

Retrieved from:
The European Journal of Psychoanalysis
Aug 18, 2022
<https://www.journal-psychoanalysis.eu/articles/revolt-act-iii/>

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Revolt! Act III

Summary:

How to convey the lexical and temporal paradoxes of psychoanalytic practice—their proper potencies and potentialities, their urgent stakes—in plague times?

One tack: faced with scourges at once epidemiological, political and discursive, fabricate an eccentric, looping or forking itinerary out of italicized citations from Malaparte, Gadda, Serres, Lacan, Benjamin, Pasolini, Agamben and Braunstein. Deploy smells, case material, tableaux, literary and reportorial fictions; employ Baroque and allegorical figural modes and the antitheses embedded in (equivocal) words themselves in an effort to articulate and transmit, amid the swirl of diverse contemporary pestilences, the uniquely psychoanalytic ethics put forward by Lacan: the upholding of a desire allowing the signification of a limitless love to emerge from beyond the limits of the law, where alone it may live.

So little is the vigil we see remain

Still for our senses, that you should not choose

To deny it the experience—behind the sun

Leading us onward—of the world which has

No people in it. Consider well your seed:

You were not born to live as a mere brute does,

But for the pursuit of knowledge and the good.

Dante Alighieri^[1]

Although the account (*logos*) is shared, most men live as though their thinking were a private possession.

Heraclitus^[2]

Liberty for the worker doesn't make sense; justice makes sense.

Curzio Malaparte^[3]

Like every apparatus, biometric identification captures a more or less unconfessed desire for happiness.

Giorgio Agamben^[4]

Rome-Naples, 1943: Tableau—

*“No more anything.” Freshly-freed from Rome’s Regina Coeli Prison, unshaven and unwashed, hair disheveled, nails cracked and still with the sweet, greasy smell of bugs about him, “Malaparte” is running. The protagonist of Kaputt, Curzio Malaparte’s horribly gay and gruesome book^[5] based on his experience as a World War II correspondent on the Eastern Front—four long, cruel years, as he was to put it, of blood, of hunger, of burned villages and wrecked towns—is running from the war, from its slaughter and typhus, running from the stinking dark of his detention in the former Carmelite nunnery whose name invokes the annual Easter hymn of praise to the Virgin Mary, the Heavenly Lady whose womb (or place, Dante wrote in the Paradiso, where our Desire dwelt) breathes joy supreme^[6] (the airless cell with its filthy straw mattress, the loathsome soup, the lice, the pail overbrimming with excrement...). I wanted to go home, he will later write, recalling on his skin what he will call *la carezza di un vento profumato con acqua di mare e rosmarino*, the caress of a wind scented with rosemary and sea-brine. I wanted to go to Capri, to my lonely house high above the sea—*

Now the Naples train groans with refugees, with old people and their ratty bales, with women and children, with officers, enlisted men, priests and police; the roofs of the coaches swarm with soldiers. Some armed and others not; some uniformed, others in tatters, dirty and down-cast; still others... half-naked, filthy, making merry—deserters going home, or simply fleeing without knowing where, sing and laugh in the rattling carriages. Malaparte will write that it was as if they were all of them, at once, overwhelmed and inspired by a great, wondrous fear.

A German soldier with cruel gray eyes asks suspiciously “what is Regina Coeli? A convent?” No, a prison! The crowd will erupt at his reply: “What prison? There is no longer any prison. No more policemen, no more jailers, no more jail. No more Italy. No more anything!”

An eruption of coarse, evil, painful laughter rocks the carriage, despairing laughter, and the character Malaparte calls “Malaparte” laughs too. Everybody—in the compartment, in the corridor, in the neighboring compartments, everybody in the corridors and coaches laughs and laughs until, Malaparte writes with

characteristic audacity, *the very train itself laughs, from one end to the other as it jolts and twists on the rails,* [7] *the hurling advent of the Rome-Naples,* in the words of the great Carlo Emilio Gadda (a writer whose work, graced by the involutions of its syntax and like that of Malaparte himself, is often described as *baroque* in style)—*with livid flashes on the pantograph and at the springs and joins (terror of hens on guard, scattering and screeching in its advance)—jolting and twisting, roaring, the whole train and the hammering din of the express, repeated, iterated, at every tie, as if to uproot all the points of the switches,* [8] *laughing coarsely* until finally the whole hurtling chain whistles, slows *and comes to a stop before a huge pile of debris and bloody rags: ... Naples.* [9]

Out of the car he's blasted with a wave of insupportable *heat*. The red sun *beats down through a black and glistening cloud of flies* on the few remaining *roofs and shreds of asphalt paving*. *Gusts of heat rise from the debris piled around disemboweled buildings.* [10] (*Flies stream like black smoke into, and out of, the holes in the ground.* [11]) *A mist of dry dust floats like a cloud of sand from beneath the feet of pedestrians, the stench of corpses penetrating from under the mountains of stones and plaster fragments*. Naples reeks: the *scirocco smacks of the fried-fish shops, of the taverns and urinals nestling in the dark and fetid allies of the ancient Quartieri, the stifling air ripe with bad fish and sheep's milk cheese. Toward evening the odor of cooked meat spreads from the brothels.* [12]

His books are full of smells! Kurt Erich Suckert, the *German-Italian, Protestant-Catholic, soldier-pacifist, fascist-communist, journalist-novelist, editor-architect, film director-composer, diplomat-prisoner* the *contradictions and collisions* of whose *life seem*, it's been said by the legendary Hollywood movie editor Walter Murch, *like a sped-up film of the first half of the twentieth century*, took the name Curzio Malaparte, a pun on Napoleon's *Buonaparte*, in 1925. He was twenty-seven (*prendere in mala parte* means "to take offense" in Italian; *mal partorito* means "badly born" [13]—the name might be translated as *he of the bad place* [14]).

An example: in his *Donna come me (Woman Like Me)* of 1940 he described the *earth of the Prato region* of his youth (*earth of the valley of the Bisenzio, of the Poggio del Fossino, of the Sacca, of the Retaia—clayey, smooth earth, a bit oily, mixing easily in the hands and, if you pour water from the rivers of the Rianoci or the Riabuti over it... promptly rising like bread dough*) as, when dug from *underneath the delicate living grass growing strangely green and shiny in the shadow of fine cypress woods (where pines add a lighter and sadder touch to the whole)*, redolent of *resin and mushrooms, of sage and mint, making one want to eat it.* [15]

Gadda too excels at smells and, similarly, revels in place names; words transmit odors in these books, as names convey the material *givens* of places, their specific empirical *matter*, eliding any description or map. In *Acquainted With Grief*, set in the fictional South American country of Maradagàl, the *shrugs and gestures* of a laborer from Lukones (*forgetful... of the barber and oblivious of all talcum*) are described as *properly exhaling urea, lipoids, valerianates, borneols and derivatives of caprylic and isobutiroric acids.* [16] After striking in Pastufrazio an *annihilating thunderbolt* leaves, *where the crook was, a blackish spot on the ground, singed, and nothing else except a brief smell of sulphites and ammonia, which a gust of wind annihilates in the air.* [17] The latter portion of his masterwork *That Awful Mess on the via Merulana* takes form as, among many other things, a kind of topography of the many hamlets, grottoes and backwaters in and around 1927 (Fascist) Rome, where the never-resolved police investigation making up the bulk of the novel's proceedings are set—smelly places all. A hovel in *Casal Bruciato*, for example: *a stink there, of dirty clothing or of not very washable or seldom-washed people in illness, or sweating in the labor that the countryside, unremittingly, at every change of weather, demands: or rather, even more, of feces poorly put away near illness, so needful of shelter.* [18] Both writers' works are littered with toponyms; both positively brindle with odors.

What's tastiest about these texts is their doubled quality. The ubiquitous presence of smells, clinging to their words—penetrating and undermining their linguistic unities; deep-seeping within the compounds, layers and interlacings composing their signifiers; sliding or leaking from their syntactic arrangements, clouding their

represented concepts and images—repudiates any fantasy of sure concordance between what might have actually occurred and what’s being recounted. Odors betray, as in the testaments of the outrageous fabulist, journalist, survivor and eyewitness Malaparte,^[19] the confounding gap between what’s being said and what actually happened, or between what’s *meant* and what comes out in the very act of *saying*. Smells signify something *else*, something *other* that the words used to describe them can’t quite contain, the *olfactory sense* serving, in Julia Kristeva’s words, as a kind of *camera obscura of our thoughts*, facilitating *the necessary transit between acting body and invisible memory*...^[20] or between, in George Steiner’s terms, *grammatical-discourse* and the *vocabulary and syntax of matter*, with which it is *radically at odds*.^[21]

The copresence of scents and words in these texts clouds ideation’s clarities, muddies declaration’s efficiencies; it troubles the regular thrusts of narrative and the business of quotidian communication (etymologically, the making *common, public and general* of an intended meaning), muddling messages with some other oral, aural or neural sense at once publically shared and shamefully private. It contaminates them with the reek of something vaguely *unspeakable*. Some savor or *sapidity*, some *sapience* or material-bodily insight implicates ear and nose and tongue (yours? mine? ours?), their very mingling evoking, *through an alloy of syllables, vowels, rhythms and assonances a map of deep-seated deposits*, their confusion dredging *to the surface a glittering pattern of underground veins*.^[22]

(Smells delineate an atavistic map of our social nodes, couplings and knottings, Lacan suggested with his claim that hippos chart their territory with their shit, *delimiting it*, as he said in his 1958 seminar on desire and its interpretation, *with a series of relays or points designed to adequately indicate* their grazing grounds, *their own scraps of turf*, from their *fellow creatures*. This *first sketch of symbolic activity in animals takes* in the case of mammals specifically, he said then, *the form of an odiferous, specifically excremental clarification, a marking of place*. Yet *the progress made by humans depends on language alone*, which greatly complicates our relationship with the alluring and *socialized objects*—words and things and sites—that get *volatized* into the ornate patterns of our exchanges, the elementary structures composing their fabrics. In speaking beings this aromatic symbolism, grounded in the marking, mapping and naming of our particular bodies and places and the transmission of their manifold essences, engenders a kind of wager on a future coming-to-being. A shared bending, turning or tending—a literal *con-vergence*—towards possible outcomes drives our speech: *man* unlike the hippo *does not*, in Lacan’s unforgettable words, *guard his grazing ground with shit: ...he keeps it as collateral for the essential grazing ground, that which is yet to be determined*.^[23])

(*Yet to be determined*: speech in the Lacanian clinic inclines to possible futures even as its aromas rapidly evaporate, the *mixture and mingling of material givens, the confusions of sapidity*^[24] volatized into verbal productions; in an analysis talk—*fine or light, fleeting or transitory; swift, rapid, flying—changes readily; flighty as a bird or other winged creature, fickle as the camouflaging damask of a butterfly’s wings*,^[25] it will in time form a watermarked moiré of forgotten, banished or inarticulable traces, a *finely detailed watered-silk map drawn on the palate, or lingering in the mouth... lacking ready-made words to designate it or sentences to describe it*.^[26] Inclining to the moody or wishful, the angsty or portentous tenors of conditional and subjunctive tenses, this map will be marled with memory tracks and bodily essences, carrying scents of the unsaid. Its words will bristle with palpable *possibility*.)

Both Malaparte and Gadda speak, as the philosopher Michel Serres would say, with a *forked tongue*: on one side, linear time of meaning, data, reason; on the other, a mixed and mingled weather, savor of *givens*.^[27] In their books the funk we ban from speech returns to mess with it, sense and sensation coupling in a kind of *confusion*—etymologically, a pouring together and inmixing of things properly kept separate, an unchaste lying together, engendering *shame*—of meaning and *matter*. In the baroque speech-fields unfolding from these pages, as in those of the psychoanalytic consulting room, things inassimilable, things cleft—the individual from the collective, the singular from the generic; sound from sense, the senses from meaning, the “sexes” each from each—will be intensified in their *antitheses*, even in their very *melée*—even as, impurely or impiously, their split parts rub up close, or even yoke together (think of the paradox of the word *cleave*, which means both to wrench apart and to cling, or that of *articulate*, to divide into parts and/or to link or

join, to attach by joints).

Lacan's clinic was precisely built upon—or, more precisely still, whirls perpetually around, as origin or empty source-hole—what he termed the *equivocity* of articulated speech. On the analytic couch, as in these stanzas (these passages or pages, cells or *rooms*), talk at once bereft and intimate, particulate and common, *windowless* and penetrated... discloses the timeless meshing of all symbolic fastenings, of all particular articulations and exchanges, with the impossible—a linking with the inarticulable, the ineffable or unspeakable, an unbreakable bond with the unlimited possibilities inhering in *unknown knowing*. Words—comprising codes which incline, even in their most sublime iterations (as when surpassing, in poetry of speech or thought, the functional transmission of messages, information or data), to the tasteless and odorless ecstasies of music—will take on a toothsome sapidity there, a scent: language tangles with what Lacan called the *letters of the body*, the material *givens* which predate and surpass it. (*It is with our own bodily members*, he said in 1959, *that we create the alphabet of the discourse that is unconscious—and, of course, we each do so in different ways, for, although we are caught up in the unconscious, we do not all use the same elements.*)^[28]

Serres calls smell *the sense... of the confusion of encounters*. Neither mine nor yours, neither here nor there, odors generate a kind of “between two subjects” undermining our cherished fiction of selves as self-contained units. Glancingly (for they are on the whole resistant to capture in any grammar, any metaphor or metonym, any topography or topology) fragrances join what Lacan called the *subversion of the classical subject*^[29] engendered by psychoanalysis, the *eclipse* of its imagined unity, autonomy or integrity in a clinic which, by the historic breach constituting its defining moves, subjects social ties and the discourses regulating them to upheaval and revolt.

Odour signifies liaison, intersection, knot. Yet smelling signals the animal recognition of an *individual body*. We're talking about something paradoxical here, at once *confusion of encounters* and *rare sense of singularities*. Serres suggests that it is via this truly *common sense* (*common*, understood etymologically as standing in for something at once *shared, joint, general or universal* and *occupying a middle position*, taking *the same form for two cases, genders, voices or meanings*^[30]) that we sniff out the *specificity* of the creatures we encounter: *in no way*, he writes, *are we inferior to animals in this respect; it is only practice we lack, or shame that overcomes us... offended by sweat and musk.*^[31]

Sagacity (keenness of perception, acute sense of smell) *goes beyond intuition, or informs it: certainly it recognizes mint and lilac, orange rind and sage leaf, but it comes to know men, too, their weakness, deficiency, illness or explosive force, their very singularity; it recognizes the beasts within that transform our nearest and dearest into parrots, sharks, birds of prey or pigs; renders us trusting or wary, fleeing or approaching them. Scents of hatred and indigestion, of acrid sweat and resentment emanate from this chamber, this scrutiny... the scent of mingled genitals so heady that we sometimes think we might pass out. The sage* (etymologically a peripatetic tracker or tracer, a seeker, a taster) *knows that there is nothing in the active mind or consciousness which does not first pass via this sense.*^[32]

Scent undermines the generic: in place of the fantasy, persona (*mask*) or *stereotype* of a category, or of an identity—the *I*, for example, as enduring totality, as whole or sphere, as effigy or unified form—the *deployment of our entire sense of smell* confronts us with the *virtually infinite detail* of that which is *singular*, outside of any general, technical or clichéd definition. It *causes us to suspect and guess the presence of the real, the object in the world*; along with *taste* it *determines the existence or non-existence of the local subject and the singular object*. Serres says these senses *give us* what he calls a *localized cogito*.^[33]

(In his seminar of 1972 Lacan, discussing Aristotle's claim in the *Nicomachean Ethics* that pleasure is borne by scent, mentions the impossibility in the French tongue of representing the act of smelling using any word that is not *equivocal*;^[34] this because in French, as in every Romance language other than Spanish, the verb meaning *to smell* is the same word as that signifying *to feel* or *to be aware*: they all derive from the Latin *sentio*, which means at once *to perceive* or *sense*; *to discern*, *to recognize*; *to be alert*; *to meet with*; *to*

experience, as an *emotion; to intend; to enjoy, to know*—^[35])

Faced, on the couch, with their own *slips of the tongue*—their inadvertent blurtings, admissions, witticisms, vulgarities or extravagances—the imagined totalities ever sought by what he called the *divided subject* (ego or I, psyche or self) *fade or vanish*. (*Psychoanalytic experience*, JL wrote, *pursued tenaciously to the outer edge of what we see, shows us that it is impossible for human beings to accede to an experience of totality because they are divided and ripped apart, no cure ever able to restore anything other than a semblance of their entirety, their all.*)^[36] Engaged in this *confusing* practice, speaking beings encounter *elisions* become *allusions*^[37] (enticing, menacing), enunciations absent meaning or meanings absent sense, *absense*^[38] and nonsense; mystifying gaps or *cuts in the signifying chain* will evince, as if by chance, *the existence of messages the subject doesn't know exist*.^[39]

Words reveal their *duplicity*. They articulate a kind of double-speak or double-mindedness, putting a dodgy ambiguity into play; a treachery, a twofold or plaited deception: what you're saying is not what you thought you'd said. Speaking with a *forked tongue*, you run headlong into a censored “between-the-lines” or *inter-dit* (the French word meaning “forbidden” signifying, quite literally, an inderdicted “between saids”), a blank place, laden with some inarticulable, shared sense—some share of disarticulated, common sense. Something once pushed away slithers back or, palpable, emerges from its hole. Something unsayable, gleaming in the murky *confusion of encounters, slides from things* (from the inanimate, from the organs of the mutely signifying body, from objects or events, *given* conditions or perceptions or places) *to speaking beings*,^[40] affecting us with angst, afflicting us with shame.

It's this very duplicity that Malaparte, with no apparent sense of shame whatsoever, parlayed to grand effect. His voice has been described as *double-edged*, as *odd and disingenuous*, as dripping with *tones of brutal irony*^[41] or mixing *despair* with *savor*.^[42] With his strange blend of reaction and subversion; his early fascism, later flirtation with communism and rumored deathbed conversion to Catholicism; his manipulation, self-promotion and *currying favor* with whatever power happened to be ascendant, all the while mocking and reviling them—with, perhaps most of all, his deployment of baroque modes of disclosure, reminiscent of Goya, of *truth* (of the *real horror* of war, for example) via distorted and false representations, Malaparte was a virtuoso of the contradictory, in a literal sense: he played that which runs against speech like a violin.

Slender, elegant, of toreador good looks and given to dueling, a superb conversationalist and cultivator of counts and princesses, lifelong friend of figures as diverse as Eugenio Montale, Benedetto Croce, Alberto Moravia, Umberto Saba and Harold Nicolson, Malaparte had been, as a young man, one of *the most brilliant and vitriolic of the “Fascist pens,”* producing strident *justification for the squadristi* (“action squads,” *the Blackshirted terror gangs* who burned and looted).^[43] In classic Fascist vein, he *revered violence* and *fetishized power*; he *hated the bourgeoisie* and indulged in *an unrepentant dandyism* (he looked like a *movie-star*, wore perfectly tailored clothes, and insisted on shaving his legs, armpits and the backs of his hands). His tone was *caustic*.

Sophisticated and slippery, a master manipulator of other people's judgements, Malaparte was, Rachel Kushner writes in introducing the English translation of his novel *The Skin*, *an ideologue of a sort, but a particularly perverse and inscrutable one. He celebrated Lenin, criticized Hitler, assisted the Americans, was a fan of Mao, and was visited on his deathbed by Togliatti, the head of the Italian Communist Party, which Malaparte then joined (legend has it that, while dying an agonizing death of lung cancer, he was formally received into the Catholic Church). His political vacillations were bizarre and eccentric, and not the work of an opportunist, exactly, though that is precisely what he has been accused of being.*^[44]

In a particularly damning afterword to a recent translation of *Kaputt*, the novel Malaparte completed at his iconic modernist villa on Capri at the close of the war, the critic Dan Hofstadter describes him as *an intellectual harlequin and consummate arriviste who found it hard to mask his scorn for those in power, oscillating between strident sloganeering and a stylish, riddling equivocation*.^[45] Malaparte has been

dismissed not only as an *equivocator* and *arriviste* but as a *trashy vulgarian*, as *horrifyingly irresponsible*,^[46] as *secretly attracted to the sadistic and perverse*^[47] and, by Moravia, as *representative of the fascist illusion*;^[48] Antonio Gramsci called him *capable of any infamy* in service of *achieving success*.^[49]

Malaparte's rejection by the Italian literary establishment has been near total.

When *The Skin*, his novel about the American occupation of Naples, published a year earlier in France, came out in Italy in 1950 it was *met with outrage and derision, banned by both the Catholic Church and the city of Naples*. “*Malaparte has done, God forgive him, one of those things that one really should not do,*” wrote the critic Emilio Cecchi. “*Silence and hypocrisy are almost better than this ambiguous cleverness. He has brought misery, shame and atrocities into play and stripped them of all decency in order to use them for literary purposes.*” Yet indecent *misery, shame and atrocities* were, of course, *the prevailing features of occupied Naples*, as of all Europe during and after the war; Malaparte *made of them a fantastical literature that looked straight at, revealed and transmitted the most haunted, hidden, “wrong” side of life*.^[50]

Savoir-vivre, in this high-stakes game, bears heavily on the ethics of *savoir-faire*; aesthetic predilections (personal, reportorial or literary *style*) orient questions of the truth or falsity of speech, its relation to acts of atrocity and complicity, resistance and revolt. Nothing less than the speaker's—the writer's or reader's, the *artificer's*, the *listener's*—stance in the face of genocidal violence is at play. Hofstadter describes *Kaputt*, marked by what he considers an insupportable *absence of candor, of personal experience and of understanding*, as *nonetheless an astonishing document, a signal act of journalistic imposture in which a writer of singular gifts faked precisely the account of events in Eastern Europe that readers craved at the war's end (when in fact it became an international best-seller)*.^[51]

Fake news? The truth is not so simple. *Kaputt* and *The Skin*, *luridly attentive to violence and surrealistic detail*, are novels that *in moments seem like reportage but are too fabricated, too manipulated and absurd to be mistaken as such*.^[52] *Chez Malaparte*—as in Freud's famous cases of Dora, Little Hans, the Rat Man and the Wolfman, the romances around which psychoanalytic praxis germinated and formed—every *truth* is revealed to *hide a falsity*; every *falsity* to *hide a truth*.^[53] Lacan, ever perspicacious, picked up this thread, famously claiming that *truth, once articulated in speech, will inevitably acquire the structure of fiction*.^[54] (In this he echoed Dante, who called *fiction that truth which has the face of a lie, a true invention which might be opposed to a mendacious verity*.^[55]) In a 1960 paper on what he called psychoanalysis's *subversion of the subject*, Lacan wrote that *truth receives from speech the mark that instates it in a fictional structure*;^[56] he said in his seminar that year that it is only *invention* which, like Hamlet's staged scene disclosing the suppressed history of his father's murder, is able to *create a structure which will bring about its disguised dimension*. Truth can be transmitted only via *fiction*,^[57] via art or *articulation; savoir-faire* or the *fact* (act) of *doing* only through *artifice*.^[58]

Did Malaparte *invent*, or did he *report*? He was always, Kushner writes, *in the right place at the right time to witness a scandal, and deliver a biting retort*. When the notorious Nazi Marshal Erwin Rommel (the “Desert Fox”) turns up at his house on Capri and demands a tour, asking if he designed and built the villa himself, Malaparte answers “no” (a lie) and, *with a sweeping gesture indicating the sheer cliff of Matromania, the three gigantic rocks of the Faraglioni, the peninsula of Sorrento, the islands of the Sirens, the faraway blue coastline of Amalfi, and the golden sands of Paestum shimmering in the distance*, replies: “*I designed the scenery*.”^[59] The reader's inevitable question—did this actually happen, or is he making it up?—*misses the point of his performance, which is to render the very question unanswerable*. Malaparte *makes a joke of the fictions that hold reality together*. In his moral and reportorial *ambiguity*, he strove to write from what Kushner describes as the very *center of things*, committing to a *histrionic mode of gesting at the terrible matter of “real life”*—war, suffering, cruelty, debasement. *He lets contradictions rise up and impose themselves on the reader whole cloth. Guilty as charged: he lingers over the grotesque details of war, and writes fantastical scenes that seem too incredible to be believed—but genocide is also too incredible to be believed*. Malaparte was less the opportunist he has been described as, writes Kushner, than a kind of *pest, or a plague*^[60]—

(Nothing like a plague to confront you with the potential loss of everything you cleave to, or even the prospect of a world with no people in it. The *terrible matter of real life* breaks, bearing apocalyptic fictions of the past as if they're dawning in real time; real time, hard as nails, recalls futuristic cinema scenarios of a planet—humans reduced to naked life, or wiped out entirely—overrun with warring automata, or viruses...)

Yet in *The Skin* it's the American liberators who carry a *fearful contagion* to Naples, a malady to which they themselves remain mysteriously immune. In the opening chapter of the novel (titled, after Camus' transparent parable of the Nazi occupation of France, "La Peste"), Naples is in the throes of a dreadful epidemic which *broke out*, precisely, *on October 1, 1943—the very day*, Malaparte writes, *on which the Allied armies entered that ill-starred city*.

This is a scourge characterized by a kind of viral *shamelessness*; *in the midst of the wreckage of houses destroyed by the air raids, drunken soldiers dance with women almost or completely naked in what's left of the city's squares and streets. A mad orgy of drinking, of eating, gaiety, singing, laughing, prodigality and revelry roils amid the frightening stench emanating from the countless hundreds of corpses buried beneath the ruins*. It suggests a *macabre public celebration or funereal festival* escalating, inexorably, to a fever *pitch of violence*.^[61] Malaparte describes how, *pink-faced, calm and smiling*, the Allied soldiers *move about in the midst of the plague-stricken mob without contracting the loathsome disease, which gathers its harvest of victims solely from among the civilian population, spreading like a patch of oil into the territory liberated by the Allied armies as they laboriously drive the Germans northward. (It was strictly forbidden however, under threat of the severest penalty, to insinuate in public that the plague had been brought to Italy by its liberators.)*^[62]

Because the text is ambiguously worded, you might at first understand Malaparte to be referring to a biological illness. But as you read on, you come to glean that this epidemic, rather, is linked to the Neapolitans' paradoxical state of being at once *liberated* and *conquered* by the Allied troops; the plague is one of *abasement*—described, in his characteristically hyperbolic terms, as a *shamelessness rendered abominable, almost diabolical, by its grotesque, obscene manifestations*—that will come to infect all of Europe, and then the entire globe, in the years following the cataclysm of World War II. *This was a plague profoundly different from*, he writes, *but no less horrible than the epidemics which from time to time devastated Europe during the Middle Ages. The extraordinary thing about this most modern of diseases was that it corrupted not the body but the soul. The limbs remained seemingly intact, but within the integument of the healthy flesh the soul festered and rotted. It was a kind of moral infection, against which it seemed that there was no defense*,^[63] characterized by rampant *trafficking* of all kinds—especially the human kind.

Malaparte describes the uncanny sense of *disquiet* he's *unable to account for* as he contemplates, with a kind of retroactively dawning horror, a *marvelous vision of classical Italian civilization already as it was in the hour of its supreme triumph corrupted and degraded, rendered sterile by this same malady, taking the form of a mysterious tendency to transform*, as he puts it, *ideals of liberty into yearning for sensual gratification, moral obligations into a total rejection of responsibility, social and political duties into vain intellectual exercises, and the new proletarian folklore into the equivocal folklore of a narcissism perverted into masochism*.

(Profit derived from the exchange or sale of human flesh had, of course, had been a throughline from the beginning, the *slave trade* and its "*necropolitics*," in the words of Achille Mbembe, *emblematic of the nocturnal face of capitalism and of the negative labor of destruction without which it has no proper name*,^[64] its *mad prodigality* roiling and pullulating always *amid the stench of countless rotting corpses*.) Faced with Neapolitan mothers selling their own children in the street for money to buy bread, Malaparte contemplates the *venality* (etymologically, the capability of being *bought*) of future generations in a world *not purged but corrupted by its own suffering, not exalted but degraded by its newly won liberty*.^[65] (The Allied victory granted a *freedom* ripe, of course, for the growth of capital markets under new, liberal régimes in the decades following the war; a *virus of consumerism*^[66] was poised to engulf the entire, ruined continent.) *Power*, as Serres has written, *spreads pandemically*.^[67]

Malaparte suggests that the freedom granted by the Allies, the liberty that was to flower and founder in the decades to come, was *born not of liberation, but of the plague*. Perhaps it was written that, just as liberation had been born of the sufferings of war and slavery, so freedom must be born of the new and terrible sufferings caused by the plague which liberation had brought with it. The price of this freedom is high—far higher than that of slavery. And it is not paid in gold, nor in blood, nor in the most noble sacrifices, he wrote, but in cowardice, in prostitution, in treachery, and in everything that is rotten in the human soul.^[68] The revolution...that went by the name Liberation he called merely the prologue to the one that will reduce Europe to slavery.^[69] In 1970 Lacan was to call this new servitude of the liberated a *so-called liberation, progressive only at the price of a deprivation*;^[70] a new discourse of the markets touting liberation without freedom.

Liberation with the plague is, of course, an *allegorical* move on Malaparte's part. Which is not to say he reduced the malady gripping Naples in 1943 to mere *metaphor*: those who have endured them know full well that infectious diseases, though apt to unleash storms of words, are by their very nature anything but purely *symbolic* happenings. They are irruptions of the real the *epidemics of signification*^[71] they give rise to can never touch, agonizing expressions of *hard biological facts*—they will have their way, no matter what we think or say. Illnesses, like the smells composing the floral posies carried as prophylactics during the so-called *Black Death* (fragrances faced with which language can only *take refuge in the pathos of simile*,^[72] lamely likening them to the *names* of the things they issue from, the only path by which to transmit their material *givens*—*sweat and musk... mint and lilac, orange rind, sage leaf*^[73]), persist in subverting metaphor, carrying with them some measure of the *terrible matter of real life*. And Malaparte seems to recognize the *real element* or *true part* of the sickness ushered in by Italy's liberation; his account of the *plague* infecting Naples speaks *at one and the same time* to the vicissitudes of life in a pandemic and to the viral nature of the new liberties the Allies imposed.

Michel Serres, describing the infectious diseases which *ravaged* Ancient Rome, puts it this way: *the same discourse, the same remark is valid whether it's a question of a social crisis or authentic epidemic. The words speak this equivalence*.^[74] (He's referring here to the shared root, the *equal value* or *worthiness* of the words *hospitality* and *hostility*, and to the Romans' attempts to ward off the devastation of plague by creating festive rituals celebrating the very reversibility of these signifiers, their equivocity or *indistinguishable doublet*. These carnivalesque enactments culminated historically in the development of *stage games, theatre, satire and farce—comedy*, he writes, *at its origin a remedy for pestilence*.)^[75] In like manner Malaparte's *equivocal* speech talks plague and social crisis, antiquity and the contemporary scene with a forked tongue; two terms share a *valence*—an essence, a capacity or potency—and his is a speech fluent in their essential *reciprocity*.

(Serres: *archaeology... is said. I don't know if the plague took place, I mean the epidemic, the coming of the microbe, its multiplication, the buboes and the dead. The great mass of corpses that year isn't enough to decide if there had been a real plague. A crisis is enough, one of those that spreads in the social body like a plague epidemic, by analogous laws, to get the same result... Power spreads pandemically: this can be a figure of speech, this can be true*.^[76]) We shall see how this verbal *equivalence* or *equivocity*, this doublet of *truth* and *figure* delineated by both Malaparte and Serres speaks to the very *valence* of psychoanalytic work—the essence of its historic potential, its singular capacity for *action*—in times of crisis, whether epidemiological or social—or both.

To *allegorize* is to elevate *speaking with a forked tongue* to the level of art; it's a doubled strategy, perhaps most famously associated with artists of the Baroque, of referencing at once a thing immediately depicted and, at the same time, *something else* entirely, *another meaning* immured or floating beyond the given word or image. Borges in 1949 called allegory a *monstrous encoding of two contents, the immediate or literal and the figurative, in a single, enigmatic form*. Because conventional language is *insufficient to fully express all reality*, he wrote, unable to *denote all the mysteries of memory and all the agonies of desire*, allegory composes sense—or meaning—fabulously. It's an *other language, like architecture or music*, implicating both one thing and another, at once the *novel*—the *singular*, the *individual* or the *particular*—and the

collection or collective, the abstract, the generic. (Dante's immortal *Beatrice* might thus be seen allegorically, for example, less as *a sign of the word "faith"* than a signifier for all *the valiant virtue and secret illuminations indicated by that word, infinitely more precise, richer and more felicitous*, Borges wrote, *than the monosyllable "faith."*^[77])

Allegory vivifies the wellsprings of the word. Walter Benjamin, writing to Gershom Scholem from Capri in 1925, expressed his fascination with this *quasi-musical hybrid form, characterized by the endlessly resonating "word in transformation."* He wrote then that allegory exemplified the *expressive* nature, the *still-open* (even then, even now!) *future* of baroque drama,^[78] its unique capacity to demonstrate how *truth, actualized in what he called the round dance of presented ideas, eludes any kind of projection into the realm of knowledge.*^[79] (We might—if we have the nerve—equate *psychoanalytic discourse* itself with this very reel; Lacan characterizing, in the same vein, analytic praxis as *lying precisely on the palpable frontier between knowledge and truth.*^[80])

Benjamin was gripped by the search for an "*Ursprung*," a whirling *source* or *originary leap* which might elucidate the *great difference between truth and the object of knowledge with which it has been customarily equated.*^[81] He was convinced that this elusive dynamic might come to be understood to have been transmitted in exemplary manner by the allegories of the German Baroque, its forms possessing an uncanny ability to encompass at once both the singular, concrete qualities of *unique objects* and *general and generalizing treatments of them, escaping, in so doing, the vacant dogmatics of historicism while, at the same time, remaining faithful to moments of temporal specificity—even those that prove unrecapturable.* "*Truth*," in these baroque allegories, "*is the death of purpose*" *but also incomplete and esoteric blueprint*; Benjamin's efforts to articulate its *stately, even absurd form mirror, anticipate and help to grasp*, in George Steiner's ever-prescient words, the most extreme challenges of our *dark present.*^[82]

Pasolini too was partial to it. He called allegory *doubly voiced* and, like Borges before him, turned to Dante as the exemplar of this singular signifying strategy marked by what he called a *double nature*, the manifestation of *two vocal registers* at once: the *rapid* with the *extremely slow*, the *figurative* with the *symbolic*, the *historical* with the *atemporal* instant, the *immense and understanding glance* with the *analytic observation of the world case-by-case.*^[83] (Striking the ear these words, uncannily, could be Lacan's: Pasolini articulates here, in precisely the great analyst's terms, the veritably *split* or doubled quality of the speech issuing from psychoanalytic couches, its fractured time or weathers. It's as if he were describing what an analyst hears—though he was not.)

Pasolini's films aspired to a *precisely geometrical, rigorously mathematical, implacable choreography* that would demonstrate the *unbridgeable gap between representation and reality.* His favorite shot, the "*plan-tableau*" or *tableau shot (a carefully composed, static shot that resembles a painting)* was the primary formal method by which he fabricated what has been described as a *double discourse, an unstable mixture of high (painting) and low (cinema), of movement (shot) and immobility (tableau).* These allegorical tableaux vivants, *heightening the unease created by a cinema marked by inexplicable ellipses and startling shifts of tone and meaning, endowed the tiniest of movements—the least batting of an eyelash, a facial tic—with a mysterious significance, giving rise to performances in which parody and tragedy lived in dangerous and disturbing proximity.*

Pasolini aspired to what he called a "*reality which had nothing to do with realism*"^[84] (or, more succinctly, a "*certain realism*"^[85]) more aligned with Lacan's conception of the *real* than the clutch of (*imaginary* and *symbolic*) social conventions structuring what we call "reality." He sought consistently to *show the "discontinuity" of the world* and practiced, as Ernst Bloch put it, "*an art which strives to exploit the real fissures in surface inter-relations and to discover the new in their crevices.*"^[86] *Nature*, he believed, *is already artifice, culture, spectacle... reality plays the role of art, or rather, is already art.*^[87] ("*Living, then, we represent ourselves, and we attend the representations of others. The reality of the world is nothing other than this double representation, in which we are at once actors and spectators: a gigantic happening, if you will.*"^[88]) His *certain realism* was an essentially baroque conception in which, as Deleuze would have it,

any distinction between nature and artifice is always already becoming blurred.^[89] (This aesthetic strategy recalls Gadda, who aspired to what he called a *macaronic* literary form which would, as an act of subversion, transmit “*la barocaggine del mondo*” [*the baroque-ness of the world*] by leading readers into *the interspace of lacunae and fissures that constitute a large part of the senseless reality, of the devastated and dolorous time imposed by canonized phenomena, by the abuses of history and its fraudulent discourse.* [90])

Such tactics *demand*, the critic Naomi Greene says of Pasolini’s camera work, *a process of deciphering, of interpretation, even as they zealously work to guard their secrets from us. The uncertainties stemming from tableau shots—glances that constrain us to seek meanings “beyond what is immediately visible”—are heightened by the many lacunae that punctuate the parable itself. Constant gaps of information, as any psychoanalyst worth their salt will tell you with respect to the practice of their own singular art form, make it impossible to reach a definitive, unequivocal, reading... our desire to see, to know, is constantly thwarted.* [91] Pasolini spoke like an artist of the Baroque in a 1971 interview: he said that *faced with a disintegrating world, he was seeking a stylistic crystallization which would confer “form” ...upon uncertainty and chaos. I felt a pressing need, he said then, to create “objects:” works which were like “slices of life” lived intellectually.*^[92]

Parables punctuated or perforated with *lacunae*, the *terrible matter* of life spoken, then *sliced* to reveal the verities or consolations of “formal” structures, impossibility of a definitive interpretation or *unequivocal reading*... these words speak at once to the immediate subject of Pasolini’s radical cinematic aesthetic and, beyond it, to the riddling texts of the analytic consulting room. In *its* scripts words evoke a fantasmatic *other scene* each time a speaker’s message, grotesquely inverting itself in the very act of its articulation or in the return of its citation, comes in the presence of a silent or parroting auditor to juxtapose the true with the fictional, the *figurative* with the *symbolic*, the historical with the *atemporal* instant—or the *immense and understanding glance* with the *analytic observation of the world, case-by-case.*^[93]

A bitter bird at the edge of the frame—

A drop or two of darkness, but don’t make it your mirror —

There’s physical death, there’s symbolic death...and then there’s vestigial death, memory death, the effect all our mementos have on us—

Sense of being haunted by the future. I don’t want to be haunted by the future—

So much of what’s said in an analysis—words that speak on one hand to the thing at hand and, on the other, to something else entirely, some (censored, submerged or hovering) *Thing*, abject or alien and, at once, unspeakably *intimate*—enacts in real time the *cleft* terms of speech. Analytic free association will disclose the *equivocity* of talk itself; signifiers at once bifurcated and bound abound, sundered and clinging, exemplifying what Freud in 1910 called the *antithetical sense of primal words*. These are verbal charms, studded throughout diverse languages, signifying at one and the same time both a given thing and its polar opposite—the same word meaning, for example, both *old* and *young*, *far* and *near*, *inside* and *outside*—or *bind* and *sever*.^[94]

Pasolini in his turn spoke of an *inexplicable unity* encompassing *two antithetical terms*, crystallizing in an *absolute, inalienable moment*. Such terms, articulated, afford a temporality more *logical* than *chronological*; Lacan’s coinage “*logical time*” evokes, etymologically, the emergence in the clinic of a *time of speech* or *logos* as against the clicking *time of the clock*, a temporal climate conditioned by speech’s very equivocity that he characterized, in words which rhyme uncannily with Pasolini’s, as comprising “instants of the

glance” and retroactive “times for understanding.” Discoursing on Shakespeare’s *Hamlet* in 1959, Lacan called *logical time* the *hour of truth* in which *past, present and future, the constitutive times (or: tenses, or weathers, depending on how you translate the French word temps) of temporality* are revealed to be *those of grammar... logical time being time, he said, mapped with respect to the act of speaking.*^[95]

Time mapped ... to the act of speaking: the formulation pithily evokes Benjamin, who in his now legendary study of the *bloody and bombastic history plays* of the late seventeenth century *Second Silesian School* known as *baroque trauerspiel, mourning plays*^[96] or (incorrectly) *German tragic drama*, put forward the idea that allegory *transposes originally temporal data into what he called a spatial unreality and simultaneity*.^[97] In these plays a *fundamentally historical world—bleak, disenchanted, empty of access to all prior transcendentals and haunted by ineradicable memory;* a world, in other words, very much like our own—or, put in even starker terms, a *temporal process of historical crisis (outer and inner “brokenness,” preoccupation with incessant decline)—is inscribed and anatomized in spatial imagery,*^[98] ported in to the dawning present in an ineluctable moment which Malaparte in his turn calls, variously, a *sense of the real experienced as time; a sense of the event, a sense of history;* or, piercingly: the “*here and now:*” a *reality that is not opposed to dream.*^[99]

Allegory renders *history* (the recounting of an embroidered tale or an era’s *grand récit*, the diachronic vicissitudes of a psychoanalytic case or a patient’s anecdote, the rise of nations, fall of empires) in the *drawn shape* of a spatial model, *delineating the structure and dramatic form* of what would otherwise unfold and pass in time, *seizing, in Malaparte’s words, the transient moment—fugitive, ephemeral, fleeting, provisional—seizing its meaning, its individual raison d’être,*^[100] allowing history to be *transmitted* and grasped thereby, as in the clinic evinced by Lacan’s plethora of two-dimensional graphic formulations, in the moment of a glance. (*The temporal process will, writes Benjamin, be caught up and analyzed in a spatial image.*^[101])

In this sense allegory’s ability to express differing or antithetical terms positions it as the representational strategy par excellence for states of crisis, times in which *time* itself, as Hamlet puts it, *is out of joint; faced with the idea of catastrophe* or the implacable realness of what Benjamin calls *states of exception,*^[102] assumptions about pace and progress, distinctions between duration and destruction, will ignite. Every assertion will at once *evince—another antithetical word* signifying at once affirmation and negation—a *burning question, defying all names and acts of naming.*^[103]

(The reiterated and echoing statement “*nothing will be the same again,*” for example, carries a shadow uncertainty in its wake: are we living an unprecedented breach, or witnessing a replay of past happenings—a recurrence or an intensification, a heightening or acceleration of conditions already long in place, if only just now graspable in retrospect? Benjamin’s 1940 words from the brink in his “Theses on the Philosophy of History” speak directly to our uncanny present: *The tradition of the oppressed teaches us that the “state of emergency” in which we live is not the exception but the rule. We must attain to a conception of history that is in keeping with this insight. Then we shall clearly realize that it is our task to bring about a real state of emergency, and this will improve our position in the struggle against Fascism.*^[104])

Allegorical doublespeak *unfolds, to quote Benjamin, contemplative necessities lying enclosed within the epoch.*^[105] A distinctly *analytic* mode of signifying, it precipitates a “symbolic experience” (*Symbolerfahrung*) providing a *dynamic, mobile and fluid measure of time* in the present, an *evolving language or deep structure of dramatic form that spatializes the temporal structure of eschatology* (this unwieldy word signifying, etymologically, formal knowledge of that which is *last, furthest, uttermost, extreme or most remote in time, space or degree*). Effecting an *instantaneous transformation within the symbolic* (Lacan’s *instant of the glance*) it affords, as Benjamin puts it, an experience of *natural history slowed to such an extreme that every sign appears frozen, as in a tableau, and—seemingly loosened from every other relationship—arbitrary.*^[106]

Speaking, doubly-reeded, in *two vocal registers* at once (that of the *rapid* and the *extremely slow* for example, the *figurative* and the *symbolic*, or that of the *historical* with that of the *atemporal* instant), the equivocal speech psychoanalysis homes in on comes, in the manner of baroque allegory, to trace *graphic outlines* that subvert *idées fixes* and disrupt the anguished enjoyment of ruminative circuits, dissolving fast-held fundamentalisms and the stickiness of cherished doxa. Bonds between words and things loosen, fantasies fade; intended or assumed meanings falter. Signs devolve into a network or mesh of *signifiers*, unfolding onto kaleidoscopic fields of infinite combination and permutation. Things themselves, emptied of intrinsic *meaning*, come thus to *signify* in relation to one another, via their particular compositions or arrangements: *life flows out of objects*, as Benjamin's translator and biographer Howard Eiland writes, and their *hollowed-out husks become allegories, ciphers, hieroglyphs, each dependent on all the others, each singularly opening onto the abyss of meanings.*^[107] (On the couch a speaker will speak in *lyric modes*. Like poets *adopting*, in Benjamin's words, "*towers, fountains, imperial orbs, organs, lutes, hourglasses, scales, wreaths, hearts*" as *graphic outlines of their poems*, so a free associator, associating, will *meet with a projection of temporal process into space,*^[108] the "*abyss of allegory*" inevitably spawning a *teeming metaphoric*—what Lacan would call a *treasure trove of signifiers*—that *militates against any rigid application of dogma.*^[109])

In the analytic consulting room a *speech act* may come to incite revolt; a *revolution* may reveal itself as, in Lacan's words, nothing more, or less, than a *return to the starting point,*^[110] what Serres would call a *forked schema* or *spiralling, looping course, advancing through returns to the beginning,*^[111] each turn, initiating another reel in the *round dance* of social ties structuring the discourses of *speaking beings* through the successive ages and epochs of human history, a *return*—each verse or reverse enacting a repetition, a reprise or reprisal, a *representation*—of what came before, each literal *revolt*, unshackling and instantiating anew the interlocutory bonds making up the genealogically layered fields of human speech, instituting another grammar, another logic, another *Logos*, from that of the slaves and masters of antiquity (or of modernity, or of the present day) to that of the age of the hysterics and the birth of psychoanalysis; from that of the post-Second World War explosion of university research, statistical verification and the authority of science to what Lacan called in Milan in 1972, *just as capitalism was about to make its neoliberal turn, a dawning pestilence*—an emergent *discourse of the markets* which, he said then, *by virtue of a fractional slippage that went unnoticed by the very people concerned by it*^[112] would replace *the slaves of the ancient world with men who have been reduced to the status of products: products... that can be consumed like other products*^[113] in a new symbolic economy thriving on devastation and the production of waste, its accumulation of human flows, data currents and ever-concentrating wealth aiming, apparently, to outlast humanity itself.

The psychoanalytic rite masters time; it ceaselessly reforms it, through revolutions^[114] tracing, via their looping *hermeneutic rings, a topology* within which speaking beings *respond to the impossible task of appropriating what must in every case remain unappropriable, a dance in the labyrinth leading into the heart of what it keeps at a distance, passage towards a goal for which only detour is adequate.*^[115] This clinic takes the form of a *forked schema*, locating at each step a crossroads or *bifurcation* or *point of hesitation* within discourse, an inclination, emerging from the essentially equivocal nature human of speech, to radical contingency and to the perpetual possibility of *instauration*—which is to say, to acts of renewal, restoration or *institution*. In a founding *instant* at once *chronological interval and nontemporal moment,*^[116] an *analysand* will, as a poet does, *put language into a state of exception.*^[117] Via this act the analysand will take the *tiger's leap into the past in the open air of history* that Benjamin called, recalling Marx, *revolution.*^[118]

All of this brings into question just what it is that freedom means. Freedom—the loosing of restraints sought, assumed and held up as the highest value of an entire civilization, cherished aim of democracy and fountainhead of every liberatory movement—Malaparte called a *humiliating spectacle, alienating to humanity ... discredited no less than slavery*. When he *regained his freedom* after two years of extreme isolation spent in exile on the island of Lipari, he wrote that *it was like going from a room without windows to a narrow room without walls.*^[119]

In the year 2020 the analyst Néstor Braunstein described the plague then convulsing the entire planet as a *jarring avatar of social life, making evident the latent violence present in the social bond under capitalism. Distinct from previous pandemics which, homogenizing or universal, democratically attacked all or most of a multitude—pan meaning “all” in Greek; demos referring to populations—this new scourge highlighted differences of wealth and power, underscoring (the word scourge signifying, etymologically, a whip or lash, fetter, binding or tie) the hegemony of the few over the many.*

Psychoanalysis, Braunstein’s words remind us, *does not deal with the “all” (pan) nor with collectives or groups (demos); it treats the “many” affected by plague, by war, by fear of the diverse forms of an apocalyptic future, as they are distinguished by each one’s particular circumstances; this art will engage the singular fantasy, the symptomatic formations and decompensations of structure, the activation of unconscious primary processes triggered in individual subjects faced, in this as in other instances, with the forced recognition of a threat with ill-defined contours, subjects subjected, as in war, to the all too real possibility of suffering, separation and death.*

Braunstein insists that although a plague may be a *biological fact affecting everyone, it’s as an individual that each one of us shapes our own singular response to confront the blind and faceless entity; the duty of psychoanalysts in such times, he writes, is to underscore the necessary distinctions between “all” (pan-demos) and “each one” of our analysands, affirming the irreducibility of the sociological fact, supported by statistics and informing the current ubiquity of cognitive-behavioral calculation, to each singular subjective experience.*^[120] *The psychoanalytic clinic teaches us that the plague confronts not demographic groups or populations but human singletons, speaking beings subject to the dictates of language and the other scene of the unconscious, slaves of discourse, in Lacan’s words,*^[121] *who come to be only inasmuch as we speak and confront death.*

The plague faces *each one* in its own way as a kind of *ungraspable object*, real yet without tangible form or *image*, that carries with it an *uncanny* sense of the *immanence* of one’s own end. It becomes the ineffable thing around which our *fantasies* are organized. They drive us, Braunstein writes, *combining two poles*. On one side, a timeless *circling* finds its form in our painful repeated enactments, our frenetic *compulsions*, the *jouissance* underwriting everything we can claim to *know* and cleave to, an *enjoyment* beyond pleasure, partaking of Nietzsche’s *eternal return*, that obviates all facile distinction between satisfaction and suffering, life and mortality, morality and sin. On the other side, a desirous *will* drives the vicissitudes of the varied marks and acts psychoanalysis calls *symptoms*,^[122] an elusive *truth value* which in the clinic will come to be *translated*, in Lacan’s words, *into speech.*^[123]

Analytic discourse, he said in 1972, *lies precisely on the palpable frontier between knowledge and truth;*^[124] he insisted that whether *or not* we call its historic entry onto the late nineteenth century European scene a *revolution*, it has undeniably produced a *subversion* (etymologically, an *overturning*) *in the function and structure of knowledge.*^[125] Benjamin in his turn *distinguished his own critical methodology from the “seamless deductive connectivity of science” and from what he calls “Systemlogik.”* The *systemic closure* of certainty, belief or knowledge treated as goods or property, *he maintained, has nothing to do with truth, which should be understood not as an unveiling that destroys the mystery but as a revelation that does it justice.* He maintained that truth, as *distinguished from positive knowledge*, is a matter neither of *intention* nor *possession*, and characterized *his method* as, like that of psychoanalysis or the mazy matrix Agamben and Serres describe, *one of indirection, of the roundabout way or even of wile and ruse: “Methode ist Umweg.”* With Benjamin *method, with an implicit glance at its Greek etymology* suggesting pursuit or quest, path, track, road or journey, reveals itself as pure *detour.*^[126]

A *forked schema* or *spiralling, looping course* between the twin poles of *knowledge and truth*, the psychoanalytic method of Freud and Lacan intervenes at the *equivocal* locus between the material letters of the body and the *pattern of common consciousness,*^[127] between *thrown* singletons, *subjected* to the mesh of symbolic ties, and the mingled bodies or multitudes with which they inmix. This practice engages what Serres calls a *divisio* (which is to say less an indivisible human, an *individual*, than one marked and defined

by an ineluctable separation) on a marbled topos where the logic and reason of *discourse*, etymologically a running to and fro, becomes something more like *concourse*, a confused *running together*, a *collective* or *crowd*^[128] (*the whole indeterminate fragmented mass*, in Marx's words, *tossed backwards*, then *forwards*).^[129] This *liquid* and *labile* throng, a *spreading*, *flowing fusion* or *fluctuation*, confronts the singular sufferer like a *vortex*, the turbulent eddy of the mob *inundating*, Serres writes, every *institution*.

The psychoanalytic clinic treats each unique *someone* who, *entering into* the social *mix* and the imbroglio of institutions, *drowning in contingency*, *absorbed by the crowd* or *by the text*^[130] of their own recast and reproduced scripts, their own *repetitions*—*masochistic tendency*, *penchant for failure*, *return of the repressed* or *fundamental evoking of the primal scene*^[131]—risks becoming, as if subject to the possibility of lethal infection, a *vector* for the *pandemic* (*pan-demos*) confronting them with the specter of their own mortality.

Serres, whose book about the founding of Rome I've been citing in these passages, links—genealogically, philologically, allegorically—the collective with the plague. He describes the crowd as a source of *contagion* taking the form of a whirlpool or *tourbillon*, the same word Lacan used to signify the perpetually absent and elusive object, lacking a specular image and evoking *each one's* inevitable confrontation with fatality, that he called *objet petit a*—the “little other.” And it's in these very terms that Braunstein characterizes the *terrible matter* of the real disease ravaging the planet in his own epoch, a malady plaguing all of humanity, yet confronting *each one* in its own way as a kind of *ungraspable object* around which singular *fantasies* turn and return, a *real thing* yet without tangible form or *image*, *carrying with it an uncanny* sense of the *immanence of death*—the plague being, he says most aptly and brilliantly, *a jarring avatar of social life*.

In the forbidden zone between the lines of what's *said*, at the fatal interval between two poles—articulated gap between one's own bodied existence and the generalizing logos of the collective, between one's singular subjection and the statistical or epidemiological demographic ever threatening to subsume it, between truth and knowledge, desire and enjoyment, soma and psyche (or between the poem and its translation, difference and repetition, ethics and the law...)—the talking cure treats the *divisio's viability*, its capacity for life. A kind of *logical* or discursive dance, it will re-turn the *split subject*, again at each forking crossroads, to an originary *phase transition* from *hubbub* to *foundation*, a *passage* from *concourse* to *discourse*, *from the plague to its own destruction*—a shift from the *clamor* of the horde to the *accord* or *concord*, the harmony or agreement, of *language*, *meaning*, *music*.^[132] Ours is a practice recalling at each step the birth of the founding *contract*, onto- and phylogenetic at once, by which the *moving*, *rushing solvency* of the *multiple* will be, again and yet again, *bound* or *knotted*.

Everything hinges on the question of bonds.^[133] The ties binding the contracts which govern our discourses are, of course, always political, *occupying* if not themselves forming *the threshold on which the relation between the living being and the logos is realized*,^[134] the very foundation of the political as such—which is to say that all contracts, be they social or legal, will refer to the *common* or shared *being* of human subjects, the *speaking animals* of Aristotle's *Politics*. This bonded being expressed by the contract is founded, always, on a *fiction*: the *principle*, specifically, of *unity* (culture, *community*, *populace*, *polis* or *state*) that *human collectivities cannot exist without*, taking in each instance the form of an envisioned agent supposed to *unify* the *heterogeneous*. A *construct* stands in for *discord*,^[135] a *One* for all.

Vox populi, vox Dei.^[136] history in this light reveals itself as nothing so much as *a series of subjections to the monolithic figures* people place at the center of their *symbolic configurations*; from the diverse gods, totems or *Cosmos* of animisms to *the forces of physis in the Ancient Greek world* (nature, that is, as contrasted with *nomos* or law); from the *God of monotheisms* to *the sovereign ruler in monarchies*, *the people in republics* or the demagogue subsequent to their erosion, *the nation in nationalism*, *the proletariat in communism*, the “Volk” in *Nazism* or *master race* in white supremacism.^[137] Each acts as an avatar of what Lacan in 1958 called, with reference to the auditory hallucinations of psychosis, “*the signifier of the Other qua locus of the law*;^[138]” each, serving in its turn as an imagined actor invested with an *utter and complete faith*,^[139] *locates* those subjected to it, guaranteeing each one a *permanence*, *an origin*, *an end* and

an order.^[140] *Hallelujah.*^[141]

The multitude revolts. It turns, veers, inflects its course... a rotating chaos, liquid or cloudlike, versatile. The cloud becomes a vortex. Serres describes a kind of *social physics*, reenacting a founding *primal scene* or instituting instance from which, he writes, *history will progress by means of substitutions*: its roads will fork; it will *bifurcate*.^[142] At the epicenter of the throng, only a sucking void. In the very place of its sussurating tumult one identifies a semblance, what Lacan punningly called a *master signifier* or *SI*, which in French is pronounced identically to the word *essaim*, signifying a *swarm*.

This founding unity can be characterized in structural terms as *the One* of Neoplatonism or *political ontology*, as *God the Father*, Freud's *father of the primal horde* or Lacan's *Name-of-the-Father*;^[143] in the transference love of an analysand its avatar will be the analyst cast as *subject supposed to know*.^[144]

Elsewise it can be elucidated anthropologically or historically as any of the panoply of gods, demons and divine authorities—including those of “evidence,” scientific verification and technological know-how—to which humans habitually turn, as Lacan began himself to make clear in the first and only session of his aborted 1963 seminar on the “*Names-of-the-Father*.”^[145] In every instance, this *One* will be a figure defined by its very absence.

The Father has always already been deposed. L'Autre is a founding fiction, a semblance or mirror, *metasocial guarantor* or *social masquerade* which from one beyond or another, *in the face of chaos* and *as though it were real*, guarantees each subject a place, time and structure, serving as a *starting point for spatial and temporal sequences, narrative lines, histories...*^[146] A *shared fiction* allows each culture to *confront the question of its own origins, which are always already lacking as such*;^[147] the father serves as a *temporal marker*, a *signifier* replacing an *origin that can never be found*. *Every name given to this “he” is therefore designed to found that origin.*^[148] We have only to *believe*. *Organizing the social realm in which the subject appears*, thinks and acts, the key *manoeuvre* of such fictions, Lacan said in a discussion of *perversion* (the word pronounced in French suggesting quite literally a *turning* or *sliding toward the father*) in his 1967 seminar on the logic of phantasy, is to *deploy a speech that is contractual*. The contract, he said then, *dictates*.^[149]

It's in this sense that *the unconscious* of each one of us *is*, he famously proclaimed at that very moment, *politics*. Which is not to say that political events are governed by unconscious forces as much as it is to suggest that one's own *unknown knowing* takes the form of a text binding and orienting the *divisio* dogmatically or discursively to an assumed “I” or as an assumed “one,” a structure (or, in Lacanian terms, a *non-relation, bar* or *cut*,^[150] a *non/m*—the French phoneme signalling identically-sounding words for both *no* and *name*) which will be implicated in any and all revolt.^[151]?

In the psychoanalytic clinic, the law once imagined to issue as edict from the place of an omnipotent *Other*—a lofty *subject presumed to know*, dogmatic authority, *professor* or, quite literally, a *dictator*—will come ultimately to be revealed as without property or meaning or substance: just *pure empty form, devoid of all content and all feeling*.^[152] Coming to identify this empty locus as such, the person in analysis will in time accede to a new *moral law* which takes its form not from any injunction or prohibition but instead from a kind of emptiness, *simply desire in its pure state*,^[153] a lack which refuses any identification or the transitory *satisfaction* that might be *afforded the individual by empirical objects*,^[154] yearning in itself coming to serve, at once, as both *ethos* and *law*. (The ethics of psychoanalysis, in Lacan's famous formulation, boil down to an exhortation: *Don't give up on your desire!*)^[155]

The *truth* we seek, he said in that sole session of the seminar he called *On the Names-of-the-Father*, *is always in motion, deceptive and slippery*. This is the case, he said then with reference to his decades-long effort to *enunciate*, to *seek out and grab hold of analytic praxis*, because one can only move toward a *conquest of truth along the path of deception*. *Transference*^[156]—the psychoanalytic *doubled stage*^[157] or *discursive theater* allowing each analysand's singular *relationship with the Other* to be *acted out or reenacted*,^[158] articulated or translated—comes in each case to be understood, Lacan said, precisely as *what*

has no Name in the locus of the Other.^[159]

There what's been banned becomes the site of *a truth which conceals itself in the very process of disclosure*,^[160] *not a logical category but something like a mystery in constant motion of disclosure within concealment*^[161] that can only be expressed, as Freud and Lacan both underscored, via negation or the rhetorical truc of doubled negatives known as *litotes*. JL immortalized this in any number of aphorisms: *Not without an object. Not without having it...*^[162] (Heidegger called truth *aletheia*, a *clearing in the double form of refusal and dissembling... a doubled concealment.*^[163])

The analysand enters a topological space in which public and private, inside and outside, inmix. In the very place of that which has been censored, *repressed* or exiled, their work will home in on—to borrow Benjamin's words describing what he calls the *interpenetration of building and action* comprising the architecture of Naples—a *theater of new, unforeseen constellations*. In such sites *the stamp of the definitive is avoided. No situation appears intended forever, no figure asserts its "thus and not otherwise."* In a flash *the most binding part of the communal rhythm comes into being: civilized, private, and ordered on the outskirts (the French banlieu or site of exclusion), anarchical, embroiled and villagelike in the center. What was once private existence becomes the baroque opening of a heightened public sphere.*^[164]

Agamben describes how, in Roman law, a declared *tumultus* or emergency situation would lead to the proclamation of an *iustitium*, literally a "standstill," "suspension" or *cessation of the law, a state of exception* in which *citizens might take whatever measures they deemed necessary for the salvation of the state. This paradoxical legal institution, in his words, consisted solely in the production of a juridical void.*^[165] (In his book on the Baroque, Benjamin writes of a similar and antecedent dynamic whereby *athletic contests, law and tragedy, which he calls the schema or agonal trinity of ancient Greek life, were consolidated under a contract* which, via a doubled process, served at once to *restore* and to *undermine, in the linguistic consciousness of the renewed community, an ancient legal order.*^[166]) The state of *emergency*—etymologically, an *uprising*—renders, in the very act of instituting, the locus of power empty.

Once the grand *O* comes to be revealed as nothing other than semblant or *empty form* a palimpsest of historical discourses will disclose, beneath the babbling run of current sayings and happenings, its layered strata. Diverse epochs—sequent chapters from one's own biography, or phases in the longer life of one's mother tongue, one's fatherland—become palpable, sapient, crystallizing in a conditional present moment in which the stages or ages of the past will be encountered, no longer as *chronologies*, sequences or *successions*, but as a climate more resembling a *welter* (etymologically, a rolling or twisting) or *tempest* (a storm or season, from the Latin word for *time*), *copresences* ever at the point of imminent *bifurcation*—or *revolution*.

You might in any given analytic session, for example, experience in striated, brindled fashion the logic or logos of our ancestors' subjection to the *sacred tyranny* of ancient gods laid right alongside that of the subsequent military dominance of empires, or even the *oppression of calculation and currency* which followed in its wake, *more implacable* yet, Serres writes, *than the two others*. Or chatting you might instate, superceding that already late phase, *the tyranny of information*, algorithms and rootless, ecstatic communication, this final phase *so terrible* it prompts *our contemporaries* to *seek refuge* in florid collective delusions, in paranoid theories of conspiracy or in *combat* under the banner of some flag or other (*Mars*, to transpose Serre's words about the founding of Rome into the contemporary arena, *seeming less fearsome to them than the illusory autonomy*^[167] fostered by its régime).

Régime of *illusory autonomy*: the contemporary tyranny exiles *each one* to a virtual *non-place* with *no signposts and no limits, where everything is inverted.*^[168] It imposes a *chaotic non-time* obviating the existence of *any authority* who might *make a temporal order possible*, any power who might inhabit a "there" allowing the foundation of a "here" or any *external point* affording an *interiority*. It voids all the necessary *detours* without which a subject cannot *accede to the symbolic function*, cannot *construct any spatiality or temporality*^[169] whatsoever. When *the only imperative* is that *commodities must be free to circulate* without impediment, *any institution whose cultural and moral references can come between*

individuals and products becomes unwelcome; at the limit point of deinstitutionalization and desymbolization, the imperative to transgress any and all prohibitions advantages above all naked relations of force; social space becomes an environment increasingly invaded by violence and punctuated by ever more likely catastrophic accidents.^[170]

Revolt, in this scenario, will short-circuit. For it is the Other alone who locates us, and without first submitting to its desires and dictates we can never elude its suffocating presence. *If we infringe that law, escaping it before coming under it, we may well find that we are free, but we will also find that we are nowhere,*^[171] in the kind of gray no man's land on Rome's outskirts described by the poet Esther Kinsky as an *empty region which withers at every attempted description; a new alienated terrain or land of eradication, cramped and damaged beyond recognition, dispossessed of all names.*^[172]

We find we can't decline the Other's injunctions. Unbound and thus unable to rebel or to desire, each one will be forced to authorize, to name and to legitimate autonomously, each in a state of *general abandonment*, as Camus wrote in *The Plague*, *subjected to another form of slavery, living from day to day alone in the sight of heaven and handed over to its whims, hoping and suffering alone with his anxieties in extremes of loneliness and unreasonable subjection.*^[173] In this condition, he wrote in 1947, every time we *try to confide in someone or describe something of our feelings the reply we receive, whatever it is, will wound.*

I am free, abandoned wrote Beckett in *The Unnameable*^[174] and it is as if he were describing precisely the *unreasonable subjection* characterizing our *new servitude*, the liberation without freedom forged by the markets now *controlling day-to-day time and space*, tempting us to carry their logos or even, following them, to brand ourselves. Under this *strange sovereignty each one* of us has become *so free* that we are in *reality abandoned* (*abandonnés* in French, *à ban donnés*), banned, or *banished* (*"mise au ban"*).^[175]

Agamben with characteristic acuity points to a *semantic ambiguity* in *Romance languages* in which the word "banned" originally meant both "at the mercy of" and "out of free will, freely," both "excluded" and "open to all, free." He urgently warns that *we must learn to recognize in the political relations and public spaces in which we still live the equivocal structure* of what he calls, drawing from Germanic and Scandinavian antiquity, the *ban*, a *force of simultaneous attraction and repulsion tying together the two poles of bare life and naked power. What has been banned is delivered over to its own separateness and, at the same time, consigned to the mercy of the one who has abandoned it—at once excluded and included, removed and at the same time captured*^[176]... *He who has been banned [mise au ban] is not, in fact, simply set outside the law and made indifferent to it but rather abandoned by it, that is, exposed and threatened on the threshold where life and law, outside and inside, become indistinguishable. It is literally not possible to say whether the one who has been banned is outside or inside the juridical order.*^[177]

In the non-space and non-time of digital "platforms," of shopping centers and prisons, strip mines and malls, of play stations, waiting rooms, garbage dumps, detention centers, airports and camps,^[178] each one has become a kind of bandit, utterly alone in a mingled *confusion of bodies and places, of outside and inside, of what is speechless and what has words with which to speak.* In a state of isolation where it is no longer possible to distinguish *enslavement from freedom or need from desire*, each of us, subject to our own *absolute impotence, bumps against solitude and speechlessness over and over again precisely there where we were expecting company and words,*^[179] in a *new planetary political space* where everywhere the state of *exception*, in the words of Agamben, *has become the rule.*^[180]

Benjamin writes of the possibility of a radical break in the flow of time that we call *history*, a rupture or hiatus which would *blast open*, in his words, *its continuum*. Chez WB *thinking*—like the instituting suspension or standstill which, intervening in the Roman *tumultus*, places the law in abeyance—*involves not only the flow of thoughts, but their arrest as well. Where thinking suddenly stops in a configuration pregnant with tensions, it will give that configuration a shock;* in like manner the analyst's punctuation or cut in the coursing flow of an analysand's speech allows for something like what he described as a *cognizance in the present* comprising *the entire history of mankind in an enormous abridgement, a present which is not a*

transition but in which time stands still: a messianic cessation of happening^[181] in which *history appears as only the colored border of a crystalline simultaneity.*^[182]

To articulate the past historically does not mean to recognize it, Benjamin wrote, “*the way it really was.*” It means to seize hold of a memory as it flashes up at a moment of danger,^[183] not in service of repetition or progress or even liberation but as a *revolutionary chance*, a “*time of the now,*” as he put it, *shot through with chips of Messianic time*; time regained becoming a springboard, *in the fight for the oppressed past*, for the possibility of a new knowing and a new acting. This revolutionary *articulation*, he believed, would afford a *sapience* rooted in *sagacity*, a radical knowing bound root and vine to a keen, searching, *creaturely* perception: it would be as if, he wrote in “Theses for a Philosophy of History,” you could savor *time* on your tongue *as a precious but tasteless seed...*^[184]

Psychoanalytic work conjures a topological *place* that is at once spatial and temporal, utopian and monumental, *aeviternal*—which would be to say hovering between time and eternity. A doublet of art and craft, knowledge and know-how, this unique method constructs a *capacious dwelling*, a *stanza* or *container enfolding both thought and technique*; inmixing *matter* and *form*, *pure act* and *pure potency*, it’s a practice conjuring the perpetually new *potential-to-act* already envisioned by Dante in the *Paradiso*:^[185]

I see your desire/ where every where and every when is centered

...beyond all time,/beyond all comprehension.

Neither “after” nor “before” preceded/this going forth.

Pure form, pure matter, form and matter mixed/came forth

...rayed into existence all at once,/without beginning, with no interval.

With every essence co-created/its order: /pure act, pure potential

and in between, potential-to-act...

tied/so tight

that they can never be untied.^[186]

It inhabits that doubled space, a *beyond* at once dystopian and utopian—non-place transgressing the primordial distinction between possibility and event, matter and form, signifier and signified that has *dominated Western reflection* from its origin—that Benjamin called *state of exception*.?

Our practice orients not to liberty but to justice (Latin *iustitia*, an *order conforming to truth*). Its ethics incline to action. Which is to say, etymologically, that ours is an ethos (a *genius*, a *custom*, an *accustomed* stance) informing a *cause* or *grounds* or *case* based less on the fundamentally *religious* quality of *belief* than on what Lacan called *the central lack in which the subject experiences himself as desire*; beyond reverence, beyond belief, we locate in rite and in *ceremony* only, in his words, an *empty face*, a *medial or chance status*, a *gap opened up at the center of the dialectic of the subject and the Other.*^[187]

Néstor Braunstein: *there are no subterfuges nor artifices. One is always responsible for one’s position as a subject.* Each one’s singular *relationship with their fantasy*, brought to light via the *analytic setting*, summons our presence in so far as our *individuality* reveals itself as nothing other than a shared reckoning, an account, effect or affect, the *social* in subjective, *subjectified*, form. *The unconscious is politics; we are*

and will be the answers we give... it is each one of us who will decide, within and through the fantasy, the stance we'll take in relation to our own ends.

This game is played, Braunstein reminds us—as if we should need reminding!—in a world in which *reality* for the vast *majority of beings on the planet* has become one of *naked life*, a bare existence *outside the law*, deprived of the protections afforded by its rule. Without *honor*, without, as Hegel defines it, *recognition for the abstract inviolability of the individual subject*,^[188] *naked life* is the condition of those stripped of the dignity afforded by proper names (the name only a *shield*, Benjamin wrote, serving to *cover the vulnerable physis of the human being*, defending the *most stringent inviolability of the physical person*, their *integrity of flesh and blood*);^[189] condition of the incarcerated and interred, refugees and camp inmates torn from their home places, shorn of possessions symbolic and material, stateless, or uprooted from the mesh of their linguistic lineages, it encompasses the life of all creatures caged or branded, implanted with microchips or represented by barcodes and the torsions of data, all speaking beings become what the artist Ai Wei Wei has called *human flow*.^[190]

A bandit's *liminal status* means that they may be dispatched with impunity, as with a finger-twitch on a joystick: "*To ban someone is to say that anyone may harm him.*" "*Whoever is banned from his city on pain of death must be considered as dead.*"^[191] This sheer, absolute, unconcealed life, condition of all those whose murder no longer *constitutes a crime*, is essentially that of the *sacrificed*; it is the naked existence of what Agamben calls *homo sacer*: creatures relegated to the status of the *sacred*, an equivocal word meaning at once "*august, consecrated to the gods,*" and (as Freud noted) "*cursed, excluded from the community.*"^[192]

The plague *exposes our always known precariousness of existence*, at the same time making apparent that we are already in a dystopia in which the *growing vacillation of institutions of democracy, of the remnants of freedom, of respect for the fantasy of the other, the inhabitant of manipulated choices in the life of the flock that is the polis* had already long set the stage for the emergence of *the virus today invading the cells of citizens with its burden of fear, anguish, terror, and mistrust of the social bond*.^[193] In this non-place, *between the happiness of each individual and the abstractions of the plague*,^[194] *the other* has become a *fearsome source of danger*; the pathogen, in Braunstein's incisive words, *destroying by infiltrating and disordering the intimate life of the attacked cell... and of the psychic apparatus*, penetrating to the very *the neuralgic centers where algorithms govern and make their decisions*.^[195] *The contagion*, as Steiner puts it, *has spread to the nerve centres of private saying. In a dialectic of infectious reciprocity, the pathologies of public language (rotten with lifeless clichés, with meaningless jargon) further enfeeble and falsify the attempts of the private psyche to communicate verity and spontaneity*.^[196]

This pestilence—at once microbial, social, technological and civilizational—exiles humans to a virtual non-space where an aeviternal shadow-show of denatured voices and images stands in for the singular *givens* of proper names, bodies, smells and places, simulacra replacing with a realer-than-real *swarm* the dazzling array of symbolic semblances (our *Ones*, our *Names of the Father*) that had for millenia masked a beyond, an always already empty space of desire and possibility henceforth foreclosed. An incorporeal corporate hubbub now *acts as both panoptic semblant and agent*, coding, tracking, monitoring, quantifying and monetizing all human exchanges. The menace is real: *the tentacles reaching out from the "societies of control" belong neither to the realm of the imaginary nor the phantasmatic*. It is in this non-place where, Braunstein tells us in no uncertain terms, *the danger for the life of the social and for psychoanalysis lurks (beyond the oft-praised advantages of digitalization)—in the bio-psycho-technological control of telematic power over the species*.^[197] We ignore his words at our peril.

A revolutionary practice, the talking cure affords the possibility that we might come to mobilize, in place of mounting blood *sacrifices* to the voracious *desire of the Other* that Lacan called a *dark God*,^[198] a *model of knowledge* in which *desire simultaneously denies and affirms its object, and thus succeeds in entering into relations with something that otherwise it would have been unable either to appropriate or enjoy*. For it's perhaps only this forked or doubled path that possesses the singular capacity to *provide* at one and the same

time *the frame*, in Agamben's words, *for an examination of human objects transfigured by the commodity and an attempt to discover, through the analysis of emblematic forms and tales, a signifying which would construct its own authority via a dense textual interlacing or interweaving of fantasy, desire and word—a discourse that, guaranteeing the unappropriability of its object, recovers a refined love that at once enjoys and defers, negates and affirms, accepts and repels—becoming itself the stanza offered to the endless joy (gioia che mai non fina) of erotic experience.*^[199]

To practice psychoanalysis today is, as Steiner puts it—in *the very condition of our unhousedness, of our eviction from a central humanity in the face of the tidal provocations of political barbarism and technological servitude—to uphold language itself, language itself possessed and upheld by the dynamics of fiction. For to speak is to exercise the formal and executive potential of words, of syntax, of scripts to communicate... anything one wishes. (We can say any truth and any falsehood. We can affirm and negate in the same breath. We can construe material impossibility at will—) To speak is, in the most naked, rigorous sense of that unfathomable banality, to invent, to re-invent being and the world. Voiced truth is, ontologically and logically, “true fiction,” where the etymology of fiction directs us immediately to that of making.*^[200]

To practice psychoanalysis today would be to uphold the desire which, Lacan said, beyond *the voice*^[201]—*partly planetarized, even stratospherized, by our machinery—and the gaze, whose ever-encroaching character is evinced by so many spectacles, so many phantasies* arousing it—allows *the signification of a limitless love to emerge, because it is outside the limits of the law, where alone it may live.*^[202]

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Notes:

[1] Alighieri, 1994, p. 223

[2] Khan, 1979, p. 29

[3] Malaparte, 1957/2012, p.45

[4] Agamben, 2009/2011, p. 52

[5] Malaparte, 1944/2005, p. 3

[6] Alighieri, 1984, p. 274

[7] Alighieri, 1984, pp. 408-412

[8] Gadda, 1957/2000, p. 216

[9] Malaparte, 1944/2005, p. 410

[10] Malaparte, 1949/2013b, p. 12

[11] Lewis, 1978, p. 23

[12] Malaparte, 1949/2013b, p. 12

[13] Malaparte, 2013a, pp. 4-6

[14] Malaparte, 1944/2005, p. 432

[15] Malaparte, 1940/2007, p. 61

[16] Gadda, 1963/1969, p.188

[17] Gadda, 1963/1969, p. 192

[18] Gadda, 1963/1969, p. 383

[19] See Hofstadter “Afterword” in Malaparte 1944/2005, p. 431: “—readers are likely to feel bewildered by the time they reach the end of the hair-raising narrative known as *Kaputt*. At times the book feels like eyewitness reportage, at other times like a detached and rather waspish chronicle or even a work of historical fiction. *Kaputt* is actually all of these, but since Malaparte never acknowledges when he is switching from one genre to another the reportage has the imaginative texture of fiction, the fiction the reality of reportage. What is journalism here and what is historical fantasy? It’s hard at any point to say...”

[20] Kristeva, 2002/2004, p. 205

[21] Steiner, 1989, p. 16

[22] Serres, 1985/2008, p. 158

[23] Lacan, 2013/2019, pp. 106-107

[24] Serres, 1985/2008, pp. 157-159

[25] *Online Etymology Dictionary*, accessed 03.07.20, <https://www.etymonline.com/search?q=volatile>

[26] Serres, 1985/2008, p. 222

[27] Serres, 1985/2008, p. 159

[28] Lacan, 2013/2019, p. 276

[29] Lacan, 1966/2006, pp. 671-702

[30] Glare, 1982, p. 370

[31] Serres, 1985/2008, p. 163

[32] Serres, 1985/2008, p. 163

[33] Serres, 1985/2008, p. 224

[34] Lacan, 1975/1998, p. 63

[35] Glare, 1982, p. 1737

[36] Lacan, 2013/2019, p. 218

[37] Lacan, 1966/2006, p. 678

[38] Lacan, 2001, p. 452: “Freud nous met sur la voie de ce que l’ab-sens désigne le sexe: c’est à la gonfle de ce sens-absexe qu’une topologie se déploie où c’est le mot qui tranche.”

[39] Eidelsztein, 2009, pp. 56-57

[40] Lacan, 1966/2006, p. 678: “...the place of the ‘inter-said’ [*inter-dit*], constituted by the “intra-said” [*intra-dit*] of a between-two-subjects, is the very place at which the transparency of the classical subject divides, undergoing, as it does, the effects of a fading that specify the Freudian subject due to its occultation by an ever purer signifier; may these effects lead us to the frontiers where slips of the tongue and jokes become indistinguishable in their collusion, or even where elision is so much more allusive in driving presence back to its lair...”

[41] Malaparte, 1949/2013b, p. ix

[42] Malaparte, 1949/2013b, p. x

[43] Malaparte, 1944/2005, p. 432

[44] Malaparte, 1949/2013b, p. xiii

[45] Malaparte, 1944/2005, pp. 432-433

[46] Lyttleton, 2004

[47] Hope, 2000, p.77

[48] Baldasso, 2017

[49] Germino, 1990, p. 176

[50] Malaparte, 1949/2013b, p. xiv

[51] Malaparte, 1944/2005, p. 435

[52] Malaparte, 1949/2013b, p. xiii

[53] Eidelstein, 2009, p. 78

[54] Lacan, 1966/2006, p. 684

[55] *Inferno* (XVI.124), cited in Steiner, 2003, pp. 50-51

[56] Lacan, 1966/2006, p. 684

[57] Lacan, 2013/2019, p. 263

[58] Lacan, 2005/2016, p. 52

[59] Malaparte, 1949/2013b, p. 207

[60] Malaparte, 1949/2013b, pp. x-xiii

[61] Malaparte, 1949/2013b, p. 31

[62] Malaparte, 1949/2013b, p. 30

[63] Malaparte, 1949/2013b, p. 31

[64] Mbembe, 2013/2017, p. 129. See also Mbembe, 2016/2019

[65] Mbembe, 2013/2017, p. 125

[66] Greene, 1990, p. 136

[67] Serres, 1985/2008, p. 173

[68] Malaparte, 1949/2013b, p. 35

[69] Malaparte, 2020, p. 201

[70] Lacan, 1991/2007, p. 149

[71] Treichler, 1999

[72] Steiner, 1989, p. 19

[73] Serres, 1985/2008, p. 163

[74] Serres, 1983/2015, p. 172

[75] Serres, 1983/2015, pp. 162-163

[76] Serres, 1983/2015, p. 172

[77] Borges, 1949/1999, p. 338

[78] Benjamin, 1963/2019, p.xii

[79] Benjamin, 1963/2019, p. 4

[80] Lacan, 2011/2017, p.10

[81] Benjamin, 1963/1998, pp. 31-32 and Benjamin, 1963/2019, pp. 24-25

[82] Benjamin, 1963/2019, pp. 23-24

[83] Pasolini, 1972/2005, pp. 104-106

[84] Greene, 1990, pp. 141-144

[85] Caminati, 2010, p. 44

[86] Bloch, 1938/1977, p. 16

[87] Bourriaud, 1998, cited in Caminati, 2010, p. 47

[88] Pasolini, 1972/2005, p. 204, cited in Caminati, 2010, pp. 46-47

[89] Deleuze, 1990/1995, p.155

[90] Dombroski, 1994, p. 108

[91] Greene, 1990, pp. 143-144

[92] Greene, 1990, p. 141

[93] Pasolini, 1972/2005, pp. 104-106

[94] Freud, 1910/1957, p.157

[95] Lacan, 2013/2019, p. 294

[96] Benjamin, 1963/2019, p. xii

[97] Benjamin, 1963/2019, p. 67

[98] Benjamin, 1963/2019, p.xvi

[99] Malaparte, 2020, pp. 76-77

[100] Malaparte, 2020, p. 191

[101] Benjamin, 1963/2019, p. 82

[102] Benjamin, 1963/2019, p. 50

[103] Kinsky, 2018/2020, p. 110

[104] Benjamin, 1950/1968, p. 257

[105] Benjamin, 1950/1968, p. 67

[106] *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, entry on Walter Benjamin, accessed 07.21.20:
<https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/benjamin/#BarCon>

[107] Benjamin, 1963/2019, p. xvii

[108] Benjamin, 1963/2019, p. 84

[109] Benjamin, 1963/2019, p. xvi

[110] Lacan, 2011/2017, p.7

[111] Serres, 1983/2015, p. 187

[112] Lacan, 2011/2017, p. 90

[113] Lacan, 1991/2007

[114] Serres, 1983/2015, p. 187

[115] Agamben, 1977/1993, p. xviii

[116] Agamben, 1995/1998, p. 109

[117] Grünbein, 2008/2010, p. 110

[118] Benjamin, 1950/1968, p. 261

[119] Malaparte, 2013a, p. 168

[120] Braunstein, 2020, p. 1

[121] Lacan, 2005/2016, p. 414

[122] Braunstein, 2020, p. 2; see also Lacan, 2011/2017, p. 32

[123] Lacan, 2011/2017, pp. 42-43

[124] Lacan, 2011/2017, p. 10

[125] Lacan, 2011/2017, p. 17

[126] Benjamin, 1963/2019, p. xiv

[127] Lacan, 2011/2017, p. 41

[128] Serres, 2015, pp. 200-201

[129] Cited in Dufour, 2008, p. 159

[130] Serres, 1983/2015, pp. 200-201

[131] Lacan, 2013/2019, p. 394

[132] Serres, 1983/2015, pp. 201-203. See also Plato, 1996, p. 79: "...with reference to music we have to understand that *alpha* often signifies 'together' and here it denotes moving together in the heavens about the poles, as we call them, and harmony in song, which is called concord; for as the ingenious musicians and astronomers tell us, all these things move together by a kind of harmony. And this god [Apollo] directs the harmony, making them all move together."

[133] Serres, 1983/2015, pp. 201-203

[134] Agamben, 1995/1998, p. 8

[135] Dufour, 2003/2008, pp. 19-20

[136] “The voice of the people is the voice of God.” Manzoni, 1827/1972, p. 712

[137] Dufour, 2003/2008, pp. 25-26

[138] Lacan, 1966/2006, p. 485

[139] Lacan, 2013/2019, p. 395

[140] Dufour, 2003/2008, p.26

[141] See Mark Musa’s exegesis on Dante’s “I was He called on earth That Highest Good/Who swathes me in this brilliance of His bliss” in Alighieri, 1984, p. 317: “Cf. Ps. 68:4: ‘Sing unto God, sing praises to his name: extol Him that rideth upon the heavens by his name JAH, and rejoice before Him.’ ‘JAH’ is the pronunciation of the letter ‘I,’ which begins the sacred name of Jehovah... ‘Hallelujah’ contains the abbreviation as its last syllable. ‘I’ also suggests the number 1, the symbol of unity...”

[142] Serres, 1983/2015, p. 204

[143] Lacan, 2001, p. 337: “Cette place du Dieu-le-Père, c’est celle que j’ai désignée comme le Nom-du-Père...”

[144] Lacan, 2001, p. 337; see also Porge, 1977, p. 219

[145] Lacan, 2005/2013

[146] Dufour, 2003/2008, p. 41

[147] Dufour, 2003/2008, pp. 24-25

[148] Dufour, 2003/2008, p. 135

[149] Lacan, (private translation by Cormac Gallagher), p. IXX 5 (session of 10.5.67)

[150] Tomsic, 2015, p. 17

[151] Tomsic, 2015, p. 21

[152] Dufour, 2003/2008, p. 38

[153] Lacan, 1986/1992, p. 275

[154] Dufour, 2003/2008, p. 39

[155] Lacan, 1986/1992, p. 314: “A form of ethical judgement is possible, of a kind that that gives this question the force of a Last Judgement: Have you acted in conformity with the desire that is in you?” and p. 319: “from an analytical point of view, the only thing of which one can be guilty is of having given ground relative to one’s desire.”

[156] Lacan, 2005/2013, p. 90

[157] Lacan, 1986/1992, p. 266

[158] Dufour, 2003/2008, p. 41

[159] Lacan, 2005/2013, p. 90

[160] Steiner, 2013, p. 35

[161] Steiner, 2013, p. 81

[162] Copjec, in Zizek, 2006, pp. 98-99

[163] Heidegger, 1975, p. 54

[164] Benjamin, 1972/1978, pp. 165-166

[165] Agamben, 2003/2005, pp. 41-42

[166] Benjamin, 1963/2019, p. 211

[167] Serres, 1983/2015, p. 204

[168] Dufour, 2003/2008, p. 44

[169] Dufour, 2003/2008, p. 26

[170] Dufour, 2003/2008, p. 158

[171] Dufour, 2003/2008, p. 21

[172] Kinsky, 2018/2020, p. 65

[173] Camus, 1947/2001, p. 59

[174] Beckett, 2006, p. 307

[175] Dufour, 2003/2008, p. 85

[176] Agamben, 1995/1998, p. 110-111

[177] Dufour, 2003/2008, p. 85

[178] Augé, 1992/1995

[179] Dufour, 2003/2008, p. 21

[180] Agamben, 1996/2000, p. 138

[181] Benjamin, 1950/1968, p. 262

[182] Benjamin, 1963/2019, p. 15

[183] Benjamin, 1950/1968, p. 255

[184] Benjamin, 1950/1968, p. 263

[185] Alighieri, 1986, p. 347

[186] Alighieri, 1986, p. 342

[187] Lacan, 1986/1992, pp. 265-66

[188] Braunstein, 2020, p. 2

[189] Benjamin, 1963/2019, p. 74

[190] Braunstein, 2020, p. 2

[191] Agamben, 1995/1998, p. 104

[192] Agamben, 2007/2015, p. 77

[193] Braunstein, 2020, p. 3

[194] Camus, 1947/2001, p. 71

[195] Braunstein, 2020, p. 3

[196] Steiner, 1989, pp. 110-111

[197] Steiner, 1989, p. 3

[198] Lacan, 1973/1978, p. 275

[199] Agamben, 1977/1993, pp. xvii-xix

[200] Steiner, 1989, p. 55-56

[201] Lacan, 1973/1978, p. 274

[202] Lacan, 1973/1978, p. 276

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Publication Date:

November 30, 2021