' in the environment or in the self (stirrings of the unconscious). Writing on exclusion of Gypsies, Travellers and Roma in Britain, David Sibley (1995) addresses the question of the borderline; as much limitation or taboo as comfort and security. He projects a moment where this line is thrown into doubt by the encounter with another 'state', a Kantian trauma. 'Problems arise', he asserts (ibid: 32-33),

when the separation of things into unlike categories is unattainable. The mixing of categories ... creates liminal zones or spaces of ambiguity and discontinuity ... For the individual or group socialised into believing that the separation of categories is necessary or desirable, the liminal zone is the source of anxiety. It is a zone of abjection.

Sibley (ibid: 45-46) asserts an urge to separation, at once economic as psychological, spatial and social, peculiarly evident in enclaves of white (or majority) prejudice:

The propositions of object relations theory – bounding of the self, the role of good and bad objects as stereotypical relations of others, as well as their representation as material things and places – can be projected onto the social plane. The construction of community and the bounding of social groups are a part of the same problem as the separation of self and other ... [S]ymbolic construction of boundaries in small groups ... has its counterpart in the marking off of communities in developed western societies. Consciousness of purity and defilement and intolerance of difference secure some groups within the larger spaces of the modern metropolis.

This is not to legitimate the question of 'defensible space', but rather points towards a psychological internalisation of external space, and locality manifesting as stigmata in the expression of place-based racisms.

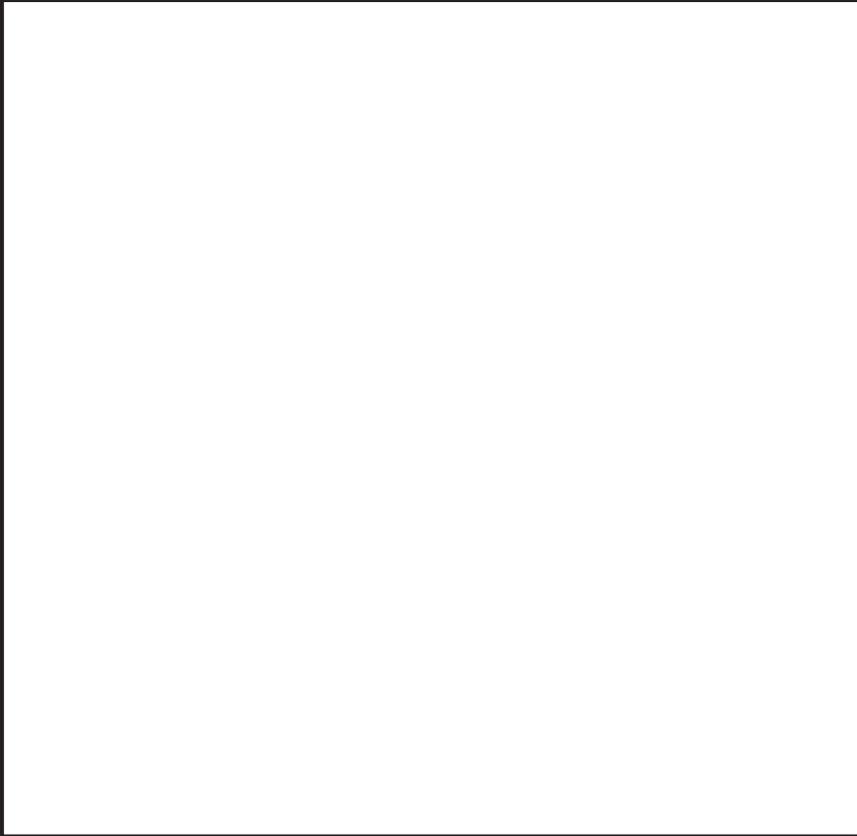
Acknowledgments

I would like to thank Martine Stead for introducing me to John Tagg's writing, and note that her work on social marketing imagery in the late 1980s spurred me on to my own interrogation of the issue. Sincere thanks are also due to my colleagues from the London Borough of Camden public relations department for their insightful observations and diligent practice on questions of imagery and state formations.

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The memorable is that which can be dreamed about a place. In this place that is a palimpsest, subjectivity is already linked to the absence that structures it as existence and makes it 'be there', Dasein. But ... this being-there acts only in spatial practices, that is, in ways of moving into something different. It must ultimately be seen as the repetition, in diverse metaphors, of a decisive and originary experience, that of the child's differentiation from the mother's body. It is through that experience that the possibility of space and of a localisation (a 'not everything') of the subject is inaugurated.

(Michel De Certeau, 'Walking in the City', 1984: 109)

Mourning through metaphor

It was the art critic Victor Burgin who first suggested it, speaking at c3 in Budapest during the summer of 1997. The internet is your mother, he told the audience. That's why people get angry when they are unable to access their email, or when the computer system crashes. It's a question of demand. I found the idea engaging, things invariably refer back to my own mother having lost her at the age of eight. But the city was my subject, space my fixation. Could the city, Budapest, stand in for my mother? And how?

This essay is an act of rectification. Most importantly, in reparation to my mother, Merriel, who I refused to visit all but once in hospital. I was only young, and I simply wanted her home, but it's too late and sadness still overwhelms me. My father blamed her death on this refusal. I also need to revisit my relationship to Budapest and an exile I hung onto for eight – formative – years.

Can the city as metaphor aid the despair of pathological mourning? And what status should be accorded to milieu in what (in the UK) gets described as 'mental illness'? In his book *The Psychotic* (Penguin, 1967) Andrew Crowcroft (after J and C Cumming) states that: 'I believe that ... the "environment itself can be the primary treatment as well as supporting or complementing other treatment".' Which suggests that a theory of space could contribute to development of an anti-psychiatry. Revising this essay in 2016, I feel that it is imperative to contest the framework of psychiatric diagnosis. The complex of symptoms that are labelled 'psychosis' and 'schizophrenia' strike me as (purely) effect of the abuse of power. Anyone seeking further clarification on this position should read continental philosophy more closely.

Back in Budapest, superficially my experience of place was peculiar to the expatriate. For the subject cut off from a linguistic context, any city becomes producer of heterogenous images; visual, tactile and acoustic sensation (aspects of the Freudian sign) are foregrounded as communication becomes foreclosed. This is (again) terrain of Julia Kristeva's marvellous construction, the semiotic chora. Combining with the thetic 'event', the chora is rupture (it irrupts); provisional articulation (rhythm); it precedes evidence, *verisimilitude*, spatiality and temporality; it gives rise to a geometry. The semiotic chora is intimately bound up with the mother, and for the infant, the mother's body mediates symbolic law organising family and social structures which constrain and arrange the drives; the mother's body becomes the chora's organising principle. Drives of the semiotic chora, with the mirror phase, are implicated in displacement of mother object, an initial process of extreme and traumatising loss. The mirror phase itself is credited with founding spatial intuition and is said to underly figuration.

As I mentioned above, cut off from language, the exile lives in ambit of chromatic saturation and intensity, vocal intonation and subtleties of ambient sounds, a generosity of social nuance. This experience of the chora is reproduced in the consumption of film, again when language is constrained, or (perhaps) the nonlinear medium of television. Beverle Houston locates this environmental acuity in emergent sexuality:

in its endless flow of text, (television) suggests the first flow of nourishment in and from the mother's body, evoking a moment when the emerging sexual drive is still closely linked to – propped on – the life and death urgency of the feeding instinct (Skirrow 1986: 123).

This flow is suggestive of an abundance, inexhaustible supply. Or alternatively, an absence of gratification. Burgin (1996: 69) observes:

In so far as the somatic experience of satisfaction survives, it does so as a constellation of visual, tactile, kinaesthetic, auditory and olfactory memory-traces ... This is to say that there has been ... metonymical displacement from 'milk' to 'breast' and ... metaphorical shift from 'ingestion' to 'incorporation',

and he quotes Jean Laplanche (ibid):

With the passage to incorporation, suddenly something new emerges: the permutability of the aim; we pass from 'ingest' not to 'incorporate' but to the couple 'incorporate/be-incorporated' ... in this movement of metaphorisation of the aim, the subject (the carrier of the action) suddenly ... loses its place: is it on the side this time of that which eats, or of that which is eaten?

The subject sexualised is, quite literally, consumed by social space.

In the Fort/Da game recounted by Freud, Little Hans projected his dependency on his mother and acquired the symbol. Introjection–expulsion–projection, the triad describes a work of mourning in process. The city became my mother, in this second scenario, lack projected (expelled) onto the city as Other; a figure of release. Strangely, for something so very distressing, Rosalind Coward and John Ellis describe this separation from the mother as a 'production of pleasure' (1977: 140, 142), and implicate the process of symbolisation in construction of desire:

Thus it is the movement of projection which gives the outside (the Other) the possibility of holding signification and therefore raises the subject from maternal dependency: 'this expenditure poses an object separated from the body itself, and at the very moment of separation fixes it as absent: as sign' (Kristeva). The child invests in the symbol, the 'stand-in' for the object in order to be able to

demand the return of the mother. We have seen here how this produces desire, which is the sense of something amiss producing the continuous metonymic movement of the subject towards an object, impossibly designated with the task of satisfying that lack.

Lacan proposes that the game represents Little Hans' entry into language as a differential system. Desire is an interesting word, unsatisfied longing, a yearning for unity. And the impossibility of such a project. As Burgin notes: 'narrative investments come to fill in the intervening spaces between actually observed images' (ibid: 232). Such was my relation with Budapest, although not in a way that you might expect.

Budapest for me was above all soothing – of terrors of poverty as much as labours of despair – and the fabric of the city, in a state of chronic disrepair, exuded a subtle empathy. There was, perhaps, a sense of something indistinct but uplifting – of hope – that I attached to my environment. At the beginning of his book *Civilisation and its Discontents*, Freud attributes such a feeling (which he describes as origin of a religious attitude – consolation, or an appeal to the Father) to a residue of infantile helplessness, a 'way of disclaiming the danger which the ego recognises as threatening it from the external world'. Perhaps an approach to the sublime in the absence of God. Departing Budapest in 2002, I felt that I had regained my good health, that is, that I had completed my mourning.

Reflection, a space in between

The mirror discloses the relationship between me and myself, my body and the consciousness of my body – not because the reflection constitutes my unity qua subject ... but because it transforms what I am into the sign of what I am. This ice-smooth barrier, itself merely an inert sheen, reproduces and displays what I am – in a word signifies what I am – within an imaginary sphere which is quite yet real. A process of abstraction then – but a fascinating abstraction. In order to know myself, I 'separate myself out from myself'.

(Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, 1991: 185)

Trauma makes one acutely aware of the fragilities of memory. Intensive recollections of my mother, intact until just before I left Hungary, now exist merely as tiny, distorting fragments. I have lost her once again.

My mother was beautiful, articulate and elegant, a talented actress, Freudian, an artist, supporter of black civil rights and also the Baader-Meinhof group ('They are formal like myself', she said). There was the time we were chased by cows on Callows Hill and she lost her Scholl sandal. Her desire to train for social work, her defence of me at school, and the time I rejected her in the playground because she brought in my recorder. A photo of myself, mouth uncertain and in a short dress, thighs distorted by camera angle so that I look as if I suffer from rickets, reminds me of her shrill laughter as the shutter clicks.

I remember her rage at me chancing upon her preoccupied, her later 'depression', and the neighbours who cut her off for obtruse reasons. On the occasion that I did visit her in hospital, her last words to me (in a moment of high and voluble theatrics) were 'We do not conform!'

She bought a dark olive woollen suit for a trip to Vienna with my father, and she was wearing this when she left that last time. She did not say goodbye but framed herself as image in the driveway in front of the car. A history here, and tragedy: her own mother departed in a similar fashion, ostensibly to marry another man, and never returned. Only years later did she 'learn' of her own mother's death (from her aunt). This has no trace in government records. What became of her father after their divorce she never knew. Letters in family archives are (to me) very perplexing.

For any child, recognition of absence is a pivotal moment. Jacques Lacan's mirror phase revolves around such an event, and with the loss of a parent, there is a sense that one is trapped within this enclosure, forever resolving this in more heightened form than those who have not lost their primal, significant other. Lack, gap, splitting is a mode of being, foregrounded:

[The child's] recognition of lack signals an ontological rift with nature or the Real. This gap will propel it into seeking an identificatory image of its own stability and permanence (the imaginary), and eventually language (the symbolic) by which it hopes to fill the lack. The child loses the 'pure plenitude' of the Real and is now constituted within the Imaginary ([that is] the order of images, representations, doubles and others) in its specular identifications (Grosz 1990: 35).

Visual space is critical to this process, Lacan's conception is brutally perceptual, the body is positioned as nodal point in a spatial field. Through the mirror phase, the child becomes capable of separating itself from the outside world, distinguishing inside from outside, subject from object, and self from other; processes that can become disrupted. Grosz (ibid: 40) comments 'Lacan posits a divided vacillating attitude that is incapable of final resolution ... the [mirror] image both is and is not an image of itself.' Crucially,

[t]he subject, to be a subject at all, internalises otherness as its condition of possibility. [Ego] is thus radically split, unconscious of the process of its own production, divided by lack and rupture (ibid: 43).

The mirror phase is a 'dialectic between alienation and identification' (Burgin ibid: 49), 'a stadium in which the battle of the human subject is permanently being waged' (ibid: 257), and 'symbolises the mental permanence of the I' (Lacan 1977/2001: 3).¹ Here, 'I' represents a parallel, internalised, 'other'; such a decentering one can build on. Lacan's explication of the mirror phase dwells on function. Even for those that can resolve the mirror phase, it **manufactures for the subject, caught up in the lure of spatial identification, the succession of phantasies that extends from a fragmented body-image to a form of its totality that I shall call orthopaedic – and lastly to the assumption of the armour of an alienating identity, which will mark with its rigid structure the subject's entire mental development. Thus to break out of the circle of the *Innere Welt* into the *Umwelt* generates the inexhaustible quadrature of the ego's verifications** (ibid: 5).

I am particularly taken with the idea that, even for ordinary mortals, the mirror 'situates the agency of the ego ... in a fictional direction' (ibid: 2–3), that is, toward a misrecognition.

The space of the mirror itself, a space analogous to the process of memory, I dedicate to my mother, a third spatiality peculiar to the narcissist that late capitalism has enjoined us all to become.

Henri Lefebvre (ibid: 186) suggests that the mirror presents 'the most disjunctive relationship between form and content', that here bodies are 'transitional', that 'the mirror introduces a truly dual spatiality [into social space]: a space which is imaginary with respect to origin and separation, but also concrete and practical with respect to coexistence and differentiation'. And he invokes an anti-mirror effect (with reference to the Surrealists). Yet the mirror remains just that, for the moment, a refractory alienation.

The mirror is a surface at once pure and impure, almost material yet virtually unreal; it presents the Ego with its own material presence, calling up its counterpart, its absence from – at the same time its inherence in – this other space ... 'other' merely represents 'Ego' as an inverted image in which left appears at the right, as a reflection which yet generates an extreme difference, as a repetition ... Here what is identical is at the same time radically other, radically different – and transparency is equivalent to opacity (ibid: 184–185).

1. Lefebvre (1991) is at some pains to point out variance in their respective theories. In a footnote on page 185, he states: 'For Lacan, the mirror helps to counteract the tendency of language to break up the body into pieces, but it freezes the Ego into a rigid form rather than leading it towards a transcendence in and through a space which is at once practical and symbolic (imaginary).'

Maurice Merleau-Ponty (1962/1958) demonstrates another principle of the mirror with an experiment by the psychologist Wertheimer who sought to prove that the visual field can impose an orientation which is not that of the body. He held a mirror at 45 degrees to the vertical of the experimental subject, who reported a slantwise distortion which righted itself after a few minutes. In an accurate description of virtual reality, Merleau-Ponty (ibid: 291–293) concludes:

After a few minutes, provided that he does not strengthen his initial anchorage by glancing away from the mirror, the reflected room miraculously calls up a subject capable of living in it. The virtual body ousts the real one to such an extent that the subject no longer has the feeling of being in the world where he actually is, that instead of his real legs and arms, he feels that he has the legs and arms he would need to walk and act in the reflected room: he inhabits the spectacle ... The perceptual field corrects itself and at the conclusion of the experiment I identify it without any concept because I live in it, because I am borne wholly into the new spectacle and so to speak, transfer my centre of gravity into it.

For the subject, 'even if he has his eyes shut', the mirror becomes a 'possible habitat' (ibid).

Guy Debord and his associates, as everybody knows, critiqued the spectacle – 'social relation among people, mediated by images' – for itself. The plagiarist technique is subtle in its cunning. Merleau-Ponty states earlier (ibid: 114) that the spatiality of the body is a spatiality of situations.

The Malevich Manoeuvres

In 1997, a scandal erupted on the internet mailing list Nettime. Alexander Brener, a Russian performance artist, had just defaced a picture by K S Malevich in the Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam, and had been arrested. Miran Mohar described the damage as 'an act of consistent artistic ... expression', and continued:

Only contemporary art [has created] a value system and language of integral individuality, first spread throughout European culture regardless of political and social borders. During the Cold War, this first autonomous and independent language of early avantgarde art became the official value system of Western democracies ... one of the most sophisticated ideologies [that] ever existed. The end of [the C]old [W]ar brought out many unresolved questions and conflicts of the past. Among other things, it raised the question of the historical roots of Western economic supremacy, which play a major role in adding market value to ... symbolic values of global civilisation.

The picture defaced was Suprematism 1922–1927, a white cross on white background. Brener had painted a green dollar sign across the cruciform and spent several months in a Dutch prison, receiving a fine of 15,000 guilders. Poor man. My own sensibility rushed to Malevich's defence. His black square on white background (Black Square, 1915) had long captured my imagination: pure feeling, absolute zero, space itself (the Hungarian word 'tér' means both square and space, 'the square gives and receives space' [Rebay 1982]); 'an icon in geometry and nihilist statement. Alternatively: '[s]pirit begins where materialism [ceases]' (ibid: 145).

Feeling is the determining factor ... and thus art arrives at nonobjective representation – at Suprematism. It reaches a 'desert' in which nothing can be perceived but feeling ... And so there the new nonobjective art stands – the expression of pure feeling, seeking no practical values, no ideas, no 'promised land' (Malevich 1968b: 341–344).

The Malevich Manoeuvres grew out of this action, a photo scenario for the internet design company I was in the process of leaving. The photographic series (taken by art photographer HK) set out to interrogate surface of the city in its animating principle, a search for a luminous geometry refracted by its infrastructure. Lefebvre's illusion of transparency, an innocence of space, accentuated with techniques of the extended moment. Aesthetically, the series referenced angular cinematography of Robert Krasker (The Third Man), played out among Budapest's more subtle landmarks: the Gozsdu udvar (a series of six interlocking courtyards, then in ruins), the city fairground, interior of the Basilica, and Szabadság híd (an ironwork bridge, linking two of the main arteries of Buda and Pest). For one shot we also used my flat. A central protagonist, in confrontation with the Absolute, grounded the filmic sequence, populated with extras from the company, a young model, and willing flatmates. The new firm was to be named after an opening gambit in chess. The square/space conjuncture, what could be more apposite? 'You'll find yourself chasing light,' warned HK. But light found us, in spectacular ways.

For Merleau-Ponty, zero point in any space is the subject immersed in that space (I live in it from the inside; I inhabit it), moving through space, or perhaps in this scenario, the camera tracing the actor. Space then takes on aspect of a topology. HK and I made two startling discoveries. A flickering moment in the Gozsdu udvar when light inverts, when all that is bright turns to shadow and vice versa, a distinct sensation in the enclosure of the stark, square, deserted archways. And a light/space conjuncture of the spring equinox in the Basilica, where a shaft of sunlight hit the centre of the nave cross. Divine truth (resurrection) harnessed to morality of urban bourgeoisie. And this when M, director of the firm, gamely playing leading role in the drama, was kneeling upright, illicitly and in mortal fear, in the middle of the main aisle facing the altar. The symbol ignites in such circumstances, foregrounded.

Light for Malevich was means to fragmentation – the body-in-bits-and-pieces – 'decomposition in pictorial space' (Markus undated: 4). Witness his set and lighting effects for the 1913 opera Victory Over the Sun. The black square featured as backdrop of the final scene (and also at Malevich's state funeral in 1935). Malevich claimed Victory Over the Sun as the 'birth' of Suprematism.

[L]ight was used to express the new Futurist language of 'Zaum', which means 'beyond-mind'. Kruchenykh described 'Zaum' as 'chopped up words, half words and their whimsical intricate combination'. Malevich aimed to achieve the same fragmentation by breaking ... forms and the space with effects of light: ... set and costumes were painted as if they were made of many geometrical parts, each in another shape and colour. Thus, every time an identical colour of the set and ... costume clashed, that part of the body disintegrated into the set and disappeared. By using spotlights [the artist] could reveal only small parts of the body or the set, and by alternating coloured filters on the projectors he could change the colours of costumes and set components, or even blacken some – by a combination of adding or subtracting colours (ibid).

There is a sense that our photo series, by highlighting the city's refractions, captured a process of continual spatial decomposition as the sun's position shifted. Later pictures by the artist, colours often far richer than black and a riot of fractured geometry, depict the moments before zero was reached.

Suprematism was resolutely urban. Malevich depreciated the romantic tendency in Russian figurative painting as provincial. He ascribed a leading role to what he termed the 'super-conscious' mind in transforming elements of the city, and credited architecture as 'static Suprematism'. In 1921, Malevich announced to INKhUK 'I want to recreate the world according to a nonobjective system', and he devoted his time to producing *planity* or *arkhitektorny*, 'accretions of rectangular forms' representing buildings and housing settlements. His use of the construction 'nonobjective' rather than 'abstract' is interesting, suggesting an engagement with mental space ('the topological space of thoughts and utterances' [Lefebvre]), or as with 'Zaum', a beyond-mind, as opposed to geometric form *per se*. That is, unbuildable, but not yet deconstruction.

[A]scent to the heights of nonobjective art is arduous and painful ... but ... nevertheless rewarding. The familiar recedes ever further and further into the background ... [C]ontours of the objective world fade more and more and so it goes, step by step, until finally the world – everything we loved and by which we have lived' – becomes lost to sight (Malevich ibid: 342).

Zero point for Lefebvre, after Barthes, is the 'neutralisation and disappearance of symbols' (Lefebvre 1984: 184). Here, another Malevich painting comes into view, White on White, a picture El Lissitzky regarded as the last image, making architecture the next logical step, 'the next thing that needed to be cycled down' (Aiello 2005: 3.12), along with the picture that Brener defaced, Suprematism 1922–1927. Lefebvre (ibid) has a different conception of zero point to Merleau-Ponty, one that does not involve a topology:

Zero point is a neutral state (not an act or situation) characterised by a pseudo-presence, that of a simple witness, and therefore of a pseudo-absence ... Zero point is a transparency interrupting communication and relationships just at the moment when everything seems communicable because everything seems both rational and real and then there is nothing to communicate.

For Brenner: in fluxions of the market place, zero was redefined. Miran Mohar laid down this challenge: did Brenner's action negate the picture's monetary value or enhance it?

Loss : lost

'Mother': 'like the cry which makes silence come into view as silence' (Tavor Bannet 1989: 28), 'the signifier already considers the subject as dead' (Lacan *ibid*). Is it at the moment when we are nothing that we become human? Suicide was never far from my mother's mind and she died, according to a press cutting found in my father's files, near the grounds of an asylum, just before Christmas 1972. I was not taken to the funeral. Text of the press cutting is brutal and I have to confess that the detail is not (in my own mind) my mother's way of dying. A certificate that confirms her death from Aylesbury county registry office has been (very deliberately) mistyped. There is no tombstone. The churchyard where my father said she was buried has several unmarked graves, deceased unrecorded in parish archives. Who knows? Perhaps she lives. As you might expect, this discovery has caused chaos.

Life is a stubborn detour, in itself transitory, decaying, lacking all meaning. This life of which we are captive, a life which is essentially alienated, ex-sisting, life in the other, is as such conjoined to death. It always returns to death, and is drawn into larger and more circuitous detours (Lacan in Tavor Bannet: 37).

For Lacan (*ibid*: 36), 'the nonexistence of the subject always accompanies the living ego, giving life and ego their form and value'. Such a loss is uncommunicable, even without the question mark. One cannot talk to the bereaved because they suffer from closures of their own distress, which states its magnitude. The nonbereaved hold loss in contempt, as self-indulgent. Medics focus on symptoms alone. The upshot is that, outside of therapy, one is never allowed to speak. A situation that shows no sign of diminishing. Mourning, therefore, can be something that is latent rather than worked through, possibly taking decades, and can demand a loneliness, extended solitude. The present resignifying – in my own case, often through the body – an unsymbolised past (deferred action, *après coup* [Bleichmar et al undated]).

With the death of anyone close, one needs to mourn or one is lost. Heidegger talks of a clearing (*Lichtung*) which both 'limits and opens up what can show up and what can be done', an absence of metaphysics (Dreyfus undated). My contention is that a self-imposed 'exile' – 'a process rather than a singular state' (Kaminsky in Allatson and McCormack 2005), 'freedom of disconnection and the pleasures of interstitial subjectivity' (Kaplan *ibid*), or conversely, a waiting-to-die – can enable such a space. To deny a human being their own interior solitude is an act of violence. To deny contact and warmth of genuine relationships with those they love is simply tyranny.

For Melanie Klein, 'healthy' mourning, '[t]he pining for a lost loved object implies dependence on it, but dependence of a kind which becomes an incentive to reparation ... It is creative because it is dominated by love' (Crowcroft 1967: 96), yet Lacan regards creativity as something alien to the individual. 'Creation remains the act of others and ... like the symbolic order itself always belongs to the other' (Tavor Bannet *ibid*: 41). With mourning blocked for myself as a child, any reparative drawings bordered on the obsessional, images repeated over and over again: a timbered house from comic Whizzer and Chips (killed off decisively on an art course, age 15); neofunctionalist suburbs planned with wavy roads. My father lived in such an enclave until he moved into a care home. Also, bereaved children often dive into reading.

How to sublimate a block? Repetition and mimesis, quotation. Photography as trace is useful. One needs to learn to transform the copy, to apply pre-existent form to new circumstance: one principle of the plagiarist aesthetic. It remains a critical experiment, and very hard work. The path to 'autonomous' expression – exploration of the mother's body – is as closed as society until something breaks. One needs to find 'circuitous detours' to fend off annihilation.

The poetic encounter with urban space, notably in the technique of drift or *dérive*, promoted by Dada, Lettriste Internationale and Situationists, and (I would argue) derived from 'schizophrenia', is one such deviation. The drift parallels that of free association and work of the Freudian analyst in a psychoanalytical session, rather than spoken traumas of the analysand. Ability to move in space is critical. In my mother's day, access to the outside of a hospital ward was punitive grace, patients threatened with medication if they needed fresh air. But we need to walk. Space begins with the body and motion – one might very well assert that good health begins with space – not in a determinist or behaviourist configuration, but in the sense that diversity of spatial enclosures or exposure, of scales, textures (and so on) is invigorating and enhances curiosity. Aldo van Eyck's Amsterdam Children's Home (1958–1960) is paradigmatic instance of a curious space; built on a cybernetic or recursive principle, the building exerted significant influence on placemaking in the 1960s.

To walk, to drift, is to lack a place. It produces nowhere (De Certeau *ibid*: 103):

It is the indefinite process of being absent and in search of a proper. The moving about that the city multiplies and concentrates makes the city itself an immense social experience of lacking a place – an experience, that is ... broken up into countless tiny deportations (displacements and walks), compensated for by ... relationships and intersections of these exoduses that intertwine and create an urban fabric ... placed under the sign of what ought to be ... the place but is only a name, the City.

Drifting creates 'dislocated metonymic structures whose meaning cannot be pinned down' (Emig 1995: 82), and away from comforts of linearity, it 'eludes legibility', 'it remains daily and indefinitely other' (De Certeau *ibid*: 93). 'To practice space is thus to repeat the joyful and silent experience of childhood; it is, in a place, to be other and to move towards the other' (*ibid*: 109).

There is also the question of the ability to modify space. Marx suggested this was necessary to our humanity, but ways open to the ordinary mortal – flyposting ('new and changeable decors' [Chtcheglov 1953]), graffiti ('the wandering semantic' [De Certeau]) are limited and, it has to be said, illegal in the UK. Arrest is the last thing anybody needs. In the absence of decriminalisation, art therapy might be extended to cover urban interventions. However, I feel that any institutional context can be unhelpful. We need a private resolution to our grief, and the liberty of aleatory expression needs to be asserted.

Any 'social existence' aspiring or claiming to be 'real', but failing to produce its own space, would be a strange entity, a very peculiar kind of abstraction unable to escape from the ideological or even the 'cultural' realm (Lefebvre 1991: 53).

Lefebvre is right. Spaces of trauma are imposed from within, created for us (a violent reification), or rely on interpretations of others. One thinks of heterotopias of psychosis, neon intensities of the material world or, *lupus in fabula*, 'the glass cabinet of the present tense' (Pilinsky 1992: 112). Traumatized persons are imprisoned by both ideology and culture. Our space and time are the postmodern, but both have been hijacked so often that we are in danger of being occluded in any discussion. Certainly, David Harvey relegates 'schizophrenia' to murderous tendency while bleeding Frederic Jameson's more insightful observations.

Key to the drift is the imperative of getting lost. London's Barbican complex taken in the right frame of mind, is exemplar for the psychogeographer. *The Image of the City*, Kevin Lynch's 1959 report on urban legibility, highlights a series of elements which work to bemuse the pedestrian. Respondents reported that interruptions in spatial continuity threw them off their direction. 'The sudden and particularly indiscernible shift of one grid system to another grid system or ... non-grid was very confusing' (1959: 62). Other misanthropic aspects (misalignment) identified by Lynch and his colleagues (notably Hungarian emigre Gyorgy Kepes, along with William and Mary Ellen Alonso) included subtle misleading curves (*ibid*: 56), sharp separation of path from surrounding elements (*ibid*), undergrounding/disconnection (*ibid*: 57), paths lacking identity (interchangability), paths branching, confused intersections (entering from multiple angles – four points plus; *ibid*: 58), and one way streets (*ibid*: 60).

Acknowledgments

My sincere thanks to HK the photographer plus all staff and management of iSYS Hungary. Also for the solidarity implied (but not necessarily intended) of my mother's name appearing in the company's dial-up validation script. Names have been removed temporarily. Insight on the relation between virtual reality and the thinking of Merleau-Ponty should be credited to Marina Grzinic.

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Proposition 1. Technology and rationalisation destroy the Idea of the survival of humanity from within¹

'The past represents its future, it advances in a straight line ... yet it ends by coming full circle.' Alpha 60, artefact at the heart of Jean-Luc Godard's 1965 dystopic masterpiece, *Alphaville*, holds the key to postmodern science fiction, 'a desperate rehallucination of the past',² combined with terror of the hyperreal. The cybernetic model mediated through traces of the everyday, immanent tyranny haunted by Auschwitz. Here, map engenders the territory, artefact the will to truth/power. In *Alphaville*, Alpha 60 defines parameters of life, work, speech, thought and war. More about 'him' later on.

In his essay 'Simulacra and science fiction', philosopher Jean Baudrillard (1994: 124) suggests that post-modern science fiction would put

decentred situations, models of simulation in place and ... contrive to give them the feeling of the real, of the banal, of lived experience, to reinvent the real as fiction, precisely because it has disappeared from our life. Hallucination of the real ... but reconstituted, sometimes down to disquietingly strange details ... brought to light with a transparent precision, but without substance, derealised in advance, hyperrealised.

Godard deploys the bureaucratic cityscape of La Defense (Paris) as framing device, with suburban *banlieues* and orbital motorways accentuating the banal, shot in expressionist darkness, windows of apartment blocks with bright lights gleaming. Corporate minimalism in the city centre is attenuated with kinetic neon. Tafuri and Dal Co (1976) argue that there is a fundamental ambiguity in the scale of such bureaucratic architecture, an 'artificial absolute' in the purism, heightened by a randomness and lack of overall purpose in these symbols of efficiency and organisation. Other commentators point to corporate architecture's impersonality, to a nonplace of super-modernity. However, I would argue that it is the understatement, the rationality and repression of certain spaces that Godard utilises, that maximises the film's strategic effect. That is, the 'human resonance'. Here, I'm thinking of the corridor and (in particular) transitional space of the lobby. But perhaps the word 'humanity' is no longer on Alpha 60's list.

Structuralist linguistics has it that there is no escape from language, and it is worth considering Godard's painstaking construction of this semantic dictatorship and its resistance.

Neon signage in the film foregrounds a semiotics of constraint, a complex based on the arrow and circle. At face value, the arrow could be taken as signifier of technocratic direction. Its symbolic associations include a phallicism and intriguingly, light of supreme power (Cirlot 1962: 20). The phallus is a subtle theme in *Alphaville*, pivoting around main female character Natasha Vonbraun (Anna Karina). The circle implies limitation, precision and regularity, and as Alpha 60 dictates, has connotations of time. ('Time is like a circle, which is endlessly described. The declining arc is the past. The inclining arc is the future.') The time of *Alphaville* is the continuous present ('The present is the form of all life' grates Alpha 60; 'The present is all one can know in life' says Natasha Vonbraun), implying a schizophrenic logic at work in structures of the city.

Godard situates the film in a formalist genre, placing acute prominence to the grace of Raoul Coutard's cinematography. Chris Darke (2005) traces arcs and linear camera movements throughout the film as components of *mise-en-scène*. Circular arcs interplay with scenography (architecture) and dialogue, most notably in scenes at the Institute of General Semantics, where Lemmy Caution (Eddie Constantine) disguised as Ivan Johnson, a jaded intergalactic agent in pale mac and worn countenance, attends a lecture by Alpha 60. Darke (ibid: 66) identifies a process of spatial dislocation as three-dimensional space is transformed into two-dimensional representation.

The IGS is pivotal within the film. This is alluded to by a gliding curve of the camera as Caution ascends (a most beautiful) curvilinear staircase in the lobby. It is here that the audience is confronted with its status as voyeur (Mulvey's 'invisible guest', a moment of Metz's 'pure *voyance*'), caught in puzzled interest, and complicit with pervasive surveillant gaze. The title of the institute is perhaps no idle choice. The reference here might be to a US school of linguistics which believed that study of communication processes could influence resolution of conflict – at an individual, local and international level (Leech 1981: pxi). Inference in the film, however, appears to be towards what has been termed 'conceptual engineering' in the former Soviet bloc. This is underlined by Godard's appropriation of photography by another auteur (Chris Marker) used in the opening credit sequence, of peace murals in East Berlin, one portraying a dove of peace, the other a tank (Darke ibid: 85). Such imagery obscures use of fifth columnists to subvert the Lands Without (the region Caution hails from and *Alphaville* is ranged against). Alpha 60 attempts to hire Caution for such a trick.

Hierarchy is counterposed to individuality. *Alphaville* citizens intone a standard, circular, greeting ('I'm very well. Thank you. You're welcome') – a phatic variation on status (phatic communion [Malinowski] ensures social cohesion) – while Godard deploys variations on singularity in Caution's battle against the machine. Incompatibility ('Increasingly I see the human form ... as lovers' dialogue. The heart has but one mouth') and subvention of what

1. Delineation of the Inhuman (a homology developed by Jean-Francois Lyotard) is taken from Williams 2000: 126-132.

2. Jean Baudrillard (1994) on Philip K Dick's *Simulacra*.

semanticists call 'two-value orientation' are prominent in fragments of poetry, and ranged against Alpha 60. ('Our silences, our words ... Light that goes ... light that returns. A single smile between us both. In quest of knowledge, I watched night create day ... Everything ordered by chance.') Both conventions constitute semantic deviance. In the city of Alphaville, transgression (semantic creativity) is a systemic contradiction. It is thus processed and harmonised by Alpha 60 to enhance system performance. The Dictionary (Bible of Alphaville's morality) pays lip service to the openendedness of language by deleting words and phrases (Natasha mourns the passing of 'Redbreast, weeping, Save those who weep ... autumn light ... Tenderness ... tenderness too, Mister Johnson'); and the creation of new words. One feels that political concepts and scientific jargon replace feeling in this dictatorship; poets and lovers are executed, thus '[r]educing the universe to order in new and improved ways' (Leech *ibid*: 32).

Proposition 2. A reserve beyond reason or technology

When you are tender you speak your plural.

(Roland Barthes, *A Lovers' Discourse*, 1978: 225)

Subject versus Object. Sender versus Receiver. Helper versus Opponent. Godard explodes such structural polarities by giving us characters that are bleak, ciphers for the inhuman, and foregrounds the relational connective as independent entity. Love opposes Caution to Natasha, the silence of infinite space opposes the Lands Without to Alphaville, and poetry opposes Natasha to Alpha 60. All three connectives function as reserve. To the author this hints that Alphaville could actually be an anti-structuralist work.

To love is to lose. To Barthes, it is a condition defined by absence of the other, expressed in a language of solitude. Caution drags Natasha towards despair, anxiety, nausea, rage and jealousy, defined by the title of the book he takes from his dying colleague, Henry Dickson (Akim Tamiroff), Paul Eluard's *Capitale de la Douleur* (Capital of Pain). Natasha is scarcely prepared for such an encounter. Yet Caution proffers no emotion towards Natasha and at the end of the film he makes a masculine demand for (empty) words of affection without return, an 'impossible demand for unity'.

Once the first avowal has been made, the phrase 'I love you' has no meaning whatever; it merely repeats in an enigmatic mode – so blank does it appear – the old message ... I repeat it exclusive of any pertinence; it comes out of ... language, it divagates – where? I could not decompose the expression without laughing (Barthes: 147).

Blankness, straying, laughter. Later Barthes quotes Lacan: the phrase evokes "[a limit situation] where the subject is suspended in a specular relation to the other". Natasha becomes trapped within a mirror of Caution's unreasonable demands. Barthes speaks too of the 'sentiment of absence and withdrawal' – a profound irreality or dislocation – experienced by the amorous subject in social situations, similar perhaps to irreality of postmodern science fiction. Remarkably, one does not laugh at the ending of the film. Karina carries her declaration off, and still the statement retains its ambiguity.

Caution's response to Alpha 60's question 'What did you feel as you passed through galactic space?' is from baroque philosopher Blaise Pascal (Darke *ibid*: 65). Caution replies: 'The silence of infinite space appalled me.' One might well fear finitude more. Alphaville operates on a closed construct. 'Time has run out, the reign of finitude is upon us', Henri Lefebvre grumbles of post-Hegelian philosophers and the moderns. Lefebvre (1991: 181) asserts the active nature, the violence of space (no longer simply a medium), and defers to Nietzsche: "Infinity is the original fact; what has to be explained is the source of the finite ... In infinite time and in infinite space there are no terminal points." Here thought is overcome by a kind of vertigo. Yet, [Nietzsche] adds, "though it has nothing to hold on to, humanity must somehow stand upright – therein lies the immense task of the artist".

In Alphaville, one might say that the limits are themselves the stakes. The Lands Without are the 'not-there' of the plot, but also the hinge on which plot hangs (defining absence). Alphaville is destroyed to protect the freer worlds. Little is known about the Lands Without (a place with 'splendid galactic corridors' as Caution's guidebook relates), except that their government sent a secret agent to assassinate or bring home Professor Vonbraun (Howard Vernon), aka Leonard Nosferatu, Natasha's father and, once, technical engineer for Alpha 60. It appears well known in Alphaville technocratic circles that Nosferatu (reference to Murnau's vampire is obvious) is *persona non grata* in the Lands Without (he was banished in 1964); Nosferatu has simply ceased to exist. The Lands Without are mediated through tourist catchphrases: Tokyorama, the land of the rising sun; Florence, where the sky is as blue as the south seas; Nueva York, probes Caution (which brings forth Natasha's trite rhyme: 'Where the winter, Broadway, a glitter in a snow fur coat'). Pretty then, but hardly a libertarian paradise. Such issues are glossed over in the film. The ending is portrayed, somewhat ironically, as an escape.

Caution too functions as reserve beyond reason or technology. A masculine proairetic powers the narrative, all focus is on Caution as man of action. Caution himself, with studied blankness of Constantine's technique, functions mostly as sign (obscure for a UK audience) of the anti-hero of Peter Cheyney's novels, and (after 1952) seven other Lemmy Caution films hugely popular in France (Darke *ibid*: 19). In these, Constantine plays Caution as a French-speaking FBI agent. Professor Vonbraun addresses potentiality of the sign directly when he turns to Caution and tells him 'You will become worse than dead. You will become a legend.' Caution replies in typical 'hard-boiled' fashion, 'Yes, I'm afraid of death ... but for a humble secret agent that's a fact of life, like whisky.' He then shoots Professor Vonbraun, precipitating the collapse of Alphaville.

In Alphaville, Constantine's persona was less 'pulverised' than 'purified', reduced to its essence. Godard referred to Constantine more than once as being like a 'block', and all the extraneous pediments attached to Lemmy Caution – the whisky, dollybirds, and punch-ups – are either stripped away or thoroughly remodelled by the director (*ibid*: 20).

Violence is either 'dispensed in "homeopathic doses"' (*ibid*: 20) or avoided. There is a strong sense of self-parody in Constantine's approach to the role, and Godard makes play with grammatical ease. Caution's conversation with Dickson mentions Flash Gordon and Dick Tracy (Guy Leclair in France). He outwits Alpha 60 with Pascal, Bergson, and via Natasha, prolific deployment of (what Darke claims as) lines by Eluard (from more than one source). Darke suggests this is all reminiscent of Pop Art ('Reporter and Revenger both begin with a[n] "R"! Tell your boss!' Caution shouts as he pursues the professor down a labyrinthine corridor). Godard draws on techniques of Surrealism (including films of Cocteau), *film noir* and German expressionism, constructivism (Eisenstein's *bandes dessinées*), baroque philosophy, pulp novels (Caution is reading Chandler's *The Big Sleep* as he shoots a pin-up through the nipples), alongside Greek mythology (*ibid*: 52) and formalist literature. The mythic reference is to Orpheus, who rescued Eurydice from the Underworld, only to have her snatched from under his nose because she looked back. Caution actually tells Natasha 'Don't look back!' as they drive towards intersidereal space. Darke notes that for Godard, Cocteau was the director who defined cinema as 'the only art which "films death at work"' (*ibid*: 95). Darke explains that Alphaville killed Lemmy Caution off. Eddie Constantine made only one more appearance as the jaded spy: in Godard's *Allemagne 90 Neuf Zero* (1991) (*ibid*: 22).

Proposition 3. Relation to affect and order through a form that makes both possible

There is a tension between Caution and Natasha which is barely resolved by the time of their escape from the city, and their relationship is marked by mutual incomprehension. Caution has a sexist aggression ('Aren't you ever propositioned?' he asks her, 'Has no-one ever fallen in love with you?' 'You don't want me to flirt with you?' – in disbelief). At one point, leaving the hotel with Natasha, he pushes her against the wall, ('Just how big a fool do you take me for? Answer me!'), complaining, as if he had known her for some time, 'Check, Princess! I can't make head or tail of what you're talking about. That's how it is. You never understand anything.' Natasha seems to make him uneasy. He compares her to a 'pretty sphinx', and notes her 'small pointed teeth', reminding him 'of an old vampire film ... the sort they used to show at cinema museums'. Natasha meets him with a formal reserve

tempered by ingenuitous eyes. In a Greimasian structuralism, Natasha would also function as the false helper. When she returns, she is on a mission to betray him, yet he declares his love and hands her *Capitale de la Douleur*, codebook to Alphaville's opposition, hoping that she will provide a clue. It seems Lemmy himself cannot decipher it, and assumes that it holds secret messages.

Natasha's betrayal of Caution is an incongruous event in the film, yet delivered with impeccable comic timing. The city's secret police arrest Caution, and order Natasha to disable him with Story 842.

Natasha: One day a tiny man entered a North Zone café ... and ordered a cup of very hot, sweet coffee ... adding 'I shan't pay, because I am afraid of no-one.' He drank his coffee. He left. He didn't pay for his coffee. For the sake of peace, the cafe owner said nothing. But when the tiny man repeated the trick three times ... the cafe owner decided to get a tough to sort him out. So, on the fourth day ... when the tiny man called for his cup of coffee ... the tough lumbered up to him and said: 'So you're afraid of no-one?' 'That's right.' 'Well neither am I.' 'Make that two cups of coffee', called the man. [Caution begins laughing hysterically].

In psychoanalytical terms, one might hazard that this betrayal is acceptance of lack (that is, lack of a phallus), yet Natasha is a phallic symbol. Indeed, were we in any doubt, she has the sign of the phallus emblazoned on her coat in white fur that circles the hem and creeps up towards her face. The norms of Alphaville conceal her deficiency, but also secure Natasha a mode of access to the phallic, literally by way of Name of the Father. The relation of affect and order takes place via Natasha through this theme of the phallus. Thus phallic yet castrated, Natasha is the site of a rupture, although within the temporality of the film, (the concealment) of a (surrealist) truth. Considering the issue of difference, lack and the woman in film, Stephen Heath (1978: 83) asserts that:

the woman is not the ruin of representation but its veritable support in the patriarchal order, the assigned point at – on – which representation holds and makes up lack, the vanishing point on which the subject that representation represents fixes to close the division of which it is the effect; setting in place then, in the alienation–separation return of a modelling of desire in which the woman takes the (imaginary) place of the Other, is procured as the truth of man,

that is, she might take the place of God. Crucially,

... difference of the woman is ... visibility of the man, the assured perspective ... form of exchange; with woman representing as the lack, the difference, her projection as image and screen, the point – the erotic return – of a certain mystery ... veil of truth (Lacan SI: 261).

Caution is crucial to this scenario; the phallus as abstraction is intersubjective, it is by means of Caution-as-other that Natasha's identity with the phallus is confirmed. Caution has to appropriate Natasha as love object, only then is his own alignment ensured, that is, during the betrayal scene and at close of the film. That the subject is constituted as such by language is a Lacanian truism, but again Natasha's position seems to bear this out as her voiceover speaks the poetry. After this pivotal scene, as character she is redeemed in the eyes of Caution.

Natasha: Sentiments drift ... I went towards you, endlessly towards the light.

The film opens with a light flashing ominously, north and south zones of Alphaville are introduced with bright neon, scientific formulas wink at the camera, windows and car headlights glare during linking sequences, and one frame features a concentric light sculpture. Light is what makes the film strange (critical to the formalist schema) and again makes possible a relation for the audience between affect and social order of Alphaville. As Chris Darke points out (ibid: 56), light is intrinsic to set, *mise-en-scène* and plot (that is, diegeticised). Sharp contrasts resonate with harsh *chiaroscuro* of German silent cinema and American *film noir*, and allow Godard to introduce his theme 'presence of the future' as well as evoke a sense of the *unheimlich* that haunts films such as *Dr Mabuse and Cabinet of Dr. Caligari* (ibid: 57). This also points to (and enhances) stark polarities at the heart of the structuralist system ruling Alphaville.

Darke (ibid: 55) comments: 'If Alphaville can be seen as one of Godard's exercises in mimetic film criticism – that is criticism conducted in the language of the medium – its object is, of course, cinema, and the light that is brought to bear on it is a light from cinema's past.' Darke (ibid: 59) notes use of the negative in scenes as Alpha 60 self-destructs as quotation from Murnau's *Nosferatu* and Cocteau's *Orphée*, signifying the *unheimlich* transition from one state of being to another. Light is also intrinsic to the morality of Alphaville: it is a means of deprivation. Caution asks: 'Why does everyone look so miserable?' Natasha replies: 'You ask too many questions. Because they lack electricity.'

Proposition 4. Affects involved in communication of a limit to order, in the context of the Kantian sublime

Inverting the thinking of Jean-Francois Lyotard (1991: 93), one might venture that in determinations of the cinematic, the 'indeterminate, the "it happens"' is the film itself, syntagms of shot and sequencing, action as it appears on screen. Unlike a painting, where such a sensation of event is not expressible, film glories in the moment. Narrative and editing are articulated strategically to produce the event – as turning point, denouement, moments of pathos and so forth. It is this articulation that secretes the sublime, which I would suggest is the dominant 'message' of the film. This is nowhere more eloquently expressed than in Natasha's soliloquy composed from seemingly random phrasing of Eluard's poetry, beautifully evocative of the inexpressible, evoking a limit to the city's all-pervasive order.

The soliloquy, and conversation that precedes it, comprise an intensity of surrealist imagery which gives the scene the cast of a dream. For Edmund Burke, the sublime was a matter of intensification: of the conceptual and emotional capacity of the spectator, a contradictory pleasure (Lyotard 1991: 100). Intensity is associated with ontological dislocation. The art object no longer bends itself to models, but tries to present the fact that there is an unrepresentable; it no longer imitates nature, but is in Burke, actualisation of a figure already there in language (ibid: 101).

For Burke, language, in particular poetry, was instrumental in the production of terror (ibid: 84) (a fear of incomprehension, of inaccessible imagery or conversely, a threat that language will cease, or one might hazard with the avantgarde in mind, will be damaged). As enunciating beings we can effect with word combinations sentiments that would be impossible by any other means. Poetry demands that the poet confront 'failure of the word' (ibid) by provocation of the unheard-of phrase. For Burke, the poet opens up an infinity of associations with the simplest of expressions. Literature too claims freedoms of syntactical experimentation, the unlimited power of 'language, in all its sufficiency' (ibid: 85).

Lyotard mentions in a later essay, in the context of Plato, that when discourse is sublime it tolerates inversions of syntax and imperfections (as a mark of true grandeur). 'Grandeur in speech is true when it bears witness to ... incommensurability between thought and the real world' (ibid: 95), an effective description of the Godard script. For terror to be permeated with pleasure and produce emotion/sensation of the sublime, the terror-causing threat must be suspended (ibid: 99). Such a privation produces relief and hence delight. After the shock of Natasha's soliloquy, her off-screen reading is cut abruptly, and Caution brings the subject back to imminent threat of treachery and brainwashing.

Phrasing in the soliloquy is marked by its simplicity, simple inversions, and use of plain words in unusual combinations. Lyotard also touches on the writings of Boileau, translator of Longinus, a Greek teacher of rhetoric and author of the treatise *On the Sublime* (C1/C3 AD). Here the sublime is concealed beneath words (cf the subliminal), perhaps the extreme simplicity of a turn of phrase at a moment when one might expect bravura, or in moments of silence (ibid: 94). The soliloquy resonates as figure of the rhetorical sublime. Throughout Lemmy Caution's engagement with authority he deploys artful quotation (out of context) with a tip to minimal economy of form; hints of the sublime concealed within the dialogue.

There is no figure of speech than one which is completely hidden, that which we do not realise as a figure of speech. Must we admit that there are techniques for hiding figures, that there are figures for the erasure of figures? (ibid: 95)

Later, aesthetics comes to supplant poetics and rhetoric in conception of the sublime. The implication of this is that one should analyse the way the spectator is affected, their ways of experiencing feeling, ways of judging works. Fundamentally: 'what is it to experience an affect proper to art?' (ibid: 97). The soliloquy shifts what is a clever film to a profoundly moving one. It is the incomprehensibility of poetic syntax, juxtaposition of opposites, and surrealist imagery, not (as Chris Darke argues) the myth of true love that animates such feeling.

The sublime is an emotion which seizes, a shock, an event that makes for sensation. For Kant, in the sublime, pleasure is mixed with pain, but pleasure comes from that pain. There is a 'dislocation of the faculties', a cleavage in the subject, producing the tension that characterises the sublime, as the faculty of presentation fails to provide a representation corresponding to the Idea of reason. A 'double pleasure' emerges as the imagination strives to figure, confronted with paucity of imagery (ibid: 98) (or as here perhaps, contradictory syntax). Lyotard asserts that there is a trace of the avantgarde in the Kantian aesthetic of the sublime. Kant himself pointed towards minimalism and abstraction (Lyotard is thinking here of painting). Both space and time are unrepresentable in their magnitudes, they are pure Ideas. One might, however, invite them with negative presentation (ibid). By this Kant evokes a figural paradox, the Mosaic law forbidding the casting of graven images. Godard himself refuses that *sine qua non* of popular cinema, sex, as component of the pivotal love/betrayal scene.

Lyotard presents us with a conundrum. The avantgarde task he says, remains that of 'undoing our presumption of the mind with respect to time. The sublime feeling is the name of this privation' (ibid: 107). 'A confusion ... becomes possible, between what is of interest to information and the director, and what is the question of the avantgardes, between what happens – the new – and the Is it happening? the now' (ibid: 106), the sublime of the postmodern moment. In Alphaville, Godard, with his continuous technological present tense, critiques the cult of the new with the event of Natasha's soliloquy. This is the sublime question, the task of the film.

Proposition 5. Limit of the human, thought according to the absolute

In *The Postmodern Condition* (1984), Lyotard posits a game between science and chance. Dice, he notes, are compatible with calculation of system probabilities (dice were used in the construction of this essay). Bridge requires cunning, and is not computable. Lemmy Caution's cunning, his obscure riddle ('Something which never changes, day or night'), and his allusion to power, perhaps or to the eternal – preoccupies Alpha 60's circuits to the extent that Caution can escape and hunt down Vonbraun. Lyotard asserts that perfect control is system weakness. Alpha 60, limit and logical end of the human, is thus acutely vulnerable.

Lyotard conjectures that with the hegemony of computers comes a certain kind of logic, a certain language. Much of the discourse of Alpha 60 is *bricolage* Jorge Luis Borges, taken from his essay 'A new refutation of time'. The film's opening statement is an extract from Borges' 'Form of a legend'. A new theme emerges in the analogy with technocratic dictatorship: the power of (formalist) literature against the subversive potential of (surrealist) poetry. Borges' words lend Alpha 60 a pathos, notably in voiceovers to scenes of self-destruction. The sublime is not lost on this artificial intellect who suffers terror at the irreversibility of time, joy and wrenching pain at the condition of being time:

Alpha 60: The present is terrifying ... because it is irreversible ... and because it has a will of iron ... Time is the substance of which I am made. [Caution searches interrogation rooms as men stumble down the corridor. A woman stands motionless against a wall.] Time is a river which carries me along. But I am time. It is a tiger, tearing me apart; but I am the tiger ... It is our misfortune that the world is reality. And I ... it is my misfortune that I am myself, Alpha 60.

Earlier in the film, during the lecture, Alpha 60 discourses on solitude ('We are alone here. We are unique, dreadfully unique'). Alpha 60 is talking about himself. In the essay 'Can thought exist without a body', Lyotard raises such a spectre, of a computer intelligence surviving the extinction of humanity, programmed to suffer as a human suffers, and (the reader here assumed) who is dreadfully alone. One might infer too that the legend referred to in the film's opening statement is Alpha 60, not Caution. Science fiction is preoccupied with such technocratic scenarios.

Lyotard suggests (1984: 80) (alluding to Proust): what is elided is 'the identity of consciousness, a victim to the excess of time'. An assertion that aptly fits the condition of citizens in Alphaville. A Nietzschean subtext becomes manifest as the death of man is postponed and Natasha forgets the word 'love'.

'To speak is to fight, in the sense of playing, and speech acts fall within the domain of a general agonistics' (ibid: 10). Thus Lyotard characterises his understanding of the term 'language game', or genre of discourse. Language games are incommensurable (for example, in the film [as mentioned above] logic is confronted with incompatibility, variations on singularity and subvention of two-value orientation, which undermine it), yet an observable social bond is composed of such moves in any conversation which obeys rules of the genre.

For Lyotard, 'knowledge of language games as such and the decision to assume responsibility for their rules and effects' (ibid: 66) is another goal within the system. The most significant effect of language games 'is precisely what validates ... adoption of rules – the quest for parody' (ibid) or illogical reasoning. Alpha 60 synthesises poetry in case it comes in useful later on (that is, useful for system performance). Caution has to destroy Alpha 60 or find himself, and his linguistic strategies, caught in its totalising plan. One must not forget the bureaucratisation of the statement, prohibition of phrases (associative and conceptual engineering) and privileged classes of statement (such as phatic repetition) that characterise Alpha 60's techniques of rule. Alpha 60 deals in denotative statements, and thus proves his scientific status. This is counterposed to the 'truth' content of Caution's voiceover narration.

Scientific knowledge requires ... one language game, denotation, [must] be retained and all others excluded ... In this context, one is 'learned' if one can produce a true statement about a referent, and one is a scientist if one can produce verifiable or falsifiable statements about referents accessible to ... experts ... It is therefore impossible to judge ... existence or validity of narrative knowledge on the basis of scientific knowledge and vice versa. [R]elevant criteria are different ... Lamenting ... 'loss of meaning' in postmodernity boils down to mourning the fact that knowledge is no longer principally narrative ... [S]cience desires its statements to be true, but does not have the resources to legitimate the truth on its own (ibid: 25–26, 28).

Technocratic anxiety was a prominent theme in French science fiction after 1945. Bradford Lyau points to the Fleuve Noir Anticipation novels, written between 1951 and 1960. Of the '11 French authors who wrote books for this series, only two offer visions wholeheartedly approving of technocracy', he says (*Science Fiction Studies* 49). Those that do oppose such a system of governance question technocratic priorities and the basis of knowledge claimed by scientific elites, and point to a revalorisation of religious belief. They challenge the philosophical basis of technocracy, and highlight proliferation of inequalities within technocratic societies along with the annihilation of individualism. French magazine Fiction (six editions after 1953) published a 'literature that explore[d] alternate and parallel, rather than other, worlds; a literature that turn[ed] away from expansive paradigms to explore the inner world of the imagining organ – the rational mind itself'.

George Slusser comments: 'this SF is Cartesian and surrealist in nature. Which means that it seeks a logical cultivation of dream worlds. And should do so in hopes of preserving the privilege of the *cogito* in relation to a material universe otherwise defined by Pascal's two infinities' (ibid). Godard's strategy remains true to this conception. I think, indicate both Alpha 60 and Caution, therefore I am. However, Godard applies this truism to both man and machine, thus throwing the Cartesian fundament into doubt.

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