

The Courage to Matter

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Well, I dreamed I saw the silver space ships flying
In the yellow haze of the sun—
There were children crying

And colours flying

All around the chosen ones.

All in a dream - All

In a dream: the loading had begun.

They were flying Mother Nature's silver seed to a new home in the sun.

Flying Mother Nature's silver seed to a new home ...

...Look at Mother
Nature on the run
in the 21st century.
Look at Mother
Nature on the run
in the 21st century.
Patti Smith (2012).¹

Apologia: in defence (ἀπολογία).

I write to you today of *courage*. In so doing, I realise full well the deep recoil against this word, this concept, this fortified intelligence – one that *implies* at the very core of its clarion call, a dreaded return to 'will' or to the metaphysics of 'truth' or to 'good and evil', the 'individual', not to mention 'humanism', supposedly long dead and buried with all honours due, but now, possibly, to be exhumed and thrown in the face of its cousin-by-a-second-marriage: the lovely and pristine 'post-human'. A careful set of bread crumbs must be laid out, for our task is too urgent and the stakes too high for anyone of us to fall victim to misguided cynicism, ivory tower intellectualism or good, old-fashioned mediocrity. In the end you may still scurry elsewhere for your philosophic-analytic, post-metaphysical nourishment. You may still misread the signs; you may still cling to vacant facts, rotted histories, arcane fantasies. Perhaps this cannot be helped. Nevertheless, the stubborn persistence of collective inertia and its silent partner, fear, cannot be underestimated. The increased militarised presences that dot the landscapes of city-states not always 'technically' at war,

¹ Patti Smith (2012), 'After the Gold Rush,' *Banga*, Sony Music Entertainment, original lyrics by Neil Young (1970). <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=32wz-7jiMLhM>

pop [pɒp]

word mimicking a light explosive sound and a widely used acronym for modern popular music or popular culture.

become more commonplace by the nano-second, girded by racist hatreds, increasing misogynies, homophobias large and small. Glaciers are melting, whole swathes of fauna, flora, insect, cephalopod, species large and small, are dying. With equally strident pronouncements ranging from ‘the end of history’ to ‘the end of democracy’ to ‘the end of the world’, a paradigm shift is underway; has been underway.

Let us make no excuse, then. It is time for a certain kind of courage.

I shall set out my stall in the long-standing tradition of those who have gone before, and declare forthwith that what follows is not a conviction, a standpoint, an opinion or whim.² Neither is it emotional hyperbole, false consciousness, madness or the perfunctory navel gazing of the self-absorbed, though from time to time, these remarks may have to cannibalise all of the above, and more. As will become clearer, this ethical demand, this call for the ‘courage to matter’ marks out a double move. On the one hand, it is nothing more nor less to begin with than a re-staging of an onto-epistemology, one that prizes the contemporary analytic ‘how’, ‘that’, ‘when’ and ‘where’ away from the worn-out universalisms of Western metaphysics towards the multiversal, sticky cohesions of our euphemistically phrased age of intelligence and managed risk. On the other hand, it is a critical *rapprochement* linking the making of sense (literally, the producing of sense – common, spiritual, cognitive, erotic, logical or perhaps something not yet invented) with the exponential proliferation of information and increasingly wild, co-evolving forms of matter.³ The first slice of the double move thus concerns the way in which method matters, both materially and consequentially. The second slice turns not only to foregrounding the critical importance of creative practice, and with it, the foregrounding of the ‘arts and humanities’, but does so by dragging the Enlightenment of the 18th – 20th century into the 21st. The problems pulling that particular cargo into our contemporary ‘now’ are of course legendary.⁴ But given the rapid rise of autonomous systems that seem to find succour in every knowledge configuration other than those emanating from the arts and humanities, it is time to peer into the abyss.

So let us take the plunge.

¹ Famously penned by Theodor Adorno (2004 [1966]) in his forceful *Negative Dialectics*, translated by E.B. Ashton, Routledge, 4, where he sets out the position that, “dialectics is not a standpoint” but an objective method for seeking the truth, particularly about the rise of fascism, the role of racism, and the task of art /critical reason in the fight against tyranny, populist, capitalist or otherwise. No fake news here.

² A vital and new understanding of *rapprochement* as distributed intelligence binding humans and machines, has most recently been made by Edward Ashford Lee (2020) in his *Co-Evolution: The Entwined Futures of Humans and Machines*, MIT. Much earlier, and from a rather different point of view, see Vilém Flusser and Louis Bec (2012 [1987]), “*Vampyrotheuthic Dasein*,” in *Vampyrotheuthis Infernalis: A Treatise*, University of Minnesota Press, 36ff, where the ontological nuance between the reality of the human and the reality of the mollusk are raised through the vectors of sexual arousal. For the vampyrotheutic, *rapprochement* is always-already in the durational moment of orgasm (41-42). See also, for example, the incredible work of Yajoi Kusama (2012) *Polka Dots* <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rZR3n-sileA>.

³ The Enlightenment (so-named by Immanuel Kant and taken up, in massively different ways by G.W.F. Hegel and most of the English liberal theorists, from Locke to Mill, Bentham, Payne) has often been cited for its overt racist and/or sexist positions (though spare a moment for Mary Wollstonecraft, Harriet Wilson and Mary Shelley to name but a few beacons of early literary and political critical thought whose works unsurprisingly overthrew the repellent racial and sexual profiling alluded to above). Speaking loftily of Reason as the driving force of the social, alongside the importance of ‘change’, mobility, the rise of the (white/propertied) individual and the separation of Church and State), one could safely say that it spawned instead, alienation, reification, suffering. It may well be asked: why bother? This will be clarified momentarily.

sense [sens]

foregrounding pleasure as a form of knowledge; aliveness or embodiment of the pluralities of logic through breath, heat, touch, and tremor.

Drawing a limit.

Foucault opens his 1978-79 *Lectures on the Birth of Biopolitics* with this seemingly benign request: picture for a moment that universals do not exist.⁵ What would be the meaning of objectivity, speculation, prediction – indeed assumptions around life itself – if one were to cast aside or ignore completely universal logics? For universals, and the metaphysics to which they are attached, have had for centuries the cunning gift to enable production (that is to say, invention, discovery, circulation) of meaning in such a way that it can be held to be ‘true’ (objective) irrespective of time, place, ethnicity, identity politics, religion, class, the weather or mass insanity. Its ‘truth’ cannot be reduced to its sign, to its literal function or its instrumental use value.

One of the most provocative and important aspects of this kind of logic is that it can embed the dynamism of change as its core feature without appealing to an Archimedean point, God, or some calvary rushing in where angels fear to tread.⁶ Thus it allows for sensuous, practical, activity, human or otherwise, to be central to the very formation of truth/meaning. In so doing, this move can discredit, when necessary, long held beliefs, superstitions, fake news. Dialectics (speculative, idealist, historical and/or negative) as both method and an ontological move is perhaps the most majestic of all universal logics because, in its elegant simplicity – and despite the profound differences inherent with the variations mentioned above – dialectics is able to grasp ‘change’ as a plural, dynamic ‘limit’ without adding anything ‘extra’ to its comprehensive grasp or understanding. In this sense it is ‘universal’ in that no matter where, when, how or why, whatever is ‘grasped’ is both able to change and, simultaneously embody the fullness of the concept without leaving anything out or adding anything extra. This totalising can only happen in a dialectical move, a move that puts at its core (rather than edge) an odd type of limit, a kind of ‘imaginary-real’ (in this context, called ‘negation’), one that is always-already, a synthetic unity. Here ‘negation’ does not mean ‘no’ or ‘opposite’. Instead, it names (expresses) the simultaneity of both a fluid ‘here’ and ‘now’ (thesis) steadfastly cohered to its point-for-point ‘other side’, the so-called ‘not-here’ and the ‘not-now’ (antithesis).⁷

⁴ Michel Foucault (2008), *The Birth of Bio-Politics: Lectures at the Collège de France 1978-79*, translated by Graham Burchell, Palgrave, 1. Deleuze pushes the point further; in his *Difference and Repetition*, he shows what is the *image* of thought, particularly Western analytic logic, a point we shall return to momentarily. Cf Gilles Deleuze (1994 [1968]), ‘Chapter III. *Image of Thought*,’ in his *Difference and Repetition*, translated by Paul Patton, Athlone Press, 129-67.

serendipity [ˌsɛrənˈdɪpəti]

a word invented by horace walpole, an 17th century english writer and art historian who in a letter referred to a persian fairy tale called ‘the three princes of serendip’. the princes, he told his correspondent, were ‘always making discoveries, by accidents and sagacity, of things which they were not in quest of.’ serendip is the old name for sri lanka (ceylon), hence sarandib by arab traders. the word has been exported into many other languages, with the general meaning of ‘unexpected discovery’ or ‘fortunate chance’.

⁵ The problem ensuring movement would be the expression of the logic can be situated as far back as Heraclitus and his famous example of trying to ascertain the relation between flow and its instantaneous expression as logos. See: Heraclitus (2020 [500 BCE]), *Fragments*, translated by Brooks Haxman, (Middlesex: Penguin). This became more centrally a part of the philosophical discourse via Kant and his proposition of two main ‘systems’ – the mathematical dynamical and the dialectic. Hegel insisted that there could be only one logic, outside of which, nothing existed. The key, then, was to figure out how to comprehend and make space, analytically and practically, for movement. This was particularly important for any political theorist/philosopher (Marx et al), since it was a way to acknowledge and develop human agency as a driving force for change. For an important summary of this development, see the landmark work by Sheldon Wolin (2004 [1960]), *Politics and Vision*, Princeton, (New Jersey: Princeton University Press), especially Chapters XI-XIII, 393-494.

⁶ In the next section, I will briefly situate the critical move of ‘sublation’ as a way to avoid obvious issues with tautology. But for a thorough romp through the rough and tumble of the complex dialectical move to “*all thinghood*”, cf G.W.F. Hegel ([1807]), ‘Preface: *On Scientific Cognition*,’ and ‘Introduction’, in his *The Phenomenology of Spirit*, translated by A.V. Miller, especially §18-§36, 10-21; and *Parts A: Consciousness*, §72-§165, 47-103, and *B: Self-Consciousness*, §166-§346, 103-210. As Hegel puts it: §345-346: “...[All thinghood]... conceals from itself the disgracefulness of the irrational, crude thought, which takes a bone for the reality of self-consciousness and whitewashes that thought by unthinkingly mixing up with it all sorts of relations of cause and effect, of ‘sign’, ‘organ’, etc, which are meaningless here... the organ of its highest fulfilment, the organ of generation [is reduced to and confused with] the organ of urination...” 102-3.

At the heart of this pluralised, onto-epistemological move, our rather complex limit, shape-shifts into a dynamic void, the strange logical counterfactual, also known, conveniently, as 'the excluded middle'. Its exclusion is a logical necessity, a required non-existent surface keeping apart by keeping together, the abstract 'here and now' with its (also abstract) 'not-here and not-now' underside. Together-forever, they form their own cohesive, sticky, hell of unified contradiction. This is the strange 'alive-but-not-alive' moment around which change is rooted within the universal. For the sake of brevity, picture if you will, a sheet of paper. On the one side can be called 'thesis'; on the other, its point for point 'not-side' or 'antithesis'. If that paper is crushed or pulled apart, the one side will not of course run to keep up with the other side; nor will it lose its grip and be flung off the page. They are cohered together-forever in a permanent 'imaginary-real' plurality; that is, they are cohered together as our infamous 'excluded middle'.

As we are not yet in the postmodernist playground, neither the one nor the other 'side' can shapeshift and sit together on the 'same' side, as it were. Now, say we were to stretch that little excluded middle in every direction. In this move, the here-now || not-here-not-now could take on the garments of a whole (non-existent but necessary) infinite surface or plane. Of course if the analytic were to complete itself at this point, one would not be able to generate the supposed uniqueness of self-consciousness, identity, not to mention the fullness of knowledge, beyond a crude and circular binaric tautology of 'thesis' being understood only in relation to what it is not. Thus, and in order to become fully universal (that is, 'concrete' or 'graspable' – both as in comprehensible and inhabitable – the so-called 'really-real'), the requirement of 'a something' would have to be supplemented to the logic. But – and here's the rub – this 'something', in its 'something-ness', would have to be able to be 'a something' without adding anything extra to the argument; no weight nor space nor time to the movement. To put this slightly differently, 'a something' would need to be added in order to make the universal fully 'here and now', and to do so without the necessity for consent, agreement or obligation. Concurrently and irrespective of this ability 'to be' (without being) and 'to move' (without moving), this necessary supplement is closer

LET'S START WITH THE
(ABSTRACT) ANTI-THESES

(ABSTRACT
ANTI-THESES)

→ IT'S "POINT-FOR-POINT"
OTHER SIDE WE WILL CALL
(ABSTRACT) THESIS

(ABSTRACT
ANTI-THESES)

↳ ON THE 'FLIP SIDE'
= ABSTRACT
THESIS

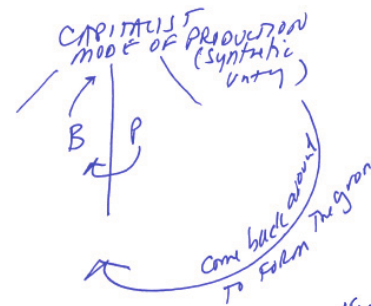
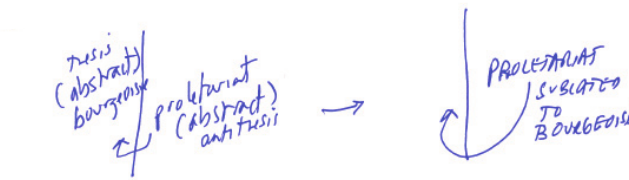
system ['sɪstɪm]

18th c version: 'a system is nothing more than the arrangement of the different elements of an art or a science in an order that makes them mutually dependent; the primary elements lead to and account for the final ones. those which explain the others are called principles, and the system is all the more perfect as the principles are fewer in number: it is even to be desired that they be reduced to one.' (Diderot). 21st c version: the logic of cohesion; that which names 'stickiness', 'movement', the 'what comes next.'

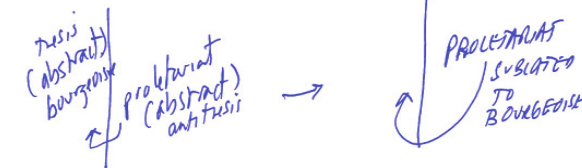
tofore but an abstract deep cut or abyss. It does this, in part, via the process of sublation (*Aufhebung*).¹⁰ A rather logically neat party trick, where the abstract 'here-now' comes into existence by simultaneously swallowing, lifting, cannibalising, inhaling (picture whatever visual metaphor is needed to grasp this odd move), it's point-for-point 'not-here-not-now'. Its synthetic unity is expressed (vomited, percolated... again, if required, chose a visual metaphor) in such a way that its subsequent logical moment both expresses the plurality of this new synthetic unity without destroying the discreet abstractions which has been sublated (swallowed, inhaled, cannibalised).

Picture it this way: the abstract face of, say, the 'all there is' – let's call this 'the wet' – is swallowed/ lifted/ cannibalised into the abstract face of the 'all there is not' – let's call this 'the not-wet'. Now, from this move either the fully formed 'concrete' concept 'Wet' will emerge, which, in its synthetic unity, will teleologically unfold (that is, in its most simple imaging: 'come back around') to give meaning to both 'sides' of the initial excluded middle. Equally possible: the fully formed concept of 'Dry' will emerge which will teleologically 'come back around' to give meaning to both sides. Here the sublated movement of the 'excluded middle' also (and crucially) imbues the whole process with a kind of 'air' or 'openness' (analytically speaking: with a kind of negation) which can take on specific political, social, aesthetic and ethical agency depending on a variety of factors. To put this perhaps more clearly, let us say that rather than name the abstract thesis 'wet', we name it instead as the abstract thesis: 'bourgeoisie'; and rather than name its antithesis 'not-wet', we name its point-for-point connected abstract 'not-side': the 'proletariat'. The one is sublated into the other (which one 'depends' on a variety of factors).¹¹ Let us say that their synthetic unity in its sublated form expresses, in its movement, the capitalist relations of production.

EXAMPLE USING
abstract bourgeoisie (thesis)
abstract proletariat (antithesis)



EXAMPLE USING
abstract bourgeoisie (thesis)
abstract proletariat (antithesis)



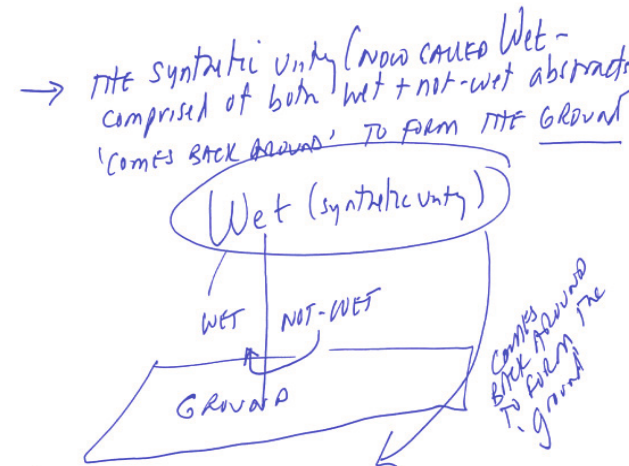
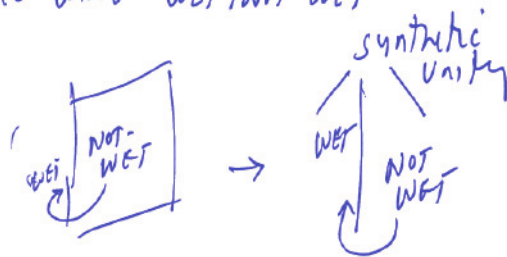
¹⁰ It would not be too far a stretch to recall at this point, Marx and Engels's famous dictum, "Workers of the World Unite! There is nothing to lose but your chains!" For in order to end capitalism, in order to completely overthrow the system would require at the very least one side dropping out of the historical-materialist dialectic. Either 'side' could do this, but clearly it would not be in the interests of the Bourgeoisie to leave the table. Cf Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels (1848), *The Communist Manifesto* at <http://activistmanifesto.org/assets/original-communist-manifesto.pdf>

⁹ Clearly a deeply complex analytic move especially regarding *Aufhebung* (sublation), see specifically G.W.F. Hegel (2013 [1812]), *Encyclopaedia of the Philosophical Sciences in Basic Outline, Part 1: Science of Logic*, translated by Brinkman and Dahlstrom, Cambridge, and his (1807) *Phenomenology*. For an accessible background read where the logics are highlighted in greater detail, cf J. Golding (2010), *Fractal Philosophy (and the small matter of learning how to listen): Attunement as the Task of Art*, www.cttheory.net/articles.aspx?id=634.

technology [tek'nɒlədʒi]

the logic of the grasp (techne), having little or nothing to do with 'machines' and more to do with the 'how' or 'mode' of the event, any event.

EXAMPLE USING "WET/NOT-WET"



(called Wet)

This mode of production teleologically unfolds (in the lay sense, 'comes back around') and forms the basis or ground of the Bourgeoisie || Proletariat contradiction now made 'real', 'graspable', materially able literally to 'make sense'. This is another tiny step towards the materiality of thought in such a way that is graspable no matter where or when or how the approach is made.

At the same time, the synthetic moment unfolds (in the lay sense, 'comes back around') to provide the 'ground' to our initially uninhabitable present (the start). Moreover and equally impressive, it points to the direction of the 'what comes next'. We have before us, a move toward 'certainty', 'prediction', move/ment full of contradiction, intensity, plurality. To be clear: the excluded middle, now given the garments of sublation, synthetic unities and teleological unfoldings, is able to kick-start the 'what comes next' without positing an external Archimedean point (observer, God, The Truth, instrumental reason, signpost, map).

To recap once more then: this synthetic unity, formally speaking, requires as its starting point an 'excluded middle'. This 'excluded middle' is a 'limit' better understood as a deep abyss, one that can never be inhabited or made 'real' but, on the other hand is always-already 'plural' inasmuch as it is an oddly cathected 'thing-no-thing'. It allows for (makes room for) both the 'start' and its grounding, a ground which is, in itself, inherently changeable.¹² Concrete conceptual truth or meaning of a thing ('any' thing, be it a system, a mode of production, a poem, an acorn, ideology or law) presents a form of knowability that in its total 'synthetic unity' is fully graspable in and of itself. Its meaning requires no outside or Other. It is fully universal. Its changing foundations, in its movement, remain open, real, accessible. In this move, any and all things past, present, not yet born or invented, entail, at their very moment of coming into existence: movement/ change/ alterability/ contradiction. In the positing, point-for-point, an abstract 'other' (the 'not-thesis' /anti-thesis) in relation to 'thesis', we have a strange doubling, a contradiction of the X in mortal stickiness with its not-X 'other'. Neither thesis, nor antithesis can be pried apart; nor can either shapeshift to be on the same 'side'. As mentioned earlier, they are forever locked in a permanently indivisible, plurally-sided (thesis/ antithesis) abyssal cohesion.

¹¹ Cf Jean Luc Nancy (2002), *Hegel: The Restlessness of the Negative*, (Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press).

term [t3:m]
components of a formula.

Most importantly for our purposes here comes this startling consequence: this strange plurality-limit, this odd 'excluded middle' and the dialectical move to which it gives expression (knowledge, direction, ethics) also admits a complex notion of time and space. This sense of time is one that moves away from the chronological towards an 'as always-already' non-inhabitable moment called 'the present,' a continuous-plural-instant stretching in all dimensions at once. It also re-asserts spatiality as an abstract movement (the no-thing) which, in its no-thing/no-where movement, embodies the unfolding path of the (also non-inhabitable) 'here' and the 'there', simultaneously. Taken together, we have our first glimpse of a speculative onto-epistemological materialism: fluid, but sticky; drawing a limit, but infinite; subjective but objective.¹³ A strange kind of limit, this 'excluded middle' / 'deep cut' state of affairs. Perhaps this is but a small price to pay given the benefits – for it promises to deliver a synthetic unity that, in its multi-dimensional movement, grounds the whole of reality without leaving anything out (except of course the 'excluded middle' or eternal 'in between' of the present). There is no extraneous entity, magician or being (God, an army, the avant-garde) required to create or be responsible for movement, history, change. There is no 'interior' or 'exterior' supposition; no taking as a given that which needs to be proven. With no privileging of various forms of circular reasoning or appeal to an outside authority or model, there is a reliance on critical reason, creative practice.

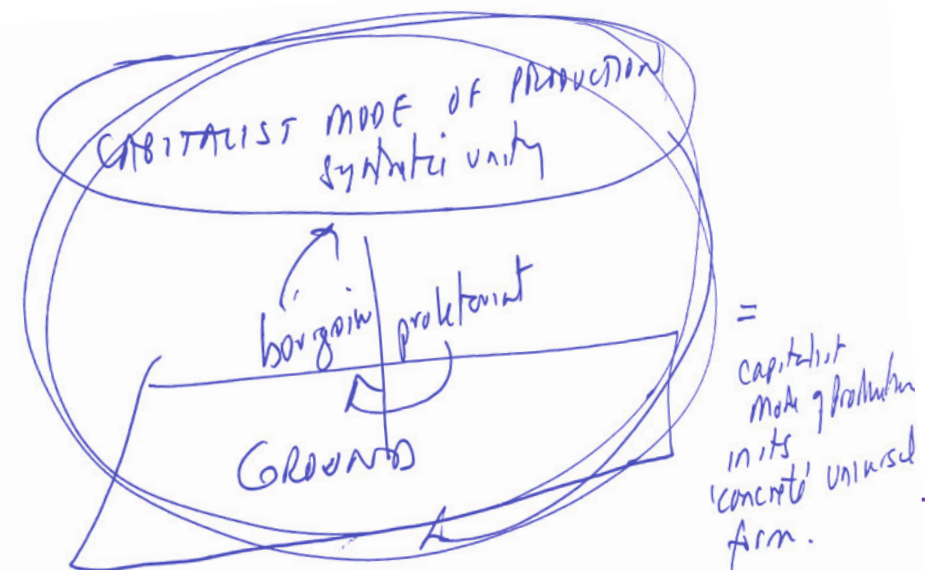
Most importantly, that which is understood to be objective is itself – its dimensionally pluralised 'self' – imbued with the speculative spatio-temporal, creative moment of change. In this sense, universality could underscore human sensuousness and reason, alongside collective organisational agency. We return to this point later in the text, but for now two points must be underscored: In its classical liberalist manifestation, this 'objective-dimensionally-pluralised self' underwrites the role of reason, the rise of the individual, the separation of Church and state, the enshrinement into law *habeas corpus*. In its classical Marxist manifestation, it accentuates the role of the political as expressly critical sensuous activity with an emphasis on human participation in making change happen, now. Rather than relegating it (change) to a teleological movement of the unfolding, it accentuates

¹² Of interest here is the work of those involved with OOO (Object Oriented Ontology) or OOP (Object Oriented Philosophy) or OOF (Object Oriented Feminism), not to mention its fore-bearer, Speculative Realism. Slightly differing emphases depending on which acronym is used, the overall view is that some kind of abyssal logic is required in order (a) to install agency into the (art) object without (b) requiring the human subject and to do so by (c) foregrounding the whole business of philosophy/metaphysics on 'aesthetics' rather than 'science'. Of course this is a move aligned to the metaphysics of Heidegger and related phenomenologists, rather than dialectics per se, but it is raised here as it privileges the

ever useful abyss in order to make meaning manifest. At a time when one scrambles to be political whilst simultaneously attempting to move away from the anthropocene; at a time when one is attempting to do this by putting front and centre: art, the art object, not to mention subjective 'objectivity' in the age of ephemeral new 'materialisms', one can understand the (fatal) attraction. Cf: Graham Hartman (2018), *Object Oriented Ontology: A New Theory of Everything*, (Middlesex: Penguin Books). See also a more politically astute account by artist and philosopher, Katherine Behar (2016), *Object Oriented Feminism*, (Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press).

vanish [ˈvæniʃ]

opening sequence of the prestige (christopher nolan): every great magic trick consists of three parts or acts: the first part is called 'the pledge' in which the magician shows the audience something ordinary: a deck of cards, a bird or a man. he shows this object, perhaps he asks the audience to inspect it to see if it is indeed real, unaltered, normal, but of course... it probably is not. the second is called 'the turn', where the magician takes an 'ordinary something' and makes it do something extraordinary. now everyone is looking for the secret... but they will not find it because of course no one really is looking to find it, they don't really want to know. the audience wants to be fooled, but they want to be fooled in a special way: making something disappear is not enough; one must bring it back. that is why every magic trick has a third act, the hardest part, the part that is called: 'the prestige'.



the 'getting of one's hands dirty', as Sartre might say, the active social battle to make (as in wilfully produce, create) a better material world, hard fought as those with power usually do not give it up, willingly. One could say, as did Marx, that this was (is) nothing less than *revolution* getting a leg over an otherwise and forever unfolding, *evolution*.¹⁴ In this sense, too, change would not (and does not) happen by wishing and hoping and watching the clouds roll by. As Marx so clearly put it in his *Theses on Feuerbach*, "Philosophers have for so long *interpreted* the world; the point is, to change it."¹⁵

One might well ask: what's not to like?

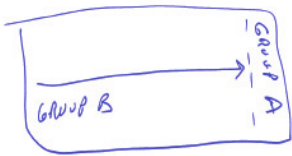
As it turns out, quite a lot. Let us turn to one last totalising approach to knowledge to understand more fully what is, urgently, at stake.

The 'excluded other'.

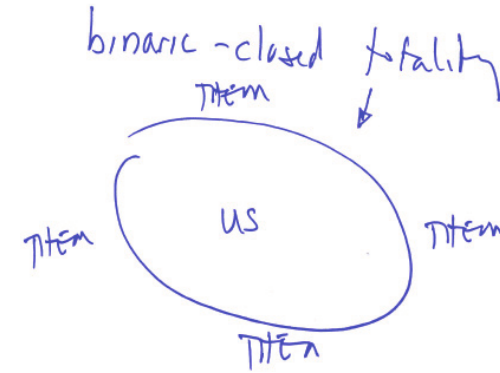
As every first year student of politics knows, the most elementary law of political science states there will always be leaders and led, rulers and ruled.¹⁶ A skilled leader/political party, social movement, will 'know' this, and will proceed accordingly, organising around the binaric principle of 'friend v. enemy', the totality of which exhausts the whole of the field. Usually referred to as the 'zero-sum game' for obvious reasons, any forward movement can only be understood as a threat to one's security and well-being; one's gain is the other's loss, and vice versa.¹⁷ If successful, this rather familiar division neatly allows for a set of allegiances to be ingrained in such a way (usually via fear or threat or mocked innuendo) that those who see themselves in Group A (say 'friends') will not assume that there are any common interests with Group B ('enemies'), nor should there be, ever. Importantly, the rhetoric of the zero-sum game also presents by implication or as a non-provable, usually apocryphal 'truth' that the spatial horizon (property, values, riches, cultural freedoms, art) will be diminished precisely if/when a forward movement is initiated by the 'opposing' group and gains momentum.¹⁸

To bring this point into an obvious contemporary moment, one could reasonably conclude that the ability to separate off, encircle to safety and simultaneously build one's 'side' away from a so-called evil or

Zero-Sum



¹³ Jean-Paul Sartre (1989 [1948]), *No Exit and Three Other Plays*, (New York: Vintage). The complexity of the works in this particular volume includes his polemical attack on racism in the US and of course the issues with 'dirty hands', moral compromise and political warfare. Of interest, too, the piercing work by Yoav Di-Capua (2018), *No Exit: Arab Existentialism Jean-Paul Sartre, and Decolonization* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press).



Marx (1962 [1859]), "XI," *Theses on Feuerbach*, first published as an appendix to his *Grundrisse der Kritik der politischen Ökonomie*, in *The Marx-Engels Selected Works, Vol 1*, (London: Progress Publishers), 11-13.

¹⁵ "The first element," Gramsci detailed in the secret notebooks he wrote whilst imprisoned under Mussolini, "is that there really do exist rulers and ruled, leaders and led. The entire

science and art of politics are based on this primordial, and (given certain general conditions) irreducible fact." Antonio Gramsci (1997 [1929-37]), "Elements of Politics", in his *Selections from the*

Prison Notebooks, translated and edited by Quintin Hoare and Geoffrey Nowell Smith, 144. This critical point is developed with much greater precision in his astute reflections on Machiavelli's

(1537) *The Prince*. See Antonio Gramsci, "The Modern Prince," in *Il. Notes on Politics, Prison Notebooks*, 123-204.

¹⁷ In case this is not obvious, zero-sum can briefly be understood thus: if we have, then you do not have; if you have, then we do not have. When both 'sides' are taken (added) together, the whole of the cultural-socio-economic field held by 'us' plus 'you' will be fully accounted. Here 'the field' equals 100%, sometimes divided as 40/60 (rare), sometimes 1/99 (more common). For a wild sci-fi exposition, delve into S.L. Huang (2020), *Zero Sum Game*: Cas Russell 1, (Tor Books UK).

¹⁸ Interestingly, the fascist theoretician and art historian, Hans Sedlmayr makes exactly this point but with respect to his deep nausea against the 'disease' of modernity: attacking Impressionism, Expressionism, Abstractionism, Cubism, Surrealism and Dada in part because he saw these movements and the artworks produced therein

as erasing the central arena which kept apart an horizon between 'high' and 'low' taste. Not only did the artists associated with those movements contribute, in his mind, to the lowering of community standards, and the making a mockery of the beautiful, it accelerated a deep psychosis in humankind promulgating degeneracy, base sexuality,

and 'art for art's sake'. Here the 'excluded Other' had taken over (art, the nation, et al). See Hans Sedlmayr (1957 [1948]), *Art in Crisis: The Lost Centre*, (London: Hollis & Carter), especially "VI. Chaos Unleashed," and "XI. From the Liberation of Art to the Negation of Art," 116-169 and 202-211, respectively.

threatening 'other' presents itself/selves under a variety of political guises: protectionism, 'making X great again', nationalism, free trade, Brexit, identity politics and even (or especially) populism. In short, an 'us' versus 'them' binaric vision of social life, the totality, of which, when taken together, exhausts the whole of the world.

In a certain sense, this elementary 'first principle' of leaders and led finds its equivalent in the infamous 'law of physics', whereby two objects cannot occupy the same place at the same time. Wrongly attributed to Newton, this seemingly 'iron law' has insinuated itself into modern and contemporary politics and aesthetics, not to mention, military strategy.¹⁹ In the version adopted by artists and non-artists alike, often one finds 'artistic practice' consigned to the nebulous-fuzzy-soft realm of feeling, emotion, intuition, pleasure, pitted against (or at least utterly distinct from) the deeply logical-hard-scienza realm of reason and rationality, stiff upper lip, furrowed brow and the like.²⁰ Taken together, these realms express the whole of the field (intellectual and practical). But should 'the soft' move in such a way as to *crash into* 'the hard' (assuming the hard is raging towards the soft with exactly the same furore), either the hard would be flattened or become soft (or vice versa) or both would be destroyed on impact. In the version adopted by State/military strategy, particularly up until and including the great World Wars, though today more closely aligned with urban-turf wars and certain team sports, we find two sides gathering on the battlefield (street, scrimmage line), facing each other and commencing their shooting/ slicing/ mutilating at point-blank range.

Victory is often empiric.²¹

Zero-sum can also be played with a bit of a twist, a twist that features heavily in game theory and has remained one of the most important features of military strategy since the start of the Cold War.²² Known as the Nash Equilibrium in gaming and as MAD (Mutually Assured Destruction) in international defence treaties, it names the state of the union when the players consider how their individual actions of 'today' will prompt, in all probability, the destruction of their respective futures. That both sides recognise there will be assured destruction, an equilibrium is formed and is supposedly held indefinitely.²³ One of the most well-known versions of the Nash Equilibrium occurred in 1962

¹⁹ That Newton never developed this particular 'law of physics' but instead developed arguments regarding motion, acceleration and mass in an entirely different manner – does not seem to have prevented centuries of wrongful attribution. The proposition that two objects travelling at speed towards each other cannot occupy the same space at the same time, was most probably developed by Thomas Hobbes in 1651, a full thirty-five years before Newton's *The Principia* (1685). Irrespective of the

²² A simple definition of the Nash Equilibrium is as follows: "In an asymmetric game, since there are two roles with different strategy sets, stability consists of a pair of strategies, one for each role. A stable state in an asymmetric game is called a Nash equilibrium [...] A pair of strategies is a strict Nash equilibrium if neither player can unilaterally switch to another strategy without reducing its payoff." From Cornell University's useful open source course at <http://hoylelab.cornell.edu/nash.html>.

profound conservative liberalism (or Liberal theory with a capital L, where having a 'stake' in society, that is, property, alongside the ability to be 'in motion' was the *sine qua non* for civil society), Hobbes's political theory incorporated at its very core, a zero-sum 'scienza/knowledge', both natural and historical. Of particular interest: matters concerning movement, not only as an inalienable 'right' but as the manifestation of what it meant, biologically, politically and ethically, to be human. See: Thomas Hobbes (2017 [1651]), "Of

²³ Though MAD seems to have held throughout the Cold War, it never quite assured that no warfare would arise. Questioning the soundness of the MAD argument, Kerry Pearson (2020) blogged: "(T)he Cold War did what it says on the tin, there were no 'hot' wars between the US and USSR. But peace did not permeate the entire globe; proxy wars were rife in states like Vietnam, Korea, and Taiwan. British nuclear power did not deter Argentina from invading the Falklands, just

the Liberty of Subjects," in *Leviathan or the Matter, Forme, & Power of a Commonwealth Ecclesiasticall and Civill*, (printed for Andrew Cooke, at the Green Dragon in St. Pauls Church-yard, (Middlesex: Penguin Classics), 129-37. See also: Isaac Newton (2016 [1685]), *Principia Mathematica: Mathematical Principles of Natural Philosophy*, translated and edited from the Latin by I. Bernard Cohen and Anne Whitman as *The Principia: The Authoritative Translation*, (University of California Press.

as Israel's nuclear arsenal did not prevent attacks from Egypt in 1973. Nuclear proliferation does not rule out chances of war. 'Weapons' and 'peace' do not belong in the same breath." Pearson (21 Jan 2020), *Developing More Weapons for Mutually Assured Destruction: A Sensible or Ridiculous Idea?*, <https://www.thegryphon.co.uk/2020/01/22/developing-more-weapons-for-mutually-assured-destruction-a-sensible-or-ridiculous-idea/>.

²⁰ Hence, too, the rather annoying question: can artists work with scientists? Spoiler alert: yes.

²¹ The utter pointlessness of this kind of 'win' was beautifully captured by Elizabeth Thompson (also known as Lady Butler) in her momentous 1876 re-enactment *Balaclava: The Return*, 25 October 1854. This work depicted the return of the Crimean victors from the Battle of the Light Brigade, veterans – including the horses – who emerged blind, deranged, legless and in shock. An empiric victory if ever there was one. Cf <https://artuk.org/discover/artworks/balaclava-204619>. Recall also *Rebel without a Cause* (1955), directed by Nicholas Ray, starring James Dean, Natalie Wood and Jim Backus, where the game of 'chicken' figures prominently. (Two cars driving at great speed towards each other. The one who swerves is, of course, the chicken). Interestingly, the first ver-

sion of this movie was written by Dr. Seuss, whose earlier works included over 400 (rather brilliant) satirical cartoons regarding the rise Hitler, fascism, the US role in that rise, and the first version of Trump's revised slogan 'Make America Great Again' as 'Make America First'. See <https://www.upworthy.com/9-political-cartoons-by-dr-seuss-that-are-still-relevant-today> and <https://www.mentalfloss.com/article/558095/facts-about-rebel-without-a-cause-james-dean>. For the game of chicken as linked to nuclear war, see this pithy article by Steve Lee (ND), "The Game of Chicken and Cold War Nuclear Weapons Strategies Revisited: An Informal Game Theoretical Approach," <http://cbc.net/steve/sub1.html>.

with the Cuban missile crisis.²⁴ Here the Soviet Union placed missiles in Cuba pointing directly at the US. Had the US attacked the Soviet Union, there would have been assured destruction on both sides. The brinkmanship came when President Kennedy ordered a blockade as a show of (minimal) force. Here one finds nations agreeing to build up their nuclear (and other) arsenals but, in so doing, step away from pressing the nuclear ‘button’ since that particular option might/would ‘assure’ the launching of the target nation’s arsenal in return. In the contemporary context of autonomous systems and artificial intelligences especially in relation to the human, there is the not too dissimilar echo: all players are seemingly caught in an apocalyptic, out of control, zero-sum game to the death (of humanity), with the view that if one can somehow input ‘trust’ or ‘governmentality’ into the algorithmic code, potentially an ‘equilibrium’ may form, indefinitely. We will return to this point imminently.

In any case, the zero-sum ‘excluded other’ game admits to two critical issues for an ontic-epistemological move. First, it takes on a kind of (superficial/surface) unreal-real materiality, though with none of the sophistication of the plurally-dimensional abyssal versions as earlier discussed. Second, the zero-sum ‘excluded other’ shape-shifts much like a parasite might do: large and swollen after feeding; shrunken and withered and in need of a fix after the game is done or nearing completion. In a certain sense, it (the zero sum game) operates as a kind of mytho-poetic but with a sting in its tail: at times it (say, Group A) may shape-shift and turn into a counterfactual, presenting its wares ‘as if’ true so as to galvanize its host (also Group A) to do the opposite. This is the preferred mode for most political theory writers from Hobbes to Locke to Rousseau, for example.²⁵ More recently, it is also the preferred mode for certain political leaders and their led.²⁶ Sometimes it (say, Group B) galvanises clearly unsubstantiated and overtly ‘false’ claims, almost up to the point of lying (or even lying) and goads itself (again, Group B) to carry the torch, often in a frenzied, daring or bullying manner towards anyone in the ‘opposite’ group (in this case, Group A). Taunts to hold their (Group A’s) ground or beat a hasty retreat mount. That Group A might resort to the use of something as lightweight as logic or reason or direct witnessing or the rule of law to dispel the onslaught of these ever proliferating ‘alternative facts’ only seems instead to act as flammable fodder for their (Group

²⁵ The importance of the counterfactual in political theory/political philosophy is legendary and yet rather understated. Hobbes, for example postulated that civil society must emerge in order to protect people from ‘the State of Nature’, which was, famously ‘solitary, nasty, brutish and short’. In order to get out of the State of Nature, our forefathers ‘agreed’ to give up their liberty for protection. This agreement is called the Social Contract (also mythical, though one’s status of ‘citizen’ makes it a bit more real). Locke, in his *Two Treatises*, postulated a State of Nature as primarily ‘good’, but having a few ‘bad apples’ which poisoned the group, thus making it crucial to join civil society (in order both to protect and preserve

liberty). Of course this only applied to those who had ‘a stake in society’ (i.e., property holders), though, interestingly, having a stake in society entitled one, also, to have ownership of their own person/body. For those without a ‘stake’, the fight for personhood was of profound importance, up to and including, today. The right to vote, drive, be educated, be treated as equal by law, own property, choose one’s sexuality, take one’s own life, stems in large part to the continuous hard fought, basic ‘inalienable’ right to personhood. Rousseau imagined the State of Nature as beautiful, empathetic, kind. For him it was civil society that was ‘nasty, brutish, solitary and short’, which came about because, as he so wonderfully

stated, “The first man who, having enclosed a piece of ground, be-thought himself of saying *This is mine*, and found people stupid enough to believe him, was the real founder of civil society. From how many crimes, wars and murders, from how many horrors and misfortunes might not any one have saved mankind, by pulling up the stakes, or filling up the ditch, and crying to his fellows, ‘Beware of listening to this impostor; you are undone if you once forget that the fruits of the earth belong to us all, and the earth itself to nobody.’” Jean Jacques Rousseau (2010 [1755]), *On the Origin of Inequality*, translated by G.D.H. Cole, (London: Everyman Library, 2010), 183.

²⁴ See the BBC’s 2017 *The Cuban Missile Crisis, Declassified Nuclear Warfare Documentary Films*, one of the best documentaries on the Cuban missile at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vm-qM7uaGfrk>

²⁶ Today we find a revised version of the classical liberal Social Contract (now fully realisable as ‘the Contract’) – a kind of neo-liberal hyper-linked apocalyptic imaginary-real taking as its central feature a profound distrust of all things ‘civil society’. A

poor imitation of Rousseau’s ethical demand – whose anger was aimed at creating a better, collective and radical empathy – this version veers towards a ‘trust no one / everyone for themselves’ policy whose mass hoarding approach to a ‘state of nature’ (read: little

or no government) comes with the added *promise* or *guarantee* of ‘trust’ embedded as core feature to its algorithmic coding. As mentioned, we will return to this point imminently, but see for example: Evan Gilman and Doug Barth (2017), *Zero Trust Networks: Building*

Secure Systems in Untrusted Networks, (Beijing/Boston/Farnham/Sebastopol/Tokyo: O’Reilly) at <https://www.akamai.com/us/en/multimedia/documents/ebooks/zero-trust-networks-ebook.pdf>.

B's) cause. Recall here the shameful 'Birther movement', still ongoing.²⁷ The refuting of the falsehoods by producing birth certificates, testimony, DNA, law suits often failed to shift this sticky tar-and-feather approach one iota. That these two different 'excluded other' materialities 'work' (produce sense, gorge-swell and stick, no matter how many situated, witnessed, iPhone-captured 'truths' are thrown at it), seems particularly fecund in today's liberal-democratic/neo-liberal political landscapes. We will return to this floaty yet visceral 'excluded other' materiality and its stickiness momentarily. But before we do, one more piece of the puzzle needs to be put in place. That piece is called fascism.

**One size fits all
(the really-really-clean-clean of the no-centre, no cry).**

Fascism is a particularly modern-contemporary beast. It is the 'perfect storm' of three moments merging simultaneously: first, when the zero-sum game takes hold in such a way that not only is there an entrenching of the binaric totality, but a growing and sustained consent of the 'led' to do so. This critical mass of consent upholds the binary based on a kind of belonging that dexterously shifts between masterful authenticity (read: racism) and the headless spectacle of the good (read: clean, anti-sexual liberation).²⁸ At the same time, it requires both the systematic ability to massify, on an industrial scale, the circulation of goods (Fordism) and, perhaps more significant for our contemporary moment, the circulation (dissemination and proliferation) of information as 'collective assemblages' – the recognition of patterns and their repeatability in whole or in part. A kind of viral Lego, though with more interesting cohered-together shapes, assemblages can be re-assembled with parts added or missing. These are then instantaneously and massively disseminated in the form of narratives, slice-of-life news stories, click bait and the ubiquitous friend suggestions via platforms as common as Google, Facebook, Twitter, and Linked-in, to name but four.²⁹

Most importantly, it requires the skilled use of media. In the 20th century, fascism gained its vitality via radio and moving image, with a growing, enthralled and captivated audience.³⁰ Of course now it

²⁷ In order to be able to run for the American presidency, one must be born in the US. The 'Birther Movement' solidified over the overt lie that Barack Obama was not born in the US, despite producing proof over and over again. Clearly a 'dog whistle', usually understood as a racist appeal to (white) American

values. Cf <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qQFJH-cY5RFM>, and <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kPH-6WAAAnFAA>. https://www.huffingtonpost.co.uk/entry/trump-birther-poll_n_57e27935e-4b0e80b1b9f-30c0?ri18n=true

²⁸ An anti-sexual liberation demand is fundamental to fascist logics (though clearly also strategically core to dictatorial and authoritarian regimes). It is directly linked to the role of guilt and shame in securing consent/obedience. Unlike dictatorial regimes, fascism emerges with the consent of 'the people' (starting at least with a critical mass). This is absolutely vital for a fascist regime to take root and flourish. Why people might willingly agree to restrict their own freedoms, has been the central concern of scholars as diverse and/or overlapping as the Frankfurt School (particularly Arendt, Adorno, Wolff, Marcuse, Moore), feminists (particularly Wollstonecraft, de Beauvoir, Kathleen Gough, Angela Carter, Gayle Rubin, Judith Butler) as well as the usual suspects in discourse

theory/postmodernism (Žižek, Foucault, Butler, and Lyotard). In particular see: See Herbert Marcuse (1968), *Repressive Tolerance*, in Paul Wolff, Herbert Marcuse and Barrington Moore (1969), *A Critique of Pure Tolerance*, Boston: Beacon Press); Gad Horowitz (1977), *Repression: Basic and Surplus Repression in Psychoanalytic Theory – Freud, Reich, Marcuse*, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press); Slavoj Žižek (2009), *Violence of Lost Causes*, London: Verso. For the role of consent, see in particular Ernesto Laclau (2018 [2007]), *On Populist Reason*, (London: Verso) and Julia Boyd (2018) *Travellers in the Third Reich: The Rise of Fascism through the Eyes of Everyday People*, (London: Elliot & Thompson).

²⁹ Of interest is to note also the way in which these assemblages can (and do) become tools for surveillance. Latest entry to the market: Ring, the camera doorbell product whose company is a subsidiary of Amazon. Whereas platforms such as Google, LinkedIn and Amazon harvest one's data for surveillance related activities with at least a tacit understanding by the user that an individual's data may be passed on via the acceptance of the benign sounding 'cookies', with Ring the image of a person at the door is transferred to one's phone without permission of the subject. The owner of the doorbell image can then choose to share it with police, neighbours and so on. In this way, as Will Oremus writes, "Surveillance tech empowers its customers to disempower others." In "Pattern

Matching, one-zero online newsletter at <https://medium.com/one-zero/newsletters/pattern-matching>. For those who use the UK send passenger data to the police without the passenger's knowledge or consent, an exchange that has apparently enabled Uber to maintain its license. <https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/uber-gives-police-private-data-on-drivers-and-passengers-dm7l3gsxv#:~:text=The%20National%20Police%20Chiefs%20Council,such%20%E2%80%9Cdata%20and%20support%E2%80%9D>. See also the landmark work by Shoshana Zuboff (2019), *The Age of Surveillance Capitalism: The Fight for a Future as the New Frontier of Power*, (London: Profile Books).

³⁰ The unfortunate political savvy by Hitler of embracing mass media (print, radio, film) to fulfil his promise of ethnic cleansing of the Jews and all those who would 'become-jew', including the Polish, the homosexual/lesbian/bisexual, the mad, the differently abled and etc, remains a blueprint for contemporary forms of social 'cleansing' including the Polish, most recently, 'draining the swamp'. Most well-known of the artists who could translate this position visually, particularly in terms of lighting, camera angles, and jump cuts, was Leni Riefenstahl (1935) with her infamous *Triumph of the Will*. But see also *Birth of a Nation*, directed by D.W. Griffith (1915). Originally entitled *Birth of a Clansman*, it celebrates confederacy and the overt brutalising of African Americans. As this was one of the very first films to be shown in public, its circulation was vast and its impact profound. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=N_yU8rRQK0A

includes also telephone, tv, cable, internet, mobile phones, autonomous systems, with an exponentially generated audience that may not even realise it is 'watching', or for that matter, being watched.³¹ This does not mean that technology is the cause of fascism, any more than the cross is the cause of Christianity. What it does mean is that, taken together, these three elements – the consent of the people to throw themselves into the zero-sum game with enthusiasm and pride; the industrial massification and co-current assemblages / circulations of information, alongside the skilled use of media – have enabled a certain kind of toxicity to be created. This toxicity is nothing less than the destruction of truth, a destruction that has the blessing of its followers in a manner that claims current reality/realities are the amalgamation of dirty lies, cheating, and aberrant morality, whilst simultaneously claiming that one person/party holds the 'really-real' truth.³² [[[A small interjection on the matter of truth – directed to those allergic to the concept, find succour in the phrase 'there is no such thing as truth (and that's the truth),' confuse truth with instrumental reason or the rigid and unchangeable, think that in foregrounding truth one is returning to the old and boring moralities of 'good vs evil' or inviting a resuscitation of God or positing some other Archimedean point to secure meaning: Please re-read earlier section on movement/change]]].

One additional analytic point needs to be addressed before returning to our 'floaty yet visceral excluded other materiality and its stickiness.' It concerns the problem of belonging, and with it, identity and difference, wherein an entire can of worms shall be opened. Here reference is made directly to Heidegger and, in particular, his 1957 onto-theo-logical lectures on metaphysics given at the end of his seminar on Hegel, on the occasion of the 500th year anniversary of the University of Freiburg im Breisgau.³³ For Heidegger, the Hegelian dialectic was mortally flawed precisely because of the issue with negation and the excluded middle. At the same time, the binaric 'zero-sum' game was for him painfully limited, not the least of which because, in losing the centre altogether, it could not address the vital aspect of 'techne' and its poetic logic as core to the birth of 20th century authenticity. For Heidegger, the 'logic of techne' or more to the point 'technology' would have nothing to do with machines as

³¹ See the incisive analysis of Cambridge Analytica's data harvesting and the rise of the floating personality without the human person, so much the font of neo-liberalism by Katherine Behar (21 Mar 2018), *Personalities without People*, at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=N_yU8r-RQKoA

³² Cf Umberto Eco (2020) *How to Spot a Fascist*, translated by Alastair McEwen and Jason Dixon, (London: Harvill Secker) and in more journalistic prose, Jason Stanley (2020), *How Fascism Works: The Politics of Us and Them*, (New York: Random House).

³³ Martin Heidegger (2002 [1957]), *Identity and Difference*, translated by Joan Stambaugh (Chicago: University of Chicago Press). As with any translation, there is always something lost and something found in the move. This is particularly true of the English translations of Heidegger. His original texts are legendary tombs of arcane and flowery old-school German, but the English versions are often spared this underlying thread quite obviously appearing in the German; to wit, the search for an authentic people or race. Debates have of course raged as to whether his Nazism 'did not matter' or was 'soft' or 'hardwired' into in his fundamental works, a point Heidegger himself definitely cleared up when his deeply anti-Semitic *Black Notebooks* were recently found and published. See Martin Heidegger (2016 [1931-38]), *Ponderings II-VI: The Black Notebooks*, translated by Richard Rojcewicz, (Minneapolis: Indiana University Press). It should be noted that there was much outrage at the Freiburg lecture as it was anticipated Heidegger would apologise for his Nazism, but no apology was forthcoming. See also Jean François Lyotard (1990), *Heidegger and 'the Jews'*, translated by Andreas Richards and Mark Roberts, (Minneapolis: Indiana University Press).

such. As Heidegger railed on in his well-known *Questions Concerning Technology*, developing the point further in his *Identity and Difference* lectures: it was all about (1) the ‘grasp’, both as in comprehending and as in reaching out or being pulled toward ‘the there’ (and vice versa, ‘the there’ being pulled toward being); and (2) the fact that the 20th century (for whatever reasons) named an epoch, not unlike had occurred in ancient Greece when, according to Heidegger, this way of ‘grasping’ (in-)formed the whole of reality and provided its framework.³⁴

This was neatly summed up in the slightly annoying equation borrowed from Parmenides: $A = A$.³⁵ On the face of it, the $A = A$ equation does appear to be a simple tautology. On closer inspection, however, it is meant to denote the *belonging* of A to A ; and more than that, a belonging that ‘sticks together’ in such a way as to denote both the attraction of the A ’s to each other, whilst, simultaneously, maintain their apartness. To put this slightly differently, one ‘starts’ with the encounter rather than one side or the other. This encounter is a non-intentional moment of cohesion that enables meaning to take shape and to take place. The first step of identity, collective and individual, then, is for Heidegger, belonging, one that articulates the fundamental importance of ‘being-apart-together.’ This assures two aspects: first, that ‘belonging’ denotes a kind of plurality, but one that is no longer constituted by a point-for-point contradiction with its necessary abyssal logics and deep cuts. Second and perhaps most importantly for the discussion here, ‘belonging’, that is to say the ‘=’ names precisely a relational start, one that only exists at the moment of its encounter. This ‘encounter’ can be called ‘dwelling’, ‘clearing’, ‘event’, a kind of visceral materiality that exists without the aid of Cogito, reason or the ego-I as the mark of its intelligibility, primary ‘start’ or beginning first-move.³⁶ More than that, and to put this slightly differently, there is an aliveness to existence captured/expressed only and at the very moment of the articulated grasp (techne).³⁷ That grasp, that logic of techne/ technology is grounded in (given meaning by) the so-called ‘groundless ground’ of difference.³⁸

As powerful and as simple this move came to be, one of the more challenging aspects of it arrived in the form of articulating the ‘how’

³⁴ See Martin Heidegger (1977 [1954]), “The Question Concerning Technology (1954),” in his *The Question Concerning Technology and Other Essays*, translated by William Lovitt, (New York: Harper Torchbooks), pp 3-35. See also *Identity and Difference*, where he states: “Let us at long last stop conceiving technology as something purely technical, that is in terms of man and his machines” and then goes on to develop the belonging/grasp as both ‘framework’ and ‘event of appropriation.’^{34ff}.

³⁶ For a discussion of contingency and determination still entrenched in dialectical reasoning, see Louis Althusser (2006), *Philosophy of the Encounter: Later writings 1978-87*, (London: Verso). For a detailed account of encounter as ‘response-ability’ as linked also to entanglement and diffraction, see the majestic work of Karen Barad (2007), *Meeting the Universe Halfway: Quantum Physics and the Entanglement of Meaning and Matter*, (North Carolina: Duke University).

³⁵ The following development is a deeply condensed rendering of clearly complex points developed through the first lecture “*The Principle of Identity*” in his *Identity and Difference*, 23-41. What will become clear momentarily is what is at stake for Heidegger in making this move. But see Wittgenstein’s pithy criticism of such a logic where he writes: §216. ‘A thing is identical with itself.’—There is no finer example of a useless proposition... Does this spot *ā* ‘fit’ into its white surrounding?—But that is just how it would look if there had at first been a hole in its place and it then fitted into the hole. But when we say ‘it

³⁷ Of course much more emanates from this seemingly simple move including the all-important notion of difference, re-thought away from its onto-theo-logic moorings by Deleuze along with many other initially ‘left-leaning’ Heideggerians. See in particular, Gilles Deleuze (2001 [1968]), *Difference & Repetition*, translated by Paul Patton, (London: Continuum Press).

Additionally, two works by Phillippe Lacoue-Labarthe: his (1990), *Heidegger, Art and Politics: The Fiction of the Political*, translated by Chris Turner, (London: Basil Blackwell) and his iconic (1989), *Typography: Mimesis, Philosophy, Politics*, with introduction by Jacques Derrida, edited by Christopher Fynsk, (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press).

fits’ we are not simply describing this appearance; not simply this situation. ‘Every coloured patch fits exactly into its surrounding’ is a rather specialized form of identity. [...] §523. I should like to say ‘What the picture tells me is itself.’ That is, it’s telling me something consists in its own structure, in its own lines and colours. (What would it mean to say ‘What this musical theme tells me is itself?’) §524. Don’t take it as a matter of course, but as a *remarkable fact*, that pictures and fictitious narratives give us pleasure, occupy our minds. [...] §527. Understanding a sentence is much more akin to understanding

³⁸ “*The On-to-Theo-Logical Constitution of Metaphysics*,” in Heidegger, *Identity and Difference*, 42-74. For an excellent and detailed analysis of the life and times of ‘groundless grounds’, see Lee Braver (2016), *Groundless Grounds: A Study of Wittgenstein and Heidegger*, (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press).

a theme in music than one may think. What I mean is that understanding a sentence lies nearer than one thinks to what is ordinarily called understanding a musical theme. Why is just this the pattern of variation in loudness and tempo? One would like to say ‘Because I know what it’s all about.’ But what is it all about? I should not be able to say... (Wittgenstein, n.d., *Philosophical Investigations*, translated by Walter Kaufman, (London: Basil Blackwell), 84-5, 142, 143. We will return to this point when we take up, directly, what it means to say ‘courage’, not to mention, ‘matter.’

of difference: *how* it mattered, *how* it must be understood in such a way as to manifest plurality whilst not to be equated with ‘negation’. Most important was the question as to how it could be ‘grounded’ in the present – without positing a ground as such; that is, without the apocalyptic disaster at the analytic level of tying belonging to the very entity Heidegger was seeking to avoid: Otherness. To avoid tying ‘belonging’ to the ‘that which did not belong’ (read: Jew, degeneracy, inauthentic, outsider, modernism, Dada, et al), required, at the epistemological level, a move back to the ontic enframed by a theo-logic, the so-called ‘groundless-ground’. This at least would retain the vitality of difference as both event of appropriation and as immanent site of an inhabitable present – the poetic logic of techne now front and centre, both the site or moment of the being-with-apart-together grasp and the ‘=’ of the that which ‘belonged-together’. For Heidegger, the move to sacrifice the sticky cohesions of difference on the altar of ontic-theo-logics was worth the price of admission.

As it turns out, this is not the only way to approach and incorporate the critical importance of ‘difference’ and the role of its stickiness (though of course in approaching difference, not to mention ‘=’ without its onto-theological moorings would move in a direction rather irritating for Heidegger). In order to put in place the last piece of the argument, then, perhaps it is best to do so on the back of Oscar Wilde’s wry observation alongside that of T.S. Elliot, paraphrasing ever so slightly: ‘Imitation is a form of flattery, stealing, a form of art.’³⁹

Let us now shoplift from the Heideggerian shelf, difference and its sticky companion the ‘=’, and return to Foucault’s ethical demand for a radical understanding of courage, not to mention, matter.

paradigm swerve, zero ground.

A little more than a hundred years prior to Foucault’s suggestion to leave the shores of universal logic and all that went along with it, 19th and 20th century physics, chemistry and meta-mathematics had already begun this incredible journey.⁴⁰ Here one entered a cornucopia of conceptual delights: trans- or multiversal dimensionalities, light years, ket vectors, simulacra, curved-time, imaginary numbers, dy-

³⁹ The original quote by Oscar Wilde (2017 [1889]), *The Decay of Lying*, (Middlesex: Penguin/Quirky Publications), “Imitation is the sincerest form of flattery that mediocrity can pay to genius.” The original quote by T.S. Eliot, *Selected Essays 1917-1932*, “Immature poets borrow, mature poets steal” was itself plagiarised by Pablo Picasso as “good artists borrow, great artists steal.”

⁴⁰ Cf the classic work of James Clerk Maxwell (2013 [1864]), *A Dynamical Theory of the Electromagnetic Field*, Rough Draft Printing. See also the seminal lectures by P.A.M. Dirac (2012 [1957/1930]), *The Principles of Quantum Mechanics*, (Snowball Publishing). Regarding meta-mathematics, see the seminal work of Kurt Gödel (2003 [1930]), *On For-*

mally Undecidable Propositions of Principia Mathematica and Related Systems, (Mineola, New York: Dover Publications). For contributions to equilibrium theories and non-dissipative structures (which won him the Nobel Prize in 1977), see Ilya Prigogine (2017 [1962]), *Non-Equilibrium Statistical Mechanics*, (Mineola, New York: Dover Publications).

translation [trænsˈleɪʃən]

‘the language that God speaks,’ philo de alexandria in answer to the question ‘what language does God speak?’ bi-directional where the descriptor and the description are equal/belong/are the same.

namical theories of electromagnetic fields, energy as velocity x mass², diffraction, complexity theory, the principle of undecidability and the seemingly mad almost delirious re-thinking of 'encounter' as an entangled form of superpositionality and non-locality.⁴¹ Time morphed into conical-wasp-like shapes of past-future (the upper and lower parts, open at both 'ends'), with its mid-section 'point' (or wasp-waist) as 'the present', and with the pluralities of 'elsewhere' somewhere not part of the cone of time. Now picture pulling the whole diagram up via its 'present' (that is, the mid-section 'point' or wasp-waist). That which is 'past' would be entangled with 'the future', and the whole of the universe would be reshaped without edge or outside.⁴² Entanglement, here, does not mean 'swallowed up' or even 'mingled'. It speaks to the shift into multiple dimensionalities, the font of string theory and other brain-explosive delights.⁴³

Astonishingly, in and around 60BC, the poet Lucretius established a set of principles around infinite edgelessness so contemporary that they would not be out of place alongside the Nobel laureates of today. Entitled *De Rerum Natura*, this majestic, erotic poem set out the concept of motion as sensuous, infinite folds, flowing in all directions at once.⁴⁴ At its core lay a deeply subversive approach to ontology and, indeed, to the laws of nature: this was nothing less than the foregrounding of the multi-dimensional, unexpected and unpredictable movements of matter: grasped in its fullness as 'the swerve'.⁴⁵ It is here, then, surfing the folds of a swerve, where we shall make our next, penultimate, move. It requires a slightly revised 'picture'.

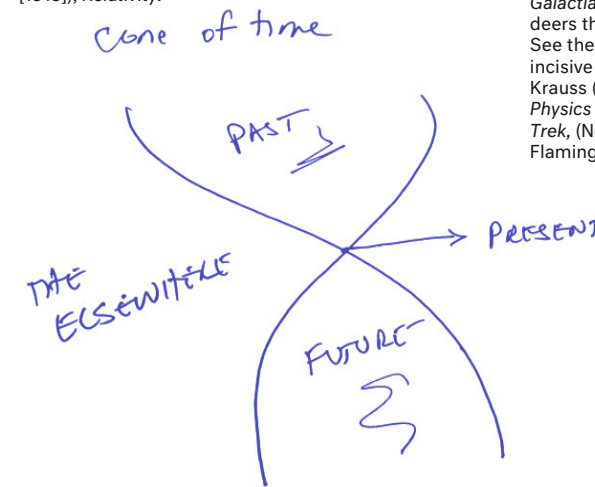
Imagine the universe as one big fat zero, stretching in all directions at once. We know that this zero is not 'nothing' but it is not quite a 'something' either. This is because, in stretching out in all directions at once, its knowability is infinite and, in that sense, unintelligible. But supposing this stretch bends at the moment of an encounter. And say that this encounter happens – not because the zero is 'intentionally' searching for, say, another zero – like a playmate or a something of some kind to help pass the time or to help make sense of its multi-dimensional not-nothingness – but because there is some kind of attraction. Now, suppose that this attraction can be denoted in some way. It would not be quite correct to suggest that it would look like

⁴¹ Of the vast literature one can turn to here, see in particular: Ilya Prigogine and Isabelle Stengers (1997 [1996]), *The End of Certainty: Time, Chaos and the New Laws of Nature*, (New York: The Free Press); Roger Penrose (2005), *The Road to Reality: A Complete Guide to the Laws of the Universe*, (London: Vintage); Albert Einstein (2015 [1915]), *Relativity:*

The Special and General Theory: 100th Anniversary Edition, (Princeton: Princeton University Press); Charles Petzold (2008), *The Annotated Turing: A Guided Tour through Alan Turing's Historic Paper on Computability and the Turing Machine*, (Indianapolis: Wiley); and of course Karen Barad (2007), *Meeting the Universe Halfway*, as mentioned earlier.

⁴² One could easily see how 'worm holes' might manifest as traversable. Say the 'future' was 1000s of light years away from the past. If one could 'bend' the future to the past just long enough to pass through before both 'sides' flipped back into place, one's silvers spaceship could go from point A to B in the blink of an eye. Much of science fiction from *Barbarella* to *Star Trek* to *Battleship Galactica* commandeers this move. See the playful but incisive Laurence Krauss (1996), *The Physics of Star Trek*, (New York: Flamingo Press).

⁴³ Somewhat of a classic now, see Brian Greene (2000), *The Elegant Universe: Superstrings, Hidden Dimensions and the Search for the Ultimate Theory*, (London: Verso). See also: Leonard Susskind and James Lindsay (2005), *An Introduction to Black Holes, Information, and the String Theory Revolution: The Holographic Universe*, (London/Singapore/Hong Kong: World Scientific Publishing).



⁴⁴ Lucretius (60BC), *De Rerum Natura (On the Nature of Things)*. See in particular the deeply accessible Thomas Nail (2018), *Lucretius I: An Ontology of Motion* and Thomas Nail (2020), *Lucretius II: An Ethics of Motion*, Edinburgh University Press.

⁴⁵ In its original Latin: *clinamen*. One of the best approaches to an understanding of *De Rerum Natura* can be found in Stephen Greenblatt (2012), *The Swerve: How the Renaissance Began*, (London: Vintage). Part of the argument above is indebted

to this work. Part of the argument is indebted to those who have also had fun with the *clinamen* and have shared their fun: Friedrich Nietzsche (1974 [1887]), *The Gay Science: with a prelude in rhymes and an appendix of songs*, translated by Walter Kaufman, (New York:

Vintage); Jacques Derrida (2016 [1981]), *Dissemination*, translated by Barbara Johnson, (London: Bloomsbury). Cf also: Alastair Brotchie, Alfred Jarry: *A Pataphysical Life*, (Cambridge, MA: MIT).

another zero or a bunch of zeroes or a satisfied zero that has swallowed up its attraction.⁴⁶ Following the Heideggerian re-think of ‘=’, it might well be denoted as this: $0 \Leftrightarrow 0$. Now let us say that when the attraction ‘holds’, even if for a nano-second or less, it could be, for that instant (however long an instant might be or become) denoted/ marked in its entirety as a 1; that is $1 = (0 \Leftrightarrow 0)$. And suppose, further, that there is more than just *one* single attraction and it’s mark. It might look something like this: $0 \Leftrightarrow 0 = 1 + 0 + 1 + 0 \dots$ to infinity. There are ‘limits’, there is ‘intelligibility’ but no edges, and, in this sense, no ‘other’ or ‘outside’ – rather like Escher’s famous work of the two hands drawing themselves. This does not mean, of course, that there is no ‘difference’. Indeed, it means precisely that difference ‘exists’ but in the manner of the wild materialities of $0 + 1$ ’s.

Sometimes it is fair to say that the zero is just that: a zero, neither here nor there (but everywhere all at once). But there are those times, sometimes, when the zero encounters. And sometimes, when that happens, we have a very different way of picturing ‘stickiness’.⁴⁷ This is a cohesive stickiness that, depending on the ‘whatever’, sometimes forms a segment (the 1) which enables the swerve to do precisely that: swerve. Sometimes it forms a kind of ‘thick’ surface, stretching in all directions at once (the zero). Sometimes its ‘1’ is also the expression marking both the encounter ($0 \Leftrightarrow 0$) but also its moment when the event of encounter is ‘appropriated’. In that case, the 1 is not suggesting a numerical value as in an amount (1 item); it is instead a *pluralised* ‘1’. In more poetic-art-philosophic phrasing, we can, take up Lyotard’s profound contribution along these lines, where the encounter manifested in all its cohesive stickiness and emerging in all directions at once can be called ‘discourse’; and its segment, marking that event as a pluralised ‘1’, can be (and is), as he calls it, the ‘figural’.⁴⁸

In *his Repetition and Difference*, Deleuze put it like this:

Something in the world forces us to think. This something is an object not of recognition but of a fundamental *encounter*. What is encountered may be Socrates, a temple or a demon. It may be grasped in a range of affective tones: wonder, love, hatred, suffering. In whichever tone, its primary characteristic is that it can be sensed. [...] It is opposed to recognition. ... It is not an *aisthētón* [an

⁴⁶ This is not to say that a zero cannot swallow its attraction. If it did, we would have something akin to a ‘black hole’. Cf Marcia Bartusiak (2015), *Black Hole: How an Idea Abandoned by Newtonians, Hated by Einstein and Gambled on by Hawking Became Loved*, (New Haven: Yale University Press), especially chapter 3 and 46 “One Would Then Find Oneself...in a Geometrical Fair-ylad,” and “Only its Gravitational Field Persists”, 35-43 and 70-86, respectively.

⁴⁷ It must be emphasised that $0 \Leftrightarrow 0$ is not ‘empty’; nor is it ‘in between’. For some it is closer to ‘the wake’ manifested in racist societies. See the searing work by Christina Sharpe (2016), *In the Wake: On Blackness and Being*, (Chapel Hill: Duke University Press).

⁴⁸ Jean François Lyotard (2019 [1971-83]), *Discourse, Figure*, translated by Anthony Hudek, (Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press), especially, “Thick-ness on the Margins of Discourse,” 103-114. See also Jean François Lyotard (2015/1993 [1974]), *Libidinal Economy*, translated by Iain Hamilton Grant, (Minneapolis: Indiana University Press), especially “II. The Tensor,” “V. Capital,” and “Economy of this Writing,” 43-94, 201-242, and 243-262, respectively.

external object of perception] but *aisthēteón* [being of the sensible]... Sensibility, in the presence of that which can only be sensed (and is at the same time imperceptible) finds itself before its own limit, the sign, and raises itself to the level of a transcendental exercise: to the “nth” power.⁴⁹

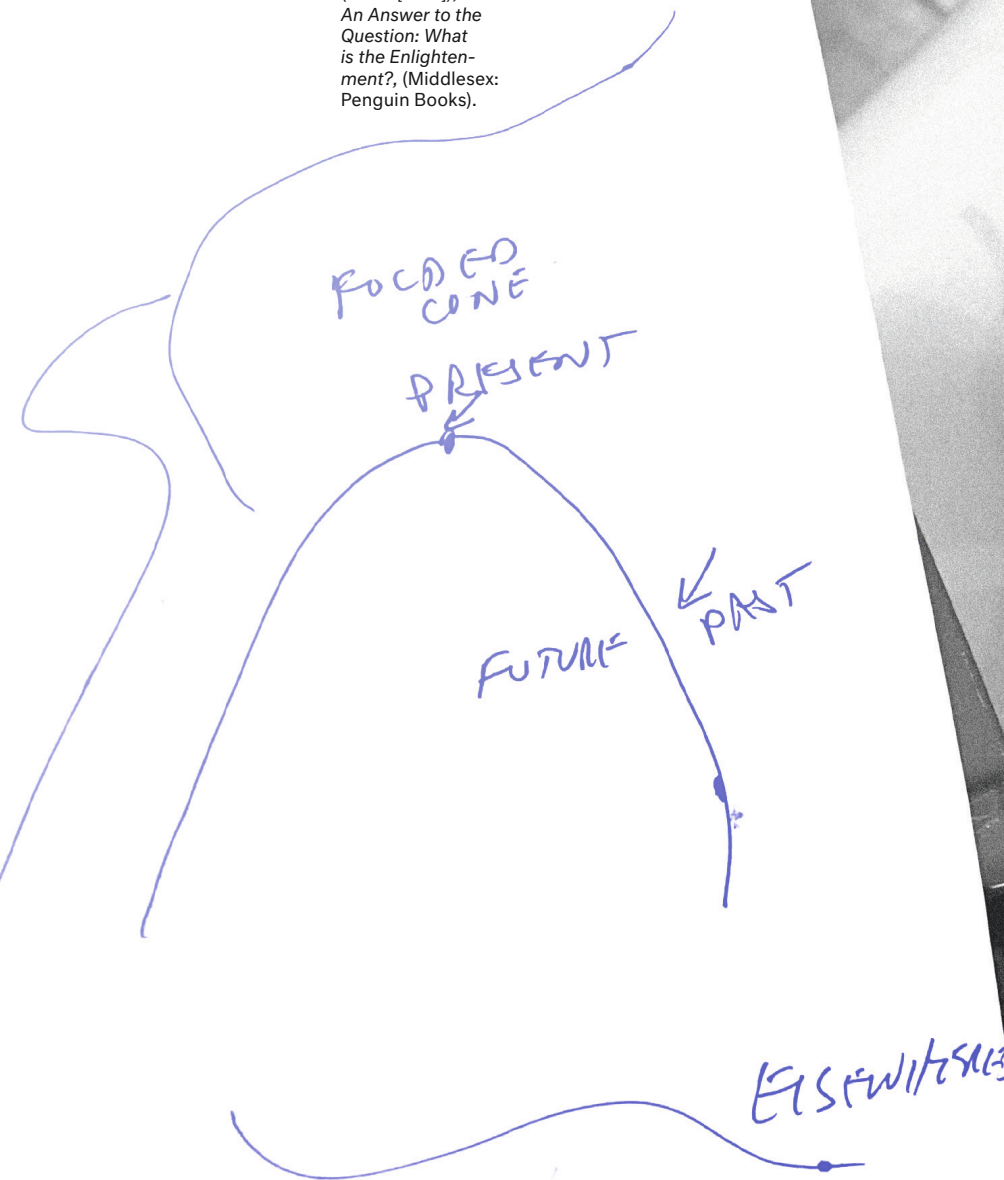
We have here an entirely different sense of materiality, matter, and indeed, agency. It is one that requires an emphasis on the grasp [as ‘comprehending’ and as ‘techne’, simultaneously] of how cohesions take shape, and become ‘real’ outside of a binaric zero-sum or the metaphysics of flow. We have instead discursive fields, marked by segments of encounter, which in turn establish new forms of horizons, fields, intensities. This seemingly ephemeral mattering enables different forms of agency to arise: distributed, fractal, ana-material. Its datum slips through the folds, are the folds, re-make the folds. These horizons, fields, intensities establish fields of meaning, which in turn shape-shift ‘depending’ on other encounters, other forms of 0s and 1s. Not only does this ‘matter’ at analytic levels, it matters at all levels. With specific emphasis on making the ‘matter’ stick, we need one last move.

The courage to matter.

Responding to a public request in 1784 by the *Berlinische Monatsschrift* (the Berlin Monthly) to find a popular (and accessible) answer to the question *What is the Enlightenment?*, amongst the respondents was Immanuel Kant. Entitled: *In answer to the Question: What is Enlightenment?*, an argument was established that promoted a notion of the individual, at the time a radical notion, which required the throwing out one’s ‘immaturity’ and replacing it with individual reason.⁵⁰ This move initiated many logical deductions, including the concept of the radical autonomy of the State a point that Hegel also takes up, with less enthusiasm. Kant’s *What is Enlightenment?*, and the vast number of works that followed, foreground many of the earlier classical liberal positions outlined at the outset; that is, the separation of church and State, and the moving away from the Church, in order actively to develop improvements regarding social, political and economic strife. Now Foucault, in his seminal re-think of Kant, suggests that rather than privilege ‘reason’ as such, one must instead

⁵⁰ Immanuel Kant (2009 [1784]), *An Answer to the Question: What is the Enlightenment?*, (Middlesex: Penguin Books).

⁴⁹ Gilles Deleuze (2004 [1968]), *Difference and Repetition*, 76, emphasis in the original)



concentrate on the ‘how’ of exiting; that is, the ‘how’ of exiting from a violent situation or the ‘how’ of exiting from the yoke of oppressive regimes, including the regimes of racism, homophobia, misogyny.⁵¹ This required, nothing less than a concentration on making the ‘how’ real, sticky, cohesive. It required a re-staging of ‘knowledge’ away from individuality per se, and towards a distributed intelligence, one that enables a ‘being-with-together’ as the basis of being ‘human’ and as a basis of the social. This ‘being-with-together’ brings with it a certain kind of *parrhesia*, a certain kind of ‘truth telling’, one rooted in a pluralised form of empathy and care.⁵²

This is then to say the following: The digital ‘age’ is not a zero-sum game. It is not inevitable that fascism will emerge or that some form of totalitarianism will continue to engulf and destroy. But in order to avoid this nightmare scenario, it requires an emphasis on ‘making’ in the midst of this movement, circulation and change. This is, in turn, an art: the art of inhabiting, reading and listening to ‘that’ which presents itself in all its present-tense fractalized elsewhere slices: as nodal points, planes of immanences; as events appropriated and made to ‘stick’.⁵³ It is a foregrounding of the ‘practice-led’, which is nothing less than the art and humanity of a certain kind of *techne*, and with it, the courage to grasp, in all its oozing, possibly fleeting, possibly entrenched, multi-dimensional surfaces, moveable limits, exponentially proliferating zeroes and ones, in all their cohesive, radical matter.

Wearable technologies at the ready, a new enlightenment is in order. We are now at the moment to do just that. In a certain sense one could say: In the face of adversity, there is nothing wrong with hope. But perhaps we can go one better and enforce the radical matter of that hope, echoing Juno, goddess and protector of the State from idiocy and cruelty. “Flectere si nequeo superos, Acheronta movebo (If I cannot bend the will of Heaven, I will move Hell).⁵⁴



⁵¹ Michel Foucault (1984), “What is Enlightenment,” in Paul Rabinow, editor, *The Foucault Reader*, (New York: Pantheon Press), 32-50.

⁵² Michel Foucault (2011), *The Courage of Truth: The Government of Self and Others, II*, Lectures at the Collège de France 1983-84, translated by Graham Burchell, (New York: Palgrave Macmillan).

⁵³ A point developed with great ferocity and clarity by Pierre Klossowski (2017), *Living Currency*, translated by Vernon Cisney, Nicolae Morar and Daniel W. Smith, (London: Bloomsbury), especially 1-45.

⁵⁴ Attributed to Juno by Virgil (29-19 BC), Virgil (2001 [29-19 BC]), *The Aeneid*, translated into English prose by A.S. Kline. Poetry in Translation Publishing House, 134.