Material Idea.
On the Legibility
of Culture.

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Introduction:
Rewriting Culture between the Lines

Making the world more legible by explaining it – has this not always been the dream of science? Works of art occasionally achieve the same aim, opening up new spaces of legibility between the observer's position and the observed objects. However, art mostly seeks to attain precisely the contrary, suggesting further questions after having contributed to following its own particular quests, its own lines of searching.

Art may blur horizons – and this often happens just when it seems to make them clearer – just as it may also displace them: by focusing on its object in a close-up, art stirs and rebuilds whole systems and, therefore, redefines contexts and perspectives. Moreover, some works of art that touch us are particularly able to open all our senses as well as recall the memories of our body.

We might see culture theories as being positioned in a middle-field between science and art, reaching out towards both and choosing their research objects within significant spaces in the so-called living realm, where human deeds may be testified to and human configurations may be interpreted. Such spaces are generously wide but not always easy to precisely grasp. Furthermore, setting limits to the task of contextualizing an object proves rather impossible and accordingly impossible to stick to any single theory unless one actively decides to do so out of some act of willingness. Theorizing and analyzing belong together in a kind of dialectic teamwork which also decides about the choice of the moment needed for research closure out of the mere pragmatic reason of getting work done.

As well as always finding ourselves among marked and unmarked spaces, we are bound to combine those theoretical approaches we may find more suitable as regards specific objects of analysis. Marked spaces are relevant not only for a culture, for a group, for a nation, but also for ourselves in a strictly personal way. In spite of not always being consciously assumed, they are vital to helping configure collective and personal identities.

A space of mind, of memory unavoidably also becomes a space of affection, irrespective of whether positive, negative or ambiguous. In such a disposal, and by framing timely traces, spaces become places in processes creating a complex mosaic of significations, which is the proper working

field of a culture analyst. In other words, a culture analyst perceives in each object and situation a complex field, full of attractors and meaning knots. It remains his/her task to establish the suitable frames and reading protocols.

A theoretical view may also be perceived as a kind of marked space. Therefore, the openness of culture theory, alongside its changing position in the palette of possibilities, may find its own *closure* – together with its own *disclosure* – within the relationship with the object of analysis. The attempt to make the world (or at least our research objects) more legible represents a dynamic issue, an attempt to find a way to overcome a huge number of barriers we are otherwise unable to surmount, to cross or to decipher even should we try to overfly them and to integrate them from a panoramic perspective.

Between the (at least apparent) regularity of scientific laws and the labyrinthine character of artistic configurations, the lines of a theoretical cultural work cannot but move slowly forward as far as they remain hostage to the tensions and contradictions generated by all kinds of relationships. Such tensions and contradictions might also be a warning to prevent cultural mappings from becoming dogmatically rigid out of a (vain) search for timeless validity for instance.

The quest for legibility might therefore actually be, as we are constantly experiencing, a task of Sisyphus, most of all when insisting on the pursuit of a functional scheme instead of playing the game provided by perspective views and hypothetic challenges. This requires hermeneutic flexibility. Goethe could still aphoristically say that one person should quietly venerate the issues that cannot be immediately understood (Goethe, 1982: 12, 467). Alternatively, as his contemporary fellow-writer Schiller had already seen some years before in his third medicine dissertation: we put aside a book that may seem illegible to us at one precise moment, in order to rediscover it some decades later when able to understand it better (cf. SW V, 324). However, a further question arises here: is a wider horizon, given by life experience, a sure guide for a better reading, or does it just provide a possibility of getting more proper insights, cautioned by timely distance?

Schiller mentioned a book, but we might also say image, assertion, as well as text or sentence in any book – or even in any e-book. The relationship between the observer (together with the conditions of his or her mis/understanding) and the object of analysis remains as a condition of possibility for the building of a non-dogmatic culture theory.

And here we stand alone, at least for a first moment while facing such a task anew, but not on totally unknown ground. Such a ground may be called "the real".

Nevertheless, what we call "the real" also proves the result of a protocol of reading. Such a reading is unavoidably historical and contingent as a product of a specific temporary sense. This also incorporates a complex correlation of marked and unmarked spaces and therefore additionally in a spatial sense. But this last facet also carries the evidence of time. Such "marks", taken as individual projections or choices, are not only constantly changing, for instance, according to the daylight (or nocturnal illumination or twilight palettes), to the instant temper or mood, to the physical conditions and the cultural antecedents of the perceiving and exposing subject – to sum up, according to a whole package of conditions and circumstances. Should we put together the myriads of individuals on the global surface, we constantly have to redraw the lines of intersection and re-read the mappings of an interactive geography made up of partly individual options, partly mimetic movements. Like ruins, views are constantly destroyed and rebuilt; like lines, they are constantly erased and rewritten. However, this never happens completely anew. Culture work may also be seen as a patient attempt to read palimpsests – which are, as we well known, marked spaces par excellence.

"Objectivity" is therefore obtained by closeness to the object(s) that corresponds rather to a sculpted reconfiguration than to any plain "thick description" (Clifford Geerz). Such "objectivity" is the product of multiple intersections, which are also interwoven with forms of materialized subjectivity. We do not need to ascribe worldly reality to a "fetish character" – in analogy with the Marxist analysis of commodities – in order to realize how such corresponds to a permanent configuration of materialized intentions, plans, perspectives, as well as emotions, passions, in a perpetual crossroad of insights, obsessions, *Irrungen, Wirrungen* (Theodor Fontane) – wandering perambulations not only in the open labyrinths of modernity but also in the representations produced by our own historical readings. We easily come to such insights by demanding and practicing finer, more differentiated forms of reading the endless fields, the multiple fabrics of the world. Enriched with information from all sources and channels, the reading-of-a-book metaphor still works as a package packed with plural significances.

Relying upon the insights of neurophysiologic research into the indissolubility of reason and feelings, coming together as emotional intelligence, we may regard both instances as a further step beyond the discussions often

taking place precisely around the postulate of some opposition existing between them. In fact, the testimonies of such discussions throughout the centuries – beginning with the platonic school and culminating in Horkheimer's and Adorno's *Dialectics of Enlightenment* – provide us with a considerable amount of marked spaces, examples of what we call here *material ideas*. Since emotions (and passions) are always as present and alive as flesh and blood in our complex psychosomatic system, they are not only interwoven with the representation of the alleged "tyrannical reason" that is supposed to repress them but they also contribute to configuring and intensifying reason based discourses. In this view, I would like to stress the hypothesis according to which the highest forms of the so-called "repression by reason" might by the same token be called the highest forms of "passion of reason". In other words, we should finally ask whether reason has not hitherto been a rather more fragile part, grasped, manipulated and configured by emotions and passions. This assertion may of course seem disputable. However what does seem undeniable is the following: as a construct, reason is a culture product, *natura naturata*, while passions are endowed with energy sources, *natura naturans*.

This brings us to the title of this volume. As an expression in itself, "material idea" has been here borrowed from a text written by Friedrich Schiller when a 19-year old medicine student. The description of the constituting processes of such ideas, although remaining within the philosophical-medical discourses of the late Enlightenment that proposed the first psychosomatic, anthropological perspectives (Riedel, 1985: 61ff), may shed light upon the building processes of ideologies. According to the young Schiller, such ideas "stir the soul" by forcing themselves "on the understanding more potently in all associations" (SW V, 266). In a kind of zero degree, according to Schiller, the "soul" or conscientiousness develops an attentiveness that points to balanced conditions in the possibility of developing free judgments, free forms of willing and acting. The gap between such situations and the grasping of the "soul" or conscientiousness by materialized ideas such as obsessions was left unexplained by Schiller. Nevertheless, his hypothesis still opens a number of thrilling questions.

This text was presented to a jury at the Stuttgart Military Academy (Karlsschule) as a medical dissertation submitted to qualify as a physician. It was rejected on the grounds of being considered too speculative. In order to gain his medical degree, and following a more academic discourse, Schiller wrote two more dissertations, one in Latin about the differences between

two kinds of fever, the other in German about the correlations between the animal and spiritual aspects of human nature. This third essay develops further pioneering insights about the psychosomatic correlations between body and soul and the display of such correlations. Ironically, Schiller quotes from his utmost secret dramatic project *Die Räuber [The Robbers]* – which some months later became a great success on the Mannheim stage – portrayed as coming from the feather of an English author, "Krake", somehow inspired by Shakespeare (cf. SW V, 309). As far as we know, such boldness remained unnoticed by the Karlsschule jury members.

The expression "material idea" is here supposed to take on a broader meaning than Schiller intended. It reaches out to multiple senses in the context of the dialectics of being-in-the-world and the paradoxes of a culture conception that always keeps an eye on contrasts whilst trying to discern the varieties among them. Therefore, this draws attention to culture configurations as spaces marked by form creations, following action memories, as well as their in-between traces and configurations.

As far as we know, modernity has dislocated the charge of meanings from older symbols to newer signs. Without being erased, the former often become easily overruled through their own inability or unavailability to move according to the proper speed of the communications. The dynamics of modernity seem to obliterate former significances, which had been settled by a patient work of meaning projections or, at the least, not caring primarily for their preservation or rescue. In the last four centuries, the Cartesian *res extensa* appears to have become full of mobile spaces, changing the scope for naming and identifying their marked and unmarked counterparts.

But is this really so – or should we not instead speak about forms of re-configuration, re-absorption, re-creation? Should we not mistrust a "current rhetoric of impossibility and unrepresentability" as a "counter-productive over-dramatization" (Rorty, 2001: 36)? In other words, as Siegfried Kracauer already suspected in his "Film Theory", we probably live not only among ruins of old believed contents with only a shadowy conscientiousness of things in their plenitude (cf. Kracauer, 1964: 379). The closeness to Walter Benjamin (our not really mysterious "WB") can neither be denied nor concealed. However, this closeness might also mean a simple recognition of the power of literature and art as an indispensable complement to scientific perspectives. Artistic codes and features provide synthetic insights that might fill the spaces within the grids of significance provided by scientific conceptions.

The indispensable distinction between moments of thinking, willing and judging, not only on a timely basis but also as spatial instances, is also connected with the relationship between them and the realms of the invisible and the visible. As a matter of fact, no cultural analysis can give up – or deny the existence of – the hidden enormity of the iceberg, implying the contextualizing task within the same analysis. Such a process of thinking simultaneously works as a kind of store for potential operations of willing and judging. The latter draw the premises for political action (in the sense of the Arendtian praxis and Habermasian communicative action) and take place, on the one hand, in the realm of appearances. On the other hand, prior to any decision that probably leads to action, on the basis of the perception of such appearances, we may set limits to our study of objects (cf. Arendt, 1982: 3). Thus, we *detach* them so to say from their respective space-time contexts and yet without *clipping* them *off* entirely.

Such a procedure brings us back to those realms where abstract and concrete elements, invisible and proto-visible aspects, continuously tend to merge. These work as flexible and open structures, constantly bringing about sense proposals. These are inseparable from the indispensable (self-) critical observation. Without this perspective, any cognitive mapping of an object of analysis would risk simultaneously becoming a work of both Sisyphus and Penelope. The caducity of the work itself, also due to the tendency towards the crystallization of any mappings, even the most complex and thickest, such caducity becomes evident in the confrontation with the permanent mutation that the actual context imposes on an object. The visibility of contingency hereby shows a fluid *polycontextuality* in a process of mutation of unpredictable speed (or slowness). At this point, the frequent lamentation (not only among older people) about the changes brought about by new technologies, about the threat these may pose to the life of books, appears as an expression, eventually pathetic, of a withdrawal from the indispensible task of starting building steps, bridges, drawing the attention to unmarked, intermediary spaces. Such a start might prove a simple result from a slight movement, of the eye, of the head, of the body, of the spirit-and-soul: "In order to understand other realities, it is enough to have the possibility of observing things in another way" (Innerarity, 2010: 148).

Some of the most powerful barriers to cultural analysis regarding the complementary tendencies in the materialization of ideas and the idealization of matter involve assertions with an absolute, conclusive character. For Schiller, these represented the most radical forms of "material ideas". Our

deployment of that expression proves less radical and more concerned with the connections of invisible, *protovisible* and visible elements and aspects in a cultural context as these belong together within a whole system (as our analytical objects) and its environment. They provide a reliable ground for object contextualization.

Marked spaces also display, as already asserted, evident historical dimensions. By reading how symbolic constitution may provide grids for reading History, we cannot be as sure as Marc Augé, in quoting Saussure, that the dominant aspects are forms of persistence of the ancient. While processual sedimentations take on an undeniable degree of stability, nevertheless, by setting and configuring marked spaces that have more chances to be universally recognized, it may happen that sheer violence, either as accelerated dynamics, or as an expression of power will, or as a response to injustice, repression or unfortunate living conditions, or even simply out of the blue of welfare boredom, leaves deep traces which need reading as modalities of memory, as well as what has been silenced, forgotten or distorted (cf. Augé, 1994: 18ss).

The determinative choices of marked spaces, as well as the forms of indifference towards unmarked spaces or spaces in-between, all of this is culturally conditioned and yet to different degrees and forms. We could enquire, almost in a tone of provocation, in just how many regions of our planet a person would easily agree with George Allan's assertion, according to which "persons are condemned to be free, but they are also condemned to be organic bodies and denizens of a culture" (Allan, 2001: 115). Surely, one might begin by asking to which degree one is allowed to be free since the two other aspects possess a more evident status. Even if we further agree that "these neighboring systems are [...] so tightly intertwined that it is nearly impossible to distinguish among nature, nurture, and free choice in the constitution of any actual person" (ib., 115f), the appearances of free choice seem clearer in our individual-based, Western guilt-cultures. However, perhaps this constitutes a false question when deciding to speak instead of "meaningful systems" (ib., 263) that enable us to integrate all kinds of differences and contradictions as well as "alternatives that might have been and alternatives that yet might be" (ib.). Traditionalism may lurk in situations where individuals, feeling insecure, reach out a help searching hand to old paradigms and not only in shame-cultures.

Between an "assertoric gaze", in its dogmatic narrowness, and an "aletheic gaze", which "tends to see from a multiplicity of standpoints and

perspectives, and is multiple, pluralistic, democratic" (Pallasmaa, 2005: 36), there can be no question about the choice. However, this represents only the beginning of a path that encounters a succession of crossroads with no formula prescribing any decision about which turn to take.

This volume's texts are divided into two groups. The six articles in the first group ("On Marked Spaces and Spaces In-between") contain specific themes interrelating with the main concern of thinking and presenting problems within their time and space contexts. They were originally conference papers and thus far unpublished and now completely rewritten in order to make the interconnections between marked, unmarked and intermediary spaces clearer.

However, we may also say that a culture analyst is entitled to follow further purposes beyond the simple will to understand complexity. He or she may quest, for instance, for a spirit of peace that has to begin by analyzing practices of conflict in order to keep its presence alive, both as a historical experience and as a threat and opportunity to switch from or into violence. War and conflict must not only be regarded as necessary *heterotopias* of peace (cf. Foucault, 2001: 1571ff) but as its nourishing soil. We could call them, analogically, *heterochronias* of peace. Without the pulsing, close memory of violence (that may surely be recalled by consequent culture work), there is no possibility of setting and keeping solid ground for a lasting peace as experienced in the recent post-war decades in most European countries. We rapidly realize how important this issue becomes when recalling all the conditions of possibility to produce and practice culture in its widest sense.

This is the main thematic thread extending through the short essays in the second part of this volume ("Searching for the Birth of Peace out of the Spirit of Conflict"). They are all dated, in order to mark the circumstances of their genesis, and contributions to discussions within the frame of the writers' meetings organized yearly by the Writers for Peace Committee of PEN International and taking place at Bled, Slovenia. They have only been published as internal conference papers for meeting participants. They have also been completely rewritten for this volume.

Such discussions have never concealed the perplexity of the double nature of PEN members around the world – as citizens and as creators – and the awareness of the fragile balance between deeds and works, between *praxis* and *poiesis*. The polemical character of most of these texts interconnects with great concern over the frequent forms of misreading the nature

of violence. As I wrote elsewhere, we should never forget the assertion that the "wounds provoked by violence always leave scars which should be read within the great book of life and hence enable us in this way to think historically about the effects of violence and to act in order to avoid injustice, cruelty and arbitrariness" (Salema, 2007: 75). Such might be suitable reading protocols, as lessons taught by marked spaces – as time scars.

Nevertheless, the scope for such violently marked spaces to release new opportunities and create forms of peaceful interchange may be opened by cultural conscientiousness of what is at stake. The reading protocol of historical memories, as well as the building of consensual practices anew, is a process that shall always remain a challenge not only for cultural analysts but most of all also for denizens in general. As George Allan puts it, "the rules of a game do not dictate the movements of the players" (Allan, 2001: 265) – they set many unmarked spaces free, which wait to be marked for the best and for the worst.

Out of all cases and situations, however problematic they might appear, there is always the possibility of taking productive yet unavoidably provisory conclusions.

<div align="right">Lisbon, October 2013</div>

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I – Marked and Unmarked Spaces. Reading Culture Figurations

The Oblique Web in the Narrative World

Let us imagine a story where the main character is someone about to light the fire in the hearth of the family's country home. The person does not necessarily have to be a man or a woman but earns a living in one of the liberal professions. This would mean having completed higher education and being proficient in some specific sort of skill. The person in question needs not be a practicing writer but, instead, owns a *narrative spirit* capable of dismantling the world into meaningful segments. While fanning the fire and sorting out bits of damp wood, putting them to one side, A. – let us fall back on the alphabet here and call our protagonist by the first letter – mourns the fact that firewood is not what it used to be. As s/he does so, s/he mulls over the reasons which led her/him to invite a few friends over for a get-together that also includes dinner and a long chat sitting before the leaping flames.

With these few pointers, it is now possible to spin a web stretching outwards from the here-and-now of local time and move off in virtually any far-off direction, going back into the past or ahead into the future, into universal time. Thus, by starting out as several bright dots, the network of A.'s friends gains in form and shape, becoming computerized images in living or lived-through memories. Put another way, they become computerized images in A.'s experience or story-making unraveling indirect information.

Both the acts of weaving a web and casting a net imply the need to survive – if their original meaning is taken into account. And should survival persist in being an emergency in vast areas of the world, in others it has become no less imperious. In the latter case, however, this imperiousness has been plucked from the biological world and transferred to an intellectual, psychic plane where it becomes vital to discover oneself and find self-affirmation, to intermesh one's identity with one's alter ego.

Let us say that A. has come face to face with a crucial moment in her/his existence; s/he has reached a turning point where messages and other people's opinions are necessary in order to see beyond her/his own forecasts and doubts. For example: whether or not to drop an interesting but exhausting profession; whether to leave behind the urban crisscross of timetables and roadways; whether to renounce the social whirl and the challenges of modernization. True to the end-of-century stereotype, A. is both single and

younger looking than what s/he really is; s/he is divorced with adult children and leads her/his own life – in other words, any decision-making need only affect her/himself.

Afterwards, the narrative may resort to flashbacks to recall other characters. Some of them would shortly be keeping A. company before the dying embers while others will not be making their appearance because they have since passed away or merely exist in A.'s imagination or because they do not really get on with A.. The oblique web of the narrative plot may be stretched indefinitely to free whoever from their history or dreams, from their geography or intermediary reality. However, the fixture point to which the web attaches itself continues to remain the place, the body giving the narrative its shape, in this case, A. And it is A. who will be putting off future challenges. Because these flights into the future may cause anguish, discomfort or suffocation; they are leaps into the unknown void or regressive descents into tightly-knit but all-too-familiar circles. For instance, leaping into space may take the form of supporting humanitarian causes on other continents, travelling to uncertain parts where a new sense of local awareness emerges along with a new sense impatience and new intransigence; it may well lie in subjecting oneself to the inevitable misunderstandings that fail to protect even those wishing to strip themselves of previously held privileges. For its part, plunging into the restricted circle may very well mean going back to the traditional humus of the family home, kept alive mostly by way of a photographic memory and, at that precise moment, focused upon the fireplace, on the womb-like fire. But then again, A. has no illusions about the narrowness of such walls or about the not-so-eternal cycle of life turning within them; a kind of life that risks gilding over the dark fluid of the city with its sharp-drawn breaths and the disenchanted trembling of its numbers and engines. A. has a critical, social awareness; s/he feels a certain amount of regret about her/his freely-admitted selfishness, belonging as s/he does to a generation which, one fine day, held the dream of building a better world.

As from this point onwards, the web opens itself up to a horizon full of expectations but it will only discover its shape in the narrative's plot when the gaps left by hurtling over several chasms, between eras, between cultures have been filled. From this stance – and, for the time being, only from this stance – dare I admit that in a Flaubertian manner of speaking, A. *c'est moi* owing to the attraction and rejection exercised upon me by the place I am in at present: the reign of mothers calling us only to reject us again, the child's

rhyme of myth and kitsch to which we compulsively return. And our mothers' reign is writing. As much as this blesses us, this also tears us apart just as soon as we show we are ready to defend its existence, its persistence, with the tenacity of any of the great, obstinate heroes of Greek tragedy.

But is writing enough? In other words, what is lost should the alphabetical combinations eventually be defeated by imagistic and digital combinations? Looking back over the tracks left by the history of writing, I do not merely see ideograms and pictograms crushed underfoot by an alphabetic *logos* throughout the centuries. I see this very *logos* binding human beings to the work bench; I see them bending double under artificial light, silencing their declamatory mouths, paralyzing both their performative pleasure and the controlled freedom of their limbs, cutting their breathing in *legato* wherein circulates their vital energy, and instead, replacing it with a state of tension in *staccato* fed on compulsive vices. Faced with the panorama of iconoclastic passions which writing has both encouraged and fallen victim to – and here, we recall the trials and purges of different climes – I cannot help but express serious doubts about writing being indispensable, doubts which are much more than a mere rhetorical artifice and much more than a chance artifact leading me to finally conclude that, in the end, writing and books are indispensable.

Let us look at what lies behind such doubts.

This love which (I believe) everyone here today has for reading and writing does not, in itself, mean any kind of proselytizing fundamentalism or any wish to live in a non-existent community composed of feverishly busy readers and writers. Besides, I think that, in the end, there is not much difference in the circles of contaminated air lying between Don Quixote's obsession for the alphabet and Sancho Panza's common horse sense; their narrow horizons eventually meet. On the one hand, what I call the *plus-value of reading and writing* does not only belong to book-lovers, who should by rights be able to appreciate the whole process involved in book-making, including the sacrificing of trees. This plus-value makes part and parcel of the narrative spirit of which I spoke at the beginning and which, I believe, provides one of the best weapons to respond to the challenges of the 21st century. It is this spirit which, even if the body that houses it never writes a single line, still knows how to discern the mechanisms of the *narrative world*, casting a range of virtualities before its eyes that extend from the nerve-wracking urban choreography to the aggressive or affable palette of nature. Ranging from the familiar city quarter

where socializing renews contact to the fascinating human mosaic-work of languages and cultures we have not yet learnt about but should have the humility to decipher in adulthood. Because everything forms part of the great book of the world even though not always written down nor even read. Furthermore, at this stage, we note that the narrative spirit is also the perceptive body; it ceases to give pride of place to sight and, instead, becomes the touch of skin and metallic surfaces, the taste of acidic fruit and dry sweets, the smell of strong mingling emotions like heavy scent or stale ashes, the sound of breathing rising and falling and a pulse beating. In brief, it seeks to go beyond the microscopic dimensions that open themselves up to us like a series of screens, helped along to a great extent by new technology and globalization.

We therefore realize that we have to deal with the advances made by computer science within a rigorous dialectic of means and ends. Should this noble Western principle be linked to a no less noble principle, which is famous in my host-country's culture, then it might be said that technology would seem a stranger bearing a warlike semblance. What is implied here, not so much any fierce combat nor even unconditional surrendering but, instead, a rather serious negotiation in which there is a meeting of bodies and minds.

On the other hand, it does not really help if we are to be surrounded by technological artificiality when having already discovered that, contrary to images and similar to books, they curtail our performative movements, which are really the only moments we have of animistic interaction and impossible to capture on film. All around us we note the rhythmic beating of expansion and counteraction expressed in the wish to sever the bonds of form and in the desperate flight for shelter in yet another kind of form that happens to be even more authoritarian and imperative. Because we pay dearly every time we cut ourselves off; human beings are not able to survive for very long in an anarchic fluid, unless anaesthetized by a state of continuous, frenetic, almost always violent activity. The Western world may yet pay dearly for the devastation caused by the cultural blindness that leads it to favor the youth-oriented dictates that hold increasing sway over the labor market, leisure time and models for attaining an idealized self and aesthetic life style. As to be expected, the problematic nature of such patterns emerges precisely in those people wishing to conform to them without, however, having the necessary physical and mental requirements. They therefore race off towards mirages, galloping ahead on their technological

prostheses. What provided the stuff for farce, superbly depicted in the literary drama and epics of other eras, has now tended to become an epidemic causing blindness because there is just too much to see.

Let us look at the present situation. It is not my intention to curse or praise a cultural pattern that may or may not be our own. Neither should we limit our recourse to technology to our particular era or to certain kinds of apparatus and materials. As ancestors of this self-same technology, do examples not lie in the manipulation of consciences by the mediaeval Jesuit Church and in the pleasurable, rational choreography enjoyed by Court society and prevalent to a lesser degree among today's monarchies? A predominantly animist technology in the former case and a predominantly corporal technology in the latter. In every time, just as something has been programmed, organized into hierarchies and made functional, anarchy has also counteracted such programs, hierarchies and functions. Thus has the world progressed in a systolic and diasystolic fashion, irrespective of the quarrel going on about the calendar and exactly when the turn of the millennium occurs.

Freedom to create, therefore, holds an oblique relationship with hierarchies and anarchies. It spins its web, setting off a chain of known and unknown sequences, feeding itself on the plasticity of a language open to other languages, where writing is only one of them. A fearful perspective? It need not be for those who have not made writing their livelihood but merely something to live for. In other words, it need not be feared by those who do not depend on publishers' fees but live for the density and the harmony of the measured word that has been weighed, smelled, tasted and felt. This word is our tool and also our epidermis; it submerses us in contradictions and adversities, divorcing understanding from emotion only to find that afterwards a way has been found to articulate one with the other.

Understanding involves being able to articulate even when such articulations turn out torturous and complicated. I would recall two examples of such articulation at this point. The first relates to the Doge Palace in Venice, and I would advise anyone about to visit it to choose the following route. Sandwiched between floors open to the general public and hidden among halls showing the splendor of the time is a relatively modest floor housing what used to be the archives of the Venetian Republic. A guided tour of these «secret sojourns» results in a better understanding of the workings of the bureaucratic machine where data compiling *avant la lettre* took place behind the scenes. Most of the information stored here came

from anonymous denunciations made by fringe elements and respectable citizens who slipped their writings into the open mouth of a stone lion embossed upon a wall at the patio entrance. The lion is shaped like a sun, shining brightly and rationally. However, its mouth makes us wary for it outlines a dark jagged oval hole that is, at one and the same time, tiny and yet infinite. It is like the ring of Moebius, its tendrils creeping outwards to spy and wreak revenge, perhaps the undesirable but also the inevitable travelling companions of such information gathering. After having meandered through this maze and visited the Inquisition chamber, where a painting by Hieronymus Bosch casts a sinister light, as well as the torture chamber, we find ourselves once again in the open air of St. Mark's square. It is then we notice the tiny round windows, situated halfway up, dotted along the corridors of these floors. We see them better because we now know more and we realize that our knowledge is merely a drop in a very deep ocean.

My second example focuses on both the advantages to be had from globalization and the perplexity caused about everything brought to us by satellite in the way of information and that consistently challenges our narrative spirit. We now witness the emergence of nationalities which, all said and done, have always been there in very concrete ways. We see demonstrations marching for civilizations that we failed at first to understand until starting to spin the oblique web that tragically cuts down on distances and makes us become increasingly more responsible for the rather hazy connections we afterwards discern. Placed within this dynamic of approach and withdrawal (always in order to see better but also to use our other senses more judiciously), we are forced to question the correlation between Western permissiveness and the fundamentalist inhibition that straitjackets feminine activity and movement. Such an inhibition, as we know, goes to the extreme of turning women into mere reproductive shadows of themselves, obliging them to hide their bodies under heavy drapes. Be that as it may – the narrative spirit asks a moment later – is this the only form of repression? Should we not take a step further beyond limiting anthropocentrism? Should we not only busy ourselves demanding rights but, more importantly, give shape to animal, vegetable and mineral places, endow them with weight and sound, smell and touch? In a final analysis, do we not have everything to learn from these cosmovisions teaching us precisely this and reaching beyond the poorly contrived audio-visual illusions created by television channels and Internet webs?

What is at stake – so my character A. finally decides – is living and sacrificing more tree trunks so as to heat up the room and looking at the cobwebs patiently spun over the weeks s/he was away from the house that keeps alive the memory of a microcosm inhabited by parents and grandparents. About those threads stretching into the future? A. knows nothing about them yet.

The story may well begin here.

Dr. Schiller and Mr. Mankind – Anthropological Analysis, Diagnosis and Therapy in the Late Enlightenment

"We should reject every answer to a question that has not yet been formulated" (P III, 40), Friedrich Schiller asserted in an informal conversation with his family in 1801 when the subject was raised about giving a religious education to a very young child. Preceding what Franklin D. Roosevelt was to say much later, Schiller continued by stating that nothing makes human kind more miserable than fear and in this respect, people had a lot to learn from animals and their absolute present. Just take the ox, for example: it only becomes afraid when the butcher's axe swings down upon it. He ended by praising the role of "enlightened understanding" striving to overcome misfortune without fearing it.

His words, uttered in a carefully chosen chatty voice because he was speaking to one of his wife's relations, once again reveals what has become a dominant note in research in the last few years: the "idealist", Schiller, who not only knew about the physical reality of the human being but, more importantly, about what I would call the *reality of human ideality*. It remains true that in other personal testimonies, mainly in the portrait he paints of himself in a letter to Goethe, written on 23.8.1794 (BW 1, 33 onwards), it was the author himself who helped construct the idealist cliché surrounding his image, which has lasted through to our own times (cf. Berghahn 1986).

However, before we run the risk of getting ensnared in the various arguments raised in studies about the author, we would do well not to forget Schiller's essay on ingenuous and sentimental poetry, where he deconstructed the caricatured extremes of realism and idealism in a most remarkable way. When writing about idealism in 1795, he differentiated between the true from the false, saying: "The true idealist only discards nature and experience because he has failed to find in it what is unchanging and unconditionally necessary and which nature wants him to seek; the fantasist discards nature merely by chance, so that he is able to pursue the desires and whims of his imagination that more freely" (SW V, 780).

This sort of objectively removed criticism is typical of writers living during the later Enlightenment, confronted as they were by the experience of the French Revolution and bearing the scars left on human kind by the

dizzying spiral of ideological experiments and physical deprivation. All Schiller's work reflects this complicated interweaving and mirrors "the concerns of a pedagogue, the apprehensions of an anthropologist, the impressions of a psychologist, the commentaries of a playwright, the marks of a stage-director, the skepticism of a historian, the despondency of a demiurge, the enthusiasm of a spectator – of the theatre, of the world" (Cadete *apud* Schiller, 1997: 7).

Last but not least, I should add that all Schiller's work, whether his plays or his historical writing as well as in his attempt to work out an aesthetic theory, reveals a *clinical eye* sharpened by the knowledge gained while sitting for his medical degree at the Stuttgart Military Academy between 1776 and 1780. This perspective, which tended to act as a place of meeting for all the others mentioned above, focused on the Enlightenment's main central attraction – in other words, the human being enquiring into his structure, his potentialities and his boundaries.

Let us look at the way in which the steps involving: 1. Analysis, 2. Diagnosis, and 3. Therapy, fit into this clinical perspective.

1. Schiller's analytical method, revealed throughout his entire work when , in the Fourth Letter on aesthetic education, calling for "a complete anthropological assessment" (SW V, 577), was consolidated on the basis of a peculiar combination made up of Cartesian theories about influx, Leibnitz's psychology of the faculties, French materialism and various other lines of thought typical of his age, although more particularly the "doctor-philosopher" current (cf. Dewhurst, Reeves, 1978 and Riedel, 1985), that came under the heading of popular philosophy. In his first dissertation presented to a jury from his medical school, Schiller raised these three perspectives from a critical angle. He tried to step beyond them by taking up the line which was much in discussion during his day and considered to lie at the crux of the matter: the influence the body and the spirit mutually exert upon each other. Schiller's speculations led him to defend the existence of a "transmutative force" allegedly demonstrated by experience and, owing to this, made irrefutable as theory[1]

Although he had left unchanged and even reaffirmed the conceptual premises of the age, namely the marked distinction between matter and spirit, the immortality of the soul, divine perfection and the moral perfectibility of the human being, Schiller's first dissertation on medicine was rejected by

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[1]   Cf. *Philosophie der Physiologie [Philosophy of Physiology]*(*1779*), *SW V*, 254.

the examining jury and he was thus obliged to write another two dissertations in the months that followed. One of them dealt with a medical issue (describing two different kinds of fever), while the other opened up a broader range of study about the correlation between the human being's physical nature and his spiritual nature and Universal History. In this second text, the author openly recognizes the influence exerted on him by Adam Ferguson's *An Essay on the History of Civil Society* (1767). This had been translated into German by the popular philosopher, Christian Garve, and published in Leipzig the year following its first edition while bearing no mention of the translator's name. Apart from relying on this publication to give the object of his study wider scope in space and time, projecting it backwards in time to other civilizations, Schiller also imbued it with personal concerns of an experiential, dramaturgical nature. Such preoccupations were to take on particular interest when consolidating his methodology as I shall briefly refer to next.

His concern with the experiential was aroused when following up on a case study on hypochondria. It involved a fellow doctor, whom Schiller was attending while writing his second and third medical dissertations. On a par with noting in his definition of *Febris Putridarum*, that the etiological factors consisted not only of physical symptoms such as miasmas and wounds but also psychic symptoms such as indignation, anger, weariness, yearning and melancholy, the writer excitedly noted in the same text, that the fever also had a healthy aspect to it (excretory, purifying, cathartic). He pointed out the etymology of the word, *februare*, and recalled how this meant a chance to ritually expel ancestral ghosts[2]. At the same time, Schiller observed his colleague's behavior, believing his disease to indicate "a real case of hypochondria, this unhappy state typical of a human being, in which he is the deplorable victim of the exact sympathy between the abdomen and the soul, a disease of the spirit of all those who think and feel deeply as well as of almost all the greatest wisemen"[3]. Schiller leaves the question of cause open and states that "the exact connection between the body and the soul makes it infinitely difficult to detect the primary source of evil". This in turn, renders difficult deciding on the place to begin looking for its origin, whether in the body or in the soul[4].

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[2]   Cf. *De descrimine febrium inflammatorium et putridarum* (1780), *NA* 22, p. 48, and also Foucault 1983, p. 182.

[3]   Cf. *SW* V, p.286 onwards.

[4]   *Ib.* p. 269.

The dramaturgical dimension emerged just as Schiller was rewriting his study about the correlation of man's physical and spiritual natures and which later became his third dissertation. This also came simultaneous to the writing of his first play, *Die Räuber (The Robbers)*. He was unable to resist writing into his academic thesis, a self-quotation under the pseudonym, Krake, supposedly a Shakespearean scholar and whose work exemplified this correlation. Accordingly, the evil Franz Moor, brother of the brigand, Karl Moor, intends to kill their father by causing him grief because the old man had transferred his favours to the prodigal son. We see how this gets exemplified in the harmony among strings when their vibrations are mutually transmitted between the physical and the psychic domains in agreement with what Schiller calls the law of mixed natures according to which "the free activity of organs should also be linked to the free flow of sensations and ideas, (…) while the deterioration in their state should likewise have the same way of thinking and feeling"[5].

Both examples show how difficult it was for Schiller, the analyst, to abstain from interfering with either the intention to treat or the aim to manipulate. When seen against the backdrop of the world in the 1700s, and given the Enlightenment's agreement as to mankind's active role, current research was founded on the way in which all knowledge was constituted and processed as a moment triggering action in the world. In Schiller's case, this view of things was magnified not only because of his medical-philosophical (anthropological) and historical knowledge acquired at the Academy, but also because of his gift for rhetoric and drama. They afforded him a highly complex view of things due to his heightened awareness of spatial and temporal limitations. Schiller tapped into precisely these gifts when striving to articulate his analysis, diagnosis and therapy.

2. We know that in medical practice, treatment cannot take place without the benefit of prior diagnosis and a diagnosis is only made when some sort of crisis (or disease) calls for it. Schiller's medical expertise helped him consolidate a line of thought tending to favor the psychodynamic approach put forward by Georg Ernst Stahl without, however, dismissing La Mettrie's materialism[6]. At this point, Schiller, the playwright, made use of his clinical look in order to bestow added relevance to the state of conflict, both latent and open, between the components of human nature.

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[5]   Cf. Note 8 and also, *Versuch über den Zusammenhang der tierischen natur des Menschen mit seiner geistigen [Essay on the correlation of the animal nature of the human being with his spiritual nature]*, *SW* V, 312.

[6]   Cf. Riedel 1985, p. 24s.

It is here that we are able to catch a glimpse of the nucleus of human complexity, revealed through analysis, sharpened through diagnosis, and partially re-established in its precarious state of balance through therapy. However much the relationship between the body, spirit and soul may be in harmony, the diversity of their separate natures and aims helps to set up an osmotic tension and mainly in situations where there is opposition and conflict. Knowing about this tension enabled Schiller not only to chart diagnostic maps for private and universal human crises, but also to draw up treatment strategies that would very often take advantage of the ensuing driving-force energies for writing drama.

As a matter of fact, all the diagnoses he made about crises, whether on the individual plane, as in the case involving Grammont, or on a civilizational plane as written about in his Fifth Letter on aesthetic education, are built around the shattering of sensitive and intellectual possibilities as well as the analytical and dynamic capabilities that may well lead to their destruction.

In a letter to his friend Ferdinand Huber written on 5.10.1785, Schiller describes the enthusiasm which helps free the spirit from the body whereby the surrounding physical shell obeys the laws of gravity and falls away in an arch-like movement[7]. In the same year, Schiller pondered about the effects of this between-extremes laceration: "This free spirit, eager to rise, is woven into a rigid, immovable mechanism, a mortal body; it is mingled with its trivial needs and tied to its small destinies – this god has been exiled to a world of worms"[8]. Moreover, his colleague, Grammont, possessed of a "Pietist delirium" and a metaphysical bitterness which lead him to believe that "all truths are suspicious", is plunged into a state of "terrible melancholy", on the same level as his "despair about his own strength" and going as far as a proto-nihilistic denial of existential finality[9].

Such personal experience was to become the subject of discussion within the *Sturm und Drang* literary movement. It gave scope to many different kinds of energy, to undisguised erotic rule-breaking, genial dreams, pathological symptoms of repression and civilizational ill-being[10]. Even Schiller himself failed to escape from the so-called Werther syndrome (and here we

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[7] *Jonas* I, 270.

[8] Fr. Schiller, *Philosophische Briefe*, SW V, 341.

[9] Fr. Schiller, *Berichte über die Krankheitsumstände des Eleven Grammont [Accounts of student Grammont's disease conditions]*, SW V, 269.

[10] Concerning this subject, cf. Mattenklott 1985.

recall the widespread effects Goethe's youthful novel had). He confesses as much in his letter of 20.1.1788 to Ferdinand Huber: "What is my state now or what has it been ever since you've known me? A fatal, never-ending chain of tension and weariness, opium-like lethargy and champagne-like light-headedness"[11].

In this way, Schiller tries to understand the make-up of physical-spiritual pathogenicity – in this case hypochondriacal melancholy – within a framework of dynamic tension between health and sickness. He attempts to transform spatial discontinuity into a kind of process which allows one to glimpse at a possible course of treatment leading to cure: "Skepticism and free thought are the feverish paroxysms of the human spirit and, therefore, in the end they play a role in helping to regain health precisely because of the artificial shock they cause in well-organized souls"[12].

Ten years after writing these lines, Schiller was already dubious about the capacity human civilization had to regenerate itself in less than one century, as he admitted in his Seventh Letter on aesthetic education[13]. The reasons are well-known, as is the picture Schiller so vividly painted in his Fifth Letter showing the uncouthness of the uneducated and the degeneration of the privileged classes. This letter reflects upon the traumatic experience suffered by many intellectuals in the aftermath of the French Revolution. Nevertheless, many readers of these selfsame letters are unaware that the focal point of his analysis had already been mentioned by the author as a young man writing his first medical dissertation. Schiller had described the morbid symptoms of what he then called the "material idea" as the over-powering of the physical state by intellectual or emotional obsessions: "[the material idea] will impose itself on all associations, although to a greater degree on one's understanding, acting decisively over it in an even more powerful way (…). There might be people, therefore, who end up by automatically doing something good or something bad"[14].

In Schiller's opinion, the same sort of contamination is present in utopian thought and it came in for some severe criticism in his Twenty-fourth Letter on aesthetic education. In this letter, he pointed out the features common to all "systems of happiness" whether relating with political or religious matters. Furthermore, he showed how in all of them and while in the

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[11]   *Jonas* II, p. 9s.
[12]   Cf. note 15, *SW* 5, p. 337.
[13]   Cf. *SW* V, 590.
[14]   Cf. note 8, *SW* V, 266.

midst of their animality, an individual or a group may be caught unawares by a push forward towards the absolute, helped along by imagination: "… and once thrust into this dull state, all man's efforts will only be directed at what is material and temporal (…), he sees himself merely motivated by the wish to extend his own individual scope towards infinity instead of becoming abstracted from it; he aspires to reaching a state of inexhaustible matter instead of aspiring to acquire shape (…).The first fruits he harvests in the spiritual kingdom are (…) *worry* and *fear*; both bear the weight of reasoning and not of the senses although it is the kind of reasoning that is obscure in its aim and acts out its will directly on matter"[15].

However, it is not only ideological voracity that concerns Schiller in his role as an analyst of civilization. He diagnoses its evils through disclosing the way human faculties have been dissociated, the way hostility wedges itself between intuition and speculation. In his Sixth Letter on aesthetic education, we face the dismaying effects of modern specialization. Needless to say, this ripping apart of the faculties bears witness to a failure to mediate, similar to what happened in the case described above. Moreover, when hostility is transformed into aggressiveness, distance, which becomes void whenever there is any contamination, also tends to disappear. In this sense, the deployment of metaphorical wordplay about war-like nature never proves innocent. Thus, we see the imagination threatening "understanding's laborious plantations" and the spirit of abstraction sucking up the energy emanating from the heart and from fantasy[16].

3. Here, we note that the individual or civilizational treatment put forward by Schiller has to go through setting up or re-establishing the circumstantial mediators between the two sets of faculties, respectively grouped according to what the author, in his Twelfth Letter, calls the sensuous drive and the form-drive. We know that he elaborated upon his aesthetic theory within this context. He considered the mediating action of the play-drive, as well as the action exerted by the play-drive itself, to be of utmost importance, whether stemming from the effort of bringing the faculties together once again after having become disconnected from each other, or whether meaning an effort to slow down and realign the distance in cases where these drives had become contaminated[17]. What Schiller was trying to do here was reach beyond the rigid Platonic-Kantian duality by referring to the Fichtian

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[15]   Cf. note 20, *SW* V, 648.

[16]   *Ib.*, p.528

[17]   Cf. *Ib.*, p. 604 ff and 612.

concept of correlation[18]thus allowing him to either set up a hiatus between the moments in conflict or fill this hiatus with mechanisms capable of absorbing the excess energy generated by the faculties in a state of tension.

Let us go back to the example and look at the treatment Grammont received. It not only revealed Schiller's psychological sensitiveness but also knowledge on the most advanced scientific methods of his time. They were based on psychosomatic therapy that was intentionally void of the customary physical violence then accompanying the treatment of mental illnesses. His description of a course of therapy based on physical and spiritual movement proves particularly interesting. The aim was to transfer or dissipate hypochondriacal obsessions by going horseback riding, bathing and reading. However, these positive aspects should not attempt to divert attention from Schiller's own ambiguous position. He openly admitted to having used the patient's language in order to gain his confidence and even of having played a double game with both the patient and his supervising tutors. Without disguising a certain amount of pride in his own rhetorical talents and creativeness, Schiller owned up to the fact that his methods were not quite orthodox but he excused them by explaining to the Duke of Württemberg, to whom the reports were addressed, that his results had been successful: "...while we were speaking, we were unable to make him realize that we were following orders; we were only allowed to act within the boundaries of friendship because one preferred backing down in the face of violence while another, a madman who imagined he had two heads, refused to be controlled by non-dictatorial methods; eventually, a second artificial head had to be placed on him and then cut off"[19]. What we have here lies at the heart of his future theory about aesthetic appearance and about the measure of truth surviving in an illusion. At this stage, the difference between sanity and illness lies in the ability to discern their respective boundaries.

As a "practicing anthropologist"[20], Schiller organized his way of behavior so as to become understandable within the light of theories put forward by Adam Ferguson and Christian Garve, both of whom were copiously referred to in his third medical dissertation. Such theories consisted of extending the path separating the perception of a need or lack and its subsequent follow up with satisfactory measures. Lengthening the chain of action would normally invert means and aims, thus leaving enough space in which to

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[18] Cf. *Ib.* p. 607.
[19] Cf. note 16, *SW* V, p. 278 ff.
[20] Cf. Schings, 1977, p.16.

exercise reason and imagination and, more importantly, leading to dialogue between them.

When writing those lines describing how the fictitious head was cut off, Schiller could not have possibly guessed the tragic prophesy contained in them. Effectively speaking and as his personal correspondence testifies, his condemnation of events happening in the French Revolution made part and parcel of the trauma he suffered when Louis XVI was beheaded. In the Twenty-sixth Letter on aesthetic education, he underlined the need to separate reality from appearance[21].

We may thus come to the conclusion that by relying on the medical knowledge he had acquired as a young man, Schiller's theoretical and dramatic work hinges on productively exploring the tension existing between idea and reality. By paraphrasing the central idea in Robert Louis Stevenson's well-known novel, **Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde**, we could say that Dr. Schiller may be considered the inseparable double of Mr. Mankind where he is not always able to respect the Kantian premise that views mankind as an end in itself and not as a means. In other words, as the Fourth Letter on aesthetic education indicates, Schiller experiences difficulty in dealing with human matter in a practical way, or rather in a political and pedagogical way, and not in a poietic or creative way, manipulating it in the same fashion as a creative artist or craftsman. Why this is so gets explained in terms that have much to do with the hard-driving all-powerful and with the risks of laceration and contamination that we have already mentioned. Therefore, for Schiller, aesthetics is not so much an ideal to strive for as an intrinsic part of human nature. Taken in this light, human nature prescribes compensatory therapy as well as prophylactic treatment. This is then rendered in a sublime and tragic register as an energetic stimulus to fragile wills or an inoculation of antibodies against weak character[22], or in a beautiful register able to soothe tense, dogmatic human nature[23].

Schiller also knows that the insolvable quality of human nature is not always receptive to treatment, whether or not displaying an aesthetic-dramaturgical nature or whether applying to an individual or a civilizational plane. Grammont ended up committing suicide despite both the treatment doctors and colleagues prescribed for him and being placed under the watchful eye of the Duke of Württemberg. Criticism based on utopian contamination,

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[21] Cf. note 20, *SW* V, p. 658.

[22] Fr. Schiller, *Über das Erhabene [About the Sublime], SW* V, 805.

[23] CF. Note 20, *SW* V, p. 620 ff.

which is so relevant in our day and age, was unable to remove the immeasurable quality of the driving force present in the human species and represented in the twofold Mr. Hyde. Nevertheless, Schiller's entire work shows us that even where compensatory and prophylactic measures fail, there are always withdrawal strategies we may follow in order to assess what has happened. There is always a platform for reflection on which the shipwrecked spectator simply cannot disguise the aesthetic sensitiveness that comes naturally to us. No amount of *guilt-culture* can wipe out it out; rather only serving to strengthen its tragic tone.

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The Principle of Escher:
Is There any Alternative to Candle Lights and Raw Vegetables?

The hands that draw themselves, believing themselves placed outside the drawing while actually intrinsically a part of the same drawing – which image could better signify the principle of reciprocity, the attitude of the observer observing himself or herself while he or she observes the object. This person draws a representation of the object as something external, perhaps without suspecting how the object has become a part of him or her, as far as it means a self projection.

Drawing Hands by Mautitus Cornelius Escher (1898-1970) could therefore materialize, in a peculiar way, our involvement as living systems, feeling and thinking the environmental world around us. The drawing hands are the drawing or, in other words, a represented reality suggesting a number of questions to us in looking for a frame and for a narrative for that intimate relationship. The following questions might appear, at a first sight, as mere disconnected lines. They try to draw co-ordinates for an understanding both of our condition, projected in the world, and of the world condition, projected in us.
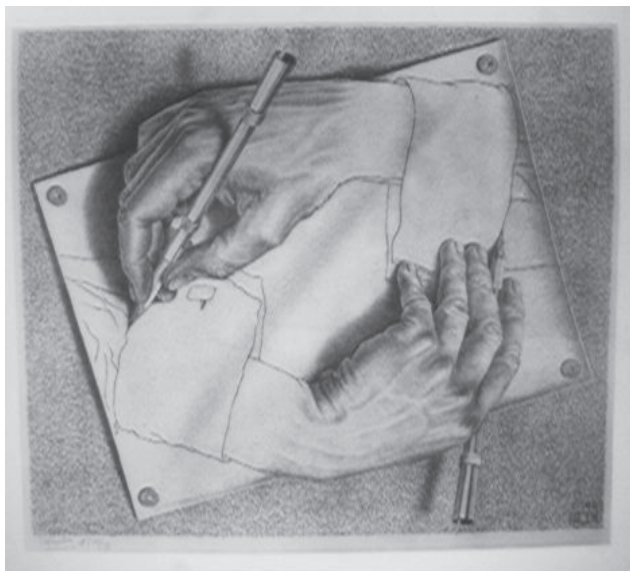
Rethinking Adam's way and the myth of Prometheus in the Western tradition: are these narratives an attempt to justify *hubris* and the predatory attitude of the human being towards nature?

- Rethinking all forms of knowledge and science between adaptability and norm: can we see all sciences as human sciences in a final instance?

- Questioning the forms of managing excesses and needs of matter, energy, information: which responses may art give us, as reflected nature, as an experimental and symbolic field?

- Questioning the alternatives: tearing up, in selfish blindness, the network of connections in which we live a predator's attitude, or restoring the same network (sustainability as a regulative principle). This issue points to the necessity of rethinking individual freedom and responsibility and promoting critical thinking against arbitrariness and dogmatism.

- Questioning the role of historical memories in the projection of the future, in the path that leads from a latent towards a displayed sense. Which perspective follows those historical memories, the predator's or the victim's one? How far are we able to detect mutual implications?

A fable by the German writer Heinrich Böll (1917-1985), **Anekdote zur Senkung der Arbeitsmoral [Anecdote to the Lowering of Productivity]**, written in 1963, suggests some links between the questions formulated above. This recounts a dialogue in a fishing port on the western European coast between a tourist with his omnipresent camera and a fisherman who takes a nap after returning from the sea. The first wakes up the second with questions in machine-gun rhythm, autistic and economicistic:

> *"Yes [if you went to the sea more often], in not later than a year, you would be able to buy a motor, in two years another boat, in three or four years you might get a little trawler, with two boats and the trawler you would be able to catch much more – someday you would have two trawlers, wouldn't you…" – the enthusiasm overcasts his voice for some moments, "you would build a little cold storage chamber, maybe a smokehouse, later on a factory for canned goods, fly your own helicopter, detect the shoals and give instructions to your trawlers by radio. You could buy salmon fishing quotas, open a fish restaurant, export lobster directly to Paris, without intermediaries – and then…", once more the enthusiasm overcasts the foreigner's speech. Shaking his head, troubled to the very deepest of his heart, almost losing the*

holiday pleasure, he looks at the quietly rising tide, where uncaught fishes spring freely. "And then", he says, with his speech again overcast by excitement anew. The fisherman slaps his back, as if he were a child with something stuck in his throat. "And then what?" he asks lowly.

"Then", says the foreigner with a moderate enthusiasm, "you could sit here quietly on the harbor, slumber in the sun and look out at the wonderful sea."

"But that's what I'm already doing", says the fisherman, "I'm quietly sitting on the harbor slumbering and only disturbed by the click of your camera."

The aforementioned western coast might be Portuguese even though the text information tells us that it could be anywhere in Normandy or Brittany; otherwise the reference to Paris would seem displaced. Read fifty years later, this fable may be faced not only as a chronicle of an announced globalization but also as a sign of cores of resistance and persistence. Here, tradition speaks out at modernization, which not only threatens to make it disappear but also promises to keep it, even to recontextualize it under better conditions, more efficiently and hygienically, with more rapidity and clear and systematic order.

We should not let ourselves get deceived by the irony. This fictive testimony, yet still entirely plausible, of the tension brought about through moments of non-simultaneity within a simultaneous situation, draws our attention towards the global context. It now becomes our task to fill up the spaces in-between the gaps, to articulate aspects of different natures and levels, mainly economic-cultural, socio-historical, and psychological-ideological. They are different for the mental universes of the tourist – probably American, but equally probably Japanese – and of the fisherman.

When we understand ourselves as cultural ecosystems, individually or collectively, we cannot but develop a scientific attitude towards everything around us, as our environment within which we keep moving. This makes manifestations of alterity, contradictions, and paradoxes easy to accept. They are no longer expressions of any metaphysical entity, as perceived in former times, but systemic configurations with a proper functionality (even if we do not seize it). They may display themselves to our eyes as indifferent, cold, opaque or even violent.

We live in a specular epoch that endows new signification to such terms as reflection. Reflection is visible and invisible, which means that it is permanently unfolding itself across multiple senses, imagistic (visible) and conceptual (invisible). This may also be experienced across multiple levels.

In our latitudes, we may observe a broad spectrum of cultural claims. They commonly swing between an inclination towards quantity, commonly subsumed under the cliché of compulsive consumption, on the one hand, and the selective claim of quality, which may also be labeled as elitism, on the other hand. We never know how far the network effects of our worldly action reach: we may either experience the illusion of being autonomous while fulfilling a function, or it may happen that we take an autonomous – and most of the times gutty – decision under the tightest amount of conditions.

In the context of ecological balance, the problem may lie in not really knowing which one of both claims (quantity or quality) comes out to be statistically a more consequent predator of resources, more parasitic on the natural elements provided by the environment. The core of the problem lies in knowledge about the subjective perspective in which both claims take root as an expression of what H. Arendt called *world alienation* (Arendt, 1958: 248ff). We are, in a somehow umbilical way, connected with our own world alienation, as self-predators, so that it becomes ever more difficult to notice just which resources we squander and spoil. Both options may therefore appear as two different phases in a symbolic ontogenesis in which the individual begins by devouring its object thoughtlessly, in a hypothetical childhood, and later on grows towards a symbolic adult age when he or she becomes able to select, to differentiate and to integrate.

However, even on this level, as we may easily discern, we have not yet left behind a fixation on a subjective self-reference. Such a self-reference may have become actually evident in our days, as an individual attitude even while continuing to decline any form of responsibility for the consequences of his or her actions, possibly as a previous, half-unconscious rejection of a verdict between catastrophic and ravaging. Nevertheless, as we may read in the fragmentary denouncement of the "dialectics of the Enlightenment" by Max Horkheimer and Theodor W. Adorno in 1947, the Manichaeism of the extremes, plenty and scarcity, corresponds to the reduction and simplification of any reasoning intending to proceed with a line of division between subject and object:

> If thought is to do more than merely confirm dominant regulations, it must appear more universal and authoritative than when it simply justifies something which already holds. You consider existing power to be unjust – Do you want power replaced by chaos? You criticize the monotonous uniformity of life and progress – Shall we then light wax candles in the evening and allow our cities to be full of stinking

refuse as they were in the Middle Ages? You do not like the slaughter houses – Is society to live on raw vegetables from now on? However absurd it may seem, the affirmative answer to questions such like this fall on friendly ears.

Without presenting friendly ears to esoteric discourses, since they are also ideological and therefore closed, let us begin by asking what is supposed to be a pragmatically scientific attitude. This is expected to articulate action and reflection and enable us to observe ourselves while observing our study objects. By consequently practicing this second degree observation, we get growingly entitled to handle contradiction and paradox. For John Dewey (1859-1952), such an attitude means a quality displayed in any aspect of life and susceptible to characterization both in the negative and in the positive senses. The negative sense corresponds to a refusal of submission under the control of routine, of prejudice, of dogma, of unexamined tradition, of pure personal interest. The positive sense consists of a will to inquire, to examine, to discriminate, and to come to conclusions after an effort to gather the available evidences. Its experimental dimension comes out of a principle according to which the ideas would be necessary as working hypotheses, which ought yet to be verified according to the consequences that they produce (cf. Dewey, 1988: 273).

Such an attitude is always trying to articulate structures with processes in order to render our eyes clear to the evolution of living elements and to our own evolution within them. On the one hand, we no more ask *what* we are observing and start questioning *how* we do it. On the other hand, we become more sensible towards all sorts of gaps, fractures, ruptures, which always appear in such simplifying paradigms as "modern society, individualist in one single token, liberal and expansionistic". When contemplating the information from the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), they may cause the most disparate reactions. We might quit driving a car, eating meat or using traditional lamps as well as getting distressed about the virtual character of all its graphics and abstractions.

We know now how to distinguish between scientific spirit and scientific assertions. The first displays a process character; the second holds implications and ways of reading the observed facts. At the last, it proves practically impossible to distillate the observing agent from the observed object, which attributes all sciences, even the "hardest", with at least some humanistic dimension. At the limit, every description represents a configuration to human eyes even when not directly interfering in the processes.

In 1795, Friedrich Schiller sustained that the poet is nature or otherwise he will be compelled to search for it, either as its witness or as its avenger (cf. Schiller, 2003: 59). In Schiller's personal case, we might add to the poet, the playwright, the philosopher, the historian, the physician and the anthropologist he actually was. Following such a perspective, we encounter the human being as a living organization, nurtured in time and space by matter, energy, and information. Should we wish to search for nature (even knowing that we can never step out of it, because we breathe and eat, therefore through our metabolism), it becomes necessary to have withdrawn from nature in its virgin state, in time and space. This has happened throughout centuries by means of migration towards cities, by mechanisms of industrialization and technique, by sheer reflection (during which metabolisms never stop). Though we are conceptually aware that such a withdrawal mainly means a re-contextualization of the organizational forms of matter, energy and information, the perception of loss is, in most cases, an acute feeling that may turn into the motor for developing ecological practices, based on the conscience of an ensemble of realities that we have lost or that we risk losing. In other words, whereas the primitive human being identified himself or herself with the environment through animism, he or she may now do so through scientific evidence.

The forms of energy we deal with are not converted into biomass but into symbolically codified information, in communicational circuits that promote a set of competences articulated with knowledge. According to the German sociologist Oskar Negt, such capacities could be summarized into six. The first would therefore be a capacity of learning out of experience that turns into forms of exemplarity and reservoirs of knowledge and faculty of judgment serving as the foundation for all other competences;

- Identitary competence – on personal, interactive, and reflexive levels;

- Technological competence – as observation of the dialectics of means and ends;

- Competence of managing justice and accuracy – *ex negativo*, that means, prioritizing concerns over avoiding injustice;

- Ecological competence – towards inner and outer nature;

- Historical competence – cultivating individual and collective memories;

- Aesthetic competence (cf. Negt, 2001: 526ff).

Could the latter represent a synthesis, an articulation of all the other competences? Looking for an answer to such a question, we come back to art, similarly to the beginning of our reflections, and to Escher's *Relativity* (1953). It seems an image of self-referentiality, of culture as an ensemble of freely combined symbols, which are also situatively independent. They are also grounded on a concrete situation that always makes discovery possible, even if such a discovery turns out to be a *Dichtung* that means the *condensation* of elements of a real that seems uncanny by reasons of focalization, of insufficient regulation of proximity and distance:
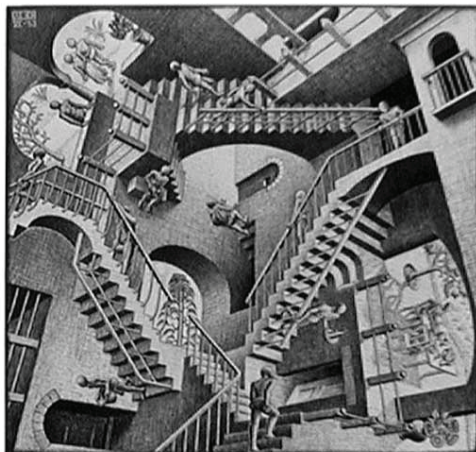
We could therefore ask: on which level are we situated? In which sense, ascendant or descendent, is our position on the steps? The vertigo caused by the circularity of the image allows us to configure possible forms of filling gaps – most of them imagined? – between claims that we may formulate, for instance in the name of a hypothetical principle of pleasure, and a principle of reality that could not but include a considerable number of perspectives, of decisions in order to give priority either to threatened, voiceless elements or to rupture with circles of vicious behaviours. By thus proceeding, we would display the knowledge of the systemic implications of each gesture as the product of a contingent decision, nevertheless making possible a symbolic rebirth, in conscientiousness and intuition.

According to Edgar Morin, all forms of organization stem from interactions between order and disorder. We may provide some examples of this:

• Our knowledge of the universe is simultaneously grounded on familiarity and strangeness.

- Researching thinking moves in the interface between logics and non-logics, between the rational and the irrational.

- What we perceive out of the world is not the object except us, but the object seen and observed, co-produced by us (cf. Morin, 1993: 85ff).

Coming back to the initial questions (have we ever at all left them?), the one question remains: how can we exercise the right of citizenship as systems within an environment that we are totally unable to leave (as happens in Escher's images), an environment, to which we should lend a voice in the name of those who lack their own voice and use names we arbitrarily create. In other words: should an ethical approach to life forbid diversion, tasting food and drink, mobility? Or does it merely change our sense of priorities? Such a change could begin, in a certain way like a furtive step, with the contemplation of a work of art – or of a natural element.

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WB against the Grain or the Devils of History

In an interview three years before his death, the German playwright Heiner Müller sustained that angels seem to appear each time we stop seeing a chance to make hope come true (Müller, 1992: 350). If this author had a chance to talk with Hannah Arendt, maybe he would have heard an assertion similar to that we read in a letter written to Kurt Blumenfeld, from New York to Jerusalem on 17.2.1957: "We know that the Greeks took wrath as being a part of the pleasant sensations of the soul (and hope as being a plague upon mortals), and I had plenty of chances to observe upon myself how far they were right" (Arendt/Blumenfeld, 1995: 181).

Of lost opportunities, partly rescued under other skies, other times, other avatars, of all that and much more does the whole work of WB deal with even when seeming splintered, as if such would send an appeal to the reader to organize the splinters in a puzzle, whether or not filling empty spaces according to his or her faculty of judgment – on a conceptual, ethical and aesthetic level. Organizing or reorganizing such empty spaces implies recalling, with H. Arendt's lucidity, that "the process of corruption is at the same time a process of crystallization" (Arendt, 1991: 238), of the transmutation of forms. This implies never forgetting that the analytical eye claims not only the redistribution the zones of light and shadow but also mostly the trying to understand the links between both – and, in so doing, to revitalize numerous zones in-between, so to say of darkening, threatening to be forgotten, falling or being pushed off into sheer darkness.

One of the most exposed Benjaminian figures under the lit spire is the angel of History. This angel has been exhibited exhaustively on research altars built around this author and all too often recycled in order to serve the criticism directed towards the vortex of progress, the inhumanity of capitalistic and totalitarian systems, etcetera, etcetera. We might enquire whether such an angel has not been deployed as a tool within the growing army of WB researchers, somehow similar to the allegory of that theological humpback dwarf who secretly guides the movements of the historical-materialistic Turkish puppet as we may read about in his first Thesis on the Concept of History (GS I, 693). Nevertheless, we would still like to ask not really about what *moves* that angel but rather about what implicitly *paralyzes* it.

Attempts to find an answer to such a question lead us to the well-known assertion by WB about the dimension of barbarism present in each document of culture. According to such knowledge, it becomes necessary to brush History against the grain, as we may read in the seventh Thesis (GS I, 696f). Therefore, when beginning to illuminate the space in-between, the communicating vessels of mutual nurture between culture and barbarism, we enter into the first avatars of the demoniac figures which, with their dynamic, could contribute to immobilizing the angel.

Let us now explain this issue partially drawing upon Benjamin's pursuit of intuitive threads whilst keeping to hand the unpacked library and other scaffoldings supporting his work, always subjacent and therefore only partly visible but no less present. When we discover the figures of private vices and public benefits that keep the world moving, we may begin by sharing the angel's staring amazement. However, we also may remain puzzled, where not paralyzed, by philosophical astonishment perhaps deriving from its dimension of theoretic curiosity. The consciousness of an osmotic and systemic relationship between the visible and the invisible makes us question such terms. Is the invisible perhaps the not yet visible also searching for its verbal expression? Therefore, we must also question the criteria determining the distribution of light, twilight and shadow.

Recalling what Madame de Staël wrote about Goethe's *Faust*, we are led to ask whether Mephisto represents the real hero in the play. And why does this happen? This happens not really because he is a villain par excellence (cf. Mme de Staël, s.d., Cap. XXIII, 323), but most of all because he is a worldly person, civilized, with a capacity to observe the *moeurs*, enlightened and conservative – a sort of gentleman. Under this light, another devil begins taking shape, where we never would suspect his existence, at least at the outset: Faust himself. Still according to Mme de Staël, he concentrates "all the weakness of humanity", which means "longing of knowledge and tiredness of work; need of success, plenty of pleasure", thus becoming a "perfect model of an instable and mobile being", with "feelings that are more ephemeral than the short life about which he complains" (ib., 324). Here, we encounter the picture of an average fellow whose will to power, which grows out of his weakness, as we all too well know, might lead to barbaric deeds. On Mephisto's side, we would have – according to Nietzsche – the moral of the lords, on Faust's side the moral of the slaves.

Now, we may grasp a picture of such a level of insecurity that is able to render Faust an object, exposable to all forms of seduction by cynical reason,

to all forms of manipulation by a demoniac intelligence and becoming an executor of its purposes. At this point, we should ask ourselves whether the impotence of the angel of history does not rather provide a kind of consciousness about its own position in the middle of crossfire ongoing in games played by obscure interest. Catastrophes happen, as we always experience, as a result of both malign as well as naive intentions. All these intentions come together as heavy storm clouds and frame the individuals in circumstances and impasses in time and space. The similitude with the obscure mechanisms leading to totalitarian systems thus begins to become clear and Benjamin detected those mechanisms years before Hannah Arendt's analysis.

The immobilization of the angel occurs therefore as if a kind of a lightening paralyzing an off camera image (cf. GS I, 1242). This implies a reading protocol of significations, not – at least not at the first moment – of contemplation or empathy. If we look at such network implications, at the before and after, at the up and down, at the left and right, when trying to look between the lines of the obscure web that holds the angel's movements paralyzed, we understand what freezes it to the observer's position out of the sheer opportunity of making an astonished gaze. Under this point of view, the angel allegory may find a correspondence not only in Paul Klee's painting but also in the image that became famous a few years before the elaboration of the Theses on the concept of History. Living in Paris in the 1930s, Benjamin probably saw in the newspapers a photo of the Republican soldier shot in southern Spain at the very moment of his death:

Federico Borrell García was a victim, not only of the cruelty of civil war but also of his own enthusiasm, his own imprudence, and – last but not least – of the demoniac look of Robert Capa's lens. The photographer himself would succumb in the 1950s to the voracious effect of a shot, of his camera and of a bullet, at a *kairos* of the highest risk. In this sense, demoniac means not really malicious but rather the provoking, triggering, displaying and concealing, in this case, of a tragic situation. It remains to clarify just whether this has been a death foretold.

Later on, there were doubts about the authenticity of the photo of Borrell falling dead, questioning as to whether Capa would have asked the Republican soldier to move out from the protection of shelter, out of the deep trench, and thus exposing himself to the fire of Franco's soldiers and allowing Capa to grasp a sensational shot. In an interview with the New York World-Telegram on 2.7.1939, Capa said that in the Spanish Civil War there was no need for any tricks or camera positions because the images were always there by themselves and the cameras undertook only the simple task of collecting them. Truth would be "the best image and the best propaganda" (*apud* Kershaw, 2004: 57).

"The true image of the past *appears fugaciously* [*huscht vorbei*]" (GS I, 695). This expression in Thesis V is difficult, if not impossible, to translate. However even if not finding a suitable translation, we are able to maturate its meaning and find a late form ("*Nachreife*") of such a maturation in the established words, as we may indeed read in WB's reflections on the translator's task. The French version, in which Benjamin deliberately and productively betrayed himself by translating his own words, says that "l'image authentique du passé n'apparaît que dans un éclair" (GS I, 1261). In fact, the theses on the concept of history evoke figurative forms of secularized thought within an iconography of correspondences and an allegoric methodology that does not intend to explain but rather to clarify on an analogical basis and therefore without any identity pretensions.

The necessity of grasping the "moment of the possible memory" (Vainstain, 1994: 234) requires an attention beyond measure, correspondingly hyperbolic, as well as a permanent availability for the intended tiger bond. Thus, shooting the camera in that exact second or analyzing the minimal instant, we may be able to discover the crystal of the total event, even if only later emerging (cf. GS V, 575). For moments, we could discern in Klee's angel a fake lightness, a levitation touching the flight by facing all opportunities, all lost instants in history. The Theses might therefore represent a last

attempt to balance heaviness and lightness, as well as avoiding the degradation of pure heroism into grotesque fundamentalism, of firm faith into madness. The Theses might also be meant to make an attempt to avoid a form of despair, similar to knocking one's head against a wall after understanding that the ways to any transcendental shelter have become impracticable and from that moment onwards losing any illusions after experiencing that physical blockade. The ways are open but not towards any divinity. This now instead splinters into infinitudes of devils, between the playful and the megalomaniac, between the mean and the excessive, between the cynical and the cruel.

The Theses could thus be read as a group portrait with a gentleman (WB), who remains in the shadow with his full body tiredness, with the voluntarism that made him carry that text by foot, over the long pathways of refugees fleeing through the Pyrenees in the Second World War:

When all metaphysic illusions have long since disappeared, when at the latest, ever since the pact between Hitler and Stalin, the belief in a future of humanistic progress in history vanished, when all promises of individual happiness have volatilized, such hopelessness still becomes a body made out of "the air we breathed together with the persons with whom we might have talked or whom we even might have loved" (II Thesis, GS I, 693). Happiness would have been the shade of the wrinkles of a beloved person much more than the luminous side of his or her beauty (cf. *Einbahnstrasse*, GS IV, 92). What remains is a last effort to rescue the dignity of the memory of the nameless people.

Paradoxically, posterity may have taken up just such a task in an almost evident and, in any case, systematic way. The increasing interest in the history of daily life rescues historical registers of apparently insignificant aspects, which nevertheless turn out to be of crucial importance. This happens out of the desire to complete a spatial and temporal puzzle, to draw a thick description even when conscious that such proves an impossible mission. Rescuing the memory of the nameless does not mean, contrarily to what mass culture might suggest, reproducing photographic images of *parvenus* on social columns or giving voice to roughness and non-culture in talk shows but rather shedding a light upon places and times sustained by those who seem to have got lost in the labyrinth of history's reading protocols. WB seems to exhort us to such engagement, which implies lucid and reflected gestures, articulating memory and oblivion, continuity and discontinuity, construction and destruction. Such lucidity counteracts a major tendency for making history and politics by repressing mortality, according to Heiner Müller, for whom the example of art encapsulated permanent communication with the dead. For this author, true culture corresponded precisely to the concretization of the possibility to concede a place to the dead (*apud* Perthes 1999, 446).

In a letter to Gretel Adorno, WB considers Thesis XVII to be of particular importance given it would open up recognition of the "hidden yet conclusive context (*verborgenen aber schlüssigen Zusammenhang*)" between such reflections and the rest of his works (Adorno/Benjamin, 2005: 410). Through a shock – as we read in that Thesis – crystallized in a monad, we might discern the opportunity of dynamiting out (*herauszusprengen*) the" homogeneous course of History" not only of "a certain epoch", but an instant – a photographic snapshot (GS I, 703). Today, we know that such a desire for totality corresponds to a kind of residual hallucination, to a non resoluble

friction between the longing for happiness and the claim for dignity. However, we nevertheless cannot deny the exaltation even should its effects turn out lethal and caused by such a friction. When considering Capa's snapshot as being his "lifework", we grasp by intuition how photography, even if reproducible and reproduced, at last rescues the aura that seemed to have been stolen from painting (according to the well-known analysis on works of art in the era of technical reproducibility, cf. GS I, 431).

The energy of this antagonistic, antithetic and demoniac principle seems to forsake the author himself in the forced nomadism of his last years and especially in the final months of his life. In a letter, written from Paris on 11.1.1940 to his friend Gershom Scholem, who had emigrated to Palestine, Benjamin denounces the diabolic mechanisms of an epoch that had bestowed the "desert landscape" of those days with "unequivocal [...] marks for such Bedouins like us" (Br, 846). And the rarefaction of the air, that air of conversation and sociability of which the second Thesis spoke, ceased shortly after being mere metaphor to become a factor threatening his very cardiac metabolism. In the last letter left by WB, written in French to Gretel Adorno from Lourdes on 19.7.1940, the author stresses the "action" shortcomings of his heart (Adorno, Benjamin, 2005: 414).

Forty years after the suicide of WB in Port Bou, Lisa Fittko, who served as his guide over the Pyrenees, recalls without a shadow of a doubt the facts, meanwhile known, about the route that required such a huge effort from Benjamin, as we may easily grasp from looking at the map above. "Could it be that I'm imagining all that?" she asks in the first lines of the chapter dedicated to WB in her personal memories on that route (cf. Fittko, 2004: 139). Fittko compares Benjamin's patience with the complaints of so many other refugees "on that route which was so hard to him" (ib., 184). From this perspective, the whole *Benjamin system* might be read as the fragmentation of a civilizing process, with its doubles of culture and barbarism, of angels and devils.

Fragmentation does not yet mean shipwreck. While Benjamin never got to know Lisbon port, the route of passage out for so many exiled authors, others have guaranteed a productive sequence for many of his concerns. I hereby mention only two examples from among the best known. On one hand, *Dialektik der Aufklärung* by Max Horkheimer and Theodor W. Adorno, first published in 1947, in which the osmotic relationship between culture and barbarism unfolds brightly and bluntly. On the other hand, as Hannah Arendt intends, in *Between Past and Future*, first published in 1961, the

rescue of the lost treasures of humanistic culture, in its dialogic and critical dimension.

I close these considerations with an approach moving towards an epilogue. Whoever follows the coastline, parallel to Benjamin's route through the Pyrenees, arrives in Port Bou and enters the bay by ship, then encountering on the left a strange iron protuberance jutting out of a hill over the village and the beach, not far from the graveyard where WB is believed buried:

An Iberian perspective might at first sight presume we face an unfinished and forsaken work of engineering. However, after having disembarked and walked around the village, we then head along the road towards the cemetery. There, we get not only a spectacular view out over the bay but also the perception of a memorial conceived by Dani Karavan in the 1990s. Such a memorial might be considered the "architecture of a caesura", the "mark of a landscape" or the "topography of History" (Perthes, 1999: 2). Following such topography may mean organizing a mental album of the flashes retained from Walter Benjamin, just as the steps of the stairs that end hovering over the sea with a Plexiglas frontal section:

We go down the steps with a feeling of "wrath without excitement", which should be *the* art par excellence as H. Arendt wrote to Kurt Blumenfeld (Arendt/Blumenfeld, 1995: 183). We would add: it would be the art of managing any cultural heritage, including that of our author. In our era, that of the most vertiginous, self-devouring technical reproducibility, who does not get overwhelmed by the charm of a photo album?

Such a question cannot be Socratic, which means there is no obvious answer. WB's work seems to push us towards an autonomic decision about what is near or far, about our own angels and our own devils, which we frame in our own images – as photos, as films or as products of our imagination.

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On the Edge of the World Play.
The Skeptical Look of Director Schiller

From Schiller himself, we have learnt never to cease being skeptical, at least since following, with our heads turned upwards, the movement of the arch performed by a ball over hundred eighty degrees. A letter addressed to his friend Ferdinand Huber, dated from the 5.10.1785 describes just such a movement. After an energetic rise to the heights and the following fall to "motherly earth" (NA 24, 26), we might even read a sigh between the lines of the letter (written in energetic calligraphy), sounding like a sorrowful goodbye to a self-admitted ideality: "But such an arch is really so beautiful!" (ib.)

This passage is well known. However, the directly following lines, far less quoted, are no less significant: "So I keep comforting myself about the *human* destiny of my *superhuman* expectations" (ib.). As a second degree observer, Schiller recognizes his own "arch mobility", his conscientiousness about a structure involving a close and mutual relationship between anthropology and history. Such a relationship represents a real obstacle to any attempt at harmonious thinking as this works with – and also produces – a number of paradoxical subsystems and subsequent frictions and tensions. In other words, if there is any chance to attain or discover any kind of harmony then this may only appear out of a process replete with moments of struggle. In any case, such tensions inspire the author to create not only all his forms of polarity but also all the nuances existing between the extremes. In this way, he obtains his aesthetical offers of sense as well as his poetic and dramatic propositions, and still furthermore – last but not least – his historical narratives.

Our main perspective, from which we draw the main thesis, presupposes the knowledge of Schiller's complete anthropological evaluation as formulated in his fourth Letter on Aesthetic Education. We might therefore detect a certain anthropological resignation over the *conditio humana*, which for Schiller proves not only a matter of fact but, most especially, wide ground for research and presentation. This view constitutes his working method right from the times of Karlsschule, the Stuttgart Military Academy where Schiller studied medicine and wrote not only his dissertations but also his first poems and his first play, *The Robbers*. The author is conscious of the

entropic effects of ideality and how this grasps reality and seeks to configure it violently, deploying the mechanisms of production and manipulation of a material object without any life of its own. Later on, after the shock of mass rebellion and mass manipulation in the process of the French Revolution, he surveys the consequences of violence towards human beings and asks himself about the necessity for any form of violence. The conclusions remain ambiguous: on the one hand, he seems to justify configuring violence towards raw materials; on the other hand, he closes his 27th Letter on Aesthetic Education by guarantying equality between a modest tool and every citizen within an Aesthetic State supposed to fulfill a utopian function.

Let us stick with the idea of Schiller's *inquiétude* over the at least potential entropic effect of ideality over reality. Such an *inquiétude* also contains its own dynamics and may even enhance the anthropologic complexity. Thus the assertion about our being citizens of time, as well as of space, as we may read in the second Aesthetic Letter, in this context deserves a closer look. We correspondingly take into account its three complementary aspects: 1. The human being is a product of his/her time and cannot escape from it; 2. The human being is burdened down by history and cannot but live with such a fact; 3. The human being is pregnant with his/her own future in the sense of an overwhelming thinking ever since the times of transition between the Ancient Régime and the modern era following double (French and Industrial) revolutions; this happens independent of the way he/she faces the idea of progress, whether with greater or lesser skepticism.

Under such premises, we are able to formulate our thesis, which we also need in order to analyze the conditions to any possible application of Schiller's concept of play: we perceive Schiller as a *realist*, who is not only widely aware of ideality but also searches constantly for free spaces in order to insert forms of ideality into reality. This process should happen not in any aggressive, invasive way, but in a harmonic process enabled by the mechanisms of configuration. In brief, material idea should turn into idealized matter. We may trace this process in the famous letter to Goethe dated 26th December 1797. In contrast with his friend, Schiller operates in a mood that diverges from the realm of literature theory and instead stems from anthropology through analyzing both the *necessity* to distinguish between literary genders and the *possibility* to approach them. What is at stake here, so Schiller feels, are not only literary genders but also their cultural contexts. Schiller's concern deals with in-between spaces, which might bring dramatic necessity closer to epic freedom in a form of productive tension (cf. NA 29, 176f),

and always in the search for possibilities of configuration within empty or unmarked spaced, marking those spaces out in order to build plausible scenarios.

In other words: only that separated according to determined categories and differentiated according to recognized criteria is able to again meet face to face in a fruitful encounter. We should ask ourselves in the present whether Schiller's intended separation of such realms, appearance and reality, does not correspond to a form of operative closure. In any case, Habermas warns us two hundred years later against an interpenetration of both realms without mediation in time and space (cf. Habermas, 1985: 64). We, the citizens of the 21st century, are only too aware of numerous examples of contamination between aesthetics and politics, fiction and reality, tragedy and comedy. The extreme forms of much unhappy miscegenation too often carry a totalitarian stigma, out of the impossibility of realizing the existence or necessity of space distance and time delay – of sheer mediation. In some cases, this derives from the unavailability of individuals to realize that and we thus see the tragic situations turning comic.

We should ask ourselves about the existence of alternative reading protocols to Schiller's play drive, beyond those canonical research results and the multiple forms of popularization of their concepts. When in Austria, I happened to browse the Linz newspaper *Der Standard* of 23th October 2009 and finding, in a section named "Chronik" on page 12, a report about new models of ecological cars under the title "Man is only then really a man when he plays". Neither a word about the author, who is probably supposed to be popularly known, nor any reference to the 15th Aesthetic Letter. Just a sentence serving as a sort of bridge: "With their constant play drive, car producers in Japan show that they have not yet run out of ideas in spite of the crisis".

Such an example displays how Schiller's quotation may still be taken seriously. This happens despite the arsenal of triviality, kitsch and parody, thrown at the complete works of the author down the centuries. In this case, the direct liberty of scientific research serves a principally noble purpose: protecting the environment. However, how would we react if we read the same sentence in connection with a really more trivial, yet more *playful* commodity? We know how the trivialization of the play concept has brought about pernicious effects, among them the attributes of Nietzsche's *last man* and our fellow humans with their consumerist orientations.

Nevertheless, there remains in Schiller's aesthetical theory a moment of *insolubility*, which resists all attempts of appropriation and contamination.

This also happens because the Aesthetic Letters incorporate a clear warning about the possibility of being deceived in the real world. We may in fact read the criticism concerning the so-called systems of happiness in the 24th Letter as criticism concerning all forms of desire to make sheer utopic ideas become real. In our times, we may detect such moments in the most distinct realms, from the leisure society through to fundamentalist groups. A specific political warning by Schiller himself might already be read in the essay on the necessary limits in the application of beautiful forms (cf. NA 21, 26). Such criticisms still continue related to the conditions for the feasible development or practice of an aesthetical consciousness, which should also be capable of developing forms of knowledge. Such conditions imply the formation of a self-critical subject.

We may therefore perceive Schiller's aesthetic writings – apart from his well-known living circumstances and the illness that caused an interruption in his dramatic creation in the early 1790s – as a level of reflection in which the self-nominated stage director Schiller places himself on the very edge of the world play. From that position, he not only reflects sharply about the possible implications of a materialized ideality but also simultaneously formulates, for those seeking put it into practice, the methodological developments to his aesthetic education and, as a kind of prescription, alongside several warnings. We might even say that – as the doctor he also remains – he even proposes antidotes or offers protective vaccines. This happens because Schiller knows only too well that the epoch of transition between the Ancient Regime and the Contemporary Age (known in German as *Sattelzeit*, saddle time, meaning an imaginary saddle reaching between epochal paradigms), which meant an enormous opening of the horizon of expectations, not always followed by the extension of the space of experience, and also bearing schizophrenic traces. On the one hand, the autonomy of the subject is theoretically postulated; on the other hand, the subject himself/herself is often denied and remains therefore repressed, even though the subject idea continues being inscribed as a postulate and, in fact, a desideratum. For such reasons, such a postulate also proves a permanent source of frustration with Schiller himself having to repeatedly learn how to manage that gap.

The question whether the author would still advise us to cultivate an aesthetic education should he live in our present days, may seem somehow vain. However, it certainly is not and may also be answered with a resounding Yes, to which we might also add: "Especially nowadays!" As we have

seen, the lapidary utopian criticism of the 24th Aesthetic Letter has clearly not lost its sense of opportunity. Such a critique points to various forms of shortcomings in the mediation of time and space, of contamination, of acceleration and partly resulting from the inadequate treatment of contingency by the modern individual. It remains a fact that practicing the idea of freedom may produce more forms of contingency instead of attempting to manage or neutralize them. Firstly, this is expressed neutrally and should not be misunderstood as a defense of conformity to authority and tradition. We have been aware of the well-known correlation since Horkheimer first postulated it: freedom movements unavoidably carry their egoism along with them (Horkheimer, 1968). Since Horkheimer – or also since Schiller's *Fiesko*? – the threat to freely using one's own capacity of judgment, caused by an opaque web of interests, remains a leitmotiv. Schiller had learned this from the school of moral philosophers, who explained it clearly before Hegel, in his philosophy of right, understood and developed the system of needs in civil society.

In this context, the history of the "Merkwürdige Belagerung von Antwerpen in den Jahren 1584 und 1585" ("Notorious Siege of Antwerp in 1584 and 1585"), written in the working phase of the aesthetic works, justifies closer attention. It was supposed to be an expedient for publication in order to overcome the lack of texts for Schiller's magazine "Die Horen". However, the work proves of far greater import: the text sets out a merciless portrait of bourgeois groups and state functionaries, led on by their own private interests. It even touches upon caricature. In a city, which had conquered its freedom from the Spanish Crown, the "lack of consequence" (NA 17, 352) of its citizens brought them to defeat. Schiller, the playwright and theatre director, may have attributed victory in his account to Alexander Farnese's capacity of mobilization whilst commanding the troops of the Spanish Crown. We thus encounter here a highly interesting case in the realm of civilization theory. This work characterizes the transition from pre-modern to modern paradigms of value. Schiller discerns the meanness of such subjects dominated by limited motivations even if living within a free civil order for which they themselves fought. His sympathy blatantly veers towards the representative of the Spanish Crown, who happened to be the son of the regent Margaret of Parma, whom he had treated roughly in an earlier historical essay about the separation of the Netherlands. The display of such sympathy does not come a priori but unfolds itself as a process over the course of the events and after analysis and presentation of the unequal

relationship between the forces. However, which side Schiller is on already becomes clear in the opening first lines. The incipit of this essay determines the reading protocol:

> "It is a delightful play to look at the human spirit of invention fighting with a powerful element and to see how obstacles, which common capacities cannot overcome, may be defeated by cleverness, determination and a constant will. Less delightful, but the more didactic, is the play of the contrary situation, where the lack of such qualities jeopardizes all efforts of genius, making fruitless all serendipity and, because it does not know how to use it, destroying a success which seemed already to be decided" (NA 17, 312).

The whole narrative looks like an epic war film in which both parts apply their skill: on the one hand, building a ship bridge designed to block the river Scheldt, on the other hand, in the development of a strategy of destruction in order to break such a blockade. The reader almost gains the impression that Schiller lets his actors move around only in order to come to a conclusion and judge in favor of a commander capable of serving as a model for his fighters and going into battle alongside them and while respecting their "delicate feelings" (NA 17, 354). The just quoted introduction might be, in this context, an anticipated conclusion, fitting the abrupt form of the last lines. In this case, the inglorious surrender of the city to the Duke of Parma, which ends the exposition, may also relate to the deadline for *The Horen* and which allowed for no further explaining of details (cf. letter to Goethe from the 19.3.1795, NA 27, 163).

At this point, we might conclude that Schiller, while searching for manifestations of republican virtue, merely runs into split individuals – either into unmerciful, reason-obsessed *citoyens* or narrow-minded, interest-oriented *bourgeois*. All of them badly need aesthetic mediation, as in the art of distance taking and retardation in space and time. However, let us not be deceived about the well-known commentary by Goethe, in his conversations with Eckermann, about an alleged aristocratic self-mise-en-scène by Schiller and compared with him. Schiller sets out the energy of the will, known to produce strong characters that arise beyond all moral representations. Furthermore, these are exclusively supposed to cast the attentions of the scene director.

Schiller's look upon the past also holds a future orientation. Indeed, he may be confessing, just for a moment, to a secret nostalgia towards the heroic times of the Knights of Malta. We know how he worked at that dramatic

project for many years and only gave it up in order to write *Wilhelm Tell*: in this last character, he seems to have at last found a worthy representative of republican virtue. He also often draws a line between the apparent radicalism of a society of warriors and the generations of their refined descendants, who were his contemporary fellows. However, he does also critically stress the roughness of primitive times, as we may read for instance in the 26ᵗʰ Aesthetic Letter (cf. NA 20, 402f). He would certainly not like to see it restored, most of all because he knows only too well how artificial – that means contrary to cultural evolution – such a restoration would be. In the epoch of individual affirmation, Schiller may only make recourse to a kind of solution that attributes a person with an external juridical framework and an internal aesthetic framework. This means, in other words, the individual would be simultaneously both supported and limited.

Schiller's works do not have autobiographic traces. Nevertheless, we do find several tracks of his perceptions of the representational limits of complex contexts. His own game – as a sort of hide and seek – is labyrinthic. He sometimes discloses his position on the revolutionary process in France and he sometimes conceals it. His method, which as we have seen consists in framing reality in order to search for configuration possibilities within that frame, is openly documented and also because Schiller applies it to himself. We may only imagine how, for instance, the "effect of the *Robbers*", similar to Goethe's "effect of *Werther*", went viral. However, should we recall his defense of an approximation between play and reality (for instance, in the 1784 Mannheim speech), or his sharp criticism of the living conditions at the *Karlsschule* in his Announcement of the *Rheinische Thalia*, we attain a considerable number of indices and factors that surely led the author to a later moderating self-censorship.

One sign of this are the passages eliminated from the second edition of the *History of the Separation of the Netherlands from the Spanish Government*. Between 1788 and 1801, the dates of both editions, the European experiential space attained a complexity and depth that unavoidably brings a multiple refraction of historical optimism. An assertion from the introduction, which in 1788 seems implicit within a near horizon of expectation, was completely eliminated in 1801:

> "Therefore the energy, with which it [the people from the Netherlands, TRC] acted, has not vanished among us; nor is the venturous success that crowned its boldness denied to us, should the processes come back and similar opportunities call us to similar actions" (NA 17, 11).

The refraction persists, and we may perceive it most of all in his references to the present in his shorter historical essays. As seen, Schiller never takes refuge in any form of nostalgia for past times. Nevertheless, we cannot but discern a sharp criticism of the willing weakness of reason in his epoch from the introduction to his History of the Malta Order. Precisely those "heroes of the Middle Ages" (SW IV, 992), who in the *Universal Historical Panorama* of 1790 had merely contributed to the outcome of the "human century" (NA 17, 375), Schiller's century, in his inaugural speech of 1789, are here described as remaining confined to their energetic illusion, their "foolishness (*Torheit*) (SW IV, 992). In their isolation, they cannot be seen as integrated members of a chain of progress. Furthermore, also in the *Universal Historical Panorama*, which Schiller declared to represent a peak in his creative powers and historical construction (cf. the letter dated 3.11.1789 to Caroline von Beulwitz, NA 25, 315ff), the Modern Age somehow gets portrayed as a hybrid product:

> "Because only in Europe, and here at the end of the Middle Ages, the energy of will came together with the light of understanding, only here could it be made possible to hand a virile generation over into the arms of wisdom" (SW IV, 849).

We face here not only a historical fiction but also a temporalization of historical complexity. The couple metaphor did not produce a happy marriage when taking into account the chronological sequence of both his short essays about the Middle Ages. On the contrary: such a sequence disclosed the internal laws of history in all their paradoxes and aporias and drew Schiller's attention to the problematic of the non-simultaneity of the simultaneous. Schiller's discontent about civilization is therefore produced not so much by some gap between wild roughness and decadent laxity, but rather by the fatal contamination of both moments and aspects. Let us recall the lucidity of his essays about the necessary limits to using beautiful forms and, in the end, about the sublime. In both cases the director's finger appears, as well as the physician's touch – prescribing scenarios, prescribing dosages. For instance: as well as in certain moments, the exuberance of beauty should be excluded from contact with the naked reality and its respective exigencies and parameters for the same reasons an anthropological vaccine with elements of scarcity and tragedy would be necessary so that in times of the "hardships of plains" the heroic values from the times of the "hardships of mountains" (Brecht) would not only remain unforgotten but also without

effect. Most of all: such a recalling vaccine would impeach those values from suffering the fate of heroic and tragic persons, themes and situations in prosperous times – the probability of being made ridiculous, parodied or simply minimized and at last forgotten. In any case: of not being taken seriously as advice against the cyclical crises that often follow prosperity.

The acceptation of asymmetries, by retaining a desirable tendency to harmonize the horizon of utopia at a distance on, means Schiller remains careful and chooses not to agree with coercive syntheses. The coordination model, as the basis of the aesthetic education, must itself be learned as a process. A desirable praxis without constraint may appear as a final goal. However, any hasty reading protocol, somehow tending to place it near the communicative action conceived by Habermas, is already denied by the delicate irony of the 27th Aesthetic Letter: since when can a "serving tool" be a "free citizen" (NA 20, 412)? A functional element is bound to be used only instrumentally, which means "poietically" not "practically". Could it yet happen that Schiller here anticipates the freedom of ends seen in modern art installations, which defunctionalize features in order to transfunctionalize them?

Precisely because we cannot avoid, as second degree observers, remaining time citizens, we can feel compelled to bring out such examples, which Schiller probably never would have imagined. The desideratum of the "freedom of a serving tool" may be regarded as a mere ironical metaphor. This does not really constitute proof of how unattainable the aesthetic education goal actually proves but most of all represents a sign of the secret wish to see such a goal against a clearly described horizon, yet still out of reach. Thus, also only in this way does the energetic effect of such desideratum keep its full tension. And only in this way may Schiller, the director and utopia critic, on the edge of the world play, poke fun at History and feel good in his nutshell, or director's box.

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Should the Temple Stand near the River?
About the Signification of Intermediary Spaces

The receipt, or formula, for the civilization process may be well known but is unhappily less often followed: take your time, take your distance. Modern voracity is one of the main drivers preventing the implementation of such a recipe, which by its very nature becomes flexible enough to suit almost any situation. Modern dynamics need open magnanimous spaces around the world in order to set productive forces free. This causes all kinds of discontent and not only the obvious consequence of exploitation. In the early 19th century, Goethe had already complained about "velocipheric [velozipherisch]" time management. In times of impatience, of urgent acceleration, which has never ceased existing in the Western countries and has proven a factor in the most recent crisis, it also becomes necessary to shed light on aspects and elements which may seem rough, opaque or incomprehensible, simply ignored or made into scorched earth.

In Goethe's *Märchen [Fairy Tale]*, at the end of the short novel *Unterhaltungen deutscher Ausgewanderten [Conversations between German Emigrants]*, the lamentation song to the "beautiful Lilie" may at first sound like an impatient cry for the rapid concretization of a wish out of utopian thinking: "Ach! Warum steht der Tempel nicht am Flusse/Ach! Warum ist die Brücke nicht gebaut? [Alas! Why does the temple not stand near the river/ Alas! Why is the bridge not built yet?]". However, Goethe himself provides a possible explanation for that lamentation, this time in prose: "but alas! Is it not simply an infatuation of our nature to imagine that better days will come, when so much pain comes together?" (HA 6, 225).

Here, we encounter two interesting references: on the one hand, the modern impatience of wanting to attain a self-determined goal just as soon as possible, on the other hand, the production of deceiving representations that might comfort us over the frustrations caused by the fact that such goals cannot in the end actually be reached so fast. As we will see, modernity often moves between the production of contingency and the search for compensation – mostly as an effect of that contingency production.

However, let us first remain with Goethe for a while. Not because of any kind of perplexity, which often leads us to the classics. The Goethe I mean is hardly manageable as a teddy bear for adults to adopt Odo Marquard's cool

terminology (Marquard, 2000: 72) for an object that we carry with us and at the end leave on a symbolic toy shelf after having served to strengthen our self-evidence, to compensate for our insecurity and to legitimate our further needs of justification. That this is not the case stems from being able to still feel Goethe's discontent with modernity.

How did Goethe cope with the signs of modern disquiet, which together emerged in the early 19th century, with the critical and crisis-like consequences of his time? We could almost say: probably not at all. In the years after all the revolutionary and inflationary traumas, after the effects of the French and industrial revolution, Goethe tried, throughout his later works, as we know, to allegorize many of the issues and situations that were not to his approval. Among such aspects, he stressed the uneconomic consequences of facts and processes that he neither controlled nor understood such as expressions of hubris, voluntarism, lack of insight, egocentrism, searches for eternal youth: in short, everything displayed on the surface of the world as forms of deceiving behavior by the subjects. In his eyes, such forms were not worthy of being taken as symbols – merely as contingent, ephemeral allegories. Under the influence of their nerves, such subjects always suffered and remained shorn of all protection. They might suffer a similar discontent to ours in a time when we again and again perceive complaints about the loss of sure guidelines in our lives.

What subjacent drives push modern people forward? People are certainly pushed forward by a lot of different issues and factors because the very basis of modern culture is individual. Modern disquiet displays a correspondingly differentiated nature. We may mention guilt, in the prospective sense, as a striking factor in the creation of cultural models and patterns. How far guilt-culture should be considered as a result of the secularization process of the Christian religion and, most of all, of its protestant-Calvinistic branch still remains an issue for discussion. In a text written in the 1990s, yet only recently published in a Portuguese newspaper, the novelist Agustina Bessa-Luís wrote that culture might not be possible without guilt (cf. Bessa-Luís, 2011). In her opinion, the global overwhelming of barriers has contributed to jeopardizing the right to loneliness, to the productive reflection of many individuals. She writes this out of a well-known skepticism towards hedonistic trends and the subsequent trivialization of cultural life. However, Agustina's claim to rehabilitate guilt as a cultural principle may also be thrown into doubt especially when recalling the alienating dimension to such a principle. We may instead recall that perspective Freud opened: *nolens*

volens. This may be formulated as follows: without discontent, no civilization whatsoever. In this sense, we would shed a positive light on Agustina's culture critique. Simultaneously, our attentions would be redirected to the intermediary spaces rather than handling them as unmarked ones, burned out by the sheer influence of the guilt drive.

We act in our own cultural epoch and by doing so we model it and are modeled by it. The higher or lower risks of life's demands make us feel our anthropological nature constantly, which is as precarious as it is open and implies moments of dynamic innovation as well as those of species conservation. This depends upon personal options. Either we perceive and take new chances or we satisfy real or symbolic needs, or, still furthermore, we engage ourselves in seeking for more justice in the world. In this sense, we remain aware of intersubjective, interactive and material contexts, which means our environment. Human nature is therefore exposed to contingency, carrying out possibility in times and spaces between necessity and improbability. Simultaneously, this also produces contingency and contributes to raising the contingency levels in the modern world.

Should we carry out cultural analysis on a systemic basis, we must begin by perceiving the multiple valences of human affairs, their contexts and taken as challenges. This also means only being able to perceive a small amount of factors in a reality undergoing permanent change. We must be able to detect significant trends and build frames of reference in order to also plan and carry out actions, to understand and build systems, to bring scenarios to life, to change objective situations – in brief, to find ways of making it easier to handle contingency and understand the forms of compensation conceived as responses to it in this context.

The feeling of contingency arises jointly together ["jointly together"?] with mobility, with those modern dynamics that have not ceased occurring ever since the process of the so-called original accumulation (Marx), world alienation (H. Arendt), the questioning of religious certainties (Protestant Reformation), of power structures (Machavelli) and throughout all the centuries in which natural law theories kept on asking about the just forms of government. We know of most compensation formulas that attempt to minimize insecurity as an effect of experienced contingency, both acting in the world and interpreting the world. From aesthetical theories (the world as a stage) to philosophical grids (nature's intentions and unsociable sociability by Kant, the invisible hand of Adam Smith, the social contract by Rousseau, tricks of reason by Hegel and so forth), such interpretations tend

to provide a safe haven for individual disquiet in a world full of contingency yet without the insurance formerly supplied by a theocentric vision.

In our multimedia present, the "world theatre" metaphor may seem utterly obsolete to our eyes. However can we speak about a "world screen"? In any case, such metaphors do contribute to drawing our attention to the illuminated zones of the world, to its outstanding points, to "contagious ideas" (Sperber, 1996: 8), to mainstream channels that may, for the first moment, leave the intermediary spaces of the living world, the interconnected levels of reality, in the dark. This deserves some reflection.

Let us recall how such intermediary spaces have been symbolically evoked through the distance between the temple and the river in Goethe's *Fairy Tale*. Such spaces are kept in the dark since they go unmarked as a sort of ground of elements that remain unperformed and unrepresented. They also seem to serve no kind of function but available for usage if necessary. They are a product of the conceptual tradition of dualism and the subsequent classification of marked and unmarked spaces, with their respective signification codes. However, within a cultural perspective that reaches beyond the traditional criteria of performative symbolism or functional pragmatism, such spaces may be seen as paths only experienced when heading through them. They cannot be but detours. They are often not tarred and there is no sand under them. Dialectics of means and ends is replaced by the scope for obtaining new forms of perception, of opening new forms of reading, should we agree on going through them. Should we aim to describe such experiences with the formula of the "discovery of sluggishness", we run into an open door since the discovery of new forms of space demands a slow approach to attaining the availability to face the corresponding dynamics of each new situation in its concrete space-time specificity. Such an approach also contributes to compensating not only the arbitrary, functional forms of modern contingency: we may also observe how living beings, and ourselves among them, try to regain a homeostatic balance after having too often exceeded their tolerance limits. As a matter of fact, such balance is provided to our living system by multiple relationships within the environment, which contains a complex web of marked and unmarked spaces. Together, they build a web that also integrates intermediary spaces.

We need such intermediary spaces, as both real and symbolic. They are in any case something else than the so-called "non-lieux" according to Marc Augé, passages, no man's land, crossing roads, railway stations, airports

(Augé, 1992). However, such places may also be mapped as changeable time-spaces. Should we ask: "What do we need them for?" in such cases the answer cannot be but functional and contingent. However, on asking: "What are they there for?" then we find before our eyes a horizon of multiple possibilities, real and virtual, irrelevant and fascinating, attractive and threatening. In this case, even contingency appears as a form of challenging enrichment and not necessarily as a threat or a limitation. Moreover, culture discloses its forms of dimensional self-experience, not only making past moments present but also interiorizing and reproducing or recreating intermediary spaces.

Multimedia information streams overwhelm us with images and messages spanning every register not only from our modern culture but also from ritualized traditional cultures with their taboos and marked spaces. At the latest, since the outburst of the Arab spring, we experience an eruption of contingency also in places where many observers, at least in the first moment, would suspect finding a sequence of recurrent formulas. Following Schiller's words, we might say, at least concerning the first months of the process in Tunisia and Egypt, that it has been an "attractive spectacle [anziehendes Schauspiel]", with stimulating and thrilling moments. Nevertheless, we know that it is much more than this. Inside each individual, whoever actively participates in the democracy building process, there is a peculiar clash of civilizations, which means a complex struggle between this individual and his or her own self, between contradictory interests and values.

Let us take a step further beyond daily events. In fact, all phases of modernity may be said to display an unstable mosaic in which contingency plays a major role. The relationship between subjective implications and objective situations leads each univocal world representation *ad absurdum*. The concurrent rationalities cannot be separated from their irrational dimensions. The present crisis discourses display this *ad nauseam*. We realize that we are experiencing crises as processes with three characteristics: 1. A dynamics of immediacy, which may signify spontaneity as well as urgency, 2. Disorientation and reorientation in space, and 3. Acceleration and period classification in time. The modern individual therefore perceives him- or herself between the Scylla of their own initiatives (which he or she must handle with contingency and cannot help but create further cases of contingency) and the Charybdis of compensatory solutions. These are not strange to any individual or the collective memory of traditional patterns and often dictated by their nostalgia.

Modernity also challenges individual consciousness. We may ask ourselves, taking into account the present research progress in psychoanalysis and neurophysiology, whether there is any free will. Such freedom concerns first of all the moment of reflection about the potentialities of action. In any case, that so-called free will is implicated in numerous, more or less opaque networks, within the interactive web of the living world. This happens as soon as intentions to act are materialized and the causes are always multiple and complex, last but not least, because of the impenetrable deep layers of the subject.

We seem to have remained for too long on the ground of an overwhelming contingency, which seems only to stress contrasts in the world ground without however questioning how such contrasts might become varieties. At this point, intermediary spaces take on a new relevance in order to re-order the significance of what until then was an amount of unmarked spaces. How can this happen? Let us return to our main symbolic question: how can we reach the river coming from the temple – and how can we return? One possible way, or answer, might be: this may happen when we open ourselves up to the alterity character of the barriers since such barriers have already taken root at the discourse level. Where some authors see a clash of civilizations, we might begin by discerning a critical confrontation of cultural elements in an intermediary space, most marked by a lack of information and understanding, with fear, with discontent, even with hatred. Nevertheless, when pulling a single thread out of this intricacy, we may find the distance between the opposite elements does not become shorter. Yet the space in-between no remains longer unmarked and instead packed with aspects that challenge us to re-read, re-order.

Let us take the example of identity discourses. Meanwhile, we have become aware that they certainly need seeing within a critical light. On the one hand, individual identity narratives follow an epic timeline. On the other hand, collective identity patterns tend to organize themselves in spaces about to become autistic in a dramatic way. Drama always needs a counterpart, an image of a hostile alterity. The process of collective identity creation is therefore self-foreclosing.

But is this necessarily so? Are collective identities unavoidably bound to produce aggressive attitudes? What happens when we encounter situations that might get termed "intermediary spaces of facing the Other"? Individuals might here meet each other in differentiated forms and perhaps begin voluntarily to exchange signs and messages, perhaps without thinking in

the first moments, of collective culture patterns that are unavoidably rooted in them. Indeed, in doing so, they are already shedding a critical light over such patterns. In other words: the well-intentioned postulate of multicultural tolerance and coexistence may often contribute to building isles without intermediary spaces, which can only be overcome by individual attempts, gestures, signs, and discourses. In this sense, the skepticism of conservative politicians towards the chances of success of multiculturalism might be seen as a mere reverse of multicultural apology. Both discourses are bound to fail because of their insular character with this occurring even before any criticism of their ideological substance has been formulated.

As a matter of fact, we may consider the integration of an individual into a foreign country and into a strange culture as a process similar to weaving threads from a different nature into a texture that already exists but which never takes. As culture analysts, we should be able to develop acceptance strategies for strangers, setting out from differentiation into forms of integration. This implies the necessity of working at obstacles in order to discover and display their problematic as well as their enriching aspects. In this context, we may begin seeing ourselves as new intermediary spaces, because we have also interiorized distances, gaps, paths and bridges. We are now able to recognize, verbalize, symbolize and recreate them.

When it becomes necessary to theorize and to abstract, the theoretical threads must be articulated within a complex cultural web even though they cannot but at first be elements of strangeness. However, even strangeness has its own historicity, which may appear as a reduction of complexity, as a simple summary. In fact, when we draw our attention upon dark zones, as information lacunas, even as something that cannot be described, we may also begin with a work of archeological reconstruction in order to understand our objects of analysis better. We frequently experience two parallel processes: while becoming familiar with strange moments from outside, there are moments in us that become stranger in our eyes. This double process has also often been exhaustively analyzed. Approaching the stranger through the imagery of intermediary spaces, we succeed in avoiding anthropocentric perspectives. In an integrative sense, this appears friendlier to the environment than strictly humanistic perspectives. Such an approach also allows an insight into situations of modern contingency. We have seen how this contingency contributes to stress the tolerance limits, which we constantly perceive as complex psychosomatic systems.

I would like to precise this last assertion so as also not to give the impression of trying to force a theoretical balance or even an idyll. Such a perspective is also far from promoting an anti-humanistic attitude. When we get a perception of the whole web of relationships and not only of human affairs, as Hannah Arendt postulated (Arendt, 1958: 181ff), but also of differentiated relationships in intermediary spaces that are also historically conditioned, then we shall be able to contextualize situations properly, which certainly means taking their factors into account. If we miss this procedure, we cannot avoid producing contingence again and again, which brings the need to search out forms of compensation but which will do no more than fill some gaps after having trampled upon and even destroying intermediary spaces . However, should we wish to build symbolic paths or bridges, towards other people or towards other elements of the environment, we must first properly perceive this. This means first looking and listening, touching and feeling in order to become aware of where such paths or bridges disclose themselves as being possible or even desirable, or otherwise. This procedure needs still opener forms of knowledge than the usual ones. When we proceed with it, we must incorporate the forms of insufficiency, of accepted distances.

In Goethe's *Fairy Tale*, the snake sacrifices herself by becoming a bridge. In the reality of many situations, a permanent obstacle may work as an understanding bridge of negativity. Which snake may help us, for instance, to overcome the Israeli-Palestinian wall, which has been built precisely in order to block intermediary spaces? Maybe this might be achieved by an unsustainable situation that will have taken form in images and words. And this latter approach means precisely an acute necessity of dialogic intermediary spaces in a present when we only seem to encounter barriers of stubbornness and speechlessness. In such situations, the real understanding of hard necessities may carry a need to incorporate limits of pain in the middle of intermediary spaces.

Such spaces are at the end no third elements from outside. They exist before our eyes everywhere. We have a symbolic relationship with temple, river and bridge and most of all with the elements that stay and move between them, not only with other people. We simply have to do this without ready-made recipes or formulas – just with the principle of respect, which can bear but a grain of hope unless it risks manipulating the environment for its own sake and, in doing so, no longer proves able to perceive intermediary spaces.

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II – At the Crossroads of Conflict and Peace: The Birth of Peace out of the Spirit of War?

The Torn Texture:
Five Theses about Rescue in the Midst of Danger

1. The questing for chances always takes place between order and chaos. Chaos and order always go hand-in-hand. In our times, we commonly feel ontologically secure, which means that the search for ultimate reasons has ceased to be a priority and most probably remains a reserve for philosophical speculations in some forested corner of the soul. Since modern science provides most explanations, our minds feel free to try a sophisticated rhetoric and, by the same token, to deconstruct them. However, that comfortable security is but a fragile texture and we do not need to recall the omnipresence of danger and death, the recent memories of war and devastation in order to realize all the menaces arising from our frail psychical constructions, from the destructing drive of instrumental technology that culminates in military machineries. What is the role of art, of literature amongst all this turmoil? Should that fragile texture be definitively torn?

All laws of reciprocity (an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth) are among the best examples for the tight relationship between order and chaos. As a matter of fact, all laws may serve as examples for this. We know how justice has always grown out of violence, out of the need to put an end to or to avoid violence, in the worst case to keep it within certain limits by using higher, more powerful forms of violence, which have the force to legitimate themselves by weapons, by blackmail or, in the luckiest cases, by persuasion or compromise.

Nowadays, we are said to live under the laws of the image. Images seem to hold absolute sovereignty; many people seem ready to sacrifice the kingdom of their own self-respect for a single minute in the light of the cameras. We certainly realize how some extreme cases (for which reality shows and TV interviews fill our perceptive memory with plenty of exemplary situations) are but consequences of the modern sequestration and fragmentation of our performative possibilities. In the intimate tyranny of the private realm, images may force people into a passivity resulting in the absence of engagement or any risking of public opinions. Such passivity may also open the door to a chaotic invasion of images, of information, of persuasion techniques into our personal systems of perception, discernment and feeling

and the subsequent inability to configure our ethical claims to a singular or collective, to a performed or modulated voice.

Nevertheless we cannot simply turn away from the world we live in and thus must therefore search for the first form of rescue from danger in which our singular voices may grow stronger by meeting other similar voices, out of trivial violence and without leaving the ground beneath our feet.

2. We have not yet left modernity and perhaps never shall. The unpredictability of human manifestations is involved in a web of ideas and emotions, ideologies and judgments, a web which carries acts and words in a relationship with their interactive and material environment. Hence, this means: what starts out as immaterial has to take worldly shape or else simply remains inexistent. However, conjectures also hold huge force and may easily become weapons of mass destruction. We always live in *contingency* and even contribute to increasing contingency given how our subjectivity may lead to problematic forms of world alienation. Here, I do not only mean fundamentalist forms of religion, in that sense which made Nietzsche write that religious people think only of themselves. We may easily point to other examples: the struggle for world hegemony, for energy sources, for geopolitical influence; their motivations always rooted in a dark chaos of intentions, desires, and attempts at legitimation. Order and reason have their source and find their legitimacy mostly as a form of *compensation*. Furthermore, this compensation involves attempts at reducing the moments of insecurity and anxiety – of contingency – by acting in the world and by interpreting the world.

Today, the global reality enters our living room through media images and shows us how cultural patterns constantly keep merging. The collective pride and traditionalism of the *shame-cultures*, such as the Islamic, are crossing over with the fascination generated by the individual models of the *guilt-culture*, which relies upon western traditions of self-identity, upon an unstable balance between capital exchanges and critical citizenship. No testimony is timeless: I am writing these lines some days after the surrender of Bagdad, after having read about the worldwide discussion in the media (including on the streets of Bagdad, where the people, although humiliated, now seem to feel free to defend their own opinions) concerning the roles played by the international military and political actors. However, can we truly believe in the fiction of remaking a new order out of the chaos, after the war game-like displays of such a monstrous "clash of civilizations"? The psychical precariousness of the modern subject, so often glossed over in the literature of the last three centuries, finds here a tragic correspondence with

the material precariousness of the living conditions caused by the subjective and the objective arising out of contingency.

3. More than about a clash of civilizations or empire, would it not be appropriate to speak about a spiral of hyper-contingency and overcompensation? The dramatic dimensions to some worldviews, and their subsequent individual performances, are daily conveyed in images that make us realize how shame and guilt may combine under many modalities. We constantly meet forms merging between honor and responsibility, between material interests and ideals, between religion and western concepts of citizenship. Nowadays, we realize how reduced and simplified the leitmotiv of the isolated subject in the twentieth century has been especially if just contemplating all the implications of the butterfly effect on the economic and communicative exchanges ongoing on a global scale.

From the thesis about the clash of civilizations (Samuel Huntington), we may retain the feeling of the emulative inhibition *shame-cultures* display towards the power of technique and military machineries, which constitute the monopoly of violence in the *guilt-cultures* and underpins the scope for most European countries developing the politics of the social welfare state and the discourse of social and international solidarity, which now seems spreading across the globe. Neither have we reached the end of history nor even does the often quoted author of that thesis (Francis Fukuyama) believe this because, in the end, he still maintains that human beings never will abdicate from a so-called *timic* impulse (Geek word for evaluations) to reach beyond their own possibilities and skills. In a way, we here encounter the heritage of the *shame-culture* even in our world wide web and this means an always renewed chance to act, to create and to perform art and citizenship.

On the other hand, the same *timic* impulse, combining with or struggling against material interests, may reach extreme attitudes and originate forms of *hyper-contingency*, which contribute to fostering permanent disorder and crisis. The greater the chaos, the more powerful the order required to respond to it and hence why we nowadays see and hear forms of discursive legitimating of *overcompensation*, which becomes imperative, inquisitorial and intransigent in the intended way of supporting its supposed democratic values. By an impressing technological apparatus, this aims to confuse our perceptions of reality and fiction, of B-series pictures and science fiction.

4. Between the sublime and the ridiculous, should we not try to rescue a tragic feeling, together with the possible lightness of being? The codes of heroes cannot help but be codes of cruelty and aggressiveness. They tend to rise up not only

against the sheer materiality of daily life, against the consumer and leisure society but also out of a situation of crude needs, of economic despair and political hopelessness. Between both extremes, we always encounter bridges of religious intransigence, of ideological convictions, of explicit interests to a greater or lesser extent, which turn into violence when taking possession of some kind of material. In both cases, we feel the excesses of energetic fluxes, which are nevertheless necessarily requested by life and by art. "Meanwhile, until the philosophers try to explain the construction of the world, the same world keeps going on, through hunger and through love", wrote Friedrich Schiller more than two centuries ago (1795) in a satirical poem about "The wise men of the world".

Nowadays, the so-called "old Europe" (D. Rumsfeld) seems to represent the enlightened, cynical, decadent but also because of that tolerant part of the world. It also seems wedged between two fundamentalist domains, the self-cultivated American illusion of legitimacy over world hegemony and the Islamic conviction of spiritual integrity. However, that may precisely be what in recent months has rather appeared a frailty: the sense of the diversity of the other embedded in a social state, the consciousness of the weight of our cultural heritage, of the endless precariousness of human life and the uniqueness in each individual biography. This might yet mean a new chance for searching and finding other forms of engaged citizenship, closer to life, to art, to informality, to the rhythms of hearts beating yet tempered by a disciplined breath.

In recent times, we have felt impotent between two main streams, the discourses and the movements of the self-declared heroes and, on the other hand, the deconstructions of their images, above all through the Internet cartoons over the first intended and then executed Iraq invasion. We could see Bush and Saddam as symmetrical figures, as a kind of unhappy comic and tragic blood brothers, in several ridiculous forms through the materialistic reduction of their poses. At this point, we should be allowed to ask how can we rescue, from both forms of noise, the heroic discourses and the sarcasms intending to tear them down, how can we rescue our differentiated, ambivalent, dialogical heritages, such as irony and dialectics, such as the tragic feeling and a bearable lightness of being? Are we really paralyzed through overdoses of global information, stripping us of our ability to translate our communicative impulses into new performative acts?

5. There is no recipe for rescue from danger or "nobody can grasp God alone" (Hölderlin). Today, we may replace the word God in Hölderlin's poem

"Patmos" with that kind of sacred values that not only mean the "real presences" (George Steiner) in art but also clamor for materialization in forms of justice, freedom and human rights. We should by now know that the only just struggles are those carried out for negative purposes, which means against the lack of those aforementioned values. This means therefore struggling for the chance, for new gaps where we might inscribe not only fairer political systems but also our works of art and, on an untouchable personal level, perhaps our nostalgia for the happiness possible. For these tasks, we must trust the role of culture, as a plural, open, discursive and acting rationality capable of recognizing the *place of contingency* and preventing it from becoming a factor of aleatory, of anomy or of totalitarianism. In this point of view, war is not just a form of hyper-contingency but also an evident manifestation of a movement of flux and reflux, of identity contraction in the face of an external threat, a merging between star treks and gulf struggles. This reflects not only the gap between the existential interests of civil populations and the strategies of great capital, which during the colonial period used to export inner social conflicts and in post-colonial ages requires the help of a mask in the form of democratic discourse. Should our capacity to deconstruct the same discourse remain testimony to our powerlessness?

Precisely in this situation, and before we come to face the threat of defeatism, we are invited to search for new human dimensions in the useless weapons of the former heroes and meaning we mock our frailties and faults to explore our capacities, to reformulate the consciousness of the world's potentialities into new forms of creation. We still admire American culture, literature, film, music, as well as the precious Islamic tradition and arts. And we are also fully aware that the response to oil wars cannot be as simple as the polemic work written by Theodor W. Adorno and Max Horkheimer in 1947 in their "Dialectics of Enlightenment", under the trauma of the experience of the American culture industry. What I mean by this is that we really can do more than (as Adorno and Horkheimer polemically put it) light candles, eat raw vegetables and ride by carriages. We deserve at least ecological bulbs, Mediterranean cooked vegetables and reliable public transports.

(2003)

Two or Three Things that Did Not Happen: Is There any Possible Peace without Somewhat Tragic Memories?

This question looks suspiciously rhetorical. Its implicit answer might make all the following considerations sound superfluous or even sophistical. Nevertheless, we writers still feel a kind of pressure to keep spinning a tiny thread of sense, raising a small voice, in a world that seems too illegible, too illogical, too absurd or simply too unpredictable. Since "faith has become portable" (Fouad Ajami), since ideologies have become changeable, the temptation to complain about these and many more items (the increasing replacement of the book by the screen, for instance) is no longer sustained by any system of traditional values, which most of us have imbibed with our mother's milk only in order to deny them during our own process of individuation.

Whoever thinks of reality as a heart beating, as a living system with its systolic rhythms of distress and pain, but also with its diastolic moments of joy and anger, cannot help but also thinking historically (in time) and contextually (in space). For two or three moments of extreme violence, brought into our homes by the TV's evening news, we can easily imagine a long, an overly long odyssey of accumulated daily sufferings, humiliations, oppressions, which fertilize the soil where violence grows, seasoned by whatever kind of religion or ideology. Even this is anything but new; we all remember the words of Friedrich Engels in the 19th century about theory becoming material *Gewalt* when taking possession of the masses.

Gewalt: this German word meaning both violence and power and revealing how the latter grows out of the former, how the memories of fire must be kept alive to help give light to a modulate sense in which shadows remain perceptible within the most intensive clarity. As we know, this was one of the most cherished metaphors of the Enlightenment, when thinking and debating were finally being seen as progress in contrast to the dreadful scenes of the Thirty Year War. However, we are also aware how further wars got fought even while thinkers and writers were engaged in discussions in the salons or through publications about the most suitable means of implementing a government of justice and peace on earth. This means a peace which, remembering the irony of Immanuel Kant's words, we may desire to be eternal but lasting forever only in the graveyard.

Thus, we must keep on with trying to formulate our concerns, our aims, our hopes, our fears, within an increasingly worn out system of words and images. It already seems that the not even so modern, not even so post-modern fight between words and images, is getting exchanged for a long succession of *déjà vus*, that most common currency in which we are no longer able to read the inscriptions but also because we already know them by heart. However, we need only to remember, for instance, that amazing scene from the film American Beauty (by Sam Mendes) when the boy describes the movements of a plastic bag in the wind to the girl. Suddenly, that prosaic object we use every day at the supermarket is animated by forces of nature that render it alive and so seemingly having become a bearer of its own will, if not free will then at least an aesthetical will. Suddenly, another reality emerges in the middle of a distressing, suffocating environment. All at once, the sight of an unexpectedly graceful form may contribute to neutralizing family violence, generational conflicts. What is more, in the end, the world kaleidoscope has changed. It has become lighter, somehow more bearable And through the simple movement of the wind.

However, we do not live in a movie even while our fictionalizations of the world go on ceaselessly. Moreover, such fictionalizations, which we experience daily in TV news, reality shows, etcetera, are strongly tinged with some tragic knots supposed to increase the show's appeal. Nevertheless, instead of inoculating with the germs of a strong character, as Friedrich Schiller defended in the 18th century, these home made tragedies do not prepare us to act properly in real and tragic situations. This does not happen because we are but spectators who mostly sit comfortably on the sea shore gazing out at the ship all the while it sinks. This then was also the situation of the spectator in Schiller's time (By the way, we can also read how Schiller argued against the banality and futility of most spectators, thus anticipating the critical voices of the present against a demonized TV as if we are not free not to turn it on, not to instead choose a book or a CD rather than watching reality shows). We only feel disarmed when no longer able to bear the silence which inevitably precedes the analysis of tragic situations and therefore also such works that most of us aim to create within the largest spectrum in time and space, all the way from those stupidly killed and wounded through to the dancing, flying plastic bag. But are there the words for saying silence? Are there acts to answer tragedy? From this question onwards, from all the real memories that we have of the present, even when merging with many journalistic banalities and TV news or shows, from the unsheltered human

condition which perhaps makes us stick together, we may begin rethinking peace. The idea of peace may therefore be reborn out of a collective of living images and forms containing at least two or three things that did not happen but tragically could have happened. In our unreligious world, this exercise may seem suspicious. However, I consider that precisely such an exercise not only lies at the root of all artistic creation but may also stimulate a new, at least, or even a better attitude towards the environment that means nature, that means the constructed world, that means other people and most of all those whom we do not understand at the first glance.

This is, at a time when everyone speaks and reads English, not a matter of language. It's a matter of ascertaining just where the roots of our system may be able to blend history with fiction (but is writing history not already a kind of fiction?), of finding where the branches of our human condition remain unprotected against the winds of violence, except when these branches take wing and begin flying after having stood stock still during a great storm.

(2004)

Terrorism of Expression as a Means
for the Sake of Freedom

Some twenty years ago, when working on my doctoral thesis, a sociology professor told me that he had once dreamed of becoming a writer. However, he said further, he never grasped what motivates writers and hence he quit literary studies. He only knew one thing: such authors as Walter Benjamin or Theodor W. Adorno, whose paths to their own particular forms of expression were impossible to retrace but proved far more interesting than those of the much more easily decoded Georg Lukács or Max Weber.

Such words may provide us one main reason to place the first two authors, Benjamin and Adorno, among the group whom I shall call the *authors of silence*. That means to me, authors who shape sentences out of silence, bringing them into life as the result of a struggle against silence, pushed by a kind of will to memory. However, what does silence really mean? In the context that matters for the sake of art, of creation in freedom, for the sake of everything that prevents life from being an "eternal view of destruction", as Friedrich Schiller wrote more than two centuries ago, silence may also mean a sort of threat, a condemnation to oblivion, a negation of the right to live and let live, precisely *not* in the sense of a struggle for life.

Some further steps have been made since the debates about engaged art and ideology, since Sartre's *literature engagée*, since Peter Weiss' *aesthetics of resistance*, since many others who have not quit searching for the right measure, the right balance, who have not given up trying to represent what cannot be represented. Between silence and triviality, we seem to have at our disposal a wide highroad, or at least an open field of aesthetical virtualities. But I don't think we do. The resistance of the text is proportional to the challenges of which we become aware, which touch us or even penetrate us deeply, but which we cannot let turn into expression. I am not speaking about epidermic agitations following clear geopolitical interests under a cloak of religion. Nor am I speaking about the risks which freedom must take, otherwise it would not really be free.

Instead of that, I'm speaking about the obscure web of implications from which the human condition never can escape. We must not mistake the cloud for Juno. If we do so, should we remain by the letter forgetting the desire to search for ways which may bring us to an idea of spirit, we profess

well-intended commonplaces such as "freedom of expression is a high good", "religious feelings deserve respect", "some regimes pour oil onto fire", "violence is not always unjustified", etcetera. However, we all know how the core of the problem lies somewhere else. Perhaps we do not even know where the problem is, but we know almost always where it is *not*. I mean, we are able to differentiate instinctively the ways to explore a subject for a newspaper article, for a radio feature or for a written text.

By this time, I should have begun to explain the title to my work. If I seem to be beating around the bush, it is because I perhaps fear being misunderstood. Many of us had the opportunity to live radical historical changes, from censorship to freedom of expression. Those who have undergone such experiences have also developed practices of looking for fractures within the system into which it is always possible to pour what we would like to say or at least to suggest it. We know the tension of texts, the challenge to improve. This might even produce a great thrust of adrenalin in times of censorship, which might also later contribute to a certain mistrust in the freedom of expression as the natural consequence of a democratic evolution. However, we also here know the slings and arrows of the book market, as well as the inner tensions caused by our own aesthetic censorship, so that in the end there is no wide highroad, no open field for our creation, just a small gap between anger and longing, between engagement and reflection.

How can we therefore take a step beyond the discussion about engaged art? Here, I would say that engaged art goes beyond the discussion itself. This is not merely a speech game. We all feel it each time we experience the necessary, although not always urgent, dimension of a work of art in such a way that always represents more than words could ever say. However, we must work with words, which remind us that each tug of war between spirit and letter often leads to a clash of fundamentalisms, not of cultures. Cultures are resistant because they are versatile; fundamentalisms are fragile in their apparent toughness, in their real fear of opening up fissures in their walls.

Freedom is both resistant and fragile. No power is able to defend it without making itself vulnerable. Nevertheless, the dilemma is that no power is able to defend itself without keeping liberty of expression. Neither is this a speech game. And I must also stress that the title of my paper holds no intention of playing with the theme of this round table. Furthermore, I am convinced that freedom in its noblest sense, which goes together with human dignity, with human rights, must always be conquered against some kind of oppression, of prejudice, of self-complaisance, of security thinking,

against all those attitudes tending to too easily take things for granted. Each of us certainly has a different definition of freedom, more or less driven either by the desire to decide about our own ways of acting, of writing under the given conditions, or by the caution not to hurt someone else by our own actions, by our own writing. In any case, I simply care about the following kind of alternatives, which may well be mixed in different proportions: freedom in the positive sense of doing something, freedom in the negative sense of not having to do something, freedom to care about someone else's feelings, freedom to face contradictions. In this last case, freedom begins to take on another shape, to become a sort of civil courage, to apply the linguistic expression, speech acts in its fullest sense.

However, even all these forms of freedom tend towards becoming commonplaces, especially nowadays. It proves enough to wrap them up into journalistic jargon, which may flatten and dissolve each text by ignoring its context or, even worse, by creating a false context dictated by immediate interests. But here again I would not like to be misunderstood. To put it into a sentence, we should not forget aims over useful purposes. I am not establishing hierarchies. I am simply speaking of different things. In the same way, I refuse any attempt to place limits on freedom of expression, I would like to stress that one literary aim may be a kind of terrorism of expression, as a consequence of freedom and for the sake of freedom. Here, I at last reach the point where I have to explain what this means to me. However, this does not represent an easy task. Otherwise, it becomes too easy to imagine some kinds of shocking effects, of language attacks, of sadomasochistic descriptions. Nevertheless, this would perhaps never leave any level of significance and remain as epidermic as an angry person burning a flag at a demonstration.

Leaving the epidermic level will not lead us to attain any kind of "essentiality", which is but a construction of the mind and simply does not exist. Instead of a nebulous "Empire," we live in a networked world. Every art producer has known and felt this for many centuries and, in whatever the case, long before he or she might have dreamed about the existence of a world wide web. What we really know is the existence of the world as a real or symbolic battle field, a minefield with some beautiful places, some landscapes, some houses, some cafés and some works, which cannot but cause us permanent astonishment. However, the battle field, the mine field still remains everywhere even should we ourselves feel secure. This simply represents the price of freedom, which many of us would like to push away. We notice it

at the mere level of words as I try to legitimate my positions in order not to be misunderstood precisely as if tip-toeing through a minefield. And the occasional explosion would not derive from some kind of anger that my words might provoke in you but from within, from my own conception of living within the reality of the texts and of their networked implications.

We could also see that metaphorical minefield as a severe warning about the need to differentiate. Each painful situation and memory on the one hand, but also each cliché, each commonplace, on the other hand, may be a mine. Furthermore, just how can we write about what is marked by mines through forgetting them, through concentrating on what is between them? Mines are not only local metaphors; they also have a temporal life in our individual and collective memories. I apply them here as metaphors for what would destroy perhaps not really our safety but most of all that tension that proves indispensable for a work of art to achieve its polysemic dimension and thus its resonance of former stories, of lives which perhaps remained without expression but were nevertheless lived. Perhaps you recognize here the old claim put forward by Walter Benjamin in his historical-philosophical theses written a few months before he committed suicide in a small hotel on the Spanish-French border in order not to fall into the hands of the Nazis.

However, rescuing forgotten issues begins with our own history. In the middle of the 19th century, Karl Marx wrote, while reasoning on the Jewish Question, that the Christian state is the *Christian negation of the State* and not the political realization of Christianity. By replacing Christians with Muslims, by comparing history with contemporary times, we are doing more than summing up history; we are mainly rescuing the European memories of all that long process of secularization during the Modern Age, which gave birth to possibilities of tolerance and coexistence, by separating religion from politics. This proved possible – and the work of Thomas Hobbes perhaps serves as the best example – by putting pacifying people and the satisfaction of their basic needs over religious questions, as a public matter and not as a private matter. Therefore, we are correspondingly more likely to defend our cultural and political heritage of freedom and human rights, of plurality of expression when remembering how dramatically these have been conquered. The history of the 20th century, that Age of Extremes reminds us too closely that this same heritage of freedom and tolerance has been anything but granted. Even the coexistence of cultures, of groups, is no guaranty of any dialogue between them, which should always start from the beginning as if some morning exercise. Let us start in Guantanamo.

We may still ogle at the passion that moves masses in rage against freedom of expression when felt as in the Danish cartoon affair and secretly envy that emotional picture show because we would like to have our own citizens also so passionately mobilized for the cause of freedom. However, we also forget too easily the individualistic implications of a guilt-culture. We are, so to speak, sentenced to pluralism, therefore to challenges made to our capacity to tolerate, not only by people with different habits, beliefs and sensitivities but most of all by situations and conflicts caused by practices incompatible with the democratic order and its claim to dignity. This differentiation could be a criterion to help us in breaking the chains of political correctness that render people blind to the necessary clarification of the contradictions and should draw on a little help from our cartoonist friends. In other words – what about letting Mohamed's head blast off as a bomb but not of explosives but of flowers, of sweeties, of toys? In any case, I find political correctness much more suitable material worthy of satire than any kind of deity, who in our secularized society rather lacks flesh and blood and therefore any explosive potential.

It took Europe many centuries to learn how to differentiate between powers, religions, competences and perspectives. The analytical sciences even intensify still further that tendency. Nevertheless, only art can retie the threads which in the past had to be cut in order to gain the democratic liberties and freedom of expression. When I say art, I mean literature within it, with open limits and glass doors between the codes of expression. Whenever literature does not produce a sort of butterfly effect, showing the implications of each simple story, of every apparently clear situation, whenever a text does not confront us with the unbearable dimensions of that life that must incessantly feed art, then you may be looking for a pocket book at an airport magazine store and about to have a pleasant flight.

Don't worry; you are not on the passenger list of a hijacked plane.

(2006)

The Walls Inside Us or:
What Kind of Resistance Is at Stake?

Which are the points of resistance, active and passive, conscious or unconscious, that impede us from doing the right things? In the prologue to her work *The Human Condition* (University of Chicago Press, 1958), Hannah Arendt asks herself and the reader whether the emancipation and secularization of the Modern Age, "which began with a turning-away, not necessarily from God, but from a god who was the father of men in heaven", should "end with an even more fateful repudiation of an Earth who was the Mother of all living creatures under the sky" (p. 2). Fifty years ago, there were already good reasons to worry about the earth, regarding the agonistic escalation of nuclear weapons during the Cold War, the paranoia represented by the stubborn clashes of ideologies between the blocks of the so-called free world against the so-called socialist world or, in reverse terms, of the so-called imperialist world against the so-called totalitarian world.

Historians often speak about the century of ideologies, the Era of the Extremes, etcetera. Umberto Eco even said in an interview that he *believed* the 20th century had turned out "hyper-religious". This irony is not accidental; I just had to stress once more how the analyzing subject is himself a constitutive part of the analyzed object. However what constitutes the core of the problem, if there ever is one? In any case, we should retain the accurate analysis by Hannah Arendt of what she called "world alienation," which means several forms of subjectivity, of withdrawal from reality in the name of some paradise searching, of aggression towards the objects in the name of some survival or welfare or even profitable interests.

However, we also understand this represents a wider problem, which consists of setting limits inside us, of judging what is right or wrong not according to moral norms but as the consequence of judging a concrete situation; we must "play it again" and again and again, repeating the question about the Here, about the Now and most of all about the Who – that means, about the place and the time, about just who is really concerned about a crisis situation. However, when simultaneously thinking historically and globally, we correspondingly risk both generalizing and particularizing. Excuse me for mentioning Hannah Arendt on several occasions, there are surely the usually expected reasons for doing so (her 100th birthday and the conferences

and meetings held all over the place last year), but I would also like to stress one of her leading ideas, on the possibility of being symbolically born again and again by having the courage to act according to our judgment, made possible by reflection and completed by communication and interaction. This is by no means a system of rules drawn by the book and outside of reality but, on the contrary, a conscientious presentation of our whole philosophical tradition as a sort of treasure arch from which we are free to take inspiration in our reflecting connections with the real world. When Hannah Arendt refused, in the famous TV-interview given in 1964 to Günter Gaus, to be labeled as a political philosopher and, instead, claiming to be a political theorist, this was because she knew too well that the treasure arch threatened to turn into a Pandora's box with ideological intentions and the world's reading protocols, mostly taking possession of it, following an idea, or – even worse because higher placed – an ideal. Instead of that, theory should rather descend to the level of a simple tool, which anyone could use, even in precarious situations, even in dark times, but never without any sort of mediation. In the same interview, she stressed that there are (almost) always ways of acting with dignity without risking (necessarily) one's life. We know the history, we know what she was talking about. We can spare ourselves the recalling of her analysis of totalitarian systems in the 1940s, her report on Eichmann's trial in Jerusalem in the early 1960s. However, we must remember that she refused to "anthropologize" political contingency, this means rendering it essential by sustaining how an Eichmann exists inside each one of us who, under the same circumstances might act in exactly the same way as he did.

My own point in raising H. Arendt is above all to think reality and correspondingly history in a holistic, systemic way, which requires trying to observe the observer. As a matter of fact, this author offers a most interesting example of the difficulties in getting along with the "hardships of the plains" after having experienced the "hardships of the mountains" – the words taken from the poem "Wahrnehmung" ("Perception") written 1949 by an already disillusioned Bertolt Brecht and chosen by H. Arendt's biographer Elisabeth Young-Bruehl as the epigraph for the chapter about the post-war period. In the so-called dark times, men (a problematic designation, which includes Rosa Luxemburg among Lessing, Jaspers, Heidegger, Brecht, H. Broch, W. Benjamin and Pope Johann XXIII; but I don't intend to follow the gender studies path) could fight, had to fight against outside barriers; afterwards, in times which we dare not really call full of light, people who have gone

through all forms of totalitarian darkness due to the suppression of the possibilities of living differences in public spaces, such people have to face a sort of inside barriers, which means walls interiorized after having survived the course of those dark times.

How come such inner walls remain – or even arise anew – in a democratic society? Here, we must take care not to throw the baby out with the bathwater and therefore not to anathematize economic progress as a factor that brings about short-sighted, materialistic perspectives and behaviours: we know only too well those cynical cartoons that pointed out (not only with the pencil, there are many words with cartoon effect, as we know) the East Germans rushing towards Coke and bananas shortly after the Berlin Wall came down; it is then too logical to proceed with a really Wailing Wall litany against the loss of orientation and values, about the dissolution of violent monopoles that warrant security, about the incapacity of common people to fight against more or less sophisticated forms of criminality in the era of globalization, as if there remained no alternative than becoming "one of them" or remaining comfortably sat on a cosy couch reading the latest world best-seller about conspiracy theory.

We do not live in any Brave New World but merely in a time when the information speed confronts us permanently with the simultaneity of the non-simultaneous. We may call it a clash of civilizations but we still remain never able to understand completely what is going on. I must correct myself: we begin understanding parts of it, even if such cognition takes a slower path, we always begin understanding when feeling how the contradictions and paradoxes of our time go through our complex psychosomatic system and leave traces.

In this sense, post-totalitarianism might be a new illustration of the fable of the wizard's apprentice: the big broom is not only broken but also replaced by a lot of small brooms, which seem to work together to produce a similar paralyzing influence, however with one significant difference. Totalitarianism produced visible walls; the tradition of human rights has to recall them in order to prove that no freedom can be taken for granted and the will to fight against injustice shall never vanish. The small brooms are the "hardships of the plains" in the shape of the comfortable belief about already reached utopias. But is that really so? Can we afford to quit climbing mountains and not only for fun or fitness? At the moment I write this, I see the TV news about the disclosure of a planned terrorist conspiracy in Great Britain to kidnap and execute a soldier – but I also subsequently hear

the wonderful lyrics by David Gilmour and I ask if we can hear them, again and again, without a chill, which is more than a mere goose skin reflex but a sense of real freedom of choice, a real capacity of determination that breaks the walls of indolence within us: "On the day the Wall came down/They threw the locks onto the ground/And with glasses high we raised a cry for freedom had arrived" (Pink Floyd, *The Division Bell*). Can we still complain about becoming conformists, can we still – raising the cynical parade – be glad about the existence of reasons elsewhere to fight for freedom? Let me quote H. Arendt one last time on sustaining in a letter to Kurt Blumenfeld that wrath was a more positive feeling than hope – precisely because it calls for action and does not legitimize passivity. Hope might become a powerful inner wall – wrath never: it just has to be moderated by critical analysis.

(2007)

Abolish Conflicts? Do We not Need Them for the Sake of a Stable Peace?

On such issues as trying to develop an ethical attitude towards history as a source of peace, on trying not to forget tragic events, on doing everything in order to prevent deformation or even repression of painful facts, we cannot prevent experiencing a deep contradiction. For some of us, who did not live our whole life under the banner of freedom, it seems that our highest aim should be, now enjoying the freedom of expressing our thoughts, which is also warranted by law, never to rest before the "whole truth" is discovered, which means both that shown through images and that written down. It might seem most probable that we feel a strong need to disclose the hidden aspects of a past made up of dictatorship, censorship, war and civil war. However, why it this not always so? Putting this in other terms, why for instance does literature reach farther than history, sociology, statistics or psychology? Why is it able to accomplish a broader understanding of complex situations in spite of the fact that it cannot work without the support of all those forms of abovementioned knowledge?

We know that literature universalizes insights without losing the appearance of tracing a direct line to our individual soul. This individual soul is also part of a system in being a complex mixture of feeling and understanding attempting to establish a balance of emotional and critical reason. Here, I hesitate about which term I should mention first and decided to put in first place that which displays itself more immediately, that is, emotion, which in a certain way also provides a considerable part of the energy necessary to driving the mechanisms of judgment.

With the help of these precise mechanisms, we can disclose another ambiguity. We cannot but occasionally show certain nostalgia for those times of dictatorship and raw violence. Why does this happen? Because those times also allowed for the developing of radical qualities, which were themselves mostly ambivalent: heroism mixed with criminal energy, courage mixed with ferocity, but also fear, hope and disappointment. Such a mixture provided the capacity to give both the best and the worst of oneself. Here, we already begin to see how literature may work more effectively than social sciences. While sociologists like Karl Mannheim were able to *mention* complexity as the "simultaneity of the non-simultaneous", writers like Malcolm

Lowry *described and dissected* the reasons why modern individuals feel torn when facing past and present.

We notice the present commitment towards cultivating historical memories, for instance at universities through the creation of such specialized branches such as "Memory Studies" or "Memory research". This trend is not only proportional to the civic conscience but also appears as a political conquest against the tyranny of pragmatism and functionalism, against the primacy of strict economic criteria, which are often imposed by global rules. Regarding the twentieth century, "memory" is often a synonym of "Holocaust" and I do not see any reason not to agree with that when perceiving this from a broad perspective, which grasps all the victims of the totalitarian Nazi hallucination about eliminating all the persons who did not fit into the fable of a 1000 Year Reich maintained by pure Aryan people.

Let us say that we carry with us our phylogenetic memories whether or not we like it: we carry with us the former hunter and collector that have been a more considerable part of humankind than the shepherd and the farmer or, still closer to us, the courtesan and the citizen. Both our phylogenesis and our ontogenesis are crisscrossed with memories of violence and the process of its taming. This process is anything but linear but we may generally state that the biggest civilization conquest has been the evolution from direct physical violence to a more performative form, either in the form of satire, irony, drama, story-telling, debate or any kind of discourse. Here, we can clearly make out two sorts of reasons: first, why literature plays a capital role in changing societies and interfacing times; secondly, why we can never take any peaceful situation for granted, whether between two or just a few people or among a group or a nation. As Norbert Elias, the Jewish sociologist whose parents died at Auschwitz put it as he had to answer the accusations of seeing his civilization process – that is, the evolution from the warrior to the courtesan – in a linear way, which did not fit reality: We can never say "once civilized, forever civilized". Even the philosopher may turn into a cannibal under particular circumstances as the young Friedrich Schiller wrote in the 18th century.

Our ethical commitment to history means, as I see it, a close relationship with our long term phylogenetic past, as well with our short ontogenetic biography, because we know, at latest since Freud, that we were born neither as wolves nor as lambs. In other words, we need the close experience of conflicts precisely in order to develop a capacity for conflict. The danger of ignoring the possibility of becoming aggressive, and this happens sooner than

we think, creates a problematic gap or a blind zone where fear, hope, love and hatred may establish the most fantastic projections which suddenly appear as a "material idea" (Schiller) where ideology takes direct possession of any kind of object, transforming, functionalizing, and possibly perverting it.

I do not want by any means to adopt Goethe's words when he told Eckermann that he did not know any crime which he would not be able to carry out. Let us hope never to come into a situation when we should be forced to kill. Let us reject Hannah Arendt on the assertion there is always an Eichmann inside us. H. Arendt did it vehemently during a debate in the sequence of the not very peaceful reception of her Eichmann report in the early sixties – we may do it more softly and skeptically in the present days. However, we need the insight into history and this implies reading it as Walter Benjamin did as a history of injustice and repression, which clamors for rescue as a text with images on which we draw retrospectively because the past put these images into the text, like negatives clamoring for development.

Since Aristophanes, we have known that wars may break the stagnation and even decadence of long periods of peace. Nevertheless, when more closely studying that kind of "peace", we notice that it already contains the germs of violence within, and this not just because violence is inherent to life as a sort of primary energy, which needs to be "processed", sublimated, civilized, cultivated and channeled. Furthermore, when looking at real life, which occurs in those times of "peace", we probably notice that it may be a "hot peace" (in a way a pendant to the "Cold War" or its continuation after the fall of the Berlin Wall). They usually represent times when material plenty is not favorable to the cultivation of citizenship virtues, of civil courage and discipline without giving up on generosity and solidarity. Those qualities are generally supposed not to grow in this soil; on the contrary, we often see them satirized, maybe because they get experienced as unbearable to the way of feeling and living in the mainstream. The step from that situation to the tyranny of the marketplace, to the conjuncture of pressures by majorities, is only a small one as we so well know.

How can we draw our path lines in the most complex web of our globalized realities, among the plenty of sense offers, of historical narratives? Perhaps we should simply go back to our human condition, which we have never really abandoned and recall the sentence that René Char wrote during his years in the Resistance: "Notre heritage n'est precédé d'aucun testament" ("Our inheritance was left to us by no testament") (*Feuillets d' Hypnos,*

1943-44). In the words of the Spanish poet Antonio Machado: "Caminante, no hay camino, se hace camino al andar" (Wanderer, there is no way, the way is made by walking"). For that, we are not undefended, because we have our capacity to collect information (including, or even firstly, our perceptions) and submit them to our faculties of judgment.

Hannah Arendt quoted that René Char sentence (in her book *Between Past and Future*) in order to remind us how problematic it is whether forgetting the link to the years of the Resistance or idealizing that period; a whole generation of European intellectuals have done that, contributing to the building of the European identity as the inheritance of both critical and practical reason.

We return to the problem that I raised in my paper last year, that is the problem of the transition from a situation where everything is missing and danger lingers to another one where we cease measuring each step, where every deed and word loses weight among the noise of the doxa. Therefore, I will not insist on this problem but just recall how crucial it is to interpose our critical judgment between our heroic nostalgias and our living, daily praxis. This praxis should be precisely a constant research for peace. This reaches from a present, where we have to take options at every moment, which are often painful, to an active way of dealing with the past. We return to Hannah Arendt who compares René Char's lack of testament with Tocqueville's assertion about the obscurity in which a man would wander when his past has ceased to throw its light upon the future.

How can we reach peace with a world in which men seem engaged in so many kinds of warfare? The ethical claim of describing and narrating the past, of setting it up as a problem by opposing true and distorted facts, by comparing different historical perspectives and, simultaneously, by trying to analyze all kinds of censorship, all of this should always be more than some simple rescue of stories, of names, of voices, of situations. Taking ethical attitudes at the very present has to represent a challenge. For this challenge, there are no rules, no books, solely the faculty of judging from within an unavoidable situation of contingency. Nevertheless, it was still René Char who wrote in those abovementioned Resistance papers: "L' homme est capable de faire ce qu'il est incapable d'imaginer" (*Oeuvres Complètes*, Paris: Gallimard 1983, p. 230). Even when knowing that history is not suitable for telling, we may always try to tell a version, which we in the same breath admit only constitutes our own version, our own contribution and proposal for peace.

(2008)

Understanding versus Acting: a Silent Effect?

The well-known assertion by William Faulkner that the past is never dead because it is not even past, since its formulation in 1951, has found infinite possibilities for usage, especially within the realm of memory studies and their corresponding intention to precise and differentiate historical narratives. In our global time and space, the consciousness about the fact that such historical narratives move ever closer to fictional writing, or vice-versa, has risen to the surface and become discursive evidence.

Historical memories may therefore be seen as one of many discursive strategies applied by our task of understanding. I hereby recall Hannah Arendt's answer in a television interview with Günter Gaus, after having been asked whether the job of thinking, of constructing political theories, would not be a specifically masculine task (We must recall this happened in 1964). The answer of the non-feminist Arendt might lead us into the fringes of gender role clichés, when telling the interviewer – amidst thick waves of smoke by the way since smoking was not generally forbidden at that time – that while men wanted so terribly to *act*, to produce effects (in German: *so furchtbar gerne wirken*), she would rather try to *understand* (in German: *verstehen*), as if this meant taking a step backwards from the arena of action and towards a platform of reflection.

In our present communicative world, we may no longer avoid processes leading to decisions that might be of some importance and contributing somewhat to making the world more human or less inhuman. At the least, we must no longer remain mere *de jure* individuals, simply enjoying the fact of having civil rights, as new technologies are increasingly putting at our disposal means which allow us to exercise our faculties of understanding, judging, *and* acting in order to feel as one part of a huge communicating world and thereby inserting ourselves into a process which may make us *de facto* individuals, which means citizens standing up for their words and deeds even at risk to their own lifes.

We know that Hannah Arendt rather arranged herself in a shadowy private domain in order to observe how the different realms of the world interacted. This was reaffirmed several times, including in her last speech, delivered upon receiving Denmark's Sonnig Prize in 1975, a few months before she died. Her position had in my opinion less to do with possible

self-judgment about some feminine incapacity to act or to carry out the existence of a political person than with her sense of the correlative proportion of understanding, which would also imply judging and acting. In some sense, we could say that understanding and acting, rather than excluding themselves mutually in the sense of situational options similarly correlate to the invisible and visible parts of an iceberg.

A most interesting, and perhaps less known, proof of an unusual sense for an urgency to act by Hannah Arendt comes from a series of articles by her published during the 1940s in several American magazines, in both English and in German, concerning the Palestine issue and the foundation of the state of Israel. Here, there is no space for the speech about reflexive interaction between understanding and acting. On the one hand, we feel the pressure of urgency in her pointing out the necessity of taking political measures and acting in a dialogical way to the Palestine Jews, the necessity to neither let themselves get enraptured by Zionistic policies nor fail to criticize all situations of violence and injustice. On the other hand, Arendt's urgency, in this particular case, of judging by acting and acting by judging, could not be understood by us, as her readers, without knowledge about her philosophical and political working and living processes and experiences. However, for the moment, let us merely presuppose these aspects and proceed.

"There is still time": this is perhaps the most acute assertion we might read or hear when knowing it was formulated just a few days before the proclamation of the Israeli state. The article, published in May 1948 in the New York magazine *Commentary*, meant the "Jewish homeland", which in H. Arendt's opinion could still be saved, both as *an* idea and as *a* reality, not as a result of Zionist claims based upon a militarist and expansionist practices, but upon *the* neighborly reality, at each moment made possible by negotiations, mostly on the edge of incommunicability, between Jews and Arabs. This simultaneous reflection about the conditions to the possibility for acting politically and its subsequent communication within an influential Jewish community revolved around the polarity of what "should never have happened", as she said during the aforementioned interview concerning the Holocaust.

I cannot help asking myself again and again what that assertion ("there is still time") really could have meant since Hannah Arendt knew only too well the irreversibility of the creation of the Israeli state under the banner of the Zionists. She knew about the long history of the Zionist fiction of a so-called "land without people for people without land". She knew about

the total disrespect of radical Zionist groups and their armed troops such as Irgun and Stern and not only towards their Palestine neighbors. She knew about the long coexistence of practices between Jews and Arabs under the Ottoman Empire or the British protectorate. She knew about the criminal military "operations" against Palestinian and British people since April 1948, in order to protect settlements outside the territories included in the United Nations decision of November 1947. She knew about the massacre in the Palestine village of Deir Yassin on 8.5.1948, when 254 people, mostly women and children, were brutally slain. She knew about the complexity of the historical relationship between Jews and Arabs, which the Zionists were about to reduce to a *tabula rasa*. She knew what we also know today, since the reigniting of the Gaza war led to a wave of eagerness to be informed about a past, which is not even yet past.

And yet – is there still time? We look at the waste land of Gaza and have heard of the constant bombings and the intransigent statements by Arabs and Jews during the war from watching Al Jazeera, which for a while seemed the only bearable TV channel as close to a reality which we knew was too real but yet still unable to allow us out of our daily life any more than the financial crisis has done.

Yes, there still might be time. There might be the time necessary to reset the capacity of thinking back to the complexity of a situation carrying not only geopolitical but ideological, religious and symbolic aspects. Understanding might mean, within the context of the Palestine issue, deliberately *not* acting in a first moment in order to first ask how to break the spiral of violence, which itself stems from a twisted product of too many violent chains.

Is the Israeli-Palestine conflict really so original in universal history? In his booklet against fanaticism, Amos Oz asserted that both peoples have to be ready, as if two men agreeing to have limb amputated to save their lives, to make the most painful concessions that in his opinion should lead to a peace for which the Europeans have needed an unequally longer time. Writing in the 1940s, Hannah Arendt stresses the immaturity of both sides, reflected by emotional, nationalistic and illusionary forms of behavior, rendered possible by the umbrellas of the Ottoman Empire and British protectorate. As a "late nation" such as Italy and Germany, Israel has right up until today continuously reinforced its symbolic legitimacy through the Holocaust tragedy, which leads an Irish journalist to call for an end to this same legitimacy in order to allow the world to judge Israeli war crimes and the daily humiliations inflicted on the Palestinian people.

Is there still time to re-act like a symbolic new birth, starting from a mined political platform, a clash of intransigent interests? In any case, the analysis by Hannah Arendt about the violent clashes around the creation of the Israel state points us, *mutatis mutandis*, to the necessity of deconstructing the Israeli colonization of Palestine, as a tragic case in which dominators and dominated live next door and not on some far distant continent. In spite of not being a feminist, and perhaps simply because she was not one, Hannah Arendt enables us to understand better the reasons for long self-legitimating, humiliation, aggression, which amounts to a long chain of irrational aspects not really beyond but rather in-between the daily lifes of Israelis and Palestinians. In this sense, the letter by a Jewish woman to Barack Obama, written to the new president of the USA on the day of his election in November 2008 and begging him to come to the disputed "homeland" and release her from the pain of carrying the guilt of a brutal colonization ("Obama, take away the pain in my stomach"), reveals a similar concern about caring for real people without any longer having to support forms of daily military violence. "Do it for me", she claims. This is not a simply egoistic issue but also the acute form of feeling a daily tragedy.

Next to or beyond, analysis of the materially detectable and describable aspects remains perhaps the biggest section of the problem and perhaps just as big and silent as the hidden chunk of any iceberg or as sinuous as a labyrinth thread that leads us through a perpetuation of violent chains out of the symbolic, ideological, religious and historical issues clash over a long spiral. The path leading to negotiations seems blocked by genuine dilemma, out of the necessity for the mutual recognition of one side by the other but which is mutually blocked by fears of getting into still greater dangers by recognizing the other, the first being losing one's own face with the next being having to give up ownership rights and other forms of legitimacy. Men – Hannah Arendt would perhaps say again were she alive in this precise moment –so dreadfully want to keep on humiliating and shooting and bombing their neighbors whilst women have more than enough in trying to understand and want, once and for all, to sleep in peace, raise their children, cook a meal in order to invite all the neighbors, Arabs and Jews. There is always time for a shared meal.

(2009)

Rapid, the Shadow of Peace,
between Hinge and Door

I borrow here the title to a beautiful novel by Vergílio Ferreira (1916-1996), a most distinguished novelist and essayist and also a founding member of Portuguese PEN. He meant this shadow as a memory of brief but bright moments of happiness, such moments that we are mostly able to recognize only when they are gone. We also may experience the memory of dark moments thereby stressing the sunshine that we feel after such moments in our breathing chest and that makes us offer up a secret hymn to sheer life. Thus does peace also often get experienced, out of an oppressing, depressing realm, back to simple and clear lines of life so easily recognized but also often so difficult to put into words.

However, peace represents more than just non-violence even though the absence of violence may be seen as a threshold of peace. What then does peace have to do with dreams?

While it seems almost self-evident to me that daydreams are affected by what Ernst Bloch called *das Prinzip Hoffnung*, the principle of hope. However, I do not attain the same clarity on whether night dreams are definitively bound to turn into nightmares. I think most of us may love night atmospheres and find them suitable not only for dysphoric sceneries but also for open-eyed dreams of a better world while speculating between books and the computer screen, between the cat purring under our working lamp and the jazz music kept low because of the neighbors, a soft saxophone within imaginary smoking spirals. There, we may also find a terrible arena for fights between hope and anger. We may then realize just how paralyzing hope can prove, how mobilizing anger can disclose itself as.

Contradictions lurk and sit everywhere. We may have blissful and hopeful day-time visions, scenes of a possible better life, as well as experiencing not only nightmares but also stimulating night dreams as projections of our daily wishful thinking. Dreams are no linear issue but certainly most complex and thus their ability to serve as inspiring sources for literary images, both in poetry and fiction.

However, there is a perspective according to which light and darkness must be strictly differentiated: all forms of repression and tyranny need a dimension of conspiring in the dark, which means in private secret domains

away from the lights of the public realm. But soon we notice how these realms of lightness and darkness cannot really exist without each other. We also know how they melt into a borderline that resembles the sea level at the point in which the smaller visible part of the iceberg emerges from its bigger invisible part. They stick intrinsically together just as any totalitarian regime blends lightness and darkness, private conspiracy and public presentation.

Even in the midst of political darkness, where the state of hope touches a threat of despair, there may always be daydreams of a better world, based on experiences that have been made elsewhere or in former times. Such experiences, or the reporting of them, allow us to tell how some dreams might possibly come true someday and right in those places where we happen to have been born simply because they have become reality elsewhere. However, there are also those situations when we fancy we are dreaming reality itself. Then, we may exclaim "we must be dreaming", but we may also do this in both a positive and a negative sense.

I can tell you my own experience. As a daydreaming, eighteen year old girl from the middle classes, I fled the Portuguese dictatorial regime after secondary school in order to continue my studies abroad. Though I had friends who, in 1960s Portugal, had troubles with the political police, I did not have the sensation of going into exile. My grandfather, a freemason and humanist, showed me that there could always be a narrow path on which one could pursue a civic life with dignity even under a dictatorship. It was therefore not directly political persecution but rather the suffocating atmosphere that pushed me out of the Lisbon village – and it was almost a village or at best a small town at that time when I left in the late 1960s, with its old yellow trams and double-decker green buses. Girls had to wear skirts and uniforms at school. We all knew that in each corner, at each table in those beautiful cafés dotting the city, there might be standing or sitting an agent from the political police. The literature and the cinema of the decade and its predecessor had shown me another world really did exist, a world with more freedom of expression and more life choices, without having to wait for family favors or to bear the consequences of expressing one's own opinion. It seemed, out of my bookish daydreams, to be a world with greater glamour and mobility, a cosmopolitan world where women wore tight sweaters, could say what they liked and smoked.

I was a student in West Berlin, having engaged in many of the campaigns and actions during the wild 1960s, when I heard one morning, on

25.4.1974, the news about the uprising of the April captains in Portugal and the immediate huge support from a population fed up with a rotten regime. My first reaction was to say "It must be a dream" and though I stuck to the radio and TV news during all that day, it happened that I only really believed in the events the next day, when a Brazilian friend congratulated me by slapping me on my back and so to say a sign to return to a reality that I had never before dreamed. Later on, having read a lot about the factors leading to the Carnation Revolution, I again understood how the immaterial dimension to many of those factors was made out of the same stuff dreams are made of – dreams of a better world. That made only a small push necessary to topple and collapse an already frail building.

Thirty-six years after this revolution, most of those beautiful cafés in Lisbon city have been replaced by banks – political freedom needs its economic backing, even while the aesthetics of daily life had to be sacrificed for that sake. In our days, it would simply bring a café to ruin were there still the old possibility of taking up a table for a whole morning or afternoon, reading the paper or discussing daily life and consuming just a single espresso. However, we also cannot forget the permanent paradox of life, of literature, of culture. Portuguese poetry of the twentieth century derives its high quality partly because there was censure and many messages got obliged to circulate through the flower, the *durch die Blume* to turn to the well-known German expression. Nevertheless, in this way they also reached the receivers often as an explosive "condensation", *Dichtung*, therefore in a process similar to Freud's *Traumarbeit*, dream work.

Dreams circulate in our communication as well as in our literary work. I would even say that in their volatility they may begin by fitting themselves into the empty spaces between the reality of facts and objects. However, at the same time, and in doing so, they contribute to reconfiguring what seems so indefectibly factual and objective. We all incorporate our dreams, both daydreams and night dreams, into a dimension that is not always conscious to ourselves.

What has peace to do with all this? Well, we have known since the Greeks that both war and peace are ambiguous. On the one hand, most common aspects connoted with peace are positive, such as peace of mind and civilized urban communication. On the other hand, most live testimonies convey the image of war as sheer hell but not only that: we now even have war tourism and, ever since the Gulf wars, we encounter the opportunity to exercise the "embedded journalism" contributing to raised adrenalin

levels. Furthermore, we have experiences of the rotten peace, the graveyard peace of corrupt or totalitarian regimes.

Nowadays, we live daily with images of war; we consume them at dinner because they may even contribute to higher prime time audience shares for several TV news channels. The dangers of this situation have not only been analyzed by media researchers: we feel them daily precisely by noticing how our capacity of empathy with sufferance seems on the wane. We cannot reach a hand out to the children in Gaza or in Haiti and, if we could do, we would probably only encounter more troubles in our busy existence. City life is principally monochromic; even if diverse stimuli draw our attention from several sources, we have to do just one thing at a time, whatever placed upon our agendas. Therefore, we corresponding seek to appease our troubled consciences by making donations, by signing petitions.

We therefore mean to live in peace within the daily struggle of our urban life. Nevertheless, we still know that at every instant this situation may change. Out of the apparently most peaceful situations, the most unexpected forms of violence may emerge, challenging our endurance, our capacity of conflict to deal with them. We can just fancy how many accumulated frustrations and nightmares have built up the support, over a long period of time, for many sudden attitudinal outbreaks of violence.

However, we also know that the inverse also proves possible, which means we have experienced or read or seen in pictures or on TV that in the middle of such brutal struggles there may be scope for gestures of kindness, of mercy, of humanity. I remember that wonderful picture by B.Z. Goldberg, Judith Shapiro and Carlos Bolado called "Promises" (2001). There, we see how serious and concerned are the Israeli and Palestinian children brought to talk with one another to then ask their parents inconvenient questions. Children, as Goethe once said to Eckermann, are the greatest realists. At the end of this independent documentary, the Israeli children bring their parents following a dinner invitation from the Palestinian family of their new friends on the West Bank.

There must perhaps be a childish impulse to produce the conditions for peace, a naïve gesture made of a precise will, a will not to forget but rather to go beyond heavy memories. This is the sense of the words of Ernst Bloch in his *Prinzip Hoffnung* (Principle of Hope): *Denken heißt Überschreiten* – Thinking Means Going Beyond. And it was a Portuguese poet and scientist, António Gedeão (1906-1997), who wrote a marvelous poem, "A pedra filosofal" ("Philosopher's stone") in the 1950s. On being put to music by the

singer Manuel Freire in the following decade, it rapidly became a resistance song against the oppressive atmosphere of the dictatorship: I quote the last lines:

"They neither know nor dream, / that dream leads life, /and always when a man dreams, / the world springs and goes forward,/as a colored ball / between the hands of a child". Or between hinge and door, perhaps as rapid as a shadow, but no less vivid, as a powerful source of hope and anger – and an impulse to act.

(2010)

On the Road between Pages with a Multitude of Strangers and Me among Them

It nowadays seems commonplace to say that we are our own next strangers and hence meaning strangers towards ourselves. As children, we discover parts of our body, we see our face in the mirror for the first time, we experience all that as something both familiar and strange and only after that as something of our own. The process of socialization – seen from the perspective of an average individual, living in a modern city – helps us get acquainted with a large palette of Others. We get to know both figures of otherness: the *alter*, as the familiar Other, as our privileged dialogue partner, and the *alius*, as the really strange stranger, as the uncanny Other. The process of individuation, which follows the process of socialization in the ontogenesis, makes us acquainted with the abyss of our own self. Later on, as adults, we feel able to turn such forms of fracture, experienced during childhood and adolescence, into masks that we are obliged to wear in our daily practices. They can even be masks of creation, like the heteronyms of Fernando Pessoa. Indeed, Fernando Pessoa himself, as a signature with his real name, might have been just one more mask and perhaps his best achieved face to the world.

We seem, as adults, to have interiorized former experiences of facing both the *alter* and the *alius*. We could say they now struggle with each other inside of us. Such a situation is a common pattern of our experience of interior strangeness while we also become acquainted with exterior strangeness. Along this process, we build our images in endless configurations. They have to be problematic, critical, unusual should they truly be supposed to supply us with stimulating material for our creative plans. In other words: why should images of the stranger, as well as experiences with strangers, be felt as threatening from the outset? This must not necessarily be so at least in the times and places of current city life in peace, whenever growing up in an open-minded human environment. City life is exciting and so are the strangers we meet there. Moreover, an image of a stranger can prove a permanent reason for fascination whenever the conditions of possibility extend to including it in an open horizon of understanding. In other words: we cannot but consider the meaning of strangeness as being polysemic where not outright paradox.

The image of the stranger may yet become threatening if coped with alongside any sort of identity obsession whether of the individual or the collective sort. This happens because such identity obsessions in most cases provoke a closure of that horizon of understanding letting it instead turn into an arena of misunderstanding. Reading the Other, in such situations of closure, no longer becomes an open adventure on the wire between discovery and risk but rather a dull, uniform, self-reproductive task. The horizon is also no more one of understanding but of self-defense. From that reactive platform to aggression and violence, there is no more than one short step. However, this may happen whenever subsuming our fears and frustrations into a sheer singular. If we differentiate that singular, decomposing it into the plural that such a figure really is, we also deconstruct the dramatic tension of such a fixation. Let us therefore say: the others. And let us quit that phantasmagoric majuscule.

Moreover, when searching for shelter (and on many occasions we simply need a shelter or a friendly shoulder), we must ensure that such a shelter keeps a door or at least a window open, otherwise it rapidly turns into a prison. And should we continue being free, according to our eccentric human nature always looking for new information and impressions to be written on our reservoir of experience, we also keep being critical towards prejudices. We know only too well that prejudice is no more than the result of a blatant inability to set up communicative bridges towards the others, thereby correspondingly recognizing their merits, their particularities. The problem of the stranger is therefore a matter of receptivity.

We read the others but we also read ourselves. Furthermore, within each additional reading, contradictions and paradoxes become ever more visible, yet disclosing connections with aspects that we can only suspect, these therefore being invisible – or as we might rather say *protovisible*. As we know, visibility does not mean necessarily clearness. We always carry with ourselves a fullness of forms, of masks, of impressions and pictures, of the experienced or the imagined otherness. The wider we keep the spectrum, the smaller the danger that we build hostile images of others, most of all out of experiences with figures of the *alius*. The roots of any form of barbarism always lie in a dangerously narrow sense of the meaning that we produce, for ourselves and for others.

And how do we learn to deal with diversity where not through the mediation of literature and art? Literature provides us with that wide spectrum of characters, many of them said to be larger than life but in any case able to

extend our organs of perception *ad infinitum*. I must say that I cannot speak for the generations born with e-books. My individual room, as an adolescent, was situated next to the home library. The limitations on the space experienced due to the Portuguese dictatorship in the 1950s found a lot of compensation between book covers. We could read almost everything because the regime trusted upon the gap between a small cultivated elite and the non-literate masses. Reading had therefore to be, in the second decade of my life, experience enough.

Perhaps we should reformulate the sentence claiming that an image is worth more than a thousand words. As a matter of fact, does a single word not also provoke a thousand associations and correspondingly images? Discussing this issue in my university courses, a student gave as an example the word LOVE and the myriads of images associated with it. All the academic audience understood her immediately. We understand this immediately. And yet there is also hardly a word that may lead to more frustrations and misunderstandings than the word LOVE. Literature nourishes itself to a considerable extent on this insight. But the human sciences, for instance psychoanalysis, come to similar conclusions: listening to Freud in his "Civilization and its Discontents", we soon recall not only the deceiving and deceptions connected with love in spite of its sublime moments, but also the *fata morgana* dwelling in the Christian dogma that tells believers to love the Other, and further, to love their own enemies. We know that even if succeeding in doing so, we would be lying to ourselves, or even worse, be violating ourselves. And why is this so? Because in doing so, we are erasing, or trying to erase, the necessary distance, within the space of appearance, from which we become able to understand, to respect, and should such prove the case, to love the Other. (I would not like to be misunderstood: there may be situations of *coup de foudre*; but if bound to become stable relationships, they must still also go through a process of mutual knowledge and understanding.)

Through differentiated relationships with many others, the problem splits into a myriad of processes. The one-sided monotheistic cultural patterns are definitively contradicted, if not dissolved, by modern network relationships. Furthermore, our capacity of dealing with insecurity, with difference, with contradiction, with ambiguity, with strangeness, can be promoted intensively through literature. However, here we must care about the way we do it. Whenever functionalizing what we read, for instance, in order to quote it in academic papers or before an audience, we may be jeopardizing the chances of knowing others, because by doing so we shall be subjecting it to

a dialectic on means and ends. (Again I ask not to be misunderstood: in our academic jobs such procedures are all too often unavoidable but this does not represent a reason for not recognizing this as functionalistic.) In an interview about his researches on Hitler's private library, Timothy Ryback said the German dictator only applied the matters he read about in his books in order to legitimate his perverted deeds through quotations. This represents an extreme but significant example of the assertion above. Books do not make us better without a process of self-distance that also implies a critical distance towards the dialectic of means and ends.

From literature, we also experience processes of identification. Which characters appear sympathetic to us, which roles do we often secretly play, resembling those figures whose skin we feel easy about slipping into? Nevertheless, precisely because this is a process, we soon realize how differences and discrepancies become clearer and clearer and therefore we become strange to them while also a stranger towards ourselves.

To promote that capacity for handling strangeness means approaching literature with the open attitude of purposelessness. We do it for its own sake, incidentally in the same way as we should approach a strange face. We are aware of all the light-years of knowledge and experience, all the black holes that lie in the great history of mankind, but in spite of that we keep trying to build small narratives upon our experience of reading, of facing others. We are looking for meaning instead of (immediate) love, for insight instead of deceiving images of happiness. We are cultivating a mental space that promotes the ability of living with ambivalence. All strangers have several Doppelgangers within us. Literature and art have shown this to us since the most primitive times. Freud has just asserted it. Some writers handled this insight genially. Pessoa once wrote that he felt being just one was a prison. As we know, he escaped from that prison by creating several heteronyms.

Walking with our own Doppelganger, we keep struggling with him or her, or even them. Nevertheless we still also escape from the prison of identity obsessions. And at the end of the road, we may feel happier because we breathe freely, without having been pursuing happiness, or any form of essentialism, as a primary purpose. And most important of all, we make peace with the strangers inside and outside us, because on our way we have learned how to measure and to handle distance and mediation, before arriving at the threshold of our home – if still able to recognize it.

(2011)

A Handful of Sand: Looking for a Lost Paradigm?

Modernity spans a large spectrum across both time and space. This may include late modernity and post-modernity as variations, or reading protocols, on the same pattern. One of the main characteristics of such a pattern may consist of a sort of absence of previous determination, leaving free space for tracing individual paths. This would mean that we are also able to see in many manifestations of modernity the lacunas left among the paths to greater mobility and dynamics. But is this really so? When looking back over the long history of the Modern Ages and the first manifestations of what Hannah Arendt called *pathos of novelty,* we may draw a line throughout five centuries, throughout the attempts to follow one's mind and the faculty of judgment, among and against all kind of barriers and lianas of authority, hierarchy, traditions, prejudice. Therefore, we may also say that modernity is a permanent state of latent or outburst crisis.

As a matter of fact, we need to differentiate among a lot of aspects. In this second decade of the 21st century in which we live, we might unfold, so to say, a fan of innumerous stories within history. These are both universal (since the basic anthropological structure of humankind has hardly changed) and local (with their visual outlines but also sounds, textures, flavors, tastes, cultural patterns). That means, within our individual protocol of history reading, we are continuously drawing lines of *grandes et petites histoires*, and also discovering how mutually interwoven these are. Looking into each one of such microcosms, we might also disclose expressions of free will against conventions, thus establishing a possible plot for avoiding such situations of clashes that help in shaping successful narratives.

Let me make this clear: whether or not such processes are carried out in full consciousness – or not all the times – we are always tracing our own story within history. If we write fiction, we slip under the skin of our characters to bring them to life – otherwise, they will not be living characters but outlined shadows. If we write essays, we unfold our line of thought around concerns that we wish to share regarding whatever the object of analysis.

Therefore, we are always sharing the world with others but on a very basic level. We are permanently exfoliating outside ourselves but within the world, as well as incorporating parts of it. Modernity means mobility too as we know too well. In crisis scenarios, we are forced to remain mobile even

when holding down secure jobs. I mean hereby a protean kind of mobility, able to create forms of empathy and solidarity, beginning with the availability to listen to others. Moreover, in our age of communication, we have access to all kinds of scenarios without getting up from our working chair. As well as for creating our fictive characters, we not only need full documentation and research about a topic but also a full life inside its characters.

We have to experience the whole meaning of sharing, before choosing which step might be our next step, both in literature and in real life.

In his reflections about the essence of beauty, Friedrich Schiller analyzed five situations around helping a man who had become a victim of robbery and lay wounded on the edge of a road. The first four situations showed different people acting out of a genuine wish to help but still displaying different kinds of secondary motivation and interest. The only kind of beautiful act was therefore, according to Schiller, the final one, as an example of an action carried out of a spontaneity that meant not precisely a real absence of motivations but most of all an impulse born of the situation.

This leaves the dialectics of means and ends on a second plan because the gesture of the helping hand takes over the whole picture. No matter how helping somebody else, in this case a stranger, would bring trouble into the daily life of those whose hand reached out to the wounded, such a gesture was simply drawn without asking further questions and therefore providing the scene with the absolute character of being its own end. Later, Schiller characterized such an attitude as graceful. Furthermore, in a letter written to a friend he wondered whether the Christian religion might be the only religion deserving of being called aesthetical. This means surely a form of idealization of the character of Jesus, after whom the Pietistic tradition created the conception of the "beautiful soul". We may even trace a biblical influence in Schiller's description of the five scenes of helping the wounded man, leading to find out which one might be considered aesthetical. But we must also say that Schiller did not conceive an unhistorical theory of beauty, since such perfect and fulfilled situations can never be programmed and cannot be considered but as ephemeral and absolute. The beautiful soul, he wrote in his essay about grace and dignity, has no other chance than becoming sublime in situations of affect, urgency, necessity, pain and death.

"Does God judge us by appearances? I suspect that He does". By quoting W.H. Auden at the beginning of her volume about Thinking, so to say as the first degree of the life of the mind, Hannah Arendt did not want to hurt any religious feelings but only draw the reader's attention upon our

worldly condition. Under this very condition we stand every minute before the decision of keeping or sharing material and immaterial things, issues, aspects, opinions. This is not a matter of consuming in order to be happy – whatever each of us may understand under the volatile concept of happiness – but simply understanding the difference between use values and exchange values.

By the same token, we have to take one step further. This means taking into account not only those material, exchangeable goods or unique objects that may bring color into our lives, but also the wholeness of materialized ideas. These may be perceived as a link between the visible realm and the invisible domains existing and taking shape and coming into existence when we communicate, act and create. Conceiving therefore the world as a huge mosaic full of familiar and uncanny regions, of delight and dread, we cannot but begin realizing that openness towards such a mosaic already represents a first degree of sharing. However, this is not in itself enough.

When trying to shed a contextualizing light upon the examples mentioned above, we realize that the biblical intertextuality of Schiller's aesthetic considerations not only integrates topics from the Old and New Testaments, but is mostly rooted in the tradition of an ancient culture, according to patterns which prescribe the duty to share our possessions with relatives, friends and strangers, acknowledged as such. We still experience this in many countries, correspondingly in rural regions. The subjacent thought could thus be formulated: what has Mother Nature given to us is to be shared.

On the opposite side, modern urban culture has been built over the last three centuries upon a basis of individuals earning their livings and therefore relying primarily on the result of their work. This creates forms of ontological security but existential anxiety as Anthony Giddens expresses it. The numerous glosses about individual spleen and solipsism in literature and art, in the human and social sciences can be read both as a brand or a stigma of modernity itself. Moreover, since the modern human condition seems to bear the face of a magazine cover, with fancy clothes but sad eyes foretelling a tragic "Dorian Grayish" aging, its representations seem to lie on the opposite side of the socializing life of traditional, tribal cultures.

Since Freud, however, we have also become aware of the double bind of freedom and neurosis, the later seen as the incapacity of the ego to endure the free times and spaces of each individual path. This also explains why many modern individuals attempt to compensate such moments of emptiness with packed agendas and meticulous routines as if living within a huge

tribe of alter egos somehow repressed or at least troubled by an unconscious or untold sense of guilt. The glass-bell motive has also been too often glossed in all sorts of works dealing with modernity. The way out of such modern dilemmas seems, at a first moment, sheer suicide or madness.

Many of us modern citizens live therefore in a culture that makes sharing simultaneously easier and more difficult. It seems easier on the one hand, because free individuals in democratic regimes enjoy freedom of expression and association, of making personal choices. It appears more difficult on the other hand, because of the individual urgency to earn a living – a condition we often paradoxically share without the sense of sharing – inhibits the socializing moments that belong to the communication texture that makes sharing consistent, as a praxis of joyful interchange.

When assuming the freedom to excavate the asphalt in order to find the beach that means utopia, according to the sixty-eighty slogans, we may even reach a handful of sand, which at first we are unable to share. It is not only a matter of searching for a kind of cultural second nature, in some form of a lost tribal tradition. We have also seen the historical results of the obsession to find or build communitarian forms of group sheltering, out of modern loneliness. They have led to forms of totalitarianism in which the freedom of exchanging free opinions with others in the public realm has simply been erased through panoptical control.

Let us assume that Kant's anthropological assertion of the "unsocial sociability" holds a considerable amount of experienced historical reality. This would open the door to other anthropological interpretations of human beings as being born with an openness resulting from their lack of autonomy. Let us stick to this image, associated with Hannah Arendt's assertion of acting among the others (and not towards a mystified abstraction of "the Other") as a symbolic form of birth, of nativity. By communicating and sharing our knowledge (as the Dalai Lama said) we achieve the only possible form of reliable immortality. This kind of sharing means an earth connection, not a bank donation.

We also need both tradition and modernity in order to deal with the present crisis. This word may also have been felt as a mere cliché of real ancient tragedies, when whole populations were massacred in wars or lost their entire living basis in natural catastrophes. Media discourses of (financial) crisis have a taste of ruminant arrogance towards the contemporary sufferance of entire populations on other continents. We still have a roof over our heads, flowing warm water in our homes and enough to eat and

dress ourselves. However, do we have the courage to live on these essential goods, not sacrificing animals in order to source our nourishment, assuming the transitory aspects of creation and interaction as if moments of being – as Virginia Wolf put it – and handling those objects we call our own and that will survive us as if ephemeral goods that we might easily give away because the most important aspect of sharing comes from an immaterial impulse to become part of the eyes and ears of the world?

Up until this moment, the word peace has been avoided, perhaps because such a word easily becomes another cliché if merely proclaimed and not converted into a living praxis out of a desire to end all superfluous forms of daily violence, to break the chains of repression and cruelty and look into the eyes of another individual even when not speaking his or her language. Maybe then, we have found a lost paradigm, that which lies around the corner and can be reached by our stretched hand, without asking why.

(2012)

Close to the Next Door

Travelling is becoming more and more difficult nowadays and this happens precisely because it is being made all the easier. This apparent paradox gets rapidly solved when thinking of what travel as a learning process should *not* be – the purchase of a tourist package, the blind and breathless running between airports and seashores, monuments and hotel rooms. All this will continue to exist as a continuously self-reproducing commodity crossing our eyes and probably generating new forms of blindness. And such blindness is then supposedly compensated for by the frantic eye of the cameras, which completes the apartheid of the senses and dividing our complex psychosomatic system from the respective environment. However, let us be sure: it certainly does not prove difficult to agree upon avoiding tourist packages should we want to become and remain a full system in permanent connection with the changing environment before the written feedback comes out.

Some great writers never travelled far from home or never travelled at all. Does this mean they never escaped their bodies, that their bodies never underwent transfiguration? Reality changes every second even when not leaving our working chairs. There are basic aspects about travelling that should be discussed before talking about the peaceful role of the writer abroad or about the utilization of new media.

Peace means regaining self-balance, after letting contradictions and paradoxes speak up and display themselves. If what is at stake is a simple understanding of other cultures, we simply need to cross the street and encounter the sheer difference existing in other individuals, with their own complex systems and subsystems, with their own biographies and even when speaking the same language as ours. Intercultural communication, as is deemed the politically correct way of approaching foreign people, therefore begins at a former, almost incipient level, which seems to be subconscious; and in no case whatsoever may be taken for granted. The experience of the Other, of the Stranger, always begins close to the next door. And such an experience, even if it should be radical, is not always frightening or threatening: this may be felt not only as a fascination towards the Freudian Uncanny but also as a genuine wish to read the great book of the world, with all its lights and shadows, its colors, its sounds and smells, its moments of silence and cacophony, of misunderstandings and *déjà-vus*. As for the people one meets, the great

discovery consists of changing the *alius*, the uncanny other, into an *alter*, a travel mate on the path of life.

The idea of the *Bildungsreise*, only approximately translatable as travel for one's own formative enrichment, is at least as old as the educative ideals of the Enlightenment. Reading travel reports from the eighteenth century, such as Goethe's *Italienische Reise*, means travelling in time and space. This implies a patient work of context reconstruction, in which the incorporation of the familiar, the apparently familiar, the not really familiar, and strange aspects helps fulfill the formal figure of *re-entry*, which enlarges our views, our minds and our memories. We assimilate images, text passages, ideas, impressions, reflections until they become part of our systems. If we read about Goethe trying to understand whether the coach drivers in Naples are really lazy or just have to wait hours for a customer on the streets, having occasionally the opportunity to take a siesta, we also incorporate a new understanding into the differences of living conditions in various cultures. Goethe was, as we know, a practicing anthropologist *avant la lettre,* trying to seize structures through participant observation as Claude Lévy-Strauss was later to do.

All genuine literature could, in a certain sense, be read as travel literature since it involves endless longing for that far distant and unreachable – and a spiritual trip to the places described in a book. It never ceases to produce the tune of such longing (in German: *Sehnsucht*, the most perfect word for this feeling perhaps) in our head, in our soul and between the lines. Even when the text describes places that may sound familiar, literature always configures various forms of distance and longing for it. Such a distance has also a time dimension, between temporary experience and writing about it. There is always a before and an after (the real or imagined journey). Travel literature is therefore an example not only of what Michel Foucault called *heterotopie*, other spaces, but also what I would call *heterochronie*, other times. When the traveler writes down his topics in notebooks, whether paper or digital, there is always a new version that differs from the concrete experience. If we are aware of this as readers, we may ask about the worlds turning around between such moments.

Travel reports satisfy both sides of our phylogenetic heritage: the hunter's and the collector's mobility, or the hunger for obtaining new experiences and the settler's text of cultivation. As a traveler and note taker, the writer is a hunter and collector; as a text worker, he or she is a farmer. The chronological sequence may synthesize the former big periods of our common

history. Furthermore, within a developing media system, in which journalists and writers approximate each other, the former often compose novels out of their reports while the later give up on some stylistic exigency in order to reach a wider public.

Travel literature may therefore become part of mass tourism since many book guides also seek to enrich themselves with literary quotations – both from specific literary reports and from the literary works of the country which they are introducing tourists. In this view, the experience of foreign countries and the strangers who live there may become an obligatory homeopathic exercise for modern citizens in order to rescue the educative dimension of travel. This implies traveling as its own goal, in the sense of Cavafy's "Ithaca" – "As you set out for Ithaca, hope that the voyage is a long one, full of adventure, full of discovery".

But what has all this to do with peace? At the outset, very little. In any case, not directly.

But insofar as every form of stable peace cannot but be born in a negative sense out of the experience, or memory, or knowledge of war, we should ask ourselves whether war reporters could (not) prove the best defenders of the idea of peace, whether intentionally or otherwise. Within this perspective, it is interesting to consider a work which might be characterized as the opposite of travel literature – Jean Genet's *Un captif amoureux*, published 1986, shortly after the author's death. Here, we deal with a multiple terrain of writing – is this an essay, an autobiography, a travel report, a poem in prose, a novel?

Genet has, using Goethe's words, a feeling eye and a seeing hand, which allows him to change each *alius* into an *alter*. Genet follows, in the 1970s, the romantic mythos of the Palestinian struggle for freedom, according to the model of the guerilla anti-colonial fight. His search is everything but touristic: the feddayin have not yet any real national conscience, which would later become expressed as a demand for a Palestinian state. Genet searches for the eternal mobile, under the form of that permanent *Sehnsucht* that aims for no goal but the path. He does not care about a chronology while noting his Middle Eastern experiences, aware of their artificial character and the permanent perspective of change in a ground already so often retraced, reoccupied and redefined. From his perspective, each attempt to settle down incorporates the danger of getting corrupted. In this sense, we have a travelling author writing about a moving object. The self-critical dimension, as a second degree observation in time and space, also conveys

a sign of consciousness about his near death, recalling several trips to the Middle East in the early 1970s and the 1980s. He also witnessed in Beirut the consequences of the departure of the multinational UN forces and the massacre of the remaining Palestinian refugees in the Shatila camp, carried out by the soldiers of the Phalangist Party with the complicity of Israeli troops. Two year later, Genet testifies to the turbulent daily life in the same refugee camp that had been the arena of that massacre. This inspires the question about the ghost character of all memories, even the bloodiest ones, even those that seem to have been deeply engraved in the author's system with the help of every sense.

The quest for peace makes a tragedy into an epos: it has a narrative structure. We could also call this the *narrative spirit* that pulls forward the writing hand. The quest for peace could also be read as a remake of the Odyssey. Genet's Penelope is a family fragment, a home that had given him shelter in the early 1970s, the young Haza and his mother. He asks himself: "… mais pourquoi ce couple est-il tout ce qui me reste de *profond*, de la révolution palestinienne?» (J. Genet, *Un captif amoureux*, Paris: Gallimard 1986, p. 611).

We could read in Genet's search for the reality of *that* house, of *that* family, which fulfill the dream of a precise sense of *home*, and how this becomes fourteen year later, a search for peace. This means a search for a kind of settlement without corruption, represented through the simplest family ties in their daily labor. In this sense, we find in Genet a defense of the practice of peace, of images and situations related to peace and coexistence, which leads to the struggle for peace and should also be present in every conversation that politicians carry out on this issue. Only when the sound of guns is overlapped by memories of devastation and by the desirable horizon of a reestablishment of the conditions for normal life, only then can we begin talking about peace. Recalling that which caused a spirit of war may also be a safe midwife to a stable spirit of peace.

Like Goethe, Genet carried out a participating observation of the communities that shared their daily livelihoods with him. Is there any other way towards peace? Can we rely on writers who have not shared the same bread with the people of the regions where they travel before they provide us with a sense of these places and people as being close to the next door?

What we call "the real" is also the result of a protocol of reading. Such a reading is unavoidably historical and contingent, as a product of a specific temporary sense. It also stands within a complex correlation of marked and unmarked spaces, therefore in a spatial sense too. But this latter framework also carries the evidence of time. Such "marks", taken as individual projections or choices, are not only constantly changing, according for instance to the daylight (or nocturnal illumination, or twilight palettes), to the instant temper or mood, to the physical conditions and the cultural antecedents of the perceiving and exposing subject – to sum up, according to a whole package of conditions and circumstances. If we put together the myriads of individuals on the global surface, we constantly have to redraw the lines of intersection and re-read the mappings of an interactive geography made of partly individual options, partly mimetic movements. Like ruins, views are constantly being destroyed and rebuilt; like lines, they are constantly being erased and rewritten. But this never happens completely anew. Culture work may also be seen as a patient attempt to read palimpsests – which are, as we well know, marked spaces par excellence.