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Inverted worlds and belated baroques

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Inverted Worlds and Belated Baroques

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Cover Image:

Frontispiece, *The World Turned Upside Down: Or No News, and Strange News.*
J. Kendrew, Colliergate, York, 1820.

For Tim, who taught me to turn things inside out,

and

For Marc, a fearless baroque pícaro.

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*For natural consciousness, to give itself up completely
and straight away to science is to make an attempt,
induced by some unknown influence, all at once to
walk on its head.*

(G.W.F. Hegel, Preface, *Phenomenology of Spirit*)

*Man is the world of man — state, society. This state
and this society produce religion, which is an inverted
consciousness of the world, because they are an inverted world.*

(Karl Marx, *Contribution to the Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right*)

*Today it has even become common to speak about baroque science,
the baroque's art of war, baroque economy, baroque politics, and so forth.*

(José Antonio Maravall, *Culture of the Baroque*)

Introduction

The baroque world of specters and “evil geniuses” who try to distract the modern subject does not solely constitute the *locus communis* of some seventeenth-century philosophers and fictional characters. Far from being limited to the era of Descartes and Don Quixote, the baroque as a *modus operandi* rather than an epochal style—so argues this thesis—is an essential feature of modernity, as well as a response to it. Walter Benjamin, for example, returned to the rather insignificant tradition of German baroque tragedy as a *terminus a quo* for his redefinition of allegory as a symptom of modern aesthetics. The semiotic excess of allegory replaces the vertical structure of unified meaning with an agglomeration of seemingly contradictory fragments. This tragic loss of unity, which has even become rather tragicomic in modernity, underlies a literary and philosophical universe that the present study will discuss from the era of Descartes and Don Quixote to the (post)modern genres of the fantastic and the Latin American neo-baroque.

The domain of literature and philosophy, however, is here closely linked to, if not mediated by, the social relations that make up the concept of political economy. The fact that both Don Quixote and Descartes doubt, or even deny, that the world of appearance coincides with the essence of things, already anticipates the dominant mode of perception in modernity. When things appear to be the opposite of what they are, like fantastic giants instead of windmills, or more

broadly, if the world in its entirety appears to be nothing but a demonic deception, then we are dealing with a specific phenomenology that this study will identify as the instance of the inverted world. As the Spaniards of the seventeenth century noted, the social relations in burgeoning modernity are increasingly defined by the divergence between *ser* [being] and *parecer* [seeming]. Later, this diremption has become the crux of the critique of political economy.

Modern economic relationships, Marx argued, resemble the supernatural domain of religion and, as such, constitute an inverted world. The surface of things appears as the opposite of what those things actually are. The “natural attitude,”¹ or that which Hegel calls “natural consciousness,”² takes this immediate appearance of things for granted but in modernity this only results in further self-deceptions. “[A]ll science would be superfluous if the form of appearance of things directly coincided with their essence,” Marx once famously remarked.³ Thus, the inverted world emerges from an epistemological crisis, but rather than referring just to a lapse in consciousness, it denotes an entire world gone “wrong.”

The present thesis will focus on the connection between the concept of the inverted world as an epithet for modernity and the notion of the baroque as the aesthetic manifestation thereof. The goal is to retell the story of modernity anew, as well as to present an understanding of the baroque from a dialectical point of view, which is to say, from the perspective of inversion. Eventually, the world of modernity appears, here, as a baroque inverted world, where things and persons are placed into a stark contradiction while producing a topsy-turvy perspective that indicates that those relations actually stand on their head.

The Hegelian concept of the “inverted world [*verkehrte Welt*]” emerges in *The Phenomenology of Spirit* as a transitional term between different stages and shapes of the understanding mind. Likewise, for Marx, the “inverted world” is a “phenomenological” concept that grasps the topsy-turvy world of capitalism as the result of what he calls “false” or “inverted” consciousness. Before it was identified

¹ See Edmund Husserl, *Ideas Pertaining to a Pure Phenomenology and to a Phenomenological Philosophy*, trans. F. Kersten (The Hague/ Boston/ Lancaster: Martinus Nijhoff Publishers, 1983): 113.

² See the first chapter epigraph of this thesis; G.W.F. Hegel, *The Phenomenology of Mind*, trans. A.V. Miller (Oxford/ New York: Oxford University Press, 1977): 15.

³ Karl Marx, *Capital Volume II*, trans. David Fernbach (London: Penguin Books, 1991): 956.

with Husserl, “phenomenology” did not mean secured knowledge or the “unprejudiced” science of how objects are given to consciousness alone. If for Husserl, the objective outside world constitutes the disturbing factor that destabilizes the ground for unprejudiced knowledge (just as it does so for “transcendental subjectivity” itself); for Marx, the phenomenological aspect expresses itself in the scientific interest in the objective “thought-forms” produced by the social factors of commodity production, deeply rooted as they are in fetishism. An example of this phenomenological approach can be found in Chapter 4 of *Capital 1*. There, Marx asks the question, *what* is a capitalist? His answer is the following: a capitalist is someone who takes the *objective* goal of capital, i.e. valorization, as his *personal* and *subjective* concern.⁴ Thus, the intentional object that appears to subjective consciousness is mediated by the objective thought-forms that dominate economic relations in society. Therefore, when we are dealing with the inverted world, we are dealing with the subjective appearances of objective structures and the objectification of subjective impressions.

This (con)fusion between subject and object does not make “the inverted world” simply a shorthand for ideological indoctrination. Quite the opposite, as a concept, it also bears the potential for a critique of bourgeois epistemology, insofar as it reveals that modernity *really* is a world turned upside-down. That is to say, the inverted world allows us to grasp how the logic of the market has enforced its inversions as a socially “necessary,” and “natural” form of organization. Thus, in the critique of political economy, the inverted world ceases to be a term that can be traced to the individual consciousness of the lunatic *caballero* or the skeptic philosopher. Instead, the inverted world denotes the entire phantasmagorical structure of modern society. As such, the inverted world is both an anti-Cartesian and anti-Husserlian concept that does away with any presumable subjective ground for the constitution of the world.

Indeed, capitalism has shown great indifference towards “the subject” as the basis for the constitution of the world. Next to Theodor Adorno and Max

⁴ *Karl Marx Frederick Engels Collected Works Volume 35*, trans. Samuel Moore and Edward Aveling (Digital Edition: Lawrence and Wishart, 2010): 163ff.

Horkheimer,⁵ Michel Foucault indicated that knowledge is power,⁶ but this is not quite true in capitalism. We are rather dealing with yet another instance of the inverted world: modern market-society is probably the only social totality in which knowledge and power do not necessarily concur. Knowing the laws of the market will not increase power over the system. Knowledge of the logic of capital will not create better investment bankers, economists, or other professionals. Neither will those with a correct understanding of financial markets be capable of preventing or even accurately predicting the next economic crisis— *nothing of the kind*. capital is beyond subjective agency. This topsy-turvy circumstance has practical consequences for the definition of the self, or "the subject," in modernity.

Therefore, although virtually functioning similarly, the inverted world does not coincide with "traditional" and wrong understandings of ideology. The inverted world is not an ideological "veil" that is cast over the world to be lifted by the cunning intellectual. It does not produce an esoteric circle that separates those in-the-know from those who are out-of-the-know. The inverted world is not a lens that one can adopt or drop. Rather, the inverted world is a mode of appearance, and a technical term, enforced by the social conjuncture that mediates the perceptions of things, persons, and their relation amongst one another. The transformation of social relations into their fantastic reification, as theorized by György Lukács, is the very essence of the mechanism of the inverted world. Precisely because capitalist social relations appear as interactions between things rather than human beings, the inverted world functions as their objective and materially enforced social conjuncture. These social relations conjure a "phantom-like objectivity" [*gespenstige Gegenständlichkeit*]⁷ that is to say, they are not empirically observable but nonetheless constitute a socially objective reality. "False consciousness," then, is a form of objective class consciousness, it exists *objectively* as a result of economic relations. However, it is neither a form of

⁵ Max Horkheimer and Theodor W. Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, trans. Edmund Jephcott (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2010): 132.

⁶ Michel Foucault, *History of Sexuality. Vol. 1 – An Introduction*, trans. Robert Hurley (New York: Pantheon Books, 1978); *Power / Knowledge – Selected Writings and Interviews. 1972-1977*, trans. Colin Gordon (New York: Pantheon Books, 1980).

⁷ Georg Lukács, *History & Class Consciousness*, trans. Rodney Livingstone (London: Merlin Press, 1967): 172. Karl Marx, *Marx-Engels Gesamtausgabe Band 8 – Zweite Abteilung "Das Kapital" und Vorarbeiten Teil 1* (Hamburg: Dietz Verlag, 1989): 70.

solipsism nor a psychological condition. As such, the inverted world and commodity fetishism are fundamentally related. In this vein, the topos of the *mundus inversus* extends to all social contradictions and facets of identity formation in modern society, from relations of exploitation to those of self-capitalization. The inverted world is, then, the dominant mode of appearance of modern economic relations—a reality that mediates all other social and logical contradictions in bourgeois society.

But more than that, the *mundus inversus* is, as implied before, also a literary topos that blooms in the Baroque.⁸ Therefore, it is no coincidence that it emerges as a formal structure of thought in Cervantes and Descartes. The (re)turn to the Baroque, as a pivotal moment in the structural awareness of the inverted world, is therefore motivated both aesthetically and politically. The Baroque demarcates a period of revolutions and upheavals which finds expression in the tropes of vanity and chaos. Contrasts, contradictions, and *chiaroscuro* effects are the characteristics of baroque aesthetics. Baroque aesthetics are, amongst other features, exemplified by fantastic elements such as the already implied Cartesian *malin genie* or the Quixotesque *malvado hechicero*. Indeed, the "evil wizard" is an often-featured antagonist in the philosophical and aesthetic tradition of baroque phenomenology, novels, and ghost stories, and later belatedly appears in classical German theater, fantastic literature, bourgeois Realism, and finally in Latin American postmodernity. While this admittedly somewhat unusual constellation of different times and artworks may at first seem arbitrary, it involves a systematic unfolding of the inverted world as a baroque literary commonplace that aligns with philosophical and aesthetical dialectics.

So far, studies of the Baroque/baroque, for example, those by Heinrich Wölfflin,⁹ José Antonio Maravall,¹⁰ Walter Benjamin,¹¹ José Lezama Lima,¹² and

⁸ When written with a capital B, the word "Baroque" refers to the official classification of the historic-aesthetic epoch of the seventeenth century. When spelled with a lower-case b, "baroque" refers to an aesthetic mode of representation of the social and political relations of modernity, as theorized in this thesis.

⁹ Heinrich Wölfflin, *Renaissance and Baroque*, trans. Kathrin Simon (Glasgow: Collins / Fontana Library, 1964).

¹⁰ José Antonio Maravall, *Culture of the Baroque*, trans. Terry Cochran (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986).

¹¹ Walter Benjamin, *Ursprung des Deutschen Trauerspiels* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1978).

¹² José Lezama Lima, *La expression americana* (Mexico D.F.: Tierra Firme, 2010).

Frans-Willem Korsten,¹³ have focused predominantly on specific geographical contexts of the baroque; respectively, Italy, Spain, Germany, Latin America, and the Netherlands. The contribution of this study is the reconsideration of the baroque as a transcultural concept and an aesthetic exposé of political economy.

Roughly said, this thesis addresses the readers of the aesthetic and philosophic traditions of modern literature and culture in the German and Latin American traditions as well as those interested in the critique of political economy. The barriers of language have prevented the German-speaking and the Hispanic traditions from productive interaction, but such barriers may dissolve when the two traditions are read against the cultural totality of modernity, especially concerning the concepts of the inverted world and the belated baroque. The baroque, as it was clear to Latin American intellectuals from the beginning, is necessarily a multicultural and transcultural concept.

The baroque topos of the *mundus inversus*, as described in this study, differs from the sixteenth-century concept of the inverted world. Mikhail Bakhtin¹⁴ and Roger Caillois,¹⁵ for example, focused on the ludic notion of inversion as it happened in popular Renaissance culture. They used it in the context of ritualized practices during games and festivals. The carnivalesque de-crowning of the king and coronation of the beggar or fool, in their view, bore some revolutionary or overturning potential. Temporarily, the otherwise so strict social hierarchies appeared to be inoperative. Yet, even if the social oppositions were inverted during carnivals, their stark contradictions remained intact. Fusion between the two worlds did not occur. The roles of king and fool remained separated, albeit inverted. Thus, one important difference between the sixteenth- and seventeenth-century *topoi* of the inverted world consists in the fact that the former maintains a dual structure in which two worlds, the official serious and the unofficial carnivalesque world of laughter, exist analogously. As Bakhtin puts it: “laughter in the Middle Ages remained outside all official spheres of ideology and

¹³ Frans-Willem Korsten, *A Dutch Republican Baroque: Theatricality, Dramatisation, Moment and Event* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2017).

¹⁴ Mikhail Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*, trans. Helene Iswolsky (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1984).

¹⁵ Roger Caillois, *Man, Play, and Games*, trans. Meyer Barash (Urbana / Chicago: University of Illinois, 2001).

outside all official strict forms of social relations.”¹⁶ The baroque inverted world, in contrast, suspends this dualism. One is no longer confronted with an inversion of the relations between two worlds, but with an inversion within one and the same world—and this has philosophical and political consequences.

The political Baroque is generally associated with an expanding universe enabled by the creation of the world market and the necessarily imperialist organization of the modern world economy into peripheral and core regions that result from it. In correspondence with the emergence of the world market, a new concept of the world arises: that of totality. Henceforth, the modern world is no longer a clutter of monads or atoms, that is, no longer made of independent regions and entities; rather, it is a single world economy made of, and by, the wholeness of the market where each “individual” is correlated with all others. It is important to note that, aside from being a logical category, totality is first and foremost a political category. As such, totality is not simply a logical fiction that can be easily dismissed by its philosophical-theoretical opponents. Totality is the entire sphere of production and circulation produced by the world market, and it transforms individuals not into self-sufficient and independent entities but into strictly relational particulars. Moreover, with the emergence of an ever-expanding world market, one must speak of an immanently developing totality that absorbs all transcendence. Thus, the otherworldly and the heterogeneous gradually evaporate or become included in this one world.

What makes the Baroque so fascinating, in this context, is that it denotes the transition from mercantilism to modern capitalism and hence from (colonial) feudalism to (colonial) bourgeois society. The first “global” economic crises after the introduction of the monetary system in the sixteenth century, and the political crisis of monarchic absolutism, are felt severely in the seventeenth century. Europe knows its first “world war,” i.e. the “thirty years war,” out of which the Netherlands definitely rises as the new world power, leaving a completely bankrupt Spain in political demise - while Amsterdam also replaces Genoa as the world market for gold and silver. War and epidemics reduce the population drastically. The baroque, therefore, constitutes itself out of an accumulation of

¹⁶ Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*, 20.

different untimely, that is, residual and emergent, elements. As Immanuel Wallerstein indicates, the seventeenth century is full of contradictions that can only arise with the consolidation of a world market and what he calls a "world system."¹⁷ The seventeenth century saw, on the one hand, an oversupply of agricultural products, and yet, on the other hand, it is a period that in Europe has become famous for famine, while production is rising much faster than the population.¹⁸ At the same time, the era is well-known for its technological innovation and blooming cultural production as a consequence of both the Counter-Reformation and of burgeoning bourgeois society. One could say perhaps that the Baroque is the first manifestation of the cultural and economic awakening of a world in crisis, produced by excess rather than shortage. As such, the Baroque anticipates the inverted world as an emblematic problem of advanced market economies; its periodical crises are produced not because of failed harvests, or the lack of knowledge of what people need in general, but because of overaccumulation.

If the inverted world ceases to indicate an encounter between two separate worlds and instead signifies an inversion within one and the same unity, this means that difference now only occurs within sameness. One must speak of a unity of opposites. This involves a philosophical and aesthetic procedure that reveals a concurrence of oppositions and their subsequent contradiction in unity. In Hegel, the concept of the "inverted world" emerges at the end of the chapter "Force and Understanding" in *The Phenomenology of Spirit*, and constitutes the transitional term in the passage from "consciousness" to "self-consciousness." That is to say, "consciousness" in this transition understands that all the differences it had grasped so far, fall within the self. All differences are in fact immanent. In doing so, the transition from transcendence to immanence has been completed. Put differently, the understanding mind now recognizes itself as the ground of all difference.

¹⁷ Immanuel Wallerstein, *The Modern World-System - Mercantilism and the Consolidation of the European World Economy 1600-1750* (Berkeley/ Los Angeles/ London: University of California Press 2011).

¹⁸ *Ibid*, 13ff.

In Marx's "Introduction" to *Contribution to the Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right*, the topos of the inverted world becomes the epithet for religion, and more generally, for ideology. Religion, Marx indicates, is a *fantastic* expression of *real* human suffering. In order to bear his suffering, man posits a second world to compensate for his ordeal. Hegel spoke in an entirely different context, namely that of Newtonian physics, of the position of a "second supersensible world,"¹⁹ which in turn produces the inverted world. Like ancient metaphysics, physics deems the world of mere appearances to be inessential. It posits a supersensible kingdom of tranquil essences., i.e. scientific laws, behind the world of appearance. For Marx, these abstract but essential laws are recast as the non-empirical laws of capital. The inverted world arises as an invented world over which the self-conscious man has no control, even if he is the creator of that very same world. For Hegel, the inverted world is the product of the skeptic philosopher; for Marx, the inverted world emerges as the "inverted consciousness" of religion, the state, and capital. In either case, Hegel and Marx indicate that the self-conscious man does not recognize himself as the author of these worlds, but instead perceives them as static and immutable realms.

Thus, the inverted world may be related to different fields: physics, metaphysics, religion, and society at large. This thesis will deal with the inverted world predominantly as an aesthetic and phenomenological expression of modern socioeconomic relations. The domain of physics, metaphysics, and religion may only return as metaphors for the market itself. After all, the world of commodities, in Marx's words, is "abounding in metaphysical subtleties and theological niceties."²⁰ At other moments, Marx spoke of a naturalization of economic relations,²¹ through which the law of accumulation may appear as an immutable law of physics, like that of gravity itself.

When used in the sense of "false consciousness," the inverted world refers to a form of alienated self-consciousness. Hegel called it "unhappy consciousness"²²

¹⁹ G.W.F. Hegel, *Phänomenologie des Geistes*, *Werke 3* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1970): 126ff.

²⁰ Karl Marx & Frederick Engels, *Collected Works* vol. 35, 81.

²¹ *Ibid*, 111.

²² G.W.F. Hegel, *Phänomenologie des Geistes*. "B. Freiheit des Selbstbewußtseins; Stoizismus, Skeptizismus und das Unglückliche Bewußtsein," 154ff

and Adorno “reified consciousness [*verdinglichtes Bewußtsein*].”²³ The dialectical approach translates the ludicrous carnivalesque inverted world back into a dirempted self. The tragedy of modernity consists in the fact that the subject assumes its self-grounding as self-relinquishment. Again, this tragic conception signifies a departure from the Renaissance topos of the carnivalesque inverted world. The baroque version of it, however, is no less absurd. The grotesque deformations of social relations are an important aspect of belated baroque reality. The inverted world, as it was used first by Hegel and then by Marx, is tied to a topsy-turvy preposterous perspective. It reverses the inner and outer, and the top and bottom of things. One is confronted with the ontology of the “wrong state of things.”²⁴ The *verkehrte Welt* concerns the social, epistemological, and ethical position of the modern subject in his ability to know, describe and intervene in his social surroundings. It is a troubled world and translates, as Donald Phillip Verene correctly indicates, as a “topsy-turvy, reverse, inverse, perverse-inverse world.”²⁵

Yet, the concept of the inverted world is not limited to the absurd worlds described by Hegel and later by Marx. The inverted world, as understood in the present thesis, is rooted in a specific awareness of the rift between reality and appearance, a structure of feeling that became poignant from the seventeenth century onward. Even though the topos blooms already in the sixteenth century, only from the seventeenth century onward did it become associated with the bizarre and darkly fantastic aspect of horror stories.

As is almost always the case with epochal categorizations, they are hopelessly anachronistic. “Baroque,” and “Renaissance,” are nineteenth-century bourgeois fantasies. The man of the Baroque was not aware of the fact that he lived in the epoch of the Baroque. The present study will constitute no exception to this anachronism. Contrariwise, it will even radicalize the temporal misplacement and implement the baroque as a predicate for the exposé of bourgeois society. The result is not a faithful reconstruction of baroque sensibility,

²³ Theodor Adorno, *Negative Dialektik* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1966): 41.

²⁴ *Ibid*, 11.

²⁵ Donald Phillip Verene, *Hegel's Recollection* (Albany: Suny Press, 1985): 44.

nor is the present study a *bona fide* historiography. No attempt is made to arrive at an accurate historical understanding of the Baroque, nor will History itself serve as an argument, that is, as an apology, for the formation of modern social relations. The gaze into the past should rather be understood as an allegorical view, a “leap of the tiger,” [*Tigersprung*]²⁶ as Benjamin has put it. The aim of this study may broadly be summarized as the telling of the story of bourgeois society at large while defining its self-understanding as “belatedly baroque.”²⁷ This procedure of rereading and retelling involves a rigorous reshuffling of aesthetic genre definitions. The baroque is consequently not a “style” per se, but a mode of appearance, or *modus operandi* that mediates perception in modernity.

As a result, traditional genre taxonomies as historically progressive stages decay into debris. Benjamin spoke in this context of a “blast” or “blasting” [*sprengen*] of several cultural and political elements out of their historical continuum.²⁸ But baroque allegory not only works through explosions; it also functions productively through the formation of new constellations. It is the procedure of the parenthetical notion of the “dialectical image,” which shatters chronological linearity in order to re-synthesize and crystalize the broken elements.²⁹ This does not happen through coincidental temporal association but through qualitative convergences.

Traditional genre definitions are not only anachronistic, they are also Eurocentric, and by necessity enter into new contradictions when juxtaposed with anything outside of European bourgeois consciousness. In Latin America, the baroque, *per definitionem*, has always already been belated. There, the baroque

²⁶ Walter Benjamin, *GS, I-2* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1980): 701.

²⁷ I have borrowed this predicate from Marc Caplan, who mentioned the term “belated baroque” in his graduate student seminar *The Baroque and its Afterlives* during the Fall Semester 2012 at The Johns Hopkins University. For a discussion of his concept of belatedness, please refer to *How Strange the Change*. In this study, Caplan is making a compelling claim for the belated entry of Yiddish and African authors into modernism and modernity. This belatedness simultaneously signifies a moment of anticipation, thus constituting what the author calls “peripheral modernities” (Marc Caplan, *How Strange the Change – Language, Temporality, and Narrative Form in Peripheral Modernisms* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2011): 10ff.

²⁸ Walter Benjamin, *GS, I-2*: 701.

²⁹ “*Wo das Denken in einer von Spannungen gesättigten Konstellation zum Stillstand kommt, da erscheint das DIALEKTISCHE BILD*” [Where thinking comes to a standstill in a constellation saturated with tensions—there the dialectical image appears] (Walter Benjamin, *GS, 5-1* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1991): 595, capital letters in original).

appears in the eighteenth century and is generally associated with its own uprisings and political overturnings: decolonial struggle. In this overseas scenario, baroque self-understanding is often already contaminated by emergent Enlightenment ideals of self-determination. This makes the Latin American baroque belated and anticipatory at the same time. It is the desire to be modern, which already from its inception is troubled by the fact that modernization comes at the price of backwardness. “Backwardness” and “underdevelopment” are literally the creation of modernity, and only arise with the specific region’s entrance into the world market.

While in Europe the style of the baroque is generally associated with the decadence of the aristocratic class and culture, the Latin American baroque, as Bolívar Echeverría indicates, refers to the culture of the everyday life and the lower classes.³⁰ It is a popular concept rather than an eccentric or flamboyant one. For the Cuban writer Alejo Carpentier, it is “the marvelous real [*lo real maravilloso*]” of everyday culture which indicates that Latin American reality is in itself already strange and wonderful enough. He takes the Haitian Revolution as one of these pivotal marvelous-real moments that sets baroque reality in the Caribbean in motion.³¹ But with Haiti’s successful independence struggle, Europe has lost its most profitable colony, La Hispaniola. Sugar production becomes now a dominant factor in Cuba, begetting that which Fernando Ortiz has defined as a “baroque counterpoint.”³² The baroque counterpoint, like what Benjamin has described as baroque allegory, denotes a coming together of seemingly incompatible fragments. For Ortiz, the Cuban counterpoint denotes the collision of several cultural and economic components. Cuba is a “transcultural” society in which several domestic elements are superposed by foreign elements, while residual elements, conversely, attempt to resist this superimposition.

This makes the baroque not only a transcultural but also a transtemporal concept that is convertible to a general philosophical or aesthetic idea, as many

³⁰ Bolívar Echeverría, *La modernidad de lo barroco* (México: Ediciones Era, 2000): 75.

³¹ Alejo Carpentier, *El reino de este mundo* (Seix Barral: Madrid, 2003).

³² Fernando Ortiz, *Cuban Counterpoint. Tobacco and Sugar*, trans. Harriet de Onis (Durham: Duke University Press, 1995).

studies have already argued.³³ José Antonio Maravall, for example, connected the baroque to the idea of a *resorte*, an ideological mechanism that is constitutive of the social self-awareness of the first "mass man." For him, modern mass society was inherently baroque and the Baroque itself was already the cradle of modern mass society. Echeverría spoke of a baroque ethos as the self-affirmative gesture of popular life in Latin America. He saw the baroque as an alternative approach to modernity over and against the culturally leveling tendencies of global markets.

However, yet another concept of belated baroque emerges in Latin America, the so-called "neo-baroque." The *neobarocco* is often used synonymously with the return of the Baroque in postmodernity.³⁴ Moreover, the Latin American neo-baroque constitutes a direct anticolonial gesture, which is to say, it is anti-European and anti-modern, as Irleamar Chiampi, following Lezama Lima, has suggested.³⁵ Also, in the Euro-American academic context, one must speak of the emergence of a *postcolonial* or *anticolonial* baroque which aligns itself with a postmodern critique of the modern episteme. These new baroque tendencies fathom themselves in opposition to the immanent critique associated with the "unfinished project" of modernity. Ostensibly, they emerge exogenically to philosophical modernity and seek to question some of its major problems, such as the circularity of "subject-centered reason," from without. The present study, however, clearly divorces itself from the idea of the baroque as an instance of counter-modernity. The belated baroque is a *locus communis* that has neither left modernity nor precipitously returns in postmodernity as anti-modernity. Instead,

³³ Studies that argue for a *return* of the Baroque in Contemporary Culture are among others: Mieke Bal, *Quoting Caravaggio... Contemporary Art, Preposterous History* (Chicago / London: University of Chicago Press, 1999); William Egginton, *The Theater of Truth. The Ideology of (Neo)-Baroque Aesthetics* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2011). Hills, Helen (ed.) *Rethinking the Baroque* (Surrey: Ashgate, 2011); Greg Lambert, *On the (New) Baroque* (Aurora: The Davis Group Publishers, 2008).

³⁴ Nanne Timmer has contested the assumption that postmodernity would be a Western homogeneous concept. Especially Frederic Jameson's assumption that postmodernity is a superstructural expression of the logic of late capitalism, in her view, does not hold in the Cuban context. There, the postmodern emerges in opposition to both the domestic discourse of the Revolution, and the supposed end of ideology that enthrones liberal democracy as the vicar of all cultural global development (Nanne Timmer, "La crisis de representación en tres novelas cubanas: *La nada cotidiana* de Zoé Valdés, *El pajarero*, *Pincel y tinta china* de Ena Lucía Portela y *La última playa* de Antilio Caballero," (*Revista Iberoamericana*, vol. LXXIII, no. 218, enero-marzo 2007: 259-274).

³⁵ Irleamar Chiampi, *Barroco y modernidad*. México, D.F: Fondo de la Cultura Económica, 2000.

the baroque, as a specific self-conscious mode that mediates perception, echoes from the seventeenth century far into contemporary culture.³⁶ The belated baroque is thus not a gesture of disruption but one of continuity. It emerges endogenously from within modern social totality, not in opposition to it. Finally, since the baroque is not the other of modernity but rather a predicate for its immanent contradictions, it finds concrete *gestalt* in the inverted world. The Hegelian concept, after all, has made a claim for an immanent critique. Going through the stage of the inverted world, “self-consciousness” realizes that there are no external differences: there is no alternate modernity but only a unity of opposites. How they fit together or how their opposition may be overcome, “self-consciousness” does not yet know. That is why, according to Hegel, it is an “unhappy” or alienated form of consciousness.

The “inverted world” has been extensively discussed as one of the most puzzling passages in *The Phenomenology of Spirit*. The chapter “Force and Understanding” connects the world of Newtonian physics to modern (Kantian) skepticism and the logic of syllogisms to the topsy-turvy world of a morally perverted society. Hegel's sarcastic response to the emergence of the empty vogue word “force” in the scientific-philosophical discourse of his time, and his abstract references to political developments, more than once have confused and divided the opinions of his interlocutors. Amongst the more systematic studies are Hans Georg-Gadamer's³⁷ and Joseph C. Flay's essay.³⁸ Donald Philip Verene's discussion of the section of the inverted world has proven to be most beneficial to the argument presented in this thesis because it perceives the interplay of essence and appearance as an effect of theatricality.³⁹ In the same vein, this thesis relates

³⁶ Eugenio d'Ors and Alejo Carpentier perceive the baroque as a constant element in history, as a sort of eternal return. Whereas the former perceived the baroque as an accompanying counterforce to rational development, the latter perceived the baroque as a culmination that connects different epochs between their rise and decline. The former adopts a Nietzschean lens, the latter one that seems to oscillate between Herder and Hegel. Cf. Eugenio d'Ors, *Lo barroco* (Madrid: Technos, 1993); Alejo Carpentier, “The Baroque and the Marvelous Real,” *Magical Realism: Theory, History, Community*, ed. Lois Parkinson Zamora and Wendy B. Faris (Durham/London: Duke University Press, 1995): 89-108.

³⁷ Hans-Georg Gadamer, “Die verkehrte Welt,” *Hegel, Husserl, Heidegger, GA 3* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1987): 29-46.

³⁸ Joseph C. Flay, “Hegel's Inverted World,” *Review of Metaphysics* 24; 4 (June 1970): 662-678.

³⁹ Verene, *Hegel's Recollection*, 52.

the inverted world to yet another famous baroque topos, that of the *theatrum mundi*.

The baroque metaphor of the world as a stage appears as a dominant trope in the Spanish Baroque, for example, in the work of Calderón de la Barca, Lope de Vega, and Tirso de Molina. In the present study too, this metaphor functions in a twofold way, both as a literary and as a politico-economic concept. Here, the specters, doubles, masks, and cross-dressers emerge as consequences of a new world order created by the market, which assigns economic-theatrical roles to individuals as well as to entire world regions. The problem of belated baroque phenomenology and political economy is a theatrical one since it organizes reality into a space of representation, where the “curtain [*Vorhang*]” of appearances hangs before the realm of the essential social relations that it conceals.⁴⁰ Baroque aesthetics and dialectical phenomenology destabilize, however, the dualistic worldview between appearance, on the one hand, and essence, on the other. Appearance, as a matter of fact, is already essence. When Marx indicates in the very first sentence of *Capital* that the wealth of capitalist societies appears as a “monstrous [*ungeheuer*]” accumulation of commodities,⁴¹ he means that this appearance is already its essence. Wealth is defined by the production of useful things. Use-value is their essence rather than exchange-value. However, exchange-value is the essence of a thing insofar as it is a commodity. This is what constitutes its distinctive feature since without exchange-value the same useful thing would not be a commodity to be traded on the market but only a thing that people use to satisfy their needs. Even though the commodity appears at first sight as a “very trivial thing,”⁴² its hidden essence is the non-empirical social character determined by the abstract labor time invested in it – a relation of exploitation. The commodity has, therefore, acquired a dual existence. Its substance and magnitude are determined by the quantity of the socially necessary abstract labor time invested in it. Its appearance is expressed in its exchange-value which is eventually realized in its price.⁴³

⁴⁰ Hegel, *Phänomenologie des Geistes*, 135.

⁴¹ Marx, *Collected Works*, Volume 35, 45.

⁴² *Ibid*, 81.

⁴³ *Ibid*, 45ff.

As Guy Debord has put it, the theatrical spectacle of capital consists of the moment when “the commodity has succeeded in totally colonizing social life.”⁴⁴ Therefore, appearance is not “false,” rather it is the *dominant* social appearance of all social relations. Things and individuals exist twice in capitalism, once as their immediate surface appearance, and another time as products of relations of exploitation. Thus, Marxist phenomenology breaks with the old metaphysical dualism between essence and appearance and remains faithful to a Hegelian notion of substance that is socially mediated, and as such dependent on political and economic development.

Another account of baroque theatrics is given in Benjamin’s *Ursprung des deutschen Trauerspiels*. There, Benjamin identifies the core of belated baroque aesthetics as a procedure of tempo-spatial layering that transpires from the contact between the auratic remainders of myth, or “the symbol,”⁴⁵ and the reality of an increasingly differentiated and changing modern society. The eternal and transcendent values of religion, traditional metaphysics, and naïve science, as Hegel and Marx argue, are part of an ideological structure that produces a petrified inverted consciousness of the world.

The socioeconomic concept of theatricality, in contrast, makes the changing aspects of social roles visible. Substance is a *subject*, which is to say, it has a developing character because it always *acts* in exchange with other actors on the world stage. Thus, theatrical spectacle is *habitat* and *habitus* of the modern individual, from Calderón’s *The Great Theater of the World* to Debord’s *Society of the Spectacle*. But in modernity, individuals exist twice; their roles double and split. The spectacle of capital unites their active and passive parts and puts them in the position of both spectators and actors. One is defined by one’s social and economic role, and at the same time tries to escape from the parts one has to play in society. This explains why “retreat,” “isolation” and “radical passivity” have become appealing strategies in response to the economic logic of modernity. The

⁴⁴ Guy Debord, Guy Debord, *The Society of the Spectacle*, trans. Ken Knabb (Bureau of Public Secrets, 2014); aphorism 42: 16.

⁴⁵ Benjamin, *Ursprung des Deutschen Trauerspiels*, 138ff.

question of a position outside of capital becomes increasingly virulent, and a new baroque social type and literary genre emerge: the *pícaro* and the picaresque.

The poetics of the errant/erring *pícaro*, of transculturation, displacement, migration, and exile, is one of the consequences of early burgeoning and current global capitalism. Hence, the tramp, the *lumpen*, the outcast, and the refugee, are belated baroque types created by the uprooting tendencies of modern drama. This new *pícaro* appears to occupy a position outside of capital's dominant social relations. As such he ostensibly constitutes a resisting negativity and direct refusal to be sublated into the totality of burgeoning bourgeois relations.

The wandering *pícaro*, the leitmotiv *par excellence* of belated baroque novels, will serve as the allegorical structure of this thesis. One of the most famous *pícaros*, Don Quixote, is described as a *caballero andante* [knight-errant]. Here, Cervantes' novel already shows the dialectical self-awareness that usually is associated only with modernity. The social totality of the medieval Spanish Peninsula was defined by a so-called *convivencia* between Christians, Jews, and Muslims. This syncretism is shattered with the forceful expulsion of the latter two during the Renaissance. *Don Quixote* is a baroque utterance of the awareness that with the arrival of modernity something "precious" has been lost. As Tariq Ali argues, the novel essentially laments the destruction of Europe's first multicultural society.⁴⁶ The picaresque worldview is a tragicomic example of the inability to come to terms with this brokenness. This is the melancholic worldview that Benjamin associated with the debris of baroque allegory. However, melancholia is also the typical structure of feeling that Lukács identified with the emergence of the novelistic genre. The picaresque and the novel emerge here in fact as synonyms. *The Theory of the Novel* redefines melancholia as "transcendental homelessness."⁴⁷ It is the idealist expression of a desire for, and the inability to return to, this unbroken totality.

Hopefully, the reader may, here, excuse some eclecticism on my part. Sometimes a certain degree of conceptual dissonance may be unavoidable. Of

⁴⁶ Tariq Ali, "[World Literature and World Languages.](#)" *Globalisation Lecture* SOAS (University of London, December 1, 2010).

⁴⁷ Georg Lukács, *The Theory of the Novel*, trans. Anna Bostock (Dublin: The Merlin Press, 1988): 40-41.

course, György Lukács did not identify his theory of the novel with Benjamin's concept of baroque allegory. Rather, he understood his concept of "critical realism" and the novel as a critique and alternative to the subjective tendencies of the modernist avant-gardes that he associated with Benjamin's theory of the baroque.⁴⁸ Thus, his aesthetics of melancholy stand opposed to Benjamin's. But, as I will argue later, Lukács' notion of transcendental homelessness may be quite compatible with Benjamin's baroque melancholia and equally qualifies as a belated baroque structure of feeling.

In sum, destruction, homelessness, and melancholia have set the tone of the new era; the witty main protagonist of Cervantes' novel has understood this from the outset. But the *pícaro* is also the product of the new social relations created by the political economy and expansion of the world market. As a new social type, he displaces the pre-modern notion of the *zoon politikon* with that of the *homo oeconomicus*. The baroque anthropological view holds that man is selfish and socially dysfunctional by nature.⁴⁹ While the *pícaro* emerges as the first awareness of man's non-identity with social totality, he nonetheless has to act, persistently, as an artist of the circumstance. His behavior anticipates in many ways the bourgeois spirit of opportunism. Thus, the errant chevalier Don Quixote no longer feels at home in this modern world and sees through the curtain of its appearances. He redefines the Spanish Golden Age [*siglo de oro*] as "Iron Age [*edad de hierro*]." ⁵⁰ In doing so, he evokes the instance of an inverted world.

The picaresque poetics of errantry, moreover, constitutes the frame for Luis de Góngora's *Soledades* [1613]. The poem is a rather free adaptation of Homer's *Odyssey*, and an exorbitant artifice of language – a poetic explosion, as the Cuban theorist of the (neo-)baroque, Severo Sarduy, would have said. The poem's "Dedication to the Duke of Bejar" opens with the verse: "*pasos de un peregrino son errante* [the steps of the pilgrim are errant]." In Góngora's poetic view, the modern

⁴⁸ Georg Lukács, *Wider den mißverstandenen Realismus* (Hamburg: Claassen. 1958): 42.

⁴⁹ Cf. The new baroque definition of the *homo oeconomicus* has most famously been summarized as "*Lupus est homo homini.*" Thomas Hobbes, "Epistle dedicatory," *On the Citizen*, trans. Richard Tuck (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998): 3.

⁵⁰ "Sancho, my friend, I would have you know that I was born by heaven's decree into this iron age of ours to revive the age of gold, commonly known as the Golden Age" (Miguel de Cervantes, *Don Quixote*, trans. James H. Montgomery (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing, 2009): 548.

self is estranged and expelled by definition. Exile is the dominant and deracinating structure of feeling that becomes poignant with the inauguration of early modern society. The poem's pilgrim symbolizes this exiled foreigner, who is per definition at odds with social life, and so, he breaks free from court life and the official truths of the Spanish Crown. The *Soledades* shows that, in baroque society, the search for such sheltering and authoritative truths has become a void entertainment, doomed, in the poem quite literally, to shipwrecking.

The story of modern errantry, or pilgrimage, in this thesis proceeds from the theoretical underpinnings of the inverted world and the belated baroque in chapter one, where the topos of the *mundus inversus* and the *theatrum mundi* will be further introduced. The novelistic character emerges, in this chapter, as the expression of a socioeconomic type acting on the world stage of modernity. Here, the insights from literary criticism and sociological analysis convene to describe the logic and reification of bourgeois consciousness. The chapter lays the theoretical groundwork for the reading strategies of the belated baroque and the dialectical implications of the inverted world. It is important to note that the inverted world, in this context, emerges as both the result and appearance of bourgeois relations as well as the challenge of that very same order. Certainly, the identification of capitalist society as an inverted world already contains its critique. As such, the inverted world is associated with the reversing of existing social relations, more precisely, with the overturning of economic, cultural, and moral values in modernity.

The second chapter contemplates the inverted world as belatedly baroque aesthetics in the context of the literary fantastic. Two modern picaresque novels, E.T.A. Hoffmann's *Die Elixiere des Teufels* (1815) and Reinaldo Arenas' *El mundo alucinante* (1965) will serve as the material for an analysis of the "unhappy" bourgeois consciousness in modernity. The genre of the literary fantastic emerges here as a return of repressed sensuousness in modernity. In Hoffmann's novel, the specters and doubles are read as products of the impossibility of coming to terms with the constraints of developing modern society. Arenas' book shows the independence struggle in the Americas. The scenery depicts a dark universe in which the exiled protagonist remains trapped forever in his attempt to free himself

from the repression of society and politics. Both works present the option of a poetic retreat from modernity. Nonetheless, both novels show that such a poetics of withdrawal is a mode of self-deception at the same time. Hoffmann's and Arenas' protagonists are painfully aware of the dialectics of modernity and find that social development comes only at the price of an impoverished aesthetic life. Backwardness, rather than advancement, becomes the crux of the experience of modern social relations.

The notion of the "mask," as an epithet for the economic *dramatis personae* in the great theater of modernity, constitutes the topic of the third chapter. Here, the Marxist notion of the "character-mask" is discussed both in relation to the *mundus inversus* and the *theatrum mundi*. A new type of subject emerges from the drama of modernity: the individual. The desire for individuality is something that all new modern social types discussed in the chapter, such as the "woman," "drag queen," and "philosopher" share. These types are specific character-masks that appear both, in opposition to, and as a consequence of, the traditional social roles in political economy. This chapter moreover discusses the relation between social appearances and essences in capitalist modernity. Finally, the last section of the chapter will examine the character-mask of the "philosopher" and the "sovereign." The "last philosopher" at the end of history is a crucial character and concept that attempts to respond to the radical immanence of modernity in a quasi-metaphysical manner. This happens, again, through the idea of withdrawal which in the words of Georges Bataille appears as "the only position apart from..."⁵¹

Ultimately, the last chapter of the thesis will draw on the consequences of the poetics and philosophy of withdrawal, and take the reader to the notion of

⁵¹ The full original quote is the following: "Nietzsche is the only position apart from communism" (Georges Bataille, *The Accursed Share, vol II & III*, trans. Robert Hurley (New York: Zone Books, 1991): 373). In the "Psychological Structure of Fascism" (1933), Nietzsche appears also as the only true alternative to fascism. "The only position apart from..." is, in Bataille's Nietzschean way, defined as an opposition to modernity as a whole, that is, as an anti-capitalist, anti-fascist, anti-Hegelian, and anti-Marxist position. Georges Bataille, "The Psychological Structure of Fascism," trans. Carl R. Lovitt, *New German Critique* 16 (Winter 1979): 64-87. See also, Geoff Waite. *Nietzsche's Corps/e- Aesthetics, Politics, Prophecy, or the Spectacular Technoculture of Everyday Life* (Durham: Duke, 1996).

“exile” as a modern picaresque strategy of the ex-centric author. The “writer in exile” is the key element in the aesthetic self-orchestration of the author/narrator in the work of W.G. Sebald, Herta Müller, and Roberto Bolaño. However, exile is also, as the chapter argues, a political attitude that emerges as an ideological consequence of the implosion of dialectics at the “end of history.” As an experience of transcendental homelessness, the spiritual exile emerges from the lack of political affiliation and the inability to meaningfully differentiate between the political left and right. This attitude produces yet another instance of the inverted world: the inversion of left- and right-wing positions. The experience of exile and the loss of political affiliation are the most imminent consequences of global capitalism that makes superfluous entities out of the vast majority of the peoples on this planet. Those who cannot, or refuse to fulfill a social-economic function are made redundant, spare, and useless on the modern world stage: they are the poor, the refugee and outsider, the failed poet, or other eccentric figures. The second inverted world in this chapter, then, is defined as the eccentric writer’s coping mechanism with his dissociation. He now claims that only the exile can be the true home of the author. The tone of this type of author is confessional and above all melancholic. In the literary wasteland after postmodernity, the encyclopedic style of Bolaño, Müller, and Sebald re-inscribes a baroque longing for the bizarre, and the desire to submerge into the order of things. Subsequently, new contingent compositions of the rarity cabinet emerge.

Before a Labour Court, a dismissed female employee is suing for either restoration of her job or compensation. Her former boss, a male department manager, is there to represent the defending firm. Justifying the dismissal, he explains inter alia: 'She didn't want to be treated like an employee, but like a lady.' In private life, the department manager is six years younger than the employee.
(Siegfried Kracauer, *The Salaried Masses*)

Chapter 1 Theoretical Framework

1. Social Types

The following section attempts to pin down a common foundational political interest between literature and social criticism. It does so by turning to the notion of "social type." The term is borrowed from the sociologist Georg Simmel who understood it as a descriptive sociological unit that captures the form, rather than content, of social relations in capitalism. Much like Max Weber's "ideal type," the social type is an abstraction that functions as a heuristic tool to make palpable the non-empirical substance of bourgeois relations. It does so by appealing in its form to the aesthetics of representation commonly identified with literature. Accordingly, Simmel has included in his sociological writings a description of social types that seemed to have directly stepped out of a Realist novel. The protagonists of his studies are 'the Stranger,' 'the Poor,' and 'the Adventurer.'¹ Later, Henri Lefebvre adds the social type of 'the Tramp,' which he identifies as the primary character of protest in the films of Charlie Chaplin.² This feature of resistance is what these artistic depictions and the critique of political economy have in common: the exposé of social relations is by the same token its critique.³

¹ Georg Simmel, *On Individuality and Social Forms, Selected Writings*, ed. Donald N. Levine (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1971): 141-198.

² Henri Lefebvre, *Critique of Everyday Life. Vol. 1.*, trans. John Moore (London / New York: Verso, 1991): 12ff.

³ The expression is borrowed from Marx. In a letter to Ferdinand Lassalle, Marx writes on February 22, 1858: "The work I am presently concerned with is a *Critique of Economic Categories* or, **if you like**, a critical exposé of the system of the bourgeois economy. It is at once an exposé and, by the same token, a critique of the system [emphasis in original]." The work that Marx announces here will later become known under the name of "Capital. A Critique of Political Economy." *Marx & Engels. Collected Works*. Vol. 40 – Letters 1856-59. Digital Edition: Lawrence and Wishart, 2010: 270.

The influential sociologist and cultural theorist, Siegfried Kracauer, was also aware of this fertile association between the literary and the sociological. The epigraph at the beginning of this chapter originates from *The Salaried Masses* (1930) and deals with the emergence of a new social type in advanced capitalism, the so-called "white-collar worker." The beginning of his book already references, in a slightly ironic way, the value of literary depiction. When the female employee is asked to describe her life in the office, she dodges the question and replies: "but you can already find all that in novels."⁴ Kracauer, in turn, refutes the employee's answer. The white-collar worker constitutes a new social type about which very little is known so far, let alone, *written*.⁵ Having completed a firm bourgeois education and belonging to a certain *habitus* with its very own aesthetic and distinctive judgments of taste,⁶ the female employee insists that she does not want to seamlessly add up to the labor force, but rather desires to be addressed "like a lady." While she has not yet been fixed into a novelistic character, in the aftermath of the First World War, and due to the recent restructuring of the industry and labor market, she already has been reduced to a social type, performing a novel economic function.

According to Kracauer, the white-collar worker is the product of a new rationalization phase that inaugurates the transition from assembly-line methods to clerical cubical departments. Later, Maurizio Lazzarato described this development as the increasing hegemony of "immaterial labor" that characterizes the so-called service sector from the 1970s onward.⁷ 'Immaterial labor,' non-productive or 'spiritual labor,' if one takes the Marxist term in its literal

⁴ Siegfried Kracauer, *The Salaried Masses: Duty and Distraction in Weimar Germany*, trans. Inka Mülder-Bach (London/ New York: Verso, 1998): 28.

⁵ In the first half of the last century the presence of this new social type still lacks concrete definition, while in the second half, he is already a much-discussed figure, especially in the context of the emergence of so-called "Postindustrial Capital." The latter concept is a rather misleading term since it implies everything but the disappearance of industrial capitalism. What is meant rather is the Post-Fordist stage of Capital that has outsourced different stages of the assembly process to multiple low-wage regions. Hence, a part of a product is produced in China and another part in Bangladesh or Mexico, for example. To the workers in core regions, however, it appears as if industrial production has increasingly disappeared, hence the rather unfortunate predicate "postindustrial."

⁶ Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste* (trans. Richard Nice). Abingdon: Routledge, 2010).

⁷ Maurizio Lazzarato, "Immaterial Labor." *Radical Thought in Italy: A Potential Politics*, eds. Paolo Virno & Michael Hardt (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996): 133-146.

translation from the German “*geistige Arbeit*,” is also what the female employee thinks to be the crux of her working activity. In line with the traditional separation between mental and manual labor, she locates herself on the presumably privileged side of the former; a clear instance of *inverted consciousness*.

This newly organized labor force, which emerges in the interwar period, has lesser influence and power over the working process than it had before. The working activities these workers perform only instigate greater deskilling. The white-collar worker thinks that she performs mental labor – after all, she has had a decent bourgeois education – but throughout the day she mostly hits the buttons of copier machines, typewriters, telephones, and fax machines. In the meantime, the blue-collar worker, traditionally identified with the proletariat, is organized in unions that have enforced better working conditions, such as the eight-hour workday, and a slight increase in wages. The white-collar worker, who takes himself to be superior to the plebeian factory worker, however, does not perceive that all the time, he was subject to proletarianization himself.

Thus, the more responsibilities and tasks the white-collar worker gains, the greater becomes the ambiguity of his function and role. As Lazzarato concludes, in the second half of the twentieth century, the old contradiction between the command of the surveilling capitalist and the obeying labor force has gradually been suspended in the service sector. Now the employee internalizes this antagonism:

Capital wants a situation where command resides within the subject him- or herself, and within the communicative process. The worker is responsible for his or her own control and motivation within the group without a foreman needing to intervene, and the foreman’s role is redefined into that of the facilitator.⁸

At the same time, the traditional hierarchies of power remain intact, and the worker has to be careful not to translate his newly acquired autonomy into an obstacle in the optimization of the production process. “Precarity, hyperexploitation, mobility, and hierarchy” are the most obvious characteristics of this restructured labor force.⁹

⁸ *Ibid*, 135.

⁹ *Ibid*, 136.

This circumstance makes Kracauer's study imminently relevant for the contemporary economic setup. Currently, it is no less true than it was in the past: the mass of salaried employees differs from traditional proletarian workers in one thing: they are "spiritually homeless," which is to say, they are *outcasts*.¹⁰ While turning their noses up at their comrades from the lower classes, their middle-class bourgeois shelter has been bulldozed by the latest economic developments. Isolated and atomized, less than a third of the white-collar workers are organized in unions.¹¹ And indeed, why would they? After all, they have a job that they like and that best attends to their *capacities* and *personalities*.

Such a tragic misconception, an instance of the inverted world, is habitually represented in novels, as the opening of Kracauer's *The Salaried Masses* implies. The tasks of literature and philosophy, in Lefebvre view too, are not that different. In *The Critique of Everyday Life*, he writes:

Like the poets, philosophers are wavering between the familiar, the trivial, the 'inauthentic', and the anguishing, the mysterious - between bourgeois reality and mystical unreality - and are pushing human reality to one side.¹²

This passage implies that prose in addition to poetry, and sociological inquiry next to philosophy, are needed to repair the one-sided idealism of both poets and philosophers. Indeed, the preference for the novel as the superior literary genre comes also to the fore in the work of Lucien Goldmann,¹³ György Lukács,¹⁴ and Mikhail Bakhtin.¹⁵ They all hold that the novel is the aesthetic genre *par excellence* that reveals the complexity of social relations in modernity. The novelistic genre is the aesthetic and logical expression of totality, says Goldmann, since there is a correlation among book chapters and different characters, and between the parts and the whole. This relation between part and whole is for him,

¹⁰ Kracauer, *The Salaried Masses*, 88.

Based on the numbers in 2019, in the Netherlands, less than 20 percent of all workers are organized in unions, according to the CBS: <https://longreads.cbs.nl/nederland-in-cijfers-2020/welk-percentage-van-de-werknemers-is-lid-van-een-vakbond/>

¹¹ Kracauer, *The Salaried Masses*, 31.

¹² Lefebvre, *The Critique of Everyday Life*, 77.

¹³ Lucien Goldmann, *Towards a Sociology of the Novel* (trans. Alan Sheridan). London: Tavistock, 1975.

¹⁴ Lukacs, *The Theory of the Novel* (1988).

¹⁵ Mikhail Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination*, trans. Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981).

but also for Lukács, the distinctive feature of the novelistic genre. But, for the latter, that relationship is predominantly one of diremption; the particular individual struggles to find “authenticity” in the totality of a world that deems these values increasingly void.¹⁶ Moreover, with the concept of *homology*, Goldmann has postulated that there is a structural analogy between, on the one hand, the consciousness (self-understanding) of a class embedded in the totality of social relations, and the genre of the novel, on the other.¹⁷ Raymond Williams, however, criticizes the vulgar materialist equation between basic economic relations and their superstructural expressions in cultural artifacts. He indicates that the sociology of literature is determined by the interplay between the residual, emergent, and dominant elements in society.¹⁸ Since hegemonic elements in society are from time to time under attack, they make space for marginal and emergent new elements in culture, while being threatened by residual ones, radiating from the past. Cultural production is not a matter of reflection nor of a simple homology but one of mediation. Mediation, in contrast to the passive concept of reflection, denotes a much messier process in which several elements are in constant struggle with each other. Bakhtin identified this as the dialogical dimension, a feature, which he distinctively attributed to the novel. The novel, in his view, is an inherently heteroglossic genre, full of different dialects, sociolects (*skaz*), and everyday expressions that are constitutive of, and mediated by, the multiple social struggles in society.¹⁹ What those sociological approaches to literature have in common is that they perceive the novel as a genre whose aesthetic representations accommodate social struggle.

The multiplicity of elements that make up the totality of the novel, however, does not necessarily indicate a conjuncture of singularities. The depiction of different social types, elements, and discourses in the novel are not themselves referring to the particular psychology of the individual, at least, that is not their *termino ad quem*. The pre-Marxist Lukács defines the task of the novel as the

¹⁶ Lucien Goldmann, *Pour une sociologie du roman* (Paris: Gallimard 1986): 23

¹⁷ Lucien Goldmann, *Essays on Method in the Sociology of Literature*, trans. William Q. Boehlhower, (RaymondSt. Louis: Telos, 1980): 66.

¹⁸ Raymond Williams, *Marxism and Literature* (Oxford / New York: Oxford University Press, 1977): 121ff.

¹⁹ Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination*, 337.

depiction of the interplay between individual structure and physiognomy, rather than being a profound self-contemplation by the lonely and isolated personality. In doing so, he anticipates much of his later definition of ideology and class-consciousness. Bourgeois reifications, he indicates, are *subjectively* justifiable according to an individual interest. At the same time, they are advancing the realization of *objective* economic goals in society. The pursuit of those objective interests does not happen, however, through conscious deliberation on part of the individual. Such ignorance is part and parcel of the bourgeois consciousness that is distorted by commodity character, comprising isolation, disconnection, atomization, and above all, the *naturalization* of social relations. The novel, which on the one hand, is the expression of all these experienced fissures and rents in society, should, in Lukács' view, present the subjective particular as always mediated by the objective whole.

In sum, the social type as an aesthetic and ideal type in literature and sociology no longer refers to an individual character but to an ideal type or allegory that represents a structural economic function. As Marx indicates in the "Preface" to *Capital*: "individuals are dealt with only in so far they are the personifications of economic categories, embodiments of particular class relations and class interests."²⁰ That is, the moral and psychological outlook of individual actors did not interest him in the least.

For Marx, the disregard of psychology and practical philosophy was the condition of a scientific analysis of society liberated from moral prejudices, normativity, or philosophical obfuscations. In this way, *Capital* constitutes a break with classical political economy, which perceived society as the sum of atomized individuals who act consciously or intentionally, seeking to fulfill their own egoistic interests. In capitalist exchange, however, the particular individual (a human being or commodity) only exists in relation to others on the market. Individuals do not act consciously. They act before they reflect, Marx indicates, alluding to German classical modern literature: "'*Im Anfang war die That* [In the beginning there was the deed]." They therefore acted and transacted before they

²⁰ Marx quotes from Goethe's *Faust*. *Marx & Engels Collected Works*. Vol. 35 *Capital* I: 10

thought.”²¹ The quote from Goethe here serves to underscore that one must speak of thought forms as already realized social *practices*; not of thoughts preceding deeds, but of deeds as the objective but unconscious manifestations of such thoughts.

As a result of such unconscious acts, within the sphere of capitalist exchange, the individual is reduced to his economic function: individuals exist only as economic *dramatis personae* in action, such as “the buyer,” “the seller,” “the worker,” “the female white-collar worker,” “the female maquiladora worker,” “the gypsy,” “the stranger,” “the guest worker,” “the refugee,” and “the single mother.” The individual is the general, and so, the plural of person is not persons, but personnel.

2. Baroque Tragedies

The *dramatis personae*, mentioned by Marx, connect the aesthetic notion of social types to the theatrics of political economy. The social type is now nothing but the result of a dramatic role assigned to each individual. The idea of the human being as a role-playing actor has been the key definition of the *homo sociologicus*, and thus primarily emerges in a class society, as Ralf Dahrendorf²² has indicated. Though, the awareness that one is always acting and fulfilling a social role had already become commonplace in baroque society. Pedro Calderón de la Barca’s *autos sacramentales*,²³ *El gran teatro del mundo* [*The Great Theater of the World*] and *El gran mercado del mundo* [*The Great Market of the World*], written between 1630 and 1655, implement the allegory of the world stage for pedagogical purposes. The social types and economic functions in his plays, amongst others, are the King, the Poor Man, the Worker, the Child, and the *Pater Familias*.²⁴ Each is frozen and confined to his mask since his role has been decided and given to him by God. The dramatic origin of the word “person” already indicates that

²¹ *Ibid.* 97

²² Dahrendorf often substitutes the notion of class with role. As such he attempts to remain faithful to Marx’s notion of the “character-mask” which will be discussed in chapter 3 of this thesis (Ralf Dahrendorf, *Class and Class Conflict in Industrial Society* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1959): 177ff)

²³ *Corpus Christi* plays.

²⁴ Pedro Calderón de la Barca. *El gran teatro del mundo – El gran mercado del mundo* ed. Eugenio Frutos Cortés (Madrid: Cátedra, 2007).

individuals are defined by their masks. If the characters attempt to snatch off their masks, they will realize that they have torn down their faces too as they were stuck to their masks. In their attempt to rebel against their God-given roles, all the characters in Calderón's *The Great Theater of the World* eventually end up in hell—all but *two*: the Poor Man and the Pious Man. The Catholic-orthodox and stoic doctrine that lurks behind the dramatic action comes into view only through these two characters who do not rebel against their ascribed roles. All other characters are part of an inverted-perverted world, and the final judgment condemns them to damnation in the hereafter.²⁵ The plot constitutes a straightforward pedagogy to keep the impoverished city dwellers and workers in check since it decrees that one has to stick to one's role and social standing.

The appearance of the dramatic genre of *autos* is thus partially a response to popular upheavals during the rapidly changing society of the seventeenth century that increasingly became the order of the day. The baroque cities, writes José Antonio Maravall, “were in fact the site where the first symptoms of proletarianization took place.” At same time, they were also the location “where the professional activity of popular groups was represented in art; in their occupations, revolts and fiestas, [...] making evident that the baroque heavily relied on the presence of these groups.”²⁶ According to Bakhtin, Renaissance carnivals denaturalized the status quo and provoked a temporal obliteration of the dominant hierarchies, which could provide the conditions for a permanent overturn. In Maravall's view, the Baroque reacts to the increasingly uprooting tendencies of the Renaissance, but it does so in a contradictory way. Its message is conservative,²⁷ while implementing the most advanced techniques that show an insatiable desire for novelty.

²⁵ “The King,” however, is not sent to Hell since in baroque society that would probably have meant that Calderón had been sent to prison. Thus, the end of the play suggests that the character may eventually be rescued while having to dwell in Purgatory for a little.

²⁶ Maravall, *Culture of the Baroque*, 94.

²⁷ Frans-Willem Korsten, however, has corrected the hitherto reductive understanding of the Baroque as a conservative and decadent reaction to the crisis of absolutism in the context of Spain, France, and Germany. His study of the Dutch Republican Baroque presents a new perspective on baroque sensibility and politics; one that is not focused on the notion of sovereignty, and the centralization of power, but rather on its dispersal: (Frans-Willem Korsten, *A Dutch Republican Baroque* (2017))

The baroque notion of *theatrum mundi* is integrated into the geography of the city and produces the urban area as the site of a popular drama with its very own particular social types. Its plot, however, unfolds backwards. The more advanced the state of a society, the more the characters will be forced into the role of actors, and the more will they be catapulted back into a de-individualized mythic role. The characters largely lack self-consciousness, and their motivations, although not entirely absent, are not fully developed either. Freely acting and developed characters do not appear on the stage of the modern *theatrum mundi*. What is interesting in Maravall's study of the Baroque, in this regard, is a certain modern perception of artworks as vectors of ideology. In many ways, Maravall's *Culture of the Baroque* resembles Guy Debord's *Society of the Spectacle*. The notion of "*resorte*," which refers to a mechanical clutch spring, or a rebounding force, stands for the mechanical and disciplining determination of the human will through baroque spectacles. Akin to Debord's notion of the spectacle, which is of course the aesthetic manifestation of capital itself, baroque spectacle develops using sublime representations that force the spectator into a passive role, and overwhelm him with wonder, awe, and amazement. As such, baroque spectacle unfolds as a form of theatrical violence, which aims at disciplining the senses of its beholders through aesthetic experience.²⁸

The similarity to the work of Walter Benjamin is striking in this context. Maravall's book on the Baroque and Benjamin's "Artwork" essay both discuss the inclusion of the spectator into the theatrics of the artwork. Benjamin remarked

²⁸ Of course, Debord was rather skeptical about the over-usage of the term "baroque." His diagnosis of the baroque spectacle as the decisive historical moment through which art's independence at the same time inaugurates its decline, however, is consistent with the logic of belatedness and anticipation as described in this thesis. The Baroque is the art of change, the loss of a mythical order that announces the arrival of modernity. But, modernity's birth pangs have been mistaken as its death blows. What follows is art's individuation until it finds resolution in its fragmentation and demolition. In line with Eugenio D'Ors, Debord describes the Baroque as the unity of the peak and decline of art (Debord, *The Society of the Spectacle*, aphorism 189, 101-102). As Benjamin implies in the Artwork Essay, the modern sovereignty of art, as expressed by the motto *l'art pour l'art*, is the condition for its appropriation by fascism. An art that has emancipated itself from political content lends itself *par excellence* for the aestheticization of life and politics. Thus, according to Benjamin, the only opposition to fascism's "aestheticization of the political" must be the re-politicization of art. (Walter Benjamin, *Das Kunstwerk im Zeitalter seiner technischen Reproduzierbarkeit*. Frankfurt: Suhrkamp 2003: (7-44): 42 ["The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction." *Illuminations*, trans. Harry Zone (New York: Schocken Books, 2007): 242]).

that the fascist appropriation of modern techniques of representation (and reproduction) seeks to draw the masses into the artwork by muting them. Fascist art expresses the masses not by giving them an active role but by presenting them as mere adornment, architecture.²⁹ The fascist spectacle does not envision the emancipation of the working class since it does nothing to upset or question the existing property relations. What it aims at, according to Benjamin, is an "aestheticization of political life,"³⁰ and it produces a new social type, that of the mass man. These conclusions also inform Maravall's discussion of the baroque aesthetic *resortes*.

Benjamin finished his work about the Baroque in 1925. The notion of the "symbol," as opposed to "baroque allegory," is all too well reminiscent of the notions of "aura" and "myth" that, according to Benjamin, fascist artists successfully combined with the capitalist means of production. Just like Maravall, who wrote his work during the Francoist fascist-*falangist* era in Spain, Benjamin too was confronted with the emergence and establishment of fascist rule in 1925. Their works may thus be seen as direct reactions to the rise and rule of fascism. Hernán Vidal's argument goes in a similar direction when he indicates that Maravall's book most likely reckons with the glorious self-orchestration of the Falange in Spain.³¹ Such anachronistic readings of the Baroque are all the more tempting in light of passages like the following:

The baroque monarch made use of a large repertoire of means to succeed in dominating the tensions of adverse forces, this along with the novelty of some means, revealed who was constitutive of baroque culture. It includes all aspects from physical constraint, based on military force, which is the *ultima ratio* of political supremacy, to psychological expedients [*resortes*] that acted on consciousness and created within it a repressed psyche.³²

²⁹ The legacy of Siegfried Kracauer's notion of the "mass-ornament" is quite evident, here (Siegfried Kracauer, *The Mass Ornament – Weimar Essays*, trans. Thomas Y. Levin (Cambridge/Massachusetts/London: Harvard University Press, 1995): 75-88).

³⁰ Benjamin, *Das Kunstwerk im Zeitalter seiner technischen Reproduzierbarkeit*, 42.

³¹ "The term points to Maravall's arbitrary decision to apply the label "Baroque" to the crisis of empire administration. There must have been an ideological agenda in his choice. Maravall was too fine a social scientist to vaguely suggest that the "Baroque" was a "natural" excrement of repression. Was he trying to discredit the Francoist exaltation of the "Golden Age" as Spain's finest hour? (Hernán Vidal, "Aesthetic Categories as Empire Administration," *Hispanic Baroque—Reading Cultures in Context*, eds. Nicolas Spadaccini and Luis Martín Estudillo, *Hispanic Issues*, (Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press, 2005): 42.)

³² Maravall, *The Culture of the Baroque*, 36.

The mentioning of “physical constraint,” “military force” and “repressed psyche” may be read in correlation to more recent discussions of “micro-fascism” that is, not of historical fascism *per se* but rather of its general psychological structure.³³ Not least, *Culture of the Baroque* was published in the same year as Foucault’s *Discipline and Punish*, and discusses, in light of the vast emergence of the masses in urban areas, the rise of more effective and oblique forms of state violence, as opposed to direct corporal punishments. Be it as it may, the relation between the Baroque/ baroque, fascism, and the disciplining spectacle of the commodity in late capitalism goes beyond the scope of the present study and is only very loosely evoked here. The logic of the baroque, as a logic of spectacle that self-consciously draws the spectator into the dramatics of the artwork, is, however, a characteristic of both the Baroque and Modernism, resulting in anonymization and alienation as some of its primary effects.

Alienation as a central social experience, however, only appears in societies where capitalist modes of production have already become dominant. Henri Lefebvre points to the “universality” of the alienated man as a specific type of representation in *the* modern *mass* medium that comes to succeed the baroque tragedy, i.e. cinema. In his view, especially the films of Charlie Chaplin constitute an exposé of social types in advanced industrial capitalism. Chaplin assumes many roles: the worker, the petty-bourgeois, and the dictator. But, the image of protest, a “reversed image,” as Lefebvre calls it, is that of the “Tramp.” The Tramp or *lumpen* is the belated baroque *pícaro* who moves at the margins of society and links the ‘super-city’ with the ‘super-country,’ the core to the periphery. Members of the *lumpen-* or *subproletariat* perform a very specific social function since they act as the reserve army of unemployed workers, whose economic function is to depress wages, limit the working class’s scope, and maneuver in collective bargaining, to make sure that capital’s insatiable thirst for labor is never left high and dry. At the same time, the potential mode of resistance expressed in the Tramp, or *pícaro*, is the refusal to perform this task. Constantly redirecting,

³³ Michel Foucault, “Preface.” *Anti-Oedipus*, (authors, Gilles Deleuze & Félix Guatarri, trans. Robert Hurly et. al) (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003): xi-xiv.

failing, and sabotaging existing labor relations, the Tramp refuses to be integrated into a social function within the political economy.

The Tramp just like the seventeenth-century *pícaro* has a complex relationship with everyday life, attempting, but often failing, to cope with modernization. Herein, Chaplin and Don Quixote differ very little. The most everyday things, windmills in the countryside of La Mancha, or the furniture and stairs in an apartment, suddenly have become estranged, defamiliarized. Lefebvre indicates that this mechanism of estrangement constitutes the conditions of resistance. Suddenly, the mask becomes the stereotypical and estranged familiar image of what one is, while transcending it simultaneously. The reverse image that Lefebvre identifies in Chaplin's films exaggerates bourgeois culture, turning it into something tragicomical by recasting it as the opposite of what it is:

The waiter in a café is not playing at being a waiter. He *is* one. And he is not one. He is not selling his time (for working and living) in exchange for the waiter. And it is precisely when he is playing at being a waiter (and a virtuoso in the art of carrying overladen trays, etc.) in front of his customers that he is no longer a waiter; by playing himself he transcends himself. Moreover, it is certain that a worker does not play at being a worker and could not transcend himself if he did. He is completely 'that,' and at the same time he is completely other and something else: head of the family, or an individual eager to enjoy life, or a revolutionary militant. For him and within him, at his best moments and his worst, contradictions and alienations are at a maximum.³⁴

The social type is forced into his role, unable to tear off his mask without ripping off his face, but at the same time he is non-identical to that mask, never entirely coinciding with his role. Thus, also Simmel writes:

We know of the bureaucrat that he is not only a bureaucrat, of the businessman that he is not only a businessman, of the officer that he is not only an officer. This extrasocial nature—a man's temperament, fate, interests, worth as a personality—gives a certain nuance to the picture formed by all who meet him."³⁵

For Simmel and Lefebvre precisely this non-coincidence produces man's alienation.

The non-reducibility of the face to the mask creates not only a moment of being exogenous to society but also of being out of time. The film *Modern Times* (1936) constitutes such an untimely meditation and functions as a prototype of belatedness. The motion picture arrives blatantly too late on the big screen.

³⁴ Lefebvre, *Critique of Everyday Life*, 15.

³⁵ Simmel, *On Individuality and Social Forms*, 13

Chaplin made a silent film at a moment when sound films had already become hegemonic.³⁶ Yet, this belated arrival ironically anticipates the future development of the surveillance society, of video calls and surveillance cameras. Another example of belatedness that is anticipatory at the same time, is E.T.A. Hoffmann's *The Devil's Elixirs*, a picaresque novel written between 1815 and 1816. The belated baroque novel's narrative technique already anticipates, in many ways, the technique of montage, typical of Eisenstein's cinema, as well as modern literary Surrealism. The preference for fragmentation, diremption, and ruins, all untimely remainders of the past, is precisely what Benjamin highlighted as the essence of baroque allegory and tragedy, and, therefore, as the core of belated baroque aesthetics.

For Benjamin, the complex temporal coincidence of belatedness and anticipation has clear political consequences. The political Baroque inaugurates the decline of the aristocracy and the emergence of the bourgeoisie. Therefore, there is certain untimeliness about the nobility's remaining values that they themselves deemed timeless. Don Quixote is here, merely, an ironic example of this adherence to timelessness. In the spasmodic attempt to hold on to these remnants, these untimely values can only be resurrected as *mythic* rem(a)inders, that is, as fragments incompatible with a rapidly changing society. As a consequence, Benjamin identifies two separate dramatic genres, the so-called martyr-tragedy, and the tyrant-tragedy, that in the Baroque merge into one drama. "*Tyrann und Märtyrer sind im Barock die Janushäupter des Gekrönten. Sie sind notwendig extreme Ausprägungen des fürstlichen Wesens* [In the baroque the tyrant and the martyr are but two faces of the monarch. They are necessarily the extreme incarnations of the princely essence]."³⁷ For Benjamin, the baroque social types *par excellence* are the sovereign and the martyr. While the tyrants are coping with the sociopolitical developments at the edge of an already *ruined* feudalism, they produce a sort of theater of the political, a spectacle of power,

³⁶ Of course, the film does use synchronized sound effects. Those effects, however, represent the *inhumane* in *Modern Times*. Only the commanding voices of Capital: the factory owner, the radio, and video-screens produce tone, the all other characters and protagonists remain silent.

³⁷ Benjamin, *Ursprung des deutschen Trauerspiels*, 51; Walter Benjamin, *Origin of the German Trauerspiel*, trans. Howard Eiland (Cambridge, Massachusetts/London: Harvard University Press, 2019): 69.

which, in Benjamin's view, in contrast to antique tragedy, catapults its *dramatis personae* onto the stage of history. The untimely tyrants and martyrs, unable to actualize the modern concept of autonomy or sovereignty, transform their suffering into an electrifying drama. In doing so, they aesthetically stage their own demise and resurrect the auratic remainders in an already modern and presumably differentiated society. Tyrant and martyr are not just two separated and opposed characters, neither are they simply the janiform aspect of the crowned head. Rather, they are the dual aspect of modern consciousness, an unhappy consciousness, because it is a dirempted consciousness.

Of course, it does not require complex guesswork skills to discover that Benjamin's Sovereign and Martyr function in a similar way to Hegel's Master and Slave. The two types are united and separated at the same time. Just like the white-collar worker who eventually has to internalize the command to which she answers, the antagonism of Sovereign and Martyr, Master and Slave, is in late capitalism an immanent one. The external master becomes redundant and can be dismissed. Once the master is killed or dismissed, the slave keeps working under the dictate of accumulation and wage labor because he has internalized the master. If for Benjamin, the Baroque sublates this opposition between Sovereign and Martyr, this means nothing but that he, as well, in a quite Hegelian fashion, has produced an aesthetic transfiguration of the transition from consciousness to self-consciousness, that is, from transcendence to immanence.

In contrast to their own self-understanding, the modern co-acting agents who are now acting without the commands of the master are not the free and developed characters they pretend to be. This is the specific false consciousness that emerges only in capitalism. In capitalism, subordination *appears* as freedom. In the background, the tunes of Radio, "free-choice/free-wage-labor/free-market/free-elections," make sure that these signals are sent persistently. Freedom rules without alternative. After all, what is at stake in free elections are never the institutions of capital themselves but only their specific representative staff members. No one questions the accuracy of capitalist social and economic relations concerning human development itself but only the suitability of their individual caretakers. Not least, one has learned that the mind and the body are

free. Free wage labor offers the worker the *choice* to freely sell his labor power (his body and mind), but at the same time, he has no other alternative than to do so.

Sooner or later, so much freedom must lead to skepticism. In the inverted world of capitalism, coercion appears as emancipation. Here, Adorno and Horkheimer do not beat about the bush. They define the social role of the modern individual as that of a “*Zwangskonsumenten* [coerced consumer]”³⁸ who acts in the mode of “*Zwangsscharakter der Selbsterhaltung* [enforced self-preservation]”³⁹ in a “*kollektiver Zwangsmechanismus* [collective mechanism of coercion].”⁴⁰ Precisely because capital does not appear as an *immediate* form of domination and subjugation, but as an arena or *stage* that produces and enables an actor’s free identity and choice, these relations are not experienced by the modern subject as something alien(ating). Contrariwise, on the capitalist world stage, the actor perceives himself all the more like the fully individualized subject, who makes his own free choices. But of course, he is free only *as long as*, and only *to the extent that*, he does not hear the chain of his shackle rattling. This is what aesthetic representation makes palpable. In modern gothic literature, cellars and dungeons are untimely commonplaces of the modern grotesque universe, making visible what hitherto has not been seen: that the individual is a prisoner, and nothing more than the appendix of economic laws. Inverted consciousness in capitalism consists of this misrecognition that individuals freely choose their roles and are *morally* responsible actors. But capital’s functions are beyond good and evil. Here, Foucault’s argument is similar to Adorno’s: the subject is “subjected” or individuated because the modern capitalist institutions require “subjects” or “individuals” to be able to *function*. But this also means that the modern subject is no more than a function of capitalist production processes and its institutions.

Containing both a tragical and comical aspect, today’s inverted world consists of the fact that, for the worker, capital is not the conceived opponent but the exclusive source of acquisition. The image of an exploited collective labor force

³⁸ Max Horkheimer und Theodor W. Adorno, *Dialektik der Aufklärung*. Fischer: Frankfurt, 2010: 457.

³⁹ *Ibid*, 83.

⁴⁰ Theodor W. Adorno, *Soziologische Schriften I, GS 8* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1996): 12-13.

has been exchanged for the self-image of free individuals, who are flexible, fluid, deterritorialized, and always available even for more than one day-job, or several sidelines, alternated by periods of unemployment. These characters accept their current place in society, which for some may appear as the natural course of the universe, and for others as a dead-end. Once upon a time, the Left-Hegelian tradition indicated that the conditions of possibility for emancipation are to be found at the heart of capitalist relations themselves, right in the midst of the circumstances of man's enslavement. Today, the modern individual, however, recognizes "enslavement" and "exploitation" only from museum exhibitions and critically rewritten history books.

3. Baroque Strategies

The previously discussed Marxist notion of *dramatis personae* once transposed into the context of the New World creates new types and economic functions. In *Cuban Counterpoint*, the anthropologist Fernando Ortiz compiled a "theatrical" script of the Cuban political economy, while highlighting the origin and development of its economic and cultural contradictions. These dichotomies give birth to two new and specifically Cuban economico-dramatic characters. The personifications of capital in Cuba are *Doña Azúcar* [Madam Sugar], on the one hand, and *Don Tabaco* [Mister Tobacco], on the other. The former represents foreign and international capital, and the latter local mulatto and black anti-capitalist craftsmanship. Ortiz examines these opposites to prove that Bronisław Malinowski's functionalist anthropological term, "*acculturation*," is an ideological one. The notion of acculturation, in Ortiz's view, leaves little room for the multilateral determination of different cultural elements in society because it only emphasizes the idea of one-sided assimilation of the substratum by the superstratum. "Transculturation," Ortiz's corrective counterpart to Malinowski's term, is the synthesis of "deculturation" and "acculturation," "exculturation" and "inculturation." As such, it is a neo-baroque phenomenon that identifies different cultural and temporal layers, covering up some and uncovering others. It forges those layers not simply as multiplicity but as a struggle of opposites, that is, as "*counterpoints*."

The analysis of the *Cuban Counterpoint* focuses on the antagonism between tobacco and sugar. After the independence of Haiti, sugar plantations and sugar mills are being sited in Cuba. The sugar industry introduces capitalist modes of production to the island; first, in the form of slavery, and later in the form of wage labor. “Sugar” comes to symbolize foreign, *white*, capital that will hold the West Indian island hostage for decades to come. “Mechanization, latifundism, sharecropping, wage-fixing, super-capitalism, absentee landlordism, foreign ownership, corporate control and imperialism,”⁴¹ are the consequences of the entrance into the stage of the world market, by which the workers are catapulted into a state of slavery and serfdom, bound to the plantations and landlords for which they work. As a consequence, the principles of feudalist landownership of the comprador and latifundia bourgeoisie are “belatedly” (re)introduced to wage labor.

According to Ortiz, the origin of the tobacco industry in Cuba represents the opposite. The production of tobacco in Cuba has its roots in black and brown free and skilled labor. Not only is the tobacco industry without machinery, limited to smaller land and with a few skilled hands picking and rolling it, but also, tobacco is a vernacular product of the indigenous land. The oppositions are clear: “[i]n the history of Cuba sugar represents Spanish absolutism; tobacco, the native liberators.”⁴² Transculturation, rather than implying the submission of domestic culture to the foreign one, denotes their unity in opposition. Tobacco and sugar belong to Cuba like hurricanes and water. This does not imply an unchanging dominance into which marginal elements are assimilated, but rather a dynamic hegemony, which, using the words of Williams, is constantly under attack by residual and emergent cultural elements that expose dominant constellations as vulnerable. The residual elements of the tobacco industry remind us that capitalist sugar production cannot subdue and 'white-wash' the Cuban political economy without the radiating threat of past indigenous and black traditions. Counterpoint is the *locus* where different temporal and cultural elements – residual, dominant, and emergent – are put into contact, where the decline and emergence of one thing

⁴¹ Ortiz, *Cuban Counterpoint*, 51.

⁴² *Ibid*, 71.

fuse into another. Thus, Ortiz argues for a union of opposites, the marriage of *Don Tabaco* and *Doña Azúcar*. Both are the undeniable constituents of Cuban modernity that cannot be eradicated from the social and economic reality of the island.

Ortiz's ethnographic model of transculturation is one of the forerunning ideas of cultural hybridization, a key concept in postcolonial studies. In the Latin American context, the term "*mestizaje*" has been commonly used to describe the presence of cultural and racial mixing. The anti-racial implementation of the term was already present in Ortiz, however. But the idea of cultural mingling has also been emphasized by Alejo Carpentier, who saw it as a distinctive feature of the baroque and as a tendency that seriously upsets any neat classification of literary and cultural material into epochal styles as historical stages, especially, but not exclusively, in Latin America. Establishing the linearity of time in the colonial context is fruitless, not least because colonizers interrupted the domestic development of space and time in the conquered territories. As a result, Latin American *chronotopoi* are necessarily heterotopic, that is to say, they present an accumulation of different styles, experiences, and times. Latin America is "baroque" precisely because its continents constitute every possible symbiosis, i.e. *mestizaje*, of different styles, peoples, times, cultures, and ideas. For Carpentier, *mestizaje* is that which defines the transnational, global, scale of the baroque. He insists that every age has known its own concept of the baroque⁴³ insofar as culture is necessarily transhistorical and transterritorial. Moreover, Carpentier attributed to the baroque the feature of completing an era [*culminación*], and at the same time foreboding [*premonición*] a new one.⁴⁴ Following Eugenio d'Ors, who defined the baroque as a historical force (*éon*) that relentlessly returns, he writes:

⁴³ Carpentier's use of "baroque" bears some similarity to the usage of the term "modernity" in Baudelaire's essay on Constantin Guys: "By 'modernity' I mean the ephemeral, the fugitive, the contingent, the half of art, whose other half is the eternal and the immutable. Every old master has had his own modernity; the great majority of fine portraits that have come down to us from former generations are clothed in the costume of their own period" (Charles Baudelaire. *The Painter and Modern Life and Other Essays*, trans. Jonathan Mayne (London / New York: Phaidon, 1995): 13.

⁴⁴ "Por lo tanto el barroquismo siempre está proyectando hacia adelante y suele presentarse precisamente en expansión en el momento culminante de una civilización o cuando va a nacer un orden nuevo en la sociedad. Puede ser culminación como puede ser premonición" (Alejo Carpentier,

*Hay un eterno retorno de un espíritu imperial en la historia, como hay un eterno retorno del barroquismo a través de los tiempos en las manifestaciones del arte; y ese barroquismo, lejos de significar decadencia, ha marcado a veces la culminación, la máxima expresión, el momento de mayor riqueza, de una civilización determinada.*⁴⁵

There is an eternal return to the imperial spirit, historically speaking, just as there is an eternal return of the baroque style in art through the ages; and this baroque style, far from signifying decadence, has at times represented the culmination, the maximum expression, and richest moment of a given civilization (My translation, E.E.).

Subsequently, Carpentier goes as far as to say that Rabelais was already baroque. Passages like this insinuate that the baroque is a transcendental category of History that manifests itself through civilizational pinnacles, almost like a world spirit who touches soil at a given age and place.

A similar idea is expressed by Irlemar Chiampi. She suggests that Carpentier's notion of the baroque reacts to, but also reproduces the logic of Hegel's "Lectures on the History of Philosophy,"⁴⁶ a racist study that excludes Latin America from the "cunning" course of reason in History. In Hegel's mind, Latin America, like Africa, is the virgin land that is not ready for self-conscious liberation. Carpentier's latent Hegelian and Herderian tone produces, in Chiampi's view, an ambiguous Eurocentrism insofar as it takes European Enlightenment ideals as the central categories and measures for civilizational progress. Conversely, one could of course say that it is also the denial of Eurocentrism insofar as it indicates that Europe is not the sole possessor of that same civilizational development. Be it as it may, the problem of perceiving the baroque as a category of historical progression, be it a transcendental linear, or a cyclical one will be discussed in the next and the last chapter. Suffice it to say here that this study does not perceive the baroque as a sort of "cunning" of reason in History, nor as a fated eternal return. If previously the unity of belatedness and anticipation was discussed as an essential feature of the belated baroque, this

Lo barroco y lo real maravilloso," *Obras completas de Alejo Carpentier. Vol. 13, Ensayos.* (México, D.F.: Siglo Veintiuno Editores, 1990): 344) [Therefore, the baroque style is always projecting forward and tends to emerge in the span of the culminating moment of a civilization, or when a new order in society comes into being. It could be culmination as much as premonition" (My translation, E.E.)].

⁴⁵*Ibid*, 335.

⁴⁶ Cf. "La historia tejida por la imagen," José Lezama Lima, *La Expresión Americana*, (eds. Irlemar Chiampi), 9-33; *Barroco y modernidad*. 25ff

means that this temporal contradiction is immanent to its very own manifestation alone. There is no overarching historical plan, no "mastermind," that has traced a historical path for the manifestation of individual aspects of the belated baroque. If anything, the belated baroque is a subjective mode of appearance that has attained objective validity in a given society dominated by capitalist relations. or Prior or external to this social context, the belated baroque does not exist. It is just the immanent *result* of those social relations; not something that organizes these relations transcendentally, as appears to be the case in Carpentier.

Perhaps for good reasons then, there are a few Cuban intellectuals who despise Carpentier's interpretation of the baroque. The wish to constitute a link or a moment, small as it may be, in an overall historical development is rather a submissive gesture. After all, one deduces one's own importance from the grandeur of something larger and more significant than oneself. Alternatively, *mestizaje* comes to stand in the light of a profound anti-globalism. Now *mestizaje* is no longer a transnational concept of *all* times and cultures but an exclusively Latin American possession that highlights its difference and independence from European and global values. The baroque, then, becomes an "American expression," as the poet and essayist José Lezama Lima indicated. What is more, for Lezama Lima the neo-baroque is the culture of the "*contraconquista* [Counter-Conquest],"⁴⁷ which is to say, a resisting Latin-American version of the baroque that seeks to contest the imperial culture of the Europeans. As the political context of the 1960s will make clear, the neo-baroque is also an antirevolutionary and reactionary gesture that opposes the universalizing claims of the Cuban Revolution.

Within these *neo-baroque* intellectual circles, the assumption of the baroque being a historical force that returns, quite literally, plunges into an abysmal black hole. For Severo Sarduy, the baroque excess of cultural forms and expressions is metaphorically born from nothingness, a creative void that conceptually aligns itself with Lacan, on the one hand, and Taoism, on the other.

⁴⁷ As opposed to the idea that the European Baroque is the culture of the Counter-Reformation, Lezama Lima says that the Latin America Baroque is the art of the Counter-Conquest ["el barroco fue una arte de la contraconquista"] (Lezama Lima, *La expression Americana*, 80).

In this Cuban orientalist view, the baroque is the result of a poetic “big bang,” an explosion that comes out of emptiness, which is to say, the baroque emerges unconditioned by anything other than itself. The metaphor attempts to undermine any definition of the baroque as a historical and metaphysical force. While logically speaking, nothingness cannot create something, the big bang metaphor is aimed at indicating that the baroque has neither a metaphysical *telos* nor an *arché*. The baroque’s influence is rather one of dispersal without beginning or end. It has no intelligible center, or to put it in Lacanian terms, its center is a lack.

What remains stable in Sarduy's approach to the neo-baroque, however, is the idea of cultural mixing, which is further developed into the concept of cultural cross-dressing or transvestism. This concerns the trespassing of cultural borders, Oriental, European, and Caribbean, as well as gender borders. What the concept of cultural cross-dressing, nonetheless, makes palpable, more than merely the breakdown of borders, is the artificiality of the practice of transvestism. Authenticity, or "authentic existence" is an outdated form of cultural *Dasein*. Drag queens, just like baroque castratos, are performers that forge forms beyond the immediately given cultural and natural arrangements. The boundaries and features of nature, as Simmel would have said, are in the cultural process – cultivation - extended beyond their immediately given capacities. But for Sarduy, the opposite is also true: nature is already artificial, and therefore, the baroque “naturalizes” the artificial. The transcultural layers that had been identified as the crux of the Latin American belated baroque are now like physical layers, a reptile’s skin that can be shed off as it grows and accumulates.

Those baroque features of accumulation and exaltation call for a praxis of reading or deciphering these layers differently. Like in the case of the logic of nesting Russian dolls, the reader of transcultural processes must always be prepared to find yet another layer, or frame of reference, underneath the previous one. Sarduy bases his practice of *reading otherwise* on the baroque technique of anamorphosis. Holbein’s painting, *The Ambassadors*, as discussed by Lacan in his *Lectures Series XI*⁴⁸ constitutes a prime example of reading distortions and of

⁴⁸ Jacques Lacan, *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis – The Seminar of Jacques Lacan Book XI*, trans Alan Sheridan (New York/ London: W.W. Norton & Company, 1998): 79-90.

distorted reading. Anamorphosis plays not only with nestling but also with contortion. It warps and deforms the image of representation into something undecipherable, to hide secret elements that cannot be easily unpacked unless the beholder leaves his central spot in front of the painting. Shifting his vantage point, he has to take a marginal or “picaresque” position, which is to say, he has to adopt the perspective of the outsider. Anamorphosis produces a staggering experience of disorientation and reorientation, baroque diffusion, and rational mathematical encoding. Its procedure is one of many temporal leaps and spatial shifts.

This belated baroque technique anticipates the modernist aesthetic traditions of the grotesque. The character Max Estrella in the play *Luces de Bohemia* (1924) relates the technique of anamorphic distortion to the innovations of modernist Spanish Theater, which its creator Valle-Inclán has summarized under the noun “*Esperpento*.” The character Max explains the “*esperpentic*” procedure in the following way:

Los héroes clásicos reflejados en los espejos cóncavos dan el Esperpento. El sentido trágico de la vida española solo se puede darse con una estética sistemáticamente deformada. [...] La deformación deja de serlo cuando está sujeta a una matemática perfecta. Mi estética actual es transformar con matemática de espejo cóncavo las normas clásicas.⁴⁹

Classical heroes reflected in concave mirrors yield the *Esperpento*. The tragic sentiment of Spanish life can only be rendered through systematically deformed aesthetics. [...] Deformation ends when being subjected to perfect mathematics. My current aesthetics is to transform the classical norms by utilizing the mathematics of the concave mirror (My translation, E.E.).

Max indicates that, in modernity, dramatic heroes do not deserve more than tragic comedy. Their arrival on the stage has something “*ubuesque*,” as Alfred Jarry would say. Before they emerge on stage, according to Max, the classical heroes have to pass through the *Callejón del Gato*, an ally in *Puerta del Sol*, a shanty neighborhood in the center of Madrid, famous during the *fin de siècle* for its nightlife and concave mirrors. Here, the belated baroque of Spanish modernist theatre anticipates the tragicomic fate of the avant-garde poet, of the character Max Estrella himself, who is an outcast, or a *bohémien*. He knows that he is no

⁴⁹ Ramón del Valle-Inclán, *Luces de Bohemia – Esperpento*, ed. Alonso Zamora Vicente (Madrid: Espasa Calpe, 1970): 140-141

more than a laughable figure. He does not feel at home in the rapidly changing world. His presence begets an example of being out-of-time, condemned to oblivion.

To summarize, belated baroque strategies consist of a mode of presentation that personifies material and substantial social contradictions. It identifies those oppositions as "counterpoints." These counterpoints give the baroque the features of belatedness and anticipation but are not themselves moments of transcendental historical development. The interpretation of the complex of social relations in modernity requires the adopting of a transcultural lens: the awareness of cultural mixing and class fractions. The individual is never entirely identical to his mask: his cultural identity and social class. The awareness of the individual's non-coincidence with dominant economic and cultural values produces an alienating aesthetics that is both liberating and tragic at the same time. The aesthetic of the reverse image exaggerates a specific social type up to the point that the character emancipates itself from its stereotype and shifts into its opposite. As a particular aesthetic of alienation, the reverse image is part and parcel of both belated baroque strategies of representation and the inverted world. Next to the reverse image, there is anamorphic distortion, which, unlike the reverse image, does not exaggerate what was previously overlooked but hides what hitherto appeared as ubiquitously present. Only by taking a marginal position, that of the *pícaro*, the hidden substance of social relations may be perceived.

Last but not least, the baroque strategies of the reverse image and the inverted world also beg for a reading approach that turns concepts and their creators immediately against themselves. One final example will illustrate what this mode of reading-otherwise means more concretely. As implied before, the Hegelian-Marxist reading of the baroque in this thesis is somewhat unusual. Marx and Hegel were not outspoken admirers of baroque aesthetics. In Hegel's case, even the opposite is true.⁵⁰ In his *Lectures on Aesthetics*, he expresses nothing but contempt for romantic irony, which he identifies as a neo-baroque aesthetics. Amongst other examples of "romantic irony," he identifies the specifically the

⁵⁰ Hegel was, however, a great admirer of Dutch seventeenth-century painting, which he appreciated predominantly for its turn to everyday life and taste for realism. However, his discussion of Dutch Baroque painting is quite minimal in comparison to his discussion of Goethe, Sophocles, or Shakespeare, for example.

literary fantastic with a “*barocke Zusammenstellung von Gegenständen, welche zusammenhangslos auseinanderliegen und deren Beziehungen [...] sich kaum entziffern lassen* [baroque composition of objects that are disconnected and whose mutual relations can hardly be deciphered (My translation, E.E.)].”⁵¹ This means that in Hegel’s view, neither the Baroque nor literary modernism are successful representations of social totality as an “organic” whole. “Contingent composition” means that the totality represented is a *mechanical* one. Its relation between parts and whole is not commanded by inner organic necessity like body organs relate to the whole of the body, for example, but as something that Hegel calls “bad infinity”⁵²—an infinite totality of endlessly accumulating exogenous parts. While Hegel was right to define the fragmentation of modern aesthetics as “baroque,” he was wrong, however, in dismissing it as a pejorative aesthetic procedure, incapable of accurately capturing modern society. We have no other choice than to turn Hegel against Hegel, then. Needless to say, this is far from being the first attempt at turning Hegel upside down.

Next to the more famous attempts of Marx and Engels, Alejo Carpentier reads Hegel against Hegel in *The Lectures of the Philosophy of History*. Aesthetically, Carpentier attempts to overturn Hegel as well, and deliberately or not, contests his reading of the baroque. Like Hegel, Carpentier associates the artificial, and therefore, *mechanical*, part-whole relation with a degraded form of aesthetic imagination. But, unlike Hegel, he identifies baroque aesthetics with the opposite of such mechanical and artificial compositions. Rather the baroque becomes the organic unity of different cultural and temporal elements that represent Latin American totality. Contingency and artificiality, in turn, are associated with the style of Surrealism, which stands in stark opposition to Carpentier’s own concept of the Marvelous-Real. Surrealism only produces marvelous elements through conjuring tricks. In Carpentier’s view, surrealism creates artificial compositions and brings objects into unlikely and contingent juxtapositions: “the umbrella and the sewing machine on an operating table,

⁵¹ G.W.F. Hegel, *Vorlesungen über Ästhetik I, Werke 13* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1986): 386.

⁵² G.W.F. *Enzyklopädie der philosophischen Wissenschaften im Grundrisse I. Werke 8*. §94: (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1986): §94: 199.

which spawned the ermine spoons, snails in a rainy taxi, and the lion's head in a widow's pelvis."⁵³ The quote, which refers to the work of Lautrémont and Salvador Dalí, evokes mechanical arrangements in the style of the "bureaucrat" who has lost all wonder and amazement for the real and everyday reality. Similarly, Lefebvre indicated that Surrealists despise ordinary everyday relations, which they constantly have to spice up with the "bizarre."⁵⁴ For him too, the relation between everyday life and the extraordinary should not be stilted or haphazard. He defines the bourgeois consciousness of the Surrealists as vulgar. "Vulgarity," in Lefebvre's view, is the incapacity of pronouncing the real without quotation marks.⁵⁵

But perhaps Hegel, Carpentier, and Lefebvre are too quick in dismissing the "artificial" as a merely bizarre aspect that undermines everyday social life rather than making it visible. Carpentier even excludes the gothic novel as a genre that deals with the marvelous-real aspects of our modern world. Monks, buried behind walls and turned into ghostly priests, reveal nothing about the existence of the modern individual. But such a claim can only be made if the metaphor is taken literally. Specters, ghosts, and haunted objects are not simply the otherworldly strangers that haphazardly invade the natural everyday environment from the outside. Quite the contrary, they emerge immanently from the deformations of bourgeois consciousness, which takes the phantasmagoria of capital as something natural and real in itself. After all, it was no one less than Marx who enthusiastically implemented the supernatural as a metaphor for economic processes and social relations. He had borrowed these metaphors from horror literature, religious tales, and superstition. The imaginative power of the artificial, of fantasy, as Herbert Marcuse has argued, bears the potential of the "Great Refusal" insofar as it rebels against the reality principle of capitalist realism. Fantasy refuses to accept the limits imposed by capitalism on freedom

⁵³ Alejo Carpentier, "On the Marvelous Real in America," *Magical Realism – Theory, History, Community*, ed. Lois Parkinson Zamora and Wendy B. Faris (Durham/ London, Duke University Press, 1995): 85.

⁵⁴ Lefebvre, *Critique of Everyday Life*, 107

⁵⁵ Henri Lefebvre, *Critique of Everyday Life- From Modernity to Modernism, Vol. 3.* (London/ New York: Verso, 2005): 73-76.

and imagination.⁵⁶ As such, Marcuse indicates, fantastic imagination bears a utopian dimension. Later, Mark Fisher indicates that what he calls "capitalist realism" consists of the persistent elimination of imagining any coherent alternative to capitalist society.⁵⁷ Fantasy, in this regard, may precisely be the melancholic acknowledgment of this incapacity.

4. *Inverted worlds*

For Marx, specters and vampires do not simply emerge in opposition to capitalism and everyday life but as a result of it. As abstract forms stemming from fetishization, they are derived from the quasi-religious belief in the power of images. In capitalism, people have created their own totemic imagery, which they perceive as an alien power that holds society in sway and over which they have no control. As if confronted with the images of saints, (neo)classical economists and capitalists have passively delivered themselves to the laws of the market that they, in turn, mutually impose upon others. One of the more famous examples, here, is Adam Smith's belief that market mechanisms are effects of divine providence. Joseph Vogl described this unbroken faith in the authority of capital as *oikodicy*. For bourgeois consciousness, *oikodicy* appears as the proof that capitalism is indeed the best of all possible worlds, despite its fluctuations and crises.⁵⁸

The belief in capital as a supernatural power comes most evidently to the fore in Marx's Chapter on the "Trinity Formula" (*Capital 3*) which describes the interaction of the values of capital, land, and labor. Here, Marx indicates that bourgeois society is held together by nothing but an irrational faith that conjures an uncanny inverted world:

In capital–profit, or still better capital–interest, land–rent, labour–wages, in this economic trinity represented as the connection between the component parts of value and wealth in general and its sources, we have the complete mystification of the capitalist mode of production, the conversion of social relations with their historical and social

⁵⁶ Herbert Marcuse, *Eros and Civilization- A Philosophical Inquiry to Freud* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1966): 149.

⁵⁷ Mark Fischer, *Capitalist Realism. Is There No Alternative?* (Winchester/ Washington: Zero Books, 2009): 3.

⁵⁸ Joseph Vogl, *The Specter of Capital*, trans, Joachim Redner (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2015): 14.

determination. It is an enchanted, perverted, topsy-turvy world, in which *Monsieur le Capital* and *Madame la Terre* do their ghost-walking as social characters and at the same time directly as mere things. It is the great merit of classical economy to have destroyed this false appearance and illusion, this mutual independence and ossification of the various social elements of wealth, this personification of things and conversion of production relations into entities, this religion of everyday life.⁵⁹

It seems likely that Fernando Ortiz has drawn his inspiration for the personifications of *Don Tabaco* and *Doña Azúcar* in *Cuban Counterpoint* from this passage. For Marx, the description of capital as a stage for apparitions shows that we are dealing with a realm haunted by fantastic personifications of abstract goals that rule the individual interests of persons. Those individuals, in turn, are subject to reification and de-personification and have become subsumed under such dead abstractions. As a result, capitalist modernity creates its own horrific, half-animated, dead-like creatures in a fantastic universe that is no longer inhabited by individuals made of flesh and bones, but by functions and modes, revenants, zombies, and vampires. “Capital is dead labour, that, vampire-like, only lives by sucking living labour, and lives the more, the more labour it sucks,” writes Marx,⁶⁰ indicating that in the universe of production, labor, and circulation, one is no longer confronted with the laws of nature and reason but with irrational chimeras that make up capital’s “phantom-like” objectivity.

The aim of this section is, however, not only to indicate that capitalism is a perverted-inverted fantastic world but also to show *why* and *how* the inverted world emerges as a formal contradiction in thought, which is also realized as a social practice. This is as much an epistemological as a socially ontological question. Marx’s analysis of capital, so this section argues, implements Hegel’s concept of the inverted world to show that the world of capital is dominated by abstract obfuscations, akin to those of classic physicists and metaphysicians. In Hegel’s discussion of the inverted world, physicists err to the extent that they implement a vulgar materialism that petrifies the world of changing phenomena. Metaphysicians mystify social relations utilizing a crude idealism. Marx follows

⁵⁹ *Marx*, Capital Volume 3, 969.

⁶⁰ *Marx & Engels Collected Works*, Vol 35, 241.

suit and shows that naturalization and mystification are both aspects of reified consciousness in capitalist society.

Like Hegel did in *The Phenomenology of Spirit*, Marx begins the first chapter of *Capital* with the immediacy of “sense-certainty.” For Hegel “sense-certainty” is the first and simplest shape of “consciousness,” which grasps the object in its pure immediacy. It seeks to find the essence of a thing exclusively in the object itself. Step by step, “consciousness” understands that the appearance of the essence of the object is mediated by something other than itself. Thus, Marx begins *capital* with the immediate appearance of wealth in capitalist societies. The first and the most common unreflected object is the commodity. The rest of the investigation consists of the search for what lies hidden beyond the immediate sense-certainty of the commodity, i.e. its value, owners, and producers. What is invisible behind the immediate appearance of the commodity is not a stable *eidos*, like traditional metaphysics would have it, but rather the social relations that *mediate* it. If essence is mediated and relational, then certainly it cannot possess any stable and self-sufficient quality. Capital gives the lie to such metaphysical chimeras. Marx, just as Hegel before him, indicates that essence resides neither in the object itself, nor in the subjective idea, but in the objective thought-form that mediates, or produces, the actual object and its idea. An inverted world occurs when the thought-form in question is reduced to either of its one-sided appearances, as each side is the inversed side of the other. For example, the "crude materialism" of vulgar economists "who regard as the natural properties of things what are social relations," is just as much an inverted world, as their crude idealism which "imputes social relations to things as inherent characteristics, and thus mystifies them."⁶¹

Abstract labor, reified into a commodity, is evidently an abstraction, but it acquires concrete realization in and through the worker’s monotonous activities in the labor process. The value-form of labor stands in the same inversed relation to individual labor, as does exchange-value to use-value, which is to say, these are relations of abstractions. At the same time, abstractions, or objective thought-

⁶¹ Karl Marx, *Grundrisse: Foundations of the Critique of the Political Economy*, trans. Martin Nicolaus (New York: Penguin, 1973): 74.

forms, are *real* individual functions that are put into social practice in capitalism. Thus, the abstraction of individual labor procures the alienation of *real* labor. Labor is then no longer perceived as the result of the worker's own activity but as something that stands in an inverse and independent relation to him. Therefore, Marx shows that capital is the domination of abstraction over life and its social everyday activities.

But before Marx, Hegel already criticized abstractions. He defined abstract thinking as the ability to see in the murderer nothing but the abstract fact of murder.⁶² Abstract thinking is a form of immediate thought, then. It abstracts or separates the object from its mediating context. However, even though abstract thinking is simplistic and inevitably incomplete, it is for both Hegel and Marx, the necessary point of departure and first step in the development of scientific understanding. But if thinking stops short in abstractions, it will eventually conjure an inverted world, because abstraction only allows unilateral and unreflected thought.

While in Marx, the first object under scrutiny is the commodity, in the section "Force and Understanding," Hegel investigates the concept of essence, which he initially describes as "force," and its modes of appearance, defined as "expression(s)" of that force. As he concludes, both the world of eternal essences, posited by the old metaphysicians and the laws that underlie natural phenomena according to physicists are nothing but a form of fetishization. Once Hegel's shape of "consciousness," which has now assumed the form of "understanding," recognizes this, it will recast the presumable eternal world of essences and laws no longer as the true world but as the untrue world. Eventually, the new shape of "self-consciousness" understands that behind the curtain of mere appearances, there is nothing to be found, unless it goes behind that curtain itself.⁶³ What Hegel means is that the so-called border or curtain that separates appearance from

⁶² G.W. F. Hegel, "Who thinks abstractly?" *Hegel: Texts and Commentary*, (ed. Walter Kaufmann), Garden City: Anchor Books, 1966: 113-118.

⁶³ "It is manifest that behind the so-called curtain which is supposed to conceal the inner world, there is nothing to be seen unless *we* go behind it ourselves, as much in order that we may see, as that there may be something behind there which can be seen" [emphasis added, E.E.] (G.W.F. Hegel, *Hegel's Phenomenology of Spirit*, trans. A.V. Miller, (Oxford/ New York: Oxford University Press, 1972): §165: 103.

essence cannot be drawn unless one already knows the beyond, of that which lies on the other side of the border. The notion of an impenetrable stable essence that ostensibly lies on the other side of the border— and this includes Kant's thing-in-itself — in Hegel's view, turns out to be nothing but an instance of *hocus-pocus metaphysicus*. Of course, Kant indicated that everything we know and perceive is mediated by our subjective capacity for knowledge. Thus, what the things *really* are “in-themselves,” we cannot know. Hegel, in contrast, indicates that “consciousness” itself has drawn the border between the knowable and the not-knowable. Therefore, in principle, “consciousness” must also have the ability to cross that border, since it is the very author of that border. Neither can there be a secret “tranquil kingdom” of unchangeable essences beyond *this* world, as the old metaphysicians would have it. Both visions necessarily produce an inverted world. For if the essence of a thing is defined as something unreachable for “understanding,” things may just as well be the opposite of what they truly are. Hegel uses the rather banal example of a universe in which black is now white, green is red, sour is sweet, the North Pole is the South Pole, crime is a virtue, and left is right. In the inverted world, noumena and phenomena stand indifferently opposed to one another.

This separation between essence and appearance is typically a form of false bourgeois consciousness. But again, for Hegel and Marx, this separation constitutes a necessary step in the unfolding of self-conscious knowledge, as it presupposes a split between subject and object, and the objectification of the subject. One must speak here of a philosophical and aesthetic procedure. The poet Friedrich Hölderlin, at some point a close friend of Hegel and Schelling, spoke of an “*Ur-Teilung* [original division].” It is the necessary discriminatory process one engages in when one “judges [*urteilt*].” Without the formal separation of subject and object, self-conscious knowledge is impossible. Here, alienation and abstraction are not used in a pejorative sense because they reveal that for the substance to appear there has to be bifurcation and separation. As indicated before, this separation constitutes the crux of Marx's theory of value, where labor splits into abstract labor (time) and the concrete activity performed by the worker.

The domination of one over the other constitutes the realized practice in the capitalist production process.

Hegel's "self-consciousness" knows that eventually it has to bring the alienated aspects back together but it is forgetful. "Spirit" must recollect *and* internalize [*er-innern*] the same steps on a higher level, and it will make similar mistakes: separation and alienation. Dialectics rather than being a "method" that one can apply, is the predicate of thought thinking itself. Walter Benjamin has turned this introspection of thought thinking itself into the idea of a dialectical optic that perceives the mysterious as everyday and the everyday life as estranged. In this process, an anamnestic moment may occur. Benjamin calls it an *Aufblitzen*, through which the two estranged and independent parts are suddenly recognized as fundamentally belonging together. There is a Platonic and perhaps also Hegelian dimension to Benjamin's *Aufblitzen* (as *er-innern*), which in Benjamin's essay on Surrealism is defined as the idea of a "profane illumination."⁶⁴

What makes the Hegelian and Marxist inverted world not only a surreal world but also an *absurdist* universe is that the subject knows that itself is the source of a supersensible world - after all, *it* has posited the border and its "beyond" - but it behaves as if the "second supersensible world" were a transcendental realm, separated from the understanding mind itself. In this way, Hegel's skeptic philosophers and physicists are like Marx's capitalists and vulgar economists. Their mystical fetishization and crude materialism are the results of an attitude that abstracts the immediate object from its context or transposes it into another world altogether. Inversion for Marx, therefore, cannot simply be the inversion of two opposed realms or the exchange of idealism for materialism. Rather, the overturning of social relations must proceed from the abolishment of the opposition between theory and praxis in revolutionary practice. The appearance of social relations relates to the individual in an inverted manner, that is to say, as independent "things-in-themselves" rather than the product of his own doing. The inversions become absurd if one does not abolish the contradictions but only reverses them. Subject and object remain alienated parts at all times, then.

⁶⁴ Walter Benjamin, *Selected Writings II part 2*, ed. Michael W. Jennings et. al, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2005): 209ff.

Eventually, the Hegelian shape of “consciousness” can supersede this opposition as *external* difference, however, it is now left with the problem of immanent contradiction. Thus, “self-consciousness” becomes an internally broken and “unhappy” consciousness.

However, a social world in which essence and appearance come to stand in an absurd contradiction to each other already has become a typical baroque mode of representation, of course. Francisco de Quevedo’s “Dream of The World from Within [*El mundo por de dentro*],” published in 1627 draws such a conclusion. His inverted world is turned inside-out and is defined by the persistent interplay between illusion and disillusion. The main character, whose name is “Disenchantment [*Desengaño*],” constitutes the allegorical expression of the social experience of decadence and the loss of truth. The character, *el Desengaño* indicates to the author and lyrical I that if one were to lift the curtain of appearances, which are still defined as illusions in the old metaphysical or theological sense, one must first turn them inside-out. The inverted world, here, consists of a game of overturning. It stages the moment, in which one thing turns into its opposite to show its essence. As the character, *el Desengaño*, continues, “the things you see here [...] are those which are concealed in the external world.”⁶⁵ Eventually, just like in Hegel's inverted world, inversion produces differences in sameness. It is a world where “honesty and knavery have often an air of resemblance; truth and hypocrisy appear like sisters of the same father; civility and curiosity assume the same colours; friendship and interest are with difficulty distinguished.”⁶⁶

What Quevedo's inverted world shares with Hegel, is the idea that the emergence of one thing into phenomenological presence requires it to be contrasted with, and contradicted by, another. The inverted world appears to Quevedo in a dream but its allegorical abstraction stands for the corrupted morality that informs social practice. Note that Quevedo does not speak of another world *beyond*. The world from within is *this* world as it *truly* is. Quevedo’s baroque inversion is already an immanent one, even if his neo-platonic and stoic doctrine

⁶⁵ *The Visions of Quevedo* (trans. W.M. Elliot). Philadelphia: Clerk Office, Henry Porter, 1832: 85.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*

eventually deems all appearances to be inessential because they are *morally* false. But as the author of *The World from Within*, Quevedo, concludes: “my dear reader, what I have presented to you, a dream, a vision; it is more real than you can imagine.”⁶⁷ In the baroque, as he implies, life is nothing but a dream, perhaps a nightmare even, but this dream is even more real than reality.

In this respect, most theories of the baroque seem to agree that the strict borders between the real and the surreal, or the true and the false, can no longer be upheld. To put it in dialectical terms, appearance *is* already essence. The dream is real, and the fantastic distortion is a socially realized praxis. However, it must be added that the baroque constellation of different worlds, of course, does not always need to be grasped as one of inversion. For Quevedo, it clearly is, and for the “belated baroque” as developed in this thesis, the inverted world, and its contradiction in a union is an essential concept. In contrast, Frans-Willem Korsten in *A Dutch Republican Baroque* holds to a different constellation. For him, the Dutch Baroque denotes the collision of multiple worlds to be understood as a Deleuzean fold, that is, as the coincidental coming into contact of two parallel lines which otherwise might have continued infinitely. This fold is what Korsten describes as a potential historical opening in which several virtual worlds come together. Eventually, only one world is actualized over and against all other worlds. The excluded worlds may remain virtually present and actualized at another moment in history. Korsten describes a multiplicity of virtual worlds that, once realized, become mutually exclusive. Their co-existence is ruled out by the principle of com-possibility. These multiple worlds are exogenous worlds that coincidentally fall into one dramatic action, and all are the causes of one dramatic effect. In doing so, Korsten’s notion of the baroque privileges ontological difference over the unity of opposites in consciousness.⁶⁸

⁶⁷ *Ibid*, 99.

⁶⁸ Even if Korsten speaks of a bifurcation, or rather a “split” or splitting, he does not refer to what is commonly identified in Hegel as diremption, i.e. the splitting of parts that fundamentally belong together. Rather, splitting for Korsten means the coincidental separation of worlds, as a result of the realization of one world as opposed to another. Since the two worlds no longer coexist on the purely virtual plane, because one has become actual, they split so to speak. Cf.: “All are equally real, intrinsically linked at some point or moment, after which they split off and become disparate, separate realities. From that moment on they are only palpable in a sublime way, as existent by implication.” (Korsten, *A Dutch Republican Baroque*, 86-87).

In this respect, his idea of opposed worlds differs from the dialectical contradiction of the inverted world discussed in this thesis. Difference as diversity is not the same as opposition or negation in Hegel's dialectic. Difference in existence differs from difference in essence. Hegel's concept of difference and opposition is informed by determinate negation, which is again opposed to absolute negation. Determinate negation involves always the negation of a particular quality. Therefore, what Hegel calls "the other" is not the wholly other but always the *concrete* other. For example, in grasping the object raspberry, "consciousness" realizes that the qualities of raspberries are *not green, not crunchy, not sour* (but pink, soft, and sweet). A raspberry is what it is, by virtue of the properties it excludes. It is *not* a green apple or an orange. The Saussurian model of signs, of course, functions similarly. A signifier signifies what it means only by virtue of its exclusion and relation to other signifiers. The result of Hegel's determinate negation can therefore never be sheer nothingness since the concept retains something in the process of exclusion. In the last part of Chapter 3 of this thesis, the notion of abstract or absolute negation, as opposed to determinate negation, will be further clarified. Suffice it to say, in the post-Hegelian tradition it is especially Heidegger and the French interwar intellectuals who use the notion of abstract negation to overturn or invert Hegel. They seek to overcome the problem of diremption of "unhappy consciousness" in bourgeois modernity, but they try to do so in an undialectical manner.

To restate and summarize the previous paragraphs, the Hölderlinian principle of *Ur-Teilung* constitutes the necessary condition for any scientific and ethical judgment. It formally splits the primordial unity of subject and object into two alienated parts. This splitting constitutes the ground and consequence of the inverted world, which arises from a one-sided perception that results either in fetishization or mystification. The fact that the inverted world is abstract and alienated, however, does not mean that the concept is simply a predicate for the "untrue world." Rather, the inverted world is the result of an idealist attitude that, at the same time, constitutes an aspect of the very real world whose social phenomena it has subsumed. Put differently, the untrue world is a *mode* of the true world itself. In modernity, the dualism of being and seeming is no longer the

result of a belief in lasting and stable values that stand in opposition to their corrupt appearances, as was still the case in Quevedo's concept of the inverted world. Rather, Hegel's inverted world tentatively shows that appearance, in fact, is already essence.⁶⁹ Abstraction, being such a mode of appearance, is therefore not simply an incomplete or inessential form. Despite being a form of false consciousness, abstraction and alienation organize social relations in capitalism and constitute the latter's very essential features. For example, when the young Marx spoke of alienation, he indicated that religion was the "false" expression of "true" suffering. But not only does religion produces alienation; next to the religious promise of salvation and compensation in the hereafter, it is the state that promises general well-being in return for the subject's sacrifice of his or her interests. If we all push aside our interests a little more and accept the fact that everyone has to contribute to the greater good, we can live in a society that benefits all, or so the argument goes at least. The more familiar expression of this logic was, "ask not what your country can do for you – ask what you can do for your country." Thus, the state affirms itself as the caretaker of this abstract collective interest and intervenes against, and at the cost of, the individual interests of its subjects. These individuals, in turn, have to fill the gap between general and individual interests and perceive the limitation of their interests simultaneously as the vehicle for the advancement of their individual benefit. But, a social order that demands the persistent surrender of the interests of all for the greater benefit of all, is either an irrational order or, quite simply, there are *another* logic and purpose that rules such a society.

The Marxist theory of alienation indicates that there is indeed an alien and *impersonal* form of domination that stands opposed to the vast majority of the interests in society. The young Marx was influenced by the Feuerbachian critique of religion and he understood alienation still in terms of estrangement from an

⁶⁹ In the section "Force and Understanding," the abstract notions of force and law produce a tautological way of arguing in which various natural phenomena are defined as products of a game of soliciting and expressing forces. The manifoldness of forces, however, then is grounded on the idea of a tranquil law. Subsequently, the law turns out to be, in fact, multiple laws, and so on. The forces that were supposed to express themselves, however, are not different from their expression. The inner is the outer, and so, "understanding" produces only empty tautologies, but it will later realize that the expressions of force (appearances) and the forces themselves (essences) are one and the same thing.

anthropological and metaphysical notion of essence. In contrast, classical political economists defined the essence of man as self-interest or egoism. They assumed that everyone should just follow his interests and in doing so, a perfectly balanced market will arise, adjusting problems of shortage and surplus, supply and demand. Marx, however, dismissed such essentializing abstractions about the human “nature” by indicating that it is not so much the egoism of the individual but rather the abstract and alien goal of capital that reproduced as the “greed” of the individual. However, instead of bidding farewell to anthropological abstractions, Marx created yet another one. In the *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts* of 1844, *The German Ideology*, and in *A Contribution to the Critique of Hegel’s Philosophy of Right*, he speaks of a “species-being,”⁷⁰ and a “species-activity.”⁷¹ What characterizes the human *qua* human, is that s/he is a needing, desiring, and above all acting or working being. Capital, rather than attending to human nature, alienates man from his natural and social being, insofar as it separates man from his natural desires and needs. Those desires, however, are contingent upon social and technological development and, therefore, cannot be defined by something like an “essential” nature.

The mature Marx, however, had become more rigorous when it come to the critique of such abstract obfuscations. As implied at the beginning of this section, Marx speaks in *Capital* of the rule of dead abstractions over the living human being. Such poetic evocations have already become iconic depictions of consumer society. George A. Romero’s film *Dawn of the Dead* has produced the archetype of the consumer zombie: the (un)dead straggling through shopping malls like apparitions. In the film, the protagonist Francine asks Stephen why the zombies have come to the mall. Stephen guesses that it must be some sort of natural instinct because the motely world of commodities probably was “an important place in their [previous] life.” Conspicuous consumption, as Stephen indicates, has already been transformed into a natural and unconscious instinct. Capital inverts the

⁷⁰ Karl Marx, *Marx & Engels, Collected Works. Volume 3*, Lawrence & Wishart, Electric Book, 2010: 107.

⁷¹ *Ibid*, 119.

natural order of material needs and their satisfaction. First, there is the commodity, then there will be the need for it. Advertisement ensures that this reversal is persistently enforced. Eventually, the consumer, especially the penniless consumer, stops feeling any need at all. He is alienated both from his needs as a self-conscious being and from his animal-like existence. In Lefebvre's words: "the worker stops feeling the simplest needs, which are the most difficult needs for workers to satisfy: the need for space, for fresh air and freedom, for solitude and contemplation."⁷² As a new social type the consumer-zombie, thus, symbolizes the complete alienation from natural human needs and desires, as pointed out by the young Marx. The reified worker stands opposed to, and alienated from, his labor so that the product he produces does not appear as the fruit of his own effort—after all, it immediately is transferred into the hands of someone else—but as something foreign and adverse. Subsequently, the social ontology of individuals has changed; they have been reified into commodities and consumers of commodities, which, in Romero's film, find expression in zombies and shop-window dummies.

In the film, it becomes clear that the colorful world of commodities in the shopping mall has been created as a counter-world that should help the modern worker to forget his alienation. Consumption in capitalism, rather than merely following the purpose of satisfying the needs of customers, has also a disciplinary function. In order to fulfill his own interests, the worker and the consumer must satisfy the interests of capital *first*. Capitalism is a system in which personal needs and interests cannot be fulfilled without first increasing the profit in someone else's pockets. The accumulation of wealth on the opposing side has to be accepted by the individual as his concern since, without the enrichment of the other, he will be excluded from access to the goods and services in society. In this respect, Kant's categorical imperative makes, here, a rather modest addition: Treat the other person always at the same time as an end and never simply as a means. "Never simply," implies here, *quite simply*, that the practice of using the other as the vehicle for alien interests is in fact *the* dominant form of economic intercourse.

⁷² Lefebvre, *Critique of Everyday Life.*, 162.

Eventually, the mature Marx realized that the critique of capitalism does not require theoretical abstractions like the "species-being." The mere description of capital as a social and economic order where individuals are not able to freely act but instead are forced to work under the dictate of wage labor and accumulation was enough to criticize capitalism according to its own logic. The social subject is caught in political and economic structures from which he cannot individually emerge. Therefore, Marx distanced himself from his own anthropological abstractions, and wrote in the preface to *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy* that he wanted to submit these ideas to the "gnawing criticism of the mice,"⁷³ since he had lost interest in publishing them.

However, contrary to what Louis Althusser argues, Marx never gave up the notion of alienation as the rule of abstraction that dominates bourgeois society. Marx describes capital as impersonal domination that stands opposed to any free development in society. Those abstractions are not immediately perceived as something alien and enforced because they are ubiquitously present in all social interactions. Althusser indicates that for political economists before Marx, these non-empirical aspects remained

necessarily *invisible* in the field of the existing theory, because they are forbidden by it – they are objects and problems necessarily without any necessary relations with the field of the visible as defined by this problematic. They are invisible because they are rejected in principle, repressed from the field of the visible: and that is why their fleeting presence in the field when it does occur (in very peculiar and symptomatic circumstances *goes unperceived*) and becomes literally an undivulgeable absence – since the whole function of the field is not to see them, to forbid any sighting of them. Here again, the invisible is no more a function of *a subject's sighting* than is the visible: the invisible is the theoretical problematic's non-vision of its non-objects, the invisible is the darkness, the blinded eye of the theoretical problematic's self-reflection when it scans its non-objects, its non-problems without seeing them, *in order not to look at them* [emphasis in original].⁷⁴

What Althusser indicates, is precisely this invisible theoretical structure of the necessary transitions in Marx's critique of capitalism, which theories of classical political economy had *unconsciously* overlooked. What remained absent from their theory of value is not that labor produces value, but the question *of why* labor

⁷³ *Karl Marx & Frederick Engels Collected Works* Vol. 29 (Lawrence & Wishart, Electric Book, 2010): 264.

⁷⁴ Louis Althusser, "From Capital to Marx's Philosophy" *Reading Capital* (trans. Ben Brewster and David Fernbach), London/ New York: Verso, 2015: (9-76): 24-25.

takes the form of value in capitalism, and why it is abstract labor *time* that determines the magnitude of value. As Althusser points out, “the invisible is no more a function of *a subject’s sighting* than is the visible.” What is seen is precisely dependent on that which is not seen: the essential abstract laws that govern capitalist exchange, and that make up the “phantom-like objectivity” of bourgeois social relations.

This fantastic expression of social relations is, ironically, the result of a rational and calculating spirit. The “spirit of capitalism” results from the mystification of its values into a cult. Capitalist society, which considers itself superior to what it calls *primitive* societies, produces its own superstitions. In the disenchanted modern world, religion returns as the haunting specters of capitalism. Benjamin described this process of mystification in a very short and unfinished fragment titled “Capitalism as Religion.” Like Max Weber, Benjamin indicates that capital predicates its logic of reproduction on the idea of *guilt*. The German (and Dutch) word *Schuld* means “debt” as well as “guilt.” Benjamin writes, “[c]apitalism is probably the first instance of a cult that creates guilt [*Schuld*], not atonement.”⁷⁵ Debts [*Schulden*] have become the true motor for the production of wealth in capitalism. What previously was perceived as a deficit, now appears as a benefit.

In Weber's account capitalism resembles the protestant ethic. In this worldview, man's guilt is decided beforehand. But unlike the secular worshipper of capital, the Christian Protestant still believed in salvation. That is why the Protestant believer has adopted the devotional ethic of hard work to prove to others that he is a pious man that will be chosen for salvation. But, the modern secular man lives without hope for salvation. External coercion and belief in the hereafter are no longer needed to keep him working under the dictate of capital. Modern man is the creator of his “iron cage [*stahlhartes Gehäuse*],” which is the edifice of past religious convictions, Weber argues. “*Als ein Gespenst ehemaliger religiöser*

⁷⁵ Walter Benjamin, *Selected Writings 1: 1913-1926*, ed. Marcus Bullock, Michael W. Jennings (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2004): 289-291.

Glaubensinhalte geht der Gedanke der "Berufspflicht" in unserm Leben um. [In our lives, the idea of professional duty is haunted by the specter of past religious content] (my translation, E.E.).⁷⁶ Though it may not be very likely that Protestantism has served as the "cultural" base for capitalism, Weber has nevertheless revealed that the acceptance of capital relies on a confusion between moral and economic values. Benjamin used a similar argument, even though he was not a very attentive reader of Marx, whom he puts aside, together with Nietzsche and Freud, as a "priest of capitalism.

As seen before, the confusion of moral values and economic values is not only the condition for the inverted world in Quevedo's baroque dream but also the distinctive feature of how persons relate to each other in advanced capitalism. The next section will describe this entanglement by identifying what money is and how it functions in a market economy. The final section of this chapter will discuss two dominant moral concepts in bourgeois society: "good conscience" and "hypocrisy."

5. Money

Money makes the world go 'round. This is an indisputable fact in capitalism. Some try to relativize the dictum by indicating that money cannot make you happy, for it cannot buy everything.⁷⁷ In a society where one has to pay even for using a toilet, and where air is probably the only thing that does not cost money (unless one has a polluting factory), this is a rather naïve claim. Already the baroque poet Luis de Góngora in his satirical poem "*¡Dineros son calidad, verdad!*," gibed at this very dodgy type of thing called money. His rival, Francisco de Quevedo, personified money in his poem "*Poderoso Caballero es Don Dinero*," where money is presented as a powerful lord who makes everyone bow to him. The awareness that money can buy anything and that it serves as the equivalent

⁷⁶ Max Weber, *Die protestantische Ethik und der Geist des Kapitalismus* (ed. Dirk Kaesler), München: C.H. Beck, 2013: 465.

⁷⁷ The slogan in a Mastercard commercial is the following: "There are some things that money can't buy. For everything else there is MasterCard." The joke of the commercial consists in the fact that those presumable moments which money can't buy, like friendship, love, and happiness, all involve the spending of money in one way or another; be it the acquisition of tickets to a sports match, a box of chocolates, or a bunch of flowers for the beloved ones.

of everything—“*todo lo iguala*,” as Góngora puts it—had already become a widespread belief during the Baroque. In its particular nature, however, money only exists in capitalist exchange.

In its immediacy, money is seen as a neutral and practical instrument that facilitates exchange. But even without pondering on the essential nature of money in capitalism, everyone knows that he *needs* money without having to know what money exactly is. “Money represents the crystallisation of the fundamental relations of value and acts as the unconscious organiser of a market economy.”⁷⁸ As such, it does not simply act as a neutral mediator of exchange, but the money-*form* becomes a decisive factor without which capitalist markets are unable to function. The hoarding aspects of capital, which relies on the ability to “store” value, for example, would be impossible without money.

While money functions as the equivalent of all other commodities that have a use-value, which is the *means* but not the *raison d’être*, for their exchange, the actual use-value of money is *zero*.⁷⁹ You cannot watch TV on it. You cannot eat or drink it. However, the peculiarity of money consists in the fact that, virtually, money can realize *any* use-value. All other commodities contain their measure within themselves, which means that their limit is defined by their specific use. No one wants to have a thousand TVs, no one wants to eat a hundred loaves of bread a day. Money, on the other hand, because it is the actuality of no use-value, but virtually of any use-value, produces an insatiable desire. The demand for it is limitless since it represents the abstract power to command whichever commodity one desires. Marxism and psychoanalysis have both indicated, each in their own way, that wealth in capitalist society is not predicated on pleasure and the fulfillment of desire, but on abstract wealth, self-repression, and power. Disney’s character Scrooge McDuck is such an accomplished icon of the

⁷⁸ Costas Lapavistas, “Preface,” *Marxist Monetary Theory* (Leiden / Boston: Brill, 2017): IX

⁷⁹ The exception to this would be the old-fashioned commodity-money gold, which is not only used for jewelry but also as dental fillings. Hence, it is more specifically “fiat-money” or “paper-money” that is entirely useless outside of the sphere of circulation.

successful capitalist entrepreneur.⁸⁰ He does not spend his money, because his pleasure is drawn from abstract wealth alone. His power is defined by pure potentiality. For him, nothing is more satisfying than taking a dive in a swimming pool full of golden coins and listening to their jingling sound. Money, thus, represents the monopoly of the ability to realize and store value, an ability that necessarily results in money hoards.

As a consequence, the capitalist puts exchange on its head. He inverts the basic structure C- M- C (commodities are sold to buy other commodities) into M-C-M' (money is invested in the production of commodities to the end of retrieving more money from production and circulation processes). Commodities are not produced because they are useful things that people need, but they are produced to be circulated in order to generate profit. Use-value is nothing but the mere bearer of exchange-value and profit. This leap from quality to quantity extends to the entire production process. Likewise, any specific type of work is reduced and measured in “quantifiable” abstract labor time, no longer possessing its specific distinct quality but being measured and expressed in money only.

Since money does not represent any specific quality—because quality implies determination and therefore exclusion (sugar is neither TV nor bread), money can function as the wildcard in commodity exchange. Therefore, money represents value as such without representing any value in particular. Outside of the sphere of circulation, paper money, however, is useless. As a sheer potentiality, that is, as a form without content, money is the equivalent in exchange for all commodities. What the exchange value of a determinate commodity is, will only come to the fore when exchanged with money on the market. Eventually, only the market can realize and transform surplus-value into actual profit. The value of a commodity is thus only actualized in relation to all other commodities on the market. The abstract labor time, which refers to the *average of socially necessary labor*,

⁸⁰ Of course, the Disney studios have put a footnote to Scrooge McDuck's success. In the Marxist definition of the capitalist, he is still an underdeveloped figure, since he only represents the money-hoarding aspect of capital, not its transformation into profit in the circulation process. Hence, as Disney's cartoon *"Scrooge McDuck and Money"* from 1967 indicates: “money has to circulate!”

informs the magnitude and substance of value, but it is not something that can be measured by a clock. It expresses itself in the money form, which, in turn, is relational and dependent upon the market, insofar as the commodity is exchanged and compared with other commodities. As a result, value and abstract labor do not exist *a priori*, as Michael Heinrich has convincingly argued.⁸¹ How much a capitalist makes depends on his relation to all other capitalists who enter the market with their products. From this follows that value is not an innate quality or (stable) essence of the commodity, but only a contingent property. Subsequently, value exists only as a social relation, and it mediates all other social relations insofar as it reduces social interactions to transactions.⁸² It is important to note that Marx's labor theory of value does not provide an explanation for prices, let alone does it offer a formula for the *calculation* of prices, as modern macroeconomists believe. Rather, Marx's goal is to show that market prices are subject to constant fluctuations, and as such, are part of an entirely chaotic and irrational economic sphere. "Value" and "price" are thus not the same thing.

When money and the commodity form become determinant factors in capitalist social relations, all human intercourse is measured in terms of its costs and gains. This circumstance is informed by an entirely self-contained logic. Marx defined capital-money as "self-valorizing value." In doing so, he redefined money, or capital, as the Hegelian self-actualizing universal idea: a chimera that has become real. The idea of self-valorization is of course only an incantation from the perspective of capitalists and bankers. Money by itself cannot self-valorize. That would require an act of magic. In one's own wallet, money actually tends to become less rather than more. In reality, value can be produced only in the production process through the application of living labor. However, the illusion of a self-valorizing value is actually more real than one can imagine. The moment

⁸¹ Michael Heinrich, *Die Wissenschaft vom Wert*, Münster: Westfälisches Dampfboot, 2006, 240ff

⁸² Georg Simmel, „Das Geld in der modernen Kultur“ *Simmel Gesamtausgabe* 5, ed. Ottheim Rammstedt (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1992): 193.

when banks and credit-money become organizing factors of all labor and wealth in society – and commercial banks have the monopoly on the creation of money- self-valorization ceases to be an ideological representation or a mere specter and becomes instead a fully realized social practice.

Accordingly, one could argue that money and capitalist exchange rely on an aesthetic and perception that entails the spectacular eradication of the boundaries between illusion and reality. As Costas Lapavitsas has shown, money, in whichever form, functions almost like an art form.⁸³ Because it functions through a layering symbolism, money is almost like a *baroque* artwork. Money is symbolism built on symbolism: credit-money⁸⁴ upon fiat-money⁸⁵ upon commodity-money,⁸⁶ layer upon layer. If money is an art form, its aesthetic device must be defined by its simulating capacity. In "Simulations," Sarduy discusses the baroque painting technique of *trompe-l'oeil*. The optical illusions created by *trompe-l'oeil* produce thickness, immediate presence, and depth, thus creating a perfect simulacrum.⁸⁷ Unlike the beholder of *anamorphosis*, the viewer of *trompe-l'oeil* simulations must freeze into his role and position. Should he move away from the center, the spell of illusion dissolves. The technique of *trompe-l'oeil* underscores the erasure of the distinction between being and appearance. What is artificial has become perfectly real, and what is real has developed into the artificial. It is reality itself that becomes artificial, phantasmagorical, and ultimately, naturalized. This is what the baroque worldview shares with bourgeois culture: it moves from the natural to the artificial and from the artificial back to the natural. What else does the faith in the value of money constitute but a pure simulation, an effect of *trompe-l'oeil*? It is the make-belief, and the social acceptability of that belief, that allows money to represent and symbolize value, rather than it being *just* a piece of worthless paper or a digital number stored on a computer. The abstract power of money, that is, the command to access whatever commodity is produced in society, becomes *real* only

⁸³ Lapavitsas, *Marxist Monetary Theory*, 13.

⁸⁴ Symbolizing the promise to pay "the commodity money."

⁸⁵ The "fiat" money created by the state at the end of the 17th century, the banknote, symbolizes the commodity money.

⁸⁶ The commodity money, as such, represents value: the golden or sterling coin.

⁸⁷ Sarduy, *Written on a Body*, 106-107.

under the make-believe that money indeed represents and symbolizes value. As a result, with money, reality itself becomes artificial, phantasmagorical.

To sum up, money, representing value exists in several layers: 1. as universal equivalent in exchange; 2. as a representation of value as such; and 3. as a wildcard or symbol of value, i.e. the banknote or coin. All those layers depend on the mere faith that money indeed represents value. It is only by means of going through those layers that the inverted world fabricated by the money economy can be uncovered, and it is only in this way, that the relation between its essence and appearance may be grasped.

6. Morality

The idea that money and belief are two sides of the same coin has gained quite some currency in capitalism. It is no secret credo that those who have credit also enjoy credibility. In this respect, money and morality intersect. One must speak, here, of an immanent reversal of base and superstructure within capitalist relations themselves. Some indicate that capital and morality stand indifferently opposed. For, after all, money spoils the character of men, and especially of those who have none.

However, money does not only act as a mediating facilitator of capitalist exchange but, conversely, also may disrupt that very chain of exchange when sales are no longer accompanied by acquisitions. This might eventually lead to too large money hoards, while production remains limited or even stagnant. Goods are then no longer sold, and unemployment rates rise. Since it is the market that eventually transforms surplus into profit, capitalists can never be entirely sure whether their anticipated surplus-value will actually be realized. Thus, speculation is already a part of the production process. The advancement of credit-money for further investments of course depends on the credibility of the debtor, who himself, because of further speculations, depends on the expansion of the production process. However, price fluctuations, stagnant production, increasing unemployment rates, the collapse of stock markets, and even the breakdown of entire banks or state economies, are all imminent capitalist risks. To the capitalists, such crises attest to normal stages in capital's perfectly healthy life

cycle. Financial crises, therefore, do not indicate a malfunction of capitalism, and neither do they propel capitalism to its self-destruction as vulgar interpretations of Marx posit. Instead, the belief in the “idyll of the market” as Vogl indicates, perceives bourgeois society as a spontaneously emerging natural order that propagates the “inner consistency of an economic doctrine that—rightly or wrongly, for good or ill—views contradictions, adverse effects, and breakdowns in the system as eminently compatible with its sound institutional arrangement.”⁸⁸

The fact that capitalism comes with quite some crises and sacrifices is for all members of bourgeois society business as usual. And what is more, within this “perfectly rational” system, deliberately or non-deliberately, everyone has already interiorized the logic of “determinate negation.” As indicated before, determinate negation denotes a process of signification in which each particular is what it is by virtue of the exclusion of another. For those who are dependent on wage labor as their exclusive means of subsistence, this procedure has become the everyday rationale of their economic practice. The poor know very well that the acquisition of one thing excludes the acquisition of another. And, those who are not entirely penniless and have made a larger investment will most likely for the longer term be unable to invest that money in something else. In capitalism, people not only have to realize their interests at the cost of other people's interests but also at the cost of their very own other interests. Austerity is an economic standard that many have to accept as their personal moral maxim. Thrift, as Max Weber has shown, constitutes one of the highest moral goods of the common man in capitalism.

However, because for philosophers from Aristotle to Hegel, happiness constitutes the undisputed condition for moral action, but austerity most of the time creates the very absence of happiness, some philosophers have come up with a better solution. Arthur Schopenhauer, for example, was well aware of the fact that in capitalism there is always a difference between the will and its fulfillment. His proposition was: the problem is not *what* we want, but that we *want* something, to begin with. Because the difference between the will and the object of satisfaction endlessly proliferates, Schopenhauer concludes that life is one great

⁸⁸ Vogl, *The Specter of Capital*, 16.

suffering in the constant pursuit of this or that desire.⁸⁹ He forgot to add that *within* capitalism, and, *only* in capitalism, the pursuit of one's desires persistently demands a great deal of sacrifice. Thus, like Kant, Schopenhauer thought it would be best to train yourself in self-abstinence. Those who constantly abstain from the fulfillment of their desire will experience the true benefits of their abstract freedom, like Disney's Scrooge McDuck. But, *true* freedom of course does not consist in abstinence, but rather in its opposite, that is, in the ability to give *content* to my will: I want *this*, and *that*, or *not* that. I want to read a book on the beach, and not work eight hours in the office, today. Freedom requires determination and exclusion. Autonomy results from the circumstance that I can make the content of my will definite, legitimate, and act upon it. To affirm that the autonomy of the will consists in abstinence, like Schopenhauer and Kant do, is the same as saying that because I do not want anything in particular, I am a genuinely sovereign and free subject. The will is purified into a merely abstract and empty form.

In this context, Adorno spoke of a "sovereign freedom in the midst of deprivation" and claimed this "negative freedom" is the only form of freedom that can be experienced in capitalism.⁹⁰ Before Adorno, however, Schopenhauer's student Nietzsche had already characterized his mentor's logic of desires as an inverted world. Nietzsche's call for the "transvaluation of all values," not least, concerns itself with ethical standards that deem the world of inclinations, desires, and their fulfillment to be inessential. He identified such standards as life-negating, as they rely on the persistent suppression of one's sensuous desires. Thus, Nietzsche's proposal was eventually an "inversion of the inversion," or an overturning of the "perverted" spirit of morality. While Schopenhauer indicated

⁸⁹ Schopenhauer says: "Now the essence of a human being consists in the fact that his will strives, is satisfied, and strives anew, and so on and on, and in fact his happiness and well-being are nothing more than the rapid progress of this transition from desire to satisfaction and from this to a new desire, since the absence of satisfaction is suffering and the absence of a new desire is empty longing, languor, boredom"(Arthur Schopenhauer, *The World as Will and Representation Volume 1*, trans. Judith Norman, et. al (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010): Fourth Book, §68: 287).

⁹⁰ Adorno, *Negative Dialektik*, 17.

that asceticism and philosophical contemplation are the only way out of the problem of the heteronomous will, Nietzsche replied that if presented with the Schopenhauerian options between life (desire, will, and suffering) and truth (philosophical insight, contemplation, and withdrawal), he would be a fool to opt for the latter. In the film *The Matrix* (1999), the protagonist, Morpheus, before explaining to Neo what the “Matrix” is, repeats those Schopenhauerian options: “You take the blue pill, the story ends. You wake up in your bed and believe whatever you want to. You take the red pill, you stay in Wonderland, and I show you how deep the rabbit hole goes. Remember, all I’m offering here is the truth.” Morpheus acts just like the baroque character *El Desengaño* in Quevedo’s dream. Eventually, he reveals to Neo that the world as we see it is a second world that has been pulled over our eyes to prevent us from seeing our true essence: we are nothing but a slave or fuel for the motor of capitalist development. The other option, the blue pill, which Neo rejects, is to stay in the lure of the inverted world and to continue our existence as consumer zombies, or “couch potatoes,” unaware of the fact that one is just the *means* and never the end of capital’s accumulation.

Unlike the character Neo, Nietzsche decides against philosophical truth. In doing so, however, he inherits the old metaphysical dichotomy between thinking and being without upsetting the separation in the very least. Nietzsche’s “transvaluation of all values” aims at overturning the moral values that have belittled life, diminished the human being, and in general, sought truth and essence external to life itself. What is valued morally from Plato to Christianity is the turning away from life in favor of a higher truth. This, in Nietzsche’s view, ought to be devalued. Conversely, to go against established moral standards and follow one’s drive without pitying the other are values that ought to be elevated. But more than targeting moral standards in general, Nietzsche’s announcing of the devaluation of the highest values serves yet another purpose. Mimicking and mocking the Hegelian tradition, Nietzsche inverts the Master-Slave dialectic by attributing the “good” spirit of affirmation - that is, the unconditioned affirmation of life - to the master-type and the “bad” spirit of revenge associated with morality to the slave-type. Thus, Nietzsche’s transvaluation in fact is an inversion of the Western metaphysical tradition from Plato to Hegel. However, his inverted world

fundamentally belongs to, and is dependent on, the moral values it wishes to destroy. The installment a *new* moral standard can hardly be avoided. The old Hobbesian values, which presupposed that nature is violent and man a beast, a *homo homini lupus*, are without further ado accepted by Nietzsche. However, by way of inversion, he elevates man as a beast amongst other beasts, a “blonde” beast, as he says somewhere, into the new great caste-race.⁹¹ Nietzsche refracts social antagonism as a natural struggle, as did Hobbes before him. Capitalist society is the organization of men’s interests in an antagonistic way, that is, the cost of another. This circumstance is now merely translated back and dissolved into the idealism of nature’s combat. Nietzsche indeed reverses the Hobbesian values, but he does not tear down the theoretical presuppositions of that moral edifice. The inverted world does not perish because one has inversed its values. It is Nietzsche’s miscalculation to think that with the abolishment of the true world, the false world too would be naturally canceled out.⁹²

Even if the Nietzschean transvaluation remains impotent in effectuating a “twisting free” [*Herausdrehen*] from established values, as Heidegger clearly saw,⁹³ Nietzsche poignantly described the hypocrisy and self-loathing of the modern individual. He exposed the experience of self-rift and bad conscience as the sanctimonious self-orchestration of the modern *pious* man. To understand Nietzsche's critique of the logic of hypocritical self-loathing, one has to return to the master-slave opposition. Nietzsche's inversion proposes that there could be a conceptual master-type, who in reality may be a slave, and accordingly, he is submitted to suffering and torment. What makes him a conceptual master-type, nonetheless, is that, despite his suffering, he maintains his posture at all times.

⁹¹ Friedrich Nietzsche, *Zur Genealogie der Moral KSA 5*, eds. Giorgio Colli & Mazzino Montinari (Berlin/ New York: De Gruyter, 1999): 277 & 324. Also in Nietzsche, it seems, there is a privilege for the Caucasian race as the new master race. Many defenders of Nietzsche, however, believe that he was actually speaking about the lion.

⁹² „Die wahre Welt haben wir abgeschafft: welche Welt blieb übrig? die scheinbare vielleicht?... Aber nein! *mit der wahren Welt haben wir auch die scheinbare abgeschafft!* [We have abolished the true world: what world remained? The world of appearances perhaps?... But no! With the true world we have also abolished the world the world of appearances (my translation, E.E.)] (Friedrich Nietzsche, *Götzendämmerung, KSA 6*, eds. Giorgio Colli & Mazzino Montinari (Berlin/ New York: De Gruyter, 1999): 81)

⁹³ Martin Heidegger, *Gesamtasugabe, Vorlesungen 1923-1976, Band 43, Nietzsche: Der Wille zur Macht als Kunst*, “Kunst als Wille zum Schein” (Frankfurt am Main: Vittorio Klostermann, 1985): 49ff.

Mastery, or what Nietzsche also calls "nobility," means that one should bear one's suffering in line with a certain "fatalism free of revolt."⁹⁴ In opposition to the conceptual slave type, however, there is also the conceptual slave-type and moralist. Unlike the conceptual master, he is racked with a submissive inner discord and legitimizes his suffering as his rightful punishment, admitting that he in fact deserves to be maltreated. The conceptual slave-type, who, in reality, could be also a master, declares that he is just a poor devil. He never intended to harm anyone but the critical situation made him make this difficult decision. Along those lines, the firm manager decides to dismiss 200 employees, declaring that he feels for the workers who have now lost their only source of income. He too thinks that the situation is just heart-breaking. In turn, the dismissed employee grudgingly admits that he has been victimized but accepts that in capitalism such difficult decisions have to be made in concordance with the company's prosperity and survival. For Nietzsche, the fact that a victim justifies his own maltreatment is something that only Christianity and capitalism have achieved. Nietzsche's inverted world thus brilliantly uncovers the inverted consciousness of the modern individual, which he quite evidently unmasked as *hypocrisy*.

Hypocrisy, as already discussed by Hegel before Nietzsche, refers to a specific *base* type of "good conscience." As such, it is intrinsically linked to moral self-awareness. In *The Phenomenology of Spirit*, "conscience" emerges as a form of a dirempted shape of "spirit" that experiences an inner breach, just like the shape of the "unhappy consciousness," did before. This time, the contradiction is between his own moral code of conduct and that of the general will. The target of Hegel's criticism is Kant's moral asceticism, here. On the one hand, "conscience" is confronted with the rather absurd repression of its personal inclinations that informs the Kantian practical reason. On the other hand, it must deal with the fact that moral behavior cannot depend on its own subjective and contingent motivations either. Said subjective ground can be described as "the good intentions" one has and that are the conditions or point of departure for any kind of moral behavior. "Conscience," however, learns that neither self-repression nor "good intentions" can serve as the ultimate ground for the justification of moral

⁹⁴ Nietzsche, *Zur Genealogie der Moral*, 321.

action. The morally fragmented individual, as Kant would have it, resolves the conflict between subjective intentions and the objective will via his free submission to the universal law. That would mean that he deduces his moral action from an alien cause outside of himself. But the metaphysical trick is that the individual *freely* submits himself to the universal and moral law. In other words, a free submission is no submission. If I freely submit myself to universality, then it concerns an action that *I* have initiated myself, a deed that cannot be ascribed to the alien cause to which I knuckle down. Just like the Kantian concept of autonomy, the moral law has to remain empty and can only assume the mere *form* of a law. Morality is disinterested. Content, however, stands opposed to disinterest because it makes the moral will dependent upon something other than itself. Thus, for Hegel, the type of "conscience" that submits itself to the moral law is the first, and most abstract shape of "spirit," because it looks for the moral justifications of its action in abstractions outside itself.

Next, "conscience" seeks to find the essence of moral behavior in its personal intentions rather than in the universal law. The problem with "personal good intentions," however, is that they are subjective and contingent and that they cannot be proven. After all, the righteous person will always assure you that she acted according to her best intentions, and we must simply believe that this person is telling the truth. Consequently, "conscience" learns those good intentions cannot constitute the ground for moral action either. It understands that mere "words," which are used by the righteous person to assure us of her best intentions cannot be trusted. It assumes the shape of what Hegel calls the "beautiful soul." This shape is the clear conscience, which for Hegel is a shape that is synonymous with "inaction." The "beautiful soul" does not want to get dirty hands because it knows that action may besmirch its purity. In an entirely different context, Jacques Derrida, for example, has indicated that for justice (or ethical behavior) to happen, it is indispensable that the just person acts immediately. Inaction can never be just. Like Hegel, Derrida indicates that action will, in one way or the other, always betray the Other. Guilt is an unavoidable byproduct of justice. The "beautiful soul" is aware of this contradiction and decides to remain innocent. Hegel discusses the relationship between innocence and guilt in the second part of *The*

Phenomenology, where he juxtaposes the characters Ismene and Antigone from Sophocles' tragedy. The first sister's conscience remains pure. She is innocent because she does not act. The second sister acts and becomes guilty.

The tragic characters Antigone and her antagonist Creon must assume responsibility for their actions. But what an action means and whether it is right or wrong can only be established after the fact, when the character learns about the consequences of his action. Hegel has developed a retrospective understanding of action. In this regard, he has produced a quite ardent critique of the liberal theory of guilt (*Schuld*). In Western democratic jurisdiction, intentions are to be judged first, then the action that results from it. They determine the degree of a person's guilt. For Hegel, however, intentions can never serve as a justification for moral action. What is to be judged are not the "right" intentions of the person in question, but rather the consequences that transpire from his action. One has to take responsibility for one's actions regardless of one's good intention. Now, the *hypocritical* individual reverses this state of affairs, which results either in inaction or the transferal of all responsibility to an external "master." In the latter case, he can always claim that fate, bad luck, or sheer necessity forced him to act in the way he did, but that his intentions were quite different from the outcome. In persistently highlighting the incommensurability between his personal and the general will or objective circumstances, the hypocrite flaunts his good conscience. He is the firm manager who never wanted to dismiss all those employees but was simply forced to do so.

Finally, in capitalism, hypocrisy evolves into a specific type of conscience that links economic and social success to propriety. Already Quevedo had associated hypocrisy with a specific type of economic conscience. The main street of *The World from Within* is called "Hypocrisy." Those who live there attempt to pass off as standing above their own social class: "the shoemaker now flaunts himself as footwear impresario;" the "wine-skin maker is styled as a vintage tailor;" and "the muleteer rejoices under the name of the gentleman of the

highway.”⁹⁵ Meritocracy is the modern key word. Those who are successful and became rich, did “work very hard” for their prosperity. It is their “honest” earning. Inversely, the situation is quite different, when it comes to one’s own economic failure. Now, poverty is nothing but the clear index of moral integrity. This time, it is the rich other who shamelessly sells his own grandmother for economic success. One’s own poverty now is the proof of one’s righteousness, and the other’s wealth is acquired by nothing less than walking over dead bodies. Bourgeois conscience has internalized the entanglement of moral and economic values; that is why it has created an inverted world because it is an inverted consciousness.

Hypocrisy and the confusion of moral and economic values are the typical outcomes of bourgeois unhappy consciousness. It is a false attempt to heal the breach between one's personal interests and the general objective goal of society. The next chapter will discuss this issue once more, but then as the general problem of the *pícaro* in fantastic literature. The inner discord of bourgeois unhappy consciousness inescapably conjures an inverted world that acquires fantastic and belated baroque features, the chapter will argue.

⁹⁵ “*El Zapatero de Viejo se llama entretenedor del cazado. El botero sastre del vino, porque le hace de vestir. El mozo de las mulas, gentilhomme de camino. El bodegón estado; el bodegonero, contador. El verdugo se llama miembro de la justicia, y el corchete, criado*” (Francisco de Quevedo, *Dreams and Discourses* (bilingual version) *El mundo por de dentro*, trans. R. K. Britton (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 1989): 190-191).

Nada me desengaña, el mundo me ha hechizado.

(Francisco de Quevedo, *Salmo VI*)

“Siehe nur, unser Uebel ist entgegengesetzt.

Du hattest zu viel Fantasie, ich habe zu viel Wirklichkeit”.

(E.T.A. Hoffmann, Brief an Hippel, 1. Mai 1795)

Chapter 2 Realisms and Antirealisms

1. The Baroque and the Fantastic

The term baroque, as it is wearisomely repeated in every dictionary, besides relating to a style in architecture and painting, denotes a tendency to flamboyance, over-complexity, extravagance, the grotesque, and the tasteless. Its etymology is traced to the trope of the irregular pearl—it evokes a sense of disfigured beauty. This process of distortion, which Walter Benjamin attributed to the baroque, and described as the transformation of the symbolical into the allegorical, highlights the incompatibility of the timeless beauty of art with the development of modern society. The baroque taste for continuous novelty, technological and scientific inventions, expresses itself in a desire to gaze at the wondrous, constantly yearning for the rare and curious. The cabinet of curiosities accumulates rarities from the new and old worlds and displays a desire for, and a fear of, the monstrous, bizarre, and disfigured; a fear confusingly intermingled with scientific inquiry and colonial-positivist classification. In the Early Modern age, monstrous and bizarre animals, disfigured human beings, and curious artifacts from strange cultures were put on display contributing to the grandeur and cosmopolitanism of the sovereign or patron who collected them. Soon they became the material for horror and popular fantasy stories satisfying the pleasures of the reader’s creeping flesh and repulsion.

The baroque fears exhibit, as David Castillo argues, a re-bloom in the fantastic literature of the nineteenth century and the gothic novel that precedes it. He traces the roots of the literary fantastic back to the “age of curiosities,” or

the seventeenth century.¹ According to Castillo, the desire for the bizarre can be read in concert with the logic of spectacle as outlined by Maravall, which aims at inspiring awe and veneration in response to the soberness of an increasingly rationalized organization of society. The culture of the baroque is a culture of self-orchestration and image-making, while surface appearance, or form, supersedes the importance of content.

Similarly, the fantastic has often been defined, *quite vaguely*, as an anti-rational impetus in response to an equally vague “Discourse of Enlightenment.” The following sections, however, argue that the fantastic may be read as a commentary on the collision between untimely remainders of the *ancien régime* and the newly emerging ideal of self-determination in a rapidly changing society. The fantastic, as such, is not a synonym for “the irrational” aiming at a critique of “instrumental reason,” or something like that. Rather, the fantastic is a mode of depiction that makes visible the contact between marginal, emergent, and dominant social elements that otherwise go unnoticed.

This chapter will connect the literary fantastic of German late Romanticism to that of the Cuban “neobaroque.” The first part of the chapter discusses E.T.A. Hoffmann’s *Die Elixiere des Teufels* (henceforth, *The Devil’s Elixirs*),² and the second part Reinaldo Arenas’ “(post)modern” novel *El mundo alucinante* (henceforth, *Hallucinations*).³ Both novels are, as will be argued, belated baroque novels that demonstrate a curiosity for the real. This type of “realism,” disguised in the mode of the literary fantastic, emerges out of the same phantasmagorically hypostasized surface appearance that in the previous chapter was introduced as the phantom-like objectivity of essential social relations in modernity. Although the fantastic and the mimetically realist are respectively understood in reference to the other-worldly and the this-worldly, they are not really concerned with two

¹ David R. Castillo, *Baroque Horrors: The Roots of the Fantastic in the Age of Curiosities* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2010).

² E.T. A. Hoffmann, *Die Elixiere des Teufels* (ed. Wolfgang Nehring), Stuttgart: Reclam, 1986; *The Devil’s Elixir*, trans. Ronald Taylor, (Richmond: Alma Classics, 2017).

³ *El mundo alucinante*, ed. Enrico Mario Santí, (Madrid: Cátedra, 2008); *Hallucinations*, trans. Andrew Hurley (New York: Penguin Books), 2001.

ontologically different realms.⁴ The fantastically other is not transcendently other, but an immanent alterity within the world of modernity itself.

One very influential theory of the fantastic, which reduced the genre to a structural reader function,⁵ however, still holds on to a stark ontological difference between self and other, or the this-worldly and the other-worldly. In Tzvetan Todorov's view, the fantastic is an effect produced in a reader who doubts as to whether a story or a novel's plot is set in a universe where the laws of physics still apply, or, rather in a supernatural universe where basically anything may happen. This effect is produced as an epistemological crisis whereby the reader does not know whether the novelistic characters are hallucinating and dreaming, or whether they inhabit ontologically different worlds. One could almost say that the fantastic produces a dissociated consciousness in that it constantly shifts between an epistemological and an ontological resolution while it does not yet know how to bring the two realms together. If the reader accepts the existence of a supernatural world, the genre is transformed into the "marvelous." If he discards the possible existence of parallel worlds and seeks a 'rational' explanation for the plot, such as the mad visions or hallucinations of the narrator or protagonist, then the fantastic concludes into another "neighboring genre:" "the uncanny." The either/or structure of Todorov's account, erroneously, excludes the "allegorical" reading, and so both the reader and the work are reduced to an apologetic and adaptive attitude where the depicted world is either restored as a rational and positivist universe or reduced to the status of a fairy tale. The fantastic, therefore, loses its "subversive" potential, because neither "rational" nor "fairy-tale" are accurate descriptions of the bourgeois relations that make up the totality of modernity. Only when the two terms are taken together, the essence of appearance can be grasped. This is why Carpentier indicated that modernity is necessarily both marvelous *and* realist. Therefore, the contradiction between reader, work, and world, cannot be ironed out, as the structural approach would have it. Most fantastic works are far too

⁴ Rosemary Jackson makes a similar argument in *Fantasy: The Literature of Subversion* (London/ New York: Routledge, 1981): 11.

⁵ Tzvetan Todorov, *The Fantastic – A Structural Approach to a Literary Genre*, trans. Richard Howard (Cleveland/ London: The Press of the Case Western Reserve University, 1973).

biting to admit for such a one-sided reduction. Hoffmann's and Arenas' novels are no exceptions and forbid any such false reconciliation.

In this regard, the similarities between the two novels, *The Devil's Elixirs* and *Hallucinations*, are quite striking, even though their publication is separated by more than one and a half centuries. The second part of Hoffmann's novel was completed in 1816 and the first Spanish edition of *Hallucinations* appeared in 1969. They both assume the genre of the fantastic picaresque, and their main protagonists are fleeing monks confronted with authoritative limits of artistic freedom in societies in transition from (colonial) feudalism to bourgeois rule. These coincidences do not only call for a comparison between the two novels in terms of their literary devices and plots, but also for a reconsideration of epochal classifications of genres and styles. While *Hallucinations*, in general, is considered to be a prototypical example of the postmodern novel,⁶ this chapter argues that there is no fundamental break in style, devices, and motives that would allow for a rigid separation between modern and postmodern elements. Both deal with modernist topics identified with the uncanny, such as the double and the theme of repressed libidinal drives. They problematize the discrepancy between personal and institutional authority and, more generally, contain a discussion of the social status of the poet, whose romantic ideals collide with the dull reality of modern society. Finally, *The Devil's Elixirs* and *Hallucinations* implement an abundance of plot structures, testimonies, and fragments—elements commonly identified with postmodernism but that will be discussed, here, as belatedly baroque.

2. *Critical Antirealism*

In *Theses on the Philosophy of History*, Benjamin argued that aesthetically and epistemologically modernity can only be represented in a form that does justice to its destructive and fragmenting forces. Adopting the lens of baroque allegory, the disoriented modern subject will perceive its lived world in one single shot of a landscape of ruins. Living in the midst of debris, surrounded by incomplete presences or rudiments, the modern man is essentially melancholic. Also, for Lukács, modernity goes hand in hand with melancholia and man's spiritual exile.

⁶ Mario Santí eds. *El mundo alucinante*, 38

However, he utterly disapproved of modern art's unreflected embrace of the experience of fragmentation and dissociation. He perceived this as art's capitulation to bourgeois social reifications, a tendency that he predominantly associated with the modern avant-garde.

Both Benjamin and Lukács wrote their aesthetic theories in the destructive and extremely violent context of war. Shattering, fragmentation, and destruction were the undeniable objective reality that informed their writing. Whereas for Benjamin, it is tragedy, cinema, or photography that most accurately expresses the fragmentation of modern life, for Lukács, it is only the formal totality created by the novel that can reveal the profound contradictions and shortcomings immanent to modern society. In this regard, the task of the novel is precisely *not to* disguise or cover up “all the fissures and rents that are inherent to the historical situation.”⁷ In order to do so, however, the novel must assume the idea of a “critical realism.” Lukács uses this term to refer to the novel's capacity to depict the modern struggle of the individual as mediated by, and embedded in, the social environment. This is not to say that Lukács endorsed the dogmas of Naturalism, according to which an individual is fully determined by the external social factors of *race*, *milieu*, and *time*. On the contrary, “critical realism” opposes such a unilateral determinism. In Lukács' reading, the pseudo-objective scientific attitude, implicit in Naturalism, turns out to be nothing but the idiosyncratic focus of the author on banal or meaningless details, such as the color and patterns of wall papers, or the withering of flowers in a vase on a table. Such sceneries of still life petrify social being and are unable to penetrate reality beyond its immediate surface appearances. Thus, the novel must carefully negotiate subjective and objective impressions, economic and non-economic signs. Lukács' Hegelian view claims that a truly critical work can neither be the result of the author's extreme subjective view, turning the events into one stream of consciousness, nor of an unmediated and arbitrary objectivism, which crudely dissects details from their context and presents the story as an accumulation of fragmented and immutable facts. In this way, Lukács and Benjamin stand opposed. The latter values petrification or *standstill* and the isolation of fragments, and the former dynamic

⁷ Lukács, *Theory of the Novel*, 60.

development, and the composition of particulars as totality. However, what Benjamin and the early Lukács share, could be defined, as Enzo Traverso has done, as “Left-wing melancholia,”⁸ that is, the idea of melancholia as an epistemological paradigm providing access to past events so as to imagine a future state of revolution, *redemption* in Benjamin’s and *sublation* in Lukács’ words. “Critical realism” far from simply denoting bourgeois realism is a political view that allows for the inclusion of a socialist perspective. Lukács thought that after the failure of the 1848 Revolution, realism as a genre eventually entered a decline.

What is most surprising, however, is that in *Skizze einer Geschichte der neueren deutschen Literatur*, of all things, he describes E.T.A. Hoffmann, one of the most-quoted authors in scholarly work on fantasy and horror, as a “truly great *Realist*.”⁹ From this rather unconventional claim follows that Lukács’ concept of “critical realism” cannot be condensed into an aesthetic style and genre definition, but must be interpreted as an epistemological-critical concept. Yet, it remains strange that Lukács associates the German author of the fantastic with a genre definition that commonly applies to authors like Theodor Fontane, Charles Dickens, and Honoré de Balzac. In doing so, Lukács is undermining conformist literary taxonomies and suggests that the affinity between artworks does not lie in epochal classifications, nor in their mere literary forms, but must be sought elsewhere.

However, Lukács’ concept of “critical realism” is still too imprecise. The label “realist” for Hoffmann is an inept classification for various reasons. “Realism” is not just a whimsical term, whose meaning and style can be indefinitely stretched. To use it as a surrogate for any critical depiction of the essence of social relations in modernity is to engage in false abstractions. Not only a plethora of unrelated works would fall under that same *indifferent* label, but most importantly, such a category glosses over the possibility that some authors

⁸Enzo Traverso, *Left-Wing Melancholia. Marxism, History, and Memory* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2016).

⁹ Georg Lukács, *Skizze einer Geschichte der neueren deutschen Literatur* (Niewied: Luchterhand, 1963): 87.

deliberately implement *antirealist* compositional means.¹⁰ Behind the concept of “critical realism” lurks the danger of a rather one-sided determination of artworks by the social context from which they have emerged. Thus, Lukács’ concept is, on the one hand, too specific, and on the other, too abstract.

Therefore, in contradistinction to Lukács, this chapter argues that Hoffmann’s and Arenas’ novels implement a *deliberate* and self-conscious *antirealism*, without losing their critical potential to depict and inform the sociopolitical context from which they emerge. Without intending to restore traditional genre definitions, “critical *anti*-realism” is, no doubt, the better definition, because it identifies a deliberate turnover of realism in the fantastic novels of Hoffmann and Arenas.¹¹ This approach to the fantastic as a *deliberately* antirealist genre also distinguishes itself from other previous accounts of the fantastic, which in one way or the other, have always reduced their object to an *unconscious* effect of some *underlying structure*, be that structural,¹² psychoanalytical,¹³ or economical.¹⁴

The fantastic runs intentionally counter to the leveling tendencies of “capitalist realism.” As such, it is a response to the lack of the possibility of imagining an alternative to capitalist modernity. Since fantasy reminds us of a repressed prefiguration of freedom, it has a utopian and critical dimension, insofar as it shows that the new civilizational expansions have not brought the emancipation that man had hoped for. Rather, so the fantastic shows,

¹⁰ Michel Löwy and Robert Sayre tentatively speak of the possibility of a “critical irrealism,” as a fraction within the Romantic literary movement. (Michel Löwy & Robert Sayre, *Romanticism against the Tide of Modernity* (Durham/ London: Duke University Press, 2001): 12). However, the term “irrealism” (and its derivative “unrealistic”) not only sounds pejoratively, but still sounds too passive, as if it were a mere side-effect of Romantic depiction. Antirealism, instead, denotes a *deliberate* confrontation with realism, and directly negates its logic of presentation.

¹¹ The term “antirealism” itself appears in the work of Lukács as a pejorative label for the modernist avant-garde. Like Hegel he was too hasty in dismissing the antirealist tendencies of modern literature. His rigid separation between critical realism and antirealism, the latter of which he most evidently identified with Kafka and Joyce, does not hold, once his idiosyncratic *gusto* for particular literary works has been exposed. Georg Lukács, *Wider den mißverstandenen Realismus* (Hamburg: Classen, 1958).

¹² See again, Tzvetan Todorov, *The Fantastic – A Structural Approach to a Literary Genre* (trans. Richard Howard), Cleveland/ London: The Press of the Case Western Reserve University, 1973.

¹³ See again, Rosemary Jackson, *Fantasy: The Literature of Subversion*, London/ New York: Routledge, 2009.

¹⁴ David McNally, *Monsters of the Market – Zombies, Vampires, and Global Capitalism*, Leiden/ Boston: Brill, 2011.

modernization seems to have catapulted society back into an impoverished and underdeveloped state.

Moreover, because in the two novels discussed below, the *pícaro* is a poet who remains unemployable for the capitalist production process—since his labor does not contribute to self-valorization—both novels also give the lie to the platitude of abstract labor. The experience of non-assimilability of both the author and his work constitutes the *crux* of the implicit treatise on art in both *The Devil's Elixirs* and *Hallucinations*. For both Hoffmann and Arenas, literature is per definition picaresque since it mocks the drive of formal abstraction by means of a “play drive,” and in so doing evades the transformation of surplus into profit.

Part 1 *The Devil's Elixirs*

3. Baroque Principles of the Fantastic

E.T.A. Hoffmann's own fascination with the Spanish baroque, of which he implicitly defined himself as a successor, comes most explicitly to the fore in his *Fantasiestück*, a “*Kunstgespräch* [conversation about art]”: titled *Nachricht von den neuesten Schicksalen des Hundes Berganza* [*News from the latest fate of the dog Berganza*, 1814] which he published a year before the first part of *The Devil's Elixirs* appeared. In *Berganza*, Hoffmann reuses the literary material of Cervantes' *Coloquio de los perros* [1613], published as one of his *Novelas ejemplares*. In Cervantes' novella, the *pícaro* takes the fantastic shape of the speaking dog Berganza who reflects on his misfortunes during various stays with different owners. What the canine character painfully experiences, is the difference between the idealized universe of literature and the actual crude social reality of baroque society.

Two hundred years later, Hoffmann restages the conversation between Berganza and the human narrator of the *Nachtstück*, as a treatise on the function of theater and art in modernity. Just like Cervantes' canine character, so does Hoffmann's dog Berganza describe a culturally backward and morally bankrupt society, and opts for the exchange of this crude reality with poetic transcendence.

His worldview is plagued by a tragic sentiment of life, i.e. the awareness that with the modernization of society and its shift from qualitative to quantitative values something precious has been lost in modernity.

In *Don Quixote*, Cervantes had already warped the melancholic spirit of his time into a fervent parody. The “medievaesque” nobleman Quixote wanders in a social reality where residual medieval heroic values from chivalric romances eventually have to yield to the emergent mercantile values of commercial entertainment-literature. Later, the burgeoning ‘culture industry’ in Hoffmann’s time repeats this melancholic criticism, often in the *gestalt* of a farce. The topic of the *Kunstgespräch* in Hoffmann’s *Berganza* revisits the Cervantine question whether art belongs to commercial entertainment culture or whether it should be viewed as the poetic mediator between the subject and the “deeper secrets” of nature and society.

In *The Devil’s Elixirs*, the modern sentiment of disillusion [*desengaño*] is rendered, in a Quixotesque manner, into an identification with a seemingly irrecoverable past: a medieval-pastoral mentality that existed prior to the “protestant ethic” and the uprooting spirit of the Renaissance. The novel was published in two parts, compiled between 1814 and 1816. Although well received only by some aficionados of horror and fantasy at its time, it has largely been characterized as “*Unterhaltungsliteratur* [popular commercial literature],” if not as trivial literature. Hoffmann modeled *The Devil’s Elixirs* after Matthew Gregory Lewis’ very popular and widely read gothic novel *Ambrosio or the Monk* [1795], and was, thus, undeniably aiming at wide public appeal. The novel’s lack of success, in part, can be attributed to its over-complex and baroque structure. It is organized around the testimony of the monk, Medardus, looking back at his life just before his death. Besides the testimony of the monk, the novel comprises a confusing clutter of different fragments written by different narrators. Those testimonies, which contradict one another, often remain incomplete and suddenly break off. To summarize and reconstruct the plot of *The Devil’s Elixirs* borders almost on insanity. However, in spite of this difficulty, the next section will reconstruct some parts of its plot, while reading the fragmented structure of the

novel as a symptom and metonym for the diremption and alienation of the modern subject.

4. *Dédoublements, Surrogates and Crypts*

The novel, a recollection of memories, is in reality Medardus' confession and penitential exercise for committing serious crimes. Before the story begins, a so-called "Editor's Preface" comments on the difficult reconstruction of the manuscripts. The preface is also a reading guide that introduces the reader to the perspective of "*camera obscura*": a viewpoint that rotates the image by 180 degrees. In doing so, the reader is right away asked to adopt the lens of the inverted world. What follows are some musings of the fictive editor, evoking German Romantic clichés such as the view on the "blue mountains," uncanny "gothic buildings," and "images of saints." They set the scenario for the action to take place. And then, the reader is warned that he is about to confront the *Entsetzliche* [the horrible] as well as the *Possenhafte* and *Tolle* [the farcical and the grotesque]. Here, the reader is prepared for the contortion of the symbolic into the allegorical. The Romantic poetic search for transcendence is immediately supplemented with fantastic horrific features. The turnover from one thing into its opposite recasts the Romantic sense of longing and beauty as fantastic apparitions. Those specters return in the novel as revenants, reminding the subject of unsettled businesses. The preface is essentially a warning that repressed mythology and superstitions, thought to be superseded by rational progressive development, will eventually return to haunt the modern disenchanted world. What first appeared as lack, now returns in excess.

After the fictive editor's preface, the story opens immediately with the Freudian primal scene.¹⁵ The birth of the young Franz (Medardus' birth name), coincides with the death of his father, who, so it was told, led a sinful life but died in reconciliation. Immediately after his father's death, the young Franz is taken to be raised in a monastery, where he acquires the name Medardus and is

¹⁵ In reality, it is rather the other way around, Freud uses this novel together with Hoffmann's *Der Sandmann* to discuss his concept of the uncanny, and in particular the notion of the *Doppelgänger*. Cf. Sigmund Freud, *Sämtliche Werke Freuds I* (Dinslaken: askleopiosmedia, 2014)/ Apple Books.

inaugurated to the Order of the Capuchins. One day, however, he falls prey to satanic temptations and drinks the devil's elixir, a relic, or *ruin*, of St. Anthony's. Soon after that, a demonic figure emerges who appears to be an altar painter from ancient times. After giving into the satanic temptations of the elixir, Medardus develops a talent as a gifted and passionate orator. His sermons thrill the masses. The elixir, however, unleashes not only a sophistic power, but also a strong carnal desire which he can hardly control. At a certain moment, he almost goes mad when a young woman visits him to make her confessions. In Medardus' view, she looks exactly like the pious St. Rosalia in the altar painting. The other friars notice the transformation of the monk and decide that it is best to send him out on a pilgrimage to Rome, so that he may restore his spiritual and moral faith. But upon leaving the suffocating environment of the monastery, Medardus has only one thing on his mind: he has desperately fallen in love with the young woman who came to make her confessions, and wants to find her.

What follows is a series of adventurous episodes during which Medardus is entangled in one crime after another. Like a *pícaro* he travels from place to place leaving a trail of destruction behind him. In a forest, he runs into Count Victor, whom he frightens so that the latter accidentally falls into a ravine—or did Medardus push him? Victor, as later in the novel will become clear, is his half-brother and double. He is both Medardus' self and other. After Victor falls into the abyss, Medardus decides to dress up as the Count and assume his role. Ironically, as the reader learns later, Count Victor had intended to dress up as a monk in order to infiltrate the castle of the Baron of F, a gothic castle full of cabinets and hidden rooms. When Medardus, dressed up as Count Victor, arrives to the castle, he learns that Aurelia, the woman with whom he had fallen in love, is the Baron's daughter. The pious Aurelia, a *femme fragile*, has a double too. It is her "evil" stepmother Euphemia, a *femme fatale* who had conspired against the Baron and had planned to run away with Count Victor. Medardus, whom Euphemia misrecognizes as Count Victor, feels intimidated by the *femme fatale*. In order to escape from her, he poisons and kills Euphemia.

In the novel, the constant cross-dressing and alternations between different characters constitutes a clear instance of the inverted world. What it reveals are

the constant reversals and inversions through which the characters have to go in order to assume their true selves, which for most of them turns out to be yet another mode of deception. The true self is superposed with multiple *personae*. “[I]t is in the sense of a “costume,” or rather a mask, expressing a process of disguising, where behind each mask, there is yet another.”¹⁶

When Medardus realizes that Aurelia is in the castle, he attempts to slip into her room at night. Hermogenes, Aurelia’s brother, however, stops him before entering. As if by reflex, Medardus stabs Hermogenes with a knife and quickly flees from the castle. By then, he has already committed three murders. Throughout the novel Medardus constantly denies and forgets the crimes he has committed, while he shifts back and forth between conscience and nescience. His true ego appears to have a separated and concealed existence.

Later in the novel, the reader is told that Medardus unconsciously repeats the sins and crimes of his ancestors. The sin that seems to haunt Medardus’ entire family line is that of having been overcome by carnal desire. In this respect, *The Devil’s Elixirs* narrates the underside of the “genealogy” of the modern subject, a history of repressed pleasure principle and failed sublimation. That moment on St. Antony’s day, when the uncanny altar painter appeared, Medardus does not know yet that the demonic painter is *Francesco I*, a follower and student of Leonardo Da Vinci, who was commissioned to paint the altarpiece in the church. While working on the altarpiece Francesco had fallen in love with an unknown demonic woman. The representation of the pious St. Rosalia in the altar painting is increasingly transformed into the image of the voluptuous earthly Venus. *Francesco I* and the demonic woman give birth to a child, also named Francesco. Medardus, Victor, and Aurelia, who also turns out to be Medardus’ half-sibling, all descend from this family tree.

Sometimes the phantoms of past generations emerge from the poorly shut tombs and their secret continues to haunt the next generation. And so, Medardus reenacts the crimes of his ancestors while constantly being haunted by his double, Count Victor. The double figures an intrapsychic splitting between self and other,

¹⁶ Gilles Deleuze, *Logic of Sense*, trans. Mark Lester (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993): 263.

resulting in the appearance of two distinct individuals. The double is the product of a psychic enclave that Maria Török and Nikolas Abraham have called the *crypt*.¹⁷ This intrapsychic tomb is the locus of repressed and buried desire, which may not simply be that of the subject alone, but is the result of an unwitting transmission of family secrets—the crimes and desires of our ancestors. Anticipating the findings of psychoanalysis, Hoffmann indicates that in order to understand the psychic structure of a personality one has to recur to early childhood, from the ‘prehistory’ of the individual to that of the genus. Moreover, this eternal return of the same crimes and occurrences, points to the closure and repetition by which the modern subject is subdued to the capitalist routine; an automatic subject over which he has no power, nor from which he can break free. Like abstract labor, Medardus actions stand as alien and opposed to him; they do not appear as his own conscious deeds over which he could claim authorship.

The crypt is a gothic but also baroque motive. One only has to visit the Escorial castle to perceive that there are crypts incorporated in the majority of its rooms. The crypt constitutes the locus of the already disfigured symbol and is the reservoir of lost transcendence flattened or emptied out in modernity. Its nexus of revelation and concealment produces an uncanny effect, which is a consequence of the lost symbol and the loss of the faith in divine images or the aura of art. This currently empty space which metaphysically used to belong to God is now appropriated by man. However, as Nietzsche once described, the paradox of modernity is that man continues to live with God’s shadows even though he has killed Him.¹⁸ Since, strictly speaking, this reservoir is neither the *locus* of man nor God, an uncanny space emerges where basically anything may happen. “A whole world of unconscious fantasy emerges,” one that leads to its own “separated and concealed existence.”¹⁹

¹⁷ Nikolas Abraham and Maria Török, *The Wolf Man’s Magic Word: A Cryptonomy*, trans. Nicolas Rand (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986).

¹⁸ “Gott ist todt: aber so wie die Art der Menschen ist, wird es vielleicht noch Jahrtausende lang Höhlen geben, in denen man seinen Schatten zeigt.” (KSA 3, *Fröhliche Wissenschaft*, Drittes Buch, 108; 467) [God is dead, but given the way of men, there may still be caves for thousands of years in which his shadow will be shown]

¹⁹ Abraham and Török, *The Wolf Man’s Magic Word*, 130.

The tensions between Medardus' moral existence and his sensuous desires, between transcendence and immanence, are reproduced through a constant turnover into extremes, epitomized by his doubles. The *dédoublement* [*Ich-Verdopplung*], dissociation of the self [*Ichteilung*], and transposition of the self [*Ichvertauschung*], as established by Freud²⁰ not only produce an uncanny atmosphere, but, in *The Devil's Elixir*, they also produce a carnivalesque effect, constantly evoked by the practice of cross-dressing. Next to his uncanny double, Count Victor, Medardus also has a *comical* double, the jester-like character Pietro Belcampo, alias Peter Schönfeld, who mockingly describes the masquerade of the monk as the "*Kostüm des Weltbürgers*," the costume of the cosmopolitan but philistine bourgeois. Such an "insult" opposes, but simulataneously illustrates, the burgeoning discourse of German nationalism. Torn between the idea of cosmopolitanism and nationalism, German intellectuals saw themselves, on the one hand, as belonging to a prestigious world culture capable of competing with that of France, and, on the other, they embraced their alleged cultural non-assimilability. Accordingly, they called for the need of a strong nation state which, from a protectionist point of view, would be able to contest other powerful nation states.

The external social tensions correspond, then, to the inner struggles that find expression in Medardus' repressed desires on the one hand, and his self-indulgence on the other. He increasingly seems to be animated by an alien and destructive force from without, a force that he constantly projects on his doubles. The encounter with his terrifying double is described in a scene of imprisonment. Accused of multiple murders and incarcerated in a dungeon, Medardus is awaiting his trial. Suddenly, knocks, cries, and scratching can be heard from the bottom of his cell. "*Hihhi...hihhi...Brü-der-lein...Brü-der-lein...Me-dar-dus... ich bin da... bin da... mach auf... auf... wir wo-llen in den Wa-Wald gehn... Wald gehn!* [Hee, hee, hee! Hee, hee, hee! Lit-tle Bro-ther! Little Bro-ther Medar-dus! I... am... am... here! O-pen... the... the... door! Let... us... go... in-to... the woods!]"²¹ Lapsarian language, that is, fallen and ruined language, cries, rumbles, stutters, push

²⁰ Freud, "Sämtliche Werke Freuds, 6462-6463.

²¹ Hoffmann, *Die Elixiere des Teufels*, 182; *The Devil's Elixirs*, 154.

language towards the fragmented and incomprehensible commands of the other. They seem to be utterances of the other monk (Count Victor), whom Medardus had pushed into the ravine, just before heading to the Baron's castle. This horrible monk has arisen from the dead and come to haunt the dungeon cell. However, with astonishment Medardus realizes that the voice is coming out of his inner self:

Jetzt tönte die Stimme in meinem Innern wie bekannt; ich hatte sie schon sonst gehört, doch nicht, wie mich es dünkte, so abgebrochen und stammelnd. Ja, mit Entsetzen glaubte ich meinen eigenen Sprachton zu vernehmen. Unwillkürlich, als wollte ich versuchen, ob es dem so sei, stammelte ich nach: „Me-dar-dus... Me-dar-dus!“ Da lachte es wieder, aber höhnisch und grimmig und rief: „Brü-der-lein ... Brü-der-lein, hast ... du, du mi-mich erkannt ... erkannt?... ma-mach auf ... wir wo-wollen in den Wa-Wald ... in den Wald!“ „Armer Wahnsinniger“, so sprach es dumpf und schauerlich aus mir heraus, „armer Wahnsinniger, nicht aufmachen kann ich dir, nicht heraus mir dir in den schönen Wald in die herrliche freie Frühlingsluft, die draußen wehen mag; eingesperrt im dumpfen, düstern Kerker bin ich wie du!“ Da ächzte es im trostlosen Jammer, und immer leiser und unvernehmlicher wurde das Klopfen, bis es endlich ganz schwieg.²²

The voice now sounded familiar to me; I had heard it somewhere before but not, I thought, so disjointed and stuttering. To my horror I almost seemed to recognize it as my own voice, and as if wanting to see whether it really was so, I imitated the stammer: “Me-dar-dus! Me-dar-dus!” The laughter broke out anew but his time angry and scornful: “Bro-ther! Bro-ther! Do... you... you... know...me? O-pen... the ... door! Let... us ... go... go...into the ... the... woods!” “Poor demented fool!” came a dull voice from within me. “I cannot open the door and go with you into the lovely woods and the fresh spring breeze which is blowing outside. I am locked in this musty dungeon, just as you are.” There was a moan of grief and agony, and the knocking became gradually softer until it finally died away.²³

Arbitrarily, and with lack of control, the voice of Medardus' double seems to animate and ventilate his desire to break free from the social constraints of both bourgeois society and the clerical order. The physical space of the dungeon symbolizes the psychological interior of Medardus who seems to be unable to cope with suffocating social rules of conduct. The idyllic escape to nature, as decreed by Rousseau, for example, is represented by the idea of breaking free into the forest. What is described here is quite evidently a Romantic conception of the struggle of the poetic genius. After all, Medardus is a gifted orator who is unable to mediate his aesthetic sensibility with the standards of effectivity produced by modern society. He is incapable of assimilating and conforming to the cold and grey bourgeois order. This circumstance turns Medardus into a *pícaro pur sang*.

²² Hoffmann, *Die Elixiere des Teufels*, 182-183.

²³ Hoffmann, *The Devil's Elixirs*, 154-155.

Eventually, his incapacity to mediate his inner conflict results in “madness [*Wahnsinn*].” The monologue in the passage above expresses the Romantic cliché of the pathological poetic genius, who sees his spiritual ideals betrayed by civil society, and subsequently suffers from an outbreak of madness. To put it in a Nietzschean way, spirituality and life mutually exclude one another, and opting for the spiritual results quite literally in illness or the degradation of life.

Just as Goethe’s Faust cries “*zwei Seelen wohnen, ach! in meiner Brust!*” [Two souls, alas, dwell in my breast!], Medardus affirms: “*[i]ch bin das, was ich scheine, und scheine das nicht, was ich bin, mir selbst ein unerklärliches Rätsel, bin ich entzweit mit meinem Ich!*” [“I am what I seem to be, and do not seem to be what I am; even to myself I am an insoluble riddle to myself; for my personality has torn apart!].”²⁴ Elsewhere, Medardus’ observation: “*ich schien mir selbst ein anderer*” [I appeared as other to myself]²⁵ almost literally translates into the Rimbaudian *dictum, je est un autre*. This Faustian “unhappy consciousness” results from the incapacity to mediate the contradictions between reality and ideality or the sensuous and the supersensuous. Those oppositions remain unmediated and ossified in a stark dualism, resulting in a stagnant and alienated consciousness that finally appears as two different persons. The dialectical enmeshment of the finite (the carnal) and the infinite (the divine and poetic) produces a dirempted consciousness. As Hegel indicates in the section “Pleasure and Necessity” in *The Phenomenology of Spirit* this unmediated conflict engenders a profound nihilism, caused by an unreflected plunge into the full immediacy of everyday life. In this vein, the picaresque protagonist Medardus is transformed into the social type of “the Adventurer.”

As Simmel indicates, the Adventurer is by definition an “ahistorical” person who remains undefined by the past and future, but only lives in the immediate presence of the moment.²⁶ On his picaresque “pilgrimage,” Medardus constantly strives for sensuous, carnal pleasure, and is at times trapped in a severe feeling of megalomania. His *carpe diem* attitude is predicated on the doctrine of the

²⁴ Hoffmann, *Die Elixiere des Teufels*, 59; *The Devil’s Elixirs*, 54.

²⁵ Hoffmann, *Die Elixiere des Teufels*, 47. Unfortunately, the English translation puts: “I was a different person” (*The Devil’s Elixirs*, 41).

²⁶ Simmel, *On Individuality and Social Forms*, 190.

immediate, i.e. lust, on the one hand, and a mere passive modern consumerist attitude, on the other. However, full immediacy and nothingness are the same.²⁷ Medardus is unable to mediate, or, in psychoanalytical terms, sublimate, his sensuous desires by means of channeling principles or concepts.

The mere consumerist attitude, which does not go beyond immediate satisfaction, expresses itself in furor and mania. Because Medardus is unable to get immediate satisfaction—he fails to seduce Aurelia—the monk is often presented as a furious tyrant. However, since he adopts the attitude of the adventurer or conqueror, which is the absorption into full immediacy of the moment, Medardus' subject and object appear at all times separated. The “I” saying “I” appears as the wholly other. Subject and predicate no longer belong together, so that *ipseity* shifts into *illeity* up to the point that the whole subject-object relation collapses into self-annihilating negativity, or nihilism. “Consciousness” has now sublated itself, insofar as it has fully relinquished itself. “*Lust*,” as Hegel indicates, turns into “*Verlust* [loss].”²⁸

The consumption and reification of the outside world, as personified by the position of Hegel's Master, eventually results in the reification of both subject and object, so that Medardus encounters himself indeed as a “*willenloses Werkzeug*,”²⁹ in front of an alien power, analogous to the position of the modern worker. Capitalist modernity either throws all individuals into the nothingness of singularity, while cutting them off from the whole; or else, it relinquishes all individuality by subjecting the individuals to radical abstract exteriority, i.e. the laws of capital, which they neither control nor understand. Either way, the subject becomes an instrument that in turn makes use of instruments, which are no longer the instruments of an individual but of an abstract mechanism that is no longer transparent. Most of the time, Medardus remains ignorant of what he is doing and of his motivations to do so. Subjected to the modern “automatic subject,” he is

²⁷ Hegel, *Phänomenologie des Geistes*, 272.

²⁸ *Ibid*, 273.

²⁹ Hoffmann, *Die Elixiere des Teufels*, 129; Cf. “I was only a tool which that power was using for purposes unknown to me” (Hoffmann, *The Devil's Elixirs*, 120).

described as an “automaton” himself, as the “*elendes Spielwerk*” of a “*bösen geheimnisvollen Macht*”³⁰ and totality that he no longer comprehends.

While this section has outlined the psychological dimension of the fragmentation of the subject in modernity, the next section will make the transition from the individual to the general, and outline the representation of economic and political development in the novel.

5. Fantastic Sovereigns and Martyrs

As outlined before, for Benjamin, the crux of the Baroque is defined through the crisis of sovereignty in the seventeenth century. The tragic development of baroque drama crystallizes in the transformation of the tyrant into the martyr. If for Benjamin the martyr and the tyrant are the social types and the required parts to be played in baroque tragedy, and if this chapter claims that *The Devil's Elixirs* is a belated expression of this baroque tragic sentiment, then these types must be found in the novel too. And indeed, nothing less is true. If the previous section described the transformation from self to other, this section will identify now a quite different scene of dethronement.

In the fourth episode of the first part of the novel, the monk Medardus, who is still dressed up as Count Victor, arrives at the Castle of the Prince. The Royal Residence is described as follows: “*Die Residenz des Fürsten bildete gerade den Gegensatz zu der Handelsstadt... Im Umfange bedeutend kleiner, war sie regelmäßiger und schöner gebaut, aber ziemlich menschenleer.*”³¹ The English translation, unfortunately, deemphasizes the stark contradiction between the *mercantile* city, “*Handelsstadt*” simply translated as “city,” and the Residence of the Prince, translated as “town:” “The town proved to be precisely the opposite of the city I had left behind. Much smaller in size, it was more uniformly and attractively built, but the streets were almost deserted.”³² The description of the park continues as follows:

³⁰ Hoffmann, *Die Elixiere des Teufels*, 115 [“But I myself had sunk to the condition of a miserable plaything of that sinister power which held me in its chains, for I who believed myself free could only move about within the cage in which I was helplessly imprisoned.” (Hoffmann, *The Devil's Elixirs*, 106)]

³¹ Hoffmann, *Die Elixiere des Teufels*, 129.

³² Hoffmann, *The Devil's Elixirs*, 110.

Antike Säulen, deren Kapitälere ein großer Mann beinahe mit der Hand erreicht, sind wohl ziemlich lächerlich. Ebenso gab es in entgegengesetzter Art im andern Teil des Parks ein paar gotische Gebäude, die sich in ihrer Kleinheit gar zu kleinlich ausnahmen. ³³

[Greek columns, the capitol of which a tall man can almost reach by stretching out his hand, are somewhat ludicrous. Similarly, there were in another part of the park a few Gothic pavilions whose scale was so small as to be absurd.³⁴]

The style of the building is “impelled by a particular awareness of the Romantic” arches, full of ogee, bizarre pillars, and curlicues; in other words, the style is neo-gothic and baroque.

The worldview and manners of the Prince are described in a way all too well reminiscent of the enlightened despot Frederick II of Prussia, who used to describe himself as “the First Servant of the State [*erster Diener des Staates*].”

The monarch in *The Devil's Elixirs* contends:

Der Fürst ist der beste Mensch, den es auf der Welt geben kann, von jeher hat er den wahrhaft landesväterlichen Grundsatz, daß die Untertanen nicht seiner wegen da wären, er vielmehr der Untertanen wegen da sei recht an den Tag gelegt. ³⁵

The Prince is the noblest man one could imagine; right from the beginning he held to the paternal principle that his subjects were not there for his benefit but he for theirs.³⁶

The enlightened despot in the style of Frederick the Great, however, here appears as Frederick the Small. The fantastic distortion of the outside architecture corresponds to the fantastic distortion of the character. The *Handelsstadt*, mentioned in the first sentence of the chapter, does not function as coincidental framing for this scene. The Residence of the monarch emerges as a grotesque miniature in comparison to the commercial trading city, and behind its fantastic façades lurk the ruins of feudal absolutism.

It was indeed King Frederick II who in 1740 attempted to rationalize and modernize the Prussian economy by means of a state-controlled bureaucracy. The state thus became the principal trader, banker, and entrepreneur. In adopting and importing some aspects of the spirit of French Enlightenment, the monarch stimulated the cultural and economic values of the rising bourgeoisie. In doing so,

³³ Hoffmann, *Die Elixiere des Teufels*, 131.

³⁴ Hoffmann, *The Devil's Elixirs*, 122.

³⁵ Hoffmann, *Die Elixiere des Teufels*, 132.

³⁶ *The Devil's Elixirs*, 123.

he advanced the ruin of his own social class. Thus, the tyrant is transformed into martyr, and the state brings forward its own demise. Benjamin defines the crisis of the concept of sovereignty as the state of exception. Its primary function is the exclusion of the sovereign.³⁷ As the contrast between the commercial city and the grotesque Residence of the monarch in *The Devil's Elixirs* shows, the monarch has been literally displaced by the commercial trading city, culminating in an almost carnivalesque scene of the king's uncrowning. What the scene depicts is a backward and untimely coincidence between the sovereign (state) and bourgeois society, the latter reducing the former to a merely symbolic function.

In the story, the enlightened despot, whom Hegel once described as the “personification of ethical life in the form of self-consciousness”—and Marx, in turn, as “pantheistic mysticism”—reveals that he is a passionate gambler. He too is an adventurer who lives in the full immediacy of circumstance. It turns out that “chance” motivates sovereign decision:

*“Spielen Sie Pharo?” – Ich verneinte es. “Das ist ein herrliches Spiel”, fuhr er fort, “in seiner hohen Einfachheit das wahre Spiel für geistreiche Männer. Man tritt gleichsam aus sich selbst heraus, oder besser, man stellt sich auf einen Standpunkt, von dem man die sonderbaren Verschlingungen und Verknüpfungen, die geheime Macht, welche wir Zufall nennen, mit unsichtbaren Faden spinnt, zu erblicken imstande ist. Gewinn und Verlust sind die beiden Angeln, auf denen sich die geheimnisvolle Maschine bewegt, die wir angestoßen und die nun der ihr einwohnende Geist nach Willkür forttreibt.”*³⁸

“Do you play faro?” I said that I did not. “It is a wonderful game,” he went on, “in its utter simplicity the real game for intelligent men. It takes you out of yourself, or rather it brings you to a point from which you are able to observe the strange webs and patterns woven by an invisible force we call chance. Win and lose are the twin poles around which revolves the mysterious machine which we have set in motion and which is now driven on inexorably by the spirit dwelling within it.”³⁹

The notion of fortune as luck, and its parenthetical meaning as a large amount of money, congregate here to present both economic prosperity and the loss of economic security as a matter of chance. When the individual is persistently

³⁷ “Wenn der moderne Souveränitätsbegriff auf eine höchste, fürstliche Exekutivgewalt hinausläuft, entwickelt der barocke sich aus einer Diskussion des Ausnahmezustandes und macht zur wichtigsten Funktion des Fürsten, den auszuschließen” (Benjamin, *Ursprung des deutschen Trauerspiels*: 47-48). [If the modern concept of sovereignty amounts to a supreme executive power on the part of the ruler, the Baroque concept develops on the basis of a discussion of the state of exception, and makes it the most important function of the prince to avert this state (Benjamin, *Origin of the German Trauerspiel*, 49)].

³⁸ Hoffmann, *Die Elixiere des Teufels*, 136.

³⁹ Hoffmann, *The Devil's Elixirs*, 116.

presented as a subject who oscillates between nescience and conscience of an “invisible power” that seems to guide human activity, of course economic advantage and disadvantage must appear to him as the result of a throw of dice. The new milieu of the modern subject, bourgeois society, is marked by non-transparency: invisible hands without consciously acting actors.⁴⁰ Here, not even the sovereign himself oversees the mechanisms of modern political economy. The gains and losses in the game, solvency and insolvency, circulate in an equal manner and guarantee the mechanism of the game to open up new possibilities of future transactions.

After finishing a few successful games, Medardus, now calling himself “Herr Leonard,” engages in a conversation with the monarch. Medardus seems to plea for economic, rather than feudal, absolutism since he starts to object to “state regulations [*Einschränkung*],” i.e. the constraints that the monarch puts to the mechanisms of the game itself:

*“Aber eben diese Einschränkung, gnädigster Herr! [...] hebt wieder die Freiheit des Spiels auf und setzt selbst jenen besonderen Verknüpfungen des Zufalls Schranken, deren Betrachtung Ihnen, gnädigster Herr, das Spiel so interessant macht. [...] Verzeihen Sie meine Freimütigkeit, gnädigster Herr! – Ich glaube überdem, daß jede Einschränkung der Freiheit, sollte diese auch mißbraucht werden, drückend, ja, als dem menschlichen Wesen schnurstracks entgegenstrebend, unausstehlich ist.”*⁴¹

“But this very control you exercise, sir,” I rejoined, “takes the freedom out of the game and even erects barriers to those fateful associations the observations of which makes the game so interesting to you” [...] Forgive my frankness, sir. I believe that any restriction of freedom, however much this freedom may be abused, is oppressive, intolerable, in fact, radically opposed to human nature.”⁴²

Here, Medardus advocates the freedoms of bourgeois society, i.e. the free market and freedom of speech. What the passage painfully underscores, is the modern separation between state and bourgeois society, which will thus come to stand in an antinomian relation. Modern society loses its unity and splits, or dirempts, into the public sphere of the state, and the private relations of bourgeois society as symbolized by the *Handelsstadt*. In highlighting the increasing incompatibility

⁴⁰ Elsewhere, in E.T.A. Hoffmann’s story “Spielerglück” [“Gambler’s luck”], the allegory of the Goddess *fortuna* is wedded to this well-known economic metaphor. The notion of the “*unsichtbare Hand*,” is literally mentioned (E.T.A. Hoffmann: *Poetische Werke in sechs Bänden, Band 4*, Berlin: Aufbau Verlag, 1963: 264.

⁴¹ Hoffmann, *Die Elixiere des Teufels*, 143.

⁴² Hoffmann, *The Devil’s Elixirs*, 122.

between political economy and the notion of the sovereign, *The Devil's Elixirs* fantastically transfigures the social and economic transformations at the turn of the eighteenth century in Germany.

Part 2 *Hallucinations*

6. The Cuban Fantastic

The modern picaresque novel *Hallucinations* displays a fugitive and poetic teleology of liberation. The main protagonist is a fictionalized historical figure, the Dominican monk Servando Teresa de Mier, who sometimes also assumes the role of the author's, Reinaldo Arenas', alter ego. He begins his journey with the departure from his maternal house in Monterrey, Mexico. Like Medardus in Hoffmann's novel, Servando is a gifted orator and is persistently prosecuted by the Spanish authorities for his secular and antiauthoritarian convictions. His journey consists of continuous incarcerations and subsequent escapes, and goes all the way from Mexico to Europe to the US and the Caribbean and again back to Mexico where the fictional Servando, like the historical one, pushes for the national independence of his country. The picaresque world depicted in the novel constitutes a stirring and chaotic setting, marked by a concatenation of eighteenth-century revolutions. Everywhere in Europe and the Americas, including the Caribbean, people are struggling for self-determination, and are overturning and displacing old political orders. Sovereigns are perpetually turned into martyrs, and royal heads roll everywhere.

In *Hallucinations*, this revolutionary universe is quite often depicted in fantastic modes of representation, featuring half-man half-fish figures that appear to have stepped out of a Hieronymus Bosch painting in the Escorial or the Prado. Speaking mice emerging in the darkest corners, ready to attack at any moment, remind us of the creatures in E.T.A. Hoffmann's *The Nutcracker*. These fantastic characters dwell in a "hallucinating" world, where the colonial *ancien régime* of the Europeans collides with the "new world" of the *indio*, *mestizo*, and *criollo*, who

struggle for emancipation. The meeting of these two forces in the conjuncture of decolonial struggle is, as Carpentier indicated, quite “marvelous” in and of itself.

The first edition of *Hallucinations* appeared in France under the title *Le monde hallucinant* in 1968. The first Spanish edition appeared in Mexico in 1969. Later, in 1982, a Venezuelan editorial house published a revised edition which is the most widespread version of the novel as it is known today. In Cuba, the publication of the novel was prohibited, despite the fact that in 1966 it received an honorable mention in the book contest of the Cuban Writers and Artists Association (UNEAC). Indeed, the “1980-Prologue” to the novel adumbrates some of the personal resentments of the author regarding the censor for running counter to the values of the Cuban Revolution.

The novel pronounces some bitter irony and humor. For example, in Chapter XXIV, a certain “writer” appears who is presented as a ne’er-do-well and a hypocrite, free of any talent. According to the narrator, this “writer” implements a base realism akin to that which Lukács had understood as Naturalism. The “writer” persistently gets lost in literary descriptions that list meaningless details such as texture of the fabric of curtains, the shining of the silverware on the table, and even the page numbers in the books on a wooden cabinet. Moreover, this “writer” is preparing a so-called “Apology for the New President.” In the novel, this “New President” not only has supplanted the Spanish colonial order, but also ostensibly presents himself as a great aficionado and patron of poetry. The “writer’s” *opus magnum*, titled *El Saco de las Lozas*, reveals the narrator’s, or, in this case it is safe to say, Arenas’ campaign of vengeance against Alejo Carpentier, whose *chef-d’oeuvre* is called *El siglo de las luces*, a work that deals with the confluence of Enlightenment thought of the French Revolution and the independence struggles in the Caribbean. Unlike Arenas, Carpentier received the mercy and admiration of President Fidel Castro. His work was not censored. He even worked as the Cuban ambassador in France and, therefore in Arenas’ view, he was a hypocrite and a propagandist.⁴³ Not least, Carpentier was one of the jury

⁴³ Or as *Hallucinations*’ main protagonist, Servando, puts it: “[e]sta hipocresía constante,” which consists in “servir a esta chusma brutal que todo lo reduce a esquemas, gente que confunde la democracia con la mala educación” (Arenas, *El mundo alucinate*, 302). [“This unrelenting hypocrisy

members of the UNEAC, who criticized and prevented *Hallucinations* from winning the association's annual prize.

This brief recapitulation of the polemic against Carpentier in the novel not only matters for its concept of the neo-baroque, which aligns itself with Lezama Lima's notion rather than with Carpentier's, but also has important consequences for the novel's broader interpretation of the status of literature and the poet in general. From a position of political compromise, so the novel seems to imply, no good literature can be written. This is a position that Arenas shares with the authors discussed in the last chapter. Eventually, what all writers discussed in this thesis struggle with is the status of literature and the poet itself in modernity. Their problem may be read along the lines of that which Zygmunt Bauman has described as the (self-imposed) reduction to their mere existence as "interpreters" rather than "legislators."⁴⁴ But for Arenas, the poet is *per definitionem* a picaresque character who attempts to safeguard his moral integrity by refusing to be assimilated into any official state ideology or political program. Just as in Hoffmann's novel, the baroque problem is the diremption between the world as perceived *ideally* by the *pícaro*-poet, and the world as it empirically is. The *pícaro* is unable to bring in line his poetic and political maxims with the ruling ideas of his time. Those who are able to do so, like Alejo Carpentier, are deceivers and dissemblers. However, rather than just constituting Arenas' personal rancor, the novel *Hallucinations* can be taken as a treatise on art which promotes the author's *ars poetica*.

7. The Task of Neobaroque Literature

This section will outline to what extent *Hallucinations* can be read as a poetic conversation on the topic of art, which recurs to baroque motives to launch a critique of the present in light of the past. Thus, *Hallucinations* does not

[...] to serve that brutal mob that reduces all great things to schemes and grand abstractions, that rabble which has confused bad manners and vulgarity with sweet democracy?" (Arenas, *Hallucinations*, 235)].

⁴⁴ Bauman describes the role of the legislator as one of making authoritative statements, of selecting arguments and taking a stance. The interpreter, however, does not choose a side. His role is that of facilitating different opinions, translating statements, so that those statements can become intelligible in another context. Interpreters retain a "meta-professional authority," but their "strategy is aimed at facilitating communication between autonomous (sovereign) participants" (Zygmunt Bauman, *Legislators and Interpreters* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1989): 4-5)

reconstruct its historical material to fit its “official” present, but conversely, a past is rediscovered to criticize contemporary values.⁴⁵ What follows is a rather ambiguous perception of history and the idea of historical progression.

In a letter prefixed to the novel, which is addressed to the main character Servando and signed by “R. A.” himself, the author-narrator states that the most useful thing he found out was that “*tú y yo somos la misma persona* [you and I are the same person].”⁴⁶ Again, the Rimbaudian dictum is repeated here, or as Servando puts it later, in a rather Lorcanian way: “*Yo ya no soy yo* [I am no longer myself].”⁴⁷ Since Arenas left Cuba and fled to the United States of America in 1980, the analogy that, anachronistically, has been drawn between the author and the main protagonist consists in the fact that both the character and historical figure, Servando, and the author are politically prosecuted writers who have been exiled. However, as already seen in Hoffmann, the dictum “I am no longer myself” seems to be indicative of a broader Romantic association of the poet. Moreover, Lezama Lima indicates that amongst the various revolutionary monks of Argentina and Mexico, the historical figure Servando Teresa de Mier personifies the confluence of baroque and romantic elements that inform his concept of the neobaroque. In the case of the historical Servando, who pushed for national independence, the notion of the neobaroque acquires the feature of “*contraconquista* [counter-conquest].” Arenas’ Servando, however, is everything but a sovereign character, and the narrator accuses him quite often of megalomania and naiveté. He is, above all, a split character, fragmented by multiple accounts of the different narrators that make up the composition of the novel as a whole.

Just as in Hoffmann’s *The Devil’s Elixirs*, the dissociation of the self coincides with the fragmented structure of the novel. There are different versions

⁴⁵ This procedure is similar to what Mieke Bal has called “preposterous history.” In *Quoting Caravaggio*, she writes: “Such revisions of baroque art neither collapse past and present, as an ill-conceived presentum, nor objectify the past and bring it within their grasp, as in a problematic positivist historicism. They do, however, demonstrate a possible way of dealing with the past today. This reversal which puts what came chronologically first (“pre-”) as an aftereffect behind (“post”) its later recycling is what I would like to call “preposterous history.” (Bal, *Quoting Caravaggio*, 6-7).

⁴⁶ Arenas, *El mundo alucinante*, 83; *Hallucinations*, xxix.

⁴⁷ Federico García Lorca. From “Romance Sonámbulo” – “*pero yo ya no soy yo / ni mi casa ya no es mi casa*” (third stanza, verses 9-10).

of the same chapters. They tell the same story but with different narrators, indicated by a constant shift in pronouns, so as to produce internal contradictions in the plot. Already the first chapter opens with the following proposition: “We’re coming from the stand of palm trees. We’re not coming from the stand of palm trees.” Rather than just constituting a schizophrenic tautology,⁴⁸ the author indicates in a little note, preceding the “Letter to Servando,” that the novel is “neither historical nor [...] biographical,” but narrates “the story of Fray Servando Teresa de Mier y Noriega – just as it was, just as it might have been, just as I wish it had been.” Arenas’ reader, like the reader of Hoffmann, is confronted with various accounts of the story that forbid a clear chronological and factual reconstruction. The narrators “I,” “you,” and the external one, are all unreliable storytellers. The picaresque adventure-novel includes the possibility of lying narrators that tell tall stories, just like the infamous Baron Münchhausen. The multiplied and kaleidoscopic optics in *Hallucinations* refracts the so-called *Münchhausen trilemma*, which indicates that, strictly speaking, the validity of *no* proposition can be demonstrated in the realm of logic and mathematics. This failure of logic and reason is the *leitmotiv par excellence* in *Hallucinations*, by means of which the novel clearly situates itself in the Cuban lineage of the *neobarroco*.

The idea for *Hallucinations*, Arenas admits, came from his reading of Lezama Lima’s *La expresión americana*, where the historical person Fray Servando is mentioned as one of the great baroque-romantic figures of Latin America.⁴⁹ In an interview in 1982, Arenas indicates that when he was doing archival research on Juan Rulfo and Mexican literature in general, he found a note

⁴⁸ The exact negation of a proposition always implies a tautology, because when someone, for example, gives information about the current weather conditions and says “it rains or/and it doesn’t rain,” this proposition is not only always true, which is characteristic of tautologies, but also gives no information about the weather whatsoever.

⁴⁹ Arenas refers to the chapter “El Romanticismo y el hecho americano,” in *La expresión americana*. He says: “*Cuando en La expresión americana Lezama habla del barroco, dice que una de las grandes figuras del barroco americano es Fray Servando; que en ese cambio del barroco al Romanticismo, Fray Servando elige ser perseguido.*” (cit. Mario Santí, *El mundo alucinante*, 31.) [When Lezama speaks of the baroque in *The American Expression*, he indicates that one of the great figures of the American baroque is the Friar Servando, who in this transition from baroque to Romanticism chose to be prosecuted [instead of giving in to the Spanish authorities]] (my translation and addition, E.E.).

that claimed Servando Teresa de Mier to be the real inventor of Mexican literature.⁵⁰ Thus, he decided to retrace these national and poetic awakenings and write a novel about him, using actual historical documents such as the written memoirs of the historical Friar Servando and other testimonies, mixing it with his own fictional invocations. The beginning of *Hallucinations*, according to its creator, recaptures in a quite detailed and exact manner the life of the monk but, as the novel advances, it departs from the faithful depiction of reality toward an abundant usage of imagination and fantasy.⁵¹ *Hallucinations* can be seen as a genealogy of poetic thought, supplanting, or at least shaking, the foundations of traditional historiography. The novel's baroque structure destroys the apologetic belief in historical progress. There is no baroque eschatology, and therefore *Hallucinations* accumulates and exalts its structure before it delivers narrative closure.

The neobaroque, as Lezama Lima indicated, exchanges reason for poetic truth. According to Arenas, this has important consequences for the literary and historical modes of depiction. In the "1980- Prologue," he indicates that the work's mode of representation should be seen in sharp contrast to the so-called "socialist realist" tradition that he identifies with revolutionary Cuba, and the work of his rival colleague Alejo Carpentier, whom he does not mention explicitly in the foreword. The topic that he does mention, i.e. "communism" in general, is then identified with totalitarianism and censorship. Unfortunately, Arenas does not refrain from mentioning the thought-terminating cliché of the "concentration camp" in this context. Be it as it may, despite the authors' resentful tone in the Prologue, his own concept of "realism" overlaps quite a bit with the formal definition of Lukács' critical realism:

[V]er la realidad como un desfile o una fotografía es ver, en verdad, algo muy lejos de la realidad. Por eso, el llamado realismo me parece que es precisamente lo contrario de la realidad. Ya que al tratar de someter dicha realidad, de encasillarla, de verla desde un solo punto ("el realista") deja lógicamente de percibirse la realidad completa" [my emphasis, E.E.].⁵²

[S]eeing reality as a parade or snapshot is to see, really, something very remote from reality. That is why what is called realism seems to me quite the opposite, since trying

⁵⁰ Mario Santí, *El mundo alucinante*, 30.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*

⁵² Arenas, *El mundo alucinante*, 87-88.

to subjugate, yoke, that reality, pigeonhole it, file it away, see it from a single view point (“Be realistic!”) prevents logically, our seeing reality *complete* [my emphasis, and translation E.E.].⁵³

Here, Lukács and Arenas agree that the task of literature is not to present reality from one perspective only, but from a holistic point of view, which is to say, that the author has to reflect reality in different adumbrations⁵⁴ so as to construct a depiction of totality or “complete reality.” In this way, Arenas criticizes and refutes the one-dimensional and authoritative traits of traditional historiography, indicating that it is also the historiographer, or storyteller, who adds something of himself to the depiction of history, combining it with multiple origins and modes of representation. In doing so, he forecloses the possibility of a crude factual and pseudo-objective representation. The dynamic in which the describing subject adds something of himself to the object he describes is, however, a Hegelian gesture. It is both a philosophically speculative and a poetic gesture since it describes reality as moments of self-consciousness. The poetic and philosophical mind retrieves itself in its representation and production of reality, which corresponds to its poetic and philosophical desire for union with that which lies beyond it. Hence, it is precisely this “discovery” that “you and I” are the same thing.⁵⁵

The shifting pronouns referring to the multiple narrators in the novel have been read as a (post)modern game of *dédoublement*, a sort of hopscotch narration technique that prevents the reader from reconstructing the narration into a coherent whole. This is underscored by the title *Hallucinations*, denoting the subject’s impossibility of separating truth from illusion. The English translation of the title most evidently puts the novel in proximity to Quevedo’s baroque satire *Sueños* [*Dreams*], and thus once more reinvents a baroque narration technique in which the narrator’s unreliability is presented similarly to the testimony of liars, lunatics, dreamers, visionaries and other deceivers.

Nonetheless, the following sections propose a quite different reading, and will identify the shifting pronouns as various stages in the phenomenology of the

⁵³ Arenas, *Hallucinations*, xxv- xxvi.

⁵⁴ No reference to Husserlian phenomenology is intended.

⁵⁵ “You” being here Fray Servando, or the object of investigation for Arenas (“I”).

poetic mind. From this Hegelian perspective, the various pronouns denote different shapes of consciousness, so as to alternate between the perspective of the object, given in the first person singular (*yo* or the main character Servando himself); and the perspective of the subject, given in the second person singular (*tú* or Arenas, the author himself); and finally finding a mediating account which is neither of the subject nor the object (the external narrator), given in the third person singular. The dissociation of the narrator into various perspectives produces a dialectical concept of alienation, through which the self becomes other in order to become oneself. Ultimately, the novel entails a teleology of liberation that implies the discovery of one's freedom in the union with the other. Of course, this reading is quite unusual because, as Chiampi has indicated, the Cuban neobaroque constitutes a gesture that opposes "*los esquemas progresistas de la histórica lineal, del desenvolvimiento del logos hegeliano* [the abstractions of linear historical progression, of the development of the Hegelian *logos* (my translation, E.E.)]."⁵⁶ The next sections, however, will argue that the conception of history proposed by the novel can be read as an *ambiguous* Hegelianism, since its idea of "metahistory"⁵⁷ is very much dependent on the notions it seeks to supplant. What follows first highlights the novel's profoundly anti-Hegelian attitude towards the concept of history, to then point out the affirmation of the Hegelian concept of freedom described in *Hallucinations*.

8. Anti-Hegelianism: Historical Necessity

As already mentioned, a Hegelian interpretation of *Hallucinations* may, for some, come across as a provocation. The tremendous unpopularity of Hegel in the Latin-American context cannot be ignored, even though the work of Carpentier constitutes an exception to the rule. Latin-American anti-Hegelianism most evidently can be traced back to Hegel's infamous *Lectures on the Philosophy of History*, a text that *errs* in multiple ways. The racist description of American and

⁵⁶ Chiampi, *Barroco y modernidad*, 2.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

African peoples in these lectures⁵⁸ constituted a quite obvious stumbling block for Latin American intellectuals—even if, as Susan Buck-Morss⁵⁹ and Timothy Brennan⁶⁰ have later attempted to show, other texts by Hegel may be interpreted in anti-colonial ways. Indeed, *The Phenomenology of Spirit* comprises a fierce critique of phrenology, a racist pseudo-scientific study of skulls contemporary to Hegel’s time. Frantz Fanon had of course already discovered the anti-colonial potential of Hegel; however, one thing can be said clearly: consistency in these matters was certainly not Hegel’s strength.

The obvious racism in the *Lectures on the Philosophy of History*, however, may not be simply, or at least not *exclusively*, a symptom of reactionary politics, but rather of a hyperbolic “scientism.” The clearly *absurd* “quasi-scientific” nature of Hegel’s claims, regardless of whether they are about natural-scientific, political, or aesthetic phenomena, can be traced back to in an insatiable desire to “deduce” logically and “scientifically” everything that exists: If it exists, it can be logically explained, if it can be logically explained, it must exist precisely in the way it exists, otherwise, “of course” it would have existed differently. “To be,” for Hegel means, “to be rationally intelligible,” and to be rationally intelligible, means that “being” is justified as a rational existent. In the context of the historical “world spirit”, this means that the enslavement of the Americas should be seen, according to Hegel, as a proof for the fact that things could not have happened differently since they have happened in this way and not in another. The Indians were, thus, inferior and unable to confront the European colonizer, because they were not

⁵⁸ Hegel said for example: “I will not deny the New World the Honor of having emerged from the sea at the world’s formation contemporaneously with the old; yet the Archipelago between South America and Asia shows physical immaturity. [...] Of America and its grade of civilization especially in Mexico and Peru, we have information, but it imports nothing more than that this culture was an entirely national one which must expire as soon as Spirit approached it. America has always shown itself physically and psychically powerless and still shows itself so. For the aborigines, after the landing of the Europeans in America, gradually vanished at the breath of European activity. [...] The inferiority of these in all respects, even in regard to size, is very manifest [...] (G.W.F. Hegel, *The Philosophy of History*, trans, J. Sibree (Ontario: Kitchener, 2001): 98-99).

⁵⁹ Susan Buck-Morss, *Hegel, Haiti, and Universal History* (University of Pittsburg Press, 2005).

⁶⁰ Timothy Brennan, *Borrowed Light – Vico, Hegel and the Colonies* (Stanford University Press, 2014).

strong enough to deal with their “gun powder” and “brandy.”⁶¹ If they were, they would have survived. The platitude of this view is, of course, second to none.

However, there can be no objection to the attempt to *logically* explain the fact that the indigenous empires perished and the European colonizer conquered and exploited the Americas and the Indians. But it can only be explained *logically* in terms of expansionist and imperialist interests, akin to the concepts of the nation state and mercantile capitalism. It can be explained to what degree and in what way it follows *that* logic, but it cannot be explained in terms of a higher necessity. That is to say, to understand the colonization and genocide of the indigenous Americans as *necessary* to a colonial and capitalist logic, does not justify these events as historically—and *overall*—necessary. Only from a “vulgar scientific” perspective philosophical and historical necessity congregate to indicate that since certain things persisted and others perished, they had to happen in this way, and because they have happened this way “there must be a deeper explanation” for them.⁶²

Hegel’s philosophical confusion between explanation and justification can be described itself as an inverted world, akin to his idealist system. Hegel’s topsy-turviness, as Marx indicated in his *Critique of Hegel’s Philosophy of Right*, consists in his notorious confirmation of the categories of logic actualized in empirical reality, so that once the categories have been found in empirical reality, they are “scientifically” and logically deduced from that same reality again. Thus, Marx indicates that in Hegel’s system the categories of logic are not used to explain the state, but the state is used as an example to illustrate logical categories.⁶³ It is nothing less than “madness” to think that one must find the logical categories

⁶¹ Hegel, *Vorlesungen über die Geschichte der Philosophie. Werke 12* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1970): 108.

⁶² Rolf Röhrig, *Hegel*, 2010: 23.

<https://www.contradictio.de/hegel.html> Accessed, 15 August 2021.

⁶³ Marx writes: “He does not develop his thought out of what is objective [*aus dem Gegenstand*], but what is objective in accordance with a ready-made thought which has its origin in the abstract sphere of logic. It is not a question of developing the determinate idea of the political constitution, but of giving the political constitution a relation to the abstract Idea, of classifying it as a member of its (the idea’s) life history. This is an obvious mystification.” (*Critique of Hegel’s Philosophy of Right*, § 269).

<http://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1843/critique-hpr/ch01.htm>

of the mind and shapes of consciousness confirmed and realized in the course of history, philosophy, religion, and art.

Accordingly, Arenas' novel, figuratively, bursts out in laughter at this confusion between explanation and justification and presents *Hallucinations* as the exact opposite of Hegelian *logic*. The multiple accounts of the different narrators defy any historical necessity, since things might have happened differently as well, and cannot be traced back to a single and "abstracted" logic. The events in the novel could very well be the opposite of what they are, as the header of Chapter XVI indicates: "*De mi llegada y no llegada a Pamplona. De lo que allí me sucedió sin haberme sucedido* [... which tells of my arrival and not-arrival in Pamplona. Which treats of what there occurred to me without its ever occurring to me]." ⁶⁴ Fray Servando may have dressed up as a doctor in order to not get caught by the Spanish authorities, or he may have never met the authorities that seek to imprison him in the first place. Perhaps all these things did not happen at all, as the character-bound narrator (*tú*) says at the beginning of Chapter XVIII: "*Jamás has estado en Madrid. Jamás has atrevesado Los Pirineos. Ni has estado por todos esos lugares que mencionas y críticas* [You have never been in Madrid! You've never crossed the Pyrenees! Or been to a single of those places you mention]." ⁶⁵ The narrators are unreliable and the plot follows no necessary course or development. Here, picaresque novelistic narration techniques are mobilized to mock the philosophical desire for (historical) necessity and thus the novel turns this idea upside-down.

Therefore, it is not so much the case, as many argue, that *Hallucinations* predominantly turns against the possibility of "objective" and "scientific" truth. ⁶⁶ Rather, it is historical and "*scientistic*" *necessity* that it mocks and puns on. The absence of necessity breaks the ground under the feet of any apologetic or legitimizing historical stance. Against the assumption of the single and abstract logic of necessity that determines the course of history, Arenas proposes an almost

⁶⁴ *El mundo alucinante*: 185; *Hallucinations*: 104.

⁶⁵ *El mundo alucinante*: 197; *Hallucinations*: 117.

⁶⁶ Cf. Angela Lynn Willis. *El mundo alucinante vis-à-vis Guzmán de Alfarache and El buscón: The living traditions of the Baroque picaresque*. (Dissertation, University of Texas, 2001). reference other sources, or: Adolfo Cacheiro. "El mundo alucinante: History and Ideology." *Hispania*, vol. 70, no. 4, (Dec. 1996): 764.

Viconian multiplicity of origins as exemplified by the different narrators. As Giambattista Vico claimed in his *Szienza Nova*, there are multiple origins of civilization, and all civilizations and their (hi)stories developed more or less independently of each other.⁶⁷ In the Viconian worldview, none of these origins can claim primacy over the other. This non-hierarchization of origins is what *Hallucinations* seeks to address.

Even if this multiplicity of stories begets an anti-Hegelian gesture against scientific and historical necessity, there is, however, in the novel also a flirtation with Hegelian thinking. This Hegelianism not only has to be read with a *necessary* degree of “Romantic” irony, but also with sufficient “baroque” sentiments of disillusion or *desengaño*.

9. Ambiguous Hegelianism: Freedom

As mentioned before, *Hallucinations* is a picaresque novel that insinuates its development in terms of a teleology of liberation. Each episode in the novel requires a new solution or escape. In Hegel, the process of freedom coincides with one’s self-actualization (or self-creation). Therefore, freedom is not a trophy that awaits one at the end of a hurdle race, but only comes into being in the process of self-actualization. As Christoph Menke has indicated: “[t]he process that defines the being of freedom can never lead to some state of actualized freedom as its telos. The development of freedom is endless.”⁶⁸ Therefore, Hegel has always defined substance in terms of a “subject,” that is, as something that develops and realizes itself rather than remaining stagnant.⁶⁹ Hence, the criteria for what counts as freedom are always established belatedly. This belatedness attributes a tragic quality to freedom, as freedom is only established cathartically after its own undergoing.

Belatedness is in Hegel the crux of identity-formation. For the subject to constitute himself as an author or originator of a deed, s/he has to assume

⁶⁷ Giambattista Vico, *The New Science of Giambattista Vico*, trans. Thomas Goddard Bergin (Ithaca/ New York: Cornell U Press, 1948).

⁶⁸ Christoph Menke, “Law, Freedom, History, Society.” *Symposium*, vol. 17, no. 1 (Spring/ Printemps 2013): 11.

⁶⁹ Hegel, *Phänomenologie des Geistes*, 506.

responsibility for it. This is at the bottom of Hegel's idea of tragic affirmation as it was already discussed in relation to his critique of the "good intentions" of the hypocrite. In order to assume responsibility for a deed, one has to wait and see what happens and what consequences transpire from it. That is to say, for Hegel, the meaning of an action and its result are always, and only, perceived retrospectively. It is a matter of responding to the circumstances. Responsibility, as it has often been said following Hegel, is a mode of responding to the other. It is in and through these actions that the subject's authorship and identity are established—belatedly. For Hegel as much as for Arenas, liberation or self-determination is a process that is always belated—always after the fact. In order to liberate oneself, one must already be free. And if one is not already free, one cannot liberate oneself. Hence, Marx has pointed out that Hegel indicated that the emancipation of the bourgeoisie was just a formal matter of political emancipation, since they had already liberated themselves economically. In *Hallucinations*, the character Alexander von Humboldt is most confident that the time is ripe for the liberation of the Indians: "*La América Española está madura para ser libre, pero carece de un gran hombre que inicie la marcha* [Spanish America is ripe for its freedom, though it still lacks a great man to set it on the move]." The external narrator ironically adds: "*Conoce a la América mejor que la mayoría de los americanos, y sus ideas políticas son de las más avanzadas* [He knows the New World better than most men born and bred there, and his political ideas are of the most avantgarde]."70 Where the allusion to European self-glorification is explicit, the swipe at Carpentier and his mobilization of the Enlightenment for his revolutionary concept of the baroque is implicit. Moreover, the narrator comments that in revolutionary France, at the Parisians soirees of the European elite, "*[d]e América no sale a relucir ningún libro, ningún autor. Tal parece como si no existiera...* [[n]o book from the New World is so much as mentioned in these circles, no author, as though the entire hemisphere did not exist...]"71 Emancipation, so the narrator seems to imply, is still dependent upon the recognition of the master.

⁷⁰ Arenas, *El mundo alucinante*: 214; *Hallucinations*: 132.

⁷¹ Arenas, *El mundo alucinante*: 210; *Hallucinations*: 129.

Since liberation from this perspective remains external to the subject, which is to say, it is an alienated form of freedom, the process of emancipation in modernity, for both Hegel and Arenas, although in different ways, acquires a gloomy, if not pessimistic tone. For both, liberation from one order is only acquired at the price of submission to another. Hegel describes this dynamic in terms of a liberation from nature that is produced by means of positing a “second nature.” For Hegel, as for Hobbes, the “first” nature is connoted thoroughly in pejorative terms. Its primal scene is that of the master-slave dialectic in which man is enslaved by a master. In working, the slave recognizes himself in the activity and fruit of his own labor. He creates a new order through habitual practices that enable him to posit this same new order as *his* second nature, i.e. the ethical community of which he is a part and the laws that he has given to himself. The fact that it is still defined as a (second) *nature* is proof of its imperfection. The modern subject generates his own order to which he submits himself freely. As Adorno would say, it is a freedom still expressed by its unfreedom. In *Hallucinations*, this contradiction is implicitly defined as the overcoming of the rule of the Spanish colonizer, the subsequent revolutions, and coup d'états that succeed them.

The revolution is permanent, and there is no politically revolutionary subject prior to the revolution itself. The revolutionary subject is not a sleeping beauty which after decades of lying dormant suddenly awakes to make a revolution, but it only emerges *a posteriori*, through the act of revolution itself. *Hallucinations* reckons with this idea of the *a priori* constituted emancipated subject that is “ripe for independence” as the character Alexander von Humboldt had declared. The idea that there would be a revolutionary class, or subject, that exists prior to the revolution, which it then sets in motion, is a fiction crafted by left authoritarianism, naïve interpreters of the early Marx, and Enlightenment libertarian thought. Moreover, the message in Latin America has been quite

clearly defined: Europe ceases to be the center of Revolutions and, as Trotsky has it, “as it is, it will not occupy that position again.”⁷²

Arenas’ novel, however, ironizes the thought of progressive emancipation and human development in general. Servando’s chains and shackles, which are a *leitmotiv* in the novel, appear both as the condition of his imprisonment *and* his liberation, only to give way to his next confinement. There is the episode, for example, in which Servando was chosen by the Jewess Raquel as her future husband. She puts him in a cage so that he is unable to escape his fate, but the weight of his chains eventually causes the cage to crash down, crushing Raquel to death and liberating *him*. In another scene, Servando is held as a prisoner on a pirate ship. The accumulation of chains put on him eventually gives birth to the absurd scene in which Servando simply “eats” them to free himself, only to be captured again by a slave boat. Similarly, at the end of Chapter XXIV, the prison building collapses through the weight of the chains, leaving a heap of debris behind. These scenes seem to indicate that society crashes down because of the bonds and shackles it has imposed on itself. Therefore, Hegel’s second nature is neither something imposed externally nor something for which one can excuse oneself (externally). As Sartre would say much later, one is free without excuse. It is man’s (spirit’s) own doing. ⁷³

The term “second nature” is defined by Hegel in *The Philosophy of Right* as “the world of spirit which is produced from within itself.”⁷⁴ As Menke argues, this entails nothing but the mind’s own self-inversion, a turn inwards-out.⁷⁵ Conversely, the social order appears to the subject as nature, that is, as something external. Indeed, naturalization of social relations, as Marx and Weber indicated later, is a form of social mechanization, or automatization.

⁷² Leon Trotsky, “Copenhagen Address, December 1 1932” “Trotsky’s speech in Copenhagen (Denmark) / Trotskyren hitzaldia Kopenhagen (Danimarka)” uploaded by Liebknecht TB, *Youtube*. 2009.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kBLnTNL5ZPQ&t=8s>, Accessed August 21, 2021.

⁷³ Jean-Paul Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, trans. Hazel. E. Barnes (New York: Philosophical Library, 1956): 440ff.

⁷⁴ G.W.F. Hegel, “Introduction” §4,” *Elements of the Philosophy of Right*, ed. Allen W. Wood, trans. N.B. Nisbet (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991): 35.

⁷⁵ Menke, “Law, Freedom, History, Society,” 21.

Spirit's external self-positing is an idealistic inversion. This is evoked in the following ironic episode. In the already mentioned scene in Chapter XXIV, chain after chain is put on Servando, so as to prevent any further escapes. However, this scene describes that just before the prison building crashes down, Servando already had liberated his mind. Even if all other body parts are put in chains attached to the so-called *cadena madre*, the "chain of chains," his mind cannot be held in captivity:

Algo hacía que la prisión siempre fuera imperfecta, algo se estrellaba contra aquella red de cadenas y las hacía resultar mezquinas e inútiles. Incapaces de aprisionar ... Y es que el pensamiento del fraile era libre. Y, saltando las cadenas, salía, breve y sin traba, fuera de las paredes y no dejaba ni un momento de maquinarse escapes y de planear venganzas y liberaciones. El pensamiento, emergiendo ligero de entre aquellas barras de cero, saltaba por sobre las mismas narices de los carceleros y llegaba, retrocediendo en el tiempo, hasta los campos de arena [...].⁷⁶

The prison was still imperfect, for something exploded out from that web of thick chains and made it all futile, petty, mean. *Powerless to imprison...* For the friar's thought was free. Leaping over chains and walls, it flew, though briefly, yet still unfettered, outside the dungeon, outside the jail, and even when it rested, it never ceased inventing methods of escape, and ways of wreaking vengeance. Though, escaping as light as mist through the ironwork, ran right under the jailers' noses, fled far away, back in time, to the sandy expanses [...].⁷⁷

The body-mind dualism could not have been worked out more absurdly. The omnipresence of thought and the superiority of the free mind over matter crystalizes in the presentation of a mind completely detached from his body up to the point that it walks all over the prison guards. The scene shows that the external narrator thinks that the liberation of consciousness precedes political liberation. He indicates that consciousness first has to posit itself as free, and that freedom is not something that can be granted mechanically from the outside, but instead has to be perceived as the organic result of one's own mental labor or activity. One could even say, that Servando, symbolizing Mexico here, can only liberate himself because he is already free.

But, the teleology of liberation described in *Hallucinations* is anything but an optimistic perspective on modernity.⁷⁸ As a matter of fact, the melancholic tone

⁷⁶ Arenas, *El mundo alucinante*, 238.

⁷⁷ Arenas, *Hallucinations*, 159.

⁷⁸ No explicit reference to the Theology of Liberation is intended here.

of the novel comes very close to Weber's mournful iconography. Modern man has accustomed himself to his iron cage, as the external narrator indicates: "*Fray Servando se había ido adaptando a las prisiones*. [Fray Servando had had much experience in adapting to prisons]." ⁷⁹ Habit is the motor of the subject's positing of second nature; it is a form of mechanization. A series of repetitive acts, such as imprisonment and breaking free again, are turned into a mechanics insofar as what is "new" and different, i.e. the relation to the particular, is quite literally suppressed in the *chain* of events. Thus, Hegel and Servando agree here: so far *true* freedom has not been realized. What has been achieved is merely a social disciplining in the form of habit. In order to break free from the mechanization of modern society, the free spirit will have to posit a new world—this is the realm of poetry.

10. *The Poet and the Logician*

The concept of 'second nature,' in Hegel as much as in Aristotle, is a paideic one. That is to say, it develops in terms of education or formation. The German notion is *Bildung*. One could say that *Hallucinations* constitutes an ironized *Bildungsroman*, insofar as it produces a genealogy of poetic thought that recasts history and national awakening in terms of *poiesis*. The poetic thought of Fray Servando stands in diagonal opposition to the *logos* that the novel seeks to criticize and supplant. The logician investigates the forms of thinking detached from any content; "implication," "negation," "judgment," "validity" and so forth. The Romantic poet, likewise, formalizes the use of language to the extent that the symbols and signs appear as indifferent to their actual contents or referents. Poetry is a solipsistic practice that scorns at the truth values of formal logic, but "behaves" similarly in that it formalizes language up to the point that content becomes indifferent and is surpassed by form. Logic and poetry are forms of thinking that bid farewell to empirical content. ⁸⁰

⁷⁹ Arenas, *El mundo alucinante*, 237; *Hallucinations*, 158.

⁸⁰ The separation of form and content is precisely what Hegel criticizes in traditional and formal logic. In the introduction to *The Science of Logic*, Hegel writes: "*Der bisherige Begriff der Logik beruht auf der im gewöhnlichen Bewußtsein ein für allemal vorausgesetzten Trennung des Inhalts und der Form derselben, oder der Wahrheit und der Gewißheit. Es wird erstens vorausgesetzt, daß*

Logic is the inquiry into its own categories and forms, and therefore it is its own subject and object. The poet and the logician produce their own object that they posit outside of themselves. They write poems or produce truth values that exist independently of their positing them, but at the same time, engage in a practice in which the content/object coincides with their own thought, and thus they retrieve their subjectivity in the object. The logician and the poet both engage in a formalization that is thinking *thinking*⁸¹ itself. Thus, they both think the union of thinking and being.⁸²

At the same time, the author is well aware of the subjective conditions for the constitution of his object but deems his subjectivity as something that ought to be added to objective reality. His “will” as Hegel would characterize it, consists in the realization of his subjective aims in the external world, giving objective existence to the content of his aims. This happens when the poet begins to publish his work. The fact that the poet sees his own subjectivity as something that is fundamentally lacking in objective reality is not a very modest gesture indeed. Therefore, both Hoffmann and Arenas present the aesthetic genius often as a megalomaniac, narcissist, or self-indulgent character. In *Hallucinations*, the Cuban nationalist Poet Heredia describes himself as “*el genio político mas extraordinario de todos los tiempos* [the most extraordinary political genius of all times],”⁸³ and Servando as “[*el mejor predicador que había en México* [the best preacher in the City of Mexico].”⁸⁴ At the same time, the poet is described as a detached, fragmented, and cut-off character, emphasizing his subjective one-sidedness. The subjectivity of the poet is ironically the condition of a multifaceted representation of “complete” reality, while at the same time, for both Hoffmann

der Stoff des Erkennens als eine fertige Welt außerhalb des Denken an und für sich vorhanden, daß das Denken an sich leer sei, als eine Form äußerlich zu jener Materie hinzutrete [...] (G.W.F. Hegel, *Wissenschaft der Logik I*, (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1986): 36-37, emphases in original) [The concept of logic has hitherto rested on a separation, presupposed once and for all in ordinary consciousness, of the *content* of knowledge and its *form*, or of *truth* and *certainly*. Presupposed *from the start* is that the material of knowledge is present in and for itself as a ready-made world outside thinking; that thinking is by itself empty, that it comes to this material as a form from outside [...]

⁸¹ Or, as usually said after the “linguistic turn”: language speaking itself.

⁸² *Ibid*, the union of speech and being.

⁸³ Arenas, *El mundo alucinante*, 300; *Hallucinations*, 233.

⁸⁴ *Ibid*, 112; *Ibid*, 26.

and Arenas, poetry denotes solipsism, since the poet posits his subjectivity as an objective maxim. His objective proposition is his subjective positing, and vice versa. The English title of Arenas' novel ironizes precisely this solipsistic gesture since it recasts the protagonist's poetic peregrinations as "hallucinations."

However, unlike poetic thought, a hallucination indicates a shape of experience, where the self does not know what is self and other, and thus, he does not know whether the intentional object transcends his consciousness and is something other than himself, or not. Just as the main character in the *Devil's Elixirs*, Servando has various doubles, one of which is another monk whom he encounters in the dungeon (where Medardus also found his double), and the other is the Cuban nationalist poet Heredia.⁸⁵ The difference between the hallucinating and the poetic subject is that the latter would eventually be able to posit being, independently of his act of positing it, while the former would not. Arenas' and Hoffmann's baroque gesture subverts the difference between hallucination and poetry. Poetic life is but a dream/hallucination. Their critique is defined by the concept of "unhappy consciousness," as discussed earlier in relation to Hoffmann's protagonist. Either the poet is a hallucinating lunatic, tempted by the "devil's elixirs," or the world is a mechanized but 'hallucinating' and untrue place that exists independently of the subject's own doing, and in which he is unable to recognize himself. In either case, subject and object are unmediated and alienated entities.

This "unhappy consciousness" that accompanies the modern subject seeks refuge and attempts to heal its lacerations by means of positing a second world, the fantastic world of literature and poetry. The Surrealists as the inheritors and continuators of Romantic and baroque fantastic worldviews were susceptible to this diremption and defined the ultimate unification (sublation) of the external world and the world of literature as the supreme aim of Surrealism. André Breton, was well-aware that the failed attempt to unite "interior reality and exterior

⁸⁵ The equivalence between Servando and the Cuban poet José-Maria de Heredia is established for example in the following passage: "*Y ahora el fraile y el poeta, confundidos por el escándalo de la metralla y el constante repiquetear, se alejan del balcón y situándose a cada extremo del corredor irrumpen en largos discursos. Los dos hablan al mismo tiempo. Los dos se quejan. Cuentan su largas peregrinaciones, sus angustias, sus tristezas del destierro [...]*(Arenas, *El mundo alucinante*, 300).

reality” is the “very cause of man’s unhappiness, but also the source of his movement.”⁸⁶ This attempt, nonetheless, could eventually end up in the one-sided “refuge” of “a system of thought.”⁸⁷ What he meant by “system of thought” is the idealist totality of poetry, philosophy, or religion that is embraced at the cost of material reality. The Schopenhauerian-Nietzschean contradiction between thinking and being is thus far from being resolved. According to Hegel, however, the idealist world of poetry, philosophy, and religion is spirit’s own self-positing but also takes hold of the absolute. With poetry, philosophy, and religion, the thinking mind has created a world that *does* and *does not* exist independently of its own mental activity. In other words, subject and object are sublated in it, because they coincide. The affirmative gesture of the poetic spirit consists in the fact that its power of imagination means the power to posit being outside of itself. In this way, poetry takes hold of the absolute because being the product of the subject’s own positing, it acquires an objective existence independently of the positing subject.

This world of the poet, however, is a profoundly lonely and anti-social world, a Romantic world that he cannot share with others, as the following conversation between Servando and Madame de Staël reveals:

– “*Lo que hace sociable al hombre es su debilidad*” – me contestó citando a Rousseau (*esa nueva y manual biblia*).

“*Y yo soy débil*” – agregó, con ese tono mezcla de picardía y confesión.

– “*El ser verdaderamente feliz es un solitario*” – le respondí, siempre citando a “*la biblia moderna*.”⁸⁸

– “What makes man most sociable is his weakness” – she answered quoting Rousseau, that new Bible.

“And I am weak,” she added in a tone mixing coquetry and confession.

– The truly happy being is solitary” – I riposted, still quoting.”⁸⁹

Even if Servando mocks the late Enlightenment Romantic thought of Rousseau and his concept of the noble savage that the Indian is supposed to embody, at other moments he admits: “[p]or entonces padecía yo por mi soledad y me refugiaba en

⁸⁶ André Breton, *What is Surrealism? Selected Writings*, ed. Franklin Rosemont (New York: Pathfinder, 1978): 156.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 155.

⁸⁸ Arenas, *El mundo alucinante*, 216.

⁸⁹ Arenas, *Hallucinations*, 134.

las letras [at that time I suffered much on account of my solitude and so I took refuge in letters].”⁹⁰ Individuality, or particularity, can only be found in poetry—such is the claim. At the same time, the narrator of the second person “*tú*” is skeptical about poetry, since he describes “literature” as poison. “*El veneno de la literatura*” leads to “*nada*,” or at best to solitude.⁹¹ Just like the idealist philosopher, the artistic genius assumes an anti-empirical attitude and looks for the grounds of poetic and speculative knowledge in his own reflecting and imagining powers, or his “*gran derroche de fantasia* [great rush of fantasy].”⁹² He longs for transcendence and seeks to go beyond the mere immediate surface of things. In order to do so, the two monks, Servando and Medardus, have to renounce their sensuousness, and bid farewell to the empirical world.

The ironic depictions of carnal temptations and the desires of the flesh in *Hallucinations* are numerous, just as in Hoffmann’s *The Devil’s Elixirs*. In *Hallucinations*, the main character’s sensual repression is criticized by both the external and the character-bound *tú*-narrator. There are a few homoerotic scenes that scandalize Servando. They have often been read as a sharp critique of the celibate. Also, they have been interpreted as a fierce critique of Castro’s Cuba and the regime’s prohibition of homosexual acts.⁹³ However, they could be read as the ironized allegory of the Romantic-Platonic poet’s desire for transcendence and his longing for a new spiritual order, a sort of *Kunstreligion* that suddenly is put into stark contrast with the crude and naked material world. In this way, they are a mocking critique of an extreme idealist attitude, akin to the poet, the philosopher, and the monk, through which the main protagonist mistakes himself as a wholly spiritual being. This idealist attitude was criticized by Marx who, in his *Critique of Hegel’s Philosophy of Right*, argued against the evaporation of all material interests into the realm of Spirit, claiming that the human being is a feeling, suffering, and desiring being, and cannot be reduced to self-consciousness alone. The hero, Servando, denies precisely this reality since it is a destabilizing and

⁹⁰ *El mundo alucinante*: 110; *Hallucinations*: 25

⁹¹ *Ibid*, 109; *Ibid*.

⁹² *Ibid*: 247; *Ibid*, 172.

⁹³ Rafael Ocasio. “Gays and the Cuban Revolution – The Case of Reinaldo Arenas.” *Latin American Perspectives*, vol. 29, no. 2, (01/03/ 2001): 93.

chaotic world that constantly puts poetic ideals of harmony and spiritual sovereignty under attack.

Thus, for Arenas and Hoffmann, poetic atonement may constitute a naïve mode of self-deception. Poetry appears as the only escape and as a realm of *true* freedom insofar as the poet posits a world in which the contraction between thinking and being is resolved, but only spuriously so.

11. Fantastic (under)development

Hallucinations and *The Devil's Elixirs*, each in their own way, deal with the question of linear time and confront the ideological problem of historical necessity. *Hallucinations* reckons off with historical determinism by uncovering European self-glorification and the delusions of grandeur underlying certain traits of German idealism and traditional historiography. *The Devil's Elixirs* seeks to critically represent the chain of historical events as a sort of eternal return of self-negation and repressed desires in modern society. As Adorno and Horkheimer indicated, this mythic historical recurrence consists of the fact that, in modernity, self-negation and self-discovery are one and the same thing.⁹⁴ The cultural determinism of modernity finds its expression in a reality principle that Mark Fisher had defined as “capitalist realism.” Fantastic critical *antirealism* constitutes a response to this reductive realism that originates from the lack of imagination of any viable future alternative beyond capitalist reality. Capital produces a deserted realism. As Jean Baudrillard indicates in one of his last writings, “capitalism is the purest form of the reality principle. It has become reality,”⁹⁵ and it cannibalizes reality. Critical antirealism is not the opposite of realism, it does not reject realism *tout court*, but it constitutes a supplement and a critique of the very realism that adheres to capital.

Traditionally, the genre of the fantastic remains, of course, hostile to cultural and economic determinism. Fantastic literature adopts an anachronistic attitude and confesses its untimely meditations in contrast to the philistine

⁹⁴Horkheimer and Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*,” 47.

⁹⁵Jean Baudrillard *Carnival or Cannibal, Or the Play of Global Antagonism*, trans. Chris Turner (Calcutta: Seagull Books, 2010): 42.

modern order. The notion of the baroque, as discussed in relation to the concept of the literary fantastic, thus essentially manifests belatedness and anachronism as a critical response to modern progressive society. Being-out-of-chronology is a feature that characterizes the genre of the fantastic. Even Lukács noted this. As indicated at the beginning of this chapter, Lukács had found elements in Hoffmann's work that qualified him as an author of critical realism rather than of marvelous-fantasy genres. Critical antirealism as a supplement to the Lukacsian notion was presented in this chapter as an attribute of the tendency towards totality in *Hallucinations* and *The Devil's Elixirs*; a feature which no longer could be qualified as properly *realist*. Curiously, but with a certain accuracy, Lukács indicates that the desire towards totality in the work of E.T.A. Hoffmann is produced, not despite its fantastic elements, but precisely *because* of them:

[D]ie Totalität der Hoffmannschen Welt ist - das Feenhafte, Gespenstige mitinbegriffen – ein Abbild des Übergangs von Deutschland aus den Verzerrungen des Feudalabsolutismus in einen – ebenso, wenn auch in den anderen Formen – verzerrten Kapitalismus. Das Einbeziehen der Jenseitigkeit ist deshalb bei Hoffmann ein künstlerischer Umweg gerade um dieses spezifische deutsche Diesseits in der Totalität seiner wesentlichen Bestimmungen darstellen zu können, in einer Zeit, in welcher der die unentwickelten und verzerrten unmittelbaren Erscheinungsformen des gesellschaftlichen Lebens noch keine direkte, zugleich getreue Gestaltungen zugelassen haben.⁹⁶

[T]he totality of the Hoffmannian world, including the ghostly and fairytale-like elements, reflects Germany's transition from the contortions of feudal absolutism to an equally distorted capitalism, although diverging in their forms. Therefore, the inclusion of otherworldliness in Hoffmann is an artistic detour that depicts precisely the German here and now in the totality of its essential features, at a time, when the *undeveloped* and distorted immediate appearances of social life did not allow for direct and verisimilar depictions. (My translation and emphasis, E.E.)

In this passage, Lukács seems to imply that the literary fantastic in Hoffmann is the superstructural expression of the backward social-economic relations of Germany at the time. The fantastic is the aesthetic manifestation and literary form of political and economic *underdevelopment*. Indeed, Germany—and one could add Latin-America—never presented a *solid* tradition of literary Realism, as it was the case in France or England for example. What could count as strictly “realist” in Germany, arrived blatantly too late with Thomas Mann's *Magic*

⁹⁶ Lukács, *Wider den mißverstandenen Realismus*, 506.

Mountain. The nineteenth century literary depictions of bourgeois everyday life, such as those of Theodor Fontane and Theodor Storm stubbornly clung to fantastic elements, such as ghostly riders and haunting orientalist specters in attics. Even in Mann's later novel, *Doctor Faustus*, the devil reappeared as a fantastic character in the midst of bourgeois realism. Fantastic elements remained the persistent and dominant form of representation throughout the German classical modern literary tradition.

Lukács had most likely derived his idea of the literary fantastic as a symptom and a response to political and economic backwardness from the "Introduction" to *A Contribution to the Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right*, where Marx introduced the concept of the inverted world. According to Marx, the inverted world is a product of backwardness. Backward Germany, caught up in its philosophical idealism, only *thought* what other countries *did*. Marx argued against left-Hegelian idealism that thinking and being are precisely *not* the same thing. France had put its political revolutionary principles into practice and England revolutionized its industrial modes of production, but Germany remained a feudal and backward country, distorted by the *ancien régime* and the persistence of "otherworldly" Christian values. The Hoffmannian fantastic universe gives German backwardness its "realistic" literary *gestalt*, Lukács argues.

While the current study does not intend to repeat the mistakes of vulgar Marxism, of which Lukács is somewhat guilty, since he reduces the literary genre to a reflection of the economic context in which it emerged, it is at the very least remarkable that Arenas' fantastic novel *Hallucinations* emerges also during the debate about un(der)development [*subdesarrollo*] in Latin America in the 1960s and 1970s. The "development of underdevelopment"⁹⁷ indicates that the capitalist distribution of social roles and functions does not only limit itself to individual social types but indeed to entire countries and regions. There is an international division of labor that categorizes and reduces nations, according to the function they play in the world market. One can speak of a "center of the center" or the "first world." The industrial countries predicated their wealth, in the period of

⁹⁷ Andre Gunder Frank. *Dependent Accumulation and Underdevelopment* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1979).

mercantile capitalism, on primitive accumulation, or more directly put, on the “looting” of the colonies and “enslaving” of their indigenous populations.⁹⁸ These are, nowadays, the most politically and economically powerful European States and the United States of America. The transition from primitive accumulation to modern relations of exploitation constitutes the context in which *Hallucinations* is set since it describes the fantastic contortions of the changeover from mercantile to industrial capitalism. Next to the center of the center, there is the “second world,” the center of the periphery, which comprises countries that after their independence from the European colonizers started to develop their own industries, like India, Vietnam, and Brazil, but also China. Since they have an industry of their own, their function is to provide cheap labor and depress wages on an international scale. The third-world countries are those countries that are reduced to resource extracting industries. They do not have any industrial development of their own but extract oil, minerals, and other raw materials that fuel the industries of the richer industrial nations. Most workers from the second and third-worlds are unemployed and function as a reserve army. The periphery of the periphery comprises the “fourth world,” those are the countries that have a tourist industry and produce some tropical fruits and coffee beans for the world market. Finally, one could even speak of a “fifth world,” which includes countries like Somalia, Ethiopia, and Eritrea. Here, capital cannot find anything that it could exploit or make productive. However, a few Dollars and Euros can still be earned there. The people living in the fourth and fifth worlds are literally the overpopulation of capital. A mere “waste product” reduced to “subhuman” status, as Frantz Fanon put it.⁹⁹ The argument made by the theorists of “underdevelopment” like André Gunder Frank is that it is only with the entrance into the world market that Latin American countries and other third world

⁹⁸ Marx explains the concept of “primitive accumulation” in the following manner:

“The discovery of gold and silver in America, the extirpation, enslavement and entombment in mines of the aboriginal population, the beginning of the conquest and looting of the East Indies, the turning of Africa into a warren for the commercial hunting of black-skins, signalled the rosy dawn of the era of capitalist production. These idyllic proceedings are the chief momenta of primitive accumulation.” (*Marx Engels Collected Works, Capital 1, vol. 35, 739*)

⁹⁹ Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, trans. Constance Farrington (New York: Grove Press, 1963): 54ff.

countries begin to *underdevelop*. Moreover, there is a hegemonic class interest to further develop underdevelopment in those regions.

There were also a few countries, however, that searched for alternatives to dependence upon the capitalist world market. Cuba was one of them. Thus, Reinaldo Arenas' *Hallucinations* situates his work within this Latin American context of (national) independence struggles and the persistent revolutions that mark the transition from colonial feudalism to bourgeois (in)dependence, and finally to a socialist alternative in Latin America.

It is important to note that, from a Lukácsian point of view, the fantastic and the absence of a solid realist tradition in Germany and Latin America goes hand in hand with the absence of a strong bourgeoisie. This is not to say, in Latin America, there was no local bourgeois class that pushed for economic development. However, the evolution of the Latin American bourgeoisie has to be understood in the context of colonialism and the later neo-colonial integration of Latin American countries into the free world market. André Gunder Frank indicates that a strong national bourgeoisie that had an interest in strengthening the development of a domestic capitalist industry was surpassed by the so-called *lumpenbourgeoisie*. The lumpenbourgeoisie denotes the local bourgeois class that maintained strong ties with the foreign bourgeoisie in the (former) mother country. Instead of advancing local industrial development, this class of landowners and compradores exploited local resources for the development of the US and European industries.¹⁰⁰

Whether the literary fantastic is indeed a consequence of, and a broader response to, political and economic underdevelopment would need further investigation. Again, the term underdevelopment is only meaningful in relation to capitalist totality itself, *not* in relation to any of higher course of history. Further investigations into the relationship between the literary fantastic and economic underdevelopment would unfortunately go far beyond the scope of the current

¹⁰⁰ Cf. Andre Gunder Frank, *Lumpenbourgeoisie: Lumpenddevelopment,; Dependence, Class, and Politics in Latin America* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1972), and see: Antón L. Allahar, "The Evolution of the Latin American Bourgeoisie: An Historical Comparative Study" (*International Journal of Comparative Sociology* 31, 3-4, 1990): 222-236.

study.¹⁰¹ However, the hypothesis of the fantastic and underdevelopment does clarify that the belated baroque fantastic emerges out of anachronisms, non-simultaneity, and delay. Indeed, the fantastic world created by Hoffmann and Arenas produces a literary and historical universe plagued by archaic remainders that, when they come into contact with belatedly new emergent elements produce a fantastic effect. This is what Hoffmann's *The Devil's Elixirs* and Arenas' *Hallucinations* have in common; they depict societies grotesquely overturned by social transitions and belated innovations, from the *ancien régime* in Germany and the colonial rule in Latin America, to burgeoning bourgeois society.

¹⁰¹ I plan to do further research on the topic of the fantastic and underdevelopment and will turn this in to a future book project, after the completion and defense of this dissertation.

*[D]er Held, der vor dem Zuschauer auftritt,
zerfällt in seine Maske und in den Schauspieler,
in die Person und das wirkliche Selbst.*
(G.W.F. Hegel, *Phänomenologie des Geistes*.)

AUTOR: *Esta mesa, donde tengo
pan que los cielos adoran
y los infiernos veneran,
os espera; mas importa
saber los que han de llegar
a cenar conmigo ahora,
porque de mi compañía
se han de ir los que no logran
sus papeles, por faltarles
entendimiento y memoria
del bien que siempre les hice
con tantas misericordias.
Suban a cenar conmigo
el pobre y la religiosa
que, aunque por haber
salido del mundo
este pan no coman,
sustento será adorarle
por ser objeto de gloria.*
(Pedro Calderón de la Barca, *El gran teatro del mundo*)

Too much nothing; it's a whole world.
(Jacques Derrida, *The Beast and the Sovereign, Vol. II*)

Chapter 3 Of Characters, Dramatic Illusions, and Theatrical Abysses

1. *Balle-Masqué*

In the previous chapter, the baroque melancholia of the *pícaro* found expression in the unhappy consciousness of the Romantic poet, whose ideals of beauty and spirituality have become increasingly incompatible with the rapid development of modern society. So far, the argument focused predominantly on the *aesthetic* and *political* reactions to the uprooting social changes in modernity. The literary fantastic emerged, in the previous chapter, as a sort of inverted realism, or *antirealism* in response to the creation of a radically immanent world. The experience of the loss of the “otherworldiness,” [*Jenseitige*] as Lukács called it, and the “reduction” to immanence that comes along with it, are the effect of a developing secular totality which transpires from a set of radical innovations, such as the creation of the monetary system and expansion of the world market, the socio-economic and cultural compartmentalization resulting from the decline

of feudal and colonial rule, the rapid technological developments, and the increasing process of urbanization that accompanies these expansions. The old castes and their social function disappear, and new role-bound identities and types emerge. Vagabonds, tramps and *pícaros* appear as the types that indicate the non-coincidence and non-coevalness with this new social order. The genre of the fantastic picaresque highlights this incompatibility between the subject's social and aesthetical self-understanding and the newly created objective economic and political functions. The experienced non-identity between the subject and object produces a belated baroque melancholia which has been connected to the diremption of the Hegelian "unhappy consciousness," and the underlying ontological and epistemological divergence between thinking and being. As a consequence, an uncanny fantastic world emerges in which the protagonists Servando and Medardus no longer feel at home.

This chapter continues to focus on the aesthetic orchestration of the self, as economic *dramatis persona*, producing at the same time a new concept of the social self, called "the individual." The emphasis in this chapter, however, will be on the philosophical and social aspects that inform the experiences of role-bound social identities of the actors in modernity. The first section of the chapter will define the notion of the individual and will discuss it in concert with the topos of *theatrum mundi* and, more specifically, with the idea of the *person* as a mask-wearing character. The second section will indicate some of the aesthetic and philosophical reactions to this modern social drama by highlighting two new social types, the "woman," and its belated baroque image of protest the "drag queen." I will first and foremost consider these two types as social-economic and philosophical dramatic categories, rather than identity-effects of gender performance theories. Again, one must speak here of "ideal" types, that is, of objective thought-forms instead of actually existing women or drag queens. The argument, however, is that these ideal types are objective concepts that mediate and produce the social reality of actual individuals. Finally, the last section introduces yet another belated baroque type, which, although in a different form, was already discussed in relation to Benjamin's baroque *dramatis personae*: the "sovereign." This philosophical and political type emerges as the rejection of the concept of "world"

as immanence and totality. The “sovereign” is a profoundly anti-social type of protest who counteracts both the totality of capitalist political economy *and* the Marxist or Left-Hegelian critique thereof. Just as the literary fantastic had been described as the aesthetic reaction to immanence, “sovereignty” constitutes the *philosophical* and quasi-political reaction to it. Benjamin had already revealed the incompatibility of the concept of sovereignty with the development of modern society. His critique targeted first and foremost Carl Schmitt’s implementation of the term, insofar as he indicated that the concept of sovereignty in fact already had become untimely during the Baroque. Accordingly, this section does not only argue that the term is untimely but also this untimeliness constitutes an attempt to philosophically “re-enchant” the modern world again. We will return, thus, once more to the baroque game of *engaño* and *desengaño*. However, before we turn to the concept of sovereignty, we will first investigate the concept of individuality and social role playing, as it can only emerge as a result of the division of labor in capitalism. Thus, the concept of social roles calls for a new “dramaturgic script” for modern economic relations.

The idea of social role playing is, of course, as old as the origins of drama, but as a basic concept in social and cultural theory is relatively new.¹ The sociologist Georg Simmel was amongst the first to implement the concept: both aesthetically and thematically, using literary descriptions for his sociological outline of the *dramatis personae* of modern capitalist totality. Not abiding by the conventions of his discipline; e.g. omitting footnotes and much of the academic verbiage, Simmel’s essay on the social type of the “poor,” not only resembles a description from a Realist novel, but also introduces the figure of the beggar as a vital function *immanent* to capitalism, rather than a function defined by social and economic ostracism.² The conclusion of his essay appears as somewhat unusual at first sight: one is *really* poor if one receives assistance from the state. Indeed, the state establishes and regulates a poverty line, and can decide when

¹ More specifically, during the last few decades under the rubric of “performance” and “performativity,” the idea of role playing became a commonplace in gender theory, after it had already acquired some currency in speech act theory. Cf. Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York/ London, 1999); and John Austin, *How to Do Things with Words* (London: Oxford University Press, 1962).

² Simmel, *On Individuality and Social Forms*, 150-178.

certain material conditions count as unacceptable or unlivable. Moreover, social welfare assists the poor but does not abolish their precarious situation as such. It helps the poor, but it helps first capital by keeping the wages low and guaranteeing the existence of a constant supply of labor force, thereby advancing the constant need for valorization. Therefore, the “poor”, just as in Calderón’s *El gran teatro del mundo*, must come to terms with their poverty. Coming to terms with one’s poverty and precarity means accepting the terms and adhering to them to be on good terms with civil society. In Calderón’s Catholic baroque worldview, the beggar may be compensated with glory in the hereafter, as the epigram to this chapter suggests. In bourgeois modernity, however, he must accept his “iron cage” with little hope for salvation or compensation. In this respect, social welfare organized by the state has a quite different function. It absolves others from assisting the poor. Relieving the poor, Simmel maintains, is motivated by the desire for relief *from* the poor, and so, solidarity, and possible alliances between different actors are successfully repelled. While the “poor” occupy a position that is not external to the market, they, are nevertheless treated as outcasts. In this regard, all social and economic functions must appear as separate or isolated, and their roles must be distinctively defined, so that the individual sticks to them.

When a state determines a poverty limit, it not only regulates the extent to which a person is allowed to object to his or her material conditions—and thus when s/he has no right to complain—but also *defines* and legitimizes a *common degree* of poverty and precariousness in society. Currently, in the Netherlands, the poor have *no* right to complain when they make eleven Euros an hour, but *every* right if they make ten.³ Moreover, it is agreed that those who have only one dollar and ninety cents to spend a day risk dropping below the established global poverty line.⁴ To borrow the unflattering but veracious words of Zygmunt Bauman, this circumstance then attests “officially” to the status of their life as “wasted.”⁵ Thus, the poor perform a vital and necessary economic function in

³<https://www.rijksoverheid.nl/onderwerpen/minimumloon/bedragen-minimumloon/bedragen-minimumloon-2022>

⁴<https://blogs.worldbank.org/developmenttalk/international-poverty-line-has-just-been-raised-190-day-global-poverty-basically-unchanged-how-even>

⁵ Zygmunt Bauman. *Wasted Lives. Modernity and its Outcasts* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2004).

capitalism, not least because the poverty line serves as a constant limit to depress wages, but also because the poor, to the extent that they are unemployed, function as a reserve army. The poor, whether a social type or an economic function, only become poor in regard to other economic functions. In this regard, they are, strictly speaking, *not* outcasts. As the end of the previous chapter indicated, it is only in relation to the totality of the world market,⁶ that a type, or even an entire region, begins to develop or underdevelop.

In this vein, it is remarkable that baroque aesthetics once again anticipate the findings of sociological inquiry and the drama of bourgeois modern society that the former seeks to describe. Indeed, Calderón de la Barca already revealed in his *El gran teatro del mundo* that poverty as a material condition does not catapult the poor into a function outside the world stage of the baroque social relations but is a fundamental function of it. Poverty, as many picaresque novels of the time attest, is the material condition *par excellence* of the *pícaro*. It is, therefore, no coincidence that the notion of hunger functions as a *leitmotiv* in many picaresque novels from the “classical” *El Lazarillo de Tormes*, and Quevedo’s *El buscón*, all the way to such modern works as Arenas’ *Hallucinations*.

Thus, if hunger and poverty are not simply coincidental and collateral damages of political economy but its intrinsic and necessary functions, the question is how the type of the poor acts and relates to other functions and types within the economic drama. The totality of social relations, of which poverty is a vital function, is only given as political economy, that is, with the emergence of capitalist relations and bourgeois society. Poverty as a material existence, of course, existed prior to capitalist political economy. What is new about it, however, is that becomes a function that is increasingly hidden and treated as a socially exogenous position. In capitalist relations, poverty means the exclusion not only from the wealth produced in society, but from social relations as such. But, this exclusion is given only as surface appearance; in essence, the beggar is a type that has become fully integrated into the mechanisms of accumulation. “Poverty” is a

⁶ Calderón also wrote the *auto* (one-act play) *El gran mercado del mundo*, in which each character is supposed to spend his money (talent) wisely on the world market. Each character is a personification of baroque virtues and vices: fame, the good genius, bad faith, lust, etc. The concept of exchange, sale and purchase, results also here quite clearly in winners and losers.

relational function, which is not to say that it is a relative one. Though poverty exists in various degrees and to various extents, it means, both in core and periferic areas, the exclusion from the access to the wealth produced in a given society. Since it is relational concept, it also means that the vaster the accumulation is on one side, the greater the poverty is on the other side.

In order to outline the economic types and their correlation, Marx introduced the metaphor of “character-mask,” a theatrical concept borrowed from ancient Greek theater which could be read in concert with Calderón’s *autos sacramentales* and Moliere’s baroque social type comedies. Marx defines the “character-mask” as the way in which social subjects relate, while standing in an antagonistic relation to one another. Character-masks refer to the specific roles (types) that the *homo oeconomicus* must assume in capitalist society. Social categories are here mediated and determined by aesthetic concepts borrowed from literature.

Wie man daher immer die Charaktermasken beurteilen mag, worin sich die Menschen hier gegenüber treten, die gesellschaftlichen Verhältnisse der Personen in ihren Arbeiten, erscheinen jedenfalls als ihre eigenen persönlichen Verhältnisse und sind nicht verkleidet in gesellschaftliche Verhältnisse der Sachen, der Arbeitsprodukte.⁷

[No matter, then, what we may think of the *parts played* by the different classes of people themselves in this society, the social relations between individuals in the performance of their labour, appear at all events as their own mutual personal relations, and are not disguised under the shape of social relations between the products of labour (emphasis added, E.E.).⁸

Unfortunately, the combination “character” and “mask” seems to be exclusively a German compound, as the English translations of *Capital* have simply put “the parts played.” Wolfgang Fritz Haug indicates that only the Spanish translation remains somewhat close to the German term.⁹ However, it does not translate the term as a compound but as options between two terms: “*las mascarar* o *las caracterizaciones*” (emphasis added, E.E.).¹⁰ Also, in English, the entire network

⁷ *Marx-Engels Gesamtausgabe* (MEGA) Band 6 -*Das Kapital*, 1. (Hamburg, 1872): 108

⁸ *Marx Engels Collected Works, Capital 1, Vol. 35*, 88

⁹ Wolfgang Fritz Haug, „Charaktermaske.“ *Historisches kritisches Wörterbuch des Marxismus* 2, ed. Herbert Bosch et. al, Berlin: Argument Verlag, 1995: 436.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

of allusive relations between character, face, and mask, inner and outer, remains underdetermined.¹¹

Character-masks indicate a process of social mimesis and adaptation. The term is slightly different from the psychological terms of social mask and role playing.¹² In the passage above, Marx uses the term predominantly as a social relation between different social types, and also as a *phenomenological* term in which the character-mask emerges as a mode of appearance or shape of consciousness. Here, the outer appearance is already the essence. However, as Marx also indicated, if essence and appearance immediately coincided, there would be no inverted consciousness of the world. The social subjects would not misunderstand their social roles as something freely and consciously chosen by themselves, but as something mediated and enforced by the “commodity-character” of social intercourse.

Thus, character-masks indicate a complex relation between essence and appearance. The relation between the two should not be seen as one of equation but rather as one of translation or mediation, as Arash Abazari suggests. The essence appears, or “translates,” into the appearance.¹³ In the case of the poor, one could say that their situation *appears* as consisting of a certain precarious material condition as a consequence of their exclusion from the wealth produced in society. But *essentially*, poverty is a necessary logic immanent to the performance of work and the accumulation of wealth organized by capital and the state. Poverty, as exclusion from the wealth produced in society, is a determined appearance posited by the essence of capital. But in turn, the essence of capital is not at all reducible to the economic function of poverty or the social type of the “poor” alone, but there exists a mimetic part-whole relation between them. The essence of the one appears in the shape of the other. Put in Hegelian terms, each type or function is a “determined” being *for-itself* of capitalist totality as opposed to the illusion of an individual existing *in-itself* as an immediate “I,” autonomously

¹¹ The term “character mask,” however does appear in the English translation of “The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte. (*Marx Engels Collected Works Volume 11*: 138)

¹² Cf. Paul Ekman and Wallace V. Friesen, *Unmasking the Face – A guide to recognizing emotions from facial clues* (New Jersey: Prentice-Hall): 1975.

¹³ Abazari. *Hegel’s Ontology of Power*, 94.

and unconditioned by its roles. In capitalist totality, being exists for-itself and this means that each being functions in correlation to totality and is necessarily related to another being which it excludes and from which it receives its definition.

In this respect, Hegel's Master-Slave dialectic already anticipated the relational and mutually dependent character of the antagonistic roles in capitalist society: there is no buyer without a seller and no worker without an employer. There is no slave without a master and no capital without labor. If the first chapter implied that the actors on the stage of political economy are rather flat characters that do not evolve or develop, this does not mean that within capitalist circulation no metamorphoses occur. A buyer can become a seller or a debtor or creditor; and a seller necessarily becomes a worker when selling his labor-power. But, even if changes of roles occur, those metamorphoses are still decided by and within the laws of circulation and production. Thus, what remains fixed and frozen is their relation to, and dependence on, capital. Winners and losers are the required parts and outcomes of the drama. According to Marx, Hegel naturalized this antagonism by describing it as a purely logical relation of "recognition" in the Master-Slave dialectic that constitutes the origin of society as such. He failed to see that it was necessarily a *historical* relation immanent to capitalist society and not an idealist logical relation, or an anthropological abstract one, as Alexandre Kojève puts it.¹⁴

Thus, the different types of character-mask only attain their determined property in relation to one another, through exchange. Exchange in capitalist totality has given rise to various anonymous encounters facilitated by the world market. The producers of one's clothes, electronic devices, food, and other commodities not only have lost their face and are condemned to clandestine anonymity, but also have become exchangeable themselves by participating in exchange; and so, have the costumers, even if billboards and commercials enforce the illusion that *this* product has been made exclusively for *you*. The *one*, or *this* one, turns out to be the *many* consumers, and therefore, such deictic signifiers logically imply their relation *to*, and *as*, other universals.¹⁵ This means that the

¹⁴ Alexandre Kojève, *Introduction to the Reading of Hegel*, ed. Allan Bloom, trans. James, H. Nichols, (Ithaca / London: Cornell U Press, 1969).

¹⁵ Hegel, *Phänomenologie des Geistes*, 85.

individual in capitalism only exists as a general or universal notion. Persons become personnel. Any natural or immediate attitude that identifies the notion of the particular as self-contained or self-sufficient in political economy is delusional.

At other moments in *Capital*, however, Marx indicates that the “economic character-masks” of the subjects are “but the personification of the economic relations that exists between them.”¹⁶ Here, the character-mask does not seem to refer only to an individual social type or a mode of appearance, but also emphasizes capital’s division of labor. One no longer speaks of individual actors but of structural economic functions. This time, the character-mask does not *conceal* some essential feature or character of the individual but, on the contrary, *reveals* it, and is constitutive of the very concept of individuality in bourgeois society. Mask, here, in the traditional sense, just as its parenthetical concept, *persona*, has the double connotation of revealing and concealing at the same time. But again, it is not the case that the outer mask would hide some distinct human anthropological essence. Rather, put in post-Hegelian terms, one could say that the absence of the individual that the character-mask embodies, reveals the very essence of the meaning of individuality in capitalism. The absence of the individual shows what individuality *truly* signifies in political economy. Character-masks, since they exist as various shapes of individuality in capitalism, do not appear as alien identities enforced upon the face, but as a type of second skin which has become indistinguishable from one’s perceived core identity. Or conversely (which indicates the same): the character-mask does not indicate the *loss of*, but the *coercion to*, individuality, as Adorno might have said.

The character-mask is “second nature,” it is worn by habit. While reification and alienation are the necessary results of one’s role in the capitalist drama, recognition—the object of desire of both master and slave—is *partout* also the desire of any character-mask. Hence, individuality and personality are the highest values precisely to the extent that individuality and particularity are absent. Of course, one does not want to seamlessly add up, or dissolve, into the sphere of the social. There is a certain vulgarity that adheres to the “social,” as Lefebvre once

¹⁶ Marx, *MEGA*, *Band 6*, 166.

put it.¹⁷ The “social” is the domain of “*das man*” of “thoughtless” consumer-zombies and wage-slaves. In “The Metropolis and Mental Life,” Simmel describes how this one-dimensional and anonymous man of (the) capital (city), increasingly shuts himself off from his environment. The noise of capital, e.g. advertisement, transport, and the crowds, overstimulates the nervous system and the individual develops a *blasé* attitude out of mere self-preservation.¹⁸ If it used to be Odysseus, who would put wax in the ears of his crew, now the modern individual imposes this *blasé* attitude upon himself automatically. He never leaves the house without headphones. When he is forced to be in the proximity of other individuals, in public transportation, for example, a videogame on one’s phone offers a welcome distraction and escape from having to bear the awkward presence of others. As a man of the crowds, however, he wants to stand out, constantly proving that he is an individual and not an element of the mass-ornament. And so, a new self-consciousness arises out of the *blasé* attitude: individualism. The individual despises the social because it constantly threatens him with exposure, on the one hand, and on the other, imposes upon him the mask from which he had sought to escape. Only in a world where one is used to the fact that life is nothing but a game—with winners and losers, as Hoffmann’s character, Medardus, had diagnosed—reality becomes inauthentic and the theatrical illusion substitutes for actual reality: it *is* actual reality. The sphere of production and reproduction becomes uninteresting, somehow unexciting—dull. One does not belong to any social class or group anymore, because one is already exhausted by the many roles one has to play at work, at home, in transport, in politics, at parties. The individual thus takes himself to be the sum of his roles. The self retreats into his own inner world because the outer world has become a mere game to him, a place of inauthenticity. The mask is both: the only form of self-realization but at the same time also his personal derealization. Here, the psycho-sociological notion of the

¹⁷ However, Lefebvre reveals such convictions as a typical example of inverted consciousness: “Nothing is more vulgar than distinction and the wish to distinguish oneself (to *be* distinguished); ethical-aesthetic judgment and sociological fact, vulgarity does not emanate from popular gestures and words, but from the everyday as it is secreted and decreed by the middle classes: a certain ‘realism’ about money, clothes, behaviour, and gratifications, a realism that flaunts and asserts itself, which is part of the ‘vulgar’” (Lefebvre, *Critique of Everyday Life*, Vol 3, 74).

¹⁸ Simmel, *On Individuality and Social Forms*: 329.

mask differs substantially from the Marxist concept of character-mask, since the former clings to a clear discord between society and individual that must be overcome. In this view, emancipation and transformation are transposed to the private domain, and political and social actions are relegated to the external world which has become somehow alien to the individual. The gap between the private and the political constantly needs to be filled.

Even if most of the time the mask is not consciously worn, divestiture, exposure, and disrobing are the constant fears of the invitees to the capitalist *balle-masqué*. Therefore, appearances must be kept up at all times. As Nietzsche indicated “*man muss selbst die Illusion wollen – Darin liegt das Tragische* [one must will the illusion – this is what makes it tragic].”¹⁹ Tragic affirmation most likely means self-confident identification with one’s social role. In this respect, Franz Schandl not only stretches the concept of character-mask to the concept of professional self-realization in the domain of career-making, but to all social roles and everyday situations in capitalist reality—including the fleeting encounters in the street or on the corridor, where people no longer have real conversations but only prompt one another to exchange the same scripted words:²⁰

- How are you doing?
- I am good. How are you?
- Fine, thank you!
- Well, I’ve got to go but it was really nice talking to you!

The phenomenon of small talk reveals a specific repertoire written for character-masks, and belongs to the recurring rhythms and consonances of bourgeois ensembles. The tragic aspect consists in the attempt to identify with one’s role, whilst persistently suppressing any possible gap between face and mask. Yet, on the long run, the discordance between thinking and acting is simply unbearable,

¹⁹ “One must even will the illusion – this is what makes it tragic” (my translation, E.E.) (Nietzsche, *KSA* 7, 427-428).

²⁰ Franz Schandl, “Maske und Charakter. Sprengversuche am bürgerlichen Subjekt.” *Krisis* 31 (2007). https://www.streifzuege.org/wp-content/uploads/KRISIS-31_S.124-172.pdf, Accessed 18-08-2021

and must be overcome by all means. This diremption between thought and being, which was outlined as the typical problem of the *pícaro* in the previous chapter, produces a non-coincidence with oneself. One no longer is oneself, one is beside oneself, something other than oneself. One no longer recognizes oneself, nor the other, since what one recognizes is solely the already known, without knowing the other and oneself very well. Or as Hegel puts it: “*Das Bekannte überhaupt ist darum, weil es bekannt ist, nicht erkannt* [[t]he familiar, just because it is familiar is not known / recognized] (original emphasis).”²¹ This is a very concise definition of ideology, since it indicates a social experience that is so ubiquitous that it has become invisible: indistinct. The ubiquity of the social contradictions of capitalist modernity are not recognized, precisely because they are perceived everywhere.

Thus, as Schandl outlines, a new type of flat-character emerges: the acquaintance.²² He is familiar [*bekannt*] and unfamiliar [*unerkannt*] at the same time; specific to capitalist one-dimensional social intercourse. For Schandl, the character-mask represents this relinquished existence of man in capitalism. Therefore, individuals like the acquaintance acquire *unheimliche* features; they are the strangers and horrific doubles that appear in fantastic stories or in a novel by Roberto Bolaño or E.T.A. Hoffmann.²³ Since everyone is the acquaintance of some other, the acquaintance constitutes an estranged and uncanny presence of oneself in the midst of other acquaintances. Strange individuals make their appearance amongst strange everyday objects, familiar and unfamiliar at the same time. Inanimate commodities have become objects of fetishism and start to lead an existence of their own, like in old *slap stick* films where an umbrella, a head, a loaf of bread, or a piece of furniture in an apartment start to become their owners’ antagonists. This is what modern aesthetics makes visible: the drama of capitalism, which turns traditional subject-object relations on their head. Reification and anthropomorphism are its constant theatrical effects.

²¹ Hegel, *Phänomenologie des Geistes*, “Vorrede,” 35; „Vorrede zur zweiten Ausgabe“ *Wissenschaft der Logik I- Werke 5* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1986): 21.

²² *Der Bekannte* in German, *el conocido* in Spanish, or *de kennis* in Dutch.

²³ In Roberto Bolaño’s *Estrella distante*, the main-protagonist, Carlos Wieder, for example, is such an acquaintance. He later turns into a serial killer, who assumes many pseudonyms. The narrator and other characters in the novel indicate that there was always something uncanny about him.

In *History and Class Consciousness*, Lukács has identified character-masks as the expression of capitalist reification. Therefore, character-masks translate into the concept of inverted consciousness. Capitalists are personifications of capital, which is to say, that their *subjective* desire and individual concern is the accumulation of surplus, the *objective* goal of capital. In turn, Marx's own coinage of *Monsieur Le Capital et Madame La Terre*, which Fernando Ortiz translated into the Cuban context as *Doña Azúcar* and *Don Tabaco* are other instances of personified economic categories. The "automatic subject of capital," in turn, is an anthropomorphic designation of what Hegel used to call the self-realizing absolute: value, profit: absolute "spirit," and a total "specter," indeed. Anthropomorphism in capitalism means that something proper or immanent to man comes to stand in an external and antagonistic relation to him. The social relations produced by man stand above and beyond him, as if they were an external alien power. Personification, in turn, denotes the incorporation of something alien and external into the self, so as to become an inseparable and immanent property of it. In this respect, Lukács, and Marx before him, have shown that dialectical terms like "reification" and "alienation" are not ahistorical logical categories, but *the* historical appearances of capitalist relations.

The mask, for Lefebvre, is both the character-mask and the socio-psychological mask that mediates between the individual and society, self and other. Since the mask is the result of enforced social conjunctures, there must be a structural difference between mask and face, otherwise the mask can hardly be the result of enforced processes and mediations. There must be a residuum, a remainder, as Adorno would have said, which indicates that individuals do not fully coincide with their character-masks. Man is always more than his mask; the mask only determines his character partially. Next to being a doctor, a worker, a husband, a peasant, and soccer player, he may be a dutiful citizen, a critical democrat, or a revolutionary agitator. His potentiality is not exhausted by the mask. Thus, there will always be a difference between the ascribed and the achieved status, and the individual always strives to be more, and to overcome his mask for the sake of another, more successful, mask. Self-confidence, and not self-consciousness, is the credo of the individual.

However, next to this tragic breach between society and the individual that the mask represents, the individual, wearing his mask, bears a comical dimension too. The films of Charlie Chaplin offer a variety of represented character-masks that reveal the inflexibility of social reality and the roles that belong to it. The individual wears his masks but they never truly fit; they are too large or too small for the character. Chaplin's social type *par excellence*, the "tramp," has become an icon of modern resistance and has attained a mythical dimension. Lefebvre's usage of "myth" bears a similarity to Roland Barthes' implementation of the term²⁴ and denotes the everyday bourgeois repertoire and semiology, hitherto deemed to be unworthy of literature and philosophy. That is to say, this new mythology of the everyday has been unworthy of *modern* literature; for in the Baroque, even in "high" literature, the *tramp-pícaro* did exist, and the marvelous mythological aspect of the everyday was captured. It was only later that they were somehow forgotten and covered up. For both Barthes and Lefebvre, the renewed desire for the recovery of myths consists of the wish to restore into historical consciousness that which has been concealed so far. This presence-absence, for Lefebvre, does not function on an imaginary level but in the everyday life itself: "[t]he most extraordinary things are also the most everyday; the strangest things are most often the most trivial, and the current notion of the 'mythical' is an illusory refraction of this fact."²⁵ This is what makes the character-mask epic, as Bertolt Brecht unmistakably saw. His aesthetics of the *Verfremdungseffekt* [alienation effect] explicitly reduces his *dramatis personae* to character-masks. However, the "alienation effect" is different from Lefebvre's notion of the *reverse image* that he identified in Chaplin's films. There, the comical but at the same time tragic effect is produced by a dialectical pair, the "petty bourgeois" and the "tramp," two types that "go on producing and destroying each other ceaselessly,"²⁶ a dynamic which constantly shifts the capitalist dramaturgy from tragedy to farce and vice versa.

The notion of alienation always involves the transposition of some authentic and singular kernel to a realm outside of the alienating social relations. The

²⁴ Roland Barthes. *Mythologies*, trans. Jonathan Cape (New York: The Noonday Press, 1972)

²⁵ Lefebvre, *Critique of Everyday Life Vol. 1*: 13.

²⁶ *Ibid.*

character-mask then represents a middle term between an alien society and an essentially and naturally free human being who can only be realized outside society. This makes the social type of the “tramp” eventually ineffective for overturning capitalist relations, since he decides to remain outside those relations, separating himself from social totality. According to Lefebvre, emancipation has to pass through society. As long as there is a difference between self-positing identity and its social mediation, between freedom and determination, philosophy and sociology, unlike the aesthetical approach mentioned in the previous chapter, produce the same solution: a conservative and affirmative solution that strives for the harmonious coincidence of the individual and the whole. The individual must ignore the difference between his will and the general will and make his personal maxim at the same time a universal law. The tables turn: alienation now does not mean estrangement from one’s “authentic” existence but from one’s mask. The given appearances of society are *a priori* affirmed. The focus is on the functioning or dysfunctioning of the individual in *pre-given* material conditions. The social role becomes an automatic or self-evident and self-explanatory justification for action, since an individual must act according to his ascribed role. As a teacher, he should punish the student, as police officer he can pull over the car, as a judge, he must sentence someone to prison. His behavior is perfectly understood according to the social role and function that he must fulfill. Intention, potentiality, and actuality are seamlessly one—any contradiction between them is overcome: this is what the character-mask ensures and secures. Roles and role playing are accepted without further ado, and without questioning the specific function the role fulfills. Here, we return to Calderón’s *auto*. If given social appearances determine one’s role in society, and if one’s mask is a mere expression of one’s material conditions, then one deals with a world ordained and ordered by fate, by the gods themselves. Individuality and role-playing are now the effect of some greater power pulling the strings. Individuals decay into marionettes or puppets in a Punch and Judy show.

What makes the notion of the mask and the *theatrum mundi* a specifically baroque structure of feeling that blooms in late capitalism is the idea of role playing, already dealing with the decay of the old castes and the transformation into a class society. Only in a class society that maintains a division of labor, which

in Calderón was already defined by the separation of mental and physical labor, the notion of the individual and the idea of social role playing can emerge. The division of labor and the dispersal of power, together with the values of productivity, efficiency, and rationalization such as they arise in civil society at the turn of the seventeenth and the eighteenth century, enforce the imagery of the world as a stage.²⁷ Though the idea of man as an actor and the world as a stage dates back to antiquity, what is new is that Calderón de la Barca places the ancient anthropological notion of “man as an actor on the stage of the world” into a theocentric universe, in which the essence of man is fixed by pre-given roles. Moreover, Calderón’s “innovation” is belated at the same time, insofar as his *El gran teatro del mundo* legitimizes and defines this social division of labor and roles as a universe ordained by God, in a society that was already transitioning to a homocentric world view. If in modernity the character-mask no longer refers to an anthropological concept but to a structural economic and social function, or, in other words, if the individual deduces his individuality from capital’s structural functions and institutions, the author of the *theatrum mundi* also necessarily disappears and no longer takes the form of an individual. There are no invisible hands pulling the strings of the market but only an anonymous domination effected by an automatic subject. In this respect, capitalist totality means not so much that the highest values have become devalued but rather that they persistently need to self-valorize.²⁸ While in Calderón’s *auto* an external God is the demiurge-dramaturge, the capitalist *theatrum mundi* is characterized by the absence of the playwright. One would have to speak of a work without an author. Marx’s correction and implementation of Hegel’s absolute self-realizing idea finds its concrete historical *gestalt* here as capital. capital is the true abstract *demiurgos* of the modern bourgeois drama; an immanent God, and not an external one as in Calderón. In his *auto* the idea of the world as a stage can only be revealed because

²⁷ In England the dispersal of power and the decay of feudalism already takes place at the turn of the sixteenth and seventeenth century. Therefore, the Shakespearian view of the world as a stage is introduced into drama and society before it finds its expression belatedly in France, Germany, and Spain.

²⁸ Marx’s definition of capital is “self-valorizing value” which automatically proceeds independently of the wills of the individuals in society. Therefore, he spoke of an “automatic subject.” (Marx, *MEGA*, Band 6, 172).

there is the external perspective onto the stage. In capitalist modernity one would have to speak of a non-empirical, i.e. “invisible theater,” to borrow the term from the Brazilian theorist of theater, Augusto Boal.²⁹ But while it is true that capitalism is authored by no-one in particular, the opposite is also true, it only exists because everyone acts and collaborates in it, and mutually imposes the laws of the market upon one another. In this way, the famous, but *erroneous*, dictum in the *German Ideology* must once again be overturned. Marx indicated there, that one’s material conditions are not determined by consciousness, but consciousness by them.³⁰ Often enough, however, exactly the opposite is at stake: the material conditions of the individual are the result of his false convictions. And this turns political economy into an absurdist theater. Also, while *El gran teatro del mundo* was predicated on Catholic pedagogy and morality, the anonymous domination of capital defies all ethical and moral regulations, since its actors and authors do not consciously negotiate, agree, or willfully subject themselves to capitalist forms of domination. In this respect, Adorno’s and Horkheimer’s diagnosis of instrumental reason as the pivotal problem of modernity is simply false.³¹ Not instrumental reason, by means of which an individual can posit and achieve a goal outside himself, but automatic or autonomous reason is the problem, a rationale that takes place independently of all wills in society.

In sum, the mask appears as a fivefold category: 1. as an aesthetic concept in literature and drama; 2. as an economic function; 3. as a social and historical category relating to one’s social standing, class, or caste; 4. as a philosophical notion denoting the general mode of appearances in objective reality; 5. as psychological mediation between inner and outer, “authentic” and socially enforced, personalities. Even though Marx was predominantly interested in the concept as an economic function, he also used it to describe a specific type of bourgeois consciousness or mass psychology mediated by commodity character and class antagonism. The character-mask, according to Marx, Lefebvre, and Lukács

²⁹ Augusto Boal, *The Theater of the Oppressed*, trans. Charles A. and Maria-Odilia Leal McBride, and Emily Fryer (London: Pluto Books, 2008).

³⁰ Karl Marx & Friedrich Engels, *The German Ideology* (New York: Prometheus, 1998): 42

³¹ Horkheimer & Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*: 23.

could only be overcome through class struggle and the sublation of social contradictions produced by capitalist modernity.

The next section, however, introduces another concept of the “mask” from the Cuban and French context. It presents a new concept of social types, one that attempts to leap out of capitalist totality and refuses to be defined by it: this new picaresque type is the “Drag Queen,” which is read as a mocking critique of another new economic type, “the Woman,” who just recently has become fully integrated into the theater of political economy.

2. *Women, Baroque Castratos and other Engaños*

There is a very specific character-mask, where cultural and economic roles intersect. While social roles are defined by their economic function which then become naturalized, being a “woman,” at first sight rather seems to be a natural, that is, biological, or at best a “cultural” identity. But here, the natural and cultural division of labor is an also economic one. Apart from capitalism, little other forms of society have been so effective in hiding this convergence, however.

Naively, in bourgeois society, the world of *leisure* has been described as the opposite of the world of work, that is, as the realm where the character-mask can finally drop, and where “man” is no longer frozen into his economic and professional roles. In bourgeois private sphere, the individual is free to be himself, ostensibly no longer defined by the many roles and functions he has to fulfill. During leisure time the individual lives his authentic existence, he “projects” himself and chooses the identity he wants to have.

But this is not quite the case for the “woman” for whom a very special social and economic role is reserved in the capitalist *theatrum mundi*. She knows that work is not the necessary expenditure for the costs of leisure but, quite the opposite, leisure is necessary for the restoration and expense of the (male) labor force. Leisure is not the absence of labor but a world that work has brought into being. The “woman” was the first to experience the opposition between work and leisure as entirely delusional. She has been all too familiar with her Janus-faced mask, if her many masks were not rather the masks of *Hydra*. Behind every mask she attempts to snatch off, multiple other masks emerge, and her work never

seems to end. The character-mask “woman” is predominantly defined by the double burden of the reproduction of life. Her work is traditionally housework. Her disposition and willingness to perform this work is derived from the love for her husband and children. Since it is a work performed out of “love,” it should hardly require any effort or sacrifice on her part. Her self-realization consists in cooking, cleaning, and using high-tech automatic vacuum cleaners, smart fridges, and egg minders. Put differently, housework, as a matter of fact, is no work at all. Exploitation only occurs in the workplace, at the factory or in the office.

Despite all of this, some women tend to disagree. One point of the criticism that the feminist movements of the seventies launched against the Marxist critique of political economy was that Marx, and the workers’ movements themselves, did not take into consideration the unpaid work at home when discussing the labor theory of value. The argument in the so-called “housework debate” and the “dual economy debate” is that the labor done by women in private households directly (co)produces the commodity “labor” of male workers.³² Subsequently, women also produced more than was necessary for their own reproduction. This “invisible” surplus value adds up to the labor power sold by the male worker, making it more valuable. This unacknowledged surplus is silently appropriated by capital. While it is true that this invisible labor and surplus is only marginally discussed by Marx, who described it as “family labor,” Engels’ essay, *On the Origin of Private Property, the Family and the State* further outlines the enslavement of women in bourgeois family structure and capitalist relations, by claiming that the repression of women through the family structure is coeval with the creation of private property which divides men in to proprietors and women into non-proprietors.³³

But this all seems to belong to the past. The “woman” is now not only the proprietor of many produced commodities, but she is also her own property and the owner of her labor-power which she sells zealously. What was once considered a liberation of women, their capacity and desire to earn and depose over their own

³² Marie Toupin. *Wages for Housework – A History of an International Feminist Movement, 1972-1977*, trans. Käthe Roth (Vancouver: Pluto Press, 2018).

³³ Engels, *Marx Engels Collected Works Volume 26*, 129-276.

income, now has become an obligation and burden, as one income no longer suffices to run and sustain a private household.³⁴ Just like the idea of free marriage, which provides the couple with the possibility of freely choosing the partner they love, the household is immediately turned into an economic cluster enforced and backed by the state. Free marriage flourishes best under forced circumstances, in which each party has to fulfill their social and economic duties. As Engels indicated, using Hegel's words, "freedom is the insight into necessity."³⁵ While the "woman" traditionally performed housework that consisted of cooking, cleaning, gardening, patching up her husband, nursing the children, and fulfilling her sexual duties, the self-confident and exploited modern female worker, now claims the exact same "duties" from her partner when she returns from the office. Needless to say, the other exploited working partner who returns tired from the office, has the same expectations. The manifold contradiction between time, money, and mental and/or muscular expenditure makes modern marriage and sharing a household a particularly promising and pleasant entertainment. What once began spontaneously as free love, now appears more as a mutual condemnation to one another. What was once considered "woman's" emancipation, is now her enslavement to capital, since what was liberated was *just* her labor force. Her right to work has become her right to alienation.

Because of her biological properties the "woman" "by definition" has this manifold burden of reproductive labor—paid jobs, unpaid housework, and sexual reproduction. Therefore, there is the assumption that women are less efficient and less productive in their paid labor. This general prejudice affects any woman regardless of whether she desires to become a wife and a mother or not. Therefore, the question about the double burden of reproductive labor is not something that is dug out of an ancient relic box but a hypothetical position and bias that affects *any* "self-confident" modern woman. Her mere biological characteristics,

³⁴ In this respect, Engels already added to his synopsis of *Capital* the following conclusion: "Formerly, the sale and purchase of labour-power was a relation between free persons; now, minors or children are bought; the worker now sells wife and child — he becomes a slave-dealer."

<https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1867-c1/1868-syn/ch04.htm>

He indicated that Capital's newest measure at the time was that the whole family had to sell their labor-power in order to earn one day's wage. After 180 years of capitalism, for most of the global population the situation has hardly changed.

³⁵ Engels, *Marx Engels Collected Works Volume 25*, 105.

naturalized and sexist modern illusions of love, the idea of free marriage and the duties that come along with it, provide the matrix for a “racism” against the “woman,” whichever woman it may be. The mere fact that she is a woman is sufficient to be suspicious and calculate the risks regarding her potential (maternal) leave or any other deficiency in productivity, due to her duties as potential wife and mother. This circumstance, however, does not mean that women are not hired, nor that they would be even *less* hired. On the contrary, one has witnessed over the last half century the emergence of service sectors in society, such as the educational, the health care, and the administrative sector that predominantly use women’s labor. It appears as if those jobs, many of which are part-time positions, have been especially created for women. Needless to say, those jobs have become mere extensions of “women’s” traditional housework tasks, done by nurses and physicians, teachers and professors, secretaries and other administrative workers. Assistance, service, and subordination to others, after all, are what “women” can do best. The wages in these sectors have, ever since women entered these jobs, radically dropped. While women are not less hired, they are paid less.³⁶

Some women may feel that they have been betrayed by capital, since its domination is reproduced by hiding the existing material inequality under the guise of formal equality. Thus, “woman’s” struggle for equal treatment and equal payment has been turned into another instance of the inverted world, just as easily. Equal exchange for equal services. But participating in the capitalist exchange of equivalences did not produce the equality “woman” had hoped for. Quite the contrary, capitalist accumulation does not exempt her, and why would it? *Because of*, and *not* in spite of, the same yardstick for each and every one that capital and its legal superstructure implement, inequality is continuously reproduced. The more equally people are treated, the more unequal they become. Since “woman” wants to be the equal of “man,” and thus wants to be persistently compared to “him,” she falls behind in the relations of exchange. She self-

³⁶ Even poverty has been gendered, and one speaks of the increasing feminization of poverty on a global scale. Cf. Silvia Federici, *Revolution at Point Zero* (Oakland: PM Press, 2012): 42; and Angela. Y. Davis. *Women, Race, and Class* (New York: Vintage: 1983): 57.

confidentially affirms that being the mother of three children, and making a career is absolutely manageable; all that she wants is equal treatment and above all, equal pay. In her fight for emancipation, she entirely blanked out that “salary,” to begin with, is capital’s instrument for its appropriation of profit (accumulation), not the condition for her liberation. In fact, it is the condition for her expropriation and the enrichment of the other. Thus, what holds true for all other economic actors and character-masks is also valid for the “woman.” Women also write their own history. They are not just the victims of “patriarchal” structures but also co-author, or co-producers, of their own oppression. Just as in the case of all other character-masks, in the “woman” the duality between face and mask has finally been resolved. What has been produced is yet another uncontradicted individuality. “Woman” becomes equal to herself. Just like the male worker, she wants her own submission and freely participates in the exchange of equivalences only to become exchangeable herself. It is, to use the words of Baudrillard, the end of her alienation. Face and mask are finally one.

In this respect, the case of women’s liberation especially in the domestic sphere is akin to the liberation of other wageless subjects: slaves, subproletarian subjects from both core- and peripheral countries, prisoners, voluntary workers, and students.³⁷ Again, the liberation of these subjects does not constitute a relic from the past, since advanced capitalism still relies on a persistent process of primitive accumulation through unpaid labor. This, quite literally, concerns *invisible* labor that secures capital’s hegemony. Unwaged labor, and, generally, the surplus that labor generates and capital appropriates, thus, must be expanded beyond the factory and the office. In the case of reproductive labor, one must “see the home and housework as the foundation of the factory system, rather than its ‘other.’”³⁸ According to Silvia Federici, housework reveals that the whole distinction between society and factory is delusional. “[S]ociety becomes a factory and social relations *directly become relations of production*” (emphasis in original).³⁹ As Immanuel Wallerstein indicates, the gender role-bound division of

³⁷ It comes as no surprise that these groups, once they enter paid jobs, are the lowest paid.

³⁸ Federici, *Revolution at Point Zero*, 6.

³⁹ *Ibid.*: 7

labor is, of course, far from being a capitalist invention, but what is new is that there is now a correlation of division of labor and the valorization and valuation of work. Under capitalism, the male labor force, that is, of the “breadwinner” has been valued and waged, but the work at home, traditionally done by women, has been steadily devalued and defined as a non-active labor force, sitting at home. “Thus, sexism was institutionalized. The legal and paralegal apparatus of gender distinction and discrimination follow quite logically in the wake of this basic differential valuation of labour.”⁴⁰ In capitalism, economic basic relations are hidden under, and coeval with, so-called “biological” and “cultural” ones. The latter function, in this context, as the mere surface appearance that covers up or distorts the essential basic relations of (re)production, up to the point that biology, culture, and economy have become indistinguishable.

In addition, it was Frantz Fanon, amongst others who suggested that there is often a simultaneity of base and superstructure. He argued that in the colonies one cannot speak of prior underlying economic relations, and subsequent social institutions that are the social and cultural expressions of the former, but that the social, the cultural, and the economic function on the same level.⁴¹ Social masks, be it Fanon’s “white masks” or the “woman-masks” are at the same time economic character-masks. The colonization is double (triple even) as many women in the Global South have indicated. The private is the political, and capital’s infinite thirst for living labor expresses itself here in the unwaged reproductive labor of women and other wageless workers, an economic function that serves to further depress the wages on a global scale and to keep the costs of the reproduction of labor power as low as possible.

Therefore, it would be as myopic to fall back on a delusional division between the private and the political, as it would be to rely on vulgar materialist base-superstructure models. The determination between the two is not a one-way street, a mere superstructural reflection or imitation of the reality of the base: “If we have the broad sense of productive forces [that is, *all* (re)productive (un)waged

⁴⁰ Immanuel Wallerstein, *Historical Capitalism with Capitalist Civilization* (London/ New York: Verso, 2011): 25.

⁴¹ “You are rich because you are white, and you are white because you are rich” (Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, 40).

labor], we look at the whole question of the base differently, and we are then less tempted to dismiss as superstructural, and in that sense as merely secondary, certain vital productive social forces, which are in the broad sense, from the beginning, basic (my addition, E.E.).”⁴²

Thus, the notion of commodity-fetishism must be extended to the cultural and symbolic realm, indicating the concealment of real power relations in the global production and flow of cultural capital. Also, those who articulate a postcolonial critique of the rigid base-superstructure model, such as Fanon, Gunder Frank, and Stuart Hall indicate that the economic dominance of capital is sustained and legitimized by hegemonic social, cultural, and economic values in society. For Fernando Ortiz, the battle between tobacco and sugar served as a new anthropological model that theorized on a coeval level the cultural and economic elements that made up his model of transculturation, a model that involved *struggle*. Transculturation indicated the sometimes painful or violent transition from one culture to another, while dominant, emergent, and residual cultural elements constantly participate in hegemonic articulation. In this way, Ortiz’s model reveals the interplay between subaltern and dominant elements and describes the loss or supersession of some cultural elements by others. This makes the contrapuntal perspective a specific tragic worldview since it traces the elements of the martyrs of political economy, and points to the desire to restore the economic and symbolic capital withheld from the colonized subject. This concerns an act of owning the means of production regarding the (re)writing of one’s own social practices and culture, and the claim of authorship for one’s deeds and actions. While it may not simply be possible to restore what was originally lost, the drama of transculturation and cultural *mestizaje* opens the potential for new protagonists, creations, and claims to common property to become legitimate. Here, the economic and cultural aspects are equally important when describing Cuban counterpoint(s).

Later, the model of transculturation was redefined as a practice of cultural transvestism, or cross-dressing. The transvestite, a cross-border artist, as

⁴² Raymond Williams. “Base and Superstructure in Marxist Cultural Theory.” *New Left Review* 82(1973): 6.

theorized by Severo Sarduy, constitutes in the Latin-American, and, especially, in the Caribbean context, a *pícaro* and *mestizo* who turns gender and race relations upside down. The general awareness that capital's imperialist division of labor is productive and profits from all sorts of racial, sexual, and cultural segregation and regulation is becoming substantially more theorized.⁴³ Indeed, capitalist totality not only particularizes and divides economic roles, but also expands privatization and particularization to the social, rendering it increasingly into a domestic sphere; and vice versa, it intrudes, regulates, and monitors private intercourse. The division between the private and the political is itself productive of sexual, gendered, and racial differentiation, of the social division of labor and its epistemological and cultural particularizations. Yet while imperialism does not limit itself to economic categories, it cannot be used synonymously with cultural imperialism ignoring its basic economic premises, either. As Engels indicates in his *Anti-Dühring*, it is not the mere desire for sheer senseless violence and the subjugation of others that underlies primitive accumulation, but material and economic interests that are enforced and maintained through racist and sexist violence. The more advanced the process of accumulation is, the more cultural and economic values become indistinguishable, and the less will this process be experienced as explicitly violent.⁴⁴

In reaction to some vulgar materialist tendencies, a few Latin-American scholars, however, gradually divorce themselves from the economical determinism that—justifiably or not—is associated with orthodox Marxist accounts that theorize subject formation, and power relations as secondary derived processes. This means that cultural elements are not only perceived as functioning on a coeval level with economical categories, but that the former are even mobilized as critique and correction of the economic reduction that capital preforms itself. The

⁴³ Cf. Ann Laura Stoler *Carnal Knowledge and Imperial Power*. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2010). Immanuel Wallerstein, "Cleavages in the World-System: Race, Nation, Class, Ethnicity, Gender" *The Essential Wallerstein* (New York: The New Press, 2000): 293-352.

⁴⁴ As Santí indicates, Fernando Ortiz was developing his description of the counterpoint between tobacco and sugar at a time when the difference between the two economic and cultural functions began to disappear. Thus, in Santí's view, Ortiz's *Cuban Counterpoint* was the attempt to make the dichotomy once again visible (Enrico Mario Santí, "Fernando Ortiz: Counterpoint and Transculturation," *Ciphers of History – Latin American Readings for a Cultural Age* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2005): 192.

underdetermination of the economical, here, is therefore to be seen not simply as a deficit but as a performative critique. One may be reminded again of Marx's letter to Lassalle. If the exposé of the economic relations constitutes by the same token their critique, the absence thereof in poststructuralist thought could be seen as a form of critique of the economic categories as well.⁴⁵ The argument of the present thesis is however different. Even though the base-superstructure model is too rigid, a disregard of the underlying economic relations ends up creating inverted worlds. Therefore, the absence of an explicit critique of basal economic relations has important political consequences. In this regard, because of its explicit reference to cultural and gendered cross-dressing, The notion of the mask in the thought of the Cuban philosopher and poet Severo Sarduy appears as a *deceptively* non-economic concept. At rare moments, however, Sarduy himself indicates that his thought should be read as a critique of political economy as well; a critique that aligns itself with Georges Bataille rather than Marx.⁴⁶

The remaining two sections of this chapter will deal with this alternative critique of political economy. As will be argued, this approach denotes a picaresque strategy insofar as it seeks to occupy a so-called "only position *apart* from Marx and Hegel," attempting to overturn their essential theoretical categories. The rest of this section will discuss Sarduy's belated baroque type of the "drag queen." This mocking social and cultural type constitutes a sort of "reverse-image" of the character-mask "woman," in that it exaggerates the concept of the "woman" up to the point that "woman" herself is revealed as an artificial construct rather than a natural identity. As such, the "drag queen" launches an implicit critique of capital's division of labor and social roles. Therefore, Sarduy's drag queen, as I read her, functions as an "ideal" and "aesthetic" type that does not only offer a critique of the notions of gender and sex in order to arrive at a deconstruction of

⁴⁵ J.K Gibson Graham constitute an example of such an approach. They indicate that they think the best strategy is a "deconstruction of the capitalism /non-capitalism relation." (Gibson Graham, *The End of Capitalism (As We Knew It) – A Feminist Critique of Capitalism*, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press): 11. The arguments in this thesis, however, align more with Raymond Williams and Henri Lefebvre regarding the critique of the base-superstructure model, and with Angela Davis, Silvia Federici, and Frigga Haug regarding the feminist critique of political economy.

⁴⁶ See for example, the fragment titled, "Economía" published in Severo Sarduy, *Obras Completas II*, eds. Gustavo Guerrero, François Wahl (Madrid: Galaxia Gutenberg, 1999): 1250.

such categorical pairs. Again, the aesthetic representation of the picaresque emphasizes the difference between being and the objective thought-form under which being is subsumed. Hence, the critique, as described here, does not concern itself so much with the tearing down of binary identities, but rather with the experience of the difference between thought and content or being. The “drag queen,” then, functions as an image of protest against the categorization of socio-economic roles and their abstract philosophical corresponding concepts. In this regard, my reading of Sarduy’s type differs from studies that describe his baroque notion of crossdressing in terms of gender identity and performativity.⁴⁷

The concept of masquerade and cross-dressing, in Sarduy, aligns itself with the idea of the palimpsest, and constitutes the spatialization and temporalization of the process of accumulation. Extended to the idea of corporal inscription, the mask is defined through its layers of signs, laws, and practices that have become carved into the body. The Kafkaesque evocation of this practice indeed does not hide the violence of this process.⁴⁸ For Sarduy, this corporal inscription is a form of tattooing: a simulation and simulacrum, akin to the baroque painting techniques of anamorphosis and *trompe-l’oeil*, written on a body. Some of the layers may remain unnoticed by the passersby. Only through shifting one’s vantage point, hidden images and signs may be revealed; or as Lefebvre puts it, almost anticipating Sarduy’s discussion of anamorphosis, “[t]here are only points of view, perspectives, masks and roles. Truth is draped in veils; it can be defined only by an endless succession of points of view.”⁴⁹

The strategy of transvestism stands here analogously to the process of simulation outlined in Plato’s *The Sophist*. This vindicates cultural and gendered transvestism similarly to the practice of dissimulators, *engañadores*, and other deceivers. Plato describes the sophists as professionals who sell spoken copies of knowledge for money to young men.⁵⁰ The knowledge sold by the sophists is no

⁴⁷ Cf. Ben. Sifuentes Jáuregui, *Transvestism, Masculinity, and Latin American Literature* (New York: Palgrave, 2002).

⁴⁸ Cf. Franz Kafka, “In the Penal Colony,” *The Complete Stories* (New York: Schocken Books, 1971): 321-369

⁴⁹ Lefebvre, *Critique of Everyday Life*, 17.

⁵⁰ Plato, “The Sophist,” *The Complete Works*, eds. John M. Cooper (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1997): 255.

real knowledge, but a sole (dis)simulation of the philosopher's wisdom and truth. The sophist participates in a degraded form of copy-making. A carpenter produces a copy, for example, a material table that embodies and resembles the original idea "table," while sticking to its right proportions and colors. The appearance-making of the poet and sophist, in contrast, is out of proportion, deforming its model. To use again the words of Walter Benjamin, the simulacrum is the deforming copy that enables the distortion of the symbol into baroque allegory. In this respect, for Sarduy, the Caribbean figure of the "drag queen" does not *resemble* the "woman," that is, she does not constitute a faithful copy, but her deforming simulation is a mimicry and mockery of "essential" womanhood. Since masks have this double connotation of revealing and concealing at the same time, what is concealed and revealed is the *draga's* lack. The artifice and simulation of the drag queen reveals that something like an essence "woman" does not exist. Her mask composes a double strategy of simultaneously camouflaging and standing out through the usage of fluorescent colors. Her body, her skin, constitutes a screen, or a curtain [*Vorhang*], to use the Hegelian term, behind which lies nothing. However, nothingness in Sarduy's account is inspired by Lacan's notion of "lack," an empty signifier from which identity derives. For Hegel essence is negation, but not a primordial lack. In Hegel, negation is change or movement, not lacuna. This is a crucial modification of the dialectical relation of identity and difference in the French post-Hegelian tradition.

Since "drag queens" *lack* what the essential woman has, their (re)productive function is entirely void; put differently, their sexuality is functionless—purely aestheticized. The "drag queen's" production of likeness is informed by mediation, not reflection. She does not reflect reality, but refracts and produces another reality. This is what constitutes her artifice and craft. Thus, "drag queens" parody the search for identity, for self-same truth.

In a slightly different context, Derrida indicates that the appearance of the "woman" in Nietzsche's writings, just like the Sarduyean "drag queen" refers to the artifice of appearance.⁵¹ Derrida focuses especially on the passage from *The*

⁵¹ Jacques Derrida, *Spurs: Nietzsche's Styles/ Éperons: Les Styles de Nietzsche* trans. Barbara Harlow (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1981).

Gay Science, where Nietzsche indicates, “*Vielleicht ist die Wahrheit ein Weib* [Perhaps the truth is a woman].”⁵² The Nietzschean “woman” is defined through the notion of *schöner Schein* (beautiful illusion) alone.⁵³ Her sophistic power consists in, and subsists through, her pathos for distance: like *trompe-l’oeil*, her effect depends on perspective, on space and layers of air. She attracts men through her distant passing for the referent, and what makes her attractive is, in this regard, precisely her unreachability. She simulates beauty and essential womanhood, but knows at the same time that essence, truth, and womanhood do not exist for her, as they never existed to begin with. Unlike the male platonic philosopher, she knows that art is worth more than the truth. Indeed, one could say that the “woman,” read through Derrida’s lens, knows that truth is not even a criterion for science or knowledge. *Truth* only exists as value judgment: true love, true friendship, or true socialism. After all, the criterion for science proper is falsification and not “truth,” and so, Nietzschean “women,” in Derrida’s view, mock the philosopher’s search for the grail.

Despite of “woman’s” “wisdom,” she nonetheless resembles, or simulates, truth and depth, because this is exactly what constitutes her power and attraction. She knows that an inner *eidos*, or *Wesen*, does not exist but, at the same time, she unleashes the desire for it. This turns Derrida’s Nietzschean “woman” into a *femme fatale*: a castrating woman.⁵⁴ She castrates the phallic desire for truth. Or rather, desire is constituted through castration, that is, through the original loss of the *eidos*. “Woman” is nothingness, a void and symbol of a negative ontology that introduces disruption into the totality of being. Derrida’s “woman” remains alien to Hegel’s determinate negation, she is absolute negation *pur sang*. At the same time, while covering up her nothingness, she is the very symbol of ideology and illusion. She alienates the spectator not only from (false) truth but from his very own desire. Since she is simulation, she is spectacle *tout court*, and so the more she is contemplated the more the spectator is alienated from his material needs and the less he understands his own desires. Like advertisement, she

⁵² Friedrich Nietzsche, *Fröhliche Wissenschaft*. KSA 3, 352.

⁵³ Friedrich Nietzsche, *Die Geburt der Tragödie*. KSA 1, 26.

⁵⁴ Derrida, *Nietzsche’s Spurs*, 59.

produces the very remoteness and proximity of the desire and its fulfillment that she has instilled in him to begin with. In this, her appearance bears some familiarity with the *resorte* that according to Maravall defined the spectacles during the Baroque, or with that which Benjamin called the aura and beauty of high art. “Aura” simultaneously denotes unreachability and vicinity, something that capitalism was able to successfully implement for its commodity aesthetics, which makes it an important aspect both of baroque aesthetics and capitalist relations.

We are, thus, confronted here with an aesthetic-philosophical paradox, since concealment and simulation is the very essence of capital’s aesthetics. As Wallerstein indicates, the hiding of the mechanisms of capitalist exchange that produce social inequalities “lay[s] in the very structure of the capitalist world-economy.”⁵⁵ Therefore, it quite evidently depends on whether belated baroque aesthetics are implemented to hide what is covered up, or uncover *as hidden* what was hitherto covered up. The former indicates that nothing has been covered up to begin with, and the latter draws attention to the very practice of hiding through the process of simulation.

Thus, as the typical icons and *pícaros* of modernity, Derrida’s Nietzschean “women” and Sarduy’s “drag queens,” are *dominant* and *peripheral* modes of representation at the same time, depending on their definition and occupation in the theory of political economy. Most certainly, their ambiguity, or perhaps androgyny, turns them into murderous copies and counterfeits—*baroque castratos*, however. They sabotage any meaningful distinction between essence and appearance, rendering the term *epokhé* in a thoroughly anti-metaphysical manner. What is bracketed is the notion of *eidos* itself. In this way, Derrida’s “women” and Sarduy’s “drag queens” are mere *engaños*, insofar as they confuse being and non-being. That is, in their simulation of depth or profoundness—the effect of *trompe-l’oeil*—they make believe that that which *is not* in a way *is*. Their semblance or illusion is being that is not. What characterizes *trompe-l’oeil* is that its mode of being is non-being. These two sides, being and non-being, belong together but exclude one another at the same time. Because such beings of

⁵⁵ Wallerstein, *Historical Capitalism*, 31.

semblance are pretenders, they pretend to be independent from essence, *depth*, but of course they are *not*.

Cross-dressing and simulation are pretentious and picaresque strategies, since they interweave and bypass the limits between being and non-being up to the point that the beholder of the spectacular appearance is “force[d]...to agree unwillingly to that which in no way is.”⁵⁶ As is well known, even Plato himself mobilizes his discussion of the sophist for castration, that is, patricide: the killing of his own mentor and *model*, Parmenides, for whom there is either being or non-being, but no (Aristotelian/ Hegelian) becoming yet. Transvestism is the constant game of becoming other than oneself. By subverting the difference between nature and artifice, or being and non-being, the “drag queen” draws attention to the very naturalization of the artifice of social (and economic) roles and the character-masks themselves. On top of that, her picaresque strategy reveals, to use the words of Lefebvre, that “what is faked in one sense is what is the essential, the most precious, the human, in another. [...] It is often difficult to distinguish between what is faked and what is natural, not to say naïve.”⁵⁷ The concepts of mask and simulation invert, so as to subvert, the dichotomy between natural and artificial, inner and outer, or essence and appearance. This is also Sarduy’s argument, which turns against any naïve or undialectical metaphysical assumption that the outer appearance would be somehow the cancellation or betrayal of being rather than its revelation.

As masters of artifice, Derrida’s “women” and Sarduy’s “drag queens” possess aesthetic sensibility. Aesthetic judgments—this is the Kantian legacy—are purposeful without purpose [*zweckmäßig ohne Zweck*].⁵⁸ They constitute a conscious activity that is however without final purpose. Judgments of taste are reflexive, disinterested and assume only the mere *form* of purposefulness, since they only judge the appearance (form) of the object, not its content. Therefore, for Kant, aesthetic judgment is not defined by a concept [*Begriff*]. Or put differently, in accordance with the sophist’s logic of simulation: aesthetic judgments produce

⁵⁶ Plato, “The Sophist,” 261.

⁵⁷ Lefebvre, *The Critique of Everyday Life*, vol. 1, 15.

⁵⁸ Immanuel Kant, *Kritik der Urteilskraft* (Hamburg: Felix Meiner Verlag, 2006): §15, 80ff.

concepts that are *not*. They are mere thought-forms without content, and this means that their form cannot be defined in terms of a foundation or telos (purpose). Aesthetic judgments are useless and unproductive from an economic perspective. Sarduy's mask appears at first sight as a non-economical one, but it contains a latent critique of capitalist totality, in which all action, and each actor is purposeful toward a definite goal. This goal, which is self-expansion and self-valorization, organizes the actors and their performance in a purposeful manner towards accumulation. Aesthetic performance and judgments, however, are without such an external purpose. This is what concedes a sovereign quality to (modern) art. The sovereignty of art is, of course, a principle launched by the modern avant-garde but it finds its antecedent in the idea of the autonomy of the *schöner Schein* of art, which philosophically translates to emptiness or abstract negativity, i.e. the absence of the concept.

The “drag queen” is, for Sarduy, therefore, not a productive but a wasteful type. What she wastes is herself, her identities. In not sticking to one identity, the “drag queen” mocks the rigidity of economic and reproductive functions, and especially those of the character-mask “woman.” As such, her performance is akin to the baroque logic of squandering. As Sarduy indicates, “*ser barroco hoy* [to be baroque today]” means “*amenazar, juzgar y parodiar la economía burguesa, basada en la administración tacaña de los bienes, en su centro y fundamento mismo* [to threaten, judge, and parody bourgeois economy, based on the strict administration of assets, in its center and foundation]” (my translation, E.E.)⁵⁹ This center is, in Sarduy's view, the bourgeois system of signs and symbolism, or in other words, the regulative objective “thought-forms” and “forms of enunciation” that are realized as social practices in capitalist economy. Thus, Sarduy defines the assault on bourgeois society as acts of “symbolic wasting, squandering, and dispersing only to the end of pleasure” [*m]algstar, dilapidar, derrochar language únicamente en su función de placer*].⁶⁰ Here, the baroque fluorescent and camouflaging masks of the “drag queen” evoke Bataille's notion of wasteful expenditure:

*[T]odo acto barroco, ya pertenezca a la pintura o a la repostería—“¡Cuánto trabajo!”— implica un apenas disimulado adjetivo: ¡cuánto trabajo perdido, cuánto juego y desperdicio, cuánto esfuerzo sin funcionalidad! Es el superyó del homo faber: el ser-para-el-trabajo el que aquí se enuncia impugnando el regodeo, la voluptuosidad del oro, el fasto, la desmesura, el placer. Juego, pérdida, desperdicio y placer: es decir erotismo en tanto que actividad puramente lúdica, que parodia la función de reproducción, transgresión de lo útil, del diálogo “natural” de los cuerpos.*⁶¹

⁵⁹ Severo Sarduy, *Obras Completas II*, 1250.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 1252.

[E]very baroque act, whether it pertains to painting or confectionery work— “What an effort!” - implies a barely concealed adjective: how much work wasted, how much play and waste, how much effort without functionality! It is the superego of *homo faber*: the being-for-work that is enunciated here, challenging the delight, the voluptuousness of gold, the splendor, the excess, the pleasure. Play, loss, waste and pleasure: that is to say, eroticism as a purely playful activity, which parodies the function of reproduction, transgression of the useful, of the “natural” discourse of bodies (My translation, E.E.).

In the passage above, Sarduy indicates that the craft and artifice of the baroque stands opposed to the logic of labor in capitalism which is functional, purposeful, directed to an alien outside goal. The baroque excess of the painting techniques realized in the masks of the “drag queen” challenges the “natural” gender discourse about economic and biological reproduction. Play and pleasure, rather than reproduction constitutes its purposeless purpose. What the Drag Queen enacts is not simply the realization and sublation of art in life, which was the ideal of the modern avant-garde, but, rather the baroque aspires at the realization of life as art:

La mariposa convertida en hoja, el hombre convertido en mujer, pero también la anamorphosis, y el trompe-l'oeil, no copian, no se definen y justifican a partir de las proporciones verdaderas, sino que producen, utilizando la posición del observador, incluyendo en la impostura, la verisimilitud del modelo, se incorporan, como en un acto de depredación, su apariencia, lo simulan. ⁶²

The butterfly turned into a leaf, the man turned into a woman, but also anamorphosis and trompe-l'oeil, do not copy, do not define and justify themselves on the basis of true proportions; rather—using the position of the observer, including him in their imposture—they produce the model's verisimilitude, they incorporate its appearance as an act of pillage, they simulate the model. ⁶³

The reference that Sarduy makes to butterfly mimicry in the passage above does away with the distinction between the natural and the artificial since it is not simply art that is translated into nature, but also nature into art. The wings of the butterfly are the canvas on which *trompe-l'oeil* and anamorphosis produce their effects of simulation. Nature itself paints, tricks, and produces the artificial. The butterfly, like the “drag queen” is a cross-dresser by definition.

The “unproductive” synthesis of eroticism and aesthetics described above, find their natural counterpart in an aesthetics of life and death, that of being devoured or devouring. According to Caillois' interpretation, such “masks”

⁶² Severo Sarduy, *Ensayos Generales Sobre El Barroco* (México/ Buenos Aires: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1987): 60.

⁶³ Severo Sarduy, *Written on a Body*, trans. Carol Maier (New York: Lumen Books, 1992): 97.

produce an “unnecessary” surplus and are therefore “dangerous luxuries.”⁶⁴ In a dialogue between the narrator, Adrian Leverkühn, and Jonathan, in the third chapter of Thomas Mann’s *Doktor Faustus*, a similar conversation about animal transvestism emerges. Here, butterfly mimicry used to describe the relation between the spiritual and the aesthetic, which in the good old German tradition is always informed by the diabolical.⁶⁵ Mimicry not only points to a performative practice of self-production, but it also indicates that traditional models of mimesis are insufficient, since they lack the dialectical moment of adaptation and transformation. Therefore, Mann’s butterflies are not simply copying or adapting to their environment but devouring and appropriating it. The transparent nudity of the butterfly signals the ability to cannibalize the environment, in order to, in turn, be not swallowed by it. The characters in Mann’s novel also distinguish between camouflage, a tactic of tasteful non-poisonous butterflies who hide from their predators, and the obtrusive fluorescent ones, whose “evil eyes” melancholically signal their spirituality and beauty but, at the same time, indicate to their predators that they are poisonous and inedible, causing them to spew out their prey immediately.⁶⁶ For Mann and Sarduy, the practice of transvestism is

⁶⁴ “We are thus dealing with a *luxury* and even a dangerous luxury, for there are cases in which mimicry causes the creature to go from bad to worse: geometer-moth caterpillars simulate shoots of shrubbery so well that gardeners cut them with their pruning shears. The case of the *Phyllia* is even sadder: they browse among themselves, taking each other for real leaves, in such a way that one might accept the idea of a sort of collective masochism leading to mutual homophagy, the simulation of the leaf being a *provocation* to cannibalism in this kind of totem feast” (Roger Caillois, “Mimicry and Legendary Psychasthenia,” trans. John Shepley, *October* 31 (Winter, 1984): 25.

⁶⁵ The example about insect mimicry in Thomas Mann’s novel amongst others deals with the realization of life/nature in art, and implies that this synthesis is an ideal shared by both surrealism and fascism. The novel should be interpreted against the rise of fascism, a tendency that Mann, *mutatis mutandis*, perceives as the apotheosis of bourgeois culture. The point, here, is not to accuse Roger Caillois or the other members of the *Collège de Sociologie* of siding with fascism. It is well known that they were fierce opponents of fascism. Rather, the crux would be to indicate that the fascist’s aestheticization of life, as outlined by Benjamin, is not something that the fascists invented but rather something that already existed as an immanent desire of bourgeois society before the advent of fascism in Europe. The argument is therefore different from that of Agamben, who recalls in a conversation with Pierre Klossowski that the latter had been once accused by Walter Benjamin of working for fascism. Agamben subsequently concludes that “we” intellectuals could be all working for fascism without even knowing it (Giorgio Agamben, “Bataille and the Paradox of Sovereignty,” trans. Michael Krimper, *Journal of Italian Philosophy*, volume 3 (2020): 253. My own argument, in this regard, is much more “*banal*,” insofar as I think that fascist politics and aesthetics have not been that original and were unable to truly distinguish themselves from modernism.

⁶⁶ Thomas Mann, *Doktor Faustus. Die Entstehung des Doktor Faustus*. (Frankfurt am Main: Fischer Verlag, 1967): 25.

dialectical, insofar as the object transgresses from self to the other. The self-conscious theatrics of anamorphosis and *trompe-l'oeil* necessarily includes the awareness of its actors of being seen by the other. This makes baroque aesthetic a spectacular and self-conscious art which tricks its beholder in order to appeal to, and confuse their senses.

The conceptualization of the absence of a generative center from which the copies derive can implicitly be read as a critique of modernity: as a revolt to capitalist totality that organizes and particularizes its economic subjects. According to Sarduy, the difference between baroque and neo-baroque consists precisely in the fact that the former still insists on a harmonious cosmology ordained by God, as in Calderón's play, while the latter emphasizes the disruption and dissonance of difference, a "new instability" as he terms it.⁶⁷ Indeed, camouflage, the "artificial loss of individuality" directly criticizes the concept of individuality produced by capitalist relations, it presupposes inertia and immobility: it is entirely unproductive and unimplementable from the perspective of capital. Nature is here the antipode of capitalist totality. The former's expenditure of its forces does not serve any purpose, as Sarduy, following Caillois indicates, but rather constitutes a revolt against assimilation to capitalist functions and social roles. Indeed, baroque art, with its folds, double frames, and shades, constitutes an ornamental function that has for a great deal emancipated itself from any servile purpose. The adornment of the baroque is itself part of an increasing aestheticization of life. To the naturalization of social relationships, Sarduy, thus, responds with the artifice of nature. Not valorization is a "natural" form but the expenditure of nature becomes the "social" form. Moreover, Sarduy implicitly refers to Caillois assumption that animal mimicry does not serve the purpose of self-preservation - according to the latter it was just a "dangerous luxury,"- but rather points to a single process that Caillois defines as "depersonalization by assimilation to space," something that he associates with schizophrenia.⁶⁸ The famous metaphor of schizophrenia as the logic of dysfunctional personality, aimed at attacking capital's production of individuals

⁶⁷ Sarduy, *Ensayos Generales Sobre El Barroco*, 17.

⁶⁸ Caillois, "Mimicry and Legendary Psychasthenia," 30.

finds its precursor in Caillois' concept of mimesis. It is a belated baroque and Romantic ambiguous metaphor insofar as it contains the synthesis of "madness" and "aesthetics" already seen in Hoffmann's *The Devil's Elixirs*. For Sarduy, this synthesis is defined by pleasure, rather than madness. In this regard, Sarduy's belated baroque aesthetics are much more optimistic, emphasizing its creative aspects, rather than its deteriorating or destructive elements.

In a way that is similar, but nevertheless, opposed to Sarduy, the baroque painting technique anamorphosis for Jean Baudrillard indicates a practice of changing perspective, whereby the beholder has to shift his angle. Unlike Sarduy, Baudrillard still holds on to a Platonic notion of truth. Anamorphosis hides the idea. Since the image is deformed and camouflaged by means of a mathematical distortion, the idea can be easily overseen. This turns anamorphosis to a non-discursive or even anti-discursive practice, since its idea cannot be assimilated by any form of discourse. It is not a process of copying in which the idea is devoured or murdered, as in the case of simulation where a copy simulates an idea, or feigns "to have what [it] doesn't have," as in the case of *trompe-l'oeil*. In contrast to Baudrillard's notion of simulation, which he defines as the masking of the absence of a profound reality,⁶⁹ the technique of anamorphosis does not create an image that simulates having an essence but, instead, hides an essence that it *has*, and pretends to have nothing. Its representation or appearance camouflages its essence. Secretly merging with another form or appearance, like the butterfly, it hides from totality. In clear distinction to Sarduy, anamorphosis for Baudrillard is still organized by a hegemonic center, even if it abandons frontal perspective. This hegemonic center, however, is different from capital's center of domination, which according to Baudrillard is defined by "determinate negation," being-for-itself, or the rendering of the negative into a productive phenomenological presence. Hegemony, in contrast, has no definition. To use Bataille's words, it is entirely sovereign.

Thus, Sarduy's concept of simulation constitutes the exact opposite of Baudrillard's account of the precession of simulacra, termed by the latter as the

⁶⁹ Jean Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulation*, trans. Sheila Faria Glaser (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1994): 6.

logic of representation *par excellence* in late capitalism. In contrast, to Baudrillard's void which occurs as a consequence of the implosion of all differences, Sarduy's original void is inspired by Taoism. It is productive, not of the capitalist series of repetition and hierarchies that are defined by homologues, but of an explosion of a series of simulations and copies whose original non-presence gives birth to the maximum saturation of all other phenomena: pure difference, instead of capitalist particularization. François Cheng defines the oriental notion of original emptiness as the place where "fullness can attain its whole measure."⁷⁰ Or put differently: "emptiness makes possible the process of interiorization and transformation through which each thing actualizes its sameness and otherness and, in doing so, attains totality."⁷¹ This is, as it were, a negative and inversion of Hegel's totality. Emptiness is, here, the space and potentiality of the actualization of being, and not, as in Baudrillard, the abyss into which all differences plunge and are swallowed.

Moreover, as indicated before, Sarduy's synthesis of nature and art bears some resemblance to the earlier mentioned modernist dream of the sublation or suspension of art into "life." One is now confronted with two options. Option one, which is the utopian solution, a path that Sarduy still pursues, signifies the suspension of art into life as revolution, i.e. the transformation of social life. Option two, which is the dystopian reality that Baudrillard's persistently evokes, is the realization of art as adaptation. Art is then nothing but a mere apology of capital itself, which contributes to the naturalization of social relations. These options have not found resolution yet. As long as art, and especially picaresque art, underscores the difference between world and word or image, the question about the *quo vadis* of art and philosophy still remains virulent in this context.

Be it as it may, in spite of the differences between Sarduy and Baudrillard, their *loci* of negativity are similar in that they can only be occupied by art. Their overlap consists in the fact that they both draw on the concept of exchange

⁷⁰ François Cheng, *Empty and Full*, trans. Michael H. Kohn (Boston/ London: Shambhala, 1994): 36.

⁷¹ *Ibid.* 38.

described by Marcel Mauss: the potlatch.⁷² This concept inspired their anti-capitalist concepts of exchange and refers to the idea of a gift that is incalculable. As Derrida would say, a gift is made only when nothing in return is expected. The turn to anthropology, here, is clearly meant to disrupt the logic of commodity exchange. But, of course, the potlatch is not devoid of any function either. It paves the way for the acquisition of rank, even though, there is no longer a self-valorizing logic that organizes and hierarchizes subject positions into buyers, sellers, workers, and capitalists. The gift, or that which Baudrillard has termed “symbolic exchange,” then, defies the levelling and equalizing logic of exchange value by abstracting both from use-value and exchange-value. A good or gift is rendered into an unproductive nothingness, released from the signifying and particularizing practice of sign exchange.

Though placing himself in the same tradition as Sarduy, Baudrillard is much more cynical regarding the dream of a baroque insurrection of signs, which he defines rather as a mere potlatch of indifference. The promise of the breakdown of the relations of domination collapses itself into an attitude of indifference: nihilism or the absence of any differentiating value system. This does not mean the absence of power, but rather the indifference to it. What was productive in Sarduy becomes nihilistic in Baudrillard. The important conclusion to draw from both Sarduy, Baudrillard, and the concept of simulation, however, is that capital itself functions on a high level of aestheticism and demands that its actors adopt this aesthetics as their own, as their “second nature.” Capital’s concepts of creativity and flexibility fuse into an aesthetic that is economically productive.

For Baudrillard, then, the concept of cross-dressing or transvestitism is a much more ambiguous notion. Like Sarduy, he traces it to the baroque technique of *trompe-l’oeil*, but he indicates that the particularization and differentiation that arises from its simulation is akin to the logic of simulation and particularization effected by capitalism itself. Popular and carnivalesque identities are ridiculed “to the point of being parodies of themselves.” The slave plays to be a master, while he is just a “distorted mirror of the negrification of the whites, self-mystified from

⁷² Marcel Mauss, *The Gift. Forms and Functions of Exchange in Archaic Societies*, trans. Ian Cunnison. (London: Cohen & West, 1966).

the outset by their own mastery.”⁷³ Baudrillard speaks of a mimetic violence transposed to a model of imitation by means of which the slave begins to mimic his model (the master) grotesquely while “piling on thick the marks of his servitude.”⁷⁴ No white masks superposed onto black skin, but cannibalized mastery. This means not the annihilation of the master—that, of course, would mean revolution—but his interiorization, or the internalization of servitude. Unlike Bakhtin’s, Baudrillard’s carnival does not constitute a reversal in which the master momentarily becomes a slave and the slave a master, so as to undermine the whole hierarchical differentiation. It is rather the moment where the whole difference between servitude and mastery collapses to the degree that the carnival turns to mere cannibalization. Copies cannibalize their models and produce mere simulations and caricatures of power. In this view, *Don Tabaco* is a mere reflection of servitude, but so is *Doña Azúcar*. The carnival of race, cross-dressing, and multiculturalism, for Baudrillard is just one of the latest inventions of capitalism which masks the fact that real differences no longer exist and everything is subjected to the logic of equivalence and exchange. Baudrillard, here, assumes the role of Quevedo’s *Desengaño*, unmasking the hypocrisy and falsity of the identity and difference produced by capital’s *balle masqué*. In this regard, Arash Abazari has outlined that the “diversity” of identities that capitalism offers and continuously produces is not the same as the real “opposition” of identity between different social actors and classes.⁷⁵ As a matter of fact, diversity *masks* social antagonism and contradiction.

In simply declaring the end of all oppositions, Baudrillard himself is perhaps slightly guilty of that very same masking, even though he certainly did not think that “diversity” is a notion that can be exchanged for “antagonism.” As Abazari shows, “diversity” constitutes the “relapse” in the ontology of totality,⁷⁶ insofar as actors are no longer perceived as related, mediated, and opposed to each other, but as self-sufficient alienated actors, divorced from other actors and from

⁷³ Jean Baudrillard, *Carnival and Cannibal*, trans. Chris Turner (Calcutta: Seagull Books, 2010): 9.

⁷⁴ *Ibid*, 10.

⁷⁵ Arash Abazari, *Hegel’s Ontology of Power – The Structure of Social Domination in Capitalism*, (Cambridge University Press, 2020): 44 ff.

⁷⁶ *Ibid*, 52.

the social totality that mediates their identities. As such, “diversity” summons the social illusion of “pure difference.” The relation of “pure difference” is an atomistic one in which each entity or actor in essence is “untouched” by its relation to the other. In a dialectical totality, each individual is only constituted and mediated by another. Prior to their relations to others, individuals do not exist. In the atomistic world view, however, individuals exist *a priori* to their relation to others. This is a crucial break with the Hegelian and Marxist conception of social reality. This atomistic and monadic view of the baroque is, for example, consistent with Deleuze’s *The Fold*⁷⁷ and his discussion of Epicurean atomism in “Plato and the Simulacrum” in *Logic of Sense*. Likewise, in *Barroco*, Sarduy’s neobaroque cosmology presents an alternative to dialectic totality, and is defined as bodies in space deriving from some “Ur-atom” or the big-bang, a condition that he defines as *retombée*.⁷⁸ According to Sarduy, that which Hegel would define as the world of spirit, literature or poems, derives from “*una gran explosión de un átomo primitivo verbal* [a great explosion of an original verbal atom].”⁷⁹ Deleuze’s and Sarduy’s approach, thus, mobilizes the “plurality” and “diversity” of nature against the dialectical totality of spirit. Hegel, however, would not deny that nature is “diverse,” but he focused predominantly on the world of spirit (society and the individual), which he perceived not as a whole of diverse and self-determining entities, but as a totality composed of *relata* and oppositions. Be it as it may, the dialectical and the atomistic social worldviews remain irreducible to one another and cannot be reconciled on a fundamental level.

Though divorcing himself from the Marxist-Hegelian tradition “pure difference” for Baudrillard is just as much another simulacrum produced by capital. But he does not believe in the notion of difference as change or becoming, either. There are no metamorphoses like in Sarduy, no metaphors anymore, only endless repetitions of a self-same logic: tautologies. “Drag queens,” just like “women,” are not exempted. Their identities are logical consequences of capitalist

⁷⁷ Gilles Deleuze, *The Fold – Leibniz and the Baroque*, trans. Tom Conley (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1992).

⁷⁸ Severo Sarduy, *Ensayos Generales Sobre El Barroco*, 35.

⁷⁹ “Severo Sarduy: Maquina,” 21; cit. Rolando Perez, *Severo Sarduy and the Neobaroque Image of Thought in the Visual Arts* (West Lafayette: Purdue University Press, 2011): 129.

particularizations, and it is quite literally “capital” that is written on their bodies, and it is to capitalism that they have sold their bodies. The “drag queen’s” stylization and consumption of her body finds expression in a mannequin, a copy-model of the “woman” who wears her body like a dress, like multiple layers, folds and *ruches*, a garment that triumphs in the fashion and the Caribbean tourist industry. Likewise, Derridean “women,” being the very symbol of ideology are not simply covering up their “essence” through beautiful illusions, *trompe-l’oeils*, in order to hide that there is no essence. Quite the opposite, their *schöner Schein* is the illusion of power, equality, and freedom that the individual thinks to possess in capitalism, while concealing that freedom and equality are the *essential* “socially necessary illusions” of capitalist exchange.⁸⁰

To be sure, self-organizing working women, transvestites, and homosexuals threaten to dissolve the idea of the bourgeois nuclear family, which is still the cornerstone of capitalist relations. That is what makes them potentially picaresque and subversive types. However, at the end of the day, transgenderism, homosexuality, and other non-normative identities are modes of the worker’s control of “reproduction,” but not his or her ways of controlling, let alone the ending, capitalist modes of production. As Baudrillard nihilistically indicates in *Impossible Exchange*, capitalist totality cannot be exchanged for another.⁸¹ There is no *théâtre et son double*, since there is no *Doppelgänger*. The baroque horrors of fantastic literature no longer inform Baudrillard’s era of simulation. One is no longer afraid of the human being, nor of its other. The mere sight of them makes one feel tired, even bored. The capitalist *theatrum mundi* pretends to have no other and no origin, only an infinite series of copies, clones and character-masks. The modernist “double,” who was the central category of the literary fantastic is absent in Baudrillard’s universe, whereas in the Romantic universe of Hoffmann and Arenas, he still was the representative of another source of value, knowledge, and truth. Once the subject-centered reason of capital, that is, its self-actualizing spirit, has eliminated its “transcendent” other, nihilism remains as the ultimate

⁸⁰ This is Adorno’s definition of ideology: “Einmal hieß Ideologie gesellschaftlich notwendiger Schein.” *Negative Dialektik, GS 6* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1966): 44 & 305.

⁸¹ Jean Baudrillard, *Impossible Exchange*, trans. Chris Turner (London/ New York: Verso, 2001).

“logical” position. An alternative character-mask of the philosopher and intellectual emerges. He will constitute the focus of the next section.

Before moving to the next section, however, it is important to mention that in reality the “philosopher” was the prototype for Marx’s notion of the “character-mask.” In another letter to Ferdinand Lassalle, Marx wrote that he derived the idea of the “character-mask,” from the Ancient Greek theatrical-philosophical types. Especially the mask of the “wise-man” drew his attention:

I was at one time greatly interested in the *sophos* as the mask peculiar to Greek philosophy (using mask here in the best sense). First, we have the seven Swabians or wise men as **forerunners**, mythological heroes, next, in the middle, Socrates, and finally, the *sophos* as the ideal of the Epicureans, Stoics, and sceptics. I derived further amusement from drawing a comparison between this *sophos* and what is (in some respects) his caricature, the French ‘*sage*’ of the 18th century. And then the *sophistes* as a necessary variant of the *sophos*. It is typical of the moderns that the Greek combination of character and knowledge implicit in the *sophos* has survived in popular consciousness solely in the form of sophists.⁸²

In that letter, Marx not only refers to the different character-masks philosophy has assumed from the pre-Socratics to the German idealists, but also mockingly exchanges *Sophos* for Sophist: the philosopher for the ideologist. The next section will further consider this character-mask, and locates it in the context of the Bataillean tradition. While Sarduy’s “drag queen” emerged out of this same tradition, the last section of this chapter deals with yet another belated baroque type, the “sovereign.” The “sovereign,” who is not only known from Carl Schmitt’s *Concept of the Political* and Benjamin’s treatise on the Baroque tragedy, constitutes here an inversion and overturning of both political economy and Hegel. The question once posed by Heidegger to Nietzsche: *Umdrehung oder Herausdrehung?* remains still relevant here, however.

3. Sovereigns and much ado about NOTHING!

The goal of the section is to look into the philosophical and quasi-political reaction to the development of immanence as initiated by Hegel’s absolute idealism. As I will argue, the “sovereign” occupies a philosophical picaresque position, and attempts to leap out Hegel’s dialectical totality of unfolding knowledge. Moreover, this type constitutes the “final” or “ultimate” expression of the character-mask of

⁸² *Marx Engels Collected Works, Volume 41, 377.*

the “wise-man,” mentioned by Marx at the end of the previous section. Bataille’s notion of sovereignty aims to find “the only position apart from” the adverse effects of philosophical modernity.⁸³ This position concerns a radical NOTHING-ness.

The already briefly mentioned philosophical debate about nihilism, and the question whether art should now occupy the place of negativity is not new. Even before Nietzsche, who claimed in the face of philosophical nihilism that art is more worth than the truth, the internationally relatively unknown Friedrich Heinrich Jacobi had already voiced in 1799 his concern that the scientific impetus of German idealism would eventually lead to “nothing.” In the so-called “Letter on Nihilism” Jacobi indicts Johann Gottlieb Fichte of having produced an “anti-philosophy [*Unphilosophie*].”⁸⁴ The letter contains the following short characterization of Fichte’s subjective idealism: “*aus Nichts, zu Nichts, für Nichts, im Nichts* [from nothing, to nothing, for nothing, in nothing].”⁸⁵

Generally, the bone of contention is about the new insight that in matters of knowledge and reason, the subject should rely on its self-grounding capacities rather than God or the King. Anticipating much of the criticism that would be voiced later in the second half of the twentieth century by Adorno or Derrida, for example, on the last days of the eighteenth-century Jacobi noted in his letter that the disenchanted world had suddenly become so radically immanent. The development of German idealism is consistent with the unfolding of a political and economic totality that gradually suspends the otherworldly. For Jacobi, however, the “other,” that is, “whatever self is not,” or transcendence, is supposed to stand in for the blind spots of subject-centered reason. Here, Jacobi anticipates in his critique of the Fichtean *Wissenschaftslehre* almost literally the poststructuralist critique of the subject: “*nicht ICH; sondern, Mehr als Ich! Besser als ich! – ein ganz Anderer!* [not I, but more than I, better than I – a wholly Other!].”⁸⁶

⁸³ As indicated in footnote 49 of the Introduction of this thesis, for Bataille, the blank in “the only position apart from...” may refer to “Hegel,” “Marx,” “Fascism,” “Communism,” or “Capitalism,” - systems that all carry to some extent that which he calls the homogenous elements of a “restricted economy.”

⁸⁴ Friedrich Heinrich Jacobi, “Jacobi an Fichte,” *Brief über den Nihilismus*, trans. Perihan Göcergei (Stuttgart-Bad Cannstatt: frommann holzboog, 2018): 11.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 29.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 39.

Hegelian ontology, on the contrary, insists that the “being” of things consists in their “being intelligible” for man. Moreover, the subject’s competence to know the other (the object) must rely on reason’s absolute self-grounding capacities – neither subject nor object can constitute the ultimate ground for knowledge but only their absolute mediation. As Hegel puts it, that which grounds reason must be absolute self-reflection, by which he means that the criterion for knowledge must be provided and tested by reason itself. Therefore, in producing its own criteria, reason must pass through its self-negation. In the words of Hegel, “reflection is a movement from nothing to nothing and so back unto itself,”⁸⁷ - a circularity that not only eliminates the realm of transcendence but also results, as Jacobi would claim, in nihilism since it finds no other ground than itself.

In line with what Nietzsche has identified as this problem of the circularity of subject-centered reason, after the death of God,⁸⁸ only art is able to fill the locus of negativity or transcendence. Though already voiced by Jacobi, it was Nietzsche who became the more famous critic of the levelling tendencies of philosophical modernity, and feared that the individual will be no longer able to find new lasting values that would make life worthwhile in a radically immanent world. The tradition to blame, for Nietzsche, was roughly the entire Western philosophical tradition, from Plato to Hegel.⁸⁹

As this section will show, Bataille follows Nietzsche’s critique and searches for new lasting values that would go beyond the passive nihilism, associated with transcendental homelessness or the disenchantment of the world. The Nietzschean and Bataillean strategy is one of *inversion*. The transvaluation of all values should eventually pave the way for the new type of man, who, after two thousand years of metaphysics (Nietzsche speaks of two thousand years of life-negation) is able to create new and enduring values that ought to overcome the

⁸⁷ “Zunächst ist die Reflexion die Bewegung des Nichts zu Nichts, somit die mit sich selbst zusammengehende Negation.” G.W.F. Hegel, *Wissenschaft der Logik II*, (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 2003): 25.

⁸⁸ Before Nietzsche spoke of the death of God, Hegel already used the phrase to indicate that in Modernity man’s immediate connection to God is lost (G.W.F. “Glaube und Wissen,” *Jenaer Schriften, Werke 2*. (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1986: 432).

⁸⁹ Likewise, Georges Bataille has identified the philosophy of Hegel as essentially one of atheism, in which the locus of God has been replaced by a theology where man has taken now the central position (Georges Bataille, Hegel, Death and Sacrifice,” trans. Jonathan Strauss. *Yale French Studies 78* On Bataille (1990): 10.

philosophical problem of nihilism. In Nietzsche's early writings, this was the aesthetic genius, who eventually evolved in his later writings into the "superman." For Bataille, it is the position of sovereignty, and a new belated baroque type and character-mask, that I will call the "sovereign." But, before I arrive at the position of sovereignty and the "sovereign," I will first indicate how "immanence" arises as a result of Hegel's inverted world.

At the end of the chapter "Force and Understanding," in *The Phenomenology of Spirit*, the understanding mind realizes that the border between the transcendence of the object and the subject's understanding of it, is a result of the subject's own discriminating capacities. The difference between essence and appearance does not concern a border that resides externally to subject's understanding, but can only be drawn immanently. The first problem focuses on the journey from "consciousness" to "self-Consciousness" and from skepticism to solipsism. Modern skepticism, which includes the Kantian position, indicates that the essence of things, or how they are truly "in-themselves," cannot be known because the human knowledge is necessarily finite. There is, therefore, in Kant's view, always a transcendental remainder that cannot be penetrated or grasped by the understanding mind.

The second problem that is implicitly outlined with the "inverted world" is the question of ultimate grounds and the lurking problem of the infinite regress. While Jacobi's letter already attacked the Fichtean idea of the self-positing subject, Hegel seeks to substitute the self-positing "I" and its "*Anstoß*" by that of the absolute reflection of reason itself, which means that reason cannot have any other ground than itself. Reason as absolute self-reflection directly attacks the positing of the thing-in-itself. As Hegel indicates, the existence of the thing-in-itself can only be determined from a transcendental position. Such a position, however, would be inadequate since it would point to a locus outside reason, and is therefore *per definitionem* unattainable for the subject. After all, the subject has no other access to the objects than their "being intelligible" in thought or consciousness. Hegel once mockingly said that insisting on a transcendental standpoint from which the capacity for knowledge [*Erkenntnisvermögen*] can be judged, is as if one wanted to learn to swim before submerging oneself in the

water.⁹⁰ It is impossible to take a meta-position from which reason, before it comes into action, *a priori*, posits its own insufficiency and finitude. After all, there is no possibility of determining how the instrument of knowledge works before or beyond the act of knowing itself. Whether human knowledge is insufficient can only be judged by a being whose knowledge is absolute, that is, God. However, if one can even speak of the absolute, for Hegel it must be already achievable by man, or how else could the “finite” even be compared to the “infinite?” Therefore, human knowledge, *in principle*, must be able to test itself, and correct its own insufficiencies. Of course, Hegel does not insist on the fact that there is nothing unknown to man, but rather that things in principle must be knowable, because to insist on both grounds, i.e. the subjective foundation for all experience *and* the finitude of that same experience, amounts to a performative contradiction. Even Kant himself admits: “What the things-in-themselves may be I do not know, *nor do I need to know*, since a thing can never come before except in experience” (emphasis added).⁹¹ Either the thing in-itself rebels against the concept if it feels that it has been violated by it, or if it does not care about the concept, we do not need to care about the thing in-itself. In any case, it is absurdity if the knowing subject declares that while he cannot know *what* the thing-in-itself is, he is sure *that* it exists. Simply put, one cannot say that one knows that there is something that cannot be known. Rather, if one constructs a boundary between that which can and cannot be known, one is in fact dealing with social power relations, rather than epistemological boundaries. To say that one cannot know what things-in-themselves are, really means that one is not *allowed* to know what they are. In reality, such boundaries only serve the purpose of securing theological, rather than scientific, positions.

As Hegel argues, as soon as one has posited the boundary, one is already halfway through it. For if the concept “violates” noumenal object, the thing-

⁹⁰ G.W.F. Hegel, *Enzyklopädie der philosophischen Wissenschaften im Grundrisse I, Werke 8*, „Zusatz I.“ (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1986): 144.

⁹¹ [W]as die Dinge an sich sein mögen, weiß ich nicht, und brauche es auch nicht zu wissen, weil mir doch niemals ein Ding anders als in der Erscheinung vorkommen kann.“ Immanuel Kant, *Kritik der reinen Vernunft* (Hamburg: Felix Meiner, 1967); A 277/B33: 321.

itself will eventually make its presence felt.⁹² In other words, if the criterion that defines the essence of the object does not coincide with its reality, that criterion must be altered. Thus, skepticism, though indicating the first step in self-conscious knowledge, ultimately fails to ground itself. This was the insight and the result of Hegel's section on the "inverted world" from "Force and Understanding." The inverted world marks the transition from locating the source of truth in the object to the subject. The result of this movement is self-conscious understanding, but it is not yet reason or absolute knowledge.

So far, and this is certainly the case in the first part of the *Phenomenology*, Hegel simply seemed to have proven that there can be no absolute contradiction in thought, or that the contradiction between essence and appearance is something that "consciousness" has produced itself. One might wonder, therefore, what is all the agitation about? Why would it lead to nihilism? As highlighted in Chapter 2, this problem would not even exist, if Hegel himself would not have been the one who was constantly looking for the realization of the concept as the rational justification of the status quo. In this regard, his own writings have nurtured and advanced the accusation of nihilism of his "system." The progressive process of comprehension that culminates in absolute knowledge functions in Hegel analogously to the completion of art, religion, and history. The idea of free and self-conscious individuality, according to Hegel has *also* been carved out in these domains. This is where the confusion between ideality and reality occurs. Once the Idea had been understood, according to Hegel, it "only" needed to be actualized empirically. Thus, Hegel was not talking about the actual disappearance of art, knowledge, or history, but about their completion as "philosophically" or "scientifically" understood. However, his apocalyptic terms like "the end of metaphysics," "the end of art," and "the end of history," certainly may have co-produced the accusation of Hegel's idealism as being both nihilistic and arrogant.

⁹² For example, if the essence of aerodynamics is not understood, the plane will crash. The other will eventually revolt. Subsequently, it will become clear that the thing-in-itself has not (yet) been understood. If the plane keeps floating, however, there is no reason to assume that the concept is finite and the essence of aerodynamics inaccessible.

While Hegel's ontology of being as "being intelligible" has done away with any form of "transcendence," the next criticism of Hegel's ontology consists in the fact that this "being intelligible" as the essence of being, always applies to a specific being (object). Determinate negation negates always a specific quality (being). This has been Heidegger's position, which indicates that Hegel can think Being only as a concrete being and has nothing to say about (the essence of) Being itself. The same criticism applies to his concept of negation, it is not an absolute notion, but only a moment of the absolute. The philosophical overturning of Hegel, *after* Hegel, will thus consist in playing off this "absolute" form of negativity against his "determinate negation."

Accordingly, we are dealing with a new form nothingness, insofar as it emerges post-metaphysically, and it is old in so far it has already been introduced in Plato's *Sophist*. Just as in the case of the concept of "simulation," nothingness denotes a mode of being which is and is not. The fact that in Plato's dialogue nothingness is introduced by "the Stranger," already implies that one deals, in fact, with a concept of alterity, the wholly Other, to use Jacobi's words. Nothingness, as alterity, however is not nihilistic. It is not Baudrillard's abyss of indifference. Nothingness is not nothing, but, as Derrida would say, it cannot be rendered in terms of *parouisa* or phenomenological presence either.

In the first instance, during Jacobi's time, the problem of immanence has to be understood predominantly within the dispute between theology and modern philosophy, the latter of which Hegel wanted to transform in to science proper. The reproach is that the secularization of totality, as immanence, is only bought at the cost of recasting it in new "theological categories," as absolutely self-reflecting.⁹³ Put more clearly, modern philosophy has produced a theology in which man or the subject has taken the place of God, or as Hegel puts it, God has become man. It ostensibly concerns a theology without God proper, but also one in which totality is the ultimate aspiration of man's own being.⁹⁴ In this context,

⁹³ Adorno, *Negative Dialektik*, 199. This contradiction, moreover, has been summarized by Horkheimer and Adorno under the rubric of the Dialectic of Enlightenment.

⁹⁴ Or, as a Bataille puts it, in view of the thought of the early Marx: "Insofar as it derives from Feuerbach, the Marxist tradition sees in man what theology saw in God. In other words, it substitutes an anthropology for the theology of the Christians" (Georges Bataille, *The Accursed*

immanence came to be an existential problem. Adorno is probably one of the most fervent debunkers of immanence. He speaks of “total immanence,”⁹⁵ of “the prison of immanence,”⁹⁶ “the hopelessly dead-ended conjuncture of immanence,”⁹⁷ “seamless immanence,”⁹⁸ “sheer immanence,”⁹⁹ “strict immanence,”¹⁰⁰ “spell of immanence,”¹⁰¹ and so forth. And what is more, for Adorno, immanence is not just philosophically totalitarian, but also politically. Finally, he even labels the concentration camp “Auschwitz” as the pinnacle of the development of the Enlightenment and the world’s “condemnation” to radical immanence.

For the French interwar generation of intellectuals, Hegel’s *Logic* and *Phenomenology* became associated with the end of history and a “totalizing” philosophical system that assimilates everything to the immanent movement of the mind. This is mostly due to Alexandre Kojève’s lecture series, *Introduction to the Reading of Hegel*, held at the École des Hautes Études from 1933-1939, which had a deep impact, not only on Bataille, but also on Jacques Lacan, Jean-Paul Sartre, and Merleau Ponty. But also in Germany, Adorno and Heidegger produced a critique of what they thought to be the arrogance of subject-centered reason and developed a notion of “absolute negativity” that functioned as the non-assimilable and non-sublatable alterity percolating through the speculative moment. Indeed, Hegel (and by extension Marx) became associated with a disenchanted cold world, in which the self-conscious subject had abolished all transcendence or otherness.

For Hegel, the transition to immanence meant that metaphysics had completed itself, or rather that *he* had completed metaphysics. Philosophy must now become science proper. Thus, Hegel became associated with the progressive ending not only of history, but also of philosophy itself. As Giorgio Colli, the co-editor of the complete works of Nietzsche, noted: “*die Philosophie existiert nicht mehr, aber die Philosophen müssen weiter existieren* [philosophy does not exist

Share, vol II & III, trans, Robert Hurely (New York: Zone Books, 1991): 318). But, as indicated before, what Bataille overlooks here is that the mature Marx departs entirely from the Feuerbachian and anthropological notions of species being and alienation.

⁹⁵ Adorno, *Negative Dialektik*, 199.

⁹⁶ *Ibid*, 379.

⁹⁷ *Ibid*, 393.

⁹⁸ Theodor W. Adorno, *Ästhetische Theorie, GS7* (Frankfurt am Main: Surkamp, 1970): 188

⁹⁹ *Ibid*, 46ff.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid*, 137.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid*, 251.

anymore, but philosophers must continue to exist].”¹⁰² Therefore, philosophy needed to rebuild and reformulate its character anew. This involves, as already seen in the case of Plato’s *The Sophist*, patricide.

Said patricide consists of a playful mimicry and mockery of the Left-Hegelian tradition, which is ultimately aimed at its refutation or annulment. Following Nietzsche, but in a much more refined manner, Bataille produces a inversion of the journey of spirit, whose *telos* is now not absolute knowledge and self-consciousness but not-knowing and the unconscious. The “unknown” and heterogenous elements attack the self-conscious becoming of spirit from the outside, that is, via a detour. They are the building blocks of Bataille’s conception of a “general economy,” which, as opposed to the restricted economy of capital and spirit, is simultaneously an alternative to Marx and Hegel. I will begin with Bataille’s critique of capital and Marxism.

In the previous section, Sarduy accurately associated the crux of the neobaroque with Bataille’s concept of waste. Bataille bases his concept of the general economy on the anthropological notion of the gift and the potlach of the North-American Indians, as described by Mauss. “Waste” denotes, here, both an economic as well an anti-phenomenological term. It refers to those remainders that can neither be absorbed by “self-consciousness” nor by self-valorization. Waste, that which is secreted, coheres with picaresque, popular and “base” cultural elements. When Bataille speaks of waste and luxury, he has not the prodigal activity of the rich in mind, but rather that of poor outcasts, as he explains:

The true luxury and the real potlach of our times falls to the poverty stricken, that is, to the individual who lies down and scoffs. A genuine luxury requires the complete contempt for riches, the somber indifference of the individual who refuses work and makes his life on the one hand an infinitely ruined splendor, and on the other, a silent insult to the laborious lie of the rich.¹⁰³

¹⁰² Giorgio Colli, *KSA* 3, 661. Quoted by Robert Pippin, “The Erotic Nietzsche: Philosophers without Philosophy,” *Erotikon: Essays on Eros, Ancient and Modern*, Shadi Bartsch & Thomas Bartscherer (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005): (172—191): 190.

¹⁰³ Georges Bataille, *The Accursed Share. An Essay on General Economy. Volume 1 Consumption*, trans. Rubert Hurley (New York: Zone Books, 1988): 76-77.

Bataille's notion of poverty, in the quote above, reminds of Nietzsche's fatalism free of revolt. Luxury, here, describes a picaresque position insofar as it denotes the refusal to work in order to become rich, and in so doing, uncovers the ideal of "hard work" as a disciplining ideology. However, in capitalism becoming rich, of course, does not depend in the least on the necessity of working. On the contrary, being rich usually implies that one can dispose over the labor power of others for the increase of one's wealth. The ideology of hard work, then, is the ideal of the petty bourgeois and Protestant. Thus, Bataille seeks to invert our common understanding of "luxury" and puts it into the hands of the destitute *pícaro* who "lies down and scoffs," that is to say, he is entirely unproductive and mocks the ideal of conspicuous consumption and hard work. The position of this (poor) outsider moreover reminds of the logic of squandering that Sarduy had associated with baroque aesthetics. Bataille insists here

on the fact that there is generally no growth but only a luxurious squandering of energy in every form! The history of life on earth is mainly the effect of wild exuberance; the dominant event is the development of luxury, the production of increasingly burdensome forms of life.¹⁰⁴

These "burdensome forms of life," are used as the naturalization of "unproductive" ways of living, aimed at opposing the "artificiality" of the logic of economic growth (based on GDP). "Burden" also translates into the aesthetics of "heaviness" that Wölfflin associated with the Baroque. In his study of the Italian Baroque in architecture and painting, Wölfflin indicates that aesthetic styles are the expression of the lived experience of the body. The baroque body differs from the ideal of classic proportionality and calm harmony.

This emotion of wild, ecstatic delight cannot be expressed uniformly by the whole body: emotion breaks out with violence in certain organs, while the rest of the body remains subject only to gravity. But this enormous expenditure of effort is not a sign of greater strength. On the contrary: the movement of voluntary organs is deficient; the mental impulses are far from completely controlling the movements of the body. The two elements, mind and body, have, as it were parted company. It is as if those men [of the Baroque] no longer have full power over the bodies, no longer permeate them with their own will; animation and formal articulateness are not equally distributed. To create dissolution, an impression of having been poured, of yielding, of amorphousness, yet leaving certain parts in violent movement; this became the exclusive ideal of art [my addition, E.E.].¹⁰⁵

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid*, 33.

¹⁰⁵ Heinrich Wölfflin, *Renaissance and Baroque*, trans. Kathrin Simon (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1964): 81.

The fact that certain elements can no longer be uniformly expressed by an organic whole, i.e. “the whole body,” nor consciously controlled because they reside externally to the will, finds its analogy in what Bataille calls the position of sovereignty, a concept to which I will return later. Suffice to say, baroque aesthetics as well as sovereignty point to an “amorphous” realm of ecstasy, the unconscious, and the sacred, as described by psychoanalysis and anthropology. Simultaneously, these elements are the constituents of a baroque alternative political economy that can be seen as a critique of the limited view of current macroeconomic theories, the latter of which, are solely capable of proposing a model of *restricted* economy.

It is the paradox of the capitalist economy that it is oblivious to general ends, which give it its meaning and value, and that it is never able to go beyond the limits of the isolated end. Further on, I will show that a basic error of perspective results from this: Our view of general ends is a reflection of isolated ends. But without making too hasty a judgment of the practical consequences, it is very interesting to observe this sudden passage from one world to another, from the primacy of the *isolated* interest to that of the *General* interest [emphasis in original].¹⁰⁶

Neoclassic economic models deny the fundamental importance of economic abundance, and develop instead an approach that persistently seeks to restrict the surplus of goods, resources, and services, in order to advance the market, which they perceive as a harmonious whole in which supply and demand are perfectly balanced. Their concept of economy is one in which there is always too little: a shortage of labor, resources, goods, and money. Bataille indicates that this economic lie of scarcity does not do justice to the economic lives of past and current generations. The problem of all civilizations, in his view, has not been that of having too little but rather too much. Remarkably, Bataille indicates that the human sacrifice of the Aztecs and the conquest of other nations and civilizations, for example, are the consequence of such an economic excess. While the human sacrifice of the Aztecs of course has little to do with societies where the market and capitalist production modes have become dominant, it is true that the old classical economists spoke of the *wealth*, rather than scarcity of nations. Also, Marx indicated that capitalist modes of production were able to produce a degree

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid*, 177

of wealth hitherto undreamt of. It is therefore strange that modern micro- and macroeconomic models suddenly became obsessed with shortage. After all, the industrial production process implies that one can plan what goods are needed and how many. *Shortage* is not particularly a problem in societies where capitalist modes of production have become dominant. Rather, scarcity in capitalism has to do with the *access to* wealth rather than the production of it. As such, it exists only as the result of class antagonism. In a restricted economy, then, the bourgeois subject has no other choice than to accumulate debts and to keep working under the dictate of accumulation. He is a slave without a master, and a master without a slave. He is, or aspires to become, the private property owner. Therefore, he no longer works for another but works for property *an sich*, i.e. capital.

Since this economic model does not do justice to the forms of human exchange that evade mathematical equations, like the encounter in wars, the potlach, or rites in “sacred” festivals, Bataille proposes an alternative model that relies on consumption, rather than production. This shift in emphasis also is the point of the departure for the alternative of the Marxist critique of political economy.

Bataille sees the Marxist critique of political economy as the pinnacle of the restricted economy because it puts emphasis on purposefulness, remains faithful to a project of emancipation, and takes productivity and production as its central categories. Bataille’s target is the idea of utility, a principle that he ascribes to both the logic of capital and the Marxist critique thereof. Because Marx indicates that the goal and logic of capital is profit, not the supply of useful goods, Bataille believes that Marx is rescuing the concept of utility and use-value from its supersession by exchange-value in capitalist relations. Marx, therefore, would still be subservient to the bourgeois concept of utility, Bataille argues. However, Marx is merely describing the relation between the exchange-value and use-value that defines the nature of the commodity without capitalist exchange is unable to function. Because the production process engenders both the relation of exploitation of the working class and the conditions for profit, Marx had put emphasis on production rather than consumption. Subsequently, Bataille seeks to overturn the centrality of this category by choosing consumption as the organizing

factor of social economic relations. The notions of excess and consumption condition the anti-teleological nature of the “general economy.” However, Bataille lacks specificity here, and ignores that his dismissal of the concept of utility does not upset capitalist relations in the least. Again, the production of commodities does not follow a logic of usefulness, that is, commodities are not produced because they are useful things, but because they generate profit. Use-value is the mere medium or bearer of exchange-value, but not the rationale of commodity production. Capitalist accumulation, therefore, depends on the unlimited growth of its markets. Supply is not its rationale, solely expansion. The production process has to persistently transgress itself because profit is only generated through the constant and boundless increase of productivity.

Not only, however, is limitless production the condition for limitless expenditure, but also is the notion of “transgression,” that Bataille values so much, a predicate of capital itself. Bataille’s concepts of uselessness and waste may in the end not be so radically opposed to capitalist totality as he had thought. They stem from the erroneous assumption that utility and usefulness would be central categories to bourgeois economy - they are not. They only exist as a fiction in macroeconomic theory, as the delusions of theory of marginal utility. And, the idea of limitless accumulation may just be substituted by another capitalist dream, that of limitless consumption. It is clear that Bataille’s notion of uselessness is meant to disrupt the chain of exchanges and social relations created by capital, hence his insistence on the negation of *any* value (also of exchange-value).

The limitless consumption Bataille has in mind, according to him, has nothing to do with the logic of the affluent consumer society but instead relies on rites of (self-)sacrifice.

Supposing there is no longer any growth possible, what is to be done with the seething energy that remains? To waste it is obviously not to use it. And yet, what we have is a draining-away, a pure and simple loss, *which occurs in any case*: From the first, the excess energy, if it cannot be used for growth, is lost.¹⁰⁷

But the problem is that the logic of capital is indifferent to this differentiation. The destruction of surplus is part and parcel of the very mechanism of the turnover

¹⁰⁷ Bataille, *The Accursed Share*, vol. I, 31.

of capital. The periodical crises of capitalism, which often indeed result in the destruction of surplus, are *necessary* to reboost accumulation. Next to the constant problem of the overproduction of goods, capital has the tendency to produce increasingly more “human waste:” the *lumpen*, *poor*, and *tramps*, as Zygmunt Bauman has shown. Such waste products do not undermine but reproduce, and to a certain degree condition capital. Bankruptcy and the destruction of surplus goods are part of the normal cycles of economic activity. For the individual capitalist, such a destruction may be a disaster because it could mean *his* sacrifice, but not for capital itself. Moreover, primitive accumulation, the looting of entire countries, and the sacrifice of people in wars and the production process are normalized practices in advanced capitalism. It is hard to imagine how Bataille’s logic of squandering, waste, excessive consumption would *practically* distinguish itself from what has recently been described by Sayak Valencia as “*capitalismo gore*,”¹⁰⁸ that is the extreme spectacle of violence that emerges with the neoliberal phase in which free-markets, organized crime, multinationals and media corporations shake hands against the background of the entirely destabilized political and economic context of the Global South.

Last but not least, Bataille associates Marxist accounts that demand legislation in favor of labor over and against capital with something like a Weberian protestant ethic. Instead of relying on a Calvinist ethics of parsimony, Bataille proposes baroque excess. But as Simmel indicates, such principles have already been personified in the social types, the “Adventurer” and the “Spendthrift.” Again, these principles do not oppose the social relations of capital but are an immanent function of it. Expenditure in Bataille appears too much as the mere reverse image of accumulation, just as his concept of transgression is wholly dependent on the idea of restriction. Thus, we are faced with the problem of the inverted world once again. An inversion does not necessarily mean a twisting-free from the concept of value or utility. The failure to overcome the

¹⁰⁸ Valencia quotes extensively from Bataille and seems to imply that his concept of eroticism and general economy have become the actualized nightmare in the current destabilizing economic context in Mexico. Sayak Valencia, *Capitalismo gore* (Santa Cruz de Tenerife: Melusina, 2010).

values and logic of capital finds its counterpart in Bataille's critique and overturning of Hegel, to which I will turn now.

Whether Bataille has had first-hand knowledge of the texts of Hegel is unclear, but he came to know Hegel via the work of Jean Wahl,¹⁰⁹ whose focus was on the "unhappy consciousness," and later, via the Lecture Series of Alexandre Kojève, who read Hegel in light of the master-slave dialectic and the concept of recognition. The latter's anthropological interpretation defined the essence of *Dasein*, or of that which defines the human *qua* human as "desire" for the recognition of the other. Kojève identifies the motor of history as a constant battle between slaves and masters who fight for recognition. What results from the specific negativity attached to the transformative work of slave, is an essence of man as a working being, a negating animal. As Kojève puts it, man is essentially negation (activity). But eventually, in bourgeois society, the master-slave dialectic comes to a halt, and with it, all historical development ends.

Appropriating Hegel's concept of the end of history, Kojève interprets the sublation of the master-slave dialectic even as the "disappearance [...] of man, properly so speaking."¹¹⁰ Something like Heideggerian "boredom," or that which the Surrealists called *ennui*, defines the existence of man at the "end-stage" of history. Boredom is abstract nothingness, a *horror vacui* which lacks determination. As such, it is the failure of desire and the end of all striving. Or, as Kojève puts it: "quite simply the cessation of Action in the full sense of the term. Practically, this means: the disappearance of wars and bloody revolutions."¹¹¹ Moreover, Kojève explained the end of metaphysics as a return to some state of nature, or as an "reversed" journey of spirit. "What would disappear, then, is not only Philosophy or the search for discursive Wisdom, but also that Wisdom itself. For in these post-historical animals, there would no longer be any "[discursive] understanding of the World and of self."¹¹²

¹⁰⁹ Jean Wahl, *Le Malheur de la Conscience dans la Philosophie de Hegel* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1951).

¹¹⁰ Kojève, *Introduction to the Reading of Hegel*, no. 6, 159.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹¹² *Ibid.*, 160.

In an often-quoted letter from December 6, 1937, titled “Letter to Blank,” Kojève’s student Bataille asks his mentor whether at the end of history (and thus of all negating *activity*) negativity would disappear altogether, or whether some form of *inactive* negativity would remain. Bataille speaks of an “unemployed negativity [*negativité sans emploi*],” which he describes as “the negativity of a man who has nothing more to do, not of a man who prefers speaking.”¹¹³ What Bataille seeks is a genuine and radical form of abstract negation that cannot be appropriated by any—but especially not by the Hegelian notion of totality. As Peter Bürger indicates, since Hegel’s system has already included and assigned a place to its adversaries (immanently), Bataille sets out to find “the only position apart from” Hegel.¹¹⁴ Bataille describes himself “exactly” as this “unemployed negativity” and his life as an “open wound [...] itself constituting a refutation of Hegel’s closed system.”¹¹⁵

Pure being and nothingness are the same, this constitutes the first insight in Hegel’s *Logic*. The absolute and the infinite are “nothingness” for consciousness. Hegel is looking for an “ultimate’ ground which consists in the identity of Being and Nothingness, which are both sheer emptiness and the lack of determination. He thus *starts* with the notion of nothingness that will define Bataille’s Sovereignty. The latter criticizes, however, that Hegel’s primordial nothingness constitutes just a moment of the development of the absolute, the beginning from which determinate negation is set in motion. What Bataille is looking for is therefore for a nothingness that is even more absolute, precisely because it remains external to *Hegel’s* absolute.

“Sovereignty is NOTHING! [*La souveraineté n’est RIEN!*],” Bataille exclaims in his *opus magnum*, *The Accursed Share*. Sovereignty is absolute nothingness, it is a power that coincides with its antithesis, i.e. “impotence,” and

¹¹³ Georges Bataille, *Guilty*, trans. Bruce Boone (Culver City: The Lapis Press, 1988): 124.

¹¹⁴ Peter Bürger, *Das Denken des Herrn; Bataille zwischen Hegel und Surrealismus* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1992). The ironic truth of Bürger’s diagnosis reveals itself for example in the thought of two poststructuralists, who are anything but enthusiastic Hegelians, that is the older Jean Baudrillard and Giorgio Agamben. As a matter of fact, they act as the most fervent defenders of Hegel’s concept of totality. The former denies any alterity or externality to capital, and the latter describes concepts such as sovereign power and the *homo sacer* not as exogenous elements to the legal order, but rather as its “inclusive exclusions.”

¹¹⁵ Bataille, *Guilty*, 123.

inaction. Sovereignty and nothingness are the same, this is, as Derrida has mockingly indicated, Bataille's "Hegelianism without reserve."¹¹⁶ Sovereignty denotes the scope, or dead angle that make up "heterogeneous" qualities of the sacred and the unconscious, terrains that cannot be rendered in terms of absolute knowledge, but of "unlimited knowledge [that] is the *knowledge* of NOTHING." Bataille reverses the journey of Spirit, which is no longer self-conscious knowing, but the unconscious realm that remains unknown. Moreover, this implies a "negative theology [and teleology] which tries to carry the implication of the theopathic state over into the realm of knowledge, [and] might merely take up the thought of Dionysius the Aeropagite" [my addition].¹¹⁷

What Bataille wants to mobilize against Hegel's "Science of the Experience of Consciousness" is strictly speaking not an anti-science but another kind of "science" whose elements are borrowed from psychoanalysis and anthropology. If Hegel wants to undo philosophy as the "love for knowledge" and turn it into a science proper, Bataille wants to preserve the "erotic" character of philosophy by means of a "passion" that goes against the "working" negativity of the concept. The affective dimension: eroticism, rage, inclination, drives, is, according to Bataille, what is filtered out in Hegel's development of self-consciousness, it is its waste-product, so to speak.¹¹⁸ Anthropology and psychoanalysis occupy themselves with this NOTHING that resists phenomenological presence.

The sacred, like the notion of sovereignty, coincides with its antithesis: "sacrilege." It concerns the crimes and transgression on which society has placed taboos: incest, murder, necrophilia. These are the actions that are not spoken of, or that remain repressed and therefore antithetical to discourse and language itself. In Bataille's own words: "[t]he world of words is laughable. Threats, violence, and the blandishments of power are part of *silence*. Deep complicity can't be expressed in words. Acting like a master means never being held accountable.

¹¹⁶ Jacques Derrida, "From Restricted to General Economy: A Hegelianism without Reserve," *Writing and Difference*, trans. Alan Bass (The University of Chicago Press, 1978): 251- 277.

¹¹⁷ Bataille, *The Accursed Share*, vol. II & III no. 3, p.438.

¹¹⁸ Katrin Pahl opposes such an assumption, and indicates that Hegel's philosophy, next to the famous dictum that reason manifests itself through passion in history, includes and predicates itself on a vast emotional register (Katrin Pahl, *Tropes of Transport: Hegel and Emotion* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press 2012).

The idea of explaining what I do makes me sick! Sovereignty isn't speaking—or it's deposed."¹¹⁹

Sovereignty must remain undetermined, since determination is precisely that which makes negation in Hegel productive, useful, and conditioned. Bataille's position is the *locus* where no concept is active, it is the aesthetical autonomous position mentioned in the previous section about the "drag queen." As soon as the negating entity receives content from that which it negates—"not *a*" and "not *b*"—it becomes conditioned by that which it excludes, and hence, it becomes concrete. Determinate negation is therefore servile: for-itself and for-another. Self-consciousness, knowledge, and work are all thoroughly slavish categories that need to be overcome by this "new" notion of absolute nothingness. This means also that the individual is only truly sovereign, where it lacks determination, intention, or reflection. This individual would not be determined by any content of his will, he wills NOTHING, is NOTHING, and signals NOTHING.

However, the refusal to be reduced to a social function or character-mask unavoidably turns over to its abstract counterpart. There is only the abstract in-itself that is not a bearer of social roles and thus has no part to play in society. This puts the "sovereign" in a seemingly similar position to Sarduy's "drag Queen." But whereas the drag queen still acknowledges that she is dependent upon the social roles she mocks, the "sovereign" occupies a much more abstract position, that consists in the refusal to be defined by any dialectical dynamics of roles. Bataille's "sovereign" is eventually mobilized against the slavish Marxist-Hegelian individual, and the idea that every individual is a *relatum* of another, dependent upon, and mediated by another.

Still, the undefined and undefinable position of the sovereign eventually runs up against its own performative contradiction. Bataille was aware of the problem that a position that opposes determination and explanation still needs to be determined and explained. The "useless" function of sovereignty as it is concretized in sacrifice, effusions, and art, then ceases to be sovereign only to become servile again. Sovereignty is a fleeting effusion in an affective or libidinal, but *never* calculative, economy. As soon as sovereignty is defined and reflected

¹¹⁹ *Ibid*, 41-42

upon, it turns over into its antithesis. Its denotative place must remain necessarily empty. Hence, Bataille indicates that the sovereign can only be the momentary, (but *not* a moment of the absolute) and the ephemeral. And this is why “it is servile to consider duration first, to employ the present time for the sake of the future, which is what we do when we work.”¹²⁰ Therefore, “[w]e don’t see the sovereign moment arrive, when nothing counts but the moment itself. What is sovereign in fact is to enjoy the present time without having anything else in view but this present time.”¹²¹ This means that genuine sovereignty can never be part of the (revolutionary) organization of the worker, whose potential is relinquished to a “master,” or “sovereign” who, in turn, appropriates the surplus value beyond investment and beyond the satisfaction of basic needs. The proletarian worker works in order to eat and pay his rent; thus, he implements work for a reward in the future. Only the worker, who wastes his money in a whiskey bar may enjoy a moment of sovereignty, while thinking that he has the whole world at his disposal.¹²²

One may wonder, however, whether Bataille’s subversion of Hegel, does not constitute, in the end, a classical example of inverted consciousness, an inverted world, insofar as he posits a realm beyond consciousness over which the human has neither mastery nor knowledge. This “beyond” is not only a regressive move to transcendence, but also installs the “sovereign” as a ruler in a desert of nothingness, the metaphysical wasteland of “post-history.” From this point of view, the “sovereign” is a belated baroque type and constitutes the ultimate philosophical character-mask of the “wise-man” who must continue to exist, even if metaphysics is no longer possible.

To summarize, the Bataillean overturning of Hegel and Marx contains the following aspects: 1. it inverts the Hegelian notions of dependent individuality and active or determinate negation, exchanging it for sovereignty and absolute nothingness; 2. it inverts, as already seen in Nietzsche, the master-slave dialectic, while celebrating the self-sufficiency of the “sovereign” as the final stage of

¹²⁰ Bataille, *The Accursed Share*, vol. II & III, 98

¹²¹ *Ibid.*, 199.

¹²² *Ibid.*

wisdom; 3. it inverts the relation between production and consumption, while privileging the latter over the former; and 4. it constitutes a “classical” example of the inverted world, insofar as it reintroduces a “quasi-transcendence” (absolute nothingness as absolute alterity) into Being, so as to invert and subvert Hegel’s immanently developing totality.

This section has shown that sovereignty is the position of the philosophical outsider. The next chapter will deal with yet another thematic variation of this outsidersdom, where it emerges as the concept of the author in exile in the work of Roberto Bolaño, W.G. Sebald, and Herta Müller. The last chapter of this thesis discusses the figure and “character-mask,” of the contemporary “author.” It focuses on the existential problem of contemporary literature, and addresses the question what it means to write literature, when literature itself in fact has already become “im-possible.” After the “death of the author,” “the end of history,” and “the end of art’ the only position apart from this dead-end must be the exile, so the chapter argues.

The truth, I would claim, is the opposite.
(William Egginton, *The Theater of Truth*)

Chapter 4 Political Inversions and Historical Submergences

1. Roberto Bolaño and the Inversion of Left- and Right-Wing Politics

In his last interview before he died, Roberto Bolaño was asked by Mónica Maristain what things bored him the most. He answered: “The empty discourse of the Left. I take for granted the empty discourse of the Right.”¹ The answer of the author of the “First Manifesto of Infrarealism,” who here clearly places himself within a certain literary tradition, evokes the “politics of *ennui*” associated with Surrealism, Bataille, and Kojève. This sentiment is symptomatic, as this chapter will argue, of a “post-political” attitude that emerges *mutatis mutandis* from the conception of “post-history” as defined by Kojève’s followers such as the Right-Hegelian Francis Fukuyama, for example. Because the end of history has been theorized as the implosion of dialectics, it has also been theorized as the end of ideology: Huntington’s “clash of civilizations” is one amongst many other prominent examples of this tendency.² Thus, when Bolaño indicates that he can no longer distinguish meaningfully between the discourse of the left and the right, his thought can be seen as a typical product of his time.

This section will argue that the work of Roberto Bolaño, including his essays and interviews, demonstrates a jettisoning of “traditional” political judgments and affiliations in favor of what Juan E. de Castro has formulated, following Jacques Rancière, as the position of the ethical turn.³ The ethical turn, according to

¹ Roberto Bolaño, *Between Parenthesis*, trans. Natasha Wimmer (New York: New Directions, 2011): 492.

² In a somewhat different way, the presumable end of the political has been discussed in Luuk van Middelaar’s book *Politicide*. Here, the author accuses Kojève and his students not simply of having announced the ending of history prematurely, but also of having “killed” politics as such. Middelaar laments the departure from Enlightenment or bourgeois politics amongst French intellectuals in the interwar and Cold-War period. Mostly, he criticizes them for their indifference towards the so-called public sphere of common rational deliberation, and their flirtation with anti-parliamentary or anti-democratic politics which he describes as their existentialist apology for revolutionary violence: cf. Luuk van Middelaar, *Politicide* (Groningen: Historische Uitgeverij, 1999): 70ff.

³ Juan E. De Castro (ed.) “Politics and Ethics in Latin America: On Roberto Bolaño,” *Roberto Bolaño as World Literature* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2017): 63-77.

Rancière, is the symptom of a post-political attitude, one of “consensus,” that rejects any polarization or “extreme” position on either side of the political spectrum. Whereas for Marx, and even to a certain degree for Hegel, the question of *Bildung* consists in a formative movement from the ethical [*sittliche*] and the economic (i.e. the pre-political) into the political community, the ethical turn reverses the development and moves back from politics to ethics, exchanging the concrete reference to the historical material conditions for an idealist discourse of Memory. The notion of trauma, and the ethical imperative to remember the catastrophes of the twentieth century, inform the “therapeutic” tasks and narratives of the author in the literary and political wasteland after fascism and communism. All the three authors discussed in this chapter, Herta Müller, Roberto Bolaño, and W.G. Sebald, fit seamlessly into this tradition. Though, even if the notion of the “post-political,” or the end of politics, resonates widely within the academic discourses of the last few decades, this section will argue that it is not so much the end of the political that is at stake in the work of Roberto Bolaño but rather the capitulation in front of the task of meaningfully defining the scope of left and right positions. This failure is eventually resolved by appealing to the *ethos* of Memory.

Indeed, Kojève’s confusion between Heidegger and Nietzsche, on the one side, and Marx and the left-Hegelian position, on the other, already anticipated much of the depletion of traditional political distinctions like conservative and progressive, and left and right, a condition that will start to characterize the neo-liberal phase from the late 1970s onward. Euro-American academic discourses here have not simply been following global political developments but actively shaping them. Anthony Giddens, advisor to Tony Blair, for example, indicated that the neoliberal framework solicits a politics that goes beyond the left and right distinction. His coinage of the third-way approach has not only served as a popular democratic framework, but also resonates with what was already perceived under fascism, targeting especially the petty bourgeoisie, as a “third-way” and a mean between international capitalism, on the one hand, and international socialism on the other. Another instance of such an alternative between two “traditional” political positions constitutes the left’s rediscovery of the legacy of the Catholic

Nazi juror Carl Schmitt in the late 1990s, of which Chantal Mouffe⁴ and Giorgio Agamben⁵ are perhaps the most internationally known representatives in *academia*. *Remnants of Auschwitz*, in this respect, has defined the ethical position post-Auschwitz, or what Agamben pompously calls *ethica more Auschwitz demonstrata*. He thinks that this position does justice to the implosion of opposing positions, in the case of Auschwitz, of victim and perpetrator, a confusion that he defines as the “gray-zone,” a zone of political, ontological, and ethical uncertainty.

Also, a certain re-evaluation of Nietzsche supposedly contributed to the intellectual bankruptcy of the left, and hence severely damaged the theoretical framework that could accommodate and produce a potentially truly communist society. According to Geoff Waite, for example, the whodunit of the premature murder of communism, or rather of its “abortion,” can be traced back to Georges Bataille. The French philosopher has already killed socialism before it even saw the light of day, or at least Waite thinks so. He poses the question, quoting from a British post-punk band: “How can something be really dead, when hasn’t even happened? –this funeral is clearly for the wrong corpse.”⁶ The French Nietzscheans, in his view, are the ghost busters who exorcised the specter of communism, and they have done so with the help of another undead presence, i.e. the corps/e-corpus of Nietzsche.⁷ “Nietzsche’s position is the only one apart from communism,” Bataille indicated,⁸ a dictum that the Althusserian Marxist, Waite, subsequently interprets as: the only truly anti-Nietzschean position is that of communism. Indeed, Bataille’s dictum has made an entire tradition suspect, at

⁴ Chantal Mouffe, *The Challenge of Carl Schmitt* (London / New York: Verso, 1999).

⁵ Giorgio Agamben, *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*, trans. Daniel Heller-Roazen, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998).

⁶ Geoff Waite quotes here from a Mekons’ song: “Funeral,” *The Curse of the Mekons*, 1991 Blast First/Mute Records, Ltd., BFFP 80 C, cit. in Geoff Waite, *Nietzsche’s Corps/e – Aesthetics, Politics, Prophecy, or the Spectacular Technoculture of Everyday Life* (Durham: Duke University Press 1996): 3.

⁷ Waite indicates that “Nietzsche’s corps/e” refers to the dead corpse of Nietzsche, his corpus of works, and the corps, that is to say intellectual followers of Nietzsche, mainly of the French tradition, i.e. Bataille, Deleuze, and Foucault.

⁸ George Bataille, *The Accursed Share, vol. II & III*, 373

least in the view of some Marxists⁹ who even anachronistically blame Nietzsche and the Nietzscheans for a hypothetical siding with the Nazis.

Traditional left political parties, nearly dead in most countries today, have ceased to provide a genuine critique of the state and of capital—indeed the only critique of the state today is articulated by right-wing populism. As Costas Lapavistas has shown in *The Left Case Against the EU*, for example, the left traditionally articulated a well-defined critique of the EU and its individual state members. But this changed precisely when the EU entered its most radically neoliberal phase, privatizing public assets and services, like water, electricity, transportation, housing and health care; and, on top of that, weakening labor law and protection. From this moment onward, the left embraced the EU and became one of its most fervent defenders.¹⁰ As for the American case, Timothy Brennan, for example, has been quite suspicious of the left's confusion, or, generally, the abandonment of the left-right distinction, and mentions the middle-way as the hegemonic approach against the backdrop of (post-)cold war rhetoric in the US, producing a twisted hypothesis of “*communismfascism*,”¹¹ a quite common (con)fusion and inversion that was already popular with theorists of totalitarianism like Hannah Arendt. This confusion is productive of a “safe” mean between two extremes which Brennan, following Roland Barthes, has defined as a “neither-nor-criticism.” In Barthes' words it is the “Morality of the Third Party,”¹² and it echoes the attitude of the dutiful democratic bourgeois who critically affirms: “I am neither a communist nor a fascist,” that is: “I am neither left nor right but pretty much straightforward.”¹³

The position of the “ethical turn,” as will be argued later in this chapter, is one of abstractions—it does not focus on political distinctions such as “left” and

⁹ Besides Geoff Waite, *Nietzsche's Corps/e*; and Jan Rehmman, *Postmoderner Links-Nietzscheanismus – Deleuze & Foucault. Eine Dekonstruktion*. Hamburg: Argument Verlag, 2004; there is Domenico Losurdo, *Nietzsche – The Aristocratic Rebel. An Intellectual Biography and Critical Balance Sheet*. [2002] Leiden, Boston: Brill, 2020.

¹⁰ Costas Lapavistas, *The Left Case Against the EU* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2019): 25

¹¹ Timothy Brennan, *Wars of Position – The Cultural Politics of Left and Right* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004): 20.

¹² Barthes, *Mythologies*, 82.

¹³ This is a translation of: “*Ik ben niet links, ik ben niet rechts, maar ik ben recht door zee*,” uttered by the former Dutch VVD- politician, Rita Verdonk affirmed in 2005 during the campaign for her new political party “Trots op Nederland” [“*Proud of the Netherlands*”].

“right;” “conservative” and “progressive;” “protectionist” and “liberal;” or “revisionist socialist,” “reactionary,” and “revolutionary.” The new political conjuncture is roughly the discursive landscape that authors of the Latin American post-boom are confronted with, and it is this discourse that informs their own aesthetic production, denoting a significant change in intellectual life. Before the decline of the left in Latin America many of the authors of the Latin American Boom, albeit not all partisans, certainly sympathized with the progressive political forces. Being left-wing was part of the political and literary establishment. Then, for the generation of Roberto Bolaño (those born in the fifties), this affiliation with the left was no longer taken for granted. Authors of the Latin American literary establishment such as Gabriel García Márquez, Octavio Paz, and Pablo Neruda are “aesthetically” and “ethically” under attack by the next generation of which Bolaño is one of the key figures. The condemnation of authors, belonging to the establishment, is for example encrypted in his “Chilean novels,” *Estrella distante* [*Distant Star*] and *Nocturno de Chile* [*By Night in Chile*]. Especially, the last novel, which features Pablo Neruda, represents the literary establishment as consorting with, and feeling at ease only in the proximity of “power.” The narrator, Sebastián Urrutia Lacroix, is an arrogant *Opus Dei* priest and literary critic. The character is inspired by José Miguel Ibáñez Langlois, an *Opus Dei* priest and literary critic, who worked for the Chilean newspaper *El Mercurio*, and was responsible for literary canon formation during the regime of Pinochet.

In the novel, the character is summoned by General Pinochet to teach him the doctrine of Marxism, because the latter thought it necessary to know the concepts of his enemy. More in general, in the novel, different political positions are (con)fused. All characters are accused of being hungry for power and being coward opportunists. Jorge Herralde, Bolaño’s editor in Barcelona, remembers that Roberto Bolaño once said about Gabriel García Márquez that he was a “man terribly pleased to have hobnobbed with so many Presidents and Archbishops,”¹⁴ and, indeed, so are many of the poets, writers, and literary critics who appear in literary workshops or soirees in his novels.

¹⁴ “Es un *hombre encantado de haber conocido a tantos presidentes y arzobispos*” (quoted by Jorge Herralde in *Para Bolaño*, (Barcelona: Acantilado, 2005): 87).

Bolaño's inversion of left and right-wing positions is perhaps the most explicit in two other novels, *Estrella distante* [*Distant Star*] and *Amuleto* [*Amulet*]. The first, another "Chilean novel," is a continuation or expansion of the last entry of his earlier published fictional anthology or encyclopedia, *La literatura nazi en América* [*Nazi Literature in the Americas*]. This last entry is titled "Ramírez Hoffman, El Infame." Apparently, Bolaño was so intrigued by his own creation that he needed to expand the entry. He rewrote and published it as a new short novel. In an interview, Bolaño gave his readership an important hint for decoding his political "message." He indicated that

el mundo de la ultraderecha es un mundo desmesurado y es interesante de por sí. Lo que pasa es que yo cojo el mundo de la ultraderecha, pero muchas veces, en realidad, de lo que estoy hablando es de la izquierda. Cojo la imagen más fácil de ser caricaturizada para hablar de otra cosa. Cuando hablo de los escritores nazis de América, en realidad estoy hablando del mundo a veces heroico, y muchas más veces canalla, de la literatura en general (emphasis added, E.E.).¹⁵

the world of the extreme right is an excessive world and it is interesting in and of itself. The point is that I capture the world of the far-right, but quite often, what I am actually talking about is the *left*. I take an image that can be caricaturized most easily, so as to talk about something else. When I speak of the Nazi writers in America, actually, I am talking about the sometimes heroic, and quite often vile, world, about literature in general (emphasis added, my translation, E.E.).

Bolaño does not simply offer here a devastating critique of the left but also heroizes and vilifies (he uses the word *canalla*) the avant-garde poet as a liminal character, that is, as transgressive in the Batailleian sense. This vilified avant-garde poet is the character of Carlos Wieder in *Estrella distante*, a novel that like so many of his works begins with a literary workshop and then ends in crime, torture, and murder.

Carlos Wieder is a serial killer and military pilot during Pinochet's regime, as well as a quasi-futuristic inventor of the new poetry for the new nation. His poetic performances consist in the act of writing poems on Chilean skies with the waste-gases of warplanes from the Second World War. If one is to take Bolaño by the letter in the quote above, then one may already be prepared to find out that Carlos Wieder is a fictionalization of the avant-garde poet, Raúl Zurita, who was an opponent and political prisoner of Pinochet, commonly identified with the left.

¹⁵ "Entrevista a Bolaño", *Lateral. Revista de cultura*, 40 (April, 1998).

The fact that Bolaño turns him into one of his Nazi writers and a torturer under Pinochet is not only a political or ethical condemnation but also an aesthetic one. All writers of the *Nazi Literature* encyclopedia are, after all, mediocre poets who lack talent and good taste. The narrator in *Distant Star* describes Carlos Wieder as a “criminal,” and “not a poet.”¹⁶ This not only implies that the narrator does not deem Wieder’s poetic performances worthy of the predicate “poetry,” but also that a truly good poet cannot be a criminal. The humanistic ideal of the narrator, however, is often enough refuted by other characters in the novel, and so, Bolaño deliberately or non-deliberately places himself in the tradition of the *Kunstgespräch*, a treaty on the function of art, already mentioned in relation to the work of Hoffmann and Arenas.

The problem that Bolaño addresses in his work is the avant-garde’s lack of ethical commitment. The novel *By Night in Chile* tells the story of the Chilean military dictatorship from *within* its own circles, and discusses the function of art and aesthetic criticism under fascism. Towards the end of the novel, at one of the literary soirées of María Canales, the fictional name for Mariana Callejas,¹⁷ one of the invited guests is wandering through her house. “By accident,” he ends up in the basement. The narrator, Sebastián Urrutia Lacroix indicates:

[t]hen I found out, from another friend, that the guest who had got lost was a playwright or maybe an actor, and that he had been down every one of the labyrinthine passages in María Canales and Jimmy Thompson’s house, over and over until he arrived at that door at the end of a dimly lit corridor, and opened it and came across that body tied to a mental bed, abandoned in that basement, but alive, and the playwright or the actor shut the door stealthily, trying not to wake the poor man who was recuperating from his ordeal, and retraced his steps and returned to the party or the literary gathering, María Canales’s soirée, without saying a word. And I also found out, years later, while watching clouds crumble, break apart and scatter in the Chilean sky, as Baudelaire’s clouds would never do, that the guest who had gone astray in the deceptive corridors of that house on the outskirts of Santiago was a theorist of avant-garde theatre, a theorist with a great sense of humour, who didn’t panic when he lost his way, since as well as having a great sense of humour, he was naturally curious, and when he realized he was lost in María Canales’s basement, he wasn’t afraid, in fact it appealed to the busybody in him, and he opened doors and even started whistling, and finally he came to the very last room at the end of the basement’s narrowest corridor, lit by a single, feeble light bulb, and he opened the door and saw the man tied to the mental bed,

¹⁶ Roberto Bolaño, *Distant Star* trans. Chris Andrews (New York: New Directions, 2004): 117.

¹⁷ Mariana Callejas was a failed Chilean writer and her American husband Michael Townley participated in various torture sessions and killings executed by the DINA, the secret service of Pinochet. She was first found guilty in the torture and killing of the General Carlos Prats and his wife, but then the verdict got overturned in 2010 and she only received a sentence of five year for her complicity in the murders.

blindfolded, and he knew the man was alive because he could hear him breathing, although he wasn't in good shape, for in spite of the dim light he saw the wounds, the raw patches, like eczema, but it wasn't eczema, the battered parts of this anatomy, the swollen parts, as if more than one bone had been broken, but he was breathing, he certainly didn't look like he was about to die, and then the theorist of avant-garde theatre shut the door delicately, without making a noise, and started to make his way back to the sitting-room carefully switching off as he went each of the lights he had previously switched on.¹⁸

The reference to avant-garde theater is no coincidence.¹⁹ The narrator presents the playwright and theorist of avant-garde theater as someone who is emotionally indifferent, but nevertheless curious about the tortured political prisoner in the interrogation room, located in the basement just below Maria Canales' soirée. Precisely, the spatial and temporal coincidence between torture and the party of the avant-garde implies not only the lack of ethical commitment of the literary circle but its direct complicity with state terror. The theorist of avant-garde drama confronted with the real *théâtre de la cruauté* in front of his eyes, returns to the party as if nothing had happened. The narrator indicates that Maria Canales and her husband Jimmy Thompson (alias Michael Townley) were not even afraid to properly hide their tortured prisoners, since terror and torture of the DINA to a great extent had been normalized and routinized in the 1970s. "Why didn't anyone say anything at the time? Because they were afraid," concludes Sebastián Urrutia Lacroix, adding that *he* would not have been such a coward, but *hélas*, according to his own saying, he did not know anything about the interrogation rooms,²⁰ —a famous excuse often heard in the German context too. Like Carlos Wieder, the literary establishment in *By Night in Chile* is guilty of a "*silencio cómplice*."²¹ The evocation of Baudelaire's poem *Le voyage*, in the quoted passage, moreover,

¹⁸ Roberto Bolaño, *By Night in Chile*, trans. Chris Andrews (New Directions: New York, 2003): 201-203

¹⁹ In a similar context, Žižek refutes the assumption that the meaning of media images would be immediately present, by refereeing to an anecdote, which tells that he showed some of the images from tortured Abu Grahیب prisoners with brown paper bags covering their head, or connected to electric wires, to friends and asked them to describe what they were seeing: "Performance theater," was the reply in some cases (Slavoj Žižek, "Between Two Deaths," *London Review of Books* 26, no. 11 (3 June 2004). This anecdote does not only reveal theatrical orchestration as the essence of torture but also indicates a shift in the avant-garde, and in art in general, of which Bataille and Artaud are some of the more well-known representatives. On top of that, nearly two decades ago, the genre "torture-chic" triumphed in the fashion and music industry, and in photography.

²⁰ "I was not afraid. I would have been able to speak out, but I didn't see anything. I didn't know until it was too late" (Bolaño, *By Night in Chile*, 203).

²¹ Bolaño, *Estrella distante*, 30.

indicates that the Chilean skies, which in *Distant Star* serve as Carlos Wieder's poetic canvas, are precisely not apt for an aestheticization of horror and the sovereign aesthetics of the *poètes maudits*. What the Bolañian novels demand is rather a committed and "courageous" art that is able to ethically distinguish between right and wrong.²²

The *poètes maudits'* fascination for cruelty makes up the persiflage in *Distant Star*, where Carlos Wieder is associated with a literary circle called "the barbaric writers," who fuse their excrements with the literary canon of the French Revolution. The barbaric writers turn out to be the "barbaric left," since behind Carlos Wieder lurks the poet Raúl Zurita. The latter's work *Anteparaiso* features some photographs from the "sky-poem" LA VIDA NUEVA, a reference to Dante's *Vita nuova*, written by means of air crafts on the sky above New York City, in 1982.²³ But in Bolaño's novel, the verses of LA VIDA NUEVA are rewritten into the macabre ideology of death and war. The quasi-religious tone of Zurita's poetic work evokes certain strains of messianic Marxism and liberation theology. Zurita's performances, combining the surface of nature, art, and poetry, no longer aim at creating solid works of art to be consumed by private owners, but are rather looking for a specific spatialization or form for poetic and spiritual idea(l)s in common land, i.e. the desert or the sky. Bolaño turns them into futuristic fascistoid total artworks. When in chapter 2, the narrator of *Distant Star* is incarcerated in a detention center and witnesses for the first time Carlos Wieder's poetic performance, consisting of the first verses of *Genesis* written into the sky, one of the other detainees, called "el loco Norberto" is praying and crying: "*Santo cielo [...] padre nuestro, perdónanos por los pecados de nuestro hermano y perdónanos por nuestros pecados. Sólo somos chilenos, señor, [...] inocentes, inocentes* [Our Father in heaven ... forgive us the sins of our brothers and forgive us our own sins.

²² Baudelaire returns in the epigraph of *2666* which reads: "An oasis of horror in a desert of boredom," evoking both the depiction of horror and the later politics of *ennui* of the Surrealists.

²³ Raúl Zurita, *Anteparadise - A Bilingual Edition*, trans. Jack Schmitt (Berkeley/ Los Angeles/ London: University of California Press, 1986).

In another poetic work, Zurita inscribed the geoglyph "*ni pena ni miedo* [neither pain (or shame) nor fear]" on the surface of the Atacama-desert, the location of the mass graves of the forcedly disappeared under Pinochet. Later, being afraid that the mass graves would be found, Pinochet had the corpses dug up and dumped into the Pacific Ocean.

http://www.cervantesvirtual.com/portales/raul_zurita/imagenes_escritura_material/imagen/imagenes_poemas_raul_zurita_guy_wenborne_escritura_desierto/

We are only Chileans, Lord, ... innocents, innocents].”²⁴ The narrator adds: “*Lo dijo fuerte y claro, sin que la voz le temblara. Todos, por supuesto, lo oímos. Algunos se rieron. A mis espaldas escuché unas tallas en donde se mezclaban la picardía y la blasfemia* [He said it loud and clear, with a steady voice. Everyone heard him, of course. Some laughed. Behind me I heard *anti-clerical wisecracks*]” (emphasis added, E.E.).²⁵ Note here, that Chris Andrews has translated the “picaresque [*picardía*]” and the “blasphemous [*blasfemia*]” of the Spanish original into “anti-clerical wisecracks,” a rather free translation that nevertheless respects the noun-structure of the original. This passage constitutes an ardent mockery of the avant-garde’s orchestration of poetic sovereignty. Bolaño seems to imply that the notion of the poet as a small god, as Huidobro once put it,²⁶ is an aesthetic ideal that is shared amongst poets of the entire political spectrum from the far right to the left. Bolaño mocks the messianism of Zurita’s discursive violence aimed at founding a new political eschatology.

Thus, Zurita’s utopianism is recast as a fascist and auratic spectacle that celebrates the death of socialism²⁷ and the rebirth of the Chilean nation under Pinochet. The fact that the character “mad Norberto” refers to the others and himself as “innocent Chileans,” depoliticizes the conflict, which is no longer perceived as one between the MIR (The revolutionary Left), Trotskyists, and the *Unidad Popular* (a coalition of left parties) that supported Allende, on the one hand, and the military Junta and the Chicago Boys²⁸ on the other, but as one between an innocent “people” and a totalitarian state. The confusion of Marxism, Messianism and Christianity in Bolaño’s Chilean novel is further explained in an interview with Eliseo Álvarez in which Bolaño indicated that he despised the “clerical unanimity of the Communists.” The true “*picardía*” and “*blasfemia*” consists, thus, in a picaresque inversion and confusion of political positions. When

²⁴ Roberto Bolaño, *Estrella distante* (Barcelona: Anagrama, 2006): 39; *Distant Star* 28.

²⁵ *Ibid*, 39; *Ibid*, 28-29.

²⁶ Vicente Huidobro is a Chilean poet and founder of the so-called “*creacionismo*.” “*El Poeta es un pequeño Dios* [The Poet is a small God]” is one of the famous verses from his poem *Ars Poetica*.

²⁷ Implied is here not only the US and Chilean air forces’ bombardment of the Presidential Palace, *La Moneda*, in which Salvador Allende died, but also the so-called “*vuelos de la muerte*” of the Chilean (and Argentinean) Army during the Dirty War.

²⁸ A short name for the neo-liberal experiment of the Chicago School of Economics of Milton Friedman in Latin America.

it comes to “mass” mobilization, communists, messianic Marxists, Opus Dei priests, and supporters of Pinochet, are, in some way or the other, all alike.

The notion of innocence that *el loco Norberto* evokes above, also returns in a slightly different way in the so-called “Caracas Address,” a speech that Bolaño gave when he received the Premio Rómulo Gallegos. There, he suggested that basically everything he has written can be read as a “*carta de amor o de despedida* [love letter or goodbye letter]” to his generation. This is, as mentioned, the generation of writers born in the fifties who during the so-called Dirty Wars in Latin America in the 1970s were in their twenties and prepared to become revolutionary militants. About this generation’s coming of age, Bolaño says the following:

we gave the little we had—the great deal that we had, which was our youth—to a cause that we thought was the most generous cause in the world and in a certain way it was, but in reality it wasn’t. It goes without saying that we fought our hardest, but we had corrupt leaders, cowardly leaders with a propaganda apparatus that was worse than a leper colony, we fought for parties that if they had won would have sent us straight to labor camps, we fought and put all our generosity into an ideal that had been dead for more than fifty years, and some of us knew it, and how could we not when we’d read Trotsky or were Trotskyites, but we did it anyway, because we were stupid and generous, as young people are, giving everything and asking for nothing in return, and now those young people are gone, because those who didn’t die in Bolivia died in Argentina or Peru, and those who survived went on to die in Chile or Mexico, and those who weren’t killed there were killed later in Nicaragua, Colombia, or El Salvador. All of Latin America is sown with the bones of these forgotten youths.²⁹

For Bolaño, it is quite clear, who is to blame for the sacrifice of the naïve, “generous,” and innocent youth. This passage, in which Bolaño presents his own generation as a bunch of idealist but stupid and blindfolded young Trotskyites, returns in fictional guise at the end of this novel *Amuleto* [*Amulet*]. The main character and narrator Auxilio remembers:

*Los niños, los jóvenes, cantaban y se dirigían hacia el abismo. Me llevé una mano a la boca, como si quisiera ahogar un grito [...] Y los oí cantar todavía, [...] a los niños mal alimentados y a los bien alimentados, a los que tuvieron todo y a los que no tuvieron nada, qué canto más bonito es el que sale de sus labios, qué bonitos eran ellos, qué belleza, aunque estuvieron marchando hombro con hombro hacia la muerte, los oí cantar y me volví loca, los oí cantar y nada pude hacer para que se detuvieran, yo estaba demasiado lejos y no tenía fuerza para bajar al valle, para ponerme en medio de aquel pardo y decirles que se detuvieran, que marchaban hacia una muerte cierta. Lo único que pude hacer fue ponerme de pie, temblorosa, y escuchar hasta el último suspiro, escuchar siempre su canto...*³⁰

²⁹ Bolaño, *Between Parenthesis*, 52-53.

³⁰ Roberto Bolaño, *Amuleto*. (Barcelona: Anagrama, 1999): 152 -153.

The children, the young people, were singing and heading for the abyss. I raised a hand to my mouth, as if to stifle a shout [...] I hear them singing still, [...] the prettiest children of Latin America, the ill-fed and the well-fed children, those who had everything and those who had nothing, such a beautiful song it is, issuing from their lips, and how beautiful they were, such beauty, although they were marching deathward, shoulder to shoulder. I heard them sing and I went mad; I heard them sing and there was nothing I could do to make them stop, I was too far away and didn't have the strength to go down into the valley, to stand in the middle of that field and tell them to stop, tell them they were marching toward certain death. The only thing I could do was to stand up, trembling, and listen to their song, go on listening to their song right up to the least breath, because, although they were swallowed by the abyss, the song remained in the air of the valley ...³¹

The curiosity and political inversion in this passage, as de Castro notes, is produced through the allusion to the left leaders mentioned in the "Caracas Address," who in a Hamelin-like manner are driving the rather stupid but "beautiful" youngsters into the ravine. The historical material that Bolaño uses for this novel, however, is the massacre of Tlatelolco in 1968, marking the beginning of Mexico's Dirty War. This massacre was not committed *by* the left, but *against* the left. Thus, it appears almost as if it were not the police and the government of Díaz Ordaz who committed the crime but that is the left Latin American leaders who are "truly" responsible for the massacre – a quite picaresque and "blasphemous" representation of the facts, indeed.

Of course, the confrontation between the guerrilla, the militant revolutionary groups, partisans and peasants, on the one hand, and the state on the other resulted more than often in massive bloodshed in Latin America, and therefore, Bolaño assumes a pacifist, and ethical position that condemns any form of violence. In the interview with Álvarez, Bolaño indicates that, at the time, he thought that Allende was not radical enough,³² but, by now, he is perhaps the only left leader whom he admires today.

³¹ Roberto Bolaño, *Amulet*, trans. Chris Andrews (New York: New Directions, 2006): 182-184

³² Bolaño now identifies himself as anarchist, then as Trotskyist. The latter proposed the idea of a permanent revolution in opposition to Lenin's two-stage theory of revolution, the failure of which had already been proven in Russia, which ended with Stalin's slaughtering of all leaders of the Bolshevik party; in Sukarno's Indonesia, which concluded in the murder of two million communists, or in Iraq, which ended with Saddam Hussein also in massive blood baths. Finally, Allende's "two-stage revolution" turned out to be unsuccessful too. The theory of two-stage revolution indicates that first social democracy has to be installed before the communist revolution can take place. This has turned out a disastrous strategy basically everywhere in the world. In Europe, the strategy paved the way for the fascist counter-revolution.

I remember September 11, 1973: in one moment, I'm waiting to receive weapons to go a fight and I hear Allende say, in his speech no less, "Go forward knowing that, sooner rather than later, the great avenues will open again and free men will walk through them to construct a better society." In that moment, it seemed terrible to me, almost like a betrayal committed by Allende against those of us young people who were willing to fight for him. With time, that's one of the things that has ennobled Allende: saving us from death, accepting death for himself but saving us from it. I think that has made him huge in an immense way.³³

Interestingly, Bolaño does not admire Allende for his political program or revisionist socialism, but rather for his courageous "self-sacrifice." Unlike the other left leaders who drove the young generation into the abyss, Allende sent everyone home and calmly waited until the bombs dropped on his head. Hence, Bolaño's admiration for Allende is motivated not politically but ethically-existentially: he sacrificed his life courageously before anyone else. In the same interview, Bolaño describes himself as an anarchist, and adds: "I was the only anarchist I knew and thank God, because otherwise I would have stopped being an anarchist."³⁴ Collective organization is clearly not Bolaño's cup of tea, or too "clerical" for his taste.

2. Herta Müller and the Inverted Production of "communismfascism"

The weariness with politics, and the lack of distinction between left and right-wing positions has been increasingly perceived on a global scale for the post-political attitude also appears as a motive in the work of the German-Romanian author Herta Müller. Her work must be read against the wake of the defeat of Real-Socialism and its transition to liberal democracy. She grew up in the German-speaking Banat-Swabian region of Romania, but due harassment and surveillance by the *Securitate*, the secret police during Ceaușescu's regime, Herta Müller wanted to escape to West-Germany, as happened right before the Berlin Wall fell. The Banat-Swabian population is in her novels and essays predominantly depicted as an opportunistic group that now aligns itself with Hitler, and then with Soviet-

³³ Roberto Bolaño, "Positions are Positions and Sex is Sex, Interview by Eliseo Álvarez," *Roberto Bolaño: The Last Interview & Other Conversations* (New York: Melville House Publishing, 2009): 68

³⁴ *Ibid*, 67.

Communism. Communism and fascism enter into a zone of indistinction and so the transition between Antonescu's and Ceaușescu's Romania appears as seamless.

Whereas Bolaño is suspicious of the avant-garde and their lack of ethical commitment, Herta Müller deeply mistrusts the idea of the mother tongue, and of language as such. More than once, in her novels and essays, it is language, or the linguistic utterance, that betrays its subject of enunciation. The novel, *Atemschaukel* [*The Hunger Angel*], for which she received the *Nobel Prize* in 2009, is a fictional account of the deportation of the ethnically German population in Romania to the *gulags* after the Second World War. It comprises the testimonies of the poet Oskar Pastior, with whom Müller had planned the co-authorship of the novel, but who died during the preparation. Furthermore, Müller's relation to and conversations with her own mother, who was deported to the gulag, and whose husband was a former *Waffen SS*-soldier, served as the biographical and second-hand experience of camp life. After the defeat of fascism, in 1945, Stalin ordered to deport all Germans in the Slavic territories to the work camps. Thus, the novel attempts to underscore the arbitrariness and absurdity of national identities and indicates: "*Wir waren alle in keinem Krieg, aber für die Russen waren wir als Deutsche schuld an Hitlers Verbrechen* [None of us were part of any war, but because we were Germans, the Russians considered us guilty of Hitler's crimes]."³⁵ Thus, here, the mother tongue betrays its speakers, as they end up in the gulag because they speak German. Just as in Bolaño's *Distant Star*, the allusion to the Second World War emerges as the latent background of other historical and national events, suggesting fascism as some universal experience or horizon. On the one hand, Müller presents the forced expulsion of the Germans from the Eastern territories that Hitler had intended to colonize as *Lebensraum* for the German master-race, as a crime of Stalinism not yet sufficiently narrated and spoken of. On the other hand, she identifies in her first collections of stories, *Niederungen* [*Nadirs*], the fascist mentality of Banat Swabian community, a mindset deeply entrenched within the identity of her family and the rural area, as

³⁵ Herta Müller, *Atemschaukel* (München: Carl Hanser Verlag, 2009): 44.; *The Hunger Angel*, trans. Philip Boehm (New York: Metropolitan Books, 2012): 21.

yet another crime and result of totalitarianism. In *Der Teufel sitzt im Spiegel*, she remembers her grandfather saying that if “we, [Germans] would not have lost the war, Germany would be here, today.”³⁶ Thus, the village population appears as still fully supportive of the imperialist project of the Nazis. In *Nadirs*, she indicates that her father and other townsmen, used to display their uniforms with Swastikas, SS-runes, and other special distinctions: “Für fünfundzwanzig Tote hat er eine Auszeichnung bekommen. Er hat mehrere Auszeichnungen mitgebracht [For every twenty-five killed he got a medal. He brought home several medals].”³⁷ Thus, her father was an SS-officer, who killed for Hitler, and Müller seems to imply that not much of his nationalism and political affiliation had changed under communism. In this way, the everyday fascism of the German peasant minority becomes embedded within the larger national context of a Stalinist dictatorship, as if there were a natural affiliation between the two, contributing to a narrated universe of political and national inversions. Her literary fusions of everyday German and Romanian tropes and idioms are aimed at defying the “purity” of the nationalistic identitarian substratum of either: Ceaușescu’s Romania and Hitler’s Germany. The confusion of cultures and languages in Müller’s poetic style, produces a stylization of German that is constantly “contaminated” by Romanian words, and more generally, each word contaminates its preceding and following words.

Contamination is indeed one of the key motives in the work of Müller, and this is not only the case on a linguistic level. Müller has been accused of fouling her own nest, because she presents the Banat-Swabian community in her home village as misogynist, backward, and having a skin deep fascistoid nationalism. Furthermore, she highlights the continuity between fascism and communism under Ceaușescu, who in her view celebrates himself as a kind of *duce* or *Führer*. At rare moments, she is also susceptible to this continuity even to post-dictatorship democracy, but it hardly occurs to her to criticize “democracy” for its

³⁶ Herta Müller, *Der Teufel sitzt im Spiegel* (Berlin Rotbuch Verlag, 1991): 23.

³⁷ Herta Müller, *Niederungen* (München: Carl Hanser Verlag, 2010): 9; *Nadirs*, trans. Sieglinde Lug (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press 1999): 2.

own methods of prosperity.³⁸ With great annoyance, she indicates that most *Securitate* agents simply continued to work in democratic Romania, and only changed their name into SRI (Romanian Information Service). She identifies this continuity as a “*Demokratie auf rumänisch*,”³⁹ in other words, not as the development into a “true” democracy but one that is still polluted by the former communist dictatorship. But of course, the same holds true for “democracy *á la* West-Germany” or more precisely, *á la* free market-economy. Many former Nazis in West-Germany were also of greatest use to the new democratic country and thus entered leading positions in the business sector, politics, and jurisdiction. In other words, this continuity was not some inherent property of communism or fascism *per se*, but something that also happened in democracy itself. What remains untouched by Müller’s criticizing tone is the essence and function of these political and economic authorities and offices as such, as if the problem were only the biography of the person who holds the office, and not the institution itself. Being quite astonished, Müller also notices that even the West-German BND (security service) was having her on its radar and suspected her to be spying for Ceaușescu. *Even* in West-Germany, she was harassed into changing or adapting a few passages in *Niederungen*. She blames, however, the long arm of the Romanian secret service for these reprisals, and not the West German state which just like other Western nations at the time was embedded in a fully-fledged competition between nation-states and world-systems, and therefore also kept an eye on its citizens, suspecting them now and then of espionage.

The fact that Müller was constantly surveilled and threatened is reflected in her specific implementation of tropes and metaphors, and especially, her vast usage of anthropomorphisms. In her work, all objects have “eyes” and have her

³⁸ An exception to this constitutes one of her early novels, *Reisende auf einem Bein*. The narrator, *Irena* (the alter ego of Müller), who fled from “the other country” [*das andere Land*] to Berlin says: “*es könnte plötzlich alles anders werden in der Stadt. Die alten Frauen mit den weißen Dauerwellen könnten plötzlich wieder jung sein und in den Bund Deutscher Mädchen marschieren* [suddenly everything could be **different** in the city. The old women with the white perms could suddenly be young again and march into the League of German Girls” (emphasis added, Herta Müller, *Reisende auf einem Bein* (my translation, E.E.) (Frankfurt am Main: Fischer, 2010): 49]. This, however, rather than indicating continuity, stresses the difference with Hitler’s Germany, and implies that German democracy needs to be defended.

³⁹ Herta Müller, *Cristina und ihre Attrape, oder was nicht in den Akten der Securitate steht* (Göttingen: Wallstein, 2009): 9.

constantly surveilled. This amounts to a style that Friedrich Dürrenmatt would have called the style of observing the observer, that is, a style of (auto-)surveillance.⁴⁰ Language, i.e. the language of the State, of interrogations, and the fear of constantly being betrayed by one's own words and that of others, are constitutive of an aestheticized mistrust of language *as such*. Language, just like the avant-garde in Roberto Bolaño, is in one way or the other, always complicit with power.

Therefore, for Müller language is, in principle, also an ethical concept. The idea of language as ethics is part of a larger literary discourse of the twentieth and twenty-first century which not only indicates that victims of totalitarianism ("*communismfascism*") are obliged to testify to these moral "catastrophes," but also that totalitarian regimes, in turn, have "illicitly" appropriated "language" for their own propagandistic means. Already since Blanchot and Benjamin, the assumption that language is *not* an instrument, *not* a medium for communication, has become a literary and philosophical commonplace. This attitude culminates, for example, in Agamben's extreme assumption that a witness is not really bearing witness to camp life in a *KZ* or *gulag*, but actually to language *as such*, or as he puts it, to the fact "that language takes place."⁴¹ Indeed, there is this quasi-ethical assumption that language would be some sort of transcendental *Ereignis* that exists prior to, and independently of, its actual users. Language is not perceived as a human activity, but rather as a reified structure existing beyond and above its speakers and writers. This coincides with Herta Müller's attitude, according to which language is not the medium through which she expresses ideas and tropes, but rather she becomes the medium through which language speaks itself. It is against this backdrop that the denial of language as a medium or instrument for ideas must be seen, and it is this conception of language (a poetic one) that is mobilized against the language of politics and ideology.

But, I argue, precisely because language does not exist independently of its use, and since it has no fixed "destination" or "goal," it cannot, strictly speaking,

⁴⁰ Friedrich Dürrenmatt, *Der Auftrag vom Beobachten des Beobachters* (Zürich: Diogenes, 1986).

⁴¹ Giorgio Agamben, *Remnants of Auschwitz- The Witness and the Archive. Homo Sacer III*, trans. Daniel Heller-Roazen (New York: Zone Books, 1999): 138ff

be abused or misused. Abuse, after all, presupposes an autonomous determination from which “language” subsequently has been alienated, a pure kernel or essence that “language” does not possess, and cannot reveal. While Bolaño despises the ideal of the sovereignty of art, indicating that the lack of ethical commitment makes it an easy prey for totalitarianism, Herta Müller, in contrast seeks to preserve the sovereignty of art *as* its ethical integrity.

Next to the ethical “non-instrumentality” of language, there is another idea of language that emerges in the literary wasteland after fascism and communism, i.e. language’s failure of representation. The assumption that language resigns in front of the liminal experiences of starvation, war, totalitarianism, and camp life, is also a recurring motive in Müller’s work. The lack of representation is often aesthetically staged as a lacuna, but frequently also transformed into a metaphorical language that seeks to unhinge existing signifying practices. Müller’s metaphorical use of language indicates that trauma, pain, and fear, are constitutive of a new signifying practice that emerges a result of the destruction of all previously normal(ized) horizons of experience. This is, of course, also the argument of Elaine Scarry’s book on pain and language that uses both phenomenology and literature as the theoretical force to describe the purposes and conditions of torture.⁴²

Against this background, Müller has earned nothing but applause and laudation for her literary achievements, not only because she reproduces or contributes to the proposition of non-representability, but also because she affirms the earlier mentioned thesis of “*communismfascism*.” The German magazine *Der Spiegel* praises Müller’s depiction of “life [*Dasein*] in a communist dictatorship with a fascist past”⁴³ —a convenient depiction that hails her as the “non-Western” author, who from first-hand experience can attest to the superiority of Western capitalism and democracy. Indeed, Herta Müller is the ideal non-foreign foreigner. She is German but from Romania; she is a defender of democracy and has lived in

⁴² Elaine Scarry, *The Body in Pain. The Making and the Unmaking of the World*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988.

⁴³ Herta Müller, “Ich habe die Sprache gegessen” Spiegel-Gespräch. Kultur, *Der Spiegel* 35/2012: <https://www.spiegel.de/kultur/ich-habe-die-sprache-gegessen-a-dae553c3-0002-0001-0000-000087908042>

a communist dictatorship. The images that she presents from the Banat-Swabian community are foreign and familiar at the same time. This exotic political gaze, or the “politico-exotic” as Brennan puts it, is a literary constituent in which foreignness is largely domesticated, and thus has become manageable.⁴⁴ Müller’s experiences with Big Brother and the *Securitate* (Ceașescu’s secret police) render her politically exotic but also all too familiar, since East and West Germans know of course what the *Stasi* “meant.” Müller herself refused to wear the label “exotic” when literary critics identified a so-called “*fremder Blick*” (alien gaze) in her work.⁴⁵ The alien gaze in her work, she indicated, is not that of the exotic foreigner, but the gaze of the estranged familiar, or that of the earlier mentioned (auto-)surveillance. It is also the gaze of the various character-masks that one constantly has to wear, as woman, as an author sold on the book market, and in the interrogation room in front of the *Securitate* agent. In the last section, the alien gaze will be further discussed as not only the gaze of fear and the estranged familiar, but also that of a self-assigned privileged marginality that corresponds to Müller’s notion of the author in exile, a notion that just as in the case of Bolaño and Sebald has become a successful sales strategy.

While in general, Herta Müller’s work has been praised for its inventive metaphors and its politico-exotic gaze, one prominent voice in the German landscape of literary criticism thought otherwise. Iris Radisch, famous for her harsh judgments, reproached the Nobel laureate’s novel, *The Hunger Angel*, of *kitsch*. But, her judgement too was in line with the ethics of the post-political position. According to Radisch, after Auschwitz and the *gulag* archipelago, it is sheer impossible, and moreover, untimely, to use such sweet metaphors as “hunger angel,” “heart scoop [*Herzschaufel*],” “swing of breath [*Atemschaukel*],” or to compare the moon to a “glass of milk.”⁴⁶ In Radisch’s view, Müller did not know her Adorno well enough, and should have paid better respect to the unsayable and language’s failure of representation, something that the author

⁴⁴ Brennan, *Wars of Position*, 61.

⁴⁵ Müller, *Der Fremde Blick oder Das Leben ist ein Furz in der Laterne*, 5.

⁴⁶ Iris Radisch, „Contra Herta Müller – Kitsch oder Weltliteratur?“ *Die Zeit* 35, 20 August 2009: <https://www.zeit.de/zustimmung?url=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.zeit.de%2F2009%2F35%2FL-B-Mueller-Contra>

Müller had sufficiently done in other works, but failed to do in this particular novel, so the literary critic concludes.

Like Adorno, who indeed quite frankly admits that the ‘irrepresentability’ of the horrors of the twentieth century, especially of Auschwitz, are in line with the iconoclasm of the old testament [*Bilderverbot*], Rancière also highlights the conflation between impossibility and interdiction and shows that the real tension lies not within the domain of representation but rather in the “gap between the perfect rationality of its [the Holocaust’s] organization and the inadequacy of any explanatory reason for that programming.”⁴⁷ Thus, representation, in the view of defenders of iconoclasm, means *legitimation*. “Rationalization,” “explanation,” “representation,” and “legitimation” are fused into synonyms. The idea is that a “rational” representation of camp life would, in a way, trivialize the occurrences. But, why would this actually be the case? The piles of dead bodies of course remain what they are, before and after their explanation: why would this diminish their gruesomeness?

The fact that one fears that representation equals legitimation reveals a great deal about the deep suspicion against the often affirmative and apologetic stance of the humanities in general, of “the affirmative character of culture,” as Herbert Marcuse put it.⁴⁸ In the next section of this chapter, the concept of “History” or “historical deduction” will be discussed as one of these legitimizing practices. The common argument for now is rather that this iconoclasm is the result of the prohibition of “aesthetic” pleasure and distance, or objectification. It is not that non-representational art does not represent, but that it functions via its own specific indexicality. Non-representational art does not have to explicitly show, since it has already included the unicity and single horizon of “the camp” into its signifying system. A pile of shoes then, “naturally” becomes the index of the gas chamber and the crematorium.

As Rancière indicates, the notion of the non-representable secures the artwork’s transition from political to ethical commitment. The ethics of non-

⁴⁷ Jacques Rancière, *Dissensus – On Politics and Aesthetics*, trans. Steven Corcoran (London: Continuum, 2010): 375-376

⁴⁸ Herbert Marcuse, *Art and Liberation* trans. Douglas Keller (London: Routledge, 2006).

representation consists in attesting “indefinitely to the immemorial alienation that transforms every promise of emancipation into a lie that will only ever be achieved in the form of infinite crime, art’s answer to which is to put up a ‘resistance’ that is nothing but the endless work of mourning.”⁴⁹ The consequence is that artworks no longer put themselves in the service of a political emancipatory goal directed towards its realization in the future, but they direct their gaze to the past, i.e. the traumatic memory that is inherited from past generations. Political goals, ideals of emancipation, are then done away as “ideological,” “clerical,” or even “totalitarian.” Moreover, whereas in the discourse of Enlightenment, aesthetic judgments (and pleasure) were “tolerated” because they do not hinder the mechanisms of pure reason, even though they remained subordinate, it is now “reason” that fails in front the “superiority” of the non-representable and the sublime that art occasions. Here, we find something similar to Bataille’s notion of sovereignty, and the analogy between art’s and philosophy’s absolute negativity comes to the fore.

In an essay about the work of Roberto Bolaño, Gabriel Inzaurrealde indicates that this manner of writing literature at the end of the twentieth century is informed by the idea of “*habitar la derrota*”—of living with, and in, the debris of the catastrophes of modernity.⁵⁰ Inzaurrealde attempts to re-politicize the melancholic notions of “defeat” and “ruins” insofar as he defines the notion of “*derrota*” as the ultimate defeat of any Latin American socialist alternative to global capitalism. The debris of this ruined socialism constitutes the post-catastrophic literary landscape onto which Bolaño, and one could add Herta Müller inscribe themselves. This feeling of living in the ruins of the past, produces a notion of melancholia that bears a similarity, as Inzaurrealde argues, with the baroque sensibility of Walter Benjamin.

If Bolaño’s and Müller’s works attest to Benjamin’s dictum that there is no document of civilization that is not at the same time a document of barbarity, the oeuvre of W.G. Sebald constitutes the most fervent, if not compulsive, defense of

⁴⁹ Rancière, *Dissensus*, 383.

⁵⁰ Gabriel Inzaurrealde, “Habitar la derrota: la ciudad baldía del exilio en Roberto Bolaño,” *Telar* 17 (2016): 84-104.

this thesis. Sebald's writings theorize and aesthetically pose the question "what it means to write literature" in post-catastrophic History. The task of the author, then, is no longer defined in terms of political action and of what lies in front us, but in terms of inheriting the legacy of the past and assuming responsibility for it through the work of mourning. The present is seen as an accumulation of debris, of rudiments from the past. The next section will discuss the problem of historical legacy, and the "im-possible" concept of History, as staged in the work of W.G. Sebald.

3. W.G. Sebald: The Problem of Historical Deduction, or how to overturn History?

Since Kojève's "end of history" radicalized the Hegelian idea that all human development must be grasped immanently, the so-called call for the end of all *métarécits*, and especially that particular *métarécit* called "History," followed almost spontaneously from it. Jean-François Lyotard was amongst those who thought that they had done away with the idea of "History" once and for all. However, he only exchanged the grand narrative of "History" for that of the *petit récit*. In other words, he replaced the discourse of History with that of "Memory," the memory and story of the "small man." The concept of Memory, launched by Maurice Halbwachs⁵¹ and turned into hard currency with Pierre Nora,⁵² is described by Norman Finkelstein in a book that ruined his career, as

surely the most impoverished concept to come down the academic pike in a long time. [...] Once upon a time, dissident intellectuals deployed robust political categories such as "power" and "interests," on the one hand, and "ideology," on the other. Today, all that remains is the bland, depoliticized language of "concerns" and "memory."⁵³

Indeed, ideology critique and notions like "power-knowledge" now remind us of the *temps passés*. Memory substitutes traditional historiography with subjective impressions of the singular reminiscence. Objectivity or reliability are not its

⁵¹ Maurice Halbwachs, *On Collective Memory*, trans. Lewis A. Coser (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1992).

⁵² Pierre Nora, *Realms of Memory: Rethinking the French Past, Volume 1*, trans. Arthur Goldhammer (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996).

⁵³ Norman G. Finkelstein, *The Holocaust Industry- Reflections on the Exploitation of Jewish Suffering* (London/ New York: Verso, 2000): 5

“concerns.”⁵⁴ Memory is *posthistoire*. It reveals something much deeper than History. But Memory *also* designates pre-history, a pre-condition for the experience of “Time” and the fullness of “Being.” Authenticity and absolute singularity are its points of departure, and its aim is to affect, rather than to logically describe or explain. The enchantment of Memory, especially if it gets connected to the idea of a “collective” and national trauma, assumes the dominant form of representation of the ethical turn, as described by Rancière. Memory and the secret jargon of the unsayable, or the inassimilable excess, are here intertwined.

However, this is not to say, that the more traditional *metarécit* of “History” is a more critical concept, nor that it would be wise to return to the good old times of traditional history writing. Rather, the point is to indicate that even though “Memory” is mobilized as a critique of “History,” it often fails to genuinely oppose the latter’s logic and concerns. What Memory Studies have shown is that History with capital “H” is not much more than a “science of nationalism,” and “a narration of the nation,” to reference Homi Bhabha. As such it is an invention common to all nation-states emerging in the period of Imperialism and after. Since there is the alliance between nationalism and History, “Memory” pretends to rescue historical reflection from such *metarécits*, like “Nation,” “Nature,” “Culture,” or “People.” In so doing, it purports to substitute the heroic history of nations with the history of the “small man” and “underdog.” Hence, the national monument is replaced by the concept of the *lieu de mémoire*, a post-auratic *locus* that is not just there to commemorate the past heroes of the nation, but also the suffering of the ordinary man.

In the case of trauma (genocide, torture, war), “Memory” pretends to do justice to the unassimilable singularity of the experience of survivors, while at the same time drawing attention to the “false” nexus of power and narration involved in historical representation. The task of the writer, i.e. the fiction writer and the “new” historian, is that of the analyst and therapist. His writing is aimed at a

⁵⁴ Indeed, Herta Müller has jettisoned the traditional idea of a literature *engagé* for the notion of *Anliegen* [concern]. Literature should no longer be in the service of a specific politics but it should have a “concern:” “*Literatur muß ein Anliegen haben*” (Herta Müller, *Der Teufel sitzt im Spiegel*, 42).

criticism and healing of the past. He engages in a rigorous activity called “working through.” Such is also the main concern of W.G. Sebald, a German-born author and academic who moved to England for professional reasons. In the Euro-American academia, it is predominantly the praising interpretation of Susan Sontag that has established him as an author traded and discussed in the international academic marketplace.⁵⁵ In general, the German landscape of literary criticism remained initially rather reluctant towards the work of Sebald, but in the Anglo-Saxon world, literary scholars articulated their interpretation in praising superlatives, mostly.⁵⁶

For Sebald, the two World Wars have produced a collective traumatic experience that calls for critical confrontation with History and the Nation-State. Thus, he indicates that the first half of the twentieth century unhinged the relationship of many Europeans—Jews and non-Jews—with their homeland. As a matter of fact, the German word *Heimat*, heavily discredited by the Nazis, can for survivors only be experienced *ex negativo*. Hence, the notion of the (lost) homeland, especially in the life of Jewish émigrés, has been recurring a topic, from Sebald’s early literary work, *Die Ausgewanderten* [*The Emigrants*] to his later work *Austerlitz*, as well as in his non-fictional prose, the untranslated collection of essays *Unheimliche Heimat* [Uncanny Homeland] and *Luftkrieg und Literatur* [translated to English as *On the Natural History of Destruction*]. The problematic relation to the homeland in modernity goes hand in hand with a feeling of transcendental homelessness, the loss of the *métarécits*, or as Jacques Austerlitz, the main character in the book *Austerlitz*, puts it “*eine Empfindung des Abgetrenntseins und der Bodenlosigkeit* [a sense of disjunction and of having no

⁵⁵ Susan Sontag, “On W.G. Sebald,” *Times Literary Supplement* (February 25 2000): <http://www.coldbacon.com/writing/sontag-sebald.html>

⁵⁶ See, for example, the introduction to Toby Green’s interview with Sebald, in which the former says about the latter: “[t]he image of this deeply humane man, traumatized by his own success and hurt beyond repair by his own experience of writing, was chastening, and I kept it close by me for some time” (Toby Green, “My meeting with Max, a prologue,” *Journal of European Studies*. 2014, 44(4), 383). The previously mentioned essay by Sontag opens with the following lines: “IS LITERARY GREATNESS still possible? Given the implacable devolution of literary ambition, and the concurrent ascendancy of the tepid, the glib, and the senselessly cruel as normative fictional subjects, what would a noble literary enterprise look like? One of the few answers available to English-language is the work of W. G. Sebald” (Sontag, “On W.G.H. Sebald”).

ground under my feet].”⁵⁷ His experience of dissociation is ambiguously infused with the idea of repressed memory. Jacques Austerlitz is plagued by a repressed trauma during infancy: he has been on one of the *Kindertransporte* [child transports] to England during the Second World War to escape the concentration camp. The novel constitutes the search for the main character’s lost memory. At the beginning of the novel, Austerlitz is entirely dwelling in ignorance and nescience. He does not know that he is Jewish nor that he was born in Prague. Neither does he have any knowledge of his biological mother, who was deported to the concentration camp Theresienstadt [Terezín]. However, at the end of the novel, he seems to remember everything again, what his mother looked like, who his nanny was and where he lived in Prague. But, of course, the story provides ample disclaimers and does not miss a chance to emphasize the constructiveness of memory and its unreliability.

Since Sebald himself emigrated to England, and many of his characters too have German-British backgrounds, they often appear as his own fictional self-orchestration. This orchestration of Sebald’s own authorship is a recurring motive in his work and has been extensively discussed by Fridolin Schley, one of the less-praising voices in Germany.⁵⁸ This tendency to write the self into one’s characters and plot is a trait that Sebald shares with Müller and Bolaño. One may be inclined to define this as the “confessional turn” of contemporary literature, a disposition that outdates poststructuralist theories of the author. Sebald, Bolaño and Müller’s literary creations are often explicit autofictional works, and their characters frequently appear as orchestrations of the author’s alter ego. The three authors have also persistently commented on their fictional prose in essays and interviews. Thus, when it comes to the discussion their work, the author is surely not “dead.”

But more than simply being ego-documents, Sebald’s works also pretend to be of historical and academic importance, and the subjective experience of his characters constitutes the prototype for the general and collective experience of post-World War context. In this respect, *Austerlitz* and *Die Ausgewanderten*

⁵⁷ W. G. Sebald, *Austerlitz* (Frankfurt am Main: Fischer Verlag, 2003): 161; *Austerlitz*, trans. Anthea Bell (New York: Modern Library, 2011): 164

⁵⁸ Fridolin Schley, *Kataloge der Wahrheit – Zur Inszenierung der Autorschaft bei W. G. Sebald* (Göttingen: Wallenstein, 2012).

function as *petit récits*, personal and pseudo-concrete stories about the fate of European emigrants. The painful and problematic reminiscence work of the traumatized individual stands for the troubled relation of an entire nation to its past, and seeks to address Germany's problematic "working-through" regarding its fascist and imperialist past. Thus, Sebald aims for nothing less than a "*schrittweise Annäherung an eine Art Metaphysik der Geschichte* [gradual approach to a kind of historical metaphysic]," as the narrator in *Austerlitz* puts it.⁵⁹ *Aufarbeitung der Vergangenheit* [working through the past and coming to terms with it], Sebald agrees with Adorno, should not mean putting the burdens of the past behind. "Redemption," to continue the quasi-messianic idiom of Benjamin and Adorno, can never mean for Germany to *rid* itself of its past. Despite this admonishing tone, however, there is a latent nationalism that underlies Sebald's reflection on the ethics of historical fiction writing, for example, in the preface to his *Luftkrieg und Literatur*. This work is actually intended to reckon with the silence and hypocrisy of the immediate postwar period and the German authors of the time, of the so-called *Trümmerliteratur* [literally, "literature of debris"]. The genre, in general, deals with the ground-zero experience after the destruction of German cities, and implements a clinical, dry, and realist style. *Trümmerliteratur* is neither critically putting the nation on trial, nor is it evasive of the total destruction by war. But, in Sebald's view, most authors of the genre are hypocrites, who sell off the misery of others, or they implement a naïve realism while avoiding a critical recording of the destruction of their cities. He deduces this hypocrisy and naivety from the general blindness to history, akin to the German people *as such*. Sebald's observation is meant also as a critique of the post-*Wende's* immediate rehabilitation of national history after the unification of Germany. The re-unification, in view of many critical voices, constituted the definite sealing and overcoming of the post-war legacy and the optimistic desire to move on and put the burdens of the past behind:

Trotz der angestregten Bemühung um die Bewältigung der Vergangenheit scheint es mir, als seien wir Deutsche heute ein auffallend geschichtsblindes und traditionsloses Volk. Ein passioniertes Interesse an unseren früheren Lebensformen und den Spezifika der eigenen Zivilisation, wie es etwa in der Kultur Großbritanniens überall spürbar ist, kennen wir nicht. Und wenn wir unseren

⁵⁹ *Austerlitz*, 22-23; *Ibid*, 40.

*Blick zurückwenden, insbesondere auf die Jahre 1930 bis 1950, so ist es immer ein Hinsehen und Wegschauen zugleich. Die Hervorbringungen der deutschen Autoren nach dem Krieg sind darum vielfach bestimmt von einem halben oder falschen Bewußtsein, das ausgebildet wurde zur Festigung der äußerst prekären Position der Schreibenden in einer moralisch so gut wie restlos diskreditierten Gesellschaft [...]*⁶⁰

In spite of strenuous efforts to come to terms with the past, as people like to put it, it seems to me that we Germans today are a nation strikingly blind to history and lacking in tradition. We do not feel any passionate interest in our earlier way of life and the specific features of our own civilization, of the kind universally perceptible, for instance, in the culture of the British Isles. And when we turn to take a backward view, particularly of the years 1930 to 1950, we are always looking away at the same time. As a result, the works produced by German authors after the war are often marked by a half-consciousness or false consciousness designed to consolidate the extremely precarious position of those writers in society that was morally almost entirely discredited.⁶¹

This passage reveals two important pillars of “historical” thinking. The first is the more common and quite banal assumption that everything that exists today must have emerged at a certain point before. Sebald engages in a procedure of historical deduction and implies that, in order to understand present customs and the dominant ideas of “our” civilization, one must look for traditions and ideas in the past. The Germans, however, are blind to their immediate history and are not truly interested in their past customs and forms of life. Therefore, they will not be able to critically engage with their present. This form of historical arguing often does not amount to much more than an empty tautology, and has been criticized by Finkelstein in a different context. Finkelstein’s critique of Daniel Jonah Goldhagen’s study on the Holocaust, *Hitler’s Willing Executioners*,⁶² indicates that a historical deduction that derives, for example, the anti-Semitism of the Nazis from the anti-Judaism of the Germans in general, dating back to the Middle Ages, does not explain much about the Nazi’s logic of anti-Semitism. It does not explain why the Nazi’s final solution occurred in the 1940s and not let’s say in the 1780s. All it says is that the Germans were anti-Semitic because of their long

⁶⁰ W.G. Sebald, *Luftkrieg und Literatur* (Frankfurt am Main: Fischer, 2001); 6-7.

⁶¹ W. G. Sebald, *On the Natural History of Destruction*, Anthea Bell (New York: Modern Library, 2004): viii-ix.

⁶² Norman Finkelstein, “Daniel Jonah Goldhagen’s ‘Crazy’ Thesis: A Critique of *Hitler’s Willing Executioners*.” *New Left Review*, # 224 (July 1997): 39-88.

history of anti-Semitism.⁶³ Such arguments are quite well-known, a similar one is made, for example, in the case of police violence against African-Americans in the USA. Such violence is directly deduced from the history of slavery. Or, to take another example, in order to understand the position of women in advanced capitalism, one does not have to go back to the witch hunts of the seventeenth century. Such practices of historical deduction are always apologetic since they do not analyze the current rationale of racism and sexism in capitalism on its own terms, but instead describe it as a logical and unavoidable outcome of prior historical constellations. This logic of deduction is akin to Hegel's erroneous concept of historical necessity. The current situation is then the outcome of an unavoidable course of history: things "had" to happen this way because of what happened in the past. Contemporary phenomena are defined as "logical" outcomes of century-long developments, as when the critical historian then says: "Yes, there is a long history to racism, sexism, or anti-Semitism that dates back to the Middle Ages, to slavery in the seventeenth century, or even to Antiquity. Therefore, such deeply entrenched stereotypes in "our" history do not change overnight, of course!" Thus, the historical deduction uses chronology *as* causality and apology.

In this respect, Sebald's character Austerlitz, who suffers from amnesia caused by his childhood trauma, admits: "*Seit meiner Kindheit und Jugend [...] habe ich nicht gewußt, wer ich in Wahrheit bin* [Since my childhood and youth [...] I have never known who I really was.]"⁶⁴ What Austerlitz is and has become, he can only grasp through his existence in the past, and since the traumatized character has no "controlled" or "immediate" access to his past memories, he has no sense of self. Only when he is already an adult and art historian, Austerlitz suddenly experiences at the Central Station in Antwerp an "*Aufblitzen* [flashing forth]," to use Benjamin's wording here. This anamnesis makes him realize that stations have played an important role in his childhood memory because he arrived with the *Kindertransporte* to Liverpool Station. The train station is

⁶³ A claim that, as also Finkelstein outlines, is everything but true. Before the Nazi's rose to power, in comparison to other European countries, the position of Jews in German society was not less emancipated. Cultural, intellectual, and artistic life, at the time, was thriving in Germany not least because of the German-Jewish symbiosis.

⁶⁴ Sebald, *Austerlitz*, 69; *Ibid*: 82.

further described as an “*Eingang zur Unterwelt* [Entrance into the underworld],”⁶⁵ a metaphor that evokes both the realm of the unconscious and the notion of exile as banishment in Greek mythology. The novel is a search for identity through a laborious reconstruction of the past, and indicates that the present is only meaningful and accessible through the past. Before Austerlitz began this painful reminiscent work, he affirms that he thought that he was “*nie wirklich am Leben gewesen* [never truly alive].”⁶⁶

The second pillar of historical thinking, next to the practice of chronological deduction, consists in the subsumption of a particular into a general transcendent whole. The accusation that Sebald makes against the German postwar generation is that, unlike the British, they have neglected their consciousness of past customs, and their historical sensibility in general; in other words, they have neglected that which constitutes “a people” and has no other destination than the integration into the transcendent whole of the history and identity of the nation. This presupposes a “false” humbleness, on part of the subject, in the sense of Hegel’s concept of hypocrisy, since it requires that it dissolves into something supra-individual, something much higher and larger than the individual, i.e. “the nation,” “the era,” “the people.” In doing so, the subject transfers action and responsibility to a cause outside of itself. In Sebald’s view, however, the fact that the Germans did not give a sufficient account of what their ancestors did is rendered into a looking away, and thus a lack of responsibility for past occurrences. Because Sebald draws attention to the moral embarrassment (discredit) of the concept of the nation that the Nazis brought upon Germany, it appears that he is calling for a “critical” rehabilitation of Germany’s image and identity. But, of course, one feels embarrassed *only* if one identifies with this larger whole of the nation, and thinks that the image of “the nation” and “the people” has been besmirched by others, in this case, the ancestors. In other words, the so-called shame and collective guilt can only arise because of the identification with this lineage. Of course, the Nazis implemented the same logic, and accused others of the contamination of their idea of nation and historical lineage.

⁶⁵ *Ibid*, 188; *Ibid*, 189.

⁶⁶ *Ibid*, 202; *Ibid*, 202.

Thus, Sebald's enterprise of "working through" the traumatic past of Europe, and Germany in particular, *is* and *is not* susceptible to the immanent nationalism of historical consciousness. This ambiguity produces a performative contradiction and desire for a "negative nationalism": an inversion but not an overturning of traditional nationalism. The paradox, and logic, of negative nationalism consists in the fact that *as* a German, Sebald assumes responsibility for that which *other* Germans have done, for the simple reason that he is a German too. Hence, it is as a dutiful "German" that one must assume responsibility for this disastrous national legacy. It is *as* a German that one engages in self-criticism and the critique of German fascism, it is not let's say, as an anarchist, socialist, bourgeois entrepreneur, proletarian, or even widow, for that matter. Historical and national continuity merge into one transcendent whole. The problem that Sebald faces, in particular, is that of reconciling the stultification of historical continuity as a consequence of the Nazis' appropriation of history with the very same desire for that historical continuity. The solution for this contradiction is given through the concept of Memory:

Memory is here said to constitute the core of individual identity; national memory is understood to constitute the core of national identity. Insofar, then, as individuals have a national as well as an individual identity, they must have access not only to their own memories but to the national memory.⁶⁷

The notion of memory should *mutatis mutandis* harmonically align the individual with the general national totality. As Walter Benn Michaels indicates in the quote above, there is an imperative not only to remember one's own memories but also those of the nation. But of course, there is a persistent fight amongst different groups in society about whose memory is worthy enough of being remembered. As such, "Memory" is precisely not a "subversive" or "critical" corrective of traditional historiography but functions in parallel to the "imaginative communities" that make up the concept of the nation-state. Memory, being a singular and individual experience suddenly has become a collective national practice.

⁶⁷ Walter Benn Michaels, *The Shape of the Signifier: 1967 to the End of History* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004): 132.

Thus, “Memory” should also provide a shelter in the era of modernity, despite that fact that there is always an emphasis on a general experience of loss. This melancholic structure of feeling has struck the poet and metaphysician with speechlessness, as Adorno once (in)famously indicated. His dictum about the impossibility of poetry and metaphysics, however, is not the only example of a generally felt disruption. While the Nazis’ appropriation of art and politics have besmirched the concepts of language, poetry, and national identity, all the way up to philosophical abstract concepts, like transcendence, authenticity, and (eternal) return, the attempt to safeguard these concepts consists in the affirmation that Nazis in general were anti-philosophical and had bad aesthetic taste. Ernst Nolte, for example, condemned fascism not least because of its hostility to “transcendence,”⁶⁸ which means that they in principle lacked profound metaphysical reflection. As Jaspers and Arendt have argued, the Nazi’s mindset and motivations were rather “banal.” Fascism, so it seems, has introduced a disruption into the discipline of the Humanities. The questions how to philosophize, write poems, and visually represent the past and present have produced a *zeitgeist* that, among other things, finds expression in the formula of the impossible condition of possibility, that is, the representational space of absolute negativity. It is an “im-possible,” to borrow Derrida’s concept because there is the acknowledgement of the fact that the desire for historical, transcendental, and cultural continuity has been embarrassed but the mere form of that desire remains upheld, while forbidding any representational content. In Adorno’s Beckettian view, the question of the meaning of life must be posed but Auschwitz forbids any meaningful response to it. Methodologically speaking, representation and aesthetics are only possible as *lacunae*, or absolute negativity, which is to say, as acknowledgments of their own failure of representation.

In *On the Natural History of Destruction*, Sebald accuses the authors of the *innere Emigration*⁶⁹ and the immediate post-war literature of the fact that they

⁶⁸ Ernst Nolte, *Der Faschismus in seiner Epoche – Action française, italienischer Faschismus, Nationalsozialismus* (München: Piper Verlag, 1963): 507.

⁶⁹ “Inner emigration” is a term used for the authors who opposed Nazism in the 30s and 40s, yet did not leave the country. Therefore, they did not voice their criticism explicitly, but rather assumed a dissociated and disconnected attitude.

did not respect those lacunas. Instead, they engaged in a sentimental realism or simply ignored the traumatic experience of the war and genocide altogether. He highlights their complicit silence and lack of historical consciousness and indicates that they ethically and authentically failed in depicting the destruction of the German cities and their inhabitants during the bombardments of the British and the Americans from 1939 to 1945. Like in the previous quote, the British and German historical consciousness are once more juxtaposed:

Im Gegensatz zu der größtenteils passiven Reaktion der Deutschen auf die von ihnen als unabwendbares Verhängnis empfundene Niederlegung ihrer Städte war das Zerstörungsprogramm in Großbritannien von Anfang an Grund scharfer Auseinandersetzungen gewesen. Nicht nur wurde von Lord Salisbury und von George Bell, dem Bischof von Chichester, im Oberhaus sowohl als in der weiteren Öffentlichkeit wiederholt aufs eindringlichste der Vorwurf erhoben, daß die Strategie der in erste Linie gegen die zivile Bevölkerung sich richtende Angriffe weder kriegsrechtlich noch moralisch vertretbar sei, auch das verantwortliche militärische Establishment war in seiner Einschätzung dieser neuen Art der Kriegsführung gespalten.⁷⁰

But in contrast to the mainly passive reaction of the Germans to the loss of their cities, which they perceived as an inescapable calamity, the program of destruction was vigorously debated from the first in Great Britain. Not only did Lord Salisbury and George Bell, Bishop of Chichester, repeatedly and very forcefully express the opinion, both in the House of Lords and to the general public, that an attacking strategy directed primarily against the civilian population could not be defended morally or by the laws of war, but the military establishment responsible for conducting the campaign was itself split over this new kind of warfare.⁷¹

From this passage can be deduced that Sebald argues very much within the paradigm of historical deduction and apologia. He is looking for the ‘good reasons’ (that is, the *historical necessity*) for the destruction of German cities, and then declares that not even the British could find them. Neither can the bombardments be justified in terms of “martial law,” nor in terms of “moral law,” Sebald concludes. Hence, the destruction of German cities is not something that can be grasped “rationally.” The attempt to rationally and realistically explain the events would not do justice to their “singularity.” But of course, those bombardments fit perfectly well into the rationale of imperialism, the competition of nations, and war strategies. To search for the explanations of these historical occurrence means to look for their “historical” necessity, and hence their “justification.” This circumstance turns Sebald into a historian *pur sang*. The attempt to identify the

⁷⁰ Sebald, *Luftkrieg und Literatur*, 22.

⁷¹ Sebald, *On the Natural History of Destruction*, 20-21.

historical “conditions of possibility” underlies here the desire to come to terms with them. However, the failure to find the “good reasons” for those historical occurrences, subsequently leads to the mere astonishment and disappointed view that the “Germans” have neglected their “epic” duty of testifying to the “incomprehensible” (that is, unjustifiable) destruction of their cities during the Second World War.

An alternative depiction that does justice to the unassimilability and authenticity of (collective) memory is what Sebald is looking for. He explicitly points to the potentially ethical role that literature can perform in staging or representing this collective *and* singular or unique experience. Theoretically and aesthetically, he draws heavily on Benjamin’s “Theses on the Concept of History,” and his baroque allegorical view in the *Origin of the German Baroque Tragedy*. As a consequence, he invents the concept of a “natural history of destruction.” Human civilization in its reckless pursuit of progress is heading towards the total destruction of the environment of man and animal, as the two world wars have shown. Ultimately, in a gesture that very much reminds of Horkheimer and Adorno, civilization will turn over into mere nature, and the former is surpassed by the latter. This dialectic of enlightenment that Sebald attempts to recycle is rendered into images, photographs that depict moss covered ruins, or debris in wide empty landscapes. As Benjamin indicated, the view of the “angel of history” recasts history as petrified and decayed into images. Those images evoke the traces of human civilization and its post-lapsarian remainders, that is to say, they evoke all kinds of incomplete and spectral presences. Sebald therefore includes several photographs into his work that serve not only to display the petrified course of history into natural still lives, but also to remind us of the “false” evocation of authenticity that photographs produce by virtue of their medium, so as to draw attention to the constructedness and unreliability of Memory and the “authentic” and “affective” response that those photos induce in their viewer. Authenticity, therefore, does not mean verisimilitude, but rather a natural or plausible intertwinement between past and present tropes that emerge in memory. In this respect, Sebald’s writing style of pure association is reminiscent of a baroque melancholic submergence into the order of things, which is aimed at

subverting the hierarchy of normal historical progression. The narrative threat in *The Rings of Saturn* and *Austerlitz* therefore is deeply troubled by the associative and detailed descriptions of seemingly irrelevant objects to the point of being almost unrecognizable. As a result, Sebald appears rather as a bad imitator of Benjamin's *Berlin Childhood around 1900* or *The Arcades Project*, than as an original storyteller. His style resembles that of the extreme subjectivism and fragmentation that Lukács attributed to Naturalism and Modernism, or the "naïve" form of realism that Reinaldo Arenas attributed to the work of his rival-colleague Alejo Carpentier, for that matter. In Sebald's writings, the description of things appears as a monstrous accumulation of commodities, to use Marx's words, and as a baroque accumulation of contingent elements without inner unity, in the words of Hegel. That is to say: immersion into things is diversion from them. It is the spasmodic attempt to perceive things not as exchangeable commodities in capitalist economy, but rather as objects defined by their beauty and usefulness. Benjamin's "mimetic capacity," and Adorno's "preponderance of the object," become rather forced guidelines in the work of Sebald. In doing so, he contributes to the cliché of representation as a non-hierarchical and non-systematic clutter of objects and memories. His novels indeed literally become cabinets of curiosities, but those of natural curiosities [*Naturalienkabinett*], as Austerlitz indicates.⁷²

Sebald's own "ethical" role as an author tormented by the great responsibility of recapturing the traumas of the twentieth century, is the result of a notorious and compulsive gesture to do justice to the national and international legacy of the great catastrophes of modernity. Sebald is well aware of the individual's implication in capitalist, nationalist, and imperialist structures, but thinks that this can be critically revealed and potentially overcome by means of "good" literature. This is an assumption he shares with Bolaño and Müller. The ethical position from which to do this is the "exile." The final section will argue that the aesthetics of exile in the work of the three authors, Bolaño, Müller, and Sebald constitutes the crux of their autofiction, which in turn produces their ethical self-orchestration as posthistorical and postpolitical authors. This involves an *ars poetica* that reflects on what it means to be an "uncompromised" author.

⁷² Sebald, *Austerlitz*, 132; *Ibid*, 127.

The exile, in this regard, is “the only ethical position apart from” left and right, and “beyond good and evil.”

4. Dramaturgies of the Self: The Aesthetics of Exile as the Only Position

A contemporary book on Levinas opens with the following statement: “Our era is profoundly marked by the phenomenon of exile. [...] [T]he condition of exile, in the past relegated to the oppressed or the poor, has now become a universal condition.”⁷³ Of course, exile is a prominent experience in antiquity, in Judaism, during the uprooting wars of religion of the Baroque, for Dante and Trotsky. Also, Simmel defined “the Stranger” as a modern social type and character-mask, which he modeled after the stereotype of the “wandering Jew.” Not least, Lukács formulated exile as a general structure of feeling in modernity, by indicating that one is always somehow transcendently “homeless.” Exile and the loss of “home” are thus anything but a “new” phenomenon and concept that would be predominantly immanent to “our” era. However, as a specific structure of feeling it only emerges in concert with the notion of the individual in capitalism. As mentioned in the previous chapter of this thesis, Capital’s rigorous division into social roles and economic masks precisely produces a modern sense of individuality and belonging which at the same time always bears its anti-thesis, that of not belonging, of not coinciding with one’s social and economic part. In this respect, Sebald indicates in his collection of essays *Unheimliche Heimat*, which deals with some of his favorite German-speaking authors, that over the last two centuries the crux of all modern Austrian literature is the topic of exile and homelessness.⁷⁴

Next to the *real* material conditions, like poverty, wars, colonization, genocidal practices, and environmental disaster, that drive people into homelessness and exile, “exile” has become—and this may indeed be a more recent development—an ethical imperative. To be exiled, whether actually or imagined, means that one is a dissident and critical individual who does not merge with the

⁷³ Abi Doukhan, *Emmanuel Levinas – A Philosophy of Exile* (London: Bloomsbury, 2012): 16.

⁷⁴ W. G. Sebald, *Unheimliche Heimat – Essays zur österreichischen Literatur* (Salzburg/ Wien: Residenz Verlag, 1991): 11ff.

métarécits of the “Nation,” “People,” and “History” without leaving a remainder. “Ex-stasis,” as modern Existentialism indicates, is a state that defines future humanity as that of the “ex-ample,” i.e. the man who lives *in limbo*.⁷⁵ This type of intellectual and writer embraces “exile” as a “universal” condition of “our era,” but also as his own existential condition in particular.

As indicated before, this final section will argue that the staging of the “author in exile” is the dominant ethical and aesthetic strategy in the work of Bolaño, Sebald and Müller. All three authors left the country in which they were born. If one defines exile as banishment or as loss of homeland due to politically enforced conditions, then Herta Müller is the only one who is “exiled” according to this stricter definition. She was able to leave Romania in 1987 because the West German government had made an agreement with Ceaușescu who then granted permission to the ethnically German population to go to West-Germany upon paying a determined sum of money. Bolaño had already left Chile at an early age and spent his adolescence in Mexico City. He indicates that his “true” exile commenced after a short return to Chile, where he wanted to support the Unidad Popular in 1973. However, upon his return, he was held prisoner for a very short period and soon released because one of the prison guards turned out to be an old school friend. Bolaño returned again to Mexico and co-founded the so-called infra-realist (post)avant-gardist movement. Sebald moved to England because he received a position at the University of East Anglia. Thus, all authors have a strong affinity to the trope of homelessness, and thematize the notion of exile as a central narrative category in their works. In doing so, they mobilize a modernist trope, that of the ex-centric writer whose only true “house” and “Being” is in language. Next to Heidegger’s definition of language as the shell (or house) of Being, Lukács indicates in his *Theory of the Novel* that the modern novel is the expression of both the longing for (lost) totality *and* for the transcendental home (*Obdach*). Bolaño shares this assumption in so far as he indicates that “[b]ooks are

⁷⁵ Cf. “Like letters with no addressee, these uprisen beings remain without a destination. Neither blessed like the elected, nor hopeless like the damned, they are infused with a joy with no outlet.” “These pure singularities communicate only in the empty space of the example, without being tied by any common property, by any identity. They are expropriated of all identity, so as to appropriate belonging itself” (Giorgio Agamben, *The Coming Community*, 10-11).

the only true homeland of the writer.”⁷⁶ The inversion that holds *mutatis mutandis* for all three authors is that of exile becoming the only true homeland for them. Though, Bolaño states during a speech held in Vienna that he does not believe in exile,⁷⁷ he adds that he sympathizes (like Sebald) with the way it had been depicted in modern Austrian literature, that is, as an “attitude of life.”⁷⁸ In the essay “Exiles,” this attitude is defined as the journey of the fiction author. “All literature carries exile within it,”⁷⁹ but it is mostly the courageous author and his work of art that qualifies for exile.

For Bolaño and Sebald, exile is a literary concept, but not quite so for Müller, or so she says at least. She always objected to the appropriation of the concept in (post)modern literature. However, for the two male authors, literature itself is exile, it is the refuge of the writer and the poet. This was also the dominant experience of Arenas’ character Servando, who was constantly on the run, hiding and escaping from Spanish colonial authorities. *Men* of letters, so it seems, are always, by their very nature, *exiled*. Thus, Bolaño revives the classic modernist stereotype of the eccentric aesthetic genius who lives beside and outside himself because he lives in language and poetry. What is new, however, is that exile, more than being just a critique of the grey bourgeois philistine world order such as it was the case in E.T.A. Hoffmann’s nineteenth-century fantastic universe, is now also, according to Bolaño, the ethico-aesthetical standard against which the author and the work is measured: “True exile is the true measure of each writer.”⁸⁰ This is an ethical standard because it indicates the radical disconnection from any totalitarian, clerical, or violent ideology, and an aesthetical one, because it is the attitude of the meandering and adventurous author who does not comply with the petty taste of everyday life in modern capitalism. Exile is the escape from that grey reality. Thus, Bolaño poses the question “What is literature of quality” in the “Caracas Address.” His answer is heroic and adventurous. Good, or epic, literature is what it has always been: “*saber meter la cabeza en lo oscuro, saber saltar al*

⁷⁶ Bolaño, *Between Parentheses*, 42

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 38.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 39.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 49.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 50.

vacío, saber que la literatura básicamente es un oficio peligroso. Correr por el borde del precipicio [the ability to peer into the darkness, to leap into the void, to know that literature is basically a dangerous undertaking. The ability to sprint along the edge of the precipice].”⁸¹ Thus, Bolaño celebrates and appropriates the concept of exile to profile himself as a picaresque character who never settles and who like Don Quixote only feels at home in literature. It comes as no surprise that many of Bolaño’s characters (and alter egos) are exiled themselves. Auxilio, the narrator of *Amuleto*, is an exiled intellectual and poet from Uruguay living in Mexico. The narrator and characters of *Estrella distante* are also exiles. As a matter of fact, the title *Distant Star* itself refers to the star on the Chilean flag: the symbol and index of Bolaño’s loss of an already distant and imagined homeland.

Many of the writers featured in *Nazi Literature in the Americas* are exiles too. The book includes fictional biographies of modernist avant-garde poets who seem to have one thing in common: they are all exiles, very eccentric and great admirers of Hitler, Leni Riefenstahl, futurism, or Neo Nazi Science Fiction. Bolaño is paying an ambiguous tribute to the avant-garde, and alludes to the fate that befalls the poet far too quickly: he and his poetry are too soon forgotten. While the fictional encyclopedia recollects the work of “fictional” right-wing poets, it implicitly launches a critique towards the left avant-garde’s political hypocrisy, or even worse, its silent “a-politicalness.”

One knows, however, that “a-politicalness,” at least since Leni Riefenstahl,⁸² is rather synonymous with full integration into the sphere of the political since it grasps the relation between ruler and ruled just like the relation between the secretary and the plumber, that is, as an efficient division of labor in which the cinematographer/poet, on the face of it, does not meddle with the domain of the politician—a crude materialism and opportunism that Bolaño wants to contest. He does so by romanticizing the poet’s struggle with life: his failure as

⁸¹ *Ibid*, 51.

⁸² The film director always denied that she sympathized with the Nazis, and indicated that she was a rather unpolitical or a-political person. Cf. Mathias Schreiber und Susanne Weingarten, “Realität interessiert mich nicht” *Spiegel*, 18.08.1997
<https://www.spiegel.de/kultur/realitaet-interessiert-mich-nicht-a-0987877f-0002-0001-0000-000008761533>

well as his striving for fame and success. But, in a society where breakdown and success are no longer the result of individual intentional acts, the need to distinguish oneself as an eccentric character, is part of a bourgeois psychological apparatus that attempts to cope with the botched notion of the individual in capitalism and of “the poet” in particular. After all, artistic integrity and success do not bear a nexus in capitalist society.

What turns the “betrayed” poet potentially into a “fascist” in *Nazi Literature in the Americas*, is that the poet can fancy himself as a melancholic and eccentric virtuoso *deceived* by capitalist liberal democracy. This is a mental structure that he shares with the “unhappy consciousness” of the bourgeois poet. He experiences a disillusion (*desengaño*) with, and betrayal by, the democratic state, while, at the same time, he holds that very same state accountable for the advancement and realization of his own individual good. This paradox is further developed in Bonapartist theories of fascism, for example.⁸³ They hold that in order to secure its property rights against the threat of an emancipated working class, the bourgeoisie would rather relinquish its political power to fascism than to attempt to seize it for itself. State and society thus remain opposed in bourgeois rule. As a consequence, the petty bourgeois and/ or fascist holds the state, which is a dirempted state, accountable for his personal and social well-being or welfare. Conversely, the traditional radical left had understood that the new alliance between state and capital follows an independent logic, that of accumulation, and therefore envisions neither individual well-being nor the common good as its primary concerns.

The Bolañian picaresque inversion consists in the fact that it is not so much the bourgeois poet who feels betrayed, and thus demands the iron fist of fascism, but, rather, it the left’s betrayal and complicity with violence and power that is staged as a sort of *trahison des clercs*. This inversion is tantamount to the performative contradiction of the author himself. Bolaño’s wit, of course, consists in his implicit critique of the division of labor produced by the a-political attitude of the bourgeoisie, but, in my view, he mistakenly thinks that he can fill this gap

⁸³ August Thalheimer, “On Fascism” *What is Next*, 1930.
<https://www.marxists.org/archive/thalheimer/works/fascism.htm>

by appealing to the ethical commitment of the poet. In this view, politics has already been redefined as the sphere of opportunism, lack of commitment, “disinterestedness,” or even indifference. The sphere of ethics is subsequently staged as a sublime anarchist exile beyond the dirty affairs of political leadership and power. “The only position” quite evidently becomes the position of the isolated poet who despises political rule and affiliation. This purified position is that of Hegel’s “Beautiful Soul,” that is, eventually of “inaction.” Thus, it seems that the *real* homeland of the poet is the political exile, as the exile *from* the sphere of political action. This is the irony of Bolaño’s critique of the “cool-blooded” and “disinterested” poet throughout his entire oeuvre. The author stages his own betrayal and disillusion with politics and fancies himself as the uncompromised author in exile who does not submit himself to any “clerical” ideology. As Nietzsche and Marx each in different ways indicated, the petty bourgeois despises all claims to power and debases everything that rules. Hence, the catastrophe that Bolaño is responding to, and participating in, is the reluctance towards political emancipation in the face of both the failure of the left, and the failure of the economic independence of Latin America.

Thus, Bolaño participates in a novelistic genre and procedure that one could define as ‘post-catastrophic’ realism. The form that he has chosen for this new realism is the detective novel. The detective genre is nothing but a theatrical staging of the search for truth, or essence, insofar as it does not trust or stick to the immediacy of “sense-perception” but demands self-conscious investigation and reconstruction. The filmic aspects of Bolaño’s novels, borrowing from the genres of thriller and horror, grindhouse and film noir, contribute to quality of a “bleeding” realism, which William Egginton has defined as “the theater of truth.”⁸⁴ To this theater of truth corresponds a mode of representation permeated by holes or blanks to be filled by the narrator and the reader. In this respect, the character Bibiano, according to the narrator in *Distant Star*, speaks of the “amputated”⁸⁵ parts of the story. When he pays a visit to Carlos Wieder, who at this point in the

⁸⁴ William Egginton, *The Theater of Truth – The Ideology of (Neo)Baroque Aesthetics* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2010)

⁸⁵ Bolaño, *Distant Star*, 7.

beginning of the novel still calls himself Ruiz-Tagle, Bibiano indicates that his apartment somehow seems to be *prepared* as a stage of crime that covers up all evidence and traces of horrible events. Hence, in this scene Bibiano's description of the apartment is constantly infused with references to cinema, old Bergman films, or to Polanski's horror film *Rosemary's Baby*—a description that contributes to a “naked and bleeding [*desnuda y sangrante*],”⁸⁶ but nevertheless *staged* realism. The tension of thriller and horror films that Bolaño builds up in this scene, something that Chris Andrews has summarized as the spectator's prescience that “something is going to happen,”⁸⁷ does not find resolution, however, and the reader remains betrayed: it did not happen or at least, he does not know whether it has actually happened.

Just as baroque techniques of painting draw in the “recipient with the promise of fulfillment beyond the surface,”⁸⁸ here, the reader is drawn into the theatrical staging of the plot, but like in *trompe-l'oeil* simulations, Bolaño's stories are deceptive. His dominant strategy consists in a failure of narrative resolution, and the search for truth is mostly frustrated. One could argue that, in response to the often-quoted question from *Los detectives salvajes*, what is behind all of this, or “*qué hay detrás de la ventana?* [what is behind the window?],” Bolaño's reply is similar to that of Hegel: there is nothing to be seen behind the curtain of appearance unless we go behind it ourselves, that is, participate in, and become accountable for, the reconstruction of truth as the product of our own labor.

This assumption that literature is a science or theater of truth is not only practiced by Bolaño; it also finds an expression in the work of Sebald. For him literature is the scope of *Bildung* by means of which author is obligated to tell the truth. While Bolaño uses explicitly the form of the detective novel or story to map out the traces of memory and the lost homeland, Sebald uses the stream of conscious-like journey of the narrator or other characters as the authentic approach to reality and truth, while “truth” always must be read between quotation marks. The staging of the search for truth is produced by means of a

⁸⁶ Bolaño *Estrella distante*, 18; *Distant Star*, 8.

⁸⁷ Chris Andrews, *Roberto Bolaño's Fiction: An Expanding Universe* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2014): 148ff.

⁸⁸ Egginton, *The Theater of Truth*, 18.

collage of genre-mixing, from photography, to travelogues, rapportage to novelistic narration. What remains “stable” in Sebald’s narrative web of intertextuality and interdisciplinarity is the perspective of the exiled outsider. By virtue of his dislocation, the exile is capable of the necessary analytical gaze, articulating a critique of the complicit silence and the power of the *metarécits* of post-war modernity. One of such metanarrative constructs is the archive. The archive, which as Foucault has shown, is essentially the expression of historical power formations and relations, in Sebald is contested by means of a non-teleological or anti-eschatological journey that follows the inconsistency and gaps in the paths of memory. For the exile, eschatology, in principle, is impossible, as the narrator in “*ritorno in patria*,” the last chapter of *Schwindel Gefühle* [*Vertigos*], indicates. The return to the homeland is always a troubled return. Therefore, the narrator of *Vertigos* is incapable of pronouncing the German word *Heimat* and only feels comfortable with the Italian signifier. After Auschwitz, the homeland can no longer be articulated directly, but only *ex negativo*, or, as in the case of the Italian word, as something foreign. Many of Sebald’s characters, like Austerlitz, or the characters in *Die Ausgewanderten* [*The Emigrants*]—Dr. Henry Selwyn, Paul Bereyter, Ambros Adelwarth, and Max Ferber—participate in a development and plot-unfolding that is similar to the investigation of a detective; not of the “savage” one, as in Bolaño, but of the melancholic investigator. This melancholy is tragic and contributes to the baroque quality of Sebald’s characters. The concept of exile gives rise to a Romantic-Quixotesque feeling of the loss of a precious past, and of a troubled longing for reconciliation mediated by the remembrances of the lost homeland. This search for truth by the melancholic investigator rotates around questions such as what happened to the other characters in the past? What happened in this building, in this village? What happened to Austerlitz’s mother? How were the gypsies of the town of W. able to survive the Nazi’s genocide? But, just like in Bolaño, narrative resolution is mostly lacking. Individual crimes and perpetrators are absent because Sebald’s oeuvre orbits around the question of “collective guilt,” and subsequently points to the disastrous outcomes of modernity

that affects culture as a whole.⁸⁹ The past deaths and their mysteries admonish the present generation of the crimes of the ancestors. They return as spectral, that is, incomplete presence, as “*gespenstige Wesen* [spectral beings].”⁹⁰ “*So kehren sie wieder, die Toten.* [And so they return, the dead].”⁹¹ Yet the “specters” of the past no longer return in the shape of the fantastic as in Hoffmann’s *The Devil’s Elixirs*. This time, they return as disembodied memories seeking objects and spaces that they can occupy. Here, Sebald’s style resonates with the work of Herta Müller since what the two share is a new form of realism defined predominantly by its anthropomorphism. The objects speak, remind, and tell the stories of past generations.

The novel as an investigative strategy without resolution aligns with the idea of modernity as an unfinished project.⁹² In this respect, the specters return to admonish the current generation of their unsettled business. For Sebald, this unfinished project consists in a critical reworking of the German history. Like in the detective story, this can be done best by an “outsider,” an individual that already has obtained some distance from the homeland, and brings in a “fresh” and impartial perspective on the domestic situation. This position is that of the *pícaro*. But unlike in postcolonial theory, such as the work of Homi Bhabha, the *pícaro* is not a liberal cultural negotiator of the third space who embraces his interstitial hybridity and chooses the identity that he wants.⁹³ Rather, the exile in Sebald symbolizes cultural deterioration, not the creation of new cultures.

The exile suggests that the essence of identity and belonging can be grasped only via a *détour*, never directly, but only *ex negativo*. This idea Sebald has borrowed from Jean Améry, an Austrian Jew, who after being tortured by the Nazis in Fortress Breendonk, and surviving the death-camps of Auschwitz and Buchenwald, was no longer able to keep his German-Jewish birth name, Hanns Chaim Mayer:

⁸⁹ Individual crimes are seldom mentioned but there is one exception to this. It concerns the arresting of the Italian Furlan, and the German Abel, who are part of a mafia-like organization, called “Gruppe or Organizzazione Ludwig” and who for their murders in 1984 become sentenced to 30 years of prison, in the second part “All’estero” of *Schwindel. Gefühle*.

⁹⁰ W.G. Sebald, *Die Ausgewanderten* (Frankfurt am Main: Fischer Verlag, 1995); 17.

⁹¹ *Ibid*, 36.

⁹² Jürgen Habermas, *Die Moderne, ein unvollendetes Projekt* (Leipzig: Reclam, 1994)

⁹³ Homi Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London/ New York: Routledge, 1994).

*Améry definiert Heimat als das, was man umso weniger braucht, als man es hat, was wiederum heißt, daß alle positiven Verlautbarungen zu diesem Thema fast von vornherein verdächtig sind und daß man das, was Heimat einem bedeutet oder hätte bedeuten können, nur ex negativo, im Exil erfahren kann.*⁹⁴

Améry defines the homeland as something one needs less the more one has it, which in turn means that all positive proclamations about this topic are almost suspect from the outset, and it means that which signifies, or could signify, the homeland can only be experienced *ex negativo*, in exile (my translation, E.E.).

This passage indicates that Sebald not only thinks that the true meaning of the homeland can only be experienced from a position of exile but also that the “truth” of the homeland was an ideological experience to begin with (“*von vornherein verdächtig* [suspect from the outset]”), and therefore, an instance of inverted consciousness. An idyllic representation of *Heimat*, i.e. of Austrian and German mountain landscapes and green meadows, cannot stand uncontested in Sebald’s work, and needs to be supplemented with “distant” and “indirect” images of destruction, ruins, (mass) graves, and bombed cities. The indirectness of representation functions also as Sebald’s personal guideline for the depiction of horror and violence, something that like the homeland can only be represented *ex negativo*. Unlike Bolaño and Müller, who implement both graphic *and* indirect depictions of violence, Sebald’s *Umwege* always comply strictly with the rules of non-representative art. He has accused others, like Alfred Döblin, of mystifying explicit depictions of violence and destruction, and hence of paving the way for the Nazi’s aestheticization of war and violence.⁹⁵ Sebald situates himself, here, within the educational trend of the critical post-unification discourse. As indicated before, according to this discourse, heavily influenced by Claude Lanzmann’s filmic strategy, the Holocaust does not lend itself for consumerist pleasure or repulsion akin to that of thrillers or horror movies. Sebald’s ethics of representation differs from Bolaño’s in *2666* or *Estrella distante*. Rather than affecting the reader through graphic depictions, the works of Sebald aim at a deeper disquietude, so as to turn the reader into an accomplice, whose due is to take responsibility for the catastrophes of fascism and totalitarianism.

⁹⁴ Sebald, *Unheimliche Heimat*, 134.

⁹⁵ Michael Niehaus & Armin Schäfer, „Der Mythos der Zerstörung im Werk Döblins,“ *W. G. Sebald Handbuch: Leben – Werk – Wirkung*, ed. Claudia Öhlschläger & Michael Niehaus (Stuttgart, J. B. Metzler, 2017): 104-106.

Apart from the specific aesthetics of exile that moves away from graphic and close-up depictions of violence and trauma, exile also indicates the spatialization of time, or the disruption of historical continuity, as discussed in the previous section. Exile is a chronotope that upsets the linearity of time and the homogeneous definition of spatial and temporal belonging, as defined by the Nazis. Their synthesis of “*Blut und Boden*” links race to a specific territory, a linkage, however, that of course is not limited to their construction of race and imperialism, but that is akin to all emerging nation-states, whether it was the Spain of the *Reconquista*, or the decomposition into nation-states of former Yugoslavia. In modernity, there are only *two* economico-political systems that are each based on the rule of the bourgeoisie, the borders of nation-state, citizenship as nationality, and capitalist production modes. These two forms are fascist dictatorship and (liberal) democracy. Sebald is susceptible to this continuity, but his subjective discourse of memory is unable to grasp and represent this “family likeness” by means of qualitative analysis of political economy. One of the very few and superficial attempts to do so, amounts to yet another inverted world. In *On the History of Natural Destruction* he writes: “The prerequisites of the German economic miracle were not only the enormous sums invested in the country under the Marshall Plan [...] but also something less often acknowledged: the unquestioning work ethic learned in a totalitarian society[...] [and] experience in the use of ‘foreign labor forces.’”⁹⁶ Sebald presents here the values of postwar democracy, that is, the “Protestant” ethics of hard work—for the majority of people it is blind *necessity* rather than ethics—and the appropriation of alien labor, as something invented by fascism and still present in a democratic society. However, it is rather the opposite, as the Frankfurt School and its precursors, on which Sebald so heavily draws in his work, wearisomely repeated. Fascism, as a matter of fact, has not introduced any radically new values into German society after the Weimar Republic. Rather, fascist rule continued to use for its own purpose a fully-fledged capitalist infrastructure that it found already present at hand, and a proletarian and petty-bourgeois labor force that lent itself for continuous exploitation, wear and tear. Sebald seems to be astonished that the democratic

⁹⁶ Sebald, *On the Natural History of Destruction*, 18-19.

capitalist values that were in place before and during fascism, are again part and parcel of the post-war capitalist democracy. As Freerk Huisken and Rolf Gutte point out, part of the astonishment and interest in the everyday life under German fascism, and the sudden turn to “the ordinary man,” stems from the concern to mystify fascist everyday life as something that was permeated by totalitarianism *tout court*, and that the Holocaust was a halo, breathed out ubiquitously.⁹⁷ Such is, indeed, the procedure of Sebald’s work, where every object and personal history is in some way or the other connected to this catastrophic event. The postwar astonishment does not only relate to excuses such as “*wir haben es nicht gewußt*” but also to the quite “remarkable” affirmation of many Germans that, quite frankly, they did not notice that much of “fascism.” Also, Lutz Koepnick contested the idea that fascism can be reduced to extermination, cremation, executions, human experiments, torture, and surveillance. “Fascism” too, just like capitalist democracy, manifested itself in and through consumer-society and culture, such as the “allure of racing cars, radios, Coca-Cola, swing, and Hollywood-style comedies.”⁹⁸ The everyday life outside the concentration camp did not present any striking discontinuity for most Aryan and non-communist Germans, after all, they were per usual submitted to the rationale of making a living and spending their earnings economically. Yet, the postwar critical and democratic Germans, who spoke of a so-called “restoration”⁹⁹ during the postwar years, needed to discover the looming death camp in each cultural and political-economic practice in everyday life, during fascism and after.

Exile, then, as a term that functions like a reservoir for several subjective experiences and meanings, denotes the disruption of modernity, being at the same time its very own product. As such the exile becomes a spiritual idealization and attitude. In an interview, Sebald indicates that the outsider perspective is his own worldview:

⁹⁷ Freerk Huisken & Rolf Gutte. *Alles bewältigt, nichts begriffen! Nationalsozialismus im Unterricht* (Berlin: edition ost, 1997): 221.

⁹⁸ Lutz Koepnick, “Fascist Aesthetics-Revisted,” *Modernism/Modernity*. Vol. 6, No. 1 (1999): 52

⁹⁹ As Andreas Huyssen points out the immediate postwar years of the Adenauer period are defined by critical voices of the generation of 68’ as the period of “restoration.” The conflict is between 1968 and 1945: Andreas Huyssen, “On Rewritings and New Beginnings: W.G. Sebald and the Literature about the Luftkrieg” *Lili-Zeitschrift für Literaturwissenschaft und Linguistik* 124 (2001): 72-90.

I do like to listen to people who have been sidelined for one reason or another. Because in my experience once they begin to talk, they have things to tell you that you won't be able to get from anywhere else. And I felt that need of being able to listen to people telling me things from very early on, not least I think because I grew up in postwar Germany where there was [...] something like a conspiracy of silence [...]. I've grown up feeling that there is some sort of emptiness somewhere that needs to be filled by accounts from witnesses one can trust. [...] I would never have encountered these witnesses if I hadn't left my native country at the age of twenty, because the people who could tell you the truth, or something at least approximating the truth, did not exist in that country any longer."¹⁰⁰

As Schley points out, this quote indicates that Sebald tends to define his own position of the outsider as one that is superior to that of his colleagues, who never left their home country. The experience of the voluntary "exile" functions here as "symbolic capital."¹⁰¹ Exile is thus not only the disruption of the historical and spatial continuum of belonging but also an "ethical" position that enables Sebald to stage himself as an uncompromised author. As Sebald indicates in another interview, he thinks that "the moral backbone of literature is about that whole question of memory. [...] I knew that writing about the subject [the Holocaust], particularly for people of German origin, is fraught with dangers and difficulties. Tactless lapses, moral and aesthetic mistakes can easily be committed" (my addition, E.E.)"¹⁰² Sebald presents himself as an author who is well aware of the "pitfalls" of remembering and representing the Holocaust in post-unification German discourse. The narrative disruption and lack of resolution in his works is thus tantamount to the dominant discourse of trauma and Memory Studies.¹⁰³ In his view, one "cannot write directly about the horror of prosecution in its ultimate forms, because no one could bear to look at these things without losing their sanity." Thus, one has to approach the subject "from an angle."¹⁰⁴

In this context, Manfred Durzak has indicated that Sebald's contradictory self-staging consists in the fact that the literary critic, Sebald, condemns here even the work and literary testimonies of survivors of the concentration camps, like

¹⁰⁰ Quoted by Schley, *Kataloge der Wahrheit*, 131, from "Interview with Michael Silverblatt: A Poem of an Invisible Subject." *The Emergence of Memory. Conversations with W.G. Sebald*, (Lynne Sharon Schwartz (eds.) New York, Seven Stories Press, 2007: 84).

¹⁰¹ Schley, *Ibid.*

¹⁰² W. G. Sebald, "The last word" (Interview with Maya Jaggi) *The Guardian*, 21-12-2001. <https://www.theguardian.com/education/2001/dec/21/artsandhumanities.highereducation>

¹⁰³ Roger Luckhurst, "Beyond Trauma Tortuous time" *European Journal of English Studies* 14: 1 (2010): 11-21.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*

Alfred Andersch and Jurek Becker. In Sebald's view, their literary works do not give an accurate and responsible account of the horrors of war and camp life.¹⁰⁵ The gaze of the critical outsider, here, once more, seems to be "the only position," a position that Sebald attributes to himself, in opposition to other authors of the genre. It is a strange contradiction and accusation made by a literary critic and writer who has been bargained as a successful author in the "Holocaust-Industry," and who sets "authenticity" and "memory" as subjective maxims for his own writings. Durzak's verdict, which aligns with Radisch's judgment of Müller's novel *Atemschaukel*, is that one cannot write about camp life from second-hand experience,¹⁰⁶ a claim that, of course, sooner or later would dismantle the entire production process of the Holocaust-Industry since the generation of survivors is dying. Be it as it may, Sebald's own pretentious claim to authenticization, in Durzak's view, is thus ultimately self-undermining.

In Sebald's view, the experience of the Holocaust is the only horizon against which all modern culture is to be measured. Thus, he inscribes himself in a tradition of Austrian writers who critically engage with the legacy of fascism. For them, too, the modern feeling of transcendental homelessness is directly intertwined with the experience and legacy of fascism:

Es bedurfte eines Generationenwechsels und es bedurfte einer beträchtlichen Anzahl ethisch und ästhetisch gleichermaßen engagierter Bücher, um die Hinterlassenschaft des Faschismus auszugleichen und aufzuwiegen. Solche Bücher sind nun und werden weiterhin geschrieben. In der Berichterstattung darüber, was an der Heimat, in der die gegenwärtige Schriftstellergeneration großgezogen wurde, falsch war und unerträglich, haben sie ihre Legitimierung. Das in der neuen österreichischen Literatur so auffällige, gewissermaßen ethnopoetische Interesse an den tiefgreifenden Schädigungen, welche von den Instanzen des fortwirkenden alltäglichen Faschismus in einer in ihrem unteren Schichten weitgehend unmündigen Provinzbevölkerung angerichtet wurden, dieses Interesse wies den neuen österreichischen Autoren, von denen eine weit überproportionale Zahl diesem geschädigten Milieu entstammt, den Weg zur Überwindung der eigenen Namenlosigkeit. Als die Wortführer der in der zeitgenössischen österreichischen Literatur dokumentierten radikalen Kritik der falschen Heimat sind diese Autoren, von denen nicht wenige in einer grundsätzlichen Opposition zu ihrer gesellschaftlichen Umgebung stehen, selbst potentielle Heimatlose und Exilanten.¹⁰⁷

¹⁰⁵ Manfred Durzak, "Sebald - der unduldsame Kritiker. Zu seinen literarischen Polemiken gegen Carl Sternheim und Alfred Andersch," *W.G. Sebald: Schreiben ex patria/ Expatriate Writing*, ed. Gerhard Fischer (Leiden/ Bosten: Brill, 2009): 444-445.

¹⁰⁶ Manfred Durzak remarked this in response to my conference paper on Sebald and Bolaño that I gave in Buenos Aires on November 30 2017 for the Asociación latinoamericana de estudios germanísticos."

¹⁰⁷ Sebald, *Unheimliche Heimat*, 15.

It took a generational change and a considerable number of ethically and aesthetically committed books to offset and outweigh the legacy of fascism. Such books exist and continue to be written. They have their legitimacy in reporting on what was wrong and unbearable about the homeland in which the current generation of writers was raised. What made this Austrian literature so remarkable is to a certain extent the ethnopoetic interest in the profound damage done by the persistent instances of everyday fascism to the lower strata of a largely immature provincial population. This interest was a way to for the new Austrian authors to overcome their anonymity, a group that in disproportionate numbers originates from this damaged milieu. Many of these authors, who present a radical criticism of the false homeland in contemporary Austrian literature, and stand, thus, fundamentally opposed to their own social and national context, are themselves potentially homeless and exiled (my translation, E.E.).

Thus, exile does not simply function as an ethical vehicle for the representation of truth. It is also an “ethnopoetic” concept. Sebald connects the idea of exile and cultural “belonging” to the essential feature of literature. In a next step, the author becomes a Romantic genius betrayed by his environment and almost collapses in front of his world-weariness and melancholy, which culminates in the journey of the exile as pathogenesis. Sebald’s pompous nineteenth-century novelistic style not only appears to be consistent with the late-Romantic aestheticization of illness during the *fin de siècle*, but also shares its thematic leitmotifs of anxiety, pain, and vertigo. The paths of memory, of literature, and civilization are in fact “*Schmerzesspuren* [paths of pain].”¹⁰⁸

This is evidenced in *Die Ringe des Saturns*, which combines the progression of society as decay with the narrator’s pathogenesis *as* melancholia. In *The Emigrants*, Ambros Adelwarth, unable to bear his traumatic suffering any longer, decides to submit himself to electroshock therapy, so as to erase all memory: “*die Sehnsucht [...] nach einer möglichst gründlichen und unwiderruflichen Auslöschung seines Denk- und Erinnerungsvermögens* [longing for an extinction as total and irreversible as possible of his capacity to think and remember].”¹⁰⁹ The emigrant Max Fercher (alias Max Aurach in earlier editions) suffers from pulmonary emphysema. Memory itself becomes a disease. This nexus determines also the development in *Austerlitz*. Here, Sebald’s nineteenth-century Romantic style conjures a rather non-deliberately ironic depiction that bears similarity to

¹⁰⁸ Sebald, *Austerlitz*, 24.

¹⁰⁹ Sebald, *Die Ausgewanderten*. 167; W. G. Sebald, *The Emigrants*, trans. Michael Hulse (New York: Vintage, 2002): 161.

the Hoffmannian heroes, who experience a moment of dissociation and disorientation right before they break out into madness:

Es war, als drängte eine seit langem in mir bereits fortwirkende Krankheit zum Ausbruch, als habe sich etwas Stumpfsinniges und Verbohrtes in mir festgesetzt, das nach und nach alles lahmlegen würde. Schon spürte ich hinter meiner Stirn die infame Dumpfheit, die dem Persönlichkeitsverfall vorangeht, daß ich in Wahrheit weder Gedächtnis noch Denkvermögen, noch eigentlich eine Existenz besaß, das ich mein ganzes Leben hindurch mich immer nur ausgelöscht und von der Welt mir selber abgekehrt hatte.¹¹⁰

It was as if an illness that had been latent in me for a long time were now threatening to erupt, as if some soul-destroying and inexorable force had fastened upon me and would gradually paralyze my entire system. I already felt in my head the dreadful torpor that heralds disintegration of the personality, I sensed that in truth I had neither memory nor the power of thought, nor even any existence, that all my life had been a constant process of obliteration, a turning away from myself and the world.¹¹¹

One may be reminded the scene in *The Devil's Elixirs*, in which Medardus is incarcerated in the dungeon, and suffers from an outbreak of madness, while his double enforces himself onto his language and consciousness as if it were an alien evil power. Like Medardus, Austerlitz too is a character who constantly shifts between conscience and nescience. His epistemological and existential uncertainty caused by the trauma in infancy is connected with the existential suffering of the artistic genius:

Was immer vorgehen mochte in mir, sagte Austerlitz, das Panikgefühl, mit welchem ich vor der Schwelle eines jeden zu schreibenden Satz anfangen könnte, dehnte sich bald auf das an sich einfachere Geschäft des Lesens aus, bis ich unweigerlich bei dem Versuch, einige ganze Seite zu überblicken, in einen Zustand der größten Verwirrung geriet. Wenn man die Sprache ansehen kann als eine alte Stadt, mit einem Gewinkel von Gassen und Plätzen, mit Quartieren, die weit zurückreichen in die Zeit, mit abgerissenen, assanierten und neuerbauten Vierteln und immer weiter ins Vorfeld hinauswachsenden Außenbezirken, so glich ich selbst einem Menschen, der sich aufgrund einer langen Abwesenheit, in dieser Agglomeration nicht mehr zurecht findet, der nicht mehr weiß, wozu eine Haltestelle dient, was ein Hinterhof, eine Straßenkreuzung, ein Boulevard oder eine Brücke ist. Das gesamte Gliederwerk der Sprache, die syntaktische Anordnung der einzelnen Teile, die Zeichensetzung, die Konjunktionen und zuletzt sogar die Namen der gewöhnlichen Dinge, alles war eingehüllt in einem undurchdringlichen Nebel.¹¹²

Whatever was going on within me, said Austerlitz, the panic I felt on facing the start of my sentence that must be written, not knowing how I could begin it or indeed any other sentence, soon extended to what is in itself the simpler business of reading, until if I attempted to read a whole page I inevitably fell into a state of the greatest confusion. If language may be regarded as an old city full of streets

¹¹⁰ Sebald, *Austerlitz*, 265.

¹¹¹ Sebald, *Austerlitz*, 180.

¹¹² *Ibid*, 182-183.

and squares, nooks and crannies, with some quarters dating from far back in time while others have been torn down, cleaned up, and rebuilt, and with suburbs reaching further and further into the surrounding country, then I was like a man who has been abroad a long time and cannot find his way through this urban sprawl anymore, no longer knows what a bus stop is for, or what a back yard is, or a street junction, an avenue or a bridge. The entire structure of language, the syntactical arrangement of parts of speech, punctuation, conjunctions, and finally even the nouns denoting ordinary objects were all enveloped in impenetrable fog.¹¹³

This passage exemplifies in many ways the constituents of Romantic modern authorship. There is the psychoanalytic connection to the childhood trauma, and the subsequent pathological destabilization of the ego of the writer-character, Austerlitz. Sebald picks up the linguistic turn, which substitutes the philosophy of consciousness with the philosophy of language. Henceforth, language itself functions as the notion of the (un)conscious. The indirect allusion to Freud's *Civilization and its Discontents* describes the unconscious as a city. The analogy between architecture and mental life is implemented persistently throughout the plot of the novel. The metaphor of the roads and paths,¹¹⁴ point to the pilgrimage as the unfolding of the plot, and finally to the purification of the character's pathogenesis. As the passage above indicates, modern man is inherently disoriented, no longer able to find his way in the agglomeration, or "urban sprawl," of modern society, as the English translation puts it. This erring pilgrimage functions analogously to the progression of time and the pathogenesis of the character Austerlitz.¹¹⁵ Illness becomes the psycho-somatic materialization of a fundamental and existential fear of decay and disintegration, disorientation, and here, quite literally, *Abbau*. Whereas for Bolaño, language remains a somewhat stable trope, Sebald's depiction of the "House of Being" gradually becomes demolished, since the character suffers from loss of memory, nausea, and trauma. The exile is homeless and sick, *homesick*. The above-mentioned experiences of social isolation, panic attacks, aphasia, and amnesia, point to existential crisis in the psychopathogenic development of the main character, but they are also the

¹¹³ *Ibid*, 181.

¹¹⁴ The ideas of illness and pilgrimage constitute the explicit framing of the *The Rings of Saturn*. And of course, it is also the setting and point of departure in Hoffmann's *The Devil's Elixirs*.

¹¹⁵ This synthesis of the flow of time and pathogenesis has been one of the pinnacles of German modernism, amongst other works, it has been the dominant theme in Thomas Mann's *The Magic Mountain*.

constituents of the classical modernist stereotypes of the aesthetic genius, from E.T.A. Hoffmann, to Arthur Schnitzler and Thomas Mann.

The modern trope of the aesthetic genius as an eccentric and exiled character is what all three authors latently implement. For Bolaño it is the sociopath and sadist demonic genius, for Sebald it is the melancholic and traumatized genius, and for Herta Müller, exile and homelessness are the constituents of the traumatized and broken writer in modernity. For Müller too, exile and trauma are connected to language and literature, though *not* directly and not for *everyone*. For Müller, just as for Sebald, language as such *cannot* be the *locus patriae*. The affirmation *Sprache ist Heimat* [language is the homeland] does not lend itself, in her view, to simple appropriation by those authors who have an untroubled relation to their homeland: “Autoren, deren Heimat unwidersprochen parat steht, denen zu Hause nichts Lebensbedrohliches zustößt, irritieren mich mit dieser Behauptung [Those authors, for whom the homeland exists without contradiction, for whom at home nothing life-threatening occurs, irritate me with this affirmation (my translation, E.E.)].”¹¹⁶ For Müller, it is unacceptable to use the equation *Heimat = Sprache* without reference to the survivors of the Holocaust or other politically prosecuted and exiled authors. It is an *obligation* [*Pflicht*] to reference those writers and intellectuals who have coined this affirmation. Müller herself prefers, however, the more practical affirmation of Jorge Semprún, a Spanish camp survivor who in *Federico Sánchez* wrote: “*mi patria no es ni siquiera la lengua [...] sino el language* [my homeland is not language [...] but that which is spoken].”¹¹⁷ In this way, she substitutes the homogenous notion of language (*langue*) shared by an abstract people with a performative notion of language (*parole*) that, at the same time, serves to indicate borders. Müller draws esoteric borders and a field that separates those who are “in the know,” and have thus the right to claim “exile” as a symbolic capital, from those “out of the know.” Her tone is often resentful to the authors and critics that

¹¹⁶ Herta Müller, *Heimat ist das was gesprochen wird* (Blieskastel: Gollenstein, 2001): 23-24. “*Was bleibt? Was bleibt, ist die Muttersprache*,” is another variation of this affirmation quoted by Agamben, *Remnants of Auschwitz*, 159

¹¹⁷ “Semprún sagt: “*Im Grunde ist meine Heimat nicht die Sprache (...) sondern, das was gesprochen wird*” (Müller, *Heimat ist das was gesprochen wird*, 26).

she describes as “*intakt*,” that is, those who are not writing from exile and cannot testify to the *beschädigtem Leben* [damaged life] that Adorno spoke of in *Minima Moralia*, for example.¹¹⁸ Only individuals with these experiences *in extremis* can testify to totalitarian harassment and genocide, and therefore can act as *experts* regarding the hardships that individuals have to endure in their home country: they are “in the know.” Here, the criterion is not knowledge, but first-hand experience. Those, who are in the field (in the know) are also those who are defining legitimate judgments of taste and ethics. Excluded from the field is the “regular” proletarian labor force and reserve army. They are, after all, *just* excluded from the wealth produced in their society, and subject to a slow, but nevertheless steady, “erosion.” The deprivation of their labor force undercuts the deprivation of the survivors of totalitarianism, who are deprived of their identity and freedom, their sense of self.

One can perceive here quite evidently, the shift from politics to ethics, and from collective organization to individual identity. Political and economic difference have become less decisive. Müller has created a literary universe where there is only cruelty, torture, totalitarianism, and charismatic dictatorial leadership. In this vein, her work is a typical outcome of the post-historical and post-political era. The world is no longer divided by political conflicts but only by personal and individual experiences of pain. The resulting absence of politics already constituted the central theme of Hannah Arendt’s work on totalitarianism, who described fascism as the “rule of nobodies.” Fascists are men without content who lack ideology, a political program, or “deep” philosophical and ethical reflections. The villain, or evil enemy, often termed “the dictator” or “the king” in Müller’s work, becomes a *banal* and apolitical character. He is the personification of the attack on liberal values of freedom and citizenship, and of the violation of the global ethical order. As such, he constitutes an “evil outlaw.”¹¹⁹ Thus, political conflict in posthistory is no longer a conflict between ideologies, nation-states, or classes, but between those who belong to the global ethical world-

¹¹⁸ Theodor W. Adorno, *Minima Moralia: Reflexionen aus dem beschädigten Leben* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1951).

¹¹⁹ Benn Michaels, *The Shape of the Signifier*, 172.

order and those who deny, and thus remain external to, it. The exile who fell victim to these totalitarian leaders in the East have the right to claim their global citizenship and to be included into this ethical order. The regular labor force of this ethical order, in contrast, has little to complain about: “*Sie haben sicheren Boden unter den Füßen* [They have safe ground under their feet],” as Müller indicates.¹²⁰ They are no outcasts. They have not been marginalized. This, Calderón’s baroque *autos* had already ironically shown, as discussed in the previous chapter of this thesis. The workers and the reserve-army do not in any way remain external to bourgeois capitalist relationships, they are a central category of those relations. As such, they do not qualify as excluded, marginalized, or exiled subjects, and can therefore not be captured in terms that describe the oppressed. Their human rights have not been violated. They have the right to shelter, education, property, and a fair wage. Whether they succeed in realizing these rights is their own individual problem. After all, in capitalism, there are *only* rights and no guarantees, as the material actualization of those rights is a purely private matter.

In the quote below, Sebastiaan Faber has illustrated how the “exile,” denoting the right to be admitted to the global ethical community, has become a popular concept, capitalized on, and by, the Humanities:

Exile evokes sympathy and appeals to the imagination. To many people exiles are fascinating, romantically heroic figures. Their lot, moreover, can be fruitfully cast in an epic, dramatic, or tragic mode, depending on one’s particular need or preference. And exile lends itself to sweeping, melodramatic generalizations about the importance of home, the pain of loss, and the illusory consolations of nostalgia.¹²¹

Exile itself functions as symbolic capital in- and outside academia. It is a successful commodity traded on the cultural marketplace. Müller has requested in an open letter to the Chancellor Angela Merkel in the *Franfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* the opening of a “museum of exile” for all those individuals who during and after the war were forced to leave their home country, and for all “the artists who have been displaced from GDR and Eastern European dictatorships.” This is

¹²⁰ Müller, *Heimat ist das was gesprochen wird*, 24.

¹²¹ Sebastiaan Faber, “The Privilege of Pain: The Exile as Ethical Model in Max Aub, Francisco Ayala, and Edward Said,” *Journal of the Interdisciplinary Cross Roads* 3: 1 (2006): 11

not a very modest or selfless gesture, quite the contrary: “*Ein wenig gehöre ich ja auch dazu* [For a small part, I am also a part of this].”¹²² The demand is for nothing less than the institutionalization of exile, so as to construe it as an official site of collective memory. Müller’s appeal was not without success. In 2011 the “Museum of Exile” opened its doors in Berlin, and the experience of writers like Müller and other “displaced” people have successfully entered the archive as official German cultural heritage. In the work of Müller, her subjective experiences are always mentioned in concert with the discourse of human rights, and especially the German task to mediate conflict and safeguard human rights in the East. Her individual concerns and experiences may be subjective, but her ethical claims are global, or so the argument goes. This is not the least of reasons why Herta Müller is such a popular and celebrated author in Germany today. During the introduction of a discussion and interview with Müller and Svetlana Alexievich, at the Maxim Gorki Theater in Berlin on February 25 2021,¹²³ Klaus Kleiderer, Senator for Culture and Art in Berlin, emphasized that it is Berlin’s duty, as one of Europe’s cultural capitals, to vouch for human rights, and especially defend artistic freedom of speech (the ethical global order), something that in the East of Europe can be far from taken for granted. Thus, the two female authors are not only invited to testify to the horrors of totalitarianism or other illiberal developments in the East (Ukraine and Belarus) but also to the superiority of West, and especially to a Germany that already envisions a new *Ostpolitik*, with itself as a mediator and custodian of democratic processes in Europe.

During that same interview, Müller appeals to the German responsibility to intervene in Eastern political processes and to accept and accommodate as quickly as possible artists, writers, and journalists subject to violations of freedom of speech and political prosecution. This is a rather convenient appeal to the German administration, after all, German refugee policy in Europe has served as

¹²² Herta Müller, “Brief der Nobelpreisträgerin Herta Müller an Bundeskanzlerin Angela Merkel – Menschen fallen aus Deutschland,” *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* 24.06.2011 <https://www.faz.net/aktuell/feuilleton/buecher/autoren/deutsche-kulturpolitik-erinnert-ans-exil-1652383.html>

¹²³ Herta Müller, “Berliner Korrespondenzen Spezial: Rewriting the Future with Svetlana Alexievich and Herta Müller, *Maxim Gorki Theater*, Live Stream 25 February 2021. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xWPjwPZd1GU> Accessed 31 August 2021.

an example not *just* for humanitarian reasons. Admitting political refugees, like Herta Müller, of course, always implies a denial of the sovereignty of the refugees' country of origin, and signals to this country that it has been excluded from the global ethical community. Admitting political refugees classifies the country of origin as a failed state, unable to provide for and safeguard the human rights of its citizens. The fact that this is not simply a humanitarian but can also be an openly aggressive imperialist gesture is easily illustrated with the case of Edward Snowden, a political refugee, who before finding refuge in Russia, applied for asylum in dozens of other countries around the globe. All Western countries denied him asylum, since no one there dared to violate US sovereignty and expel the country from the global ethical community. Thus, when Herta Müller makes an appeal to European and especially German leaders to admit refugees from Ukraine and Belarus, she has placed herself in the midst of current imperialist European politics. And, when Müller specifies that it is literature that can act as a mediator between the old totalitarian home country and the new free country of the exile, she has placed literature in the service of that very same international political framework. This makes literature more than just a therapeutic and an elucidating medium that helps the individual traumatized exiled writer to objectify and stage his or her trauma. For Müller's audience, her work and interviews become an instrument of enlightenment that informs about the violation of human rights and the unheard-of-threat of war in "the midst of Europe." In doing so, it creates a popular support-base for German foreign affairs. On top of that, more recently, refugees not only from Belarus and Ukraine, but also from the Middle-East have been implemented again as a weapon in the imperialist struggle between East and West over the Eastern European territories. Refugees, therefore, never simply constitute a struggle over human rights, but are always implemented as a means of pressure in imperialist politics.

However, the broader geopolitical consequences of the concept of exile in Müller's work are of course also linked to a personal story and the individual experience of existential fear. It is the paranoid worldview of constantly being surveilled and prosecuted. In several interviews and essays, Müller has given an account of the various threats and harassments by the *Securitate*. As an

acquaintance of a former and obstreperous group of young writers who called themselves *Aktionsgruppe Banat*, of which Müller's ex-husband was a member and founder, the secret service already had an eye on her. When she started to become a critical writer herself, she regularly became the target of the *Securitate*, who entered her apartment while she was absent, changing the location of objects in her rooms, so that she would feel threatened. Once on her bicycle, she got knocked by a bus driver on purpose, and the hairdresser used some strong irritating chemical that wounded her scalp.¹²⁴ The goal of the *Securitate* was not only to silence her, but also to blackmail her into becoming an informant for them. This, however, according to Müller, they never managed to achieve, in opposition to many other acquaintance writers, including her co-author Oskar Pastior. She keeps emphasizing the fact that she remained "non-corruptible," and this circumstance enables her to stage herself, just like in the case of Sebald, as the uncompromised and uncompromisable author.

The aestheticization of the alienated view, caused by the awareness of persistently being on the radar of Big Brother, has been noticed as a recurring theme in Müller's work. It is the gaze of someone who already exists outside herself and who is complicit with her "auto-surveillance." It is the gaze of the individual who is doubly "exiled," alien to herself and alien to the environment. Thus, exile functions as a meta-literary concept that enables Müller to write about what it means to write about the world and oneself while being surveilled by others. It is a foreign view of oneself and one's surroundings. In Müller's own words, the field of literary criticism has discovered in her work something that they call the *Fremde Blick* [alien gaze]. The essay, *Der Fremde Blick oder Das Leben ist ein Furz in der Laterne*, reacts to her literary critics and refutes the assumption that her work contains either the politico-exotic gaze of the foreigner, as mentioned before, or the gaze of aesthetic alienation akin to literary Modernism or Surrealism. The alien gaze is neither the gaze of a "foreign eye arriving to a foreign country," nor a product of fantasy or tendency to Surrealism:

¹²⁴ Müller, *Der Fremde Blick*, 5-9.

*[D]er Fremde Blick [wird mir] im doppelten Mißverständnis bescheinigt. Zum Mißverständnis, ich hätte den Fremden Blick seit ich in Deutschland bin, kommt noch ein Mißverständnis der Literaturprofis dazu. Sie halten den Fremden Blick für eine Eigenart der Kunst, eine Art Handwerk, das Schreibende von Nichtschreibenden unterscheidet. Erst mit der Zeit habe ich gemerkt, daß Schriftsteller dieses Mißverständnis stolz in Anspruch nehmen und mitstricken. Sie reden sich selber und anderen oft genug ein, das Schreiben unterscheide sich von jeder anderen Arbeit. Es bürge dem Künstler Lasten auf, von denen Nichtschreibende verschont bleiben. Autoren stilisieren ihre Arbeit zum Ausnahmezustand der Existenz. Sie lassen ihre angebliche Besonderheit gern bestaunen wie ein Goldblättchen. Sie verkaufen den Fremden Blick als Tugend.*¹²⁵

[T]he alien gaze [has been attributed to me] by means of a double misunderstanding. In addition to the misunderstanding that I would have adopted the alien gaze since I arrived to Germany, there is also a misunderstanding on the part of the literary professionals. They take the alien gaze to be a specialty of art, a kind of craft that distinguishes writers from non-writers. It was only over time that I noticed that writers proudly claim this misunderstanding and participate in it. They tell themselves and others often enough that writing is different from any other work. The artist would have to deal with burdens from which non-writers are spared. Authors stylize their work into a state of emergency. They let others admire their supposed extraordinariness as if it were a golden leaf. They sell the alien gaze as if it were a virtue (my translation and modifications, E.E.).

Müller disputes the assumption that the alien gaze would be a literary concept or stylistic device, a sort of Shklovskian “defamiliarization,” a Brechtian *V-Effekt*, or Ortega y Gassetian *deshumanización*. Her implied readers may notice against the author’s own claim, however, that it *is* of course a classical modernist procedure. However, Müller presents the counter-example of her own mother, who never wrote literature, but spent five years in a *gulag*, a circumstance that resulted in her mother’s alienated form of perception, because of her experience of starvation: “*Die Kartoffeln waren das Grundnahrungsmittel, der Grund zum Verhungern oder Überleben. Meine Mutter hat überlebt und steht in ewiger Komplizenschaft mit der Kartoffel* [The potatoes have been the staple food, and as such the cause of starvation or survival. My mother has survived and has therefore entered into an eternal complicit relation with potatoes (my translation, E.E.)]”¹²⁶ The other example she mentions in *Der Fremde Blick* is the experience and perception of a female survivor of the concentration camp Buchenwald, who cannot bear it when people barbecue meat in her proximity.¹²⁷ While fervently negating the literariness of the alien gaze, Müller has indirectly *affirmed* her own proximity to

¹²⁵ Müller, *Der Fremde Blick*, 21-22.

¹²⁶ *Ibid*, 22.

¹²⁷ *Ibid*.

camp survivors, a claimed proximity that could already be noticed in Sebald. This proximity situates her own position and worldview as socially and morally superior to others who did not grow up in a surveillance state. The alien gaze, thus, functions in her work as an ambiguous “privileged marginality,” one that denotes a certain ethical superiority of the exile who is able to see the world from a perspective wider than those who are stuck in one place and the same routine of capitalism. The term “privilege” of course indicates that certain groups have better access to economic and symbolic capital by virtue of their gender, class, race, and sexuality; and indicates that others who do not pertain to this privileged group are excluded from these benefits. It relies on an identitarian framework that indicates that those who have not experienced these mechanisms of oppression are unable to speak about them. It shapes an esoteric framework in which some people hold power, privilege, knowledge, and others do not. Müller argues that those who have not experienced the condition of exile and political prosecution, do not have a right to speak about it. This would of course disqualify Sebald as an author writing about exile all together, while he was the German author living in England, who, in turn, excluded those authors who never left their home country from his own position of privileged marginality.

The alien-gaze, in Herta Müller, however, functions also as a phenomenological term, and designates the opposite of what Husserl would have called the natural attitude [*natürliche Einstellung*], denoting the world of representation taken in its immediacy before the so-called bracketing or *epokhé*. The alien gaze no longer takes the natural existence of things for granted and breaks up common patterns of signification insofar as it insists on the disruption of signifier and signified. This is *again* a philosophical and literary commonplace: “*Die Einheit der Dinge mit sich selbst hatte ein Verfallsdatum. Alles rundum schien nicht mehr sicher zu sein, ob es das, oder dies oder etwas ganz anderes war. Über kurz oder lang gab es nur noch nichtige Dinge mit wichtigen Schatten* [The coincidence of things with themselves has reached an expiration date. It was not clear anymore whether the surrounding things were this or something entirely other. Sooner or later, there were only vain things with important shadows (my

translation, E.E.).”¹²⁸ The alien gaze renders the strange familiar and the familiar strange. One cannot entirely hold it against Müller’s literary critics and admirers that they thought they had found some of the most dominant literary and philosophical concepts in her writing. It is not a simple lapse in taste and judgment to interpret phrases like: “*Unbekanntes muß nicht fremd sein, aber Bekanntes kann fremd werden* [The unknown does not need to be strange, but the familiar can become strange]” in a Freudian or Hegelian manner.¹²⁹ Those modern(ist) elements were after all what the literary critics had appreciated for the last 150 years. The fact that now Müller ethically discredits these modernist self-affirmations amounts to a performative contradiction on her side rather than on the side of her critics. In this respect, Karin Binder has defined the alien gaze as “poetological narrative strategy.”¹³⁰ Sanna Schulte has indicated that, considering Müller’s own collage-poems, it is difficult to ignore the alien gaze as a literary concept.¹³¹ A collage deals with “exiled” words: a word is taken out of its context and put into another to which it never can seamlessly adapt. This is a sheer aesthetic procedure, of course. However, suddenly, the mere focus on *form*, characteristic of the modern institution of art and literature as theorized by Peter Bürger, is presumably deemed to be “obsolete.”¹³² What all three authors, Bolaño, Sebald, and Müller have in common is that they mobilize the commonplaces of aesthetic existentialism and modernism, and warp them into ethical categories. The problem that persistently returns in their work is that they do not believe in exile nor in Romantic notions of belonging, yet they carry their “homeland” in their writings everywhere. Now, the aestheticization of the political in art, the graphic depictions of violence, and commodification of political estrangement are procedures that the three authors condemn. However, they are unable to differentiate themselves from precisely these aesthetic procedures.

¹²⁸ *Ibid*, 9

¹²⁹ *Ibid*, 11: [“The unknown does not need to be strange, but the known can become estranged.”]

¹³⁰ Karin Binder, “Herta Müller: Reisende auf einem Bein (1989), *Handbuch der deutschsprachigen Exilliteratur – Von Heinrich Heine bis Herta Müller*, eds Bettina Bannash & Gerhild Rochus (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2013): 466.

¹³¹ Sanna Schulte, “Blicken und Schreiben („Der Fremde Blick“), *Herta Müller Handbuch*, ed. Eke Norbert (Stuttgart: J.B. Metzler, 2017): 188.

¹³² Peter Bürger, *Nach der Avantgarde* (Weilerswist-Metternicht: Velbrück, 2014): 105ff.

Postscriptum: In Lieu of a Conclusion

The drama of modernity which is still unfolding in front of our eyes, and which distributes and assigns functions and roles to virtually every region and segment of this world, not only turns all living beings into “resources” and “fuel” for the economy but also renders vast numbers of people into spare, useless and superfluous entities. The tramps, refugees, unemployed, lumpen, and homeless have not disappeared because they are a very immanent and necessary aspect of the bourgeois society itself. After two hundred years of advanced capitalism, living, i.e. renting or buying accommodation, is for the large part of the labor force still an impossibility, while living somewhere is not a choice: one cannot decide *not* to live somewhere, since it is the condition for all other economic activities, production and reproduction. The number of the homeless, however, have doubled in the Netherlands alone over the last decade.¹ Next to the increasing presence of the “foreign” refugee without shelter, a new “domestic” type has emerged, the so-called housing or renting nomad. For him, periods of employment alternated by moments of unemployment go hand in hand with intervals of being homeless – not transcendently homeless, but *actually* homeless.

In Cuba, they have a specific name for such outcasts; they call them “*Palestinos*.” This social type denotes the poor and unemployed from Santiago de Cuba who come to Havana in order to make a living, but they can only do so as tramps and *lumpen*. The name they have been given, “*Palestinos*,” already implies that they have no protection from the state and are second rank citizens: the mere surplus population of capital. Indeed, I say capital, here, and not communism.

In this thesis, I have chosen to predominantly read Arenas’ and Sarduy’s texts not as a critique of Cuban autocratic “communism,” but more generally as a critique of bourgeois economic and political values. This is not to say that I think that the critique of the Cuban Revolution is redundant, but I do perceive developments, such as the Cuban Revolution, in the larger framework of the creation of the world market, i.e. global capitalism, to which the Cuban Revolution,

¹ “Aantal daklozen sinds 2009 meer dan verdubbeld,” CBS. 23/8/2019. <https://www.cbs.nl/nl-nl/nieuws/2019/34/aantal-daklozen-sinds-2009-meer-dan-verdubbeld> Accessed 18/10/2021.

however, attempted to provide an answer. They did so by organizing labor to the degree that its primary logic was not the increase of profit in the pockets of the foreign bourgeoisie, but the supply of basic goods and services for the population. What they aspired to was independence from the money-economy and the market. However, this dream of independence turned out to be a self-*engaño* as Cuba could not assert its independence from the free market. Instead, the tourist industry made sure that dollars were flowing into the economy persistently. What is left of the promise of autonomy is nearly nothing today. The “Lineamientos de la Política Económica y Social del Partido y la Revolución” for the Sixth Party Congress made this quite clear: Cuban socialism in the eyes of the Party has failed. The population has lived *too well*. The people have been too lazy and not productive enough, which is another way of saying that the costs of reproduction are simply too expensive, and production is not profitable enough. Therefore, the new socialism indicated that new “incentives” in the form of wage differences are necessary to keep the population “motivated” to work harder.² What is needed is a restructuring of the economy according to capitalist values. Thus, the “new socialism” indicates that it needs to leave “socialism” behind. But, already for quite a while, Cuba has been following the logic of “state capitalism.” What began as a critique of the market has now turned into an ardent “self-critique:” the old socialism was a mistake, and the new one must adapt itself to the mechanisms of the market.

What is true in current “socialist” societies is no less true in bourgeois economic relations: the great achievement of capitalism, automatization, does not result in less labor time for everyone, but rather in higher unemployment rates overall, which means on a global scale more tramps, more *lumpen* and more refugees. In this sense, automatization which bears the utopian ideal of

² Some fifty years after the Revolution, the new Commander-in-Chief, Raúl Castro puts it in the summary of the “Lineamientos” in the following way: “Incrementar la productividad del trabajo, *eleva la disciplina y el nivel de motivación del salario y los estímulos, eliminando el igualitarismo en los mecanismos de distribución y redistribución del ingreso.* Como parte de este proceso, será necesario suprimir gratuidades indebidas y subsidios excesivos (‘Lineamientos, 8-9) [Increase labor productivity, *raise discipline and the spurs of wages and incentives, eliminating egalitarianism in the commodities of distribution and redistribution of income.* As part of this process, it will be necessary to eliminate undue gratuities and excessive subsidies (My emphasis and translation, E.E.)

effortlessness is in our society not a blessing but a curse.³ Automatization only exists to the degree that it is profitable, and the reality is that living labor is still so cheap today that it bets out the costs of the automatization process in many occasions. Moreover, automatization has become a short hand for the full mechanization and atomization of social life: the creation of a self-contained “automatic subject” (i.e. capital) over which the actors and participants have no control, but which they, nonetheless, continue to reproduce and impose upon another.

In short, our world is still an inverted one. The four chapters in the dissertation have each shown a different aspect of the inverted world from the perspective of literature and philosophy. Various belated baroque types of *pícaro*, such as the Romantic Genius, the Drag Queen, the Sovereign, or the Author in Exile have been discussed. These types are all archetypes of the intellectual and artistic drop-out, who no longer can bring his aesthetic, ethical, and political ideals in line with the ruling values and laws in society. Since this breach leads quite evidently to unhappiness – Hegel got this quite right – eventually, the solution of the artistic *pícaro* is to stage inversion, transformation, or revolution in *art*, which is to say as a *game*. This game, however, would be quite uninteresting, if the novel or work of art in question would just treat the troubled musings of the individual as a mere psychological case study. Yet, the types of *pícaros* reveal something about the *general* typology of social relations and the individual’s the desire to escape from them.

While Marx would say that the individual, as we know it, is the necessary social expression of capitalist relations, Hegel would probably now indicate that capitalist relations have been unable to realize and accommodate the notion of “true” individuality. If the individual, that is, the reconciliation between the

³ In the years 2017-2018 a wave of panic regarding automatization hits Dutch media outlets. I will just mention a few entries, here: “Ook uw baan wordt straks geraakt door robotisering,” *Financieel Dagblad*, 30/01/2017; “NOS op 3 Tech Podcast: robots pikken je baan in.” *NOS op 3* 16/03/2017; “Robotisering treft de helft van de banen,” *Trouw*, 04/04/2018; “Ruim helft van onze banen over 7 jaar door robots gedaan.” *Algemeen Dagblad*, 17/09/2018.

Tilburg Professor for labor markets, Ton Wilthagen wrote an open letter to the government in which he outlined the potential hazards and negative implications of robotization or automatization for the labor market: “Politieke Visie dringend nodig om robotisering in goede banen te leiden.” 18/02/2017.

general and the particular cannot be realized in capitalism, individuality has to be sought “elsewhere.”

Thus, the picaresque position is the aesthetics of exile, that is, “the only position apart from” the antinomies of bourgeois society. From this position, the *pícaro* is *free* to comment on the social and political context, precisely, because, art, just like the domain of religion, family, and work, constitutes in bourgeois society an *independent* sphere that has been *freed* from the political. The situation in Real Socialism is, of course, different. That is why in Cuba authors are faced with censorship. In bourgeois society, in contrast, the fate of art has been decided by depoliticization. The bourgeois conception of the political as *depoliticization*, thus eventually leads to the progressive ending of everything: art, history, and the political itself. Hegel, and subsequently Marx, described the foundation for this process as the political diremption of society into a public sphere of political representation and into the “private” sphere of all other relations of social intercourse, such as circulation, production, reproduction. This means that, in modernity, art’s full depoliticization,⁴ has been calculated from the outset, just like that of other “private” activities. And, it means also that with the separation of the political from the economical, capital’s laws and mechanisms function *sui generis*, more or less independently of all wills in society. The economical emerges as an autonomous sphere that cannot be fully determined or mastered by the political. It conjures an inverted world in which economics is not instrumental to social and political development, but the latter two are determined by the interests of the former, almost exclusively.

The aesthetic position of the *pícaro*, one of “sovereignty” and “exile” is comprehensible, or *nachvollziehbar*⁵ as one says in German, insofar as it provides a critical perspective from the outside, but it is not the solution to the problem of modernity. Separation and isolation are notions that have already been absorbed by the logic of the market. Therefore, the off-side position cannot be the way out

⁴ Depoliticization is not the lack of political content but the independence or separation from the sphere of the political. Since in the case of the Cuban Revolution the separation between those spheres has not been yet accomplished, the political and private have to be in line. As a result, those who cannot bring the two in line, either had to leave the country or were imprisoned.

⁵ The word means “traceable,” and “comprehensible,” something that can be traced and one has to trace in order to understand it.

of the drama. While the types of *pícaro* presented in the thesis were looking for an exit strategy, for autonomy (artistic, political, economic), the inverted world eventually indicates that what one is looking for is not autonomy or sovereignty but rather the opposite: dependency: (comm)union with the other. The off-side is the position of relinquished power, of powerlessness, and Bataille mockingly admits this. The dismemberment [*Zerstückelung*] into different spheres, functions, and individuals is the crux of the organization of bourgeois society. From this point of view, the proposed rewriting of “philosophy” and “history” cannot act as surrogates for the change of basal economic relations. We need political institutions and organizations that operate against existing institutions, and, least but not last, a collective praxis that consists in a persistent fighting down of capital through struggle for better working conditions and wages.

Therefore, if anything, the lonely *pícaro* is the mocking (de-)realization of the anti-social individual that capital seeks to naturalize and posit as absolute. In doing so, the picaresque makes visible the blatant non-coincidence between the individual and society, word and world, thinking and being. Since so far, no other social form but capital has been so effective in hiding the incongruence between the sphere of representation (equality) and the sphere of production and circulation (inequality), the *pícaro* is a necessary stage in uncovering these contradictions. This is what makes the picaresque, defined in this thesis as a matter of belated baroque, still a potentially subversive position today, because it uncovers what is persistently covered up.

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Samenvatting

[Nederlandse titel] *Verkeerde werelden en late barok*

Dit proefschrift onderzoekt de esthetische en politiek-economische relevantie van twee literaire gemeenplaatsen, “de verkeerde wereld” en “de wereld als theater.” De analyse van deze *topoi* betreft zich op een aantal teksten uit de Duitstalige en Latijns-Amerikaanse moderne literatuur en filosofie. De doelstelling van het onderzoek is, vast te stellen in hoeverre deze twee wereld-metaforen een kritische bijdrage aan het maatschappelijk debat kunnen leveren en wat hun heuristische waarde daarbij is.

Terwijl de oorsprong van deze twee metaforen ver terug in de mondiale cultuurgeschiedenis gaat, stelt dit proefschrift dat de politiek-economische relevantie van deze concepten zich voor het eerst in de context van de expansie en crisis van de wereldmarkt tijdens de barok openbaart. De barok dient hier niet zo zeer als een stijl of kunsthistorisch tijdperk gezien te worden, maar als het predicaat en de esthetische manifestatie van het opkomend kapitalisme en het aanbreken van het moderne tijdperk. De barokke esthetiek karakteriseert zich door een overvloed van vormen, tegenstellingen en *chiaroscuro*-effecten. De barok en de bijbehorende esthetiek gebruik ik als *transhistorisch* begrippen die niet zo zeer aan het idee van een epochenclassificering gebonden zijn, maar aan een sociaal-esthetische manifestatie, d.w.z. verschijningsvorm, die vanaf de 17^{de} eeuw tot ver in onze eigen tijd rijkt. Tevens is de barok ook een *transcultureel* begrip dat zich op verschillende continenten manifesteert. Het proefschrift plaatst zich hier duidelijk in de Latijns-Amerikaanse theoretische traditie van barok en neobarok, die transculturaliteit en culturele symbiose benadrukt.

De in dit onderzoek besprokene *topoi* van de verkeerde wereld en de wereld als theater worden als “late barokke” [belated baroque] esthetisch kritische verschijnselen gedefinieerd. Het concept van “de verkeerde wereld,” dat ook de betekenis van een “omgekeerde” wereld heeft, gaat terug op de bewustzijnsfilosofie van Hegel en Marx, en stoelt op de fenomenologische scheiding tussen enerzijds de verschijningen, en anderzijds het wezen van de sociale fenomenen in de moderne samenleving. Marx spreekt in dit verband van een “verkeerd

bewustzijn,” en impliceert daarmee, dat de dingen in de moderne maatschappij anders aan de mensen verschijnen dan dat ze zijn. In een samenleving, waarin de vrije markt de overhand heeft gekregen, zijn de maatschappelijk gepraktiseerde mystificatie van de markwerking en de reïficatie van de sociale relaties van de mensen onderling het ideologische mechanisme, waardoor de mensen en de dingen zich tot elkaar verhouden. Dit gebeurt echter voornamelijk op onbewuste wijze. Daardoor wordt een sociaaleconomische rollenverdeling aangenomen, die in dit proefschrift aan de hand van de laat-barokke metafoor van het wereld-theater besproken wordt. Uitgangspunt hierbij is dat de vrije markt mensen tot theatrale rollendragers reduceert, die zich onderling als verkoper, producent, speculant, vluchteling, vagebond, armoedzaaier of grootgrondbezitter tot elkaar verhouden, en daarmee de sociale tegenstellingen in de maatschappij reproduceren en intensifiëren. Het veelal onbewuste aspect van dit handelen of *acteren* leidt niet slechts tot een verkeerd bewustzijn en dus tot de naturalisatie van deze sociale verhoudingen, maar ook wederom tot een verkeerde of omgekeerde wereld. Zowel Max Weber als ook Karl Marx hebben aangetoond, dat de moderne mens in maatschappelijk economische structuren gevangen is, waaruit hij individueel niet kan uitstappen. Echter, deze structuren bestaan daarentegen alleen omdat de mensen onderling zelf aan elkaar op een dagelijkse basis de wetten van de markt opleggen.

Het eerste hoofdstuk van dit proefschrift bestaat uit een theoretisch kader dat niet alleen binnen de recente intensivering van de “*sociological turn*” in de literatuurwetenschap gesitueerd kan worden, maar zich ook op de eerdere ontdekking van literaire principes in de sociologie aan het begin van de vorige eeuw baseert. De samenhang van literaire en sociologische kritiek komt naar voren door middel van de gedeelde belangstelling voor het zogenaamd “typische” of “typologische” in de moderne maatschappij dat aan de hand van de zogenaamde “sociale typen” uit de analyse van de socioloog Georg Simmel beschreven wordt. Simmel beriep zich bij zijn sociale typen op de esthetische uitwerking van romanfiguren uit de burgerlijk realistische roman. Literaire personages verwijzen niet simpel naar fictieve individuen, maar juist naar maatschappelijke typen, die tevens ook sociaal-theatrale rollendragers zijn. De gemeenschappelijke interesse

van literatuur en sociologie bestaat dus uit de kritische beschrijving van de burgerlijke maatschappelijke verhoudingen.

De Europese kapitalistisch-maatschappelijke rollenverdeling, eenmaal geëxporteerd naar, en opgelegd aan, de koloniale gebieden produceert noodzakelijkerwijze een nieuwe maatschappelijke tweedeling een daarmee ook herordening van de lokale rollenverdeling. Het postkoloniale perspectief op Latijns-Amerikaanse context blijft in het proefschrift behouden en dient als basis voor de ontwikkeling van nieuwe barokke lees- en interpretatiestrategieën in een door de wereldmarkt toenemend geglobaliseerde wereld. Deze leesstrategieën berusten onder meer op de perspectivische theorie van de barokke schildertechnieken van *trompe-l'oeil* en *anamorfose*, zoals gedefinieerd door Severo Sarduy. Daarnaast zijn de laat-barokke leesstrategieën onder andere ook gebaseerd op de term “acculturatie” van de socioloog-antropoloog Fernando Ortiz, die sociaaleconomische processen als een tegenstrijdige ophoping van culturele en economische lagen beschreef. Vervolgens wordt in dit hoofdstuk de “verkeerde wereld” als een dialectisch principe uitgewerkt dat enerzijds de moderne wereld als een door antagonisme bepaalde samenhang definieert en anderzijds duidt op de noodzakelijkheid van een algehele omkering van economische en morele waarden in de maatschappij.

Het tweede hoofdstuk gaat over het literaire genre van het fantastische als een concrete esthetische uitwerking van de verkeerde wereld. De maatschappelijke reïficatie en mystificaties krijgen door middel van het fantastische een concreet gestalte en zijn het gevolg, zo beargumenteert het proefschrift, van het burgerlijke falen om wezen en verschijning van de dingen te verenigen. Het gevolg is een verscheurd bewustzijn dat kenmerkend is voor het fantastische in de moderne cultuur, omdat de kloof tussen de ideële en de reële wereld als absoluut geponeerd wordt. De twee laat-barokke schelmenromans, E.T.A. Hoffmanns *Die Elxiere des Teufels* en Reinaldo Arenas' *El mundo alucinante* beschrijven de breuk tussen idealiteit en realiteit aan de hand van het sociale type van de moderne dichter en schelm, die de poëtische waarheid als enige uitweg ziet om de eenheid te herstellen. Tevens kunnen beide romans gezien worden als een commentaar op de poging tot nationale eenheid in zowel de Latijns-

Amerikaanse alsook de Duitse gebieden in de context van het kapitalistische burgerdom en de markteconomie in de 19^e eeuw. Een pessimistisch of sceptisch wereldbeeld met betrekking tot het geloof in historische progressie lijkt hier echter de overhand genomen te hebben. Ook kunnen beide romans als een kritisch commentaar gelezen worden op het idee van historische progressie en het historische determinisme, dat kenmerkend is voor zowel het 19^e eeuwse idealisme alsook het positivisme.

Het derde hoofdstuk onderzoekt de topos van het wereld-theater nader en bespreekt het theatrale en sociaaleconomische begrip van het “masker,” ook wel “karaktermasker” genoemd. Het masker is hier een begrip dat wederom de breuk tussen verschijning (oppervlakte) en wezen (kern) zichtbaar maakt en betrekking heeft op de burgerlijke definitie van het maatschappelijke subject: het individu. De eerste sectie gaat over de vraag onder welke voorwaarden het individu in de moderne maatschappij kan bestaan, en wat zijn essentiële eigenschappen zijn. Daarna worden voorbeelden van verschillende maskers en individuen uitgewerkt, die ook altijd in sociologisch en esthetische zin als ideaaltypen gezien moeten worden. Deze ideaaltypen en maskers zijn, de “vrouw,” de “*drag queen*” en de “soevereine denker.” Het gaat hier wederom gedeeltelijk om laat-barokke schelmachtige typen, die te maken hebben met de breuk tussen realiteit en idealiteit, en in een sociaal-antagonistisch krachtenveld geplaatst zijn, waaruit zij proberen te ontsnappen. Zij zoeken daarom naar een positie buiten deze verhoudingen. Ze lijken in eerste instantie aan de sociale tegenstellingen en de burgerlijke antinomieën te kunnen ontsnappen, doordat ze nieuwe esthetische, economische en filosofische waarden tegen de heersende maatschappelijke waarden proberen te mobiliseren. Het hoofdstuk stelt echter kritische kanttekeningen bij dergelijke ontsnappingspogingen.

Het vierde en laatste hoofdstuk gaat ervan uit dat de moderne omkering van de traditionele waarden uiteindelijk plaats maakt voor het postpolitieke en posthistorische perspectief, wat ook altijd samengaat met een reactionair gevoel van verlies van maatschappelijke waarden. De postpolitieke en posthistorische visie wordt geanalyseerd aan de hand van drie hedendaagse schrijvers, Roberto Bolaño, Herta Müller en W.G. Sebald. Zij representeren het huidige concept van

de geëngageerde schrijver dat haaks op de poststructuralistische definities van auteurschap staat. De auteur is nu niet langer een op de achtergrond staande instantie, die in feite weinig controle heeft over de uitlegging van het geschreven werk, maar becommentarieert en stuurt de interpretatie van zijn werk. Er kan gesproken worden van een zogenaamde “*confessional turn*.” Literatuur fungeert hier als autofictie, waarbij de eigen herinneringen en belevenissen van de auteur als commentaar op het maatschappelijke debat gezien kunnen worden, en daarmee tot een collectieve beleving worden gemaakt.

De literatuur na het postmodernisme, zo luidt de these, doet recht aan de quasi-metafysische zoektocht naar de zin van het leven in het heden, waarbij het “heden” gezien moet worden als het “logische” en chronologische resultaat van verleden processen. Het gaat hierbij om een latent historisch determinisme waarbij het literaire en culturele debat zijn blik naar het verleden en richt om het heden te begrijpen. Deze blik naar het verleden - het gevolg van verschuiving van traditionele historiografie of geschiedschrijving naar de “*memory studies*” of het herinneringsdiscours - gaat gepaard met een zekere depolitisering van het maatschappelijke debat. De catastrofes van de 20^e eeuw, bijvoorbeeld het fascisme en het stalinisme in Europa, of de bloedige guerrillaoorlogen en het repressieve staatsgeweld in Latijns-Amerika hebben tot een diep wantrouwen ten opzichte van het “politieke” geleid. De politieke wereldvisie wordt in de context van de romans als “totalitair” beschouwd en vervolgens verruild voor de ethische wereldvisie. Het ethische wereldbeeld legt de nadruk op de morele plicht om rekenschap en getuigenis af te leggen voor de schending van de mensenrechten uit het verleden om zo tot een kritische beschouwing van het heden te komen. Het argument in het hoofdstuk is dat een dergelijk herinneringsdiscours ten eerste ten koste gaat van een politieke visie op de toekomst, en daarmee met het concept van het politieke zelf en ten tweede uitgaat van een problematisch historisch determinisme dat het heden tot het logische en noodzakelijke resultaat van voorgaande historische processen reduceert.

Het herinneringsdiscours is niet alleen het gevolg van het postpolitieke en posthistorische maar, zo wordt beargumenteerd, ook het resultaat van de scheiding tussen het privé domein van de economische verhoudingen en het

publieke terrein van politieke representatie. Deze maatschappelijke verscheuring, samen met het algemene wantrouwen in de politiek, leidt bij het individu tot een verlies van een algehele politieke visie, als mede het vermogen om tussen linkse en rechtse politiek een onderscheid te maken.