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Abstract

Ana-materialism & the Pineal Eye provides a landmark interpretation of materialism, representation and the image using the Cartesian conceit of a pineal gland and its voracious sexually embedded appetites. Developing the argument via Georges Bataille's re-invention of the pineal gland as an all-seeing, all devouring, (pineal) eye, Johnny Golding borrows this move to envision a different analytic approach to digital forms of 'matter' and artificial forms of 'life'. From her critical engagement with Bataille, Giles Deleuze and Judith Butler, Golding shows why the tools provided by these modern, contemporary and postmodern approaches to philosophy, image, the body, indeed representation cannot fully explore, let alone develop these new forms of reality/ies except by retreating into traditional binary divides between male and female, good and evil, mother/child and so forth. *Ana-materialism and the Pineal Eye* introduces a much needed understanding to oddly cathected sensualities, multiversal realities, digital imaginaries with no weight, no volume, no spatiality, but 'somehow' making sense, and with it, creating matter, ethics, art.



Samantha Sweeting, Detail from *His Fleece Was as White as Snow*. Performance for video (2008).

Ana-Materialism & The Pineal Eye: Becoming Mouth-Breast ***(Visual Arts in the Age of Algorithmic Reproduction)***¹

"Becoming a child," Picasso was overheard to lament, "takes a very long time." Becoming Mouth-Breast takes no time at all.

Clarification

In a meta-literal sense, the Pineal Eye is the mythical step-creature of that biological entity found in the brain; namely, the pineal gland. From antiquity forward, up until Descartes' writings on it in the 1640s, this gland was often categorised as the site for sensuous perception, a kind of guilt and shame shallow pit-seed of consciousness; an arena, as it were, where the fore-visioning of future events – not dreams, but real, not-yet-to-have-happened-but-someday-would-happen, unfolding, predictable, REAL events – were supposedly deposited, or as we might say today: archived.

By the time Descartes got a hold of the gland, he refashioned it as a 'synthesis' of sorts – a double-helix synthesis which named the Pineal Gland as both site (as in terrain) and sight (as in vision-image) where the body and the mind's 'eye' came together, and were enlivened, fashioned, quickened as it were, with a 'soul' or even 'the' soul. This was a place where memory, knowledge and the senses intermingled and became one; became one, that is to say, in the carnal, sexual-sensuous sense of the word; and, perhaps more to the point, became knowledge in all aspects of the intellectual and inventive, dipped in a wild, bio-degradable

¹First publication rights: Johnny Golding, *Ana-Materialism & the Pineal Eye (Becoming 'Mouth-Breast')* Not

substance. This was not an innocent conceptual move. The Pineal Gland was re-incarnated as the bio-instrument, which, according to Descartes, directly allowed for the animal passions – those wild, consuming spirits – to rear up, like ‘a very fine wind, or rather, a very lively and pure flame.’²

And so it was that the Pineal Gland at the base of the skull became that most rare of rare beasts: the living ‘mind’s eye’, the sight line of a conscience and a consciousness, a vision and a voice. A gland-organ-interpretive-visual-aurality that could whisper to you in that judgmentally irritating kind of way ‘no, no, no: I wouldn’t do that if I were you...’ whilst simultaneously picturing what might happen if you did the reverse or, indeed, did nothing at all.

This was a mind’s eye ‘picture’ both substantively, that is, materially immaterial (read: mental, spiritual) and at the same time aggressively, willfully, sensuously, ‘real’ (read: carnal). A living, breathing guilty and shamefaced present-tense ‘imaging’, thinkable, comprehensible and within one’s grasp, though only by virtue of its re-presentation of a synthetic unity of Spirit and a beastly carnality – neatly shelved in the archives of the Pineal Gland.

Ana-Materialism and The Pineal Eye

Before moving off this point, there is something that needs to be underscored about this re-presenting, this iteration of the ‘is’, now able to ‘show itself’ (at least in the mind’s eye of the Pineal Gland). It wasn’t just any kind of ‘is’, just any kind of mental image emerging within (or even being ‘on’) one’s mind. It was a sensuous, sexual, carnal, animal-spirited materiality of an ‘is’ in all its fabrications of the ‘to be’ (as in ‘ought to be’: ie, materially moral; as in ‘will be’: ie materially predictive; as in ‘would be’: materially conditional; as in the past predictive ‘once upon a time’: ie, materially subjunctive or that of the moody pluperfect).

With all its pitfalls – and there remain many in this slightly mad Cartesian appropriation of anatomical materiality to the picturing / expressing of the senses – a rather crucial, but surprisingly under-theorised (and/or completely misrecognised) conceptual move is initiated by Descartes. For what now is at stake is the entry of very new, very specific and very different analytic logic than that of its pre-Cartesian forbearers and post-Enlightenment thinkers. It marks the initial move to re-stage materiality and its relation to an object, subject, spirit, indeed representation itself, as an immersive economy, no longer prefiguring the image or produced by image. Rather, this materiality is a kind of ‘ana-’ materiality neither ‘real’ nor ‘not-real’. Despite this (or perhaps because of this), it figures the image and, in so doing, acts as an ontological ‘groundless ground’ for image, text, pleasure, art. One could say, along with a nod to Derrida, that the ‘truth in photo-image-graphy’ is precisely the

² Rene Descartes, *The Treatise of Man* (1633/1664), XI:129 and as “a certain very fine air or wind” in his *The Passions of the Soul* (1662), 1:330 accessed at <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/pineal-gland/index.html>

cohering into the figural the 'that which lies to hand'.³ In this sense the materiality of image (be it analogue, digital, mental) has little to do with the metaphysics of perception or understanding. It has even less to do with the technology/ies inherent in the production of said image – though, it is via technologies of production, immersivity and expenditure that this ana-materialism can best be conceptualized. Irrespective of which technology is used, ana-materialism calls forth a whole new 'truth' in representation, one that side-steps the Universal (and all this implies around totality, objectivity, identity) and instead stages the end-game as mid-game, or even as no game at all, especially if, the rules are meant to be broken. In *The Pineal Eye*, Bataille explains it this way:

"The eye, at the summit of the skull, opening on the incandescent sun in order to contemplate it in a sinister solitude, is not a product of the Understanding, but is instead, an immediate existence; it opens and blinds itself like a conflagration, or like a fever that eats the being, or more exactly, the head. And thus it plays the role of a fire in a house: the head, instead of locking up life as money is locked in a safe, spends it without counting, for at the end of this great burning head is the image and the disagreeable light on the notion of expenditure, beyond the still empty notion as it is elaborated on the basis of methodological analysis."⁴

Bataille's notion of expenditure, in concert with the pineal gland of yesteryear, forms the all-seeing fevered-eye, imbued with a material, carnal knowledge that creates the basis for 'a something' or 'an elsewhere' which, by its very definition, weighs less than nothingness, is faster than the speed of light and deeper than a black hole. One could say, further, that this 'ana-materialism,' in part born of Cartesian gentility and rude-boy poetics, steals Bataille's concept of an expended immediacy that cannot be divorced from its object/ subject/ sense/ sensibility. In so doing, it simultaneously side-steps Hegelian dialectics, Lacanian triangulations of the real, symbolic, imaginary, Butler's performative non-essentialisms and even Deleuze's "mouth-breast" (a point to which I will return momentarily).

When the seemingly non-existent (social) agency of materialism no longer remains wedded to dialectical totalities, speculative reason, or, as the newest kid on the fashion-block would call it, speculative realism; when the seemingly empty materiality of, say, the digital image, no longer is tossed on the dunghill of 'virtual reality' or ignored altogether; when all this comes to pass – as it has already done given the ephemeral code drifts of the late 20th / early 21st centuries – then it would be fair to conclude that materiality is made manifest, ie, becomes 'present', through an iterative and immersive expenditure steeped in the immediate terrain of morphogenic logics.⁵ This neither-nor (ana-) materialism marks out the boundaries of

³ Jacques Derrida, *The Truth in Painting*, translated by Geoff Bennington and Ian McLeod, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987. See in particular Derrida's parte

⁴ Georges Bataille, 'The Pineal Eye,' *Visions of Excess: Selected Writings, 1927-1939*, edited and introduced by Allan Stoekl, translated by A. Stoekl, with Carl R. Lovitt and Donald M. Leslie Jr, *Theory and History of Literature*, Volume 14 (University of Minnesota Press: 1985), 82.

⁵ On the economy and style-structure of code drifts, see their groundbreaking work, "Code Drift," by Arthur Kroker and Marilouise Kroker, *Code Drift: Essays in Critical Digital Studies*, New World

a method and the content of the 'image-field' as a radically discontinuous economy – libidinal or otherwise – and it does so without leaving a (the) trace.⁶

To state the point somewhat differently: On the back cover of Cocteau's *The Difficulty of Being*, one of the reviewers recounts the famous house-burning-incident when a reporter monotonously asks JC the same question he has asked over and over again to all his interviewees on a monthly basis. "What single item would you take from a burning house?" Apparently, and without hesitation, Cocteau retorts: "I would take the fire."⁷ And that is precisely what we are taking from an inflamed, burning metaphysics. To re-quote from Bataille above, now in the context of an ana-materialism gently removed from its pineal gland embodiment: 'and thus it plays the role of fire in a house,' though this time it does so, outside the House.

The Problem with Universal Cesspools and Self-Reflexive Logics (or the importance of becoming Mouth-Breast)

In the late 1970s, 80s and 90s, one of the ways used to combat the sterility of metaphysics (not to mention, life itself) was to inject into its crippling hold on representation, identity, sexuality, and art a more messy approach, a kind of 'fuzzy logic' often relying on shock and awe, the sexually dirty, the problematic and the cruel. A little blood, a little urine, an orgasm or two, not to mention, cannibalism went a long way to disrupt the otherwise self-sealing pronouncements (read: concepts) on what or who could be considered 'female', 'male', 'queer' and so on. Deleuze and Butler were two of the more well known anti-essentialist post-structuralist-modernist and/or postmodernist thinkers to engage this particular strategy, though it is fair to say that the latter did not venture quite so markedly onto the more indelicate arenas of bodily pleasure as mentioned above. I want to take some time, now, to discuss the one aspect in each of their work, respectively because despite their committed political and philosophical stance around non-

Perspectives/CTheory Books: 2010), p. 4-19. Morphogenesis as a concept-tool began with the recursive algorithms of Alan Turing and, three decades later, further developed (to an almost unrecognizable level with its predecessor), by Benoit Mandelbrot. Pertinent to this development: the concept of 'fractal' and recursive fractal patterns enabling one of the most breath-taking breakthroughs in 'artificial' intelligence and the ability for (ro-)bots to learn, to remember, to predict – without the need for programming. See B. Mandelbrot, *The Fractal Geometry of Nature*, (Springer: 1997).

⁶ In a lay sense, think of an image on one's iPod or 'tablet'. If one smashed open said PDA, one would not find 5,000 songs or all of one's library of e-books spewed across the floor. This does not mean for a moment, that the material reality of its contents 'do not exist' or, more important, are 'virtual'. Ask anyone who has lost their data after a hard night's work. To put this on a more conceptual register, 'not leaving a trace' – or more significant, 'not leaving 'the' trace (note to Derrida) – requires a set of conceptual moves and/or tools that must fall clear of time/space diagrammatic logics, transcendental / quasi-transcendental metaphysics and/or the eternally returning linguistic turns, incapable of nuanced, dimensional, immersive thinking so required for 21st century contemporary culture (or indeed, for any culture).

⁷ Jean Cocteau, *The Difficulty of Being* (1957), Translated by Edith Sprigge with Introduction by Ned Rorem, (New York: Da Capo Press, 1995), back cover.

essentialism, both fell back into a path that brought them (though in different ways) right back to the very thing they were fighting.

In the latter sections of his *Logic of Sense*, Deleuze speaks of the 'universal cesspool' of life: where, recapping Melanie Klein's work on psychoanalysis, he presents two types of 'surface' structures: the simulacra and the zone, the former of which inhabits and expresses the drives within the unconscious; the latter, which inhabits and expresses those of 'real-time', albeit patchwork, events.⁸ While perhaps crucial as a way for Deleuze himself to inhabit psychoanalysis without losing sight of his own, quite profound, insistence on sexuality/ies, sensuality and indeed all the senses for a methodological framework to grasp/inhabit 'difference' (and with it, a completely different kind of identity, politics, aesthetics and theory), I would like to venture that this part of the *Logic* does not represent his finest hour.

Following a somewhat potted history of Freud's originary phases (oral, anal, oedipal), Deleuze suggests that the infant-child latches onto the love-object-breast-mother and begins to suck. Oh to recall the pleasure in that suck! (And for all of you still sucking – especially on cigarettes, but also other interesting projectiles, you know precisely of what pleasure I speak). We are at the entrance of *The Mouth-Breast*: one of the most lovely, first moments of synthetic unity/identity – and non-separation, security, wholeness – constitutive of the meaning of life and, simultaneously, life itself (where meaning of life equals pleasure; and where life itself equals sustenance/security).

The suck continues, and one devours. Steadily, forcefully, aggressively. Possessively. Until two things happen: (1) the mouth-breast's digestive track kicks in and the psychic life of the 'mouth-breast' unity starts to enter the mouth-anus phase; and (2) the breast is (eventually) removed from the mouth of the 'child-other' and, depending on a number of circumstances, its return is delayed (child-mouth is satiated; breast-love-object is tired) or even removed altogether (love-object/breast-mother-other is dead or maybe just sadistic; age and circumstance of child-mouth is too old, etc). Enter the problem, the deep trauma problem (oral phase) from which the child-mouth may never recover. Hence, and from the point of view of this child-mouth, of the need to devour obsessively, maybe even to cannibalize so that, in any case, the pleasure of the suck can be prolonged for long as possible and, if lucky far into adulthood and onward to the grave. This need-dependency-addiction-strategy-tactic (call it what you will) involves an excremental 'gift' linked to and/or emerging from the anal orifice, which, now, is part and parcel of this originary sucking pleasure. The child-mouth-breast also now capitalizes on the pleasure, as Deleuze so tactfully puts it, of that 'abominable mixture' of excrement, anality, and the suck. (Parenthetical remark: May I now remind all of you who may need reminding that, as a consequence, both the mouth-child-other and the love-object/breast-mother-other are actively, simultaneously, engaged in this tango-cannibalising-suck, though for rather different reasons). "Orality," Deleuze observes, "is naturally prolonged in cannibalism and anality, in the case of which

⁸ Deleuze, *The Logic of Sense*, Translated by Mark Lester with Charles Stivale, and edited by Constantin V. Boundas, (Columbia University Press: 1997), Series 29-34.

partial objects are excreta, capable of exploding the mother's body, as well as the body of the infant."⁹ Explosions aside, he continues with this solemn, if somewhat judgmental, prediction of a mouth-breast-turned-mouth-anus:

"The bits of one are always the persecutors of the other, and, in this abominable mixture which constitutes the Passion of the nursing infant, persecutor and persecuted are always the same. In this system of mouth-anus or aliment-excrement, bodies burst and cause other bodies to burst in a universal cesspool."¹⁰

Far be it from me to criticize Deleuze on account of his reverie for dirty sphincters love objects and foul-mouthed female entities brought to bear because of (no surprises here) the mother. But it seems odd – whether or not one accepts his basic interpretation around psychoanalytic investments – that this dynamic process would be characterised as an abomination, or indeed, as a universal cesspool in the negative, smelly sense of the word cesspool. The umbrage taken, that is to say my umbrage taken, is not around the judgment per se of having characterised the inevitable / dynamic flow from mouth-breast to mouth-anus as 'an abominable universal cesspool' per se (though to be fair, one does wonder, momentarily, if in his speaking of 'orality' and the sexual in this manner, that the very playfulness of 'having fun' somehow gets lost for Deleuze in the digestive tracts of life; that is to say, is somehow sublated, this pleasure of the suck, into its darker, more malicious forms of bullying, cruelty, humiliation, beating. But I digress...).

This umbrage has more to do with Deleuze's seemingly unnecessary shift away from his own conceptual framework(s) around identity as linked to 'difference,' 'surface,' 'plane of immanence,' 'nomadic/de-territorialism' and 'event', not to mention the 'becoming-x' of life itself, as developed at the outset of his *Logic of Sense*, his *What is Philosophy*, his *Pure Immanence: A Life* and in tandem with Guattari in their *Thousand Plateaus*, to name but some of the obvious volumes. Instead, there seems to be the rather odd turn (or rather re-turn) to 'arboreal' philosophy; that is, the search for a ground, a root, a 'universal' path, and with it (or on that path), the unfolding (telos) of the proverbial acorn (mouth-breast) into the proverbial Tree (mouth-anus) which comes 'back around' to provide the path – and a mean-spirited, shameful, guilty, hard-core one at that – for the methodological acceptance of a-pleasure-now-turned-nasty-cannibalization of the suck.¹¹ I am not saying that this isn't a rather interesting way to understand the psychic-underbellies of such horrors as sexual assault, the dropping of explosives on innocent people, and the obsessive need to 'watch' those bombs being dropped from the safety of one's TV screen, etc. I am simply saying that this is a move around

⁹ Giles Deleuze, 'The Thirty-first Series of Thought, Logic and Language', in *Deleuze and Guattari: The Philosophy of Immanence*, Charles Stivale, edited by Constantin Boundas, (New York: Routledge, 2007), p. 100. (check). My emphasis.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Deleuze & Guattari, "Rhizome," in their *Thousand Plateaus*



identity and sexual politics that I do not think Deleuze needed to make (given his own trajectories) and in any case, it is one we certainly do not need to take, if we engage seriously with the verisimilitude of 'orality' in the fullest sense of the term, to include not only mouth-breast / tongue-anus-suck, but (and fill in for mouth or breast or tongue or anus or suck) voice, listening, hearing, aurality, tempo, timbre, tone.

This kind of orality is a far, far cry from the language barriers of semiotics, sign, signifier and the imprisoned boundaries of representational logics. This oral tradition, this ana-materialist mouth-breast 'picture' is nothing other than an intensity, a sensuous/libidinal intensity of surface / simulacra that, in its cohesiveness, presents a wholly different methodology; indeed presents 'difference' itself as methodology. This 'difference itself as methodology' was re-staged by Butler in her conceptual development of 'performativity.' Sadly, this move not only did not resolve the dilemma (and critically moralistic judgments) of the sexual/sensuousness intensity of becoming X, but it reinvigorated the very essentialism(s) she wished to vanquish around identity, politics, gender, sex and sexuality. Let us take a closer look at this charge.

One of the great advantages of feminism – and not just feminism, but of all the so-called 'civil rights' movements of the (18)70s, 80s, and 90s as well as the 1970s, 80s, 90s – is that as both theory and practice (social movement), feminism emphasized the non-essentialism of biology. In so doing, there was a specific kind of 'liberation' based on a conception of what it meant to be 'human'. No longer did one's genitalia or skin colour (or class or disability or, eventually, one's sexual orientation etc) have anything to do with one's 'personhood.' Seen in this light, the very foundations of a 17th century (Newtonian) physics coupled with 19th century Enlightenment (*Sapere Aude! Dare to Know!*) came to inhabit the very core of one's 'right' to be human.¹²

Without going into the whole story of how this right (to be human) became attached to law, property, schooling, transportation, seating arrangements etc., suffice to say that with Hobbes's 17thc Leviathan the 'individual', as distinct from 'the human' was born (albeit whose life was 'nasty, brutish, solitary and short'), but in any case had the right rather than privilege for 'movement'. Here movement was seen to be a necessary 'fact of life', indeed life itself, given the lens of Newtonian physics through which Hobbes owed his concept (of movement). With the right to movement, came the right over one's body (*habeas corpus*), further refined with Locke in his *Two Treatises*, as having an interest or 'stake' in society and thus, the right to own property, starting with the property ownership of one's own body (and to be able to do with it what one wished (though it did not include, and to this day still does not, include the right to suicide). With Rousseau's *Discourse on Inequality*,

¹² Immanuel Kant, *An Answer to the Question: What is Enlightenment?* (1784) in his *Practical Philosophy*, translated and edited by Mary J. Gregor, transcribed by Any Blunden (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996) But see also:

<http://www.sas.upenn.edu/~mgamer/Etexts/kant.html>

one learned how those rights could be marginalized or destroyed, given a certain set of someones who drew a circle in the sand with their collective big toe, claimed that what lay within that circle to be theirs, and found people stupid enough to believe them. This made those who had not fallen for that trick very annoyed indeed. Annoyed enough to organise, annoyed enough to fight, annoyed enough to die for the (civil) right to have, as a given, a society based on non-essentialist versions of people, class, ethnicity, religion.

I present this thumbnail sketch of modern political theory (classical liberalism) not to suggest that history, our 'history of the present', is catapulted by the voracity of the Universal Concept/Idea; but rather to underscore the value of struggle, political struggle, to take (steal, borrow, etc) various ideas presented and/or experimented with in various disciplines from physics to alchemy (if need be) and to make them become 'coherent', 'sticky'; ie, to make them work. One of the most cogent of these life-changing-in-struggle-concepts coming onto the 1980s scene was, and remains to this day, the well-known concept of Performativity. The concept is important on a number of levels, but it is especially important because it underscores not only the non-essential, discursive/constitutive nature of one's (gendered) being but that as a discursive practice, it "enacts or produces that which it names."¹³ Taken originally from J.L. Austin's work on speech act theory, this enactment pushes language beyond a simple form of representation (or standing in) and emphasizes the fact that in so naming – an activity, a moment, a place, a change – makes meaning 'take' place. Butler, again:

"One is not simply a body, but, in some very key sense, one does one's body and, indeed, one does one's body differently from one's contemporaries and from one's embodied predecessors and successors as well... [Gender is thus] "a corporeal style, an 'act,' as it were" The act that one does, the act that one performs, is, in a sense, an act that has been going on before one arrived on the scene. Hence, gender is an act which has been rehearsed, much as a script survives the particular actors who make use of it, but which requires individual actors in order to be actualized and reproduced as reality once again."¹⁴ [my emphasis]

In this sense, the earlier, liberalist view of the individual as the source of one's action(s) and self-wiling subjectivity is exchanged, replaced, as a retroactive construction that, as Boucher remarks, comes about only through the enactment of social conventions: "Gender cannot be understood as a role which either expresses

¹³ Judith Butler, *On the Discursive Limits of 'Sex'* in *Bodies that Matter*, New York: Routledge, 1993, p. 13. I am indebted to Geoff Boucher for his insightful remarks on Butler in this context. See his *The Politics of Performativity: A Critique of Judith Butler*, in *Parrhesia*, no. 1, 2006, pp. 112-141. http://www.parrhesiajournal.org/parrhesia01/parrhesia01_boucher.pdf

¹⁴ Judith Butler, *Performative Acts and Gender Constitution: An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory in Performing Feminisms: Feminist Critical Theory and Theatre*, Sue-Ellen Case (Ed). Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1990, p. 272; as cited in Felluga, Dino Felluga, "Modules on Butler: On Performativity" in his *Introductory Guide to Critical Theory*, Purdue Univ: Jan 2011. <<http://www.purdue.edu/guidetotheory/genderandsex/modules/butlerperformativity.html>>.

or disguises an interior 'self', whether that 'self' is conceived as sexed or not. As performance which is performative, gender is an 'act', broadly construed, which constructs the social fiction of its own psychological interiority."¹⁵ Moreover, and because this 'gender act' belies no essential 'truth' but is utterly, fully, historically produced, the act can be transformed, challenged, disrupted through other performative acts. This is the political nub: there is no truth to sexuality or gender, simply the enactments that make truth 'stick'.

So why would this seemingly rather liberated picture of the political, the real and the symbolic be so problematic, especially to those committed against essentialism at every turn? It is problematic because this retroactive construction of subject-formation requires the methodologies inherent in self-reflexive philosophy. Geoff Boucher, in his *The Politics of Performativity*, neatly sums up the problem:

"Butler interprets the process of subject-formation through the lens of the philosophy of reflection. In so doing, she proposes that although agents are socially constructed through the cultural ascription of multiple subject-positions, nonetheless, the intentionality behind these gender performances is driven by a desire for self-identity. She grasps the anticipation of identity effectuated by ideological interpellation as an ambivalent relation to authority that precedes identity-formation, based on a combination of guilt and love. What this means is that Butler takes advantage of the paradoxes of the philosophy of reflection to reinstall the desire for recognition, in the form of the individual's pre-discursive will-to-identity, at the heart of ideological (Althusserian) interpellation."¹⁶

This belies two problems: first, a reintegration of Lacan's real, symbolic and imaginary and with it, the insistence on the logic of castration (lack/phallus) as that which defies and defines the very core of sexuality itself, along with shame, guilt, need for recognition as primary to any coherent form of conscious life. This irritating division of lack and phallus (always tossed off as though 'not really' meaning female [lack-empty-hole] or not really meaning male [phallus-virile substance-erect and ready to go]) reinstates the second irritating problem: that of the insistence that individuated meaning must always-already be forged through the contradiction/sublation/synthetic unity of the Universal concrete concept. We are right back to Hegel, the Hegel of the **Phenomenology** and **Science of Logic**.

The Big Ask

Now, maybe this double-sided problem is just not a problem. Maybe after all these years of fighting against the stupidity of thinking that all things penetrative is 'male' and all things 'lacking', female, and no matter how many times one bangs their pretty little head against the proverbial brick wall of essentialism – no matter what form it takes – this sexist enactment just won't go away; well maybe it's just

¹⁵ Felluga, *Modules on Butler*; Butler, *Performative Acts*, p. 279.

¹⁶ Geoff Boucher, *The Politics of Performativity: A Critique of Judith Butler*, in *Parrhesia*, no. 1, 2006, pp.112-141 [this quote on p. 120]
http://www.parrhesiajournal.org/parrhesia01/parrhesia01_boucher.pdf

time to hang up those red ruby slippers, those 'over the rainbows' dreams and go back to Kansas, with or without the dog. Maybe, after all these wild debauched years, I've just been carried away with trying to explain what happens when I sniff out the uncharted paths in a manner according to my custom, especially when night stealths towards day: the stillness of air! the light! the dew! the quietness of tone! the possibility to connect a this with a that! Perhaps what I am mentioning has only a tiny micro slice to do with that raw kind of pleasure of the suck – but I mention it anyway, for no other reason than that the combination of light, and touch, and sound, and smell compels me to inhabit my body differently; now aligned, now maligned, with a series of curiosities, hungers, expectations, promises, threats. This has very little to do with losing (or conversely, with finding) 'my' self or even 'a' self. It has even less to do with 'the subject', 'subject-formation', or holes or sticks or anything in between. For this is a peculiar type of (social) agency; a peculiar type of mastery – a kind of gutter-ground 'gift', this instant surface-slice of intensity of desire and pleasure and satiation: this holy place of the mouth-breast, this holy place of the bended knee. Because, for me, for us, we owe it to ourselves to develop a feminist theory, a quantum, fractal, synthetic theory – call it what you will – a queer kind of theory, that not only 'understands' and 'enacts' the conditions of the 'here', right now, and in a direct nod to Marx and his 11th Thesis on Feuerbach, changes oppressive conditions without loosing site of the brutality that awaits when one challenges the status quo's status. But – and this is the Big Ask – it must be done in a manner according to one's senses, one's 'custom'; one that goes beyond metaphysics itself: goes beyond identity politics, beyond representation, beyond binaric divides. Otherwise, we are set simply to reiterate the either/or 'deep cut' of a synthetic unity (rooted in contradiction, telos, and grand narratives) and its co-conspirator, the wound of a suppurating lack and a very dodgy phallus.

If that isn't reason enough to grasp with impunity this strange ana-materialism, and even more peculiar 'mouth-breath' and run with it into a wholly different epistemological field, then perhaps this last set of remarks will do it.

Synthia with an 'S' (and the reality of algorithmic reproduction)

On May 20, 2010 an announcement by the J Craig Venter Institute in Rockville Maryland heralded the generative birth of the first man-made, single-cell organism, which they duly named 'Synthia' (with an 's'). It had been sequenced from the genetic code of *Mycoplasma genitalium*, the world's smallest living bacteria, found primarily in cattle and goats.¹⁷ Global reports flooded over the web and other communication technologies, describing in lurid detail how the 'natural' DNA of the *Mycoplasma genitalium* was stripped out from its cell, copied point for point, re-sequenced, imprinted with a watermark, uploaded into its bio-original as an artificial – that is to say, synthetic, life form. It was considered a 'LIFE form' because this new

¹⁷ <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/science/7745868/Scientist-Craig-Venter-creates-life-for-first-time-in-laboratory-sparking-debate-about-playing-god.html> (accessed 22/05/2010). For a more detailed account: http://www.timesonline.co.uk/tol/news/science/biology_evolution/article7132299.ece

(artificial) cell, now, and without any of its 'natural' bio-matter, began to replicate bio-logically. And while it is true that this replication (and what it produced) might not be seen quite at the same level as when Dr Frankenstein's Monster's finger trembled as a sign of life on his laboratory table – this replication held all the same terrors/jubilations /ethical conundrums – and promises—of that 19th century shout: "IT'S ALIVE! IT'S ALIVE!"

In the beginning there was the Word. And that word was: Synthia.

The important point about Synthia is not that – or not just that – 'she' would be heralded as a monster in single-cell form. It is not even that her emergence, or for that matter, the emergence of bot-learned decision making, augmented realities, dark matter, the uses and abuses of Dolly and her cloned sisters before her, 'always already' put into question the very nub of what constitutes a 'she', not to mention the very meaning of being 'alive' and whether one should or should not play Creator. It also put into sharp relief the very ontologies through which one might grasp this most modern of post-postmodern conditions. For this seemingly innocuous little event generically called Synthia was in fact a paradigmatic sea-change, a grounding event birthing a certain kind of knowledge system, whose very meaning, indeed whose origins (if this be the right word) would emerge less from the semiotics of signs and signifiers, phalluses and lacks, and more from a simple re-iterative algorithmic cogency, a simulacra deeply coded in the she-wolves of myths and founding civilizations.

This deeply superficial heterologic 'knowledge system event', fractal in nature, infinitely regressive, and aggressively successful in its virility to make meaning 'take' place, births/invents complexity as eternally returning simulacra, without ever getting beyond, beside or inside 'herself'. It is a whole new soaring, this multiply inhabited single-celled will to power, this newborn Zarathustra, forging a slice-minutiae of expression with no absolute roadmap, marker, or destiny. Deleuze pre-guessed this move as a 'reverse Platonism', a kind of simulacrum of sense.¹⁸ Lyotard shaped it as figural; that is, as a kind of "lesson in darkness, like the paintings of a blind man" – the very gesture required to make imagelessness gather momentum, materiality and, in its wake, come alive.¹⁹

The usual culprits of time and space (or time as distinct from space and vice versa), along with identity, meaning, Existenz, Being, reconfigure via a relational morphogenesis of velocity, mass, and intensity. This is an immanent surface cohesion, the compelling into a 'this' or a 'here' or a 'now', a spacetime terrain, a collapse and rearticulation of the tick-tick-ticking of distance, movement, speed, born through the repetitive but relative enfolding of otherness, symmetry and

¹⁸ Giles Deleuze, "The Simulacrum," *The Logic of Sense*, pp. 254-56.

¹⁹ Jean-François Lyotard, Sam Francis: *Leçon de Ténèbres/ Lesson of Darkness*. *Ecrits sur l'art contemporain et les artistes*. Translation and Preface by Geoffrey Bennington. Edited by Herman Parret, (Ghent: Lieven University Press, 2010), p. 31. See also his *Discourse Figure: The Utopia behind the Scenes of the Phantasy* in *Theatre Journal*, Vol. 35, No. 3, *The Poetics of Theatre*, translated by Mary Lydon, (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1983), p. 353.

diversion.²⁰ This cohesive slice, this dimension, must be understood in the strongest temporal/spatial sense of difference as 'altogether different', fourth dimensionally different. It names a kind of 'being-with-altogether-different' difference as an ana-materiality which, despite (or because of) this apparent paradox, reiteratively resembles and re-assembles platforms, planes, plateaus, surfaces as de-territorialised plural or multiversal singularities into the 'being-with' singular plural as Nancy would name it, of an 'inoperative community' fractal in nature, immanent in design, and perfectly repetitive in its bio-logic enfoldment.²¹

Distant cousin to the fragment, which can be distinguished by its relation to a concentrated 'whole' or 'totality' (as in a piece of a pie, $\frac{1}{4}$ of a 1, a thesis/antithesis of a synthetic unity and so on), this 'slice', this surface ana-material dimension, with no underlying structure or Archimedean point, pre-figures the figural as the presencing of the event so nonchalantly called 'Synthia' herself. She becomes both chronological sequence of an 'a-to-b-to-c' etc and an Aionic series of the-whatever-is, morphing to the whatever else, morphing to the whatever-works, cohesively held together by the relativity of its attraction (=). Deleuze admits this move as 'the inclusion of the senses' – its colour, its rhythm, its beat, indeed, tactility itself (touch, smell, taste), which enables expression to 'come alive'.²²

Of course there are many types of 'synthetic unities', each perfectly capable of igniting what I have often named 'the Trojan horse problem', whereby uninvited methodological assumptions and onto-theological conundrums can unknowingly or unwittingly be dragged into the picture. So when one pinches the use of Mandelbrot's fractal move, and in particular, his formulation $Z \Leftrightarrow Z^2 + C$ which neatly states an infinite expansion of a given 'Z', it may be that our more detailed picture of Synthia is not without its Trojans. For the re-iterative ana-materialist dimension/slice of reality she embodies; a kind of 'dry dream' version of Nietzsche's more sensuously wet 'eternal return', our Synthia may become both the wild child, always already 'greater than the sum of her parts' and, simultaneously, a rather dull minutiae of her presence. But this move, away from the univocity of the metaphysical Concept toward the multiversal logic of what can be called 'fractal philosophy', however problematic, is long overdue. For the problem with Metaphysics, and particularly the metaphysics of dialectical synthesis, is that it

²⁰ Mandelbrot *Fractal Geometries*, 6-24. See also Brian Cox and Jeff Foreshaw (2009). *Why Does $E=mc^2$ (and why should we care)?* (Philadelphia: Da Cappel Press, 2009), pp. 57, 71-2.

²¹ Jean Luc Nancy, *Being Singular Plural*, translated by Robert D. Richardson and Anne E. O'Byrne, (Stanford: Stanford University Press/ Meridian/Crossing Aesthetics), pp. 2-5. See also Jean Luc Nancy, *The Inoperative Community*, edited and translated by Peter Connor (Minneapolis/Oxford: University of Minnesota Press, 1991), pp. 19, 53; and Laura Marks, *Enfoldment and Infinity: An Islamic Genealogy of New Media Art*, (Cambridge: MIT Press), pp. 5-11; 163-65).

²² Further elaborated in Deleuze, *The Logic of Sense*, "Twenty-Third Series of the Aion", "Twenty-Fifth Series of Univocity" and "Twenty-Sixth Series of Language," pp. 162-67, 169-174; and 181-182, respectively.

simply does not work; it simply does not have the tools to address our post-postmodern Synthia.

This is not to say that, after two thousand years, the various sets of epistemological and methodological gifts falling under this wide umbrella called 'metaphysics' could be seen as anything other than complex and elegant. This is particularly true of the analytic gifts by Hegel, which, albeit have been challenged by a host of scholars including most significantly Adorno in his *Negative Dialectics* not to mention Marx in his *Poverty of Philosophy* and elsewhere, developed one of the most sophisticated encyclopedic logics on contemporary (that is to say, modern, life) which put at its root the fundamental position of uncertainty and change without getting 'outside' the system. He did this in part by way of a subtle positioning of negation, one that was established in such a way that allowed for synthetic reason and with it, synthetic unity to express at its very core, the process of becoming/immanence/ transcendence.²³ But, however sophisticated these moves, the dialectical system did this by privileging an abyssal present; that is, one which could never be 'inhabited' analytically, politically, aesthetically, ethically, algorithmically or otherwise. This is because not only did 'the now' slip away as soon as one tried to grasp it; but the very 'territory' of the present resided in the deep cut/ excluded middle of logical contradiction, the totality of which, in producing the kind of 'synthesis' that it did, could only point to grand narratives, as the grounding of its Truth.²⁴

With the move toward fractal philosophy, especially via Mandelbrot's 'set', the present is precisely what is inhabited.²⁵ A kind of dot in the hourglass of life, with the future, the past, and the elsewhere gathered via economies of circulation, planes of immanence and dimensional surface slices, the present emerges as the paradigmatic iteration of the 'Zeta'.²⁶ It is posed as the unsayable-something-of-whatever-that-is replicating 'herself' via an infinite feedback sequencing loop of $Z \rightleftharpoons Z^2 + C$. This sequence-ing creates pattern; the pattern re-loops to create 'synthetic unity'; the process is repeated. It is a process found throughout nature; it is in every pattern of growth; it is at the basis of artificial intelligence, and how robots 'learn'. It

²³ G.W.F. Hegel, *The Phenomenology of Spirit*, translated by A.V. Miller (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), §1-12, §16-20, §73-85; §148; §159-163.

²⁴ For a more detailed explanation, see J. Golding, *Fractal Philosophy and the small matter of learning how to listen: Attunement as the Task of Art*, in S. O'Sullivan and S. Zepke, *Deleuze and Contemporary Art*, (Edinburgh Press: 2010). An online revised version is available via Kroker and Kroker, *Code Drift, c-Theory* <http://www.ctheory.net/articles.aspx?id=634>

²⁵ Importantly, this is not to suggest that the present is 'in between', like Samson holding apart the past and the future before the haircut. There is no such thing as an 'in between', at least as far as the present is concerned.

²⁶ A useful guide for novices to Mandelbrot's work can be found at <http://www.ddewey.net/mandelbrot/>

is what Lyotard names the 'affirmative Zero';²⁷ that is, an active ana-material morphogenesis, an active the reiteration of synthetic unities, which, on May 20, 2010 at 4.30 in the afternoon created 'life'.

We stand in, or, more precisely, at, the reckoning. Caught in mid-run, whilst on the run, this 'standing' defies rationality whilst simultaneously encoding it at the very iteration of its repeatability. One is reminded of Heidegger's provocative claim that what constitutes 'thinking' is, to paraphrase Heidegger, a leap away from representation, which has served only to blind 'rational man' through an over-reliance on observation, deduction, and neatly placed observational scientism. Thinking is an active move toward non-representational dwelling.²⁸

So, picture this: Having leapt into non-representational dwelling, materialism, mouth-breast embodiment, what do you suppose Hegel's 'rational man' would make of his encounter with our warrior princess, Synthia? For make no mistake about it: it is only a matter of time when programmable learning will slip-slide into judgments, and our Turing Machine of yesteryear might well desire something more daring than ice cream with a cherry on top.

It's a dangerous game we are playing after all.

²⁷ Jean-François Lyotard, *Libidinal Economy*, translated by Iain Hamilton Grant, (London: The Athlone Press, London, 1993), pp. 5-6.

²⁸ Martin Heidegger, *What is Called 'Thinking'*, a translation of *Was Heisst Denken?* Translation and Introduction by J. Glenn Gray. (New York: Harper Collins, 2004/1965), pp. 3-19; 39.

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