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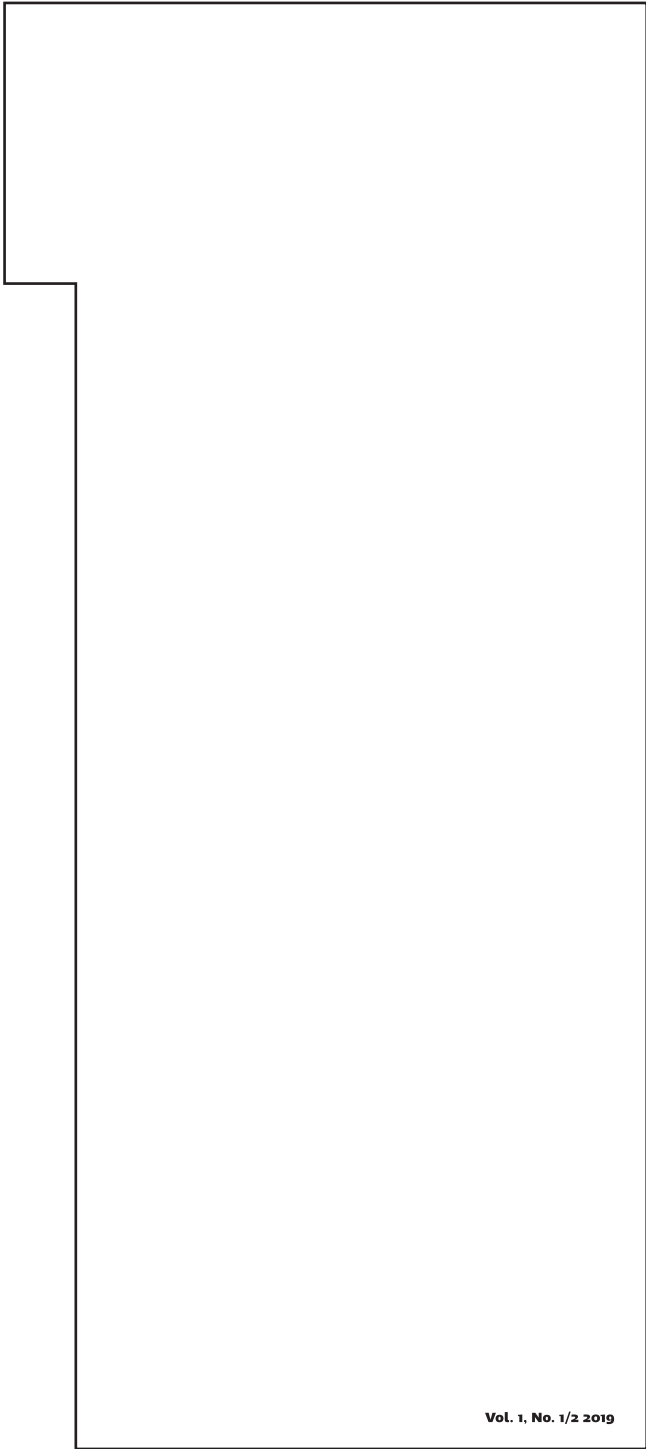
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# Cross Cultural Studies Review

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Cross - Cultural Korea





# Village Tutelary Deities as Cultural and Axiological Symbols in Korea and Romania\*

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## Abstract

An artistic creation expressed as a cultural phenomenon symbolizes the characteristics of a nation's soul and mental life. And the cultural heritage of a nation, which shows us the religious symbols and signs in the great nature to be harmonized with the profane and the sacred, is also easily found in the East and the West. Troytsa, Jangseung, Sotdae: these can be taken as representative. Regarding the Romanian cultural heritage of Troytsa, the village tutelary deity conforms very similarly to Korean Jangseung and Sotdae. Jangseung and Sotdae, representative popular sculptured creations of Korean folk beliefs, and which are related to the totem pole, are close to villagers' lives, being the divine protection of the village's peace, as well as functioning as a signpost and a boundary, ensuring a good harvest and preventing misfortune, etc. A Sotdae, which features a bird on top of a pole, is recognized as an object of belief mixed between the "Tree of the World" and the "Bird of the Soul" in northern-cultural Asian shamanism. Unlike them, the Romanian Troytsa, which took root in an ancient faith (the Totem of the Tree), is a divine, sculptured creation mixed with Christianity, generally located at the entrance of a village or at an intersection of roads. These tutelary deities and their variations share functions and characteristics, but their features and patterns are different. Jangseung have angry and fearful countenances in order to turn away diseases and evil spirits, but Sotdae and Troytsa maintain the style of a menhir or a column as one of the folk beliefs related to the totem pole. Even today, Troytsa, Jangseung, Sotdae are being generated and developed as representative cultural prototypes and village tutelary deities.

**Keywords:** folk belief, cultural heritage, tutelary deity, totem pole, Jangseung, Troytsa

## 1. Introduction

Ethnic ideology and folk beliefs, which occupy a prominent place in culture, have a profound effect on the spiritual world and human behavior patterns. Therefore, understanding ethnic ideology and folk beliefs can

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provide a barometer for enhancing nations' self-understanding of their identities and cultures as well as their values of life. The Koreans' and Romanians' religious and cultural identities are based on their inner notions, which follow the laws of nature. The spatial perception of this nature can be implicitly found in folk songs which represent both countries. The space of the *Arirang*, a representative Korean folk song, begins with a place called a "hill," while the space of *The Little Lamb (Miorița)*, a representative Romanian folk song, starts from "the foot of the plateau" which is like "the entrance to heaven," which is a similar image to the Korean hill. If *Arirang's* hill is a symbol of unbearable suffering and how it overwhelms the Korean people, *The Little Lamb (Miorița's)* "plateau" becomes the eternal spatial matrix for the existence of Romanians.

*Arirang* and *The Little Lamb (Miorița)* are situated in the spiritual worlds of the two communities, and are substances that form the spiritual life of the unconscious. Both songs begin in temporal life and reach the spirituality of transcendence, organically linking the problems of everyday life, identity and existence. The emotions of these people are also expressed in daily life and folk beliefs.

An artistic creation expressed as a cultural phenomenon symbolizes the characteristics of a nation's soul and mental life. The house or the church, among the various formative arts, reflects, in many cases, not only a proper and philosophical art, but also religious beliefs and a permanent national identity. The cultural values and heritages which show us the religious symbols and signs in the great nature which are to be harmonized with the profane and the sacred, are also easily found in many nations. First under discussion is Troytsa (Troiața), the figure of a village tutelary deity grafted with Christianity and which is representative for Romanians; then Jangseung and Sotdae, based on Korean folk beliefs, will follow.

Troytsa (Troiața) were derived from the Sky Columns which originated at the beginning. It includes the divine sense of the Tree of the World or the Tree of the Cosmos. The near Troytsas (Troiațe) which we can see today are types made after the acceptance of Christianity. On the other hand, Jangseung and Sotdae reflect the Shamanism which is accepted in Korean culture and the tradition of folk beliefs related to the totem pole in villages. As traditional Korean totem poles standing at village entrances and signifying prayers for a good harvest and a village's peace, Jangseung and Sotdae also have the features of a divine, sculptured creation of the Tree of the World, and they are installed at the entrances of villages or at the intersections of roads, taking the form of a pillar, tombstone, menhir, column, etc. Both Troytsa (Troiața) and Jangseung and Sotdae generally have the functions of a signpost, a boundary, keepers of a village's peace, ensurers of a good harvest, preventors of misfortune (or evil) and divine protection. An attempt at a comparative study of

Troytsa (Troita) and Jangseung and Sotdae, with points of similarities and differences, will be significant for a cross-cultural understanding.

## 2. Hierophany, the Manifestation of Sanctity

One primitive form that shows an image of a village tutelary deity is the Sky Columns or pillars. They have been perceived as sacred artifacts from prehistory to the Middle Ages, in which human mythical, magical and religious perspectives and interests are concentrated. In this regard, Eliade (2005: 62) understood the human thoughts and concerns about the world to be a human obsession about being at the center of divinity or at the center of heavenly communion.

According to Romanian mythologist Romulus Vulcănescu and his book *The Sky Column (Coloana Cerului)*, the endurance of the sacred monuments of the sky pillar and sky column type, monuments that concentrate the mythological, magical and religious perspectives of the people, was clearly proved and perpetuated by means of succedaneums and simulacra into the 20th century. In the same sense, Arboreal totemism (*Totemismul arboricol*), the Tree cult (*Cultul arborilor*) and Dendrolatry (*Dendolatria*) – which are all consequent stages (and, to a certain point, coexistent) in the development of the magic and religious vision of prehistoric people, and especially the inhabitants of the Carpathians – materialized in 'the worship of a tree that has acquired a sacred position,' 'deification' and the 'sanctification of trees,' that have acquired the status of sacred monuments (Oprișan viii-ix). The spiritual life of the community can be endured only under the symbol of the protection tree, which is the center of the world, corresponding to the ancient point of view. This 'Protection Tree' was becoming a totality of a totem that symbolizes an absolute deity or a spirit ruling the tree.

The Tree of Life or the Protection Tree, which itself becomes a microcosmos, is rooted in the celestial sphere, heading up or down the corolla, and imagined as the Giant Tree or the Tree of the Cosmos, connecting the three levels of underground, earth and the celestial (Molyneaux 90). This Tree of the Cosmos becomes the Immortal Tree which stands at the center of the sky and the earth and sustains the universe at the same time as it ascends from the earth to the sky (Eliade 1992b: 388). Meanwhile, the Protection Tree or some particular trees were seen as celestial trees that prevented the sky vault from falling down, or when they were represented with the branches downwards – to prevent the earth from slipping into the abyss (Oprișan ix). Finally, the Tree of the Cosmos is located at the center of the world, its roots stretching to hell, and its branches touching the sky, functioning to unite the three spheres of the universe into one (Eliade 1992a: 42-43).

These manifestations of sacredness begin to manifest themselves in various forms and intangible heritages expressing the deity of a family or the village guardian of faith. The modern acceptance of this phenomenon fit well within the Jangseung and Sotdae or Seonangdang (shrine to the village deity) of Korean culture and the Cruciform Troytsas or Shelter Troytsas of Romanian culture. Human communities can promote the communion of heaven and a divinity through a sacred tree like the Sky Columns, and more recently through the Troytsa (Troia), the Cross, the Menhir, the Seonangdang, etc. Therefore, people thought that it was possible to exist in an absolute sanctuary where the underground (hell), the earth and heaven (the sky) meet, and these three mythological and religious realms unite into one; in other words, people believed that only it was only in the center of the world that the manifestation of sacredness was possible (cf. Eliade 2008: 19). Furthermore, beside the stylized columns in place of the Tree of the Cosmos or the Tree of Life, there was an altar to offer tribute or sacrifice, and the branches of this tree were hung with objects with a symbolic value or ribbons with a magical function. This cultural ritual corresponds to the Geumjul (a straw rope – to ward off evil spirits) or the Jipguleok (mesh of straw) of Koreans surrounded by sacred objects or places.

The stylized columns and pillars that functioned as the Tree of the Cosmos began to be gradually replaced by the 'cross type,' which became a typical model of Christian formations in Romania starting in the 14th century, and in Korea, Jangseung, which have descended from the Intaehyeongsinsang (a statue of the human figure) very early, before the period of the Three Kingdoms,<sup>1</sup> and which have reached modern times as a typical form.

### **3. Korean Folk Beliefs and the Nature of Village Tutelary Deities**

As the basic religion of Korea, folk beliefs are the main energy source for religious culture as well as the spiritual element of the national culture. The diverse types and objects of belief in folk beliefs have been mentioned as the sky god, the mountain god, household deities, shamanism, divination, omens, Fengshui (divination based on topography), magic,

1 The periods that the Three Kingdoms existed on the Korean peninsula: Goguryeo (BC 37-AD 668, an ancient country developed on the northern Korean Peninsula and China), Baekje (BC 18-AD 660, a country located in the southwest of the Korean Peninsula, and it had a great cultural influence on Japan) and Silla (BC 57-AD 935, located on the southeast of the Korean Peninsula, conquered Baekje and Goguryeo, which unified the Three Kingdoms).

and natural objects. Nonetheless, in terms of everyday life, beliefs are largely divided between the community beliefs of the village unit and the individual beliefs of the household unit.

The goal of folk beliefs is to obtain wealth and health as the fundamental requirements of survival, and they include the regenerative meaning of changing the unfortunate reality of illness and poverty into a new reality of wellness and riches. However, the newly obtained 'being' becomes wasted and worn out as time passes, and a new being must be obtained. In other words, there is a double-sided disposal and regeneration of reality, and the significance of this cycle is the regeneration of being. According to Eliade (2008: 55-66), regeneration, otherwise referred to as the idea of the repeated creation of the universe, indicates a periodicity in which the creation of the world is repeated every year, effecting the periodic renewal of time. Past time must be discarded for a new beginning, and a purification ceremony is needed, such as an exorcism, that indicates 'the restoration of time.' Thus, in general, most ancestral rites of folk beliefs are held regularly in accordance with seasonal customs. The riches obtained from the ancestral rite are discarded after a certain amount of time; thus, they are intended to obtain permanent viability through periodic regeneration.

For Koreans, villages are communities of life, labor and entertainment, as well as communities of beliefs and rituals. 'Village beliefs,' the manifestation of a community that prays for peace and prosperity, exist to perform ancestral rites using a form of the 'village ritual,' which is an ancestral rite for the village god that protects the village. If this ancestral rite is held according to the ancestral ritual formalities of Confucianism, it is called a 'village ritual' or 'village god ritual'; if a shaman participates, it is called a 'village exorcism.' Unlike seasonal ancestor-memorial rites or memorial services held beside a grave and based on blood ties, the village rituals, the harvest ceremonies of agricultural rituals that became folk beliefs, are representations of village beliefs held mostly in farm and fishing villages in January under a regional unity.

Village rituals hold different objects of belief for worship, such as the village god and the mountain god (both types of tutelary deities), as well as the dragon god, through ancestral rites, putting up Jangseung and Sotdae (two different types of totem poles - the former having carved faces and the latter a bird at the top of a wood or stone pillar)<sup>2</sup> - for a

2 There are many opinions about the origins of Jangseung. Generally, Jangseung originated from the Intaehyeongsinsang (statue of a human figure) of the Neolithic Era, and Sotdae is a figure arising from the origins of the agricultural patterns of the Bronze Age (a bird sitting on each side of the ends of a bifurcated tree) (Lim et al. 352; 366). Jangseung, Sodo (the sacred area for a sacrifice to God) and Nunseokdan (a stone walled temple), which were sacrificed to the gods of heaven, were formed in a deep relationship with North Asian folklore (Lee, Jong-ho 174-177).

good harvest next to the location of the ceremony. These ceremonies are usually held in spring and autumn, and many places hold ancestral rites at midnight at the beginning of January or during the year's first full moon. Representative village beliefs include tutelary deity beliefs, represented by mountain god beliefs and Jangseung' and Sotdae' beliefs. Tutelary deities are worshipped for such utilitarian purposes as village protection, prayer, fortune seeking and cures. The mountain god is the tutelary deity in mountain areas, the sea god in fishing villages and the village guardian in homes; these also act as travel gods that guard travelers when they are away from the village. Thus, a shrine is located at the entrance of the village, along the street or on a hill, which acts as a sanctum. The tutelary deity belief is presumed to have been influenced by Mongolia's Ovoo belief<sup>3</sup> and China's Sunghwang belief.<sup>4</sup> It can be interpreted that the vertical movement system of gods: sky god - mountain god - other tutelary deities, may have been subsumed into folk beliefs.<sup>5</sup>

As part of the tutelary deity belief, the mountain god belief is especially important. Mountains are the foundation of life as well as the shelter of life for Koreans. As can be seen in *The Heritage of the Three States*, Dangun became the mountain god of Asadal when he died. Thus, because mountains were thought to be the habitation of gods who came down from heaven, they were sacred territory, places of reverence and objects of worship. People believed that there was a god with a personality in the mountains, so they held an ancestral rite called 'the mountain god ritual,' through which they prayed for the peace of the village and asked for protection from tigers. There are various names for the shrines of gods: thus, the place for worshipping the mountain god was called 'the mountain god shrine' or 'the village deity shrine,' and the place for worshipping other tutelary deities at the entrance of the village was called 'the tutelary deities shrine.'<sup>6</sup>

Next to these sanctums stand the Jangseung and/or Sotdae, which are also objects of belief. Jangseung and Sotdae beliefs are directed at the lower gods among the village guardians, which are worshipped around

3 The Ovoo, which is similar to Korea's stone tower, acts as a signpost, a boundary, or an object of belief.

4 Sunghwang means building a castle in an important place. This is a Chinese belief of accepting the sunghwang god, which is the god of the castle town, as the city's guardian.

5 The Ovoo belief primarily entered the Korean Peninsula where it was mixed with the beliefs of the mountain god and the sky god, forming the tutelary deity belief. Here, China's Sunghwang belief was also mixed in. Thus, tutelary deities may have originated from the beliefs of the sky god and the mountain god (Kim et al. 136).

6 It is located at the entrance of the village or a sanctum, and even though it is not a shrine, piles of stones or wood created for worship are also generally referred to as tutelary deities shrines (Lee et al. 8).



the time of the village rituals. The popular belief of Jangseung or that of Sotdae is a part of the native cultural heritage and fruit of the rural faith being evaluated as a typical Korean natural feature for a long time, together with the ritual of the ancestral shrine, the convention of the totem pole, shamanist customs, etc. Being a low-ranking god among the village's gods, Jangseung was long-before called Beoksoo, Jangsaeng, Jangjoo, Daehoo, Sohoo, Deoseung, Jyangseung, etc. (cf. Kim, Doo Ha 12-17; Kim et al 2003: 141; Kim, Tae Kon 186).



Image 1. An example of Jangseung  
(from Cheong 35)

Jangseung are generally divided into 'seok-jangseung,' which are made of stone, and 'mok-jangseung,' made of wood. At first this is a kind of simple wooden column or a standing stone, and later it generally has the feature of a fearful warrior mixing with the popular religion or the folk belief of a mountain god, the Taoist (or Buddhist) faith consecrated to the Big Dipper (the Great Bear),<sup>7</sup> the Four Devas,<sup>8</sup> etc. Thus, the faces are carved with fierce expressions, the male jangseung is painted in red, while the female in yellow. The names vary according to where the jangseung stands; for example, the 'temple jangseung' is at the entrance of a Buddhist temple, the 'byeoksa (to drive away evil spirits) jangseung' is at the entrance of a village, the 'road sign jangseung' along streets serves as a signpost as well as a deity, the 'bibo (fulfilling insufficiency) jangseung' is to protect weak places and the 'chief gatekeeper jangseung' stands in front of a castle gate like the 'harubang' of the island of Jeju.

As mentioned before, these Janseung are also different in figuration,

7 It is also called the personified gods of the Big Dipper (the Great Bear) which manage humanity's agriculture, life and death, fortune and misfortune, etc.

8 They are the four heavenly guardians of Buddhism which stand at the right and left side of the main gate in the temple.

type, significance and symbolism according to different regions and periods. The representative roles among the the principal functions of Jangseung are divine protection, as in preventing misfortune when same disaster or disease comes to the village, and as the signpost at the entrance of the village, the intersection of roads or at the border between villages. We guess that this tradition originated in ancient religious beliefs based on the village's peace and welfare, good harvests and superstitions regarding the prevention of misfortunes. All kinds of Jangseung which are still standing are generally evaluated as products of folk culture as well as part of a representative heritage of village beliefs that have been with us for a long time, along with shamanism.

The Sotdae, a carved bird sitting on a pole or stone pillar, is perceived in North Asian shamanism culture as an object of belief with a long history, combining the Tree of the World with a bird. With one to three wooden bird(s) or iron bird(s) placed at the top of a pole, a Sotdae sometimes stands alone, but usually it stands with a Jangseung at the outskirts of a village. Judging from the image of a bird pole engraved in relics from the Bronze Age, it is presumed that Sotdae may have been used in religious ceremonies since 6 B.C. (Kim et al. 144-145), and this type of Sotdae can be found in Siberia, Manchuria and with the northern ethnic group of Mongolia. Naturally, a Sotdae has had the function of the divine protection of a village, preventing evil, well-timed rains and winds, a good harvest, etc., since the beginning of the Agricultural Age.



Image 2. An example of a Sotdae (from Lee, Pil-young 47).

The opinions of what kinds of birds are put on the top of a Sotdae's pole are very diverse, they are either a duck or a sacred ibis related to the symbols of abundance, the (life-giving) water, or a crane, a dragon or a phoenix related to rising up in the world and gaining fame. But, according to Kim, Ui-suk's opinion (145-146), this bird is considered to be a crow. Just like a tiger as a mountain god or as a spiritual and mysterious being of mountain, a horse as a tutelary deity, a big snake as a household mascot or a luck animal, a cow as a worshiped ancestor, a pig as a god of the earth, a dog as a ghost of a person who died while staying abroad,



the crow is regarded as an object of sanctity, a good omen, the help of Heaven and renewal.

As such, there are various views about the bird on the pole. It may be perceived as a water bird or a migratory bird related to water among the three symbolic icons of richness (moon, women, water). A representative view is that it is a duck;<sup>9</sup> a duck (or a wild goose) is a migratory bird that brings the wind and water necessary for farming, connoting a symbol of agricultural water and the religious symbolism of a desire for change in village life (Lee, Pil-young 12; 40). Moreover, ducks consider the sky, ground, and water - heaven, earth, and the underground (underwater) - as their ecological territories. As migratory birds that appear and disappear on a regular cycle, they imply seasonal changes and supernatural travel. They hover between the transcendental world and the human world, as well as the worlds of death and life, taking on the meaning of revival with a strong religious symbolism (Lee, Jong-ho 180-181; Choi et al. 416-417). The Jangseung and Sotdae culture, similar to north Asian folklore, was naturalized as folk culture in the mid-Joseon Dynasty (17th century) period, later being settled upon as the lower gods that protect a village, or boundaries and signposts.

The person who presides over shamanism is the shaman; it is individualistic, but the transmitters of universal folk beliefs are communities, such as tribes and villages, and they are utilitarian. As can be seen from village beliefs, Korean folk beliefs have the strong characteristic of community beliefs.

#### **4. Romanian Village Tutelary Deities: Troytsas (Troia)**

The sculptured art called Troytsa (Troia) can be found in many places in Romania, such as at the entrance or the center of a village, an intersection of roads, a well side, at a church or monastery, on a bridge, at a border between villages, at a public cemetery, etc. With the function of a road signpost or a boundary, a Troytsa (Troia) signifies a prayer for the villagers' peace, for those who come in and out of the village, and it is a divine protection preventing misfortunes and the evil. The Troytsas of our days follow a typical pattern after the acceptance of Christianity, being sculptured and painted with cruciforms or icons. Besides, they are also decorated frequently with

9 On the contrary, there is a view that the bird in the sotdae is not a duck but a crow (magpie). Just as people considered the tiger as a mountain god and a mystical creature, the horse as a tutelary deity, and serpent as karma, the cow as an ancestral spirit, the pig as the earth god, and the dog as the ghost of those who died abroad, they may have considered the crow a sacred object and a symbol of a godlike bird or the sun. (Kim et al. 145-146)

the forms of a roof, arch, lattice, semicircle, or circle.

Some Troytsas (Troite) adopt the pure symbolic designs of Christianity (Orthodox) and others are geometrically decorated with figures of plants or animals inspired by nature, and there are also various patterns which are supposed to be under the influence of ancient religious shapes such as the sun, the Tree of the World, the Tree of the Cosmos, a dragon, 'the bird of the soul',<sup>10</sup> etc. The decorations of these various patterns which are sculptured into Troytsas appeal to ethnic feelings and in many times Romanians have also adopted them in their household goods and even in churches. In fact, these contain artistic characteristics for the expression of beauty. On the one hand this is a divine religious instinct, but on the other it is an incantatory mark of popular belief.

The oldest wooden Troytsa (Troita) was made in the 18th century and a stone one is presumed to have been crafted in the 14-15th century (Oprisan viii). Use of the Troytsa (Troita) overcomes the long tradition of being buried and smoked. It keeps the sacred above the profane, in the substance of the reconstructed material, and it is possible to engage in self-awareness and a self-examination of religion by looking at the Troytsa (Troita) as 'sacred murals in fresco'<sup>11</sup> in the monastery of Moldova province. Systematic studies and classifications regarding the sacred monuments of pre-Christian structure such as the Sky Columns and those of a Christian structure like the Troytsa (Troita) were accomplished by Romanian scholars such as R. Vulcănescu, I. Oprisan, etc.

The Sky Columns, the predecessor of the initial Troytsas (Troite), are based on the Totem of the Tree, which are similar to the Tree of the World or the Tree of the Cosmos. This tradition in an ancient people's myths, religions and mystique are grafted together, represents the Troytsas of nowadays through the acceptance of Christianity.



Image 3. An example of the Circle Cross Troytsa (Troita) (from Oprisan 74).

10 We can find this 'birds of the soul' in funerary slabs from the province of Transylvania. This bird symbolizes that the human spirit continually lives in the world of death when the human being dies (Kim, Ui-suk 300).

11 The explanation about 'sacred murals in fresco' in the monastery of Moldova province is introduced in detail in Prof. Ho-chang Lee's paper (104-105).

If the Sky Columns are representative monuments of pre-Christian structures, the sacred monuments of Christian structures are generally classified into three Troytsas (Troîțe): the Cruciform Troytsa (Troîța), the Icon-form Troytsa (Troîța) and the Shelter (Church Porch, Pergola, Fountain, Gate, Catacomb, etc.) Troytsa (Troîța). Among them, the Cruciform Troytsa (Troîța), which is made of wood and stone, is easily found, being a widely distributed type of Troytsa in Romania. In some areas, the Cruciform Troytsa and the Icon-form Troytsa create a complex ensemble, making religious values even more sacred.



Image 4. Troytsas in the forms of the Sacred Cruciform and the Icon-form (from Oprișan 185).

The Troytsa (Troîța) is generally well preserved in mountainous and hilly areas. Their preservation originated in Romanian traditional life, which comes and goes from the plain to the mountainous areas for stock farming. The highland where the two areas meet has the role of reconciling the various and different features of life, to unite them into one, and it is also a symbolic place which shelters inherent traditional conventions from aggressive and industrial civilizations.

## 5. The Lower Deities as Cultural Heritage and Axiological Symbol

The Romanian cultural heritage of Troytsa (Troîța) conforms very similarly, in a word, to the Korean cultural heritage of Jangseung and Sotdae. Jangseung and Sotdae, the representative popular sculptured creations of folk beliefs related to the totem pole, are close to villagers' lives, being a low-ranking god among the village's gods. These deific creations have the functions of the divine protection of a village's peace, a signpost, a boundary, the defense of the constitution, a good harvest, preventing misfortune, a prayer for children, etc. The Sotdae, which has birds on a pole or stone column, is recognized as an object of belief mixed between the Tree of the World and the Bird of the Soul in the cultural area of North Asia shamanism. Unlike them, the Romanian Troytsa, rooted in

ancient faith (the Totem of Tree), is a divine, sculptured creation mixed with Christianity.

A Troytsa is located generally at the entrance of a village or the intersection of roads. Moreover, one constructed in the center of a village contains the symbol of an intersection, in which whole imaginative roads meet; another, set on the border between neighboring villages, has the function of a signpost. The sacred tree of pre-Christianity, the Sky Columns, is the center of the life of the community in ancient times, and nowadays the Troytsa is recognized as the center of a community. A Troytsa has the significance of the Tree of the World which links the land with the sky and the underground in the conception of religious mythology. This is not only the consecration of a place, but also the prevention of all misfortune and evil; the Troytsa is the religious signs and cultural symbols which unite the ground and the underground, the profane and the sacred, continuance and discontinuity. From this point of view, Jangseung and Sotdae are raised on places such as the entrance of a village, an intersection, a boundary, a monastery, a gate through which supernatural beings or villagers come in and go out, where contact between the interior and exterior takes place.

The Troytsa, Jangseung, Sotdae and their variations share functions and character, but their features and patterns are different. Jangseung have angry and fearful countenances to turn away diseases and evil spirits, but Sotdae, consisting of a totem pole and the Bird of the Soul, intend to be the symbol of the Tree of the World. If Troytsa and Sotdae maintain the style of a menhir or a column as one of the folk beliefs related the totem pole, Jangseung are preserved in the forms of an iconolatry, column and tombstone.

A Jangseung is generally made generally of wood and stone, and a Sotdae is constructed in the same manner. These materials are accepted through an outlook on the world in which the divine spirits encompass all things which is a process in which the wood and the stone become the living place of gods. Troytsa is also made with wood and stone. The pre-Christian Troytsa is a type of Column, but after the acceptance of Christianity, it adopts the pattern of the crosses. Different to Troytsas and Sotdae, Jangseung are distinguished by gender. The masculine Jangseung is painted in red color and the feminine one is painted in yellow.

In some Romanian regions, Troytsas can be a complex form between the Cruciform Troytsa and the Icon-form Troytsa. This is also very similar to the Koreans' ensemble of the Jangseung and the Sotdae. In addition, when Romanians pass in front of religious buildings or structures such as a Troytsa or a church, they mostly draw the heart of the Trinity over their hearts. Koreans throw rocks (or pile them up), spit, or even offer colourful ribbons to trees for a personal Bison (rubbing the hands prayerfully) and/

or community rites, when Koreans pass in front of Jangseong (Lee et al. 108-109; 116). This can be said to be a manifestation of personal faith in the well-being of individuals and communities, the safety of travel and passage, the prevention of diseases and the making of wishes. These cultural heritages share a functional commonality among the functional elements of the signpost, a border, peace, richness, an amulet, prosperity and patronage. This confirms that a universal cultural prototype coexists in human life and in the values of the cultures of the East and the West, without origins or cultural differences.

## 6. Conclusion

The cultural phenomenon and the folk creation, which symbolize the characteristics of divine nature and spirit, and which are immanent in the life of a nation, are also an ethnic "result," which sublimates daily life and the religious notion in art and philosophy over a long time. As an axiological symbol and a village tutelary deity which reflect the whole physical and mental substance of a nation, Jangseung and Sotdae and Troytsa (Troita) show an aspect of eternal culture and value. This paper is the minimal case that meets this statement, and it will be a turning point in explaining the possibility of identity in terms of comparing the religious cultures of the East and West and their patterns of acceptance.

Traditionally, the totem poles in the center, at an intersection, or in the fields of a village have the function of the sanctification of space, an amulet for warding off evil auras and boundary markings, are the result of human imagination. From an ancient point of view, these places are where the energy of the universe is extensively increased and they were often perceived as the dominion of the souls of evil, darkness and the underworld. There is a wide variety of evil aura appearing in these places, including conflicts between stability and anxiety, yin and yang, prosperity and decline. Humanity has been troubled in the removal of the disorder of the universe, which is caused by the energy and agitation of evil, and it has attempted to reestablish goodness over evil. As a result, humans established the Sky Column or the altar, which is the symbol of heaven, the sun and divinity, and it has the function of magic and religious offerings from ancient times, located at the optimal center where universal peace would not be inhibited; and again, these took the shapes of a menhir, pillar, etc., as a primitive sculpture mixed with the folk customs and shamanism inherent in folk beliefs. Nowadays, these various totem poles have been transformed into Troytsa, Jangseung or Sotdae with the passage of time.

The Troytsa, Jangseung and Sotdae are the popular beliefs of communities



and they have various functions such as the divine protection of village peace, a signpost, a boundary, preventing misfortune, divine protection, etc. For example, the combination of the Tree of the World (the Cosmos) and the Bird of the Soul, as seen in Sotdae, creates the foundation of a folk belief related to the totem pole. This is a manifestation of the sacredness of a cultural prototype, and at the same time, it is a reflection of the modern reconstruction of totem and shamanism and the folkloristic acceptance of cultural values.

If the Troytsa is a real value that shows that the universal symbolism of the Tree of the World is located in the middle of secular life, which is called the space of *The Little Lamb (Miorița)*, Jangseung and Sotdae are a prototype of a culture built on the crossroads of life and *Arirang's* hill as one stage of Korean life. The symbolic traditions of folk beliefs, which are transmitted in various forms even today, are still being generated and developed as the representative cultural prototypes and motifs that form the basis of each nation's culture of the concurrent period.

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# Weddings in Korea and Ukraine\*

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## Abstract

Koreans and Ukrainians are two different nations in many aspects, such as geography, language, ethnicity, culture, and so on. It may seem difficult to find something in common between them. However, in terms of folk culture, especially wedding rituals, I would say that the two nations have many things in common. This study attempts to compare the traditional wedding rituals of the two nations which were performed among commoners between the 19th and the beginning of the 20th centuries. Through this study, we can understand that the basic structure of the wedding rituals of both cultures have much in common. Even though the ritual forms and contents are different from each other, both cultures use many similar objects and symbolic expressions for the wedding ceremony. This study also deals with how women's work, romance and new aspirations of social class transformed the marriage tradition, and how rituals were influenced by the intervention of the governments' authority in personal life.

**Keywords:** Korea, Ukraine, wedding rituals, tradition, folklore

## 1. Introduction

### 1.1. *Statement of the Problem*

The study of wedding rituals makes it possible to understand the problem which may happen when individuals have a life-cycle crisis and are forced to accomplish transitions in their life. If we study the nature of an individual crisis, such as a marriage, and the relation between crisis and ritual, we can find cultural and social regularities in relation to individual deviancy. Also, we can have a foundation on which many disciplines could cooperate. Besides these, wedding rituals reflect many other things, such as gender, kinship systems, social structures, the economy, and others. Through the study of wedding rituals, contemporary anthropologists try to explain gender, historical change, social dynamics, and other topics.

\* This study is based on my previous work "A Comparative Study of Ukrainian and Korean Wedding Rituals" from 2010. I have modified and revised it in English for this new publication.

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Koreans and Ukrainians are two different nations in many aspects, such as geography, language, race, culture, and so on. It may seem difficult to find something in common between them. However, in terms of folk culture, I would say the two nations have many things in common and suggest a comparative study of their cultures. In this paper, I aim to compare the traditional wedding rituals of the two nations which were performed among commoners between the 19th and the beginning of the 20th centuries and passed on from generation to generation, leaving some elements among contemporary wedding customs.

While I deal with the diversity of marriage rites of two peoples, I also raise the following question: Are there fundamental aspects of these rituals common to both cultures, or are they shared by some, but lacking in others? This question will be examined through a structural study of wedding rituals. While I conduct this structural study on wedding rituals, I also pay attention to how women's work, romance and new aspirations of social class transformed the marriage tradition, and how rituals were influenced by the intervention of the governments' authority in personal life.

## **2. Research Method and Literature Review**

In order to compare the structure of the wedding rituals of both cultures, first of all I need to discover or define a minimal structural unit, and to understand how these minimal units combine into traditional patterns. In a previous study on the structure of Korean and Ukrainian wedding rituals, I notice such a minimal structure. I then set the structure of Ukrainian wedding rituals on the basis of a comparison and compare both wedding rituals, dividing them into three phases, such as pre-wedding rituals, wedding day rituals, and wedding rituals after the wedding ceremony. If the given instance of structural analysis is valid, then it ought to be possible to replicate the analysis.

If I am successful in comparing the isolated and described structural patterns present in the traditional wedding rituals of both nations, I may have provided a useful aid in understanding the nature of culture at large as well as the cognitive categories, ideological commitments and concrete behavior of the people sharing that culture. If the identification of structural patterns in wedding rituals can be of service in articulating the basic nature of one's own worldview and the worldviews of others, then the study of wedding rituals would be absolutely indispensable to a better understanding of humanity.

This study is based on written sources, such as historic and ethnographic writings. The previous studies on Korean and Ukrainian wedding rituals tend to have three tendencies:

1. Attempts at exhaustive description, with data specified as to time and locality
2. More comprehensive picture of wedding customs and history
3. Analytic approach to the data, aiming at investigating socio-cultural change

Several materials suggest the structure of Ukrainian wedding rituals. While M. Mushinka divides wedding rituals into twenty-four stages, Z. Kuzela explains them in about twenty. Both provide encyclopedic information and generalize the sequence of Ukrainian wedding rituals, admitting local varieties. V. Shukhevych also describes *Hutsul'* wedding rituals in *Materyialy do Ukrains'ko-Rus'koi Etnol'ogii* (1904), dividing them into twenty-one parts. The study of the structure of wedding rituals is also found in more recent literature, such as *Vesil'ni zvychai ta obriady na Ukraini* (1988), written by V. Borysenko. She examines local variants and provides a minimal structural unit of Ukrainian wedding rituals, which can be found all over the country. It is the following: (1) *svatannia, zaruchyny, ohliadyny*, (2) *pryhotuvannia vesil'noho khliba* (3) *dibych-vechir*, (4) *shliub, posad molodykh*, (5) *pokryvannia molodoi i pereizd ii v dim cholovika*, (6) *vesil'na hostyna v domi narechenoho*, (7) *pisliavesil'na obriadovist'*, and (8) *obriadovi dii ochysnoho kharakteru ta obriady pryiednannia narechenoi do novoi sim'i*. I intend to use her structure of Ukrainian wedding rituals for this study and divide them into three parts: pre-wedding rituals (1), wedding day rituals (2, 3, 4), wedding rituals after the ceremony (5, 6, 7, 8).

Studies on the structure of Korean wedding rituals are also plentiful. However, previous studies tend to give too much emphasis to formal rules and "ideal" *yangban* (nobility) procedures pertaining to marriage. Also, many studies were confused between the ritual model and ritual practice. However, several studies, such as *Study on Korean Traditional Wedding Rituals* (1988), written by Hyein Park, provide useful and analytic information on the wedding rituals of commoners. The author explains how Korean wedding rituals have been made on the basis of the Chinese Confucian ritual model. However, she distinguishes the former from the latter, and also explains the difference between the Korean ideal ritual model, which was made by the government, and the ritual practice of commoners. Then the author provides a minimal structure of Korean wedding rituals: (1) *Hondam*, (2) *Sasung*, (3) *Tagil*, (4) *Ham*, (5) *Chohaeng*, (6) *Jaehaeng*, (7) *Sinhaeng*, (8) *Hyungugorae*, (9) *Geunsadang*, and (10) *Geunchin*. I will compare this structure to the structure of Ukrainian wedding rituals, explaining the meaning of Korean wedding terminology in a later section.

The main body of this study consists of four parts. First of all, the condition of both societies will be examined because wedding rituals are closely related to social conditions. This section may suggest the possible

factors that make both wedding rituals similar and different. The next three sections will examine the structure of wedding rituals according to the sequence of ritual procedures.

### 3. The Condition of Society

The change of traditional family customs and rituals is closely related to the change of the political, social, economic and religious conditions of the time. Reviewing the conditions of both societies may provide various factors that make Korean and Ukrainian wedding rituals similar and different. In the 19th century and the beginning of 20th century, Korea and Ukraine were similar to each other because they both consisted of various social estates. While the social strata of Ukraine were the nobility, the Cossacks, the peasantry, the townspeople and the clergy, those of Korea were the nobility (*yangban*), the clergy (*chungin*), commoners (mostly peasantry) and lower-class people (*chonmin*). Except for the Cossacks, most Ukrainian estates are found in contemporary Korean society. However, it is a characteristic of Korean society that the law prohibited marriage between people of different social levels. Equal social status between the two concerned parties was considered to be of prime importance in marriage. Under this restriction, provincial officials were forbidden to marry commoners' daughters residing within the districts of their jurisdiction. Apart from the desire to maintain the class distinction, the prohibition probably came into existence to prevent provincial officials from forcing women under their rule to marry them. Marriage was also forbidden between commoners and the lowest social level, the *chonmin*. A commoner woman could not marry a slave, because their offspring would inherit the father's low status. Thus, the slave population would increase while the commoner population would decrease. This would lead to a serious cutback in the state's income, as it was the commoners who paid taxes while the *chonmin* were exempt (cfr. Park).

The intervention of the government in people's lives is another factor which may influence wedding rituals. In 1392, when a new dynasty, *Choson*, was established in the Korean territory, the government established Neo-Confucianism as the new ruling ideology against Buddhism, which was the ruling philosophy and religion of the former dynasty, *Koryo*. Since then, the government changed the rites of daily life on the basis of Neo-Confucianism and forced people to follow the new ritual form. The new Confucian rituals caused many changes in traditional Korean wedding rituals. Influenced by Confucianism, which emphasizes the absolute power of the patriarch and assents the unequal role between men and women, the free courtship tradition became forbidden and sometimes

it was regarded as a shameful tradition to perform wedding rituals in women's houses, which was not allowed in Chinese Confucian wedding rituals (*ibid.*).

In the 19th century and the early 20th century, Ukrainians were subjected to two imperial rules. While eastern Ukrainians were under the rule of tsarist Russia, western Ukrainians were in the Habsburg Empire. The tsarist government consistently and systematically attempted to obliterate most traces of Ukrainian distinctiveness. However, it does not seem that the Russian government intervened in wedding rituals of the people. Moreover, since the Habsburg Empire provided Ukrainians with more liberal economic and politic policies, western Ukrainians were able to preserve their traditional customs and old-fashioned ways of life. Although foreign regimes did not intervene in Ukrainian wedding rituals, the process of the capitalistic development of social relations caused a change in wedding rituals during the later part of the 19th century. In central and southeastern regions, which were ruled by the tsarist government, the rapid development of capitalist industry took place. The peasantry was stratified very rapidly and they began to migrate to industrialized cities, such as Donbas, Kyiv and Kharkiv. Therefore, the old family and social systems, which were based on a rural economy, began to collapse because of industrialization and economic modernization, thus family customs and rituals began to change.

One of the important factors that make Korean and Ukrainian wedding rituals different is religion. Ukrainian Orthodox and Catholic churches have a different ritual structure from the Korean Confucian ritual structure. Ukrainian religions influence wedding rituals in many ways. The wedding ceremony is held at a church on a Sunday, when the church mass is performed. The wedding calendar is also influenced by the church calendar, so that during Lent the wedding ceremony is not supposed to be performed. Also, a church service provides juridical recognition of the marriage of a new couple. However, Ukrainian marriage customs consists of more folk elements than religious ones. Korean wedding rituals are also influenced by religion of Confucianism. As I mentioned before, the government established an ideal ritual model and forced people to follow it. However, the commoners did not always observe the ideal model. Korean wedding rituals also contain many elements of early folk religion and sorcery; so do Ukrainian-wedding rituals.

The marriage system is another factor that explains differences between Ukrainian and Korean wedding rituals. According to the family law of Ukraine, monogamy was established in an early period. In the pre-Christian times of Ukraine, the seizure, purchase and transfer of women were the basic forms of marriage, which was the main institution of family law. However, the introduction of Christianity brought



about a gradual acceptance of monogamy as the dominant principle of family law. The principle of monogamy became firmly established in the Lithuanian Statute, and marriage came to be regarded as both a contract and a sacrament. To make marriage binding, both sides had to enter into it voluntarily.

In the history of the marriage system in Korea, the primary characteristic can be found in its long recognition of polygamy, which is deep-rooted in a society based on paternal lineage under which the head of a family has absolute authority over his family members. History tells us that polygamy in Korea can be traced back as far as the Koguryo Kingdom (37 B.C. – 668 A.D.). But it seems that concubines were treated nearly the same as slaves or serfs at that time. In addition, concubinage was restricted within a segment of upper-class families. In the later history of Korea, by the end of the Koryo era, the government adopted a policy which resulted in government officials and even common people keeping a wife and concubines, and they lifted the ban on the entry into government service of the offspring of a concubine. Although polygamy began to collapse during the Choson era, concubinage continued to receive public cognization. The legal institution of monogamy was not firmly established until the entry into the family register of a concubine was prohibited by Japanese rule for the first time on August 7, 1915.

The marriage system may reflect the patriarchic characteristic and the status of the female in the two cultures. Although both Ukrainian and Korean societies were patriarchic, the head of the Korean family seems to have been a more powerful authority. Also, women's roles in Korea remained relatively unequal in comparison to Ukraine. These examples are easily found in many parts of wedding rituals

#### 4. Pre-Wedding Rituals

Pre-wedding rituals generally contain the rites of the selection of a bride, the marriage proposal, negotiations and the engagement. Although the terminology of rituals is different from each other, we can find a similarity in rituals by examining the meanings of them. According to Borysenko, the minimal structural unit of Ukrainian pre-wedding rituals is matchmaking (*svatannia*), the 'survey' (*ohliadyny*) and the engagement (*zaruchyny*). However, she says that in many areas, matchmaking is preceded by courtship, which is facilitated by various social meetings between the young people of both sexes. Also making 'inquiries' (*dopyty*) preceded the ceremony of matchmaking at the home of girl's parents (Borysenko 21).

Korean pre-wedding rituals are performed in the following order: *Hondam* [matchmaking, investigation (*tammun*), *Gunghap* (analyzing the

date and time of the birth of the people to marry, based on the five elements that make up the universe in order to predict the couple’s happiness and unhappiness in advance), *Seon* (visit of the groom’s representatives to the bride’s family)], *Sasung* and *Tagil* (the engagement). The following table shows the structure of the pre-wedding rituals of both cultures.

Table 1

Terminology	Ukraine	Korea	Terminology
	Courtship	-	-
Svatannia	Matchmaking		Hondam
Ohliadyny	Inspection, Investigation	Investigation (Tammun)	
	-	Gunghap	
	-	Seon	
Zaruchyny	Engagement	Sasung and Tagil	

According to the table, the Ukrainian minimal structural unit is found in Korean wedding rituals. However, this table shows two differences between Ukrainian and Korean wedding structures. First of all, Korean weddings do not have a courtship. Secondly, in Korea, the matchmaking and inspection rituals are performed under the name of *Hondam*, which literally means ‘discussion about the wedding,’ and it includes two more procedures, such as *Gunghap* and *Seon*. Now in the following sections, I explain the similarity and difference of both structures and examine the reasons that make them similar and different.

4.1. The Selection of a Partner: Courtship

In terms of courtship, a Ukrainian wedding is different from a Korean wedding. In both cultures, the bride and groom had different degrees of freedom in choosing their partners. According to Borysenko, at the end of the 19th century, the custom of pre-arranged marriage was still poplar in Ukraine. However, in this period it happened that young people between neighboring villages married at their will.

The tradition of pre-arranged marriage was much stronger in Korea than in Ukraine. Marriage in Korea was contracted without the free will of the persons concerned. One of the most crucial reasons is that Confucianism created a strong patriarchy, which emphasizes ancestor worship and the preservation of the family lineage. Because of the Confucian cord, procreation was more emphasized than love. Also, it made Korean society stick to the preservation, development and bequeathal

of a 'jib' (literally 'house,' hence the traditional Korean family). To bequeath a jib to his descendants, a man was required to pay tribute to his ancestors; and to preserve the house and property handed down from ancestor to ancestor a man had to enlarge them; and to expand the family genealogy a man was required to beget male heirs (Choi 10). These constituted the supreme filial duty to one's ancestors as well as to one's parents. Since the supreme goal of any family was to secure the perpetual preservation of its jib, marriage developed into a means of ancestral worship and of begetting sons, and for this purpose all the members of a family were subjugated to a powerful form of patriarchy. Therefore, a marriage was not decided by the free will of the couple concerned but was arranged by the consent of the heads of the two families concerned. Any pre-marriage association between the bride and bridegroom was absolutely forbidden (ibid.).

#### 4.2. Matchmaking

Although both wedding rituals contain matchmaking, they are quite different in form and content. The meaning of Ukrainian matchmaking is larger than that of Korean matchmaking. In Ukraine, all aspects of nuptial agreements and arrangements were discussed during the matchmaking visit. These arrangements had legal force. Their disruption or violence on the part of either side had juridical and material consequences (Borysenko 29). Therefore matchmaking rituals are regarded as very important and sometimes took place at the same time as the betrothal in the house of the future bride in the presence of all the relatives. On the contrary, in Korea, matchmaking, which is called *Jungmae*, is the process of introducing one family to another. The discussion and negotiation of the wedding are performed in a later procedure, called *Seon*, which is a visit of the groom's mother or relatives to the bride's house.

Concerning the matchmaker, in both cultures the groom's family members become matchmakers. In Ukraine, the matchmakers are called *svaty* and play a great role not only in performing matchmaking rituals, but also in discussing and negotiating the wedding. In Korea, family members also take part in matchmaking, however their main role is not as important as in Ukraine. Non-family members, such as female Bobusang, who carry products on their back and visit the house, selling things from one village to another, sometimes also conducted matchmaking (Lee 64). The matchmaker usually gives a description of the persons in question and their family background to the parents of both families. Therefore, in Korea many aspects of the nuptial agreements and arrangements were not discussed during the matchmaking visit.



### 4.3. Inspection

After the matchmaking, both nations perform an inspection rite. In Ukraine, the bride's father and family go to look at the home which the prospective bridegroom will offer the bride and assess his material situation, living conditions and wealth (Borysenko 29) According to Shukhevich (11), in the *Hutsul'* area, the inspection is performed by the groom's side to see how bride-to-be takes care of the house and how her family lives. Borysenko says that this is a popular ritual all over the country, called various terms, such as *ohliadyny*, *rozhliadyny*, *vyhliadyny*, *obzoryny*, and so on.

In Korea, this process is called *tammun*. One of the groom's family members goes to the village of the bride-to-be and collects information on her. Sometimes the investigator spreads an untrue story about the groom-to-be and examines the reaction to know the real intention of the bride's family concerning the marriage.

The Korean inspection rite has almost same purpose as the Ukrainian inspection rite. However, while the inspection of Ukrainian weddings is followed by the engagement, that of Korean weddings is followed by two more steps, such as *Gunghap* and *Seon*, which will be examined in the following section.

### 4.4. Engagement

One of the most different parts between the two countries is the engagement. While the engagement of Ukrainian weddings is performed as a drama, with accompanying ritual songs and dances, the Korean engagement is established through an exchange of formal letters between the two parties.

In Ukrainian folksongs, the betrothed are linked to the moon and the stars, and wishes are bestowed on them that they shall be "*as rich as the earth and as healthy as the water*" (Kuzela 335). During the singing of the wedding chorus by the prospective bride's attendants, who now play an active role in the rite, the principal elements of matchmaking are repeated: the speeches, the binding with ceremonial towels, the showing of the fiancée and the exchange of gifts. Following this engagement, the pair is blessed with bread. Either the fiancé's closest companion, the *druzhko*, who at the wedding acts as a sort of master of ceremonies, or more frequently, the fiancée's *starosta* (usually her uncle), leads them, bound by a towel, to the wedding seat (*posad*) in the corner of honor. When the guests have departed, the betrothed pair is either left to retire or the celebration is continued in the home of the fiancé, where another series of ceremonies are held which last throughout the night and are called *zapoiny* (335-6).

Since Koreans believe that the future life of the bride and groom can be predicted on the base of four pillars, which are called *sasung* or *saju* (the year, month, day, and the hour of birth), both families go to a diviner's house to check whether the two will be a good match. This custom is called *gunghap*. The matching of the combination of a couple is usually divined on the basis of the year, month, day and hour of one's birth to find out what the chances are for happiness, prosperity and success, according to the old Chinese philosophy called *ohaeng* (five elements). The divination of the *gunghap* often becomes an excuse for breaking up a relationship, mainly established by the efforts of a matchmaker before sending *sasung* to confirm the engagement (Yang 56). If the *gunghap* is favorable and both parties reach an agreement on the proposed marriage, the bridegroom's family sends an official letter with a marriage proposal to the house of the future bride, in which the four pillars of the bridegroom were written. With the receipt of the *sasung* by bride's family, the engagement between the bride and groom is automatically accomplished. Upon receipt of this letter, the house of the bride informs the family of bridegroom of the wedding day by letter. This ritual is called *tagil*, which literally means, 'setting the date.'

## 5. Wedding Day Rituals: The Ceremony and Festivities

Ukrainian and Korean wedding days generally contain wedding ceremonies themselves as well as various festivities, including preparation rituals, performed a few days before the wedding. According to Borysenko, the minimal structural unit of this stage is the preparation of bread, the girl's night, the church wedding service and the sitting together of the bride and groom during the feast. Depending on the area, she says, several rituals are added to the basic structure. For example, the preparation rituals of making green tree and wreaths are performed along with baking the ritual breads. Also, the invitation of guests to the wedding is performed before the girl's night. Before going to the church, the bride's brother performs the ritual combing the bride's hair. Also, the bride's parents conduct the blessing ceremony for the couple. After the church wedding, the groom and his family visit the bride's house, performing various rituals. Finally, the wedding ceremony ends with a big feast, which consists of a series of rituals.

The minimal structural unit of the Korean wedding ritual is the *ham* and *chohaeng*, which is followed by such wedding rituals as the *Jeonanrye*, *Gyobaerye* and *Habgunrye*. Besides these, Korean wedding rituals also contain the preparation rituals for the wedding ceremony and the feast;

these rituals do not have a special terminology. The following table shows that the wedding rituals of both cultures take place in the order of: preparation rituals, the wedding ceremony and the feast. However, while the girl's night is unique to the Ukrainian wedding, delivering the *ham* is a characteristic of the Korean wedding. In the following sections I examine the content and meaning of the wedding rituals of both nations.

Table 2

Terminology	Ukraine	Korea	Terminology
Pryhotuvannia Vesi'noho khliba	Preparation of breads	Preparation of foods	-
Dibych-vechir	Girl's night	-	-
		Gift delivery from groom's house	Ham
Shliub	Wedding Ceremony		Chohaeng: Jeonan, Gyobae, Habgun
Posad molodykh	Newlyweds - sitting together during the feast	Reception	

## 5.1. Preparation Rituals

In both cultures, wedding ceremonies require a complicated preparation process. First of all, in Ukraine, on the eve of the wedding, usually on a Saturday, a branch or a small tree was decorated with flowers, rue, periwinkle, colored ribbons and small candles. Later it stood on the table during the entire wedding or was set in the wedding loaf (*korovai*). On Saturday night the bridesmaids came to the house of the bride's parents. They would pick periwinkle (*barvinok*), an evergreen plant, which was regarded as a symbol of everlasting affection. The bridesmaid would then make a little wreath out of the periwinkle with which to decorate the head of the bride at the wedding. Also, the shape of the wreath was believed to have a symbolical meaning. It was round like the sun and was thought to assure the newlyweds' fertility and good luck (Zdoroveha 84). With the wreath on her head, the bride would be dressed in her wedding costume. Besides them, the *korovai* and its decorations had to be prepared before the wedding. On Sunday, the *korovainytsi* (*korovai* makers) decorated the top of the *korovai* with shapes modeled out of dough in the form of pinecones, doves, geese, etc. The *korovai* has a sacrificial and kinship significance. It was made of flour which was contributed by all the kin (Kuzela 336).

In Korea, before the wedding, the bride's family had to prepare many items for the wedding ceremony. In the backyard of the bride's house, a folding screen is placed, and a big grass mat is spread out. On the mat, there is a ritual table, between which the bride and groom are supposed to stand and perform the wedding rituals while looking at each other. On the ritual table, the following items had to be prepared: red and blue candles, a pine tree or branch and a bamboo or its branch, chestnuts, jujube, rice and hen and a cock which were wrapped by blue and red cloths. Besides them, red beans and liquor are prepared. While the pine tree and bamboo symbolize everlasting affection and loyalty, chestnuts, jujube and chickens are regarded as symbols of fertility. Red beans are believed to protect bride and groom from evil spirits. Blue and red are symbols of the harmony of the universe according to Chinese philosophy. A wooden goose is another prerequisite item to be prepared. On the wedding day, the groom is supposed to bring it and take it over to the bride's mother. The goose is regarded as a symbol of truth, rightness, or loyalty (Park 75-77). Depending on the area, bird-shaped food, made of cooked rice, is placed on the table. Water is also set beside the table for the purification ritual (Chosonilbo 13).

This review of the preparation items for the wedding ceremony shows that both cultures have several things in common. Both cultures use trees, plants and birds to symbolize specific meanings and desires, such as everlasting affection, loyalty, truth and fertility. The following table shows the items and symbolic meanings which both cultures share.

Table 3

Ukraine	Korea	Symbolic meaning
Green tree with flowers and a ribbon, wreath	Pine tree or its branch Bamboo or its branch	Everlasting affection or loyalty
Doves or geese on the <i>korovai</i>	Goose, chickens, or bird-shaped food	Loyalty, faith rightness
Candles on a green tree	Red and blue candles	Purifying or calling gods

## 5.2. Girl's night and the Ham

According to Borysenko, the girl's night and its equivalent, the bachelor's evening, were rites of separation. The girl's night was the culmination of the pre-marriage rituals and was usually held on a Saturday night. A characteristic element was the preparation of the wedding tree and un-plaiting the bride's hair. These rituals were performed in the bride's house after the invitation of the guests for the wedding ceremonies, which was performed by the bride-to-be and a number of her girlfriends. (Borysenko 61-68). An important part of the girl's night was the presentation of gifts.

The bride was given a pair of boots (*cherevyky*). The evening usually ended with the blessing of the couple, offered by the parents.

In Ukrainian weddings, the closest friends of the bride and groom had special roles. The unmarried friends of the partners constituted a separate group and had specific functions associated with their social status and rank. The rank of each role was indicated by means of special decorations and clothing (40-42) The invitation of the guests, making ritual trees and wreaths and the girl's night are good examples of where the bride's girlfriends played important roles. Compared to Ukrainian wedding rituals, the close friends of the bride and groom did not play a major role in Korean wedding rituals. Korean wedding rituals tended to be performed by family members. However, instead of close friends, such people who had good fortune in their life or have a boy as their first baby, were also asked to play important roles (Park 69). A good example is shown in delivering the *ham*, which took place on the wedding day before the ceremony. In many areas the person who had a boy as their first child carried the *ham*. The *ham* is a gift box, which is sent by the groom's family to the bride. It basically contained the blue and red cloth for the bride's dress. Depending on the area, the *ham* contained the bride's coronet and the list of presents, such as jewelry, bedding and clothes which would be given to the bride on the wedding day. In Ukraine, the exchange of gifts was performed during many parts of wedding rituals. Especially during the feast after the wedding ceremony, two parties performed an exchange of gifts.

### 5.3. The Wedding Ceremony

While the Ukrainian wedding ceremony is performed on the basis of Christian church rituals, the Korean wedding ceremony is conducted on the basis of the Confucian ritual order. Since the ritual procedure of Ukrainian religions is different from that of the Korean Confucian religion, the structures of the wedding ceremonies seem to have very few commonalities. However, similarity is also found in the fact that the wedding rituals of both cultures are performed on the bride's side with old folk elements.

In Ukraine the wedding ceremony usually takes place on a Sunday morning at a church. However, the church wedding ceremony had been performed among the noble class for a long time. The form of the church wedding was transplanted into the life of commoners under special orders by the ruling class in the 16th century (Zdoroveha 50-55). However, the previous wedding rituals did not disappear and were performed after the church wedding service and gave the newlyweds the official sanction as a family.

Before going to the church, a brother combs the bride's hair and the parents and relatives give her their blessing (*blahoslovennia*). When the bride says her good-byes to her parents, the bridegroom's party and the bride's party join together, and, accompanied by the musicians, go to the church to participate in the ceremony. The senior groomsman leads the bride and the senior bridesmaid leads the bridegroom. The mother douses all of the members of the procession with consecrated water and sprinkles them with grain. On their way to the church the members of the procession sing emotional wedding songs. In some villages, the parties of the bride and bridegroom meet only in the front of the church.

At the church door, the bride joins her bridegroom and they enter together. Interestingly enough, it is believed that the one who steps into the church first would have the first and last word in the family's affairs (Shukhevych 36). It is worth noting that customary Ukrainian church wedding rituals are mixed with many elements of the folk wedding, which is rooted in an older, mainly pagan past: the exchange of wreaths and rings; walking around the *tetrapod* (center table) with a burning candle; drinking wine from one cup; and so on. Also, when the priest is marrying the couple, the senior *svashka* (the senior female member of the bridegroom's party) holds above the couple's heads a loaf of bread bound with yarn (Borysenko 72; Shukevych 36).

In Korea, the wedding ceremony begins with the groom's arrival at the door of the bride's house. The groom is led into the house and performs the *jeonanrye*, which is to give a goose, wrapped in red cloth, to the bride's mother. The bride's mother receives it and wraps it well in her skirt. It is said that she does this ritual in order not to lose the goose or to let the goose have many eggs. Then she leaves it inside of a (rice) jar, or brings it into the room, where the bride-to-be is waiting and throws it before her to predict the sex of the first baby (Park 73-75). After this ritual, the bride comes out of the room and goes to the *choraechong*, where the ritual is supposed to be performed. In the *choraechong*, the ritual table is prepared for the ceremony. The groom and bride separately stand on the east and west sides of the table and have their first meeting. The ritual is led by a person who can read the ritual text. The ritual begins with the *kyobaerye*, which means the exchange of bows between the bride and groom, and it ends with the *habgunrye*, which is to drink wine, their hands tied with threads, or exchanging cups tied with threads.

There are several rituals which are common to both cultures. First of all, water is used as a purification ritual. While the Ukrainian bride and groom are cleaned by consecrated water before going to church, the Korean bride and groom wash their hands before the wedding ritual. Second, incorporation rituals to unify the bride and groom are performed in the form of drinking wine and using threads or yarn for



tying cups or binding bread. In both cultures the church service and the Confucian ritual service have legal power and serve as a juridical sanction of the union. However, the content of the rituals consists of many folklore elements.

#### 5.4. *Wedding Feast*

After the wedding ceremony at a church, the most important part of the wedding ritual takes place in the evening. According to Borysenko, one of the most significant elements of the traditional wedding ritual is the so-called *posada molodykh*, which means 'the seating of the newlyweds.' The moment that the bride and the groom are allowed to sit together at the table indicates the couple's official sanction as a new family (Borysenko 72). This ritual is also the rite of separation of the bride and the groom from the group of the unmarried people and their introduction to the status of a married couple.

In Korea, the wedding feast has a different look from the Ukrainian wedding feast. While the Ukrainian bride and groom are sitting together with guests during the feast and perform the ritual of a communal meal, the Korean bride and groom cannot sit together until the first night ritual. Although they have a brief chance to greet each other in a room just after the wedding ceremony, they are soon separated and remain so throughout the whole feast. The feast is performed in several separate places. While general guests are treated well with various food in the backyard, the groom and the guests from his family are treated with the *kunsang*, which means a big table with food. The food which is offered to the groom is supposed to be delivered to the groom's house after the groom pretends to eat it. The groom then his family and the bride's family. The moment that the bride and groom can sit together does not happen until the first night ritual in Korea (Park 84-86).

Typically, the Ukrainian wedding feast is preceded with a symbolic 'purchase' of the bride by the groom and a symbolic 'fight' for her. Before the groom and those who accompany him arrive at the bride's house, the young men from the bride's village bar their passage and demand the so-called *pereima* (treat and ransom). Then the groom must ransom himself with money. This process happens several times. Only after the 'fight' and long negotiations are the groom and his companions are allowed to enter the house, but he must overcome the resistance of the brothers of the bride and pay an appropriate ransom to obtain the right to sit beside her (Kuzela 337).

In Korea, the tradition of a 'treat and ransom' or 'fight' does not exist. However, there is another type of ritual: hanging the groom and beating

his feet. A few days after the wedding ceremony, young men from the bride's village perform a ritual – the *silangdarugi*, which is "treating the groom." During the ritual, the young men tighten some cloth around the groom's ankles and hang him upside down. Then they ask him some tricky questions, asking the bride's family for drinks and food. If the groom cannot give the right answer, his soles are beaten by the young fellows (Park 91-92). In my opinion, from the perspective of the villagers of the bride's side, the wedding results in a loss of one of their members. Therefore, they ask the groom to pay the price. "Treating the groom" seems to be a kind of ritual where the groom pays a price.

During the feast in Ukraine, changing the bride's hairstyle and covering of her head with a scarf mark the transition of the bride to the group of married women. Changing the hairstyle is also an important ritual in Korea. At the wedding ceremony, which initiates Korean men and women into adulthood, the groom's childhood pigtail is bound up into a topknot and the bride's hair is pinned into a chignon at the nape of her neck. This ritual indicates their new standing in a delicate hierarchy of status and deference.

## **6. Wedding Rituals after the Ceremony:**

***Obriadovi dii ochysnoho kharakteru ta obriady pryiednannia narechenoi do novoï sim'i* (Rites of a purifying nature and the rituals for joining the bride to her new family)**

While Ukrainian wedding rituals after the wedding ceremony and festivities consist of four minimum structural units, this part of Korean wedding rituals consists of five units. According to the following table, the two cultures seem to share only one ritual, "brining the bride to the groom's house." However, both peoples have more in common than the table shows. Although the greeting between the bride and the parents-in-law is not noted as a minimal unit of Ukrainian wedding rituals, this is performed in a different form. In the same way, Koreans also do not only have the wedding feast at the groom's house, but also post-wedding and purification rituals.



Table 4

Terminology	Ukraine	Korea	Terminology
		Groom's second trip to the bride's house	<i>Jaehaeng</i>
<i>Pokryvannia molodoi i pereizd ii v dim cholovika</i>	Bringing bride to the groom's house		<i>Sinhaeng</i>
		The first time the bride greets the parents-in-law	<i>HyunGuGoRye or Paebek</i>
<i>Vesil'na hostyna v domi narechenoho</i>	Wedding feast at the groom's house	-	-
<i>Pisliavesil'na obriadovist'</i>	Post-wedding rituals: on the bride's side	-	-
<i>Obriadovi dii ochysnoho kharakteru ta obriady</i>	Purification ritual		
		The respectful bow to ancestors in a shrine	<i>sadangchambe</i>
		Bride's visit to her parents' house	<i>Geunchin</i>

### 6.1. Bringing the Bride to the Groom's House

Although in Ukraine, the departure of the bride to the groom's house is actually performed at the last moment of the feast on the wedding day, I distinguish this ritual from the wedding day rituals. In Ukraine, after the supper at the feast, the bride says farewell to her maidens and parents and, to the accompaniment of songs and music, departs for the home of the groom, taking with her a 'chest' or *skrynja* with her dowry (*posah*) in it and a black hen (Kuzela 337).

In Korea, the bride goes to the groom's house a certain number of days after the wedding ceremony. According to the old records, in 1 A.D., the groom even built a small place after the wedding and stayed there for years before bringing the bride to his parents' house (Kim82) Due to tradition, the bride still stayed at her parent's house after the wedding and the groom had to make several trips between the bride's house and his. In the 19th century this tradition still remained, but the bride stayed in her house for a shorter period of time than before, for example, for three to seven days. Therefore, the groom had to go back home and come again to bring the bride to his parent's house. This custom is called the *Jaehaeng*, which literally means 'the second trip.' After the *Jaehaeng*, the bride can

perform the *sinhaeng*, which means 'the new trip,' to the groom's house. The bride rides in a *Gama*, a carriage which is carried by two people, and the groom rides on a horse in front of the carriage. The new trip custom is accompanied with a lot of rituals which are performed to protect the bride from evil powers during the way to the groom's house.

## 6.2. *The Greeting between the Bride and the Parents-in-Law*

The greeting between the bride and the parents-in-law is performed under the name of *pryhoshchuvaty molodu* (receiving the bride") in Ukraine and *Hyngugorye* (the rite of the bride greeting the parents-in-law") in Korea. While the parents of the groom in Ukraine meet the bride on the threshold of her new home with bread and salt and solemnly welcome her into her new family, the parents of the groom in Korea receive big bows from the bride in their room. During the *Hyngugorye* the bride pays her respects with two traditional bows and one light bow. Then they throw chestnuts and jujubes on the bride's skirt, saying, 'have many boys.' The custom of a gift exchange between the bride and the parents-in-law is observed at this time (Park 98-102).

The rite of receiving the bride in both cultures is accompanied by many prohibitions as well as rituals which promote fertility and offer protection from evil powers. In Ukraine, the bride, who must keep silent during the entire time, is taken into the house where she at once releases the black hen which she has brought with her under the stove. She is then seated in the place of honor. Her head covering is removed with a stick and is thrown on the stove. In some places she is given a piece of *pechyna*, a piece of clay from the oven, or a piece of a raw beet, and she silently throws it under the table. These rituals seem to be designed to promote fertility. In Korea, when the bride comes into the house, she has to come in, kicking some straw which is set fire on the threshold of the gate. Sometimes red beans or salt are thrown to the bride. These rituals are performed for the purpose of warding off evil power (97).

After the greeting rituals in Ukraine, the married couple is taken ceremoniously to the storeroom (*komora*) where the nuptial bed has been made on some straw and a sheepskin coat, and a sheaf of rye and a holy icon placed at its head. There the ancient rite of "breaking the guelder-rose" (*lamannia kalyny*) is performed (Kuzela 337-338). In the old ritual all of the groom's kin would wait in the house throughout the wedding night when, to the singing of erotic songs, the bride's shirt with the signs of her virginity was opened for the public. However, later this procedure was limited to hanging a red banner on the house of a true bride on the next day and

decking the *boiary* (male wedding attendants) with red belts and ribbons. The first night ritual in Korea is performed not in the groom's house but in the bride's house on the evening of the wedding day. The women of the family gather in an adjoining room trying to observe what will happen, sometimes poking holes through the paper of the door. One of reasons to perform this ritual is that it is believed that if people do not watch it, evil will (Park 87). Instead of proving the virginity of the bride, Korean people performed this ritual to protect the new couple from evil powers.

### 6.3. *The Wedding Feast at the Groom's House, the Post-Wedding Ceremony and Purification Rites*

In Ukraine and Korea, the wedding ends with a wild, festive entertainment, which used to last for several days. The honoring of the bride's family was the last event that took place during the wedding ceremonies *per se*. According to Borysenko (84), after the wedding ceremony other rituals follow, which the author defines as 'post-wedding' ceremonies. Their purpose was to unite and bond the in-law's families. These celebrations have different local names. She says that the last ritual of uniting the two families is often performed a week after the wedding in the bride's house, where the bride and the groom's closest family members attend. Korea also has a similar 'post-wedding' ceremony *geunchin*, which means the bride visits her parents. While the Ukrainian post-wedding ceremony is usually performed a week after the wedding, the Korean one is performed a month, two months, or a year later. When the bride visits her parents, the father-in-law and the groom, bringing a lot of food for the neighborhood of her village, accompany her. While the father-in-law usually comes back on the same day, the groom stays several days more. But the bride can stay until the parents-in-law call her back.

In both cultures, the wedding also ends with various purifying or incorporation ceremonies. In Ukraine the wedding ends with the purifying ceremony of the *vyvid* in the church or the ritual pouring of water from a river or spring. These rituals aim at securing the socialization of the married couple and they function as the introduction of the bride to her new family (Kuzela 338). The bride is supposed to perform a number of household duties such as making a fire in the stove, bringing water from the well, and others. The system of marriage rituals, especially in Eastern Ukraine, end with the so-called ceremony of beating the porridge (*byttia kashy*). The meaning of this ritual was to ensure the well-being of the new family, its continuation and the multiplication of cattle and wealth (Borysenko 82-83). This ritual has a very ancient origin. The porridge symbolized the happy unity of the marriage partners and was

also encountered in Ukrainian birth rituals as a fertility symbol. One of the different types of rituals which is performed in Korea is the *sa-dangchambe*, which mean 'the respectful bow to ancestors in a shrine.' The purpose of this ritual is to provide ancestors food and ask them for the safe incorporation of the newlyweds into the family, as well as for fortune and productivity.

## 7. Conclusion

In terms of the structure of wedding rituals, both cultures share the following basic units: matchmaking, investigation, engagement, preparation rituals, wedding ceremony, wedding feast in the bride's house, bringing the bride to the groom's house, feast in the groom's house, post-wedding ceremony, purifying or incorporation rituals.

The basic characteristic of the structural minimal unit is to perform the wedding ceremony on the bride's side and then bring the bride to the groom's house. Although ritual forms and content are different from each other, the basic structure of the wedding rituals of both cultures have much in common. Here we can raise a question: Do they reveal deep, necessary process of culture? It is now difficult to generalize that the minimal wedding structure of both cultures reflects a necessary process of culture. However, it must be worth developing a discussion about this question.

The wedding rituals of both cultures also share several other common features. An essential element of wedding ceremonies is the symbolic expression of the union between the individuals marrying. For example, the tying of the bride and groom's garments signifies this union. Other rituals emphasize the function of the marriage as the foundation of the family. Feasting at weddings by family and friends signifies the community's blessing of the marriage. The marriage rites of both cultures draw on civil and religious authority to sanctify the union of a man and a woman and establish the parentage of any children born of the marriage. The rites include the formal removal of one party (usually the bride) from the family group, feasts and exchanges of gifts between the families, as well as the reentry of the newlyweds into society. Both cultures use many similar items for the wedding ceremony, such as green trees, bird-shaped decorations, and so on. More commonalities are found in their rituals, which are performed for the purpose of fertility, productivity and protection from evil powers.

Despite those common features of wedding rituals, different marriage rites have developed in each nation. One of them is the religious ceremony. Ukrainian religions have distinctive wedding customs which are different

from Korean Confucian wedding customs. While Ukrainian religious ceremonies involve a nuptial mass, during which many scriptural texts concerning marriage are read, a man, who reads the Confucian ritual orders, leads the Korean wedding ceremonies. In Ukraine, the presence of a priest and at least two witnesses are essential, as they are the expression of consent by the bride and groom. These rituals are not found in Korea. Since Korean Confucianism emphasizes the absolute patriarchic order of the family, Koreans have no freedom in choosing their own partners. Therefore, while Ukrainian wedding rituals contain courtship rituals, Korean wedding rituals do not. Also, while Ukrainian wedding rituals and feasts are dramatically performed, accompanied by songs and dances, Korean wedding rituals and feasts do not contain dramatic performances.

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# Consonantal Structures in Phonetics and Phonology: Cases from Slavic languages\*

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## Abstract

The purpose of this study is to present and compare two different approaches (a phonetic approach and a phonological one) for the speech sound systems of natural languages. To this end, this study investigates natural speech sound systems with the consonantal systems of four Slavic languages, Russian, Polish, Czech and Serbian and Croatian, on the basis of phonetic and phonological approaches. In the phonetic approach, the consonant inventories of the four Slavic languages are analyzed with the theory of maximal and sufficient dispersion and the size principle, together with a frequency-based statistical approach. Segmental universals are discussed regarding sound types such as obstruents and sonorants. From the phonetic approach, it is shown that Slavic consonant systems are very unusual in terms of natural languages. Palatalized sounds in Russian and affricates and fricatives in Russian and Polish support that the Slavic consonantal system is far removed from the general aspect of human languages. On the other hand, with the phonological approach, four of the five feature-based principles proposed by Clements are employed to reveal the universals of the languages. They are Feature Economy, Marked Feature Avoidance, Robustness and Phonological enhancement. What we have seen is that some unsolved problems from the phonetic approach are explained by phonological accounts. The fact that Russian has plenty of segments represented by [+palatal] may not be unusual with respect to a feature-based approach. In addition, while the phonetic approach claims that Slavic languages (in particular, Russian and Polish) have different consonantal systems from the general aspect of natural languages because of the marked segments, the phonological approach accounts for the universals of these languages in the light of Robustness and Feature Economy. In short, what we get from phonetic accounts are language universals, found by frequency-based statistical approach while what we get from phonological accounts, using a feature-based approach, are linguistic universals.

**Keywords:** consonantal systems of Slavic languages, phonetic universals for Slavic consonants, distinctive features, feature economy, marked feature avoidance robustness, phonological enhancement

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## 1. Introduction

There are two different approaches for explaining the speech sound systems of natural languages. One is a phonetic approach, and the other is phonological. As for the former, it is said that sound systems are structured by seeking points of contact in trade-offs between the 'ease of articulation' by which similar sounds or simple sounds are preferred which are easier to pronounce (articulatory economy) and 'perceptual salience' by which very different sounds or complex sounds are preferred to provide listeners perceptual saliency (maximum or sufficient acoustic distance). As for the latter, it is claimed that languages tend to organize their sound structures according to feature-based principles such as feature economy. This paper compares two claims regarding the research of natural speech sound systems with the consonantal systems of four Slavic languages; Russian, Polish, Czech and Serbian and Croatian.

2. Consonantal Systems

Russian, Polish, Czech and Serbian and Croatian have different consonantal system inventories. The (standard) systems of four languages are shown in Tables 1-3.

Table 1. The Russian consonantal system (after Yanushevskaya and Bunčić).

	Bilabial	Labiodental	Dental	Post-alveolar	Palatal	Velar
Plosive	p b pʲ bʲ		t d tʲ dʲ			k g kʲ gʲ
Affricate			ts	tʃ		
Fricative		f v fʲ vʲ	s z sʲ zʲ	ʃ ʒ ʃʲ ʒʲ		x xʲ
Nasal	m mʲ		n nʲ			
Trill			r rʲ			
Approximant					j	
Lateral Approximant			l lʲ			

Table 2. The Polish consonantal system (after Jassem).

	Bilabial	Labio-dental	(Post-)dental	Alveolar	Alveolar-palatal	Palatal	Velar
Plosive	p b		t d			c ɟ	k g
Affricate			ts dz	tʃ dʒ	tɕ dʑ		
Fricative		f v	s z	ʃ ʒ	ɕ ʑ		x
Nasal	m		n		ɲ		ŋ
Lateral			l				
Flap/Trill				r			
	Front			Back			
Approximant	j(ɨ)			w(ɔ̃)			

Table 3. The Czech (in Bohemia and Moravia) consonantal system (after Šimáčková *et al.*).

	Bilabial	Labio-dental	Alveolar	Post-alveolar	Palatal	Velar	Glottal
Plosive	p b		t d		c ɟ	k (g)	
Affricate			ts (ɟs)	tʃ (dʒ)			
Fricative		f v	s z	ʃ ʒ		x	h
Nasal	m		n		ɲ		
Trill			r				
Approximant					j		
Lateral approximant			l				

Table 4. The Serbian and Croatian consonantal system (after Landau *et al.* 1995; 2009).

	Bilabial	Labio-dental	Dental	Alveolar	Post-alveolar	Palatal	Velar
Plosive	p b		t d				k g
Affricate			ts		tʃ dʒ	ɕ ɟʑ	
Fricative		f	s z		ʃ ʒ		X
Nasal	m			n		ɲ	
Trill			r				
Approximant		ʋ				j	
Lateral approximant			l			ʎ	

3. The Phonetic Approach to the Consonantal Systems of the Slavic Languages

As mentioned above, phonetic accounts of sound structures are based on a principle of maximal or sufficient dispersion, or contrast (Lindblom 1986; 1992; Lindblom and Maddieson). When this notion comes into phonological theory, the universals of the vowel systems are well accounted for, including major trends in vowel system inventories such as the relationship between the number of vowels and the types of vocalic sounds (i.e. if we know the number of vowels in a system we also can predict what the individual sounds might be) and the symmetry of front-back peripheral vowels. This principle also lets us know systems with a gap (or a hole) at the triangle corners are skewed.

However, whether the principle of dispersion is applicable to the consonantal system or not is controversial. The arguments for and against the principle are well known respectively from Lindblom and Maddieson and Ohala. Ohala has claimed that if the principle for maximizing segmental distance from each other applies to a consonantal system which has seven sounds, we reach an apparent false prediction and get an undesirable set of consonants such as {d' k' ts l m r ɹ}.

Lindblom and Maddieson (66f.), who have a different opinion from Ohala, have acknowledged the natures of two different types of sounds. They agree with the fact that it is not likely that consonants position themselves so as to maximize inter-consonantal distance. Instead, they still pertain to the notion of dispersion or contrast saying that 'consonant inventories tend to evolve so as to achieve maximal perceptual distinctiveness at minimum articulatory cost.' They propose the following consonantal categories based on the complexity of articulation which relate to perceptual distance.<sup>1</sup>

Table 5. Three consonantal categories based on the complexity of articulation.

Set I	Basic articulations	unmarked consonants commonly appearing in most languages (e.g. /p t k ʔ b d g f s h ʃ m n ŋ l r w j/)
Set II	Elaborated articulations	Manners: Breathy and creaky voice, voiced fricatives, pre-nasalization, pre-/post-aspiration, nasal release, ejectives, implosives, clicks Places: labiodental, palate-alveolar, retroflex, uvular, pharyngeal Modification: palatalization, labialization, pharyngealization, velarization
Set III	Complex articulations	Combinations of two or more from Set II

1 According to Lindblom and Maddieson (71), each set of articulations differ in dimension of articulation, and recruiting additional dimensions from the lower set to the higher set increases perceptual distance.

In Table 5 above, we have three different categories based on the complexity of articulation. According to the size principle, as the size of the inventory becomes bigger, the set of sounds the system takes becomes more complicated. Concrete, smaller inventories tend to fill the system only with the unmarked segments in Set I, and Set II segments can be new members of a larger system approximately at the point where Set I segments reach their level of saturation, and the segments of Set III will come into the bigger system when no more Set II segments are available

### 3.1 Analysis 1: Consonant Inventory Size

As pointed out in Pandey, one of the main concerns of studies on phonological inventories is a frequency-based statistical generalization regarding the occurrence of segments, and we will see how this manner of research appears in the phonetic approach.

We first consider the size of the consonant inventories of the languages. According to Maddieson (2013), mapping the size of consonant inventories prepares the way to investigate two connected issues. The first concerns how the complexity of different aspects of the sound patterns of the languages is related, and the second issue concerns the hypothesis that there is an overall relationship between the size of a consonant inventory and the kind of consonants it includes, i.e. the size principle. Since the former issue is beyond the scope of this paper, in the following we focus on the second issue.

According to Maddieson (2013), consonant inventories range very wide from a low of 6 consonants (e.g. Rotokas) to a high of 122 (e.g. Xu). However, the more typical size of the common systems of 562 languages of WALS (the World Atlas Language Structures) is around 22. Based on this fact, Maddieson divides consonant inventories into the following five categories, and the inventory size of the four languages are provided in Table 6 below: Russian falls into a large group, Polish is moderately large, Czech moderately large or average and Serbian and Croatian average.

Table 6. Size of consonant inventories (Maddieson 2013).

Value	Size	No. of languages	Languages
Small	6~14	89	
Moderately small	15~18	122	
Average	19~25	201	Czech(24-27), Serbian and Croatian(25)
Moderately large	26~33	94	Czech(24-27) Polish(31)
Large	34 or more	57	Russian(36)
Total		563	

As mentioned above, the size principle claims that there is a connection between the size of the consonant inventory of a language and the characteristics of the expected candidates for consonants in it. That is, again, the systems with smaller inventories tend to exhibit simpler sounds (or basic articulation) which are easier for a speaker to produce and are salient for a listener to distinguish from other sounds, and consonants which are inherently more complex will be found in larger inventories (Lindblom and Maddieson). The nature of simpler sounds is characterized as the most frequently occurring segments among consonants, or basic sounds with no elaborated articulation, and are thus acquired in early childhood. With the UPSID<sub>317</sub> data file, Maddieson (1984: 12) reveals a structure consisting of the 20 most frequent sounds under the name of the ‘typologically most plausible structure’ (but that does not exist in reality) as seen in Table 7 below.

Table 7. Typologically most plausible structures.

	Bilabial	Dental/ Alveolar	Post-alveolar /Palatal	Velar	Glottal
Plosive	p b	t d		k g	ʔ
Affricate			tʃ		
Fricative	f	s	ʃ		h
Nasal	m	n	ɲ	ŋ	
Trill		r			
Approximant	w		ɹ		
Lateral approximant		l			

Comparing the consonantal structures of the four Slavic languages with this system, we easily reach the conclusion that no Slavic language system has the nature of a small size of inventories, but rather they are classified into a ‘larger system’ because of the following segments.

Table 8. Segments that are not included in small inventories.

Language	Number	Segments
Russian	18	all palatalized consonants (pʲ bʲ tʲ dʲ kʲ gʲ ʃʲ ʈʲ vʲ sʲ zʲ ʃʲː xʲ mʲ nʲ rʲ lʲ), ʒ
Polish	8	ɕ ʒ ʑ ʐ ʄ ʈ ʉ
Czech	4	ɕ ʒ ʃ
SC	4	ʈ ʉ ʒ ʎ

What we can see from the systems of the four languages is that the characteristics of Slavic languages are mainly affricates and palatals. It is these sounds that cause the four languages to fall into the large inventory group regardless of the actual size of consonants, and we see that the system of Russian shows quite distinct aspects from the general structures of human languages.

### 3.2 Analysis 2:

#### *The Segmental Frequency of Sound Types<sup>2</sup>*

Frequency-based statistical approaches to consonantal inventories present several facts in regard to the segmental frequency of the four Slavic languages.

#### **3.2.1 The Obstruent-Sonorant Ratio**

The first phonetic universal is the ratio of obstruents versus sonorants. It is generally said that languages tend to have 70% obstruents and 30% sonorants. As for this ratio, scholars claim that it relates to the physical characteristics of the regions of the “phonetic space” in which obstruent and sonorant consonants range. The phonetic space for obstruents is larger and richer than that for sonorants (Ohala). The ratio of obstruent to sonorant for the four languages are almost the same as for the general aspect of natural languages.

#### **3.2.2 Frequencies of Slavic Sonorants**

##### **1) Nasals**

As is well known, nasal sounds are the second most frequently occurring phonetic type in human sound types. As revealed from UPSID, 435 or 96.45% of 451 languages have at least one nasal consonant, and nearly 90% of 451 languages have 2-4 nasals placed at the bilabial, dental/alveolar, palatal, and velar locations.

The four Slavic languages under discussion are very common in their numbers of nasals since they contain from 3 to 4 nasals, and are not very far from the general aspects of natural languages with respect to the quality of the nasals as well, except for the fact that Russian has two

2 Please note that this is discussed in more detail in Heo, written in Korean.



peculiar nasals ( $m^j n^j$ ) which have palatality as a secondary articulation. Note that / $m^j$ / occurs in only 10 languages, or 2.22% among the 451 UPSID sample languages, and / $n^j$ / never occurs in any language but Russian.

## 2) Liquids

The lateral approximant / $l$ /, together with r-sounds, is classified into the same group of ‘liquids’ in the sense that they share certain phonetic and phonological similarities (Ladefoged and Maddieson). From the UPSID<sub>317</sub> survey, it can be said that these sounds are very common in natural languages, so almost all languages in the UPSID sample of 317 languages have at least one liquid; that is, 95.9% of them do. Most languages, that is 72.6%, have more than one liquid (Maddieson 1984: 73f). Compared with the UPSID survey, three of the Slavic languages under discussion, unlike Polish which has two liquids, have 3 or 4 liquids; thus they present slightly unusual aspects. Note that 41.0 % of the 317 UPSID sample languages have two liquids and 14.5% have three liquids.

## 3) Approximants

Sounds like / $j$ / and / $w$ / are categorized as approximants. Of the world’s languages, 85% have the palatal approximant / $j$ / and 76% the labio-velar approximant / $w$ / (Ladefoged and Maddieson 322). What is of interest is that none of the four Slavic languages under discussion have / $w$ / if we consider the Serbian and Croatian / $v$ / as a fricative / $v$ /. Note that proto languages for modern Slavic languages, PIE, Proto-Balto-Slavic, Early Proto-Slavic and Late Proto-Slavic, have / $w$ / (Kortlandt; Sussex and Cubberley; Townsend and Janda).

### 3.2.3 Phonetic Universals for Slavic Obstruents

#### 1) Stops

Among 17 possibilities of the place of articulation for consonants, from Bilabial to Glottal, plosive sounds are produced mainly in four phonetic areas. They are bilabial, dental/alveolar, velar and glottal, as can be seen in Table 6 above, and the first three places are phonetically the most common places for plosives, so that 99% of UPSID languages have plosives at these places. The two languages of Russian and Serbian and Croatian have exactly the same places for the pronunciation of their plosives. However, the other two languages under discussion, Polish and Czech, take the

palatal as the fourth place rather than the glottal for the plosives. Note that out of 451 UPSID sample languages, only 71 or 15.74% have plosives at this place; thus, these two languages are unusual places of articulation for plosives.

2) Fricatives and Affricates

In general, affricates are classified into a stop group, but we consider them together with fricatives in this paper because of the characteristics of these languages. As can be seen in Tables 1-4, the number of fricatives and affricates are unusually large in comparison with those segments of other languages. What is more interesting is that affricates are rarely found in the proto Slavic languages, except for Late Proto-Slavic (Comrie and Corbett 70). The quantity and the quality of the fricatives of the Slavic languages under discussion are another issue that we should pay attention to.

Table 9. Major fricatives in the UPSID and the frequency of fricative series by number of series.

a. Major fricatives in UPSID <sub>451</sub>								
Segment	s	ʃ	f	z	v	X	ʒ	ʎ
No. of language	411	187	180	122	95	94	63	56
%	91.1	41.5	39.9	27.1	21.1	20.8	14.0	12.4
b. Frequency of fricative series by number of series								
No. of fricatives	1	2	3	4	5	6		
No. of languages	37	62	47	37	26	26		
Series	s	s f	f s ʃ	f v s z	?	f v s z ʃ ʒ		

As can be seen in Tables 1-4, Russian has 13 fricatives and more than half of them (palatalized fricatives) are those that are not visible in Table 9 above, and the remaining three languages are less problematic than Russian, but they still contain fricatives such as /tɕ dʒ ʎ/.

## 4. Phonological Approach to the Consonantal Systems of Slavic Languages

The phonological approach to phonological inventories has mainly been developed by Clements (2003a; 2003b; 2009). He claims that phonological inventories are structured in terms of distinctive features rather than phonetic categories. He presents five principles that constrain the internal structures of a sound system. First, Feature Bounding, by which features bound the number of sounds and the number of contrasts that a language may have. Second, Feature Economy, by which features have a tendency to be combined maximally. Third, Marked Feature Avoidance, by which certain disfavored features are systematically avoided. Fourth, Robustness, by which higher-valued features are made use of before less highly-valued features. Finally, Phonological Enhancement, by which perceptual contrasts are reinforced by introducing marked features. The four principles, apart from the first principle, relate to the universals of natural languages, and we can evaluate whether or not a certain language is high-valued according to each principle.

### 4.1 Feature Economy

The principle of Feature Economy is based on the fact that speech sounds in a language tend to appear in the same series of categories. It is true that languages prefer to have more than one voiceless plosive or front unrounded vowel rather than only one voiceless plosive or front unrounded vowel. This means that languages tend to have as many as possible sounds (or feature combinations) with the fewest features; thus, features used once in a language tend to be combined repeatedly and regularly with other features to generate new sounds without introducing new features. According to Clements (2009), "given a system with  $S$  speech sounds characterized by  $F$  features, its economy index,  $E$ , is given by expression" as in (1).

$$(1) E = S/F$$

Since the higher the value of  $E$ , the higher degree of the economy, either the number of segments  $S$  is increased or the number of features is decreased to get a higher degree of economy. Let us now see the measure of economy of the four languages. The nine features in (2a) are commonly used in the four languages, and those which are required in addition in respective languages are given in (2b) below. Note that the consonantal system of Polish and Serbian and Croatian do not require any additional features.

(2)

- a. [sonorant], [labial], [coronal], [dorsal], [continuant], [posterior], [voice], [nasal], [strident]
- b. Russian: [palatal]<sup>3</sup>  
Czech: [glottal]

Given these number of features, we can obtain the ranking of the Feature Economy index as can be seen in Table 10.

Table 10. The economy index of the four languages.

Language	DF	Consonants	Economy index
Russian	10	36	3.6
Polish	9	31	3.4
Czech	10	24-27	2.4-2.7
Serbian and Croatian	9	25	2.8

From this data, we can see that Russian is the most economical and the Czech and Serbian and Croatian have a relatively lower degree of economy, and Polish is between them. The higher degree of the economy index of Russian and Polish is due to the feature [palatal] of the second articulation such as /pʲ/ in Russian, and [strident] that characterize the affricates and fricatives in Russian and Polish. The segments corresponding to this category are 17 and 12 respectively, many of which are not included in small inventories as can be seen in Table 10 above. This may contradict to the claim of the phonetic approach above that the consonantal systems of Russian and Polish are very unusual with respect to the universals of natural languages because of these two features. These two features are problematic in terms of phonetic universals, whereas they are the features that make the two languages have a higher degree on the economic index. It is also worthwhile to note that, from the fact that these four languages are daughter languages of the same ancestor languages like Proto-Indo-European and Proto-Slavic, the two languages of Czech and Serbian and Croatian could have had more consonants (in particular, obstruents with respect to the other two languages) to reach a the higher degree on the economy index.

3 We define the feature which generates palatalized sounds as a secondary articulation is simply [palatal].

4.2 Marked Feature Avoidance

Let us now consider the universals of the four languages with respect to the Principle of Marked Feature Avoidance (henceforth, MFA). As mentioned earlier, this is simply that there are certain disfavored features in languages, and that languages have the tendency to avoid such features in taking up new constituting segments. Thus, we can predict that the number of sounds containing marked values is less than the number of sounds containing unmarked values except in some special cases which we will see below in 4.3.

In general, sonorants are more marked than obstruents, affricates are more marked than fricatives and fricatives are more marked than stops, if we define the criterion of markedness in terms of frequency, as many linguists do, including Clements (2009). This means that the universal tendency of the relation between sonorants and obstruents is that the former may occur less than the latter according to the number of the occurrence of each in a language, and the same is true for the relation between affricates and fricatives, and fricatives and stops. Now let us see the frequency of such sound categories.

Table 11. The frequency of such sound categories.

a. Frequency of sonorants and obstruents			
	Sonorants	Obstruents	
Russian	9	27	✓
Polish	8	23	✓
Czech	7	20	✓
Serbian and Crotian	8	17	✓
b. Frequency of affricates and fricatives			
	Affricates	Fricatives	
Russian	2	13	✓
Polish	6	9	✓
Czech	4	8	✓
Serbian and Crotian	5	6	✓
c. Frequency of fricatives and stops			
	Fricatives	Stops	
Russian	13	12	?
Polish	9	8	?
Czech	8	8	?
Serbian and Croatian	6	6	?

We see that the problem of the four languages is that, as can be seen in Table 11c, the number of the marked value segments (i.e. fricatives) are in excess of or not less than the unmarked value segments (i.e. stops).

Simply, they all have too many fricatives. Note that the average number of fricatives of UPSID<sub>451</sub> is between 4 and 5, but they have a range from a low of 6 to a high of 13 fricatives. It is the fricatives that make these four languages have a lower degree of universals in terms of MFA. In the case of Russian, the palatalized sounds are more marked than non-palatalized sounds, thus the feature [palatal] also makes this language violate MFA. Again, the features [palatal] as well as [+strident] play important roles in deciding on the universals of the two languages, but this time these two features, unlike the case of Robustness, make the two languages become non-universal languages.

We can see another fact, that Russian and Polish, which have large inventories, have marked segments more than the other two languages, which have smaller inventories. This is what Maddieson (1984) and Clements (2009) mentioned.

(3)

a. A smaller inventory has a greater probability of including a given common segment than a larger one, and a larger inventory has a greater probability of including an unusual segment type than a smaller one (Maddieson 1984: 10).

b. The average number of sounds in languages containing a marked term M is greater than the average number of sounds in languages containing its unmarked counterpart U (Clements 2009: 41).

### 4.3 Robustness

The next theory Clements (2009) proposes as one of the phonological accounts of the organizing principle for sound structures is Robustness. This principle is firstly based on the fact that phonological structures are not a simple gathering of sounds which are composed of the same or similar features, for example, only stops, but they consist of various types and categories of sounds such as stops, fricatives, nasals in manners and bilabial, alveolar and velar in place of articulation. In relation to this, Clements (2009: 42) claims that 'some contrasts are highly favored in sound systems, others less favored, and still others disfavored.' For instance, contrasts between sonorants vs. obstruents, labial vs. coronal vs. dorsal and stop vs. continuant are favored, while the contrasts between aspirated vs. non-aspirated, implosive vs. explosive and glottalized vs. non-glottalized are disfavored across the languages. Based on this fact, he suggests a Robustness scale for consonant features as seen in Table 12, given below.

Table 12. Robustness scale for consonant features and commonest consonant contrasts in UPSID

Robustness scale	Commonest consonant contrast in UPSID	Example <sup>1</sup>	% (UPSID)	Feature(s)
a. [±sonorant] [labial] [coronal] [dorsal]	Dorsal vs. coronal obstruent	K/T	99.6	[dorsal], [coronal]
	Sonorant vs. obstruent	N/T	98.9	[±sonorant]
	Labial vs. coronal obstruent	P/T	98.7	[labial], [coronal]
	Labial vs. dorsal obstruent	P/K	98.7	[labial], [dorsal]
	Labial vs. coronal sonorant	M/N	98.0	[labial], [coronal]
b. [±continuant] [±posterior]	Continuant vs noncontinuant sonorant	J/N	93.8	[±continuant]
	Continuant vs noncontinuant obstruent	S/T	91.6	[±continuant]
	Posterior vs. anterior sonorant	J/L	89.6	[±posterior]
c. [±voiced] [±nasal]	Voiced vs. voiceless obstruent	D/T	83.4	[±voiced]
	Oral vs. nasal noncontinuant sonorant	L/N	80.7	[±nasal]
d. [±posterior] [glottal]	Posterior vs. anterior obstruent	Tʃ/T	77.6	[±posterior]
	Glottal vs. nonglottal consonant	H/T	74.5	[glottal]

On the basis of the Robustness scale, Clements (2009: 48) formulates the Robustness Principle as in (4) below.

#### (4) Robustness Principle

In any class of sounds in which two features are potentially distinctive, minimal contrasts involving the lower-ranked feature will tend to be present only if minimal contrasts involving the higher-ranked feature are also present.

As Clements points out, this principle addresses ‘a significant gap in the theory developed so far’ (Clements 2009:43). What this principle says is simple; higher-ranked features should be taken before lower-ranked features. Thus, the features in Table 12a (e.g. [±sonorant]) should be present before the other features in Table 12b-d (e.g. [±nasal]). Considering the robustness of the four languages, we see that all the higher-ranked features listed above in Table 12, together with the feature [±strident], which is not included in the robust features, are present in Czech. This means that this language does not violate the Robustness principle. However, the situation is different in the other three languages, where the lower-ranked feature [±strident] is present instead of the higher-ranked feature [glottal]. This means that these languages do not have the glottal segment such as /h/ which is probably favored over other disfavored segments such as /ʔ/



which is [+strident], in their inventories. The segment /h/ occurs in 279 (61.68%) out of 451 UPSID sample languages, whereas /ts/ occurs in only 57 (12.64%) languages. That means that the [glottal] feature is higher than [+strident] in the Robustness scale, and thus, the former should be present before the latter, but this is not considered in the phonetic approach.

A word should be mentioned concerning the [palatal] feature used in Russian and [+strident] in Russian and Polish. Recall that it is these two features by which the two languages have a higher degree on the economy index, and by which they have a lower degree of universals in terms of MFA. As for this, the feature-based approach explains this with the interaction of Robustness and Feature Economy. As Clements (2009: 49) mentions, 'as a result of Feature Economy, even though less robust features tend to be less frequent across languages, once they are present in a system they tend to generalize to other sounds.' That is [palatal] is a lower-ranked feature and thus it would not easily be present in other consonant systems, but this feature in Russian cross-classifies almost all segments to double the number of segments. The same is almost true for the case of [+strident] in the two languages. We can see why systems which are very unusual from the phonetic point of view, and which exist in natural languages, can be explained from feature-based accounts.

#### 4.4 *Phonological Enhancement*

As a last interacting principle that, together with the above, organizes the structure of sound systems, let us consider the case of Phonological Enhancement, which is defined as the reinforcement of weak acoustic contrasts by increasing the acoustic difference between their members by introducing marked features (Clements, 2009: 50).

The notion of Phonological Enhancement comes from the fact that, contradictory to the prediction of MFA, there are cases where marked value features are more frequent than unmarked value features. According to Clements (2009), exceptional cases like this can be explained by the principle of Phonological Enhancement. For instance, [+nasal] is a marked value feature in most criteria of sounds. The only exception is the criterion of sonorant non-continuants, where only nasal stops and laterals are available. Among 451 UPSID sample languages, 435 languages have /n/ ([+nasal]) whereas only 368 languages have /l/ ([-nasal]). As for this fact, Clements claims that [-continuant] is enhanced by the marked value feature [+nasal] to increase the contrast between [+continuant] (such as /r/ or /l/) and [-continuant] in the group of sonorant non-continuants. In the cases of the four languages under discussion, we can find the following increased contrasts by the application of Phonological Enhancement.

### (5) Phonological Enhancement in the four languages

a. [+labiodental] enhancing [+continuant] in labial consonants results in increasing the contrast /f, v/ and stops such as /p, b/: Russian, Polish, Czech, Serbian and Croatian

b. [+strident] enhancing [+posterior] in coronal stops results in increasing the contrast /ʃ, ʒ/ and stops such as /t, d/: Russian, Polish, Czech, Serbian and Croatian

c. [+strident] enhancing [+continuant] in coronal obstruents results in increasing the contrast between /s, z/ and (non-continuant) stops such as /t, d/: Russian, Polish, Czech, Serbian and Croatian

d. [+nasal] enhancing [-continuant] in sonorant consonants results in increasing the contrast between /n/ and oral continuants such as /r/: Russian, Polish, Czech, Serbian and Croatian

e. [+posterior] enhancing [coronal] in sonorant continuants results in increasing the contrast between /j/ and non-coronal sonorant continuants such as /w/: Polish, Serbian and Croatian

The above five cases of Phonological Enhancement are illustrated in Clements (2009: 51) as an example of the principle, and the four cases in (5a-d) are present in the four languages. The only controversial case is /j/. Unlike the statement in (5e), the two languages, apart from Polish and Serbian and Croatian, do not have /w/, which is a non-coronal sonorant continuant and thus is supposed to be a prospective segment to be in contrast with /j/ by the application of Phonological Enhancement. Thus, we can assume that Polish and Serbian and Croatian are more universal and the other two languages are less universal. Based on UPSID data, it is true that 226 (or 71.3%) out of 317 UPSID sample languages have both glides /w/ and /j/, and only 47 languages (or 14.8%) have /j/ but no /w/ (Maddieson 1984: 91f).

## 5. Conclusion

From the phonetic approach we can see that our major Slavic languages have the characteristics of large inventory size with respect to the size principle. They have sounds that are not easily occurring in the smaller size of the consonant inventory. The palatalized sounds of all types of consonants in Russian are very odd in natural languages, and the great

number of affricates and fricatives in Polish may be a typical Slavic consonantal system, but this system is still very unusual with respect to the general aspect of human languages. The other two languages, Czech and Serbian and Croatian, have consonantal systems more or less close to that of being universal.

On the other hand, from the phonological accounts we can understand some problems which are unsolved or unexplained by the phonetic approach. The first and foremost is why certain languages like Russian have many unusual segments, not just one or two that are not easily found in other languages. The feature-based approach accounts for the interaction of the two principles of Robustness and Feature Economy. The second issue concerns Feature Economy, by which we can understand why segments occur in series in a language. This could also be problematic in the theory of maximal dispersion by which one may expect languages will contain very different segments which share no common features at all. Finally, markedness is another point we can think of. The Phonological approach, as well as the phonetic approach, show similar observations in that markedness is discussed in terms of the size of inventories, but as for the question of why some marked features prevail in certain sound categories like fricatives, this is accounted for by the principle of Phonological Enhancement from the feature-based approach.

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Speculating worlds





# Readability Thresholds Xenography and Speculative Fiction

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## Abstract

The unreadable and the illegible tend to be treated as the ‘other’ of writing. Playing on one of the meanings of *xenography* – writing in a language unknown to the writer – this paper explores the possibility that the metaphorical ‘gravity assist’ of literature, rather than engaging the resources of content and imagination, actually resides in the cognitively inaccessible layers of writing as a material phenomenon. If we accept Harman’s definition of realism as something that can’t be *translated into human knowledge without energy loss*, regions of unintelligibility in literary writing take on a completely different meaning, and appear as zones coinciding with the aseptic material exteriority, equally unavailable to thought and mimesis. Writings of Thomas Ligotti (*The Red Tower*), Reza Negarestani (*Cyclonopedia*) and Mark Z. Danielewski (*The Familiar*) are examined in the light of various atypical formal devices they use to convey a certain ‘otherness,’ introducing varying degrees of unreadability as a response to the ‘inscrutability of the Real itself’ (Fisher) and enforcing new types of non-hierarchical distribution of agency between writer, reader and text.

**Keywords:** xenography, the unreadable, the illegible, materialism, speculative fiction, Ligotti, Negarestani, Danielewski

## 1. The Other of Writing

I will begin with a quote<sup>1</sup> that will probably sound very familiar:

We must abolish [man] in literature and replace him once and for all with matter. . . . Be careful not to assign human sentiments to matter, but instead to divine its different governing impulses, its forces of compression, dilation, cohesion, disintegration, its heaps of molecules massed together or its electrons whirling like turbines. There is no point in creating a drama of matter that has been humanized.

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1 This is an adapted version of the keynote address given at *Gravity Assist. Speculative Change in Literature, Film and Art* conference (Split, September 14th 2018).

Its source is embarrassing in many ways (Marinetti 122), and one can only hope that we'll never see the resurgence of its historical context, but its overall tone makes it vaguely contemporaneous, apparently placing it among some recent tendencies in philosophy and their attempts at bypassing the human moment in the process of addressing reality. Of course, it would be a simplification – if not an outright forgery – to claim that the literal removal of humans from the realm of art (or even the true 'destruction of I in literature', as Marinetti would have it) is the primary concern of contemporary materialisms, but the question remains: if art can't help being thoroughly immersed in correlation and always inevitably conditioned by a certain frame of culture, type of economy, level of technological development, even a specific sensorium or a nervous system, how does one liquidate man once and for all precisely?

Within this frame of reference, literature might seem less engaging than mathematics (which many regard as the privileged access point to reality), but only if one thinks of it as an imaginative endeavour, conscious striving to develop new narratives and new ideas. I would like to explore, at least tentatively, the possibility that its royal road to alterity, exteriority or future, doesn't lead through thinking at all, but through the materiality of artworks, precisely at the points where we seem to fail to comprehend them.

I will try to approach this subject in a very limited and possibly old-fashioned way, looking for 'the location of nonsense within sense' (2) and posing the question: what if the true alterity to be contacted through writing is not something external after all, something pre-existing (even as a figment or a fictional object), but something non-narrative, something unrecountable, the alterity of writing itself? What if the metaphorical 'gravity assist' of literature, its capital power, the capability of propelling us into a certain unknown or previously unthought *elsewhere*, is simply a forced cognitive development in the wake of its material, non-semantic aspects?

I'll try to explore that unreadability in certain texts that belong to broadly defined speculative fiction, the way they employ it as a strategy of representing the unimaginable, and the way that varying degrees of this unreadability open up new pathways of writing and reading. This is where the most abstruse term from the title of this paper comes into play: *xenography*, which seems like a particularly useful compound word in this context, in all of its possible meanings: strange writing, foreign writing, alien writing. I'll try to appropriate it, with all of its definitions: a) writing (about) the alien; b) writing in an alien or foreign language (some dictionaries define it simply as 'knowledge of a foreign language'); c) the ability to write in a language which the individual has not learned, or even more pointedly: writing in a language unknown to the writer.

Connotations of the last definition threaten to lead us astray towards

spiritualism or automatic writing, but on another level, this might be read as a condensed description of literature as such, at least within the horizon of modernity: *writing in a language unknown to the writer*.<sup>2</sup> This definition inevitably points to asemic writing as the essence of inscription: 'Let there be writing, not *about* the body, but the body itself. Not signs, images, or ciphers of the body, but still the body' (Nancy 9). If to write – in a narrow sense of the word – is 'to touch upon the body, rather than signify it or make it signify' (9), then writing itself is a particular type of corporeality (rather than something that 'happens' on a material substratum), coinciding with the body precisely in its non-semantic areas: 'What in a writing, and properly so, is not to be read – that's what a body is' (87).

There is, of course, a very strong tradition of evaluating the unreadable, the illegible, the material as the 'other' of writing, but what if this is not a remote, borderline zone of writing's repertoire, but its very basis, its prime and irreducible quality? What if the 'natural' condition of writing is not being a representation of something through symbols (even a representation of unreadability), but being unreadability itself?

Naturally, *content* behind the narrative still seems to be the focal point for the large majority of writing on speculative fiction (and for SF writers themselves), but if the only way to adequately represent, engender, embody alterity or the alien in a non-reductive, non-anthropomorphic, non-metaphorical way leads through a channel that bypasses the weakest link of the entire materialistic endeavour – which is ourselves, the mind, causality, story, maybe even temporality – then the results will have to be at least partially unclear, incomprehensible, unreadable, illegible.

This would force us to consider writing as an irreducible exteriority: *writing is space*, opposed to the inevitable linearity of thought and storytelling.<sup>3</sup> It is not 'space' represented, described or narrated; the book is a spatial (non-dialectical) object in itself. Such privileging of inscription

2 Contrary to habitual equations of deconstruction with postmodernism, the most radically 'modernist' reading of literature as a highly paradoxical institution, working from a place of 'subversive juridicity', is proposed by Derrida: 'is it not necessary for all literature to exceed literature? . . . What would be a literature that would be only what it is, literature? It would no longer be itself if it were itself' ('Before the Law' 215). Literature (if there is any) therefore ceases to work as a preexisting category and becomes a perpetual self-generation through singular acts of writing that come to inaugurate or transform a certain universality, instead of 'belonging' to it as mere contingencies, perfectly readable and readily subsumable to its law. 'The work, the opus, does not belong to the field, it is the transformer of the field' (ibid.), placing us in a position of writing where 'we know neither *who* nor *what* is the law, *das Gesetz*. This, perhaps, is where literature begins' (207).

3 The material nature of inscription poses fundamental problems for all idealist definitions of 'literature' (in the widest scope of its meaning, including all scientific statements; see Husserl 160), and provides an axis for Derrida's early attempts at dis-

in its purely visual or graphic aspects, without considering its information-bearing capacities, might seem like an extreme proposition – writing as a material, spatial artefact that is *entangled* with meaning, concepts and thought, but distinctly *separate* from thought, maybe even prior to thought, untranslatable matter that severely tests the subject's capability of understanding, at the same time generating something that was previously unthought – but it actually ties in very well with Harman's claim that “*realism is not realism if the reality it describes can be translated without energy loss into human knowledge, or indeed into any sort of relation at all*” (*Bells and Whistles* 12). This is rephrased in *Weird Realism* in order to define artwork as ‘a real’ object in the sense that it cannot be exhausted by any sum total of specific experiences or linguistic propositions, but to some extent resists all perception and all analysis” (237), always leaving behind a remainder of the ‘too real’. This resistance to representation and summarizing is an index of the fundamental irreducibility of things to concepts: ‘The meaning of being might even be defined as *untranslatability*’ (16).

If materiality is really the opposite of knowledge, and spatiality the opposite of thought, then the crucial tendency of every text, fictional or not, might be ‘becoming-haptical of the optical’. This phrase is taken from Derrida's *On Touching* (123), but it concerns the final chapter of Deleuze's and Guattari's *A Thousand Plateaus*, ‘The Smooth and the Striated’, and the basic profile of (literary) writing could be examined through the ‘opposition’ of smooth and striated spaces. The *ideality* of striated space is opposed to the *realism* of smooth space, which is linked to the ‘tactile’, or rather haptic’ space, as distinguished from optical space. Haptic’ is a better word than tactile’ since it does not establish an opposition between two sense organs but rather invites the assumption that the eye itself may fulfill this nonoptical function” (Deleuze and Guattari 543).

The main point of interest here would be a type of deterritorialization of the striated realm, its collapse into the smooth space: text, perceived as a completely transparent vessel for meaning, connected to temporal and largely linear processes of cognition, retracting into its materiality, into its non-conceptual regions, turning into a picture, but not metaphorically, in the way of *ekphrasis*: this would be a completely autonomous graphic *tableau*, without depicting anything in particular or corresponding to

mantling the logocentric superstructures of traditional approaches to writing. His notion of *espacement*, ‘spacing’ described as ‘becoming-space of time’ (*devenir-espace du temps*) (*Of Grammatology* 68), plays a crucial role in his early works and his attempts to portray intelligibility as an *a posteriori* of writing. If ‘the space of pure reading is always already *intelligible*, that of pure writing always still *sensible*’ (289), ‘radical illegibility’ becomes a nonchronological antecedent of every work of literature, ‘the very possibility of the book’ (*Writing and Difference* 95).

the semantic level of writing at all; it would be a text-as-an-asemic-mark, text as an abstract drawing.<sup>4</sup>

This framework would be directly opposed to hermeneutics or phenomenology: the essence of a literary work of art wouldn't reside in the region farthest from its spatial and material support – in the strata of represented objects or schematized aspects (as suggested by Ingarden, for example) – but in its very base, on the purely sensory level of graphisms and sounds. Coming back to Deleuze, if we can describe representation as the smooth space of writing being territorialized and striated by conventions of anthropocentric perspective, processing materiality into communication, thing into thought, we could say that writing that fights this impulse automatically works against its own grounding in Platonic mimesis, subverting the linearity of time and affirming its own material foundation.<sup>5</sup>

There is a microscopic example of this non-dialectical type of writing in weird fiction: Lovecraft's celebrated story 'The Call of Cthulhu'. In this context, I would like to accentuate the xenographic element contained in the very title: the *word* 'Cthulhu', devoid of obvious meaning as it is, works precisely as an asemic index of the alien, of the *inconceivable*. We know the reason Lovecraft built it that way:

4 The notion of haptic space was developed more thoroughly in Deleuze's study on Francis Bacon, where painting is examined as something that *removes* the figuration from the image, liberating the matter from the reign of optical organization, making marks that no longer depend on either our will or our sight", guided by other forces", attesting to the 'intrusion of another world into the visual world of figuration' (71). This engagement with a certain 'beyond' of the image is announced on the very last page as 'the formation of a third eye, a haptic eye', offering a 'new clarity': 'It is as if the duality of the tactile and the optical were surpassed visually in this haptic function born of the diagram' (113). The *diagram* itself is defined very specifically as 'the operative set of asignifying and nonrepresentative lines and zones, line-strokes and color-patches' (71); owing more to the tactile ground than to the optical horizon, imposed upon the eye as an absolutely foreign power" (75), allowing for a 'direct action upon the nervous system' (76), the diagram is the site of chance and accident, irrationality and insubordination, finally of catastrophe and chaos. The *pictorial fact*, fundamentally shaped by those asignifying traits, is ultimately defined as 'a zone of objective indiscernibility or indeterminability' (110), an apophenic space where several forms may actually be included in one and the same Figure, indissolubly, caught up in a kind of serpentine" (112), a whirling movement that 'gives them a single body' or unites them in a single fact,' apart from any figurative or narrative connection" (90-91). Of course, it's highly inadvisable to conflate different arts and their material supports, their histories and technologies, but – since we are trying to locate thresholds of readability in writing – all of this seems highly pertinent to research into the liminal areas of literature as well.

5 Deleuze and Guattari pose the question: 'What is the body without organs of a book?' (4), indirectly answering within a later passage on Hjelmslev: He used the term *matter* for the plane of consistency or Body without Organs, in other words, the unformed, unorganized, nonstratified, or destratified body and all its flows: subatomic and submolecular particles, pure intensities, prevital and prephysical free singularities" (48-49).



the word is supposed to represent a fumbling human attempt to catch the phonetics of an *absolutely non-human* word. . . . The syllables were determined by a physiological equipment wholly unlike ours, *hence could never be uttered perfectly by human throats*. . . . The actual sound – as nearly as human organs could imitate it or human letters record it – may be taken as something like *Khîlûl'-hloo* (Lovecraft 395).

The final rendition of this sound is still a legible graphism, but it is nearer to its 'meaning', to its unthinkable *signified*, the closer it gets to unpronounceability and incomprehensibility.

We could append a long psychoanalytical footnote here, linking this blank spot explicitly to the Unconscious, the Real, *jouissance*, *lalangue*, *khôra*, *géo-texte*, the crypt etc., but maybe we should remain on the surface and focus on the pure sound or graphic shape, the unreadable and unpronounceable as the birthplace of the 'alien', as effective as it is precisely because there is no conceptual background, no meaning to concretize, no idea to participate in. It's a closed object, a foreign body barely adapted to print within a human story told in English, and that's why it works.

I would provisionally define the unreadable as 'that which I cannot reproduce' – in understanding (rendering it intelligible) or in 'performance' (literally, in pronunciation). Encountering the unreadable implies coming to terms with a 'thing' (rather than an *object*) that will never become an idea or a concept, detachable from matter, corporeality, the particular, the body; if there is a way of engaging with it, it will probably derive from what is particular, corporeal, non-generalizable in us. To some extent, this invites the comparison with Bryant's 'dark objects' which are completely non-interactive with their environment, or are – at best – producing a certain 'black hole effect': forcibly interacting with their surroundings, creating disruptions, but remaining inaccessible (cf. Willems 16). This is how Harman describes this hiatus: 'no *direct* contact with the real object is possible', while 'indirect access is achieved by allowing the hidden object to deform the sensual world, just as the existence of a black hole might be inferred from the swirl of light and gases orbiting its core' (*Weird Realism* 238).

This idea of linking black holes and literature has already appeared in the 1990s in a different context: several writers, most notably J. Hillis

Miller and Marian Hobson, wrote about black holes<sup>6</sup> and strange attractors<sup>7</sup> respectively, attempting to explain what Derrida called *singularity* – a material core of unintelligibility within the literary text, inaccessible as such, withdrawn from the possibility of representation, but still detectable by its peripheral effects. Retracing Derrida's steps from his early analyses of Husserl to his later writings on Celan or Artaud, it's hard to overlook a unifying thread, conspicuous in many recent readings: deconstruction as a radically materialistic theory of text; the notion of ideality emerging exclusively through matter; dissemination as an aftereffect of this irreducibly sensible character of inscription; finally, material properties of texts (their graphic, acoustic, "corporeal" profile), tending towards this non-dialectical "singularity", as their decisive point of resistance to metaphysics. On many points, this seems to harmonize – superficially at least – with descriptions of "the real as an indecipherable *noumenon* at the margins of the intelligible, conveying an incompressible amount of information as encrypted by the random numbers of Chaitin" (Brassier). Hobson, incidentally, also invokes Chaitin, but in order to assert that this type of irreducible complexity exists elsewhere: "Such types of binary series suggest that the much more variegated strings of signifiers in natural language may likewise not be summarized without loss, by imposition of law-like program or summary equation one to another of different scales of detail and signification" (194), their singularity remaining unavailable to "thematization" or further reduction.

In this perspective, *all* text is asemic writing on one level; all writing is xenography. But we are still faced with the question: how does the illegible acquire its place within the fantastic and its quest for the new?

The idea that a revolution in language must precede every other

6 In reading both *Ayala's Angel* and *A la recherche du temps perdu* I have encountered, in a different way in each case, a core of incomprehensibility. I have named this, figuratively, a black hole. The effect of such an encounter is to dispossess my self of its seemingly secure self-possession" (Miller 491). "A black hole does not, strictly speaking, exist, if existence depends on being observable and measurable. . . Nevertheless, though it cannot be verified directly, a black hole may be inferred from matter's violent perturbation in its vicinity and the consequent emission of signals at various frequencies. Like black holes, the wholly others never manifest themselves directly. They give evidence of themselves in a variety of perturbations that can be registered" (167).

7 Hobson's strange attractors are "entities which are outside of the web of traces, which are unintuitable and unrepresentable" (201): the term designates a "value" which remains unknown, but which determines the overall tendency of visible elements within a given field. Nevertheless, this is not a variation on the dislocated center of structuralist metaphysics, but rather another figuration of incomprehensibility: "it allows for more than, or other than, what we can say, or write. But at the same time, we cannot access it, only receive its irruptive force" (189). Standing in for French *singularités* (121), strange attractors remain transitory, offering no chance of eventual stabilization of the system.



revolution is somewhat of a cliché, and it is not specific to avant-garde movements or poststructuralist theories, but it does imply a position of *ingénieur*, a certain *a priori*: first the complete language, then everything else, including the use of that language in this or that work. Thought first, and writing afterwards. Nevertheless, as a rule, we are acquainted only with situations where – to paraphrase Beckett – writers dance first and think later, as this is the natural order.

Therefore, instead of attempting to formulate a comprehensive theory of writerly engagement with the unutterable real, or at least a taxonomy of all possible (past and future) literary ‘solutions’ for this impasse, I will stay within the vague and frustrating zone of what actually exists. I would like to proceed by commenting on several works that inhabit different margins of speculative fiction, first and foremost in the way they employ various types of xenography, different ratios of the readable and the unreadable in producing the ‘black hole effect’. None of them complies ideally with the task of representing the alien by way of absolute unreadability, but this is not meant to be a list of the most extreme cases; there have been far more radical works throughout the history of literature. Furthermore, there is a certain paradox involved in this idea of the illegible as the quintessence of literature (the idea which is anything but new, cultivated for a hundred years at least, since the heyday of Russian Formalism): the power of the unreadable actually diminishes as it reaches its pure state; something like absolutely asemic writing would be terminally unintelligible and would simply fail to produce any effects in the world available to us. It’s not surprising that Deleuze uses the non-figure of a black hole to describe a complete failure of forced ‘absolute deterritorialization’ (Deleuze and Guattari 147), the dead end of a failed line of flight, promising something that ‘may be necessary for the release of innovative processes’ (368), but threatening to catastrophically dissipate into the void, the complete closure of death and destruction.

Within the literary sphere, pure sensibility (inaccessible to any type of comprehension) would be as alien to us as pure intelligibility (freedom from any type of material support). It would simply stay outside of the scope of what we can perceive as literary writing (at least today). Everything that happens in writing happens in between these extremes, around the midpoint of the sensible/intelligible spectrum. Every thing we actually have at our disposal can’t help but be a denizen of a grey zone, a compromise formation or a transitional object, a crossfade between the old and new languages.

## 2. The Thing-Power of Text

The most easily approachable type of conveying the unthinkable would be writing the alien by almost entirely human means – in fact, employing all of the mimetic correlationist devices, the vocabulary of an anthropocentric pseudo-realism, to produce an effect of estrangement. Thomas Ligotti's short story "The Red Tower" (1996) would be a good example of this, particularly since it features an almost archetypal materialist image: an object out of time, disconnected from any human influence.

Coincidentally or not, "The Red Tower" is also the name of a 1913 painting by Giorgio de Chirico, quite typical of this phase in his work, depicting empty streets and squares in the failing afternoon sunlight. "The Red Tower" is another enigmatic structure lacking inhabitants or any immediate function, perhaps echoing the inscrutability of faceless mannequins that people other paintings of the same period. The scene itself is deceptively simple, divested even of emblematic human silhouettes or passing trains in the distance (used as indices of scale rather than habitation); nevertheless, seemingly insignificant conflicting details of perspective, as well as disorienting positions of objects and their shadows, point to a deeper structure of representation: we are faced with an abstraction, an artificial geometry that is "all wrong", assembled from impossible spatial relations between surfaces. This is something only superficially resembling our "lived experience" of spatiality, but actually offering an "impossible space", even more disturbing because of its apparent irreducibility to geometry.

In a roundabout way, all of this is pertinent to Ligotti's "Red Tower". One of the first things readers are struck by is its apparent lack of any plot, which is quite unusual for his work. For all intents and purposes, this short prose is a description of a building – a red tower in a grey desert, three stories high and reaching three levels below the earth, serving as a certain type of factory: a factory of "novelties" (trite and cheap products, horror props delivered to remote and unlikely locations by unclear methods) that might be out of commission, but is definitely out of workers or personnel of any kind. Furthermore, it is described as "a mere accent upon a desolate horizon" (Ligotti, *Teatro Grottesco* 72), subject to fading, and then finally as a product of hearsay: "I am only repeating what I have heard. I myself have never seen the Red Tower – no one ever has, and possibly no one ever will. And yet wherever I go, people are talking about it" (84).

The final "twist", a metalepsis into complete unreliability, cancelling out the entire factory as a *figment*, does nothing to compromise its horror or efficiency, to the contrary: the fact of something not yet, or not completely existing – something seeking its form or a way through – only enhances its capacity of threat. The erasure of all certainties regarding

the tower, relegating it to a spectre, created by (possibly hallucinatory) voices, somehow seems as a second-rate shock compared to the basic, matter-of-factly described properties of the building itself: there are no doors or any opening below the second floor; there are no access roads or any other ways of approaching the factory; there are no people (certainly no *characters*, apart from the narrator) whose presence would give some sort of easily recognizable purpose to the factory's work.

All of this forces us to adjust our perspective of reading. What is the *real* story here? Things like the graveyard at level -2 and the *novelties* produced by the factory seem to be mere *sideshows* to a greater terror; elements of conventional horror actually serve as places of *rest*, a *heimlich* element of traditional storytelling, probably still managing to provide a safe, regulated and recognizably coded "fright" to some readers, but making the entire vocabulary of genre a mere toy, a silly and hackneyed sub-element to much larger, incomprehensible and *bland* workings of a genuinely new and unrecognizable mechanism. The real horror lies not in the fact of a cemetery, the fact of a disembodied hand etc., but in the machines that produce and distribute them and the absolute unknowing surrounding their operations. The visible products of the factory (what we *can* read and readily understand) are designed to *conceal* what is behind them, offering *comprehensible* horror, given to figuration. This could prove to be a general matrix of Ligotti's fiction, which I hope to examine elsewhere: everything that is manifest, the better part of both the content and the style of the story, actually works as a screen withholding the Real which remains beyond understanding.<sup>8</sup>

Both Chirico's and Ligotti's red towers are "entry level" unreadabilities, offered in a "plain language" (verbal or visual), seemingly easily accessible, apparently affecting the observer through their "content" above all, manifesting structural oddities and problems only upon close analysis, tending to represent the alien *through* the familiar, along the lines of the familiar, near-replicating the familiar (the horror, of course, lies in the hiatus, however minuscule, of that *near-* prefix). This is precisely where the force of these works lies: establishing "normal" visibility, a cognitive *plein air* coupled with a complete *lack* of real understanding (or "readability") of what is clearly legible.

This metaphorical "horror in broad daylight" seems like a good example of Mark Fisher's definition of the eerie: this is a description, rather than a story, focusing on a landscape, rather than an event, containing a double short-circuiting of presence. Fisher described the eerie as a failure of

8 In that sense, we might read one of Dregler's notes in "The Medusa" (1991) as an oblique rationale of Ligotti's negative poetics: "We may hide from horror only in the heart of horror" (*Noctuary* 3).

presence or absence, and I think that the red tower actually manages to convey both, being situated in the middle of a desert, as a disturbance of absence, but at the same time failing to appear properly and completely (since all of its machinery has evaporated).<sup>9</sup> The tower is perfectly visible, then, but – as Fisher writes – ‘the symbolic structures which made sense of the monuments have rotted away, and in a sense what we witness here is the unintelligibility and inscrutability of the Real itself’ (63).

\* \* \*

Fisher’s book provides us with a starting point for examining a different type of unreadability, since he points out that the eerie is closely tied up with the ‘broader question of the agency of the immaterial and the inanimate: . . . the way that we’ ourselves’ are caught up in the rhythms, pulsions and patternings of non-human forces” (11), the forces that are ‘not fully available to our sensory apprehension” (64). The fiction of Reza Negarestani revolves precisely around this cluster of themes. Negarestani is, of course, an extremely interesting author in this context in many ways, but we could have disregarded his theoretical background in new materialisms had he written a novel that bears no traces of that work. *Cyclonopedia* (2008) is, on the contrary, thoroughly informed by theory – not only as subject matter or a philosophical ‘backdrop’ of a certain story, but as the most prominent *literary* device and narrative strategy – to the extent that this book might be categorized as ‘theoretical fiction’. This is a very elusive genre-label, but here it could mean at least two things: 1) the excessive hypertrophy of theoretical lexicon on all levels of narration, with intensive use of deleuzian neologisms, vocabularies of palaeontology, military science, demonology, etc.; 2) repetition of what we saw Ligotti do, but on a much grander scale: complete suspension of linear narrative development in favour of description, explanation, analysis and classification.

The specificum of *Cyclonopedia* is the fact that it doesn’t describe an alien object within our world; our world itself is presented as an alien object, and what dominates this object is not human race, nature or ‘life’ as we perceive it. It is oil, conceived as a sentient non-human entity: the only real subject of History, capable of mobilising global geopolitical

9 Commenting on his miniature ‘The Eternal Mirage’ (1989, collected in *Noctuary* 189–190), Ligotti delivers a succinct autopoietic statement that would perfectly fit ‘The Red Tower’ as well: ‘With that piece I wanted to convey my sense of the universe as something thin and unstable, something that barely has the quivering and illusory quality of a mirage and yet, alas, refuses to dissolve completely into nothingness’ (Schweitzer 56).

processes it requires for its propagation. This world exists in a time perspective which is so alien to ours, and so incommensurable with it, that it can only be perceived as repetition, stasis or the absence of time – at least the absence of ‘history’ or ‘chronology’ as understood by our civilisations. This insight slowly changes the initial impression of overbearing theoretical onslaught in the first pages of the novel to the conclusion that this approach is not a question of poor style but probably the only appropriate narrative response to the challenge of an unthinkable and atemporal ‘beyond’ without access points for humans.<sup>10</sup>

*Cyclonopedia* could have been written as a ‘conceptual’ work of fiction, consciously devising a routine and stereotypical plot only to let it be violently traversed by an incongruous, hyperbolic jargon of Philosophy, ending up as a latter-day *Batrachomyomachia* placed within the confines of horror genre. Nevertheless, what saves the fabular level of this book from an immediate backslide into tired scenarios of global catastrophes, regarded from the focal points of their human antagonists, is precisely the decision to present this content through a non-human point of view. It is not provided by ‘psychologizing’ oil, of course, but by composing the book as a series of extensively recounted scientific articles, rejecting more or less every traditional tool of narrative development, such as story or characters.<sup>11</sup>

Negarestani had to find a new vocabulary for at least two of his inventions: a) different timescales, since ‘events’ or ‘objects’ to be narrated exist in ‘a forsaken perpetuity, or the Ancient Without Tradition’ (Negarestani 15) – a temporality as difficult to describe as the one suggested by Meillassoux’s arche-fossils, ‘materials indicating the existence of an ancestral reality or event; one that is anterior to terrestrial life’ (Meillassoux 10); b) inverse evolution or counterintuitive processes of generation; the well-worn idea of the reanimated dead evolves into something much more complex in *Cyclonopedia*: decomposition is not a simple falling into disrepair of a whole, a gradual decline of a recognizable

10 In *Cyclonopedia*, a fictional scholar reproaches Parsani’s recent writings for the lack of their former style and erudition: it is ‘as if he has been struck by something he cannot digest, some stupefying discovery he is unable to dramatize’ (10–11), but another one retorts: ‘what my other colleagues identify as defective prose or an unscholarly approach is more than anything a quite logical and predictable development of his initial writings into something appropriate to these theories and discoveries’ (11).

11 Negarestani recently spoke about the writing of *Cyclonopedia*, insisting that his priority was ‘constructing a sense of syncretism and paranoia’, but through emulation rather than simulation, abandoning the literary resources of ‘good fiction’ in favour of inventing new mechanisms as an engineer, not a craftsman. I treated it not exactly as a novel or a work of philosophy, but as system endowed with abstract tendencies, trajectories which evolve over time, unpredictable behaviours, multiple scales of information content, etc.’ (Gironi).



object, but an emergence of a new form;<sup>12</sup> this emergence is, to be clear, reversed in time (or indifferent to time), shaped by a dynamic completely foreign to the narrative arc of birth, growth, decay and death, therefore indescribable in a language built on causality and linear chronology.

If all knowledge is necessarily conceptual, any experience of the truly Other will be constrained to arrive indirectly, not ‘as such’, immediately recognizable and classifiable. There is a principal difficulty in *inventing* the new: we can’t force the hand of chance, we can’t press the unknowable future to come forth; perhaps we can only strive to *make way* for something new, allowing it to pass through materials presently available to us. In that case, the only ‘work’ a writer can actively take up is a non-systematic dismantling of an existing language. The Other will have to manifest through various *lapses* of concept, through a spectrum of errors, outplaying our consciousness in order to open up new types of sense-articulation. That is why a large part of *Cyclonopedia* investigates what Negarestani calls, after Deleuze and Guattari, ‘( )holey spaces’: what happens to a solid, such as Earth or a traditional narrative sequence, when it is gradually riddled with an ever-increasing multitude of holes. In this context, gaps in narration or understanding, *plot holes* in a continuous narrative, are not ‘the missing links’ or ‘the places of indeterminacy’ to be eventually pacified and filled in by the readers’ cognitive intervention: they are the space of becoming, emergence of the non-human, seeking its first contact with us precisely *through* that unknowing, through our *lack* of understanding. Plot holes are ‘channels for trafficking data . . . from the other side’ (Negarestani 68).

This is a different type of narrative steganography than the one we witnessed in ‘The Red Tower’: ‘hiding’ new knowledge in plain sight as an ‘unreadable’ portion of a perfectly attainable message.<sup>13</sup> Yet the idea of

12 *Cyclonopedia* was initially announced as the first part of a trilogy entitled *The Blackening* (to be followed by *The Mortiloquist*, ‘a barbaric interpretation of the life and problems of Western philosophy’). This is a common English rendering of alchemical *nigredo*, a stage of putrefaction or decomposition engendering new values or objects on the way to *lapis philosophorum*.

13 We could roughly divide unreadabilities into two categories: 1) unreadable but purely legible inscriptions, manifesting as radical cryptography that withholds its key, nevertheless remaining *theoretically* available to thought and completely transparent in their structure (consisting, in fact, of nothing but that paradox – pure inaccessible readability, shaped by an alien code, openly providing evidence of information while concealing all content); the Voynich manuscript would belong to this type, along with its artistic parodies (Seraphini’s *Codex Seraphinianus*, for example); 2) inscriptions that – on top of being unreadable – also verge on illegibility, to the extent that their very status as inscriptions (as opposed to random blots, shades, scratches etc.) becomes problematic, crossing over into visual arts in general, or even into raw sensory input, a *hyle* of writing; it is more difficult to provide a good ‘example’ of this literary *informel*, as the elusive microzone where the articulation crumbles into

worshipping the glitch, so to speak, deliberately introducing interference into messages yet to be decrypted, doesn't belong only to the arcane backwaters of chaos magic or to the domain of contemporary digital ruinism (most noticeable in music, but widespread in visual arts and literature as well). Adding noise to a message in order to sharpen the overall signal through stochastic resonance ultimately has the same effect: seeking harmony with the 'inaudible' and the 'invisible' as the 'nonexistent', it accentuates a hidden structure which may otherwise remain obscured. If 'identities are the plot holes of someone else's curriculum vitae', as Kristen Alvanson claims (allegedly quoting Negarestani) in *Incognitum Hactenus*, a highly charged narrative preamble to *Cyclonopedia* (xiii), then acquisition of a truly *new* story, a truly *new* (category of) identity, can only arise by truncating of the old plot, to the extent that the very notion of a story is suspended, and the emergent agency can only be divined from patterns of noise.

That is one of the reasons why *Cyclonopedia* is a fiction, but probably is *not* a story: Events are configured by the superconductivity of oil and global petrodynamic currents to such an extent that the progression and emergence of events may be influenced more by petroleum than by time" (26). Any received form of communication must fail in depicting this type of existence, and Negarestani hints that the best chance of approaching it is offered by numerology or economy as an encrypted 'language', since 'in the wake of oil as an autonomous terrestrial conspirator, capitalism is not a human symptom but rather a planetary inevitability. In other words, Capitalism was here even before human existence, waiting for a host" (27). But one could argue that writing seems to be eminently human, chained to thought and intention, only from the vantage point of (crypto) phenomenological theories of language, assigning it the duty of representing mental content, thought processes, or at least their underlying logical structures.

This is one of many moments where Negarestani's writing resonates deeply with the work of William S. Burroughs as a remote relative or a non-linear predecessor, and a different reading could draw multiple parallels between *Cyclonopedia* and the cut-up 'trilogy' of his 1960s novels (*The Soft Machine*, *The Ticket That Exploded* and *Nova Express*). Negarestani

chaos is precisely the issue (probably to be approached through a series of gradients rather than clear demarcations); asemic writings of Mirtha Dermisache, *écritures* of Jean Degottex, Brion Gysin's calligraphies or drawings by Henri Michaux might give an idea of the problems involved in a thoroughly redefined 'reading' required for such analysis. There is, of course, a cultural *a priori* involved in this, complicating things further: the very fact of a graphic occurrence being placed in a certain frame (a book, a gallery etc.) inviting us to 'read' it in the first place, whereas we would have to remain ignorant of the very existence of a 'pure' unreadability-as-unreadability.



presents extraction of petroleum as an exhumation of an inorganic demon, a common topos of pulp horror and archaic SF; in Burroughs's mythology, however, writing itself (in its raw state) is an aseptic extra-terrestrial parasite, the ultimate ancestral object. The frequently quoted description of language as a "virus from outer space" actually transpires to refer to *writing*, not speech: inscription that originally had no fixed meaning and that slowly developed its parasitic vectors through speech and thought only subsequently. In Burroughs's own apocalyptic key, this is "a time bomb left on this planet to be activated by remote control"; language is not a man-made communication tool: it is the final "extermination program" (Burroughs 12).

\* \* \*

One of the key questions to be posed in this context – at least since the early 1800s – aims towards what language and literature could *become*, instead of what they simply *are*: beyond the extant categories and mechanics of determinant judgement, a "literariness" always strives to defeat the cultural or cognitive parameters which threaten to decode it automatically into Literature. If we're trying to focus on literary devices that are hindering the easy idealisation of the singular, locking the writing into the physical space of the book instead of making it readily available for comprehension and thought, it's hard to ignore the work of Mark Z. Danielewski. Each of his works uses a distinct and immediately recognizable graphic vocabulary, simultaneously providing sufficient amount of continuity with the others to allow us experiencing his entire output as a typographically (rather than thematically) defined cycle.

I would like to take a closer look at *The Familiar* (2015-2017), his series of novels planned as a sequence of 27 volumes (880 pages each), which was cancelled after the fifth book. This is a project that managed to reintroduce the phrase "the death of the novel" into the 21<sup>st</sup> century book reviews, but it reads as a perfectly logical next step after his previous novels (*House of Leaves*, *The Fifty Year Sword* and *Only Revolutions*), themselves feeding on a well documented tradition within the literary modernity. They may seem remote from habitual practices of storytelling (particularly within the genre history of SF), persistently calling for a rethinking of literature's relation to other arts, but they rely on a recognizable lineage of experiments in print: Russian and Italian Futurism, concrete poetry and typewriter art, the works of Raymond Federman, Christine Brooke-Rose, Alasdair Gray etc. (This brief list, of course, doesn't even remotely exhaust the canon of "liminal" works that accentuate their graphic disposition above other concerns, neither does it imply a certain frame or limit to this field of exploration.)

The idea of the page as a fundamental unit of literary work (instead of a sentence, an idea, a story, a character) was explored in many ways in all of Danielewski's books, most radically in *Only Revolutions*, but *The Familiar* is the first to introduce a new viewpoint into the proliferation of typographical experiments in narration: does unreadability or illegibility necessarily have to figure as a corrupt or inferior articulation, an index of a lower level of existence, of some romanticized nether regions where the rational thought succumbs to matter, daemons, animality, corporeality, the unconscious etc.? What if a certain layer of text is unreadable or illegible because it is *more* than we can take? What if a minor collapse of narration – like a blank, an error or a glitch – actually keeps a material trace of a complexity too *high*?

One of the most interesting themes of this series, still only hinted at and underdeveloped in the first 4400 pages of the novel, is the idea of interspecies communication, with all of its ontological traps and setbacks, focusing on the importance and difficulty of establishing chains of communication 'vertically'. That verticality necessarily implies a moral and intellectual hierarchy, a top-down model covering up a specist ontology, so the main problem remains dismantling the very idea of communicating as transmitting the same message 'upwards' and 'downwards', and introducing a different distribution of the divide between the sensible and the intelligible, bearing in mind that *both* are potentially carrying information which would perhaps remain inaccessible otherwise. This is a question of xenography *par excellence*: transplantation of tissue between different species.

New mapping out of the readable within the printed matter will principally be done by broadening the range of literary devices, accentuating the physical and visual aspects of text and producing a new type of inscription which Danielewski calls signiconic. Throughout its variety of locations, languages and visual codes, the entire series could be read as a narrative describing the slow and disruptive introduction of a new type of intelligence into the world. This can be understood in two different ways: 1) intelligence as a new type of information – new profile of data assembling and articulating, new process of communication, and all of the problems arising from the 'new', if taken seriously: lapses in communication, overloads, complete lack of perception, fatalities, etc.; 2) intelligence as a new type of a living, thinking agency – a *being* or a parasite that enters the world as an alien, producing unforeseen effects that always seem to challenge the boundaries of human hosts and force some type of change or growth on them; this being (new intelligence) might be an animal, it might be a new drug, a new technology – a code, a program, or a piece of hardware ('The Orb'); finally, it might be the ultimate sentient collective ever to arise in this universe, trying to communicate

an SOS message backwards into the past.<sup>14</sup>

Of course, each of these meanings could be a *mise en abyme* for the work the novel is doing on the reader, the process we are exposed to: the story as a whole could be taken for an advanced intelligence narrating its own inception and its advent into the world (to us? or to itself?), which complicates matters further: is the book itself a piece of retrospective narration, or a typographical window in progress?

This is what was meant by 'signiconic' – establishing a new type of connection, forcing a new type of engagement between the writer, reader and text, resolutely pushing the boundary in the post-human direction, into the far reaches of what Aarseth called ergodic literature. Danielewski states explicitly: 'that's where I think literature finally has to move; we're very good at giving people a voice but we have not begun, strenuously enough, to give voice to that which will never have a voice: the voice of the waves, the animals, the plants, this world we inhabit' (Interview). His definition of *signiconic* as a combination of 'sign' and 'icon' could be paraphrased as follows: instead of forcing text to represent the pictorial, or visual faculties to work as language, the signiconic simultaneously engages both to achieve a 'third perception' which would be able to surpass or bypass the mind.<sup>15</sup>

All of this still doesn't go as far as it could have in *The Familiar* (maybe this was something to come in the later volumes), but what this means in practical terms is an innovative entwining of the visual and the conceptual: colour-coding and timestamping of the chapters; atypical syntax with extremely creative use of punctuation (often inspired by procedures from symbolic logic, programming languages etc.); different fonts for each character, of course; illustrations of various types, resembling picture-books, CGI or graphic novels; illustrating *by* text, in the concretist tradition; excessively polyglottic passages (using up to a dozen

<sup>14</sup> See the 'Astral Omega' sections of all five volumes for a (possible) frame-story of the entire cycle (particularly Danielewski, *Redwood* 13-17). An interesting reading of *The Familiar* could be conducted along the lines explored by Brassier (op. cit.) and Negarestani (in his recent *Intelligence and Spirit*, announced as an attempt to reread the history of philosophy as a program for an atemporal 'artificial general intelligence'): postulating of a deterritorialized intelligence as something impersonal, anonymous, non-human and detachable from its bio-phenomenological founding. Liquidate man to liberate intelligence: such is the hyperspeculative program that will destroy all that slowed the dissolution of mammalian stupidity" (Brassier); within the present analysis, of course, the connotations of this 'intelligence of the real', adopting reason solely as a provisional skin", 'a series of strategic ploys', actually provides one more foothold for placing *The Familiar* into the horror genre territory.

<sup>15</sup> This program obviously has a certain ethical dimension, perhaps in a Derridean key again (*plus d'une langue*); we could also briefly return to the very end of Hobson's book, where she quotes Wittgenstein's description of ethics as 'running up against the limits of language' (235).

languages); playing on the visual and linguistic resources of various apps and social media etc.

Nevertheless, as I have said, many readers have experienced this mixture as bordering on the illegible, and facing illegibility is always a thoroughly anti-immersive moment. As Craig Dworkin notes in *Reading the Illegible* (57), every such instance of radical cognitive arrest is always a point of instantaneous ejection from the mentality of reading (and intuitive self-reflective subjectivity) back into the corporeal: a 'resetting' of a subject as something embodied and material. What is at stake here, then, is not a questioning of one's taste or cultural competence: illegibility of text, arising from the materiality of a book, engages the materiality of the body.

Paradoxically, that moment of evacuation from the fictional (or broadly speaking 'ideal') environment of the book's content into the 'real' situation of one's body holding a printed object, positioned in a certain way, is not perceived as a moment of getting back into oneself, coinciding with oneself, but as a moment of pure alienation. Since this is precisely the point where the idealizing capacity fails and we are faced with the base materiality of an object, the ultimate otherness of our own body is brought to our attention as well.

It's a reminder of the naïveté of the belief that we could remain the same (as a locus of knowledge) throughout and after the contact with the radically other, whereas in the *real* encounter with alien information and its structures, with true xenography, something would necessarily be inscribed into *us*: new relays, new circuits in the brain would be created, as Deleuze would say (*Negotiations* 60), and they would at least fractionally change what we are.

\* \* \*

This brings us to the threshold of the idea of 'literature' as a peculiar relationship between humans and writing, but irreducible to a socially based institution or an embodiment of an aesthetic idea: literature as a type of communication with inorganic matter where the prime agency possibly resides with the material object; literature as 'an *assemblage*' (Deleuze and Guattari 5). Indeed, one could quote this famous passage from *A Thousand Plateaus* at length, as it could have been the starting point of this paper:

a book is made of variously formed matters, and very different dates and speeds. To attribute the book to a subject is to overlook this working of matters, and the exteriority of their relations. . . . In a book, as in all things, there are lines of articulation or segmentarity, strata and territories; but also lines of flight, movements of deterritorialization and destratification.

Comparative rates of flow on these lines produce phenomena of relative slowness and viscosity, or, on the contrary, of acceleration and rupture. All this, lines and measurable speeds, constitutes an *assemblage*. A book is an assemblage of this kind, and as such is unattributable. It is a multiplicity – but we don't know yet what the multiple entails. (4)

Following Deleuze's notion of a "*nonorganic vitality*" of the tactile (Francis Bacon 90), Jane Bennett writes about the productive capabilities of inanimate matter, calling it "*Thing-Power*: the curious ability of inanimate things to animate, to act, to produce effects" (6). Materiality doesn't lose its dimension of exteriority and imponderability through the exertion of that power, but it does enter into an interaction with humans, even overlapping into them. So perhaps one can speak of a certain *thing-power of text*, beyond the limit of intelligibility: text which is "not an object of knowledge", which is "detached or radically free from representation", which "refuses to dissolve completely" into human contexts (3), but still has "the ability to make things happen, to produce effects" (5).

In this model, a life of literature wouldn't be structured as transmission of a message between two privileged contact points, within a phenomenological setup of subject as the core of all meaning-production and text as dead material, "scaffolding" for concretisation etc.; it would be a distribution of forces across an ontologically heterogeneous field: an assemblage of body and text (and *its* agency). This would be a genuine attempt at opening a different type of engagement with the unintelligible – an interactivity where human agency couldn't be a prime motivator anymore, where the inanimate, material and nonconceptual would lead, act and provoke. Bodies and materials assembled this way would gain power specifically as a group, horizontal, uneven and unstable as it is. This "human-nonhuman" continuum (37) would be "a nonlinear, . . . non-subject-centered mode of agency" (33) whose key effect would be produced precisely through that *assemblage-work*, a non-hierarchical entanglement of consciousness and things which could never be entirely programmed and controlled in advance. In literature, and anywhere else, "what is manifest would arrive through humans, but not entirely because of them" (17).

This offers some hope of bypassing the metaphysical or correlationist closure in the description of what literature does and what it could theoretically do. There is an acknowledged residue of a certain "premodern attitude" in Bennett's conflation of the living and the inanimate within a "vital materialism" (opposed to its historical variety), although the outcome of her analyses wouldn't necessarily endow objects with life: perhaps it would simply deprive us of our previous confidence in the geography of the life/death divide. Within this purview, namely, we have never been completely distinct from inanimate matter: we were never truly "alive".



In conclusion, we are facing the challenge of accepting text as something that will never become a pure intelligibility (readability) free from its material 'support' (in fact the only plane of its emergence). Furthermore, perhaps the specifically literary quality of this *thing* resides in its capability of facilitating new ways of thinking not only by way of concepts, stories, content in general, but through its material profile, its haptic qualities, working on us through sensation, communicating with our bodies before communicating with 'us', finally provoking new thoughts precisely through that corporeal haecceity.

Of course, attempt to bypass the Ego by recourse to sensation, materiality, affect etc. is one of the oldest preoccupations of art in general (perhaps art considered in opposition to philosophy), but the question of an appropriate theoretical approach to these liminal areas has yet to be solved. Writing about the dangers of theory assimilating and overcoming the alleged unreadability, Dworkin warned against the rehabilitation of noise, downgrading noise to a hermeneutically attainable content or value and cancelling its power by accepting it as a decorative layer of a readable message: 'Even critical and scholarly work that pays close attention to the disruptive possibilities of visual prosody runs the risk of neutralizing the very disruptive potential it identifies. Such work must try to avoid co-opting those disruptions for its own rhetorical ends, and might instead attempt to communicate noise in the way one might communicate a disease' (49).

And this brings us back to the beginning, the 'Technical Manifesto of Futurist Literature', a paradigmatic blind embracing of the black hole, where we are also assured that 'it isn't necessary to be understood' (Marinetti 124).

But who or what can stand behind this claim? Who can speak in the name of noise?

This paper has certainly failed in pursuit of a practical xenography, channelling noise, but not because of some misplaced feeling of duty towards the divide between literature and theory. The problem lies elsewhere; writing or speaking from this position, one can only *impersonate* illegibility: no 'I' can become a true noise generator.

Besides, while we're still here, there will be a different reason for remaining in the grey zone, as I have already repeated several times: we have no choice but to keep thinking out the interferences between the sensible and the intelligible, as this is the only continuum we inhabit. A strange attractor 'certainly cannot be calculated', but 'it has to provoke negotiation' (Hobson 232); a diagram is 'made in order for something to *emerge* from it, and if nothing emerges from it, it fails' (Deleuze, *Francis Bacon* 111). From our position, the absent absolute, the unattainable 'pure writing', offers no point of contact and no prospect of change; all becoming might

occur on the way to a smooth space, but 'never believe that a smooth space will suffice to save us' (Deleuze and Guattari 551).

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# Against the Idea of Africa as “Absolute Dystopia”: Pragmatism and Possibility in Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie’s *Americanah* and *After the Flare* by Deji Bryce Olukotun

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## Abstract

This paper examines two works that anticipate Africa-centred futures as positive and possible, without promising utopia. *Americanah* and *After the Flare* both embrace contradiction and complexity. Furthermore, their treatment of societies (mis)shaped by historical violence includes acknowledgement of their own imbrication in global structures of capitalist modernity. Against the grim backdrop of rising inequality, resurgent racism and the effects of climate change – a moment in which dystopic visions tend to predominate – Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie and Deji Bryce Olukotun’s novels embody a kind of hope. Nonetheless, these alternatives to dystopia do not imagine that the problems and abuses of the present might easily be overcome. Thus, despite their employment of popular genres that invite rather than disavow pleasure, these fictions do not simply offer a form of escapism to distract us as the world burns. Rather, I would argue, they provide useful perspectives on Africa, on race and on humanity, that also have relevance in terms of current discourses of the Anthropocene. Before elaborating my argument in relation to Adichie and Olukotun’s works, I will examine some aspects of the contexts within and against which they operate – in terms of history, geography and representation concerning race, blackness, humanity, and Africa.

**Keywords:** Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, Deji Bryce Olukotun, blackness, ecology, Africa, science fiction,

## 1. Blackness as (In)Humanity in Modernity

In *Critique of Black Reason* (2017), Achille Mbembe reminds us of the paradox of race: that it does not exist except as a socially-constructed fiction and yet, simultaneously, persists as a powerful force through its many transmutations. Imaginary constructs of blackness, always linked in some way to Africa, are continually remade in the ugly work of racism. Intertwined

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with and co-constitutive in relation to modernity and capitalism, blackness in and as race is also irretrievably connected to constructions of humanity in the modern period. Racially driven definitions of the human in relation to blackness occur in myriad variations, with humanity defined in absolute opposition to blackness at one extreme, and aspiring toward blackness as its vital essence at the other (2017, 10-37). Conflating racist constructions of (in)humanity with humanity per se presents a danger, however. For, while 'Blackness does not exist as such' but 'is constantly produced' (Mbembe 2017, 18), humanity, by contrast, asserts its ontological existence prior to and beyond dominant definitions and exclusions. In Mbembe's words, 'the Western world *considered itself* the center of the earth and the birthplace of reason, universal life, and the truth of humanity' (2017, 11; my emphasis). Nonetheless, the lies and depredations committed in the name of so-called civilization did not submerge racially oppressed people's consciousness of *their* humanity: 'slaves always remained human, despite the cruelty, degradation, and dehumanization directed at them' (Mbembe 2017, 48).

Mbembe interrogates a complex collection of interlinked histories of actions, impositions and reactions with material, ideological, and psychological associations and effects. His book's singular title – with its nod to Immanuel Kant – emphasizes the enormity of suffering imposed in the name of race and the centrality of racialized thinking and exploitation within the modern economies and philosophies spawned by Europe's imperial expansionist project. At the same time, the continual emphasis on multiplicity guards against viewing either racist whiteness or racially produced blackness as simple or monolithic.

The name 'Black reason' is laden with irony, since at first glance it seems to invoke the kind of racialized essentialism it refutes and deconstructs. At a surface level, it suggests a special form of logic placed in binary opposition to 'white' or 'Western' reason, but such a reading is shown to be part of the cluster-concept itself, that forms the object of Mbembe's critique. This 'ambiguous and polemical' term does not denote an ontological essence. Rather, it is used

to identify several things at once: forms of knowledge; a model of extraction and depredation; a paradigm of subjection, including the modalities governing its eradication; and, finally, a psycho-oneiric complex. Like a kind of giant cage, Black reason is in truth a complicated network of doubling, uncertainty, and equivocation, built with race as its chassis. (2017, 10)

It is important to note the inclusion of anti-racist assertions of black identity within the 'giant cage' in the definition above. Mbembe's investi-

gation of blackness includes “different sides of the same framework” and “refers, moreover, to a dispute or a conflict” (2017, 30). The discursive work of “inventing, telling, repeating, and creating variations on the formulas, texts, and rituals whose goal was to produce the Black Man as a racial subject and site of savage exteriority” comprised a “founding narrative... in perpetual reconfiguration” (2017, 28). This racist construction did not go unchallenged: from its beginnings, resistance created a “second narrative” of blackness that denied capture and control (2017, 28). Mbembe shows the complex and varied history of blackness as chosen identity as an important and necessary recuperative process. However, he also remarks that the second narrative was “based on profound ambiguity” and argues that, as well as “profound disjunctures,” there are “also undeniable solidarities between the second narrative and the first narrative it sought to refute.” Perhaps unavoidably, resistant blackness often is “traversed by the traces, marks, and incessant buzzing” of racist othering (2017, 29).

Current discussions concerning race and the Anthropocene are interesting to consider in the light of Mbembe’s analysis of “Black reason”. On the one hand, as Axelle Karera makes plain in “Blackness and the Pitfalls of Anthropocene Ethics”, there are apocalyptic theories that ignore or underplay racism and black suffering (2019, 35-42). These treatments reinscribe violent exclusion and reveal the ongoing dominance of whiteness within the academy.

On the other hand, interventions that emphasize blackness incur the risk of simplifying, or even erasing, complex (lived and scholarly) histories if their important focus on the undeniable reality of black suffering reproduces a state of abjection or victimhood as a kind of ontological essence. This danger is apparent in Kathryn Yusoff’s *A Billion Black Anthropocenes or None* (2018). Like Mbembe, Yusoff stresses the centrality of enslavement and instrumentation of black bodies as tools for extraction in the global edifice of capitalism, though she expands his analysis to stress the enormity of fungible black labour in the very making of the geological Anthropocene (2018, 15-20). In other ways, however, Yusoff seems to substitute one key part of Mbembe’s analysis for the nuanced complexity of the whole. In particular, her refusal of the human as conceptual category leads her to a problematic impasse (23-24). For while she acknowledges black resistance, she casts this in quasi-mystical, emotive, instinctual and poetic terms, entirely outside intellectual traditions of modernity, anchored in embodiment and personifying a close relationship with the earth that deconstructs any barriers between people, other species of life, and matter (2018, 133-134; 139-140). Replaying certain tropes of Negritude, Yusoff does not attend to Mbembe’s remark on the link between the latter movement and Western-based anticolonial “critique of an aesthetic, avant-gardist, and anarchist bent” that

largely drew on the very colonial myths and stereotypes that it sought to invert. It did not call into question the existence of the cannibal or of a fundamentally irrational and savage Black world. It sought to embrace all the symptoms of degeneration – like sparks of fire – with the idea that the ardent power of the Black Man, his furious love of forms, rhythms, and colors, was the product of that very degeneration. (Mbembe 2017, 43)

In Yusoff’s work Africa is invoked as the source of those who were enslaved and provides a few examples of ongoing extractive processes, yet there is little attention to the continent’s geographical and historical variety. Furthermore, Africa-based voices are minimised in a manner that collapses the experiences of those whose forebears remained in Africa with those whose ancestors were forcibly removed. As such, *A Billion Black Anthropocenes or None* falls into line with Western views of Africa as “overwhelmed by harshness, violence and devastation” (Mbembe 2017, 49). Karera minimises African experiences and contributions in a similar manner, referencing the continent itself in brief mentions of toxic dumping and the crisis of migration to Europe (2019, 43 and 53). Thus, both Yusoff and Karera reinscribe the ‘market dystopia’ diagnosed by Kodwo Eshun:

African social reality is overdetermined by intimidating global scenarios, doomsday economic projections, weather predictions, medical reports on AIDS, and life-expectancy forecasts, all of which predict decades of immiserization.

These powerful descriptions of the future demoralize us; they command us to bury our heads in our hands, to groan with sadness. Commissioned by multinationals and nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), these developmental futurisms function as the other side of the corporate utopias that make the future safe for industry. Here, we are seduced not by smiling faces staring brightly into a screen; rather, we are menaced by predatory futures that insist the next 50 years will be hostile.

Within an economy that runs on SF capital and market futurism, Africa is always the zone of the absolute dystopia. There is always a reliable trade in market projections for Africa’s socioeconomic crises. Market dystopias aim to warn against predatory futures, but always do so in a discourse that aspires to unchallengeable certainty. (2003, 291-292)

The powerful symbolic weights attached to the name ‘Africa’ within the ‘giant cage’ of ‘Black reason’ operate in different ways (Mbembe 2017,

10). While negative visions predominate, alongside the domain of utter devastation exist the realms of ancient wisdom, absolute innocence, and also, in certain guises, the fantasy of Afrofuturist utopia. All of these modes rely upon a certain distance from specific African places to continue their work.

Providing a kind of conceptual opposite to dystopic pessimism, Afrofuturism finds its roots in the experiences of black people in the North American diaspora. When Mark Dery coined the term in 1994, he defined it as 'speculative fiction that treats African-American themes and addresses African-American concerns in the context of 20<sup>th</sup>-century technoculture' (qtd. in Yaszek 2006, 42). Though this definition has been broadened subsequently, discussions of the body of work termed Afrofuturist focus mainly on African American sensibilities and may invoke Africa as imaginary storehouse in ways that do not necessarily resonate with the perceptions of African people. Thus, Mohale Mashigo remarks that 'Afrofuturism is not for Africans living in Africa' who 'actually live on this continent, as opposed to using it as a costume or a stage to play out our ideas' and chooses not to apply the label to her own futuristic writing (2018, x).

Africans who remained on the continent have suffered their own traumatic history but have also retained a measure of continuity with their past that was largely severed for African Americans by abduction and forced passage to slavery. And, historically, some of those who remained in Africa (especially West Africa) were complicit to some degree in the enslavement of others. So, while a broad category of blackness – the African diaspora or Black Atlantic – may be a useful generalization at times, it also radically simplifies and masks many complexities. All have suffered, but have suffered differently. Moreover, many changes have occurred over the centuries since the height of the slave trade: Africans have experienced and partially recovered from the brutal indignities of colonial conquest, have contributed to global modernity and lived their own modernities, just as others have done elsewhere.

At a time of global environmental crisis brought about by extractions wrought on human bodies, other life forms, and the earth itself, there may seem to be nothing good to be said about the vast project we term modernity that is intertwined with Western colonial expansion. And yet, as Mbembe emphasizes, 'there is only one world' in which we all live, together, at the same time (2017, 180). In that one world and time, we also share access to technologies, including techniques and inventions that are being used to shift current trajectories in more sustainable directions. Scientific technologies are not evenly distributed, but are present everywhere. They have not developed in the absence of Africans, who have been co-producers of modern systems through the last few centuries.



In his famous inaugural lecture, *In Praise of Alienation* (presented and first published in 1982), Abiola Irele effectively decolonizes scientific achievement from being seen as the sole preserve of Europeans and asserts Africa's place within it and rights to it. He does this in two ways. Firstly, he notes that

The scientific and technological supremacy of Europe was a historical phenomenon that was both particular and contingent, marked by all the vicissitudes of human experience. European civilization did not spring forth fully formed from the brain of a providential God but was shaped over time, often under dramatic circumstances that could well have deflected its course in a direction other than the one it was eventually to pursue. (2007, 604)

Secondly, Irele highlights particular ways in which African intellectual products have helped to form modernity, besides the immense role played by human physical labour and environmental resources. Among these, he notes that in the twentieth century,

our traditional art and music have provoked a remarkable revolution in Western aesthetics, the effects of which have been more far-reaching than is generally realized. The visual landscape of Europe is still being transformed by the influence of modern art on architecture and technical design, an influence that goes right back to the impact of African sculpture on artists like Modigliani, Braque, Picasso, and Ferdinand Léger. Indeed, modern technology seems to have found in African art its most adequate mode of presentation: the very organization of volume, shapes, and lines in the manufactured objects we all handle everyday has benefited immensely from the absorption of the formal principles of African art into European aesthetics. You only have to compare nineteenth-century designs to those of the twentieth century to realize the simplifying effect of the application of these principles, and the gain in functionality it has effected. (2007, 605)

The contribution of African design of which Irele writes is indeed far-reaching once one pauses to consider it, yet it barely receives scholarly mention, even today. In the same address Irele urges his Nigerian compatriots to ‘take charge’ of the alienation experienced as a result of colonialism and let it become a source of transformative agency (2007, 601). It is important to emphasize that the alienation of which he speaks is not a result of



'primitive' Africans being overwhelmed by a superior civilization, as in one of the classic tropes of colonial anthropology. Rather, Africans experience alienation because the 'paradigm of modernity' that is transforming their societies, and to which they may aspire, is associated with conquerors who were 'especially brutal' and who imposed themselves psychologically as well as physically: 'We played Caliban to the White man's Prospero, Man Friday to his Robinson Crusoe, as part of a historical drama of slavery, colonialism, and racism' (2007, 599).

Revisiting Irele's address reminds us that contemporary Nigerian writers are heirs to a rich and robust tradition of postcolonial scholarship. Chimamanda Adichie's well-established, globally recognised body of work furthers that scholarly tradition creatively and critically, adding texts to the archive that also comment upon it. Deji Olukotun is a newer, arguably less sophisticated and serious writer, who positions his work within the popular genres of thriller and science fiction. Of Nigerian heritage but having grown up in the United States, he is also less of an insider when it comes to Africa. In its own way, however, his work also engages seriously with Africa (as both places and stereotypes) and thus contributes to the postcolonial archive. Both *Americanah*<sup>1</sup> and *After the Flare* summon positive and possible futures beyond colonialism while engaging with concrete, complex conditions and problems affecting African experience in the present. The transnational aspects of these texts mean that they simultaneously perform a bridging function between the African diaspora and Africa. In what follows, I will first examine *After the Flare*, before turning to Adichie's work.

## 2. Olukotun's Nigerian Space Race

The prequel to *After the Flare*, Olukotun's first novel *Nigerians in Space* (2014) is a thriller that incorporates fantasy. It deals with a failed attempt to reverse the Nigerian brain drain and no-one actually goes to space in it. In an address to the School of Arts, Media and Engineering (AME) at Arizona State University (2017), Olukotun comments that at the time of writing *Nigerians in Space* he was feeling cynical and used the title in a somewhat provocative and ironic way. After its publication, he learned more about the space programme that Nigeria indeed has, with plans to send astronauts on missions by 2030.

This knowledge informed *After the Flare* (2017), which is more upbeat and

1 *Americanah*'s title might seem to emphasize the United States, but it refers to a term used by Nigerians to refer to compatriots who have returned home from America. As such, I would argue that it places Nigeria at the centre.

unequivocal about its generic position as fairly technical science fiction of the near future, though touches of fantasy carry over from the earlier book. *After the Flare's* premise is that some countries near the equator have the good fortune to escape the dire effects of a solar flare that has a devastating effect on most of the world's technological systems, and leaves an astronaut stranded in a damaged station with limited time before it plunges to earth. As the owners of the only surviving space programme, Nigerians mount a joint mission, with India providing technical assistance, to build and launch a rocket and accomplish the rescue. A kind of affirmative action human resource programme is built into the plan and only people of part African descent are allowed in to assist. (One of the novel's humorous touches is the manner in which Nigeria grapples with the problem of unwanted migrants from America and Europe.) Since he just makes the criteria, the light-skinned black American protagonist and former NASA employee, Kwesi Bracket, is able to find employment there. Ironically, however, his sense of racial identity and African heritage is continually undermined by his Nigerian subordinates, who insist on addressing him with the name 'oyibo,' meaning 'white man' (65). Indeed, the complex realities of life in Nigeria are completely at odds with Bracket's earlier romantic visions:

Kwesi Bracket had once believed that living in Africa would be like a homecoming, that the throngs would rise up in jubilation to celebrate his triumphant return. He would impart the wisdom that his people had gained during their centuries of surviving in the modern wilderness of America, and his long-lost brothers and sisters would instill sacred knowledge in him. (21)

The driving force behind *After the Flare's* rescue mission is a politician named Nurudeen Bello, who says the following in a speech to the assembled staff:

'There are seeds I've seen on the Jos Plateau,' he began, 'that can only propagate by means of fire... We too have been forged in the fire. We too required the cauldron of the sun to melt down our ambitions, our dreams, and our enmities to seek out a bold new direction. The Flare – the great cosmic intervention – has given us an opportunity to prove our ingenuity and to right the wrongs of the past...' (43-44)

Near the end of the book, Bello reveals his more prosaic reason for insisting that Nigerians would provide astronauts and other human capital as

well as facilities for the rescue: 'The rescue mission is hardly worthwhile to build an entire space program around, wouldn't you say? We could have more easily let the Americans or Europeans operate our facilities for the rescue. Or even the Japanese' (281). Rather, a successful rescue mission would operate as 'proof of concept' for ongoing crewed missions, leading to Bello's ultimate plan, to exploit a niche and engage in asteroid mining. Noting that Nigeria has experience in oil extraction, Bello casts aside Bracket's objections that income from oil has been diverted to line the pockets of the rich through corruption and that this would be no different, promising a new mode of operation 'backed by rigorous contracts and consummate transparency' (282). While the novel ends on a high note, warning signs abound that there will be no perfect utopia and that struggles for justice will need to continue. Moreover, the previously dominant nations have not lost all their power and are recouping. Nevertheless, for Nigerians at least, with global playing fields levelled in their favour, the future looks brighter than the past.

Olukotun's future Nigeria is plagued by familiar and stereotypical problems – ethnic conflict, terrorism, political infighting, superstition, inequality – yet it is also a place of flourishing technological invention, determination and creativity. Of course, everything is helped along by a very large dose of luck and an intervention that prevents extremist fighters from destroying the mission and which seems supernatural, though in fact, according to the archaeologist and scientist Wale Olufunmi, it can be explained scientifically.

*After the Flare* raises an interesting question about perceptions of its plausibility and the degree to which they might be influenced by stereotypical perceptions of Africa, especially for Western readers. This question of plausibility is complicated by the novel's generic placement, however. According to Darko Suvin, science fiction is characterised by 'estrangement' (1979, 4-7). More specifically, Suvin defines SF as '*a metaempirical and non-naturalistic, that is, an estranged, literary genre which is not at the same time metaphysical*' (1979, 20; original emphasis). Interestingly, according to this latter definition, *After the Flare* barely qualifies as science fiction at all, having more in common with the 'naturalistic... *adventure-journey*' that Suvin sees as belonging to the 'compost heap' of 'juvenile and popular subliterature' (1979, 22; original emphasis).

In terms of its geography, politics, sociology and technology, the world portrayed in Olukotun's novel is very similar to the world we currently inhabit, towards the end of the second decade of the twenty-first century. It is the catastrophic flare that makes the biggest difference to the main plot, from a global perspective, and solar flares are well-documented, frequent phenomena, one or more of which could quite conceivably cause damage to communication systems similar to that depicted in the text.

Thus, in Suvin’s terms, *After the Flare* works mainly from “extrapolation” rather than “analogy” (1979, 27-28). Indeed, the book has more in common with the type of science fiction that Peter Lang describes as having “verisimilitudinous narrative plausibility grounded in genuine scientific knowledge – science fiction as an extrapolative or even predictive genre, tomorrow’s headlines today”, than with the type of SF that shows a high degree of “irreality” (Lang 2013, 209; original emphasis).

In “Imagining the Future of Nigeria: Accessing Africa through Sci-Fi” (2017), Olukotun describes his search for a genre that would provide entertainment as well as capture the complexity and “extreme contrasts” (5) of contemporary Nigeria, without succumbing to colonial stereotypes of “fabled exoticism” (3). According to him, seemingly far-fetched elements may in fact be quite realistic in portraying a populous society with high degrees of diversity, inequality, adversity and energy:

You could say that there’s already enough uncertainty and unpredictability in Nigerian daily life: corrupt politicians, exotic animals, dangerous road traffic, millionaire congregationalists, armed conflicts between vastly different cultures and political systems, love affairs across social classes, and labyrinthine bureaucracies that make your average American DMV [Department of Motor Vehicles] seem well-organized. Adventure may be woven into the cultural fabric. (Olukotun “Imagining” 2017, 3)

At the same time, the futuristic aspect of “writing science fiction” could express Olukotun’s sense of optimism, allowing him to “imagine Nigeria for what it could become, rather than what it already is” (“Imagining” 2017, 5). However, it is important to emphasize that the scientific developments in the novel extend currently existing and already innovative technologies – such as Nigeria’s space programme, ICT sector and the Nollywood film industry, rather than appearing out of nowhere on a kind of blank slate.

With due allowance for the degree of willing suspension of disbelief raised by its genre, *After the Flare*’s plot might seem implausible, or at least highly unlikely, to some readers. Yet the degree to which one can accept its possibility may also serve as a measure of the reader’s willingness to overcome the weight of dystopia when thinking of Africa. For why shouldn’t contingency work in Africa’s favour? It has done so in Europe’s favour in the past, as noted by Irele (2007, 604). In one example of when disastrous events elsewhere have had positive impacts in Africa, Guy Arnold has delineated how World War II provided a boost for liberation struggles and economies across the continent that was relatively unscathed by direct

conflict in most places (2005, 1-8). Large scale movements of people forged useful connections that, alongside the weakening of the colonial powers, helped to loosen the stranglehold of colonialism, so that most countries in Africa achieved political, if not economic, independence within fifteen or so years after the war.

Moreover, if we can accept the possibility of the solar flare and Nigeria's chance exception from its effects, to reject Olukotun's scenario of an achievable outcome implies a belief that Africans do not possess the capability to succeed and a misrecognition of the current, continuing imbalance in the global economy. In short, if we cannot easily accept that his plot is possible, then we betray an outlook shaped by colonial racism.

Tellingly, Africa is not mentioned in *After the Flare's* prologue, that narrates the crisis on an international space station as the solar flare strikes earth's atmosphere, communication systems are disrupted, one crew member is injured and three are evacuated, leaving the station commander, Masha Kornokova, behind to await rescue. With Kornokova as focalizer, readers witness the flare as an event of astonishing beauty, and also as the death of Europe:

Through the porthole, intense light blinded her momentarily, and when she could see again, Earth was bathed in lime, purple, and tangerine light, the colors dancing like playful sprites along the crest of the globe. Almost as quickly, the light dissipated, and the entire hemisphere fell dark. Moscow and Berlin were gone, extinguished. (2017, 8)

Kornokova has another appearance in a short interlude about halfway through the book. A year on, her space-eye view of the changed world sees Africa as central, as

With each passing orbit she saw distinct features sharpen through the porthole: the equatorial band of Asia seemed to swoon with mysterious light, as if it had captured the moon itself, and Africa pulsed with a bright yellow eminence. It was easy to miss the United States now, when it slid by on the dark side... (2017, 166)

The brief but sympathetic portrayals of Masha's experience prevent her from taking on the simple role of a sleeping beauty. The conventional gendered aspects of a fairy tale narrative are also overturned: her lover Josephine Gauthier directs the mission and a female Naijanaut performs a daring manoeuvre to repair the Nigerian spacecraft, the *Masquerade*,



and enable their safe return together in the end (2017, 282). Moreover, if Kornokova symbolizes Europe, she does so with a certain nuance. As an Eastern European, she comes from the edges of that continent rather than its imperial heartland and, despite her bloneness, she is not strongly identified with whiteness. Passionately in love with Josephine, while spinning in her module she longs to see her mixed-raced Caribbean lover’s real face again, ‘not the polished, simulated image she was beaming up from Nigeria – blue eyes and white skin’ (167).

Ironically, it is Josephine whose ‘skin color [doesn’t] stop her from saying some of the most discriminatory things about Africans’ according to Bracket (35). Josephine Gauthier’s favouring of whiteness for her chosen self-image of cyber-identity resonates with the promotion of skin lightening by the Nigerian Nollywood star Omotola Taiwo, elsewhere in the novel (117). Through these references to a currently widespread phenomenon in his future scenario, Olukotun warns that the internalized effects of a racialized world will be difficult to eradicate.

While the sympathetic portrayal of Kornokova in the framing narrative adds emotional depth to the story and serves as a counterweight to Bello’s pragmatic opportunism concerning the mission, the fact that her plight barely features in most of the novel is precisely the point. Barring Josephine, none of the other characters spend much time worrying about Masha – they have too many other things to think about and do. In fact, the novel’s seeming subplot – Balewa and her fellow Wodaabe women’s quest to find their abducted children and defeat the Jarumi (a later incarnation of Boko Haram) who have raped them and murdered the men of their community – often seems to overshadow the space mission in importance, as indeed it should.

I would argue that the depiction of Balewa and her group is one of the greatest strengths of *After the Flare*. Poor and uneducated in formal or Western terms, following and preserving traditional ways while also adapting them, they are drawn as fully human characters, without patronage or sentimentality. The manner in which their collective lives feature tensions and irritations as well as support and solidarity guards against idealizing them, and the differences among them are as apparent as their similarities. While Balewa is secondary in terms of the main plot, her character is in some ways the most fully realised in the book. Of course, there is a strong element of fantasy in Balewa harnessing the song stones to fight back and it is deeply satisfying to see her achieving a kind of superhero power. But her use of the mysterious stones is also shown as the application of a kind of technology – an application that requires intelligence, work and skill rather than simple magic. The imagery describing Balewa’s creation of a force field, using her song to call up the stones’ power, echoes the description of the solar flare in the novel’s opening lines:

Abir stepped back as Balewa expanded the field, which dazzled a hazy electric blue. The field disappeared when you looked at it directly, but would tug at your vision, like a distant star, if you looked slightly away from it. On the inside she was surrounded by translucent bands of orange colour that leapt and swirled inside. Each stone seemed to play with a different color of light. (102)

Just as the flare is an event that brings harm to much of the world but opens a path for Africa to fulfil its potential, the ancient, hidden technology of the song stones, capable of killing, can be healing in its effects. As the two plotlines converge, Balewa's mission of revenge and recuperation also saves the space mission and thus facilitates Kornikova's rescue and Bello's longer-term plans.

### **3. Adichie's Open-Ended Homecoming: Imperfection and Promise**

While Adichie's work may not seem to be futuristic in an obvious sense, I view an orientation toward positive and possible futures as an intrinsic part of both her writing and her broader activism. With unique and elegant appeal, she combines storytelling and critique to advance multiple interlinked agendas for liberation, whether in terms of race, gender, nationality or (her own) Igbo ethnic identity. In doing so she combines deep, incisive analysis with accessibility in her social commentary, just as she marries intellectual rigour, aesthetic style and popular readability in her fiction.

A crucial component of Adichie's oeuvre is the manner in which she blurs the conventional boundary between creative and critical work. In particular, this amounts to a refusal to adhere to the norms imposed upon African artists. The colonial imaginary has generally been more willing to acknowledge African prowess in creative arts than to acknowledge and respect theoretical outputs by Africans.<sup>2</sup> Working against this legacy, Adichie positions herself as both author and critic. Thus, she self-consciously situates her work within a tradition of African writing, simultaneously honours and interrogates that tradition, and debates its constructions and silencing by outsiders. For example, in the story *Jumping Monkey Hill* (2009), young writers from different countries

2 The twentieth-century recordist, collector and scholar of traditional African music, Hugh Tracey, epitomized this colonial tendency. He recognized and admired the creativity of Africans as artists, but declared them to be incapable of fully understanding their own products, reserving the realm of scholarship for whiteness.



across the continent debate the African canon and caricature the stances of Westerners in Africa in the manner of Binyavanga Wainaina (2006). These characters must either adopt or rebel against the strictures of their workshop sponsor, a white Englishman and self-proclaimed expert who derides them for producing stories he does not consider to be authentically African.

Beginning with her first novel, *Purple Hibiscus*, Adichie shows the depth of her engagement with the work of Chinua Achebe in particular: from the opening sentence: “Things started to fall apart...”, she references his most famous novel and enters into discussion with it (2003, 1). In the story “The Headstrong Historian” (2009), meanwhile, she more overtly rewrites the narrative of *Things Fall Apart* (1958) from a feminist perspective and extends its temporal setting. *Half of a Yellow Sun* (2007) engages in similar, but more detailed, historical work: appraising and mourning the painful history of Nigeria’s civil war in Biafra and providing both tribute to and criticism of Achebe’s *A Man of the People* (1966).<sup>3</sup>

Adichie’s first two novels are set entirely in Nigeria, while her collection of short stories, *The Thing Around Your Neck* (2009) includes some works with a transnational focus, dealing with the experiences of Nigerian immigrants to America, including some characters who travel back and forth between the two countries, like the author herself.

In *Americanah* (2013) Adichie performs some of her most serious critical work to date, yet does so with a very light and subtle touch since here she also makes her most extensive use of the popular genre of romantic fiction.<sup>4</sup> Providing a social history of Nigeria and the West over the past few decades, the novel replays and reconfigures the history of the Black Atlantic, performing in the process a kind of deconstruction and a form of decolonization. Adichie moves her young Nigerian lovers, Ifemelu and Obinze, through the racial complexities of both the USA and the United Kingdom and returns first Obinze, then Ifemelu to Nigeria, where she also reunites them.

While in the USA, Ifemelu dissects tensions between Africans and African Americans and explains whiteness in a successful blog called Raceteenth or Various Observations About American Blacks (Those Formally Known as Negroes) by a Non-American Black” (4). Upon her return

3 See Chikwendu Paschalkizito Anyanwu’s chapter on these two novels in Emenyonu’s *A Companion to Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie* (2017, 139-151).

4 Adichie has spoken of her youthful reading and enjoyment of the Mills and Boon romance series. See, for example, her conversation with Jones (2017).

5 See Serena Guarracino’s discussion of fictional blogging in the novel, and of this “real” blog ostensibly by Ifemelu, in “Writing ‘So Raw and True’: Blogging in Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie’s *Americanah*” (2014).

to Nigeria, she begins another blog in which she comments on various aspects of everyday life, emphasizing tensions involving class and gender as well as attitudes (of and toward) “Nigerpolitan” returnees like herself (421). I agree with Gĩchingiri Ndĩgĩrĩgĩ that Ifemelu engages in “reverse appropriations” as she engages in her own form of ethnographic work on American and Nigerian societies, yet I find his tone somewhat disapproving and his conclusion that she, too, “becomes the object of appropriation in both spaces” rather pessimistic (2017, 199 and 211). For me, Ifemelu’s open-ended story represents a postcolonial victory that also triumphs over undue academic seriousness in its playfulness.

In an interview with Radikha Jones (2017), Adichie comments, as she has done elsewhere, that race did not really impact her life in a personal way until she arrived in America. Similarly, her character Ifemelu consciously confronts racism for the first time after her arrival in the USA. However, this idea – of race being absent in Nigeria – requires some qualification, since a close reading of *Americanah* reveals many ways in which Nigerians remain tied to aspects of their colonial past, including aspirations toward ideas of whiteness, in terms of practices such as hair straightening and the privileging of lighter skin in regard to female beauty. Indeed, colonial-tinged ideas of the sophisticated superiority of imagined metropolises fuel Ifemelu and Obinze’s youthful obsessions with England and America, respectively. (One of the book’s ironies is that they each end up in their less favourite Western Anglophone country) While in the UK, at a dinner party where well-off English guests bemoan their country’s harsh stance towards desperate refugees, Obinze reflects on his own, very different, kind of migrancy:

Alexa, flush with red wine, her eyes red below her scarlet hair, changed the subject. ‘Blunkett must be sensible and make sure this country remains a refuge. People who have survived frightful wars must absolutely be allowed in!’ She turned to Obinze. ‘Don’t you agree?’

Yes”, he said, and felt alienation run through him like a shiver.

Alexa, and the other guests, and perhaps even Georgina, all understood the fleeing from war, from the kind of poverty that crushed human souls, but they would not understand the need to escape from the oppressive lethargy of choicelessness. They would not understand why people like him, who were raised well-fed and watered but mired in dissatisfaction, conditioned from birth to look towards somewhere else, eternally convinced that real lives happened in that somewhere else, were now resolved to do dangerous things, illegal things, so as to leave, none of them starving, or raped, or from burned villages, but merely hungry for choice and certainty. (2013, 276)

This sense of "somewhere else" always being better than home changes for Obinze by the end of the novel, but after his return he still encounters many signs of what might be termed a colonized consciousness in other characters – seen, for example, in wealthy parents favouring a British curriculum for their children's education, fake snow in school Christmas plays (374), or the perceived need to have a white person in a window-dressing position in order to gain prestige for a company (27).

Racially-inflected thought, then, cannot be said to be absent in *Americanah's* Nigeria. Nonetheless, living in an independent country (whatever its problems) where almost everyone is black at least provides freedom from the direct pain and humiliations of interpersonal racism.

One of the ways in which Ifemelu experiences race in America is through the conversations of "liberal" whites like her employer Kimberley, for whom every black woman is beautiful and "the poor were blameless... she could not conceive of poor people being vicious or nasty, because their poverty had canonized them, and the greatest saints were the foreign poor" (146, 149). Although Ifemelu recognizes Kimberley's good heart and they become friends, she loses patience with Kimberley's "repeated apologies" that "were tinged with self-indulgence" (163). Kimberley's sister Laura is less benign, calling Ifemelu "sassy" and showing an "aggressive, unaffectionate interest" in Nigeria (162-163). On one occasion, Laura mentions a "wonderful" Ugandan woman she had known at university, who "didn't get along with the African American woman in our class at all. She didn't have all those issues." In response, Ifemelu retorts that perhaps "when the African American's father was not allowed to vote because he was black, the Ugandan's father was running for parliament" (168). Micro-aggressions by whites like Laura, who sometimes presume to grant honorary white status to black people from other countries, often seek to drive wedges between different groups. As stated in one of Ifemelu's blog posts, "Native blacks are always treated worse than non-native blacks everywhere in the world" (331).

From a black perspective, however, there are indeed many sources of tension and separation between people from Africa, elsewhere in the diaspora, and America. The novel stages numerous conversations in which various aspects of the history of Mbembe's "Black reason" are debated, including the foundational trauma of slavery and whether or not Africans bear any responsibility for it. For example, the following exchange between an African American student and Ifemelu's Kenyan friend Wambui occurs in one of their college classes:

Well, if you all hadn't sold us, we wouldn't be talking about any of this," the gravelly-voiced African American girl said, in a lowered tone that was, nonetheless, audible.

The classroom was wrapped in silence. Then rose that voice again. Sorry, but even if no Africans had been sold by other Africans, the transatlantic slave trade would still have happened. It was a European enterprise. It was about Europeans looking for labour for their plantations.” (138)

Ifemelu drifts into writing her blog, and as she gathers fame through it, she finds that it seems to take on a life of its own. She means what she says and raises important questions in an anecdotal way that resonates with readers. However, she does not always take it very seriously and also leverages it as it turns into a career, saying less threatening things in the diversity workshops she is invited to lead than in her frankly anti-racist online posts, for example (305). After she becomes romantically involved with Blaine, a black academic, she begins ‘slowly... to make changes, to add and remove, because of what he said’ (312). Ifemelu is aware that the very possibility and success of her blog in some way is linked to her own position as an outsider in relation to the deepest traumas of African American history. Her position grants her a certain licence, and her observations are entertained in ways that an insider’s might not be. Nevertheless, her blog posts and their ensuing responses provide a colloquial model that serves a pedagogical function on issues of racism, whiteness and black identity.

*Americanah* also gestures toward the possibility of overcoming white supremacy and achieving a genuinely post-racial future, by creating a meeting ground for black consciousness and nonracialism. An example of this mediation can be seen in the way in which interracial relationships figure in the lives of her protagonists – as possible and desirable, but not essential for their happiness. Ifemelu’s romance with her white lover Curt and her friendship with Kimberley are important but not defining involvements for her and an impression is conveyed that they have more to gain and learn than she does. Obinze’s friendship with Nigel, a working-class Englishman who is his colleague at a menial job in the UK and follows him back to Nigeria when Nigel accepts an offer to work for him in his newly successful business, overturns some stereotypes. Rather than just perform the token role of providing a white face when needed, seen as necessary for the company’s image, Nigel insists on performing a real service for his employer. The friendship continues and Nigel seems well on his way to becoming Nigerian by the novel’s end.

Like Olukotun’s futuristic vision, Adichie’s present Nigeria is no paradise. For instance, there looms the vaguely ominous presence of Chief, the ‘big man’ who gives Obinze his start in business after he is deported home from England. As Chief remarks to Obinze, ‘No-one knows tomorrow’ (14). There are no guarantees of success or happiness and major

fault-lines of class, ethnicity and gender threaten stability. The main characters, Ifemelu and Obinze, are far from perfect, though ethically well-intentioned. Nonetheless, the novel conveys a sense of progress, possibility and renewal.

The characters’ return to Nigeria implies a rejection of the familiar trope of marginalised representatives of the colonised peoples ‘writing back’ to (and thus reinscribing the importance of) the colonising metropole. At the same time, Ifemelu’s insistence on retaining her hard-won transnational status as a dual citizen of the USA rejects the tropes of separatist nativism. Symbolically, Africa becomes central, yet retains connections to, and interest in, conditions elsewhere.

*Americanah* ends poised at the entrance to the reunification of its main characters with each other and Ifemelu with her country. Adichie then also takes them beyond the book – so that, here, her speculative orientation becomes more clearly apparent – by giving them an online echo, an afterlife that also playfully blurs the barriers between ‘real’ (cyber)life and fiction. She does this by creating an actual blog ostensibly written by Ifemelu, thus embodying the blog mentioned at the end of the book and implying its extension as the lives of ‘Ifem’ and ‘Ceiling’ (Ifemelu’s romantic nickname for Obinze) fade into their contingent, quotidian future. This blog recalls and seems to embody Ifemelu’s second, home-coming blog in the novel, called ‘The Small Redemptions of Lagos’ (421). Unlike her earlier one, it is not overwhelmingly focused on issues of race.

#### **4. Avoiding the Trap of Utopia: Blackness and “The Full Range of Humanity”**

In conversation with Jones, Adichie says that it is a ‘dangerous idea’ to think of women as better or more ethical than men. Women are ‘ordinary’ and should be recognised as embodying ‘the full range of humanity’ (2017). Her point, clearly, also applies to blackness, as well as oppression based on class, sexual orientation, ethnicity, religion and disability. Because of their power, the imperfections of white, heterosexual males tend to be seen as aberrations of an individual, rather than reflecting on the group, particularly when such men are also privileged in terms of class. Yet people who suffer racism, and/or exploitation on the grounds of poverty, sexuality, gender or other forms of identity are often also made to bear the added burden of an expectation of perfection. The slightest misstep is taken as an indictment on the group as a whole. These unrealistic expectations – and the disillusionment that may follow as a result of them – ultimately serve to reaffirm the power of the status quo.

I find hope in the works of Adichie and Olukotun because their idealism



is tempered by a tough and flexible pragmatism. Both authors anticipate complicated and challenging, yet viable futures, that do not exclude goodness and joy.

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# Structure and Resistance in Thomas Pynchon's *Bleeding Edge*<sup>\*</sup>

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## Abstract

From his first to his last novel, Pynchon has addressed the 'constraints' hemming in human existence and gestured to different ways of transcending these. After summarizing the way his novels exemplify this twofold movement I will offer a reading of his last novel *Bleeding Edge* and show how the dialectic between structures of power and human resistance continue to order the narrative. My reading of the novel will argue that, like in his previous work, the cooption of utopian potential resurfaces in this work and offers a vivid way of analyzing 'speculative change' in literature.

**Keywords:** Thomas Pynchon, *Bleeding Edge*, power, resistance, utopia

*late capitalism is a pyramid racket on a global scale, the kind of pyramid you do human sacrifices up on top of, meantime getting the suckers to believe it's all gonna go on forever. (Pynchon 2013: 163)*

## 1.

I take my cue from that part of literary studies which concedes, with a sense of both resignation and sadness, that, although literature almost by default challenges the constraints of the present and seeks to escape them, much contemporary work is focused on dystopia. According to that reading of the present, the prospects for the future are dim. That diagnosis is influenced by the conjecture of which it is itself a part

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and by the readings and representations of that selfsame conjuncture which are collected as evidence of its state of being. For evidence I have repeatedly gone to Thomas Pynchon, on this occasion to his last novel *Bleeding Edge*, because I think that he has continually imparted to us convincing purchases on that state. As an initial step I return to the title of Pynchon's most famous book *Gravity's Rainbow*. Namely, I have always seen the first word in Pynchon's title as referencing systemic limitations and constraints while the rainbow betokened the momentum that worked to overcome these. The title I ultimately settled upon for this paper demetaphorizes the original terms and points directly to structures one always encounters in his work and to the different embodiments of oppositional forces that work against these. That tension runs pretty much throughout Pynchon's entire opus. However, instead of narratives of change and transformation that the leftist bias of much critical thinking has sought to read from or into his fictional worlds, I hold that Pynchon has always shown how transgressions are overshadowed by structures of power. If there is a utopian charge in his narratives they narrate how that charge eventuates in dystopian outcomes. If there is no doubt that Pynchon writes from a position "leftward of capitalism," as he puts it in *Bleeding Edge* (Pynchon 2013, 101), that position does not promulgate a positive vision of transformation and change. I will outline this point of departure by way of a detour and a comparison.

In the detour I will briefly look at Nick Dyer-Witherford's book *Cyber-Marx* (1999). I make this detour not only because the book exemplifies the challenging of and the resistance against the constraints of a present dominated by cybernetics by updating Marx's critique but also because, in different ways, that critique is implied when not explicitly referenced in what I have to say on the issue. To begin with, analogously to my own procedure, Dyer-Witherford begins his book by a reading of a work of fiction, in his case, William Gibson's and Bruce Sterling's novel *The Difference Engine* (1990). In brief, in the novel Gibson and Sterling reimagine the year 1855 in England and an alliance of science and capital that "seems irresistible, even as it drives toward unthinkable transformations in the fate of the human species" (Dyer-Witherford 1). If that were all that can be said about Gibson and Sterling's novel it obviously replicates the thematics of not only Pynchon's last novel but of much of science fiction writing. However, what really intrigued me in *The Difference Engine* is that the novel, creating an alternative history, imagines Karl Marx to have emigrated to the United States and that in the present of the novel he, along with other revolutionaries, has seized the means of information and production in the largest city of the New World.

In accord with its tenets, Dyer-Witherford thusly discusses stunning technological changes but maintains that they do not annul the possibility of transformation. On the contrary, he agrees with those theorists who maintain that 'the technoscientific knowledge crystallized in computers, telecommunications, and biotechnologies is now unleashing an ongoing and irresistible transformation of civilization, dramatic in its consequences, unavoidably traumatic in the short term, but opening onto horizons nothing short of utopian" (15). While acknowledging the annihilating power of new technologies he registers initiatives that 'constitute a diffuse coalescence of microactivisms contesting the macrologic of capitalist globalization" (157). Voicing his own activism, Dyer-Witheford comments: 'if Marxism cannot under contemporary conditions locate agents of contestation and practices of opposition, its analysis of postmodern capital amounts only to a reiteration (albeit on a more political economic basis) of the chief point of anti-Marxist postmodern theory: that under postmodern conditions, the game is over" (170-71). Interestingly enough and highly relevant to my argument, Witheford puts 'political economy" in parenthesis. As a final comment on the book, I contend that much more could have been done with the insight that during the 1960s and the 1970s financial trading became an important escape route for capital. He adds: 'Faced with loss of control in the shop floor and the paddy fields, many commercial interests simply evacuated the corporeal world, with its mud, blood, and recalcitrant labor power, taking flight not merely by seeking new sites for production but by dematerializing themselves entirely into speculative activity" (139). I will formulate how I plan to engage Pynchon's novel by way of a conditional which in a way summarizes my reading of Dyer-Witherford's updated Marx: I maintain that if enough attention had been given to this dematerializing speculative activity, one would as a consequence have been much more sceptical about the opening up onto horizons of utopia. Returning to Pynchon: without explicitly considering either his relation to Marx or to postmodernism I intend to show that Pynchon's work dramatizes the condition in which the 'game is over."<sup>1</sup>

## 2.

Texts and cultural phenomena can rarely be approached without a political bias. In what we know as theory, that bias is critical towards what exists and projects alternatives, it takes apart and scrutinizes the scaffolding of the world.

1 I articulate my relation to Marx in a recent special issue of *The New Centennial Review* (Grgas 2018).

folding of the existent and, as a rule, it beckons to a futurity yet to be realized. It puts forward normative pronouncements and ethical norms that are founded in an elsewhere that is independent from the pressures imposed by existing constraints. To use Caroly D'Cruz's formulation, that bias responds to a "certain emancipatory promise" (D'Cruz 60) and exposes "spaces in which counter-hegemonic articulations can be developed" (62). I have reservations about this idea which I will summarize with an observation Bertell Ollman makes in his book *Dance of the Dialectic: Steps in Marx's Method* (2003). The reservations I have relate to the mistake theory is prone to make and which Ollman formulates as follows: "In organizing reality for purposes of grasping change, relative stability does not always get the attention that it deserves" (Ollman 19). Paraphrasing Ollmann, I contend that the relative stability of reality that always disables change has most oftento do with the economy. The economy I have in mind is, in the words of Bruno Latour, "an infinite and boundless domain totally indifferent to terrestrial existence and the very notion of limits, and entirely self-centered and self-governed" (Latour 6). I therefore agree with Andrea Micocci who, in *The Metaphysics of Capitalism*, observes: "Economics has acquired today a perfect centrality, comparable to that central architectural position that once upon a time seemed to belong to theology" (Micocci xi). The economic order that has insinuated itself as being without alternative is capitalism. Let me quote two additional passages from Micocci beacuse of their pertinence to my argument: "despite an initial set of ruptures, capitalism has taken over a dialectical functioning that, by its capacity to cover everything material and abstract, has prevented and will always prevent change, condemning it to the stasis of its iterative mechanisms" (157). Even more to the point of the way Pynchon thematizes resistance is the following statement: "the absolute impotence of the individual vis-a-vis- the big iterativeness. No individual and no mass struggle can afflict it" (122). In Bruno Latour's words, "the world of economy...is now final and absolute" and in it we are today *being affected* by "the feeling of *helplessness* that is associated with any discussion of economics" (Latour 2, italics in original). Micocci and Latour are among the many diagnosticians of the present who recognize, as Fredric Jameson observed, that the "ultimate referent, the true ground of being in our time" is capital (Jameson 82).

That referent and how it has mutated both in historical time and in fiction has been the subject of a number of my readings of Pynchon which can be supplemented by showing how money capital structures the world of *Bleeding Edge* and what the implications of this structuring for Pynchon's representations of resistance are. However, researching the extant literature on Pynchon's latest novel I discovered, to my disappointment, that the first part of that task has, in large part, already

been performed. I am referring to Sascha Pöhlmann's article "I Just Look at Books: Reading the Monetary Metareality of *Bleeding Edge*" (2016). This article accords with my own arguing for the need of an economic reading of Pynchon and gathers evidence from *Bleeding Edge* which is pretty much what I planned on presenting as evidence of the significant role of capital in the novel. In much reduced form some of this will be redeployed below. If my reading of the novel had been exclusively focused on Pynchon's structures, Pöhlmann would have made the task wholly superfluous; but since I also seek to problematize the dynamics of resistance, this allows me to both show how my reading diverges both from Pöhlmann and from others who have taken up the theme.

Pöhlmann begins by stating that "the importance of economic issues" remains somewhat underdeveloped in Pynchon criticism and is nowhere near the level of saturation, or some might say exhaustion, of topics such as paranoia or technology" (Pöhlmann 2). I wholly agree with this assessment and have seen my work on Pynchon as remedying this underdevelopment. Pöhlmann's analysis of *Bleeding Edge* argues "that money operates as a metareality in the novel both on the levels of plot and style" (3). Pöhlmann actually uses the word I opted for in my own title, writing that money is presented "as a symbolic structure behind reality that is accessible to the initiated" (ibid.) and that "money provides the structure for other phenomena in *Bleeding Edge*" (15). According to Pöhlmann, this "does not simply mean that everything—politics, society, culture, technology, etc.—is ultimately determined by economic factors, but rather that money underlies the reality of these phenomena like a kind of source code" (3). The same notion is rephrased when Pöhlmann makes clear "that the monetary metareality that I describe in this essay is not something metaphysical or transcendent in any way but is rather entirely immanent to the world it structures all the same" (16). Explaining what he means by "immanence" he goes on to say that "no other single element in the novel provides such an all-encompassing and fundamental access to the world as money" (ibid.).

However, those who approach Pynchon espousing either technophilia or technophobia might voice disagreement. They would assign more weight to the fact that the novel's title refers to technology as "Lucas sez": "What's known as bleeding-edge technology ....No proven use, high risk, something only early-adoption addicts feel comfortable with" (Pynchon 2013, 78). Although I recognize the importance of technology in Pynchon's novel, I find it pertinent that the first documented example of the term "bleeding edge" dates to early 1983 when it was actually an unnamed banking executive who used it in reference to Storage Technology Corporation when the company took a nasty fall. His words were: "We ended up on the bleeding edge of technology, instead of the leading edge" (Hayes). The



reason I bring this up is because it shows the imbrication of technology and money in *Bleeding Edge* and that the novel ought to be viewed as squarely positioned within what Sloterdijk has labeled 'the current capitalist-informatic ecumene' (Sloterdijk 51). That ecumene has been, on the one hand, constituted by the power of technologies that ultimately produce and process information, a development which was in its initial stage seen as having a great potential for change. But it ultimately defaulted on that potential not because of its endemic characteristics but because those technologies arose within a reality whose overriding priorities were of a different nature. I will name that reality 'the capitalist schema,' using the title of Christopher Lotz's book, from which I give two quotes. The first one reads as follows: 'money is the thing' through which *all* other entities receive their real form. Money, in other words, is the *thinghood* of objects that are accessible under capitalism and is the quasi transcendental force' ... that schematizes what we encounter as accessible in our age' (Lotz 41). The second: 'the capitalist schema in some sense universalizes imagination and takes the situatedness' out of it. Money, in other words, pre-structures what can be imagined and in which framework present experiences are shaped, formed and limited' (92).<sup>2</sup> These insights supplement Pöhlmann's analysis and attribute to money a power that seems irresistible, a power that disables oppositional positionings. I will illustrate this by commenting upon Pynchon's description of capital's subsumption of the internet and by a close reading of the ending of *Bleeding Edge* which, in my opinion, is not as redemptive as some critics make it out to be.

Pöhlmann writes that the Internet in the novel is 'a sphere that is not yet entirely subjected to the logic of capitalism' (Pöhlmann 17) but that the Internet, particularly the DeepArcher segment, is depicted as an alternative to capitalism while it is 'simultaneously being incorporated into its structure' (ibid.). If the Internet does configure a space of resistance than Pynchon's novel narrates the inevitability of its subsumption under money capital. That process is personified, for example, in the opposition between 'geeks' and 'jocks': 'Same old classic dotcom dilemma, be rich forever or make a tarball out of it and post it around for free, and keep their cred and maybe self-esteem as geeks but stay more or less middle income' (Pynchon 2013, 37). At one point in the novel Maxine asks what happened to the 'revenge of the nerds,' or the resistance in my terms, and is answered by Driscoll: 'Is no revenge of the nerds, you know what, last year when everything collapsed, all it meant was the nerds lost out

2 Similar ways of reading money are developed by Korin Karatani who writes that money is 'like a Kantian transcendental apperception X, as it were...money as substance is an illusion, but more correctly, it is a transcendental illusion in the sense that it is hardly possible to discard it' (Karatani 6).

once again and the jocks won. Same as always" (48). A little further on in the dialogue we read: 'Some of the quants are smart, but quants come, quants go, they're just nerds for hire with a different fashion sense. The jocks may not know a stochastic crossover if it bites them on the ass, but they have that drive to thrive, they're synced in to them deep market rhythms, and that'll always beat out nerditude no matter how smart it gets" (ibid.). The 'drive to thrive' is shorthand for the power of capital against which the 'techies' are positioned: 'I haven't seen anything like it since the sixties. These kids are out to change the world. Information has to be free' – they really mean. At the same time, here's all these greedy fuckin dotcomers make real-estate developers look like Bampi and Thumper" (116). It needs to be noted that eventually the sixties turn out not really providing an analogy because the powers of containment are in the present of the novel much more insidious. As March editorializes on her blog: 'Back in the days of hippie simplicity, people liked to blame the CIA' or a secret rogue organization.' But this is a new enemy, unnamable, locatable on no organization chart or budget line – who knows, maybe even the CIA's scared of them" (399). Finally I quote Eric's apodictic judgment: 'Were being played, Maxi, and the game is fixed, and it won't end till the Internet – the real one, the dream, the promise – is destroyed" (432). As always in Pynchon, antisystemic utopias, in this case the Internet, are coopted and annulled.

Pynchon describes what happens to the 'undefined anarchism of cyberspace" (327) on another level as well. That level is formed by 'real estate imperatives" (166) which are particularly relevant to the evocation of the urban space of the novel. It is no mere coincidence that at one point Maxine realizes that what is happening to New York is also happening to the Internet (DeepArcher): 'Like the Island Meadows, DeepArcher also has developers after it. Whatever migratory visitors are still down there trusting in its inviolability will some morning all too soon be rudely surprised by the whispering descent of corporate Web crawlers itching to index and corrupt another patch of sanctuary for their own far-from-selfless ends" (167). The spatial metaphor 'patch" finds an echo in the way Pynchon uses the Wild West to indicate what is taking place on the Internet: 'It's still unmessed-with country. You like to think it goes on forever, but the colonizers are coming. The suits and tenderfeet. You can hear the blue-eyed-soul music over the ridgeline. There's already a half dozen well-funded projects for designing software to crawl the Deep Web –" (241). The passage continues by making the metaphor explicit: 'Except summer will end all too soon, once they get down here, everything'll be suburbanized faster than you can say late capitalism.' Then it'll be just like up there in the shallows. Link by link, they'll bring it all under control, safe and respectable. Churches on every corner. Licenses in all the



saloons. Anybody still wants his freedom'll have to saddle up and head somewhere else" (ibid.). Reg's statement 'There's always a way to monetize anything' (349) succinctly points to the context in which Pynchon traces development in cyber space.

The parallels Pynchon draws between what capital is doing to geographical space and to the Deep Web illustrate the transformative power of capital. However, we ought not to understand this power as utopian because it does not challenge capital itself but rather augments it. This augmentation is the defining trait of capital and the way it relates to space has been convincingly explained by David Harvey. I will not here detail Harvey's argument but merely point out that Harvey's notion of the spatial fix describes how capital, whenever it arrives at an impasse, seeks geographical resolutions of its contradictions. The reason I bring up the matter at the present point is because the Web in *Bleeding Edge* functions as a resource which can assuage the driving thrust of the capital drive. Daniel Marcus Greene and Daniel Joseph, in their article 'The Digital Spatial Fix' (2015), use Harvey to show how capital bends the Web to its interests.<sup>3</sup> Pynchon shows how this is done in *Bleeding Edge* where the alternative world of the Web is always already coopted by capital and its dynmaic.

The same holds true for the ending of Pynchon's novel. The mother seeing her sons off to school motif harks back to the opening scene of the novel and definitely has a compositional significance. Brian Chappell contends that Pynchon 'creates an opportunity to use the rhetorically privileged position of the ending to posit something that can last beyond the book and remain in the reader's consciousness' (Chappell 3). According to the same author, Pynchon in that ending 'posits a human response, a way of proceeding in the face of these faceless forces' (1) and the family scenes that he enumerates near the end of the novel 'are spaces of resistance to (or perhaps perhaps blissful ignorance of) a burgeoning world order bent on control' (2). But let us take a close look at the final scene keeping in mind its 'privileged position': 'The boys have been waiting for her, and of course that's when she flashes back to not long ago down in DeepArcher, down to their virtual hometown of Zigotispolis, both of them standing just like this, folded in just this precarious light, ready to step out into their peaceable city, still safe from the spiders and bots that one day too soon will be coming for it, to claim-jump it in the name of the indexed world' (Pynchon 2013, 476). Although Chappell writes that

3 This in brief is their argument: 'We argue here that the digital spaces formed by technologies such as the Internet are experimental spaces where capital seeks freedom from contemporary limits. Old strategies of accumulation are re-attempted in new spaces and new strategies are crafted through trial and error in the never-ending quest to surpass or displace the internal contradictions which lead to crisis' (Greene and Joseph 224).

Pynchon's narrator describes them as caught in the same web between hope and despair" (Chappell 12), the thrust of his argument and, I would add, that "something that lasts beyond" the general reader's consciousness, privileges the pole of hope. A cursory reading definitely leaves that impression. However, such a reading downplays the menacing signifiers "still" or "too soon." Chappell contends that in the closing stretch of the novel Maxine's "work of investigating invisible power structures become the work of helping souls, forging bonds, (re)establishing communities" (ibid.). If this is partially true, I voice my disagreement with Chappell's opinion that in the closing segment of the novel "The ominous world of terror and war, and the virtual world beneath it, recede, and a perception of even broader cosmic forces arises" (ibid.). Chappell's reading of the concluding scene accords with the importance he assigns to spirituality and the family but it does not give due attention to textual evidence. To overlook the significance of the adverbs "still," "too soon" or the fact that Maxine imagines her children in a "precarious" light elides the fact that the "spaces of resistance" are always already under threat. Those threats do not recede in the final section of the novel. My disagreement with Chappell is in no way an oddity in the critical debate over Pynchon because, as Chappell himself states at the beginning of his article, some have been "lauding Pynchon's humanism, others lamenting a perceived stance of despair, and others balking at his political naïvete" (Chappell 1). Chappell says that his essay decidedly falls into the first category. Mine does not. If I do recognize a certain humanism in Pynchon than it is a humanism that is always endangered and almost always defeated.

#### 4.

The peripeteias in Pynchon's novels set up structures against what resists and seeks to subvert them. In an "indexed world" the outcome of that conflict is a foregone conclusion. Featuring so prominently as it does at the very end of the novel, the word "indexed" demands a few remarks. In his article "Welcome to the Indexed World," David Haeselin reiterates the banal truth that Pynchon in *Bleeding Edge* deals with technological change but adds "this novel is not just about media technology or even the Internet more specifically; it is about the effect of the search engine" (Haeselin 313). Haeselin particularizes the field of technology and specifies one of its instruments. In the course of his argument he points to the role of advertising in the functioning of search engines but is not as forthright as Joseph Darlington in arguing that "the movement of DeepArcher to open source is a recuperation of radical potential by capitalism" (Darlington 248). This needs to be said because just as the

title of Pynchon's novel has a twofold meaning so does the word "index." Namely, in addition to indicating a procedure on the Internet, this being Haeselin's argument, it also relates to the economy, where indices track and signify its fluctuations.

Having said this I think it is necessary to specify that the monetary metareality depicted in *Bleeding Edge* is characterized by a distinct mutation of money. Two references from the novel suffice to point to this mutation. The first is the following: "Lucas, who'd been putting his money in places a bit less domestic, flipping IPOs, buying into strange instruments understood only by sociopathic quants" (Pynchon 2013, 73). Whoever has attempted to understand today's finance will not take Pynchon to task for his description of its "strange instruments." The second refers to a historical person and his money affairs: the person is Bernie Madoff and his affairs proved "to be a Ponzi scheme" (140). These two references, chosen among the many scattered throughout the novel, indicate the power and the illegible nature of finance in contemporary capitalism. The word "illegible" is intended to echo Alison Shonkwiler's contention that finance represents the "untaming" of the economy: "It does not stabilize questions about the value of money or where wealth comes from. In generating a sense that there is no there in capitalism, finance threatens to disconnect social, political, and class-based modes of legibility" (Shonkwiler 5). Just as Haeselin particularized the question of technology, I now return to money capital because certain things have to be reiterated and rethought in the context of thinking the possibility of resistance.

In his book *The Social Life of Money*, Nigel Dodd has a chapter on culture and utopia in which he explains how money is conceived and how it can be subverted. He offers a dichotomy "between *structural* accounts of money and *agent-centred* approaches." In other words he offers two theories of money one of which "is *determinist* and one that is *voluntarist*. One approach sees money as an objective and objectifying force, a vehicle and expression of profound alienation. The other sees money as the active and ongoing creation of its users" (Dodd 305-6). It can be said that orthodox Marxists upheld the voluntarist position believing that money could be disposed of as revolutionaries thought fit so that, as Robert Kurz remarks "The utopian thought always toyed with the idea of abolishing money" (Kurz). History shows that this was more easily thought than done. To update the issue and point to the context in which I am reading Pynchon I add another observation from Kurz: "by and large, it seems, the utopian energy is on the wane anyway. Under the global reign of neo-liberal economic radicalism, the monetary subjectivity is as unchallenged as never before" (ibid.). Using Dodd's dichotomy I hold that Pynchon in *Bleeding Edge*, as elsewhere in his opus, adumbrates a structural, determinist conception of money. This is the main point of

contention I have with Pöhlmann's reading of the novel. Namely, although Pöhlmann sees that money in the novel informs the world to such an extent that it seems to have no outside, he holds that Pynchon uses 'the ubiquity of money against that very system of capitalism itself' (Pöhlmann 32). Pöhlmann writes: 'The novel offers no sense of an outside to capitalism, and yet it identifies within that system an element that is both at its very heart but at the same time never fully under its control' (33). According to Pöhlmann, this element is money itself. Orrell helps us understand the misconception about control in capitalism implied in Pöhlmann's statement: 'Perhaps the problem is that, because money is based on number we have become used to the idea that the economy is a kind of predictable, mechanical system – rather than something with a life of its own' (Orrell 20). Money as an 'entanglement device' (16) plays a huge role in that life and as represented in Pynchon leaves little room for disentanglements and resistance even if one does, as Pöhlmann suggests, 'the right thing with regard to money' (Pöhlmann 33).

If attended to at all, readings of economic issues such as money and their narrative representations show how our axiology is often biased toward the emancipatory project. But what if the very envisioning of such a project is threatened? Roy Bhaskar introduced the term 'de-agentification,' which we can summarily define as the 'enervation or fragmentation of agents or groups' (Bhaskar 396); I find it appropriately designates the enfeeblement of resistance at a time witnessing 'the closure of the future within the present' (115). Since I am reading Pynchon within that present, let me map it with two supplementary comments. Alain Badiou discusses ethics, I would add resistance, and its relation to 'necessity,' designating the latter in the following manner: 'The modern name for necessity is, as everyone knows, economics'. Economic objectivity – which should be called by its name: the logic of Capital – is the basis from which our parliamentary regimes organize a subjectivity and a public opinion condemned in advance to ratify what seems necessary' (Badiou 30). Remarking on the possible in these circumstances Badiou writes that it is 'circumscribed and annulled, in advance, by the external neutrality of the economic referent – in such a way that subjectivity in general is inevitably dragged down into a kind of belligerent impotence, the emptiness of which is filled by elections and the sound-bites' of party leaders' (31). In her book *The Psychic Life of Power: Theories in Subjection*, Judith Butler refers to 'a larger cultural and political predicament, namely, how to take an oppositional relation to power that is, admittedly, implicated in the very power one opposes'. This is surely a predicament shared by Pynchon. She adds: 'Often this postliberatory insight has led to the conclusion that all agency here meets its impasse. Either forms of capital or symbolic domination are held to be such that our acts are always already

domesticated' in advance, or a set of generalized and timeless insights is offered into the operative structure of all movements toward a future" (Butler 17-18). I quote Butler because postliberatory and the impasse are, in my opinion, apt descriptions of the thematization of resistance in Pynchon. That she mentions capital makes her remarks all the more relevant to my argument. But I do register her critical distancing from the general, timeless and operative and do not have to underscore how both Badiou and Butler do not renegade, at least on the ideational level, from the task of challenging the existent. Neither does Pynchon.

One way he does this is by recognizing the unsustainability of capital's belief in limitless growth. The epitaph I have chosen from *Bleeding Edge* encapsulates Pynchon's sarcasm regarding that belief. Others have drawn attention to the ecological problematic in Pynchon (Schaub). Here I will illustrate it by a passage from *Against the Day* where Pynchon indulges in a bit of science fiction. At the Candlebrow Conference, 'subsidized out of the vast fortune of Mr. Gideon Candlebrow" (Pynchon 2006, 406) Pynchon gives voice to a people from the future who give warnings of where capital is heading:

We are here among you as seekers of refuge from our present – your future – a time of worldwide famine, exhausted fuel supplies, terminal poverty – the end of the capitalist experiment. Once we came to understand the simple thermodynamic truth that Earth's resources were limited, in fact soon to run out, the whole capitalist illusion fell to pieces. Those of us who spoke this truth aloud were denounced as heretics, as enemies of the prevailing economic faith. Like religious Dissenters of an earlier date, we were forced to migrate, with little choice but to set forth upon that far fourth-dimensional Atlantic known as Time." (415)

As I see it, Pynchon's critical take on capitalism is even more radical than that of its critics who espouse a utopian alternative. His future is closed and foredoomed. In my conclusion I will point out how Pynchon, although espousing a defeatism concerning the grand strategies of resistance, deploys tactics that squarely put him in opposition to the really existing world.

## Conclusion

At certain points in his career Pynchon has come out of his anonymity, which in itself can be understood as an oppositional tactic in celebrity



culture, to voice dissent against contemporary events and developments. In 1966 he published the article "A Journey into the Mind of Watts," in which he empathizes with the plight of the black ghetto. In the 1984 article "Is It O.K. to Be a Luddite?" Pynchon presciently recognized developments in technology and positioned himself with the rhetorical question. Of even greater relevance to my argument is the introduction Pynchon wrote for Jim Dodge's novel *Stone Junction* in 1997. Pöhlmann, in his article, in the section entitled "God forbid there should be real cash on a real table," speaks of cash money as a subversive element and in passing mentions Pynchon's introduction. The fact that Pynchon wrote the preface indicates that he was not indifferent to this "outlaw epic." Reducing the epic to its rudimentary plot line, I will say that the personifications of the counter-culture society named The Alliance of Magicians and Outlaws (AMO) in the novel mount up points of resistance to what Pynchon in the Preface identifies as "forces of Control" (Pynchon 1997, xi). I quote from the preface a passage that has a strong bearing not only upon the theme of structure and resistance but also upon the mutation of money that provides the economic backdrop of *Bleeding Edge*:

One popular method of resistance was always just to keep moving – seeking, not a place to hideout, secure and fixed, but a state of dynamic ambiguity about where one might be at any given moment, along the lines of Heisenberg's uncertainty principle. Modern digital machines, however, managed quickly enough to focus the blurred hyper-ellipsoid of human freedom down to well within Planck's Constant. Equally difficult for those who might wish to so proceed through life anonymously and without trace has been the continuing assault against the once-reliable refuge of the cash or non-plastic economy. There was a time not so long ago you could stroll down any major American avenue, collecting on anonymous bank checks, get on some post office line, and send amounts in the range hefty to whopping' anywhere, even overseas, no problem. Now it's down to \$750 a pop, and shrinking. All to catch those Drug Dealers of course, nothing to do with the grim, simplex desire for more information, more control, lying at the heart of most exertions of power, whether governmental or corporate (if that's a distinction you believe in). (xi-xii)

Resistance in this passage is a period of respite, a "refuge" which was once reliable and attainable through a mode of money which has all but disappeared. The last ironic and sarcastic sentence conflates control and power, the state and the economy. The outcome is unequivocal: the space of resistance has shrunk under the "continuing assault" of structures.

Different strands of my reading of Pynchon implicate Marx but I stress that Pynchon's reading of structures shares little if anything with the voluntarism of revolutionary telos. If there is a Marx that can be summoned up here than it is the Marx who at certain junctures of his writing recognized the abiding power of capital such as in *Grundrisse* where he states Labor, by adding a new value to the old one, at the same time maintains and eternizes [capital]" (qtd. in Camatte 6). Jacques Camatte, who cites this quotation in his brief piece *The Wandering of Humanity*, adds, rephrasing Marx: 'all human activity eternizes' capital" (Camatte 6). I think Pynchon would appreciate the acumen of this insight. I bring this up because I think Pynchon's 1993 short piece 'The Deadly Sins/Sloth, Nearer, My Couch, to Thee,' acknowledges, in a negative manner, the truth of that eternization. In the article Pynchon summarizes a diachrony of sloth but, relevant to my argument, he shows how at a certain point it lost its religious connotations and became an 'offense against the economy" (Pynchon 1993). Pynchon dates this shift to 1853 and the publication of Melville's 'Bartleby the Scrivener: A Story of Wall-Street,' noting: Right in the heart of robber-baron capitalism, the title character develops what proves to be terminal acedia" (ibid.). Let me suggest that what Pynchon seems to be implying is that since all human activity contributes to capital the only way to resist it, to offend economic logic, is to abstain from activity. I wager to say that instead of celebrating the liberation of labor, as a revolutionary Marxist would do, Pynchon is here slyly celebrating the liberation from or the abolition of labor as Marx intermittently argued for in his writing (see Zilbersheid). In that sense it can be surmised that the manifesto which would probably be more to Pynchon's liking than the orthodox communist one would be Marx's son-in-law's treatise *The Right To Be Lazy*.

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# To Unsee the Sea: Modern Refugees on Screen

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## Abstract

This article provides a glimpse into the echo of the European refugee crisis in contemporary European cinema and the modes of narration deployed in representations of the phenomenon that is rapidly changing the European political and cultural landscape. The representation of the crisis seems to be bringing about a crisis of representation. Mainstream media refugee images are penetrating both the big screens and television production. Drama and victimhood are, consequently, inevitably becoming the dominant modes of narration (See Rosi's *Fuocoammare*), but a growing number of filmmakers address the issue in rather creative ways, bravely experimenting with the nature of the cinematic event as a whole.

**Keywords:** film, refugee crisis, spectator, narration of the crisis

*Che fuoca a mare che c'è stasera*  
(What fire at sea there is tonight)

—Sicilian swing song, 1950

This article focuses on different modes of the narration of the ongoing Mediterranean refugee crisis in contemporary European cinema and its underlying *image*, namely by focusing on three quite recent films: Luca Guadagnino's *A Bigger Splash* (2015), Michael Haneke's *Happy End* (2017), and Gianfranco Rosi's documentary<sup>1</sup> *Fuocoammare* (2016). The first film competed for the Golden Lion at the Venice International Film Festival, the second was selected to compete for the Palme d'Or in the main

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1 Rosi's *Fuocoammare* earned the director his first Oscar nomination for Best Documentary because the narrative departs from the global news story. The global media then labelled the film as a documentary. However, the Italian director is extremely impressionistic in style and the documentary narrative is complemented with staged parts. Rosi casted Lampedusa locals and most of the narration is performed through staged dialogues involving a 10-year-old inhabitant of Lampedusa. This is why *Fuocoammare* is not a documentary in a strict sense.

competition section at the Cannes Film Festival and was the Austrian entry for the Best Foreign Language Film at the 90th Academy Awards, whereas the third film won the Golden Bear at the Berlin International Film Festival and was nominated for the Academy Award for Best Documentary Feature at the 89th Academy Awards. All of these awards gave these movies transnational acclaim, visibility, a vast audience, and a great deal of misinterpretation. Regardless of the fact of how different they might appear in narration and style, the movies listed here have one thing in common: observing obsession. It subtly pervades Rosi's documentary, Haneke makes it the main subject of his film, whereas Guadagnino violently blurs the boundaries between diegesis and non-diegesis, pushing obsession beyond the limits of the medium itself and turning the spectator into an object of observation as well. The viewer is, therefore, going to be brought into the discussion and analysis of the films; this calls for a clarification of the type of viewer this essay calls into question. The analysis of the three films addresses a viewer who approaches Haneke's *Happy End* believing that she is about to see a drama about dysfunctional family or the viewer of Guadagnino's *A Bigger Splash* who believes herself to be watching an erotic thriller. The analysis also addresses the viewer who takes Rosi's *Fuocoammare* for just another documentary. This article is an exploration of forms and modes of narration which are (un)fit to narrate catastrophes as they happen, without historical distance, for an audience able to observe such catastrophes in real-time. Difficult times, according to Rancière, call for a redefinition of the relations between art, politics, and the social sciences, and instead of analysing works of art like plays, novels, or films as a response to social causes, it is perhaps more important to analyse the forms of narration those works deploy and modes of the presentation of facts (139). This is more or less the perspective adopted in the analysis of the films listed above. The language of cinema is 'more than a language of images, and the montage is not simply a way to bring distant images closer as Godard says in his *Histoires of Cinema*. It is a way of bringing times closer, to put a multiplicity of temporalities into a unique temporal flow" (141).

Italian director Luca Guadagnino and Austrian Michael Haneke did not merely address the crisis, at least not in the 'straightforward' way that Rosi opted for, but have rather provided a glimpse into the European reality that, when decoded by the viewer, dissolves the Eurocentric, and at times even Hollywood-like plot it is wrapped into. In that way, different temporalities and different spatialities clash, exposing in the process the fiction that surrounds both. A brief overview of Rosi's *Fuocoammare* works as an argument in favour of a view that certain modes of narration of delicate matters are simply becoming outdated and, arguably, ineffective too. Guadagnino and Michael Haneke adopt a very similar approach to

representing crisis from both psychological and artistic points of view, which is why *A Bigger Splash* and *Happy End* will be discussed in the same section. New York Time journalist A.O. Scott described Rosi's straight-forward, semi-documentary project as an exceptional work of art that does not simply present the viewer with a 'tableau of human misery or global catastrophe that has been put together with the vague but unarguably noble intention of raising awareness,' as if such awareness were itself a kind of solution" (Scott). This article will try to argue that this is only partially true.

From the imagological perspective, the first two films operate elusively on the level of the so-called auto-image,' shedding the light on the collective dormant states of the modern West. *Fuocoammare* is, conversely, loaded with hetero-images,' frequently falling into stereotypical portrayals of refugees, which, however, does not rob it (entirely) of its artistic quality; mostly because the staged parts of the film function as a very lucid and even ironic commentary on the phenomenon. The choice of genre itself, in a way, limits the film's artistic expression and the choice of stylistic devices, but also determines how the audience experiences the movie. Hence, with the staged parts, Rosi is, arguably, trying to challenge not only our perception of the crisis portrayed in the movie but also certain genre conventions that can be very oppressing when it comes to the portrayal of such matters. However, I hold that the relations between the spectator and the image on the screen postulated by Rosi in his genre-mixing project are practically non-existent or at least less substantial than those Guadagnino and Haneke establish between their visual narration and their narratee by doing what I would term *genre haunting*.

According to *The Guardian* journalist Charlie Phillips, films about Europe's migrant crisis run the risk of being artful and exploitative. Now directors are seeking to redress the balance" (Phillips). However, redressing the balance sometimes requires redressing and questioning genre boundaries and turning to experimental modes of narration that do not aim at fulfilling the expectation of the audience but rather the creation and education of a new one. This article is also an exploration of new, innovative ways of doing so.

## 1. Observing the Observer

An article including advice from World Press Photo winner Kalpesh Lathigra for photographers in the field states that 'public perceptions of refugees are shaped by the narrow lens through which they are most often presented: drama and victimhood" (Howden). According to Lathigra, photographers, editors, and commissioning organizations all share a

degree of responsibility for the boats and camps' images that dominate visualizations of refugees. Rosi's *Fuocoammare*, despite its artistic dimension, falls into a category of film that is desperately drawing on the Aylan Kurdi effect<sup>2</sup> which suggests how the effect of the crises tends to wash off, even in the case of a real-life toddler Aylan Kurdi because certain modes of narration can make different catastrophes that are being narrated seem interchangeable.

Guadagnino's *A Bigger Splash*, as well as Haneke's *Happy End*, both work in the opposite direction, moving away from *effet de typique*, from stereotyping, refusing to subordinate their narratives to the spectator's prejudices and expectations, offering instead a pinch of sobering reality, and an intriguing auto-image: that of a white Westerner trying to enjoy himself not thinking about the harshness in his own vicinity. The question that arises here is how to depict a brutal reality for audiences who do not necessarily want to hear about it or are rather easily distracted from it. European cinema is rapidly offering answers to that question.

Both Haneke and Guadagnino have decided to feature our painful indifference in their films, turning it into a protagonist, if not the subject of their projects. Refugees or minorities (in Haneke's film it is quite hard to tell), on the other hand, are basically voiceless; they appear only for a brief moment and are reduced to sketches functioning merely as a backdrop for the unsettling portrait of a complete lack of interest on the other side. This is, naturally, intended to downplay the 'implied European default of normality against which the disturbance manifests itself' (Leerseen, 'Stranger/Europe' 22), and the refugee crisis that we are currently witnessing is frequently presented as such: a malign tissue on an otherwise perfectly healthy organism that is Europe. Having seen *A Bigger Splash* or *Happy End*, the spectator is basically 'raped into authenticity,'<sup>3</sup> to use Haneke's expression (Haneke). The implicit European auto-image, claims Leerseen, is

one of a separation between an ordered interior world, ruled by laws and by domestic values, a household with a centre of gravity in traditional

2 A toddler whose body had been washed ashore on a Turkish beach in 2015, a body that came to symbolize the European refugee crisis. The image of Aylan Kurdi washed ashore managed, for a brief moment, to prompt a slight shift in the attitude towards the crisis.

3 'Why do I rape the viewer? I try to rape him into being reflective, and into being intellectually independent and seeing his role in the game of manipulation. I believe in his intelligence. At its best, film should be like a ski jump. It should give the viewer the option of taking flight, while the act of jumping is left up to him' (Haneke).



authority, and cordoned off from an unordered outside where only the law of the jungle applies. That image is that of the house, with its roofs, walls, and thresholds separating outside from inside and with its central focus in the hearth and chimney giving warmth and shelter to its inhabitants. (Stranger/Europe" 22)

It is precisely this image that is satirized by Guadagnino and Haneke: Haneke tears his house down and Guadagnino turns his into a murder site. The tension that pervades both films is born from an auto-image and its unstable grounds. The otherness and the perception, or lack of perception, of otherness merely inserts itself between us and our narratives, not even to facilitate its assimilation but to point to the hidden, subconscious mechanisms standing in its way.

According to Prime, the refugee film as 'a form of transitional, transnational cinema,' it is 'preoccupied with space, integrating into its structure the sense of displacement that is perhaps the fundamental experience of the refugee and asylum seeker' (58). Both Guadagnino and Haneke play with the familiarity of domestic spaces slowly letting the uncanny creep in and instil anxiety both in the filmic space and the viewer's mind. Space is stripped of all certainty and the posh *maisons* featured in both films offer no refuge even when they are basically *maisons des artistes*, as are Tilda Swinton/Marianne Lane's.<sup>4</sup> Haneke's *Happy End* opens with a scene of a construction site collapsing somewhere in northern France as if to show that the house' we call Europe is a shaky edifice itself, with unstable walls and roofs, and that the real danger lurks inside familiar walls. Philosophy and film studies have brought about a lot of reflection on the relation between architecture and film. According to Pallasmaa,

through architecture we transform our experience of outsideness and estrangement into the positive feeling of domicile. The structuring of place, space, situation, scale, illumination, etc, characteristic to architecture - the framing of human existence - seeps unavoidably into every cinematic expression. (161)

Both film and architecture are, among other, an attempt to order and domesticate mental and physical space, to fight internal and external chaos.

4 In this case it could be also argued that these kind of spaces - all *maisons des artistes*, *buen retiro*, *turris eburnea* kind of spaces - can actually offer a privileged point of view given their, usually, reclusive and isolated nature which is apt to induce meditation.

However, Haneke's opening scene presents chaos at its most destructive and the viewer is lost right at the start as he/she is intentionally deprived of a mental dwelling space and left waiting for a 'solid ground' to walk on through the filmic space. Pallasma continues:

Presentation of a cinematic event is, thus, totally inseparable from the architecture of space, place and time, and a film director is bound to create architecture, although often unknowingly. It is exactly this innocence and independence from the professional discipline of architecture that makes the architecture of cinema so subtle and revealing. (162)

Knowingly or unknowingly, the destruction of a construction site and the death of a construction worker somewhere in France set the dominant tone for a basically non-existent plot and the cinematic event because the viewer is left with nothing to hold onto. He/she is intentionally displaced and, hence, confused and anxious throughout. Having no solid plot to follow or a safe mental space to move through gives the viewer a sense of nausea as if caught in the middle of a bad dream. According to Kracauer, when watching a film in a cinema, the viewer is surrounded with darkness, her contact with actuality reduced, and she is deprived of much of the environmental data needed for other mental activities (159). The same practically applies to dreams. One is put to sleep, in the dark and free of stimuli, left only with the brain-produced images that frequently ask for some sort of decoding while awake. Haneke's imagery is, by no means, pleasant, and, having seen *Happy End*, the viewer is forced to reflect on it long after the credits have rolled. The matricidal poisoning taking place the film is also very suggestive, as Europe is often perceived by Europeans as the good mother protecting its offspring, sticking to the *abundans cautela non nocet* rule. However, *Happy End* opens with collapse and matricide. The first wrapped in the silence of his European protagonists and the second framed by a smartphone camera in the hands of a mentally unstable child struggling with the consequences of a painful divorce.

Kracauer's viewer is attracted to a specific film not by a desire to look at a specific film or to be pleasantly entertained," but rather the viewer is desperate to be 'released from the grip of consciousness,' to lose themselves in the dark, which makes the moviegoer 'much in the position of a hypnotized person' (160). It is particularly this feature that makes film an ideal vehicle for all kinds of propaganda. Film theory has, on several occasions, compared the spectator's condition with that

of Hitchcock's fictional photographer L.B. Jefferies<sup>5</sup> (played by Jimmy Stewart in *Rear Window*), confined to a wheelchair, with his leg in cast, observing through a rectangular window, using a pair of binoculars or his camera lenses, both of which allow him to switch between long and close shots, as a way to entertain himself. Both Haneke and Guadagnino put their viewers to sleep, release them from the grip of consciousness, immobilize them only to present them with mirror images of themselves asleep, unconscious or immobilized. Finally, the viewer is, just like Hitchcock's character, metaphorically exposed and thrown out of the window, as a form of the 'rape' that Haneke deems to be a necessary feature of the cinematic event.

Both directors are, as a matter of fact, questioning what it means to be an observer today. Haneke and Guadagnino are observing the observer of the silent catastrophes taking place in the personal, but also in the wider, political space, performing what could indeed be described as a useful traumatization,<sup>6</sup> directing the camera eye towards the observer who does not even want to be seen observing. Guadagnino and Haneke are all about the visibility of the observer and reducing the distance of the audience from the filmic events, subtly pointing fingers at an individual, not at an apparatus. In his *Inglorious Basterds*, Tarantino made a similar point with the famous scene of the brutal slaughter of a entire cinema audience comprised of Nazi soldiers and their families on a night out, people who were nothing but silent observers pretending not to hear or see a thing. The question he raised by doing so is the same question Guadagnino, Haneke, and, to a smaller extent, even Rosi put forward: what does it mean to be an observer of moral catastrophes? Directing the light towards the cinema audience was an extremely powerful statement. This type of useful traumatization of largely oblivious audiences living in a mediated reality fabricated to serve the capitalist interests of the highest bidder is becoming a common feature of the new wave of directors seeking new ways of social engagement, mostly through a critique of the plague of modern times: civilized indifference.

The directors mentioned above addressed the same issue that Gramsci voiced in his 1917 pamphlet *The Future City*. 'I hate the indifferent. I believe, as Frederich Hebbel did, that living means being partisan'(...), indifference is abulia, is parasitism, is cowardice. Indifference isn't life. This is why I hate the indifferent" explains Italian philosopher and politician, referring to indifference as the 'dead weight of history,' 'the millstone around the innovator's neck,' and 'the brute matter that rises up against intelligence and smothers it' (Gramsci).

5 See *Hitchcock's Moral Gaze*; Barton Palmer, Pettey and Sanders (eds.); *Stalker, Hacker, Voyeur, Spy*; Gediman.

Silence (frequently synonymous with indifference) is in fact a recurring motif in Guadagnino and Haneke's films. The Austrian director's film is set in Calais, a major ferry port in the northern France, and a refugee camp, but that is something the spectator does not learn from the director, as the movie is entirely deprived of didacticism. Moreover, in Haneke, the spectator is not allowed to hear what the conversation between the member of the Laurent family and the migrants is about, as their voices are drowned out in a traffic jam on a busy street, just like their bodies are drowned in the waters around Mother' Europe. The sound pollution reverberating in Haneke's film comes to symbolize, among other things, the impact of modern technology on human communication. The streets of Calais in *Happy End* are teeming with life and voices, but the Austrian director puts this polyphony to work just point out that, despite the visible display of interculturality, Haneke's Europe is still not a postcolonial one that would allow new voices to speak. It is rather one that is still imposing one and only one voice. However, this Eurocentric perspective is way too haunted for the viewer and, hence, not easily adopted. Haneke's viewers are, in a way, forced on a quest for a new perspective, but a ready-made one is by no means available. By not letting the viewer settle in a 'safe spot' and by denying him/her omniscience, Haneke disables his audience and haunts their dreams, taking full control of the viewer. Haneke's viewers are constantly looking for both mental and physical states to settle in and are perpetually being denied permission to do so, a condition that pretty much resembles the condition of a modern refugee. As Ince put it, in Haneke's films, 'private and public space, like interior, mental and exterior, real' space, refuse to remain in the clearly delimited, self-identical categories that would ensure the spectator's peace of mind" (88).

Guadagnino, on the other hand, takes the spectator a step further into the depths of the human psyche, silencing not just the refugees but his western protagonists as well, taking this whole interplay to the so-called meta-image<sup>6</sup> level, as an image that is neither an auto-image nor a hetero-image but something between the two, an image that leaves both western and eastern protagonists speechless, as during an encounter in a forest on the small island of Pantelleria, both of them face their naked selves in the gaze of the o/Other in a voice deprived scene.

6 Meta-images 'exist wholly by way of imputing to Others the way how we think that they look at Us' (Leerssen, 'Imagology' 24). It is precisely at the meta-image level where the most intense antagonism takes place because 'we believe the others guilty of ill-will, a refusal to be reasonable, a deep animus, without realizing that it is ourselves who display such ill-will and animus by imputing it to the Other. We suspect the other of being suspicious, without being aware that to do so is an act of suspicion on our part' (ibid.).

According to Mendelowitz,

The filmmaker has much to teach us about the world we inhabit and share and the incompleteness we mostly embody and persistently long to surpass, about the sheer madness and mystery of being in a new millennial landscape and terrain. It is the artist's peek behind the proscenium arch; in other words, it is psychology. (187)

The Italian director, extremely psychological in his approach, attempts, in Felliniesque fashion, the deconstruction of the so-called meta-images, bringing his silent protagonist in the middle of nowhere where one stands naked' before the other, each wholly stripped of the fictitious,' which means being deprived of language as the main device helping us frame our prejudices and stereotypes. To make them really see' each other, the director relieves them of the burden of what Henri Pageaux would define as "*la confusion entre l'attribut et l'essentiel*" (qtd. in Leerssen, *Imagology*" 25), leaving each side, including the spectator, slightly uncomfortable and ashamed. This quite short, but rather powerful, Dantesque scene suggest that maybe the crisis' that we are witnessing calls not for humanitarian help only but for the deconstruction of the discourse of the self, which necessarily implies the deconstruction of the discourse of the national as well, conforming to Arendt's political theories of the figure of a modern refugee<sup>7</sup> as a potential foundation for a new social and political philosophy.

Whereas Guadagnino dwells, among other things, on western indifference and self-centeredness, Haneke, it could be argued, provides some sort of an explanation, mostly by placing modern technology as the mirror of an indifferent French protagonist, but also as the cause of it, since technology plays a great role in the domestication of violence. The non-existence of an immediate reality is, as a matter of fact, one of the leitmotifs of the movie. Moreover, the most significant and highly disturbing frames are shot with the camera filming a smart phone screen while the movie's youngest protagonist is live streaming the poisoning of her own mother and later even the failed assisted suicide of her grandfather. In Haneke, technology provides both a window into the harshness of a globalized world as well as a wall that keeps us away from it, and in *Happy End*, the presence of modern technology is turned into a framing device. Both the framing of shots and the narrative framing

7 In 'We Refugees,' originally published in January 1943 in the Jewish journal *Menorah*, Arendt dwells on what it means to be a refugee, an inhabitant of a state that exposes the so-called fiction of sovereignty and blindness of the bureaucratic apparatus to the existence of bare life in a bureaucratically unprocessed form.



are, therefore, entusted to a deranged girl struggling with her parents' divorce. This mentally unstable girl is an evolved echo of Hitchcock's immobilized photographer, whereas the role of the window is transposed into a smartphone and the protagonist is no longer able to think of the events from her surroundings as real once she places a screen between herself and the occurrences in her immediate vicinity. Haneke's frame-within-a-frame further destabilizes the viewer as well.

While the Austrian director is introducing an element of mediation and mediated reality that, when it comes to refugee crisis, is of vital importance and raises a set of questions on how this new reality should be represented in contemporary cinema, Guadagnino builds a strong intertext in *A Bigger Splash*, a film that, to start with, borrows its title from Hockney's famous pop art painting depicting a swimming pool and a modern house. The painting is extremely static; the only movement represented being the splash created by an unseen protagonist who has just jumped in from a diving board. Being familiar with Guadagnino's poetics, I assume he was particularly intrigued by the cause-effect interplay taking place on the canvass. The observer is seeing the effect of an action only, whereas the cause is hidden deep under the surface and one is left guessing who or what could it could be. Furthermore, we are faced with an effect of a human action, but the human element is nowhere to be seen in the painting, which is very reminiscent of the crisis that the Italian director is tackling. The West is, as a matter of fact, following and treating the refugee crisis as if it were indeed an effect without a cause, a dangerous self-induced tide approaching the Fortress. The dangerous water' metaphor is, as a matter of fact, frequently deployed in the media discourse when it comes to the portrayal of the refugee crisis, frequently resulting in the conceptualization of migrants as an uncontrollable, destructive force. Flow, tide, wave, and flood appear to be the terms most frequently deployed in American, British, and Balkan media as well (Mujagić). Guadagnino further develops Hockney's visual narrative' and depicts the cause instead, a naked Westerner drowned in the safety of a luxurious villa, in a posh swimming pool (a symbol of the human desire to dominate powerful forces such as water) on a Mediterranean island surrounded by those dangerous waters' frequently discussed in the media. The murder at the centre of Guadagnino's painting' is characterized as an accident, as the murderer happens to be married to a famous rock star played by Tilda Swinton and the Sicilian officer investigating the case is an easily charmed docile body. Guadagnino makes use of this well-known painting and penetrates its psychological depths with the film camera as an homage to both arts, but at the same time as an attempt to unveil the truth, only to cover it up and bring the viewer back to the pleasant and visually soothing surroundings resembling those in Hockney's famous painting.



Besides deriving its title from this modern art painting, *A Bigger Splash* is also a remake of Jacques Deray's *La Piscine* (1969) set in Côte d'Azur. Guadagnino borrows the plot and the motifs of sexual possessiveness, transposing it to Pantelleria, a small Italian island in the Strait of Sicily, an island hosting a refugee camp. The director is, therefore, juxtaposing images of prosperity with images of a struggle to survive, showing how a small geographical area can become the place of the clashing of two principles ruling our lives: the principle of pleasure and the principle of pain occasionally stare at each other silently. *A Bigger Splash* starts off as an erotic thriller, but its loose narrative line is disrupted by the unexpected intrusion of Otherness that dissolves the plot and melts down its erotic charge. The Other is suddenly penetrating both Western life and the genre the viewer believes himself/herself to be watching, and is silently seeking asylum in both. The pressure piles up and the movie ends in a murder disguised as an accident that, however, receives great deal of attention from the local authorities, as it is all taking place at a rock-star's villa. The refugee camp, as well as its inhabitants remain what they are, a part of the film setting aiming at verisimilitude. This is precisely the element that made it possible for the film to be labelled an erotic thriller. The silent encounter of the worlds in the Sicilian forest presents a breaking point in the narration and offers the viewer the possibility of choosing a different narrative line or rather the possibility to follow both lines simultaneously: a reading that turns out to be the most productive one as it encompasses the complexity of the phenomenon that is simultaneously penetrating geographical, political, cultural, and private spaces.

Therefore, both directors manage to paint the same picture of Europe Leerssen is referring to, and it is a picture of Europe as 'a combination of civilized refinement and a fraught history, a combination of suave civility and long-lost innocence, that Machiavellian sense that behind every Michelangelo lurks a Borgia, behind every Sissi a Dracula, behind every Louvre a Dachau – and between the two a sense of complexity and mixed feelings' (Stranger/Europe" 23).

## 2. Rosi's Amblyopic Eye

If an immigrant stood at my door and said: You have so much room. Can I live here? Would I let him in? No. I'm not a saint. I cultivate a certain scepticism in my films: toward other people and myself.

— Michael Haneke, *Every Film*"

Italian director Gianfranco Rosi portrays his Lampedusa through the eyes of Samuele Pucillo, a twelve-year-old boy dealing with amblyopia, his lazy eye functioning rather as a symbol than an actual medical issue, and through Pietro Bartolo, an island doctor anguished by images of the dying and suffering migrants. Samuele is only a child with no real understanding of the crisis, which is why he often points his slingshot towards the sea pretending to be fighting the enemy invasion' and is, therefore, not to be blamed for it. Samuele is the symbol of an average Westerner, a perfect picture of the collective lazy eye issue.' His condition, I would argue, functions as an embodiment of the collective dormant states that seem to be reawakening in the West as the refugee crisis is rapidly triggering both panic and fear, mostly due to a lack of knowledge or proper information on the subject.

Pietro, on the other hand, is in direct contact with the refugees, or the invaders,' but the spectator is, in a way, already familiar with his point of view: the haunting events he witnesses are the same haunting images that today's mass media is putting forward on a daily basis. However, constant exposure to an image carries in itself some sort of immunity or a tendency to think of its content as virtual, as seen in Haneke. Consequently, the spectator can no longer be 'raped into authenticity' by an image of anything else rather than herself, an image of one's own indifference, or, in this particular case, one's childish ignorance. The image of a refugee presented through the eyes of the island doctor is in fact no better than the image of an enemy/refugee presented through the eyes of Samuele Pucillo, as it is a very stereotyped one, belonging to the so-called boats and camps' images aimed at provoking pity or action and frequently failing to do so.

None of the movies analysed in this essay is plot-driven and viewers would most likely find it hard to sum up the (non)events taking place on the screen. The anxiety that pervades the works of these European directors forbids the viewer to settle in comfortably and the nonexistence of a solid, linear plot is nothing but a policing device preventing him/her to do so. Furthermore, when it comes to genre, the movies analysed here bravely defy classification. Rosi's *Fuocoammare* appears to be grounded in documentary practice, but the documentary footage is complemented with staged scenes in a neorealist fashion. The (in)flux of refugees and asylum-seekers into Western Europe, according to Prime, 'poses new challenges for genres, such as the documentary or the realist drama, that traditionally attempt to solve' these sorts of social problems" (59). Naficy goes even further stating that 'access to multiple channels and types of local and transnational media and the displacement of an unprecedented number of people have challenged our received notions of national culture and identity, national cinema and genre, authorial vision and style, and

film reception and ethnography” (8). Despite the fact that Rosi’s film is a skilful exercise in genre-mixing, the mode of narration of the central theme is rather stereotyped and conforms to what Lathigra terms ‘boats and camps’ representations.

Modern refugees inhabit a limbo, an intermezzo, an in-between space and Guadagnino’s and Haneke’s spectators are consequently placed in the same limbo in terms of effective genre disruption and narration. The refugee camp and the boat, which come to be Rosi’s in-between spaces, are the same spaces that take on the role of the dominant symbols of the displaced in Western visual culture. Guadagnino and Haneke’s refugees/minorities do not inhabit the plot but rather dissolve it and suspend it, as they are constantly ignored by the Western protagonists, by the sound director, and by the movie camera. However, the very process of intentional, even trained unseeing fills the ‘attempted plot’ with anxiety, an anxiety greater than the one Rosi is trying to instil in his audience with his real-life walking and talking stereotypes. There is an elephant in the room, be it the gaze of a Moroccan cleaning lady, a refugee at a posh seaside party somewhere in France, or an unknown wanderer from Pantelleria’s forest, and it is precisely this feeling that inhibits the viewer from enjoying the familiarity of the domestic spaces presented in Guadagnino, Haneke and to a certain degree even in Rosi. However, Rosi’s viewer is not exactly forced to take a look and acknowledge the uncomfortable gaze of the Other, whereas Haneke’s and Guadagnino’s viewers are highly subjected to the gaze and forced to take a look at themselves and acknowledge their own inertia. Whereas Rosi is using the crisis as a subject of his project, Haneke and Guadagnino are turning it onto a medium to deliver and present the most accurate image of the West that we all deem true but we would rather not see, let alone acknowledge. The fact, however, remains that we are much more in need of that kind of image rather than the images of bodies washed away on Mediterranean shores, images pointing fingers at governments, laws, apparatuses, and other mechanisms serving, among other things, to relieve us of individual responsibility.

Nonetheless, there is a striking interplay put at work in Rosi’s film that makes it worthy of attention and it is the constant juxtaposition of a ‘familiar,’ stereotyped and widely commercialized mediterraneity (scenes of a Sicilian *nonna* cooking a most delicious pasta), meaning a flat mediterraneity that can easily misguide the viewer into projecting personal positive emotions into it, images frequently deployed in advertising campaigns for the Mediterranean (perceived as a luring room with a view’) are juxtaposed with images of the ‘strange and unexpected’ appearing in the form of a crowded old vessel blocking the view and instilling anxiety. This is the mechanism behind Samuele’s imaginary war with the enemy’

Rosi's *Fuocoammare* is a Mediterranean room with a view that is suddenly filled with terror and Otherness, and the locals are overwhelmed with fear and uncertainty. Unlike Haneke's and Guadagnino's spectatorships, Rosi's viewer does not have to fear being involved or being made a subject of the narrative through the director's psychological game. Rosi's viewer has the privilege of being cut off from events and is at times overwhelmed with pity, but is still not confronted with the moral obligation to intervene. Rosi's audience is granted a dwelling space and a delicious bowl of homemade Sicilian pasta. However, the projection of positive emotions into the familiar scenes in Rosi means holding onto stereotypes and becoming a stereotype oneself, since the cosy Mediterranean scenes are, in fact, flat and highly commercialized. In Rosi, the image of the arrival of the refugee boat on the Sicilian shore, which some locals perceive as an enemy invasion, is in itself a form of a celebration of transnational space, whereas the domestic Mediterranean scenes that easily become a form of a refuge for the viewer ironically come to symbolize the resurgence of micro-level hyper-nationalisms and micro-fascisms. This is where Haneke's scepticism' comes into question: Rosi is merely illustrating fear and scepticism at work, while the Austrian director parts from his own scepticism, raising a set of question on its nature and origin, forcing his characters and audience to question the nature and origin of theirs.

Unlike their treatment in Haneke and Guadagnino, Lampedusa refugees are actually given a voice in Rosi's movie. However, they are only allowed to express themselves by Western means: using English, which is not their first language, which again, forces them to hold onto stereotypes in order to provoke empathy, and this is precisely how an alternative reality is created and served, 'a mediated and manufactured reality, encouraging simulation and theatricality, instead of genuine information' (Ignat 79). However, Rosi's stereotyped refugee invades an even more stereotyped mediterraneity, resulting in an anguishing simulacra, a representation of the original the true likeness of which no one is exactly able to recall. Rosi's refugee is stripped of all familiarity and certainty and given only limited means to try to claim them back, which, arguably, turns him/her into a walking stereotype, but the Westerner on the safety of the Mediterranean shore is no less a stereotype. Still, one is to claim protection from the other, turning the whole interplay in a grotesque *absente reo* trial with the defendant present but only in the extent in which he or she is able to use the Western tools put at his or her disposal. *Fuocoammare*, meaning *Fire at the Sea*, bears the title of a famous Italian song from World War II and features some hellish scenes at open sea where the worst terrors of our age are taking place, and yet the people in the film remain as careless as the Sicilian swing piece from 1950 from which the director borrowed his title. The spectator is allowed to do the same, there is no imagined gaze of

the Other that is supposed to instil guilt or shame in the Western viewer, whereas the other films discussed leave it, in a neoformalist fashion, to the viewer to compile and assemble the experience and his/her own personal role in it. Rosi's disembodied eye' is omniscient and more impersonal in its nature, whereas Guadagnino and Haneke's filmic eyes become organic parts of the body of the spectator, and the latter is forced to take responsibility for his/her bodily presence or at least to acknowledge it.

### 3. *Le réfugié que donc je suis*

I often ask myself, just to see, who I am-and who I am (following) at the moment when, caught naked, in silence, by the gaze of an animal, for example the eyes of a cat, I have trouble, yes, a bad time overcoming my embarrassment. Whence this malaise? I have trouble repressing a reflex dictated by immodesty. Trouble keeping silent within me a protest against the indecency. Against the impropriety that comes of finding oneself naked, one's sex exposed, stark naked before a cat that looks at you without moving, just to see. The impropriety [malseance] of a certain animal nude before the other animal, from that point on one might call it a kind of animalséance: the single, incomparable and original experience of the impropriety that would come from appearing in truth naked, in front of the insistent gaze of the animal, a benevolent or pitiless gaze, surprised or cognizant. The gaze of a seer, visionary, or extra-lucid blind person. It is as if I were ashamed, therefore, naked in front of this cat, but also ashamed for being ashamed. (Derrida 3)

A form of nudity enforced on viewers that I have discussed in the previous sections appears to be the central concept of Derrida's famous 1997 seminar: nakedness as a metaphor for naked thoughts, naked words, and naked truth: the language of thought stripped of its discursive element, the kind of nudity to which Guadagnino exposes his spectators.

Even though we tend to look at the animal as the Other, and moreover, the subordinate Other, Derrida argues it may not necessarily be the case. The original title of the seminar, *L'animal que donc je suis*, is in fact a word play, as *je suis* does not only mean *I am*. This is because the French verbs *être* - to be, and *suivre* - to follow, happen to have the same singular form for the first person: *je suis*. Hence, the problem that Derrida poses is who is following whom? Is the human following the animal (and therefore, establishing themselves as superior) or is the human an animal, and therefore equal, if not inferior, caught in the gaze of another animal?

I am aware that Derrida was speaking in defence of animals and against generalization, instrumentalization, and the conceptual simplification of



animals, challenging the so-called philosophical logocentrism. However, one of his key points is 'othering' and the mechanism of othering performed mostly through language that has become instrumentalized and put to the service of dominant power structures. The cat's gaze from the philosopher's speech corresponds to an intrusive gaze from a stranger for instance, the gaze perceived as a dominant gesture. It is the same kind of gazing we witness in Guadagnino and Haneke in the scenes of silent clashes between worlds. Their Western protagonists, all of a sudden, are brought down from their Western thrones, from a position of seeing from a safe distance, that is seeing without being seen and placed in the spot of the observed subject from Derrida's speech, that of a naked person exposed to the unbearable gaze of the Other.

What Guadagnino and Haneke do is expose their posh, bourgeois protagonist to the gaze of the Other that they would prefer to unsee, let alone to be caught gazing at the Other's gaze. It is this strong psychological element that makes their approaches to the narration of a delicate issue quite unique and effective, as the spectator is left with the feeling that she did not actually see a movie, but was rather seen, in her nakedness, allowing for embarrassment to kick in afterwards.

The modern refugee crisis addressed in Haneke and Guadagnino, more than anything else, seems to be calling for a perforation of the spaces of the construction of the self, acknowledging the refugee that one therefore is,' and that a film's plot is frequently an obstacle to the reflective process as such. A loose narrative structure, further dissolved by numerous *temps mort* scenes, provides the viewer with both space and time for reflection. Unlike Rosi's *Fuocoammare*, emotional charges are practically non-existent in both Haneke and Guadagnino, but the filmic portrayal is by no means neutral. The construction of suggestive elements in the narrative spaces of the films is performed mostly through the location of characters in space. Haneke's only Western protagonist, troubled by the sufferings of the Other and at the peak of the depression he is struggling with, expresses his repressed feelings in a free-style dance at a night club, but the stage he is dancing on resembles a box that limits the freedom of movement and what would otherwise be perceived as a gesture of finding one's inner peace, a gesture of liberation, turns out to be a claustrophobic *mise-en-scène* that is actually imprisoning the character. In *A Bigger Splash*, the visual narrator<sup>8</sup> locates the characters in space so that their respective positions resemble those of a hide-and-seek game, with one peeking out from a safe place (usually from a tiny window or the window blinds in a

8 According to Verstraten, the 'visual narrator is a narrative agent responsible for choosing who or what can be seen, for locating the characters in a certain space, for positioning the characters with regard to each other, and for determining the kind of lighting in the shot' (8-9).



police station). The viewer gets to share the character's voyeuristic, protected view, but then, all of a sudden, the camera exposes his/her hidden shelter and the situation is immediately reversed. Guadagnino offers no safe space for his viewer to settle and puts him/her under the constant threat of being abruptly exposed both to the Other and to him/herself.

This crisis that is frequently presented as if literally being born out of water, out of the Mediterranean Sea, an immense natural space featured in all three films, has become a thing to unsee in both moral and political senses, or at least, a thing to watch from the safety of being a moviegoer. The representation of the crisis in contemporary European cinema is bringing on the crisis of cinema itself, as filmmakers are struggling to find fit modes of representation that would move away from a mere illustration of events; thus, *Fuocoammare*'s biggest flaw is the fact that it is way too illustrative to be effective. Rosi's viewer is too disembodied to be thinking with the director. However, a growing number of European filmmakers (Haneke, Guadagnino, Kaurismäki, Hristov) are addressing both the crisis and the crisis of representation in the most creative ways, clearing a path for the new, subtle and, in their expression, very avant-garde forms of social engagement aimed at showing the audience that, in times of moral catastrophes, being just an audience is synonymous with being compliant.

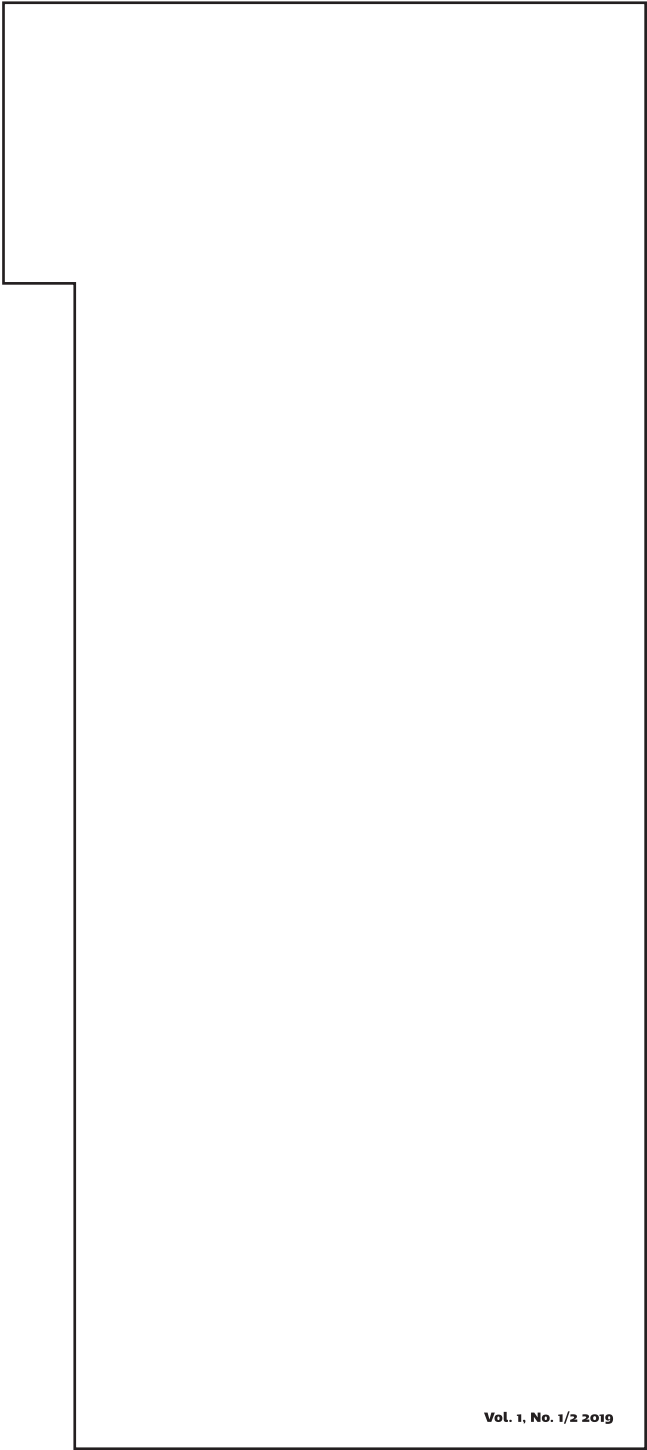
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# Cross Cultural Studies Review

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Studia Mediterranea



# Brutal Highlanders and Crooked Seasiders: Two Opposing Mediterranean Literary Archetypes

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## Abstract

This paper presents a philological and imagological analysis of the mutual contradictions of two types of characters in the corpus of Mediterranean literature. The highlander and the seaside, one brutal and the other imbedded in the hetero-conception of the other, belong to standard Mediterranean literary types, namely archetypes, from myths to the present. Literature on the Mediterranean and about the Mediterranean is abundant with typified descriptions of the highlander being a tough guy, violent, and the seaside as cunning, envious or a serial seducer. The imagology of these types and their mutual opposition is the topic of this philological analysis. The paper focuses on a comparative analysis of this imagotype/stereotype existing throughout the Mediterranean and transmitted from one literature to another throughout the centuries. The aim of the work is to review and summarize the literature concerning the archetypes of the highlander and the seaside in order to have a better understanding of the patterns of imagotypes and archetypes in the collective imaginary represented by Mediterranean literature.

**Keywords:** Mediterranean, literature, imagology, highlander, seaside.

## 1. Imagotype and Stereotype

The highlander and the seaside are, in the Mediterranean tradition of narration, a pair of not only different but also specular types. One is to the other an inevitable area of otherness, the identity of one is almost fed by the alterity of the other, in fact, the Other by definition, *per antonomasia*. One creates conceptions based on the other, that is, on hetero-conceptions, and spreads them further around its ecumene.

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Both of them, in their specific narratives, offer an auto-image about themselves and a hetero-image<sup>1</sup> about their other. Each fills their oral tradition with these conceptions, builds some of their own myths on them, perpetuates them through literature, and permeates topics with those myths.

Literature, with its cultural transversality, spreads and reconfigures those, in essence, cultural identities and alterities as images of itself and of the other. These images originated in anthropological relationships, they are the subject of cultural anthropology, but we can read them more reliably in literature where these images are summarized into types: imagotypes (a term borrowed from typography just like *type*, or *stereotype*, or *cliché*).

Ethnologists and anthropologists can draw their own ethnographic or cultural cartographies, but the raw material for a philologist is the spoken and the written word, the oral and the written tradition, which has to be challenged and questioned comparatively. Whether we decide to analyze the content or to analyze discourse, imagotypes cannot be avoided; and by this term we understand the specific, value-laden, and historically (by the moment of their emergence) marked conceptions (summarized in a type) about our own, about others, and those who are different.

Conception (and a prejudice possibly based on it) precedes the image, and it precedes its reception and mimetism, and therefore mimesis (Auerbach 2003, Girard 2008, etc.).

And yet imagology has succeeded in arising very late, just in the late 1960s (Dyserinck 1966; 1988), as a discipline of comparative literature that deals with hetero-images and auto-images. The Aachen School defines *agology* as only dealing with literary phenomena that cross the boundaries of a single language, but imagology breaks free of the boundaries of comparative literature, entering both cultural studies and cultural anthropology (Fischer 1981).

Of course, for acquiring hetero-conceptions and auto-conceptions there was no need to wait for somebody to contrive the concept and scope of imagology. They existed ever since the beginning of oral traditions,

1 According to Joep Leerssen (at [www.imagologica.eu](http://www.imagologica.eu)) imagology distinguishes between auto-images and hetero-images: the attitudes one has towards their own cultural values (self-image, auto-image) and the attitude towards the other (hetero-image). Any representation of cultural relations is a representation of a cultural confrontation; and the author's own cultural values and presuppositions are inevitably involved in this confrontation. There is, in other words, always a degree of subjectivity (auto-image) involved in the representation of another culture. This unavoidable degree of subjectivity is one of the main differences between an 'image' and objective information. Here we argue that these differences do not have to be between national cultures, but they can be the result of different cultural patterns within the same nation or the same intercultural ecumene.



before “the Muse learned to write” (according to Havelock 1986), perhaps before speech itself. They also permeate the Pentateuch and Homer’s poems - to stay within the limits of the Mediterranean chaos and cosmos. The concept of the archetype was first confirmed in Simonídes (Jacques 16, fr. 204, when writing about Praxiteles), then was widely used by Philo of Alexandria, who based it on Plato’s concepts of *eidos*, *idea*,<sup>2</sup> and *ousia* (especially in *Phaedo* 74d-75b and 100c-e).

For a pattern to be seen as an archetype, it needs to be established in the mind of a storyteller and their cultural group as an imagotype.

In today’s age of interculturalism or multiculturalism (which would not be as irritable if it was not considered vital or if it did not question the ivory towers of monocultural autism by comparison), it sometimes slips our minds that hetero-conceptions would not exist without interculturalism. All those who find themselves along any of the Mediterranean coasts and survived there are sentenced to it. Among them are even the descendants of drowned people whose languages at times vanished almost without a trace, and whose names are found in archaeological fragments or in partially deciphered myths, and still look at us or from us like some of the Mediterranean imagotypes.

The Mediterranean imagotypes, generated long time ago and perpetuated throughout the ages, thus function as stereotypes - but they do not lose the aspect of a hetero-concept, moreover, they determine it. That is also true for archetypes of highlanders or seashiders as well as for others, i.e. all Mediterranean identities and alterities exposed in classical and contemporary literature.

In an analysis of Mediterranean literary types, we face a threefold task: adopting and applying the imagology approach to the analysis of Mediterranean identities contained in analyzed literary works; observing and reviewing the interactional communicational relationship between collective imaginary and literary works; observing and reviewing the interactional communication relationship between cultural anthropology and methods of imagology in the example of Mediterranean literary identities.

It is impossible to comprehend the Mediterranean without a diachronic view, at least from the time of the formation of the Hellenic or Punic partial thalassocracy followed by the general Roman and pervasive Venetian thalassocracy, among others. In this context, hetero-images versus the other along the seaside and, even stronger, versus the other in the *hinterland* were flourishing.

At the same time there, behind the sea front, inverted hetero-images about invaders are logically generated. They are perceived as trouble-makers coming from who knows which Neverland to steal gold (even

2 Idea ← *videa* [what is perceived by a view].

the sheepskin in which some particles get stuck while it was washed away, a mythical golden fleece), and of course, to seduce women (not just Ariadne or Medea). Nevertheless, those strangers boldly protest if they experience a similar shame (for instance, by kidnapping young Helen from old Menelaus, not to mention the core story of the mountain Bull who lusts after alluring Europa).

Even in modern times, when IT links network the entire world and lift the horizons far beyond the skyline where the sea and the sky meet, Mediterranean imagotypes, anchored in literature, may serve as an incentive to our contemporary delirium. Conflict between Philistines and Jews began long before Samson the judge; it also overcame the division into blocks and attempts by now-domestic writers, such as Amos Oz, David Grossman, or Abraham Yehoshua, to break chains of hetero-images.

Those chains still function. In the mutual mistrust of seasideers and highlanders, even now we can discern Odysseus and Polyphemus.

## 2. Opposing Neighbors

Everywhere along the Mediterranean there are extended two territories, two rings, each with its past and tradition, divided by different and sometimes opposing civilizational emphasis and interrelated with migration and economic and civilizational ties.

One of these is composed of smaller islands and runs along the coastal line to the first mountains, while the mountains and the nearby inland area form the other. This division also holds for the large islands. In the south, behind the coastal line, the vast desert gapes with its nomadic civilization.

As an example, we can take Dalmatia, in the hinterland of which, in the late 18<sup>th</sup> century, Voltaire found his paradigmatic savages, the Morlachs, who have thus entered, through literature, into the collective imaginary of the West.

Here, the first territory - the islands and the coast - belongs, as the 20<sup>th</sup> century ethnologist Milovan Gavazzi says (1978: 188), to the *Mediterranean areal* of traditional culture in Southeast Europe, while the area behind it belongs to the *Dinaric areal*.

The rest of the Dinaric areal extends beyond Dalmatia, far to the north, east and south, where its boundaries fully coincide with the internal borders of the former Roman province of Dalmatia, constituted by the Roman emperor Augustus in 10 AD (763 AUC).

The economy of the Dinaric areal was for millennia based on cattle breeding (mostly with periodic livestock transhumance: in the spring to the mountains, around hamlets, and in the fall back

to the villages). Social ties were characterized by fraternities and sisterhoods. Customary law was influenced by the concept of heroic justice versus state law. Traditional social values and myths of this area are often expressed through the epic, in a pattern stretching from antiquity.

The Mediterranean areal has been, throughout history, conditioned by its vegetation, so that for food and various raw materials the inhabitants depended on olives (for spices and for lighting), figs, carob, grapevine, and the Spanish broom (whose threads were spun and weaved). The main building material was stone. Lack of fresh water forced every house to have its own cistern for rainwater. Fishing in the shallows (with a trident, sometimes even with a sabre) was very important, as was deep-sea fishing. It all required the organization of work.

The donkey and the boat were the main means of transportation in Mediterranean Dalmatia for millennia, while inland it was the horse.

In both areals people were dressed in sheep's wool and ate the products of sheep, but the Dinaric used a skewer and a kind of Dutch oven (*peka*) for roasting, while the Mediterranean used grill roasting (*gradele*); on the islands oil and wine were stored in wineskins for millennia, or in amphorae, while in Dalmatian Zagora (the hinterland) they preferred barrels.

The Epic culture of the Dinaric areal used, as its main musical instrument, a kind of a fiddle (*gusle*) with a single wire to accompany the epic rhapsod, *guslar* (fiddler) or duet without instrument (*ojkalica*, from *ojkanje*, two-part singing); in Mediterranean Dalmatia, on the other hand, developed an urban three- or four-part type of singing. In the area of *ojkalica* the minor second music interval is now compactly Štokavian; polyphonic singing and songs in the Major third are traditionally multilingual.

Multilingualism was for a long time more of a rule than an exception. The first written legal monument in the Croatian language is the Baška tablet, written in the Glagolitic alphabet around 1100, on the same island of Krk on which, on June 10 1898, the Dalmatic language<sup>3</sup> perished. On that day, Antonio Udina Búrbur, or Tuone Udàina Burbur, the last speaker of Veklisún, the northern dialect of Jadertinian Dalmatic language, passed away (a piece of dynamite detonated too close to him - it was the only case that the death of a language really echoed out, even though not too far or wide). The Venetian language probably entered Krk in the 13<sup>th</sup> century and persisted there and there until that day. For several centuries,

3 A name given to Romance forms of speech along the Adriatic coast by Istrian linguist Matteo Giulio Bartoli (1906).

Vlach shepherds, settled once by Duke Anž Frankapan, spoke their own language close to today's Romanian. This means that Krk Island, the northernmost part of historic Dalmatia, has a record of at least 900 years of bilingualism, almost 600 years of trilingualism, and a certain period of quadrilingualism. Therefore, the island was called Curicta and Vikla, Krk and Veglia (or Veja) - and nevertheless, the archives do not record any conflict on Krk caused by multilingualism. The same goes for Kotor, and for Dubrovnik (long bilingual, occasionally trilingual), and for Split (bilingual for centuries, before and after the Venetian colonial vernacular suppressed Dalmatic), Hvar (where the nobility of both languages, Hektorović and Palladini, jointly and eagerly defended themselves from the plebeians) and other Dalmatian cities and many islands. Dalmatic was used in the cities: there are documents proving that in Dubrovnik, around 1470, lawsuits were held in the Romance Dalmatic language - but it is also documented that the Croatian language had penetrated in these cities already in the first millennium and so, by the names of the inhabitants (a Romanian root could be found with a Slavic ending and a Croatian root with a Dalmatic ending) as well as by speech and poems: Cardinal Boso wrote in *Liber Pontificalis* that Pope Alexander III was received in 1177 in Zadar: *immensis laudibus et canticis altissime resonantibus in eorum sclavica lingua*<sup>4</sup> (with immense praises and songs that were highly resounding in their Slavic language).

The harmony of singing along the seaside is based, as said, on the Major third and perfect fifth and in the hills on the astringent second, which to an unaccustomed ear sounds dissonant. Charles Nodier, in 1818 (s.a. 43), used a parable of 'screaming of terrified beasts' to describe this music for French readers. Nevertheless, the archeologist Fr. Lujo Marun emphasized that neither Mozart nor Verdi could throw him into ecstasy like the *gusle*. However, when the 'Dalmatian chant' is mentioned outside Dalmatia only a four-voice singing a cappella is mentioned, but the highlander's *ojkanje* was included, in 2010, on the UNESCO's List of Intangible Cultural Heritage.

Those who believe in Confucius' and Plato's ideas about music as the harmony of Heaven and Earth can consider that these two distinct melos are the expressions of two different mentalities. Still, the Dalmatian chant can still be heard inland, and the Venetian rector of Split testified in 1547 that the blinded warrior, after receiving a biscuit as a present, 'sang in

4 As reported by Louis Duchesne, *Liber Pontificalis*, II, Paris: Ernest Thorin, 1892: 437l. 17-18 (cfr. <https://archive.org/details/duchesneo2/page/n521>). The original fragment with Boso's note was bound to *Codex Riccardianus* 228 (fo 233-271), stored in the Bibliotheca Vaticana (now, after reconstruction, in its underground depot). Translation mine.

Slavic about King Mark,<sup>5</sup> and all the people who stayed around him sang with him, as if by agreement, because everyone knows this song.”<sup>6</sup>

Literatures are equally diversified: one kind of lyric and, in particular, one kind of epic poetry persists along the coastline, and another, one could say more rough, is found behind the first hill; the prose differs as well - analogue differences characterize the prose of maritime and continental Turks, even Greeks, undoubtedly Spaniards, and to a lesser degree Italians and people from Provence or Catalans.

Differences in mentality in the two territories are undeniable. They were conditioned not only by different environments and economies, but also by various historical streams - but the connections were continuous, even in the not-so-rare times when the battlefield line was in the midst of today's cities, dividing Romans from Goths, or later Muslims from Christians. Dalmatia is now, as in previous centuries, the result of permeating yields of those who have grown up or settled there, and the permeation of its territorial-civilizational components: insular, coastal, and continental. The same is true, *mutatis mutandis*, for all the northern and eastern Mediterranean: even in culturally compact Israel singing and writing are different in Jaffa compared to Jerusalem.

Polyphemus can become educated and Odysseus a clerk, they can be found in a discussion at the same round table, their families can be mixed through all kinds of relationships - but not even then their discourses will be the same. And even less its display in literature. It feeds on the emphasis of their differences.

The clash between the sailor Odysseus and the cyclops Polyphemus is largely an archetype of the friction between highlanders and coastal inhabitants.

### 3. Odysseus and Polyphemus

Not all the Cyclops were wild highlanders, bad-tempered, selfish and unsociable, primitive and somewhat simple minded, as described by Homer in the *Odyssey* (VI: 603, VII: 204), resonating typical prejudices of the coastal inhabitants towards highlanders. There was also the previous generation of these giants, which Hesiod in *Theogony* (139) mentions as sons of Uranus and Gaia (which makes them brothers of Kronos and the paternal uncles of Zeus, Poseidon, and Hades). Hesiod mentions three of

5 Marko Mrnjavčević (1355-1395), de iure Serbian king 1371-1395, prince from Prilep, the epic hero Kraljević Marko in Serbian, Bulgarian, Macedonian, and Albanian epic poems.

6 Transcribed from archives by Vincenzo Solitro (1844: 244).



them: Brontes, Steropes, and Arges, forgers of Zeus's igneous arrows (Arges gave them light, Brontes thunder, and Steropes brightness), Poseidon's trident, arch, and arrows for Artemis, and a helmet for Hades (which Perseus used in the fight with Medusa). They are blacksmith Cyclops, strong, stubborn and fierce. Because of that it was easier to assign animal characteristics to them.

Polyphemus, son of Poseidon and the nymph Thoosa, belongs to the later Cyclopiian generation. He fiercely longed for the beautiful Galatea, one of Nereids, and beat her lover Acis to death with a stone - as Ovid wrote in *Metamorphoses* (XIII: 728). A stone is the typical highlander's tool (those too pious hit themselves in the chest with a stone, praying to God to have mercy on them, the short-tempered). Because of that Polyphemus could have been used as a mythical "macho" type who fulfils his desires by force and defends them by crime: literature is full of them (Mérimée's Don José is a rowdy Basque who would rather kill Carmen, a Gypsy, than cede her to her new love; we could also discuss Othello, although in the description of the Moor some racial prejudices are visible; nevertheless here we have an evil iago, coming from a littoral area, who manipulates the foolish general). Naive girls might have seen it as an expression of unhappy love, not as a reflection of the possession of a woman as an object, a usable thing, but how can it be tolerated, with a contemporary sensibility, for any of them to be a hero, even in an opera? In Greek mythological tragedy, the driving force is not simply love. It can only motivate an immature junior, such as Haemon, in Sophocles' *Antigone*, but only to fulfill fate, real driving force, inexorable, but sometimes still subject to change. And that is what Odysseus will experience after the conflict with Polyphemus.

On the side of the primitive giant there was just savage force, while Odysseus had intelligence and cunning, knowledge and experience, and supremacy in the number of combatants.

The story is known, probably the most famous in Homer's *Odyssey* (IX: 187-542). Exhausted from wandering, the Greeks encountered a cave and food in it; satiated, and relying on their numbers, not even thinking of the possibility that it might be a giant's habitat. When Polyphemus came home, it was a sight for his only eye: parasites were crawling in his pantry.

Hospitality in the Greek tradition, *xenía*, required guests to be hosted, but also that guests did not take advantage (the very reason why Odysseus bloodily punished wooers of his wife).

There is no phase in Odysseus's wandering in which, in one way or another, *xenía* does not act, pleasant or provoking, embodied here in the accessible Nausicaa, there in the dominant Circe, the wet dream of Mediterranean males.

The Greeks, caught by Polyphemus *in flagrante delicto*, invoked Zeus, the protector of guests, but the Cyclops did not really care about Zeus or



his possible anger. He simply drove back the huge stone that closed the cave's entrance, and compensated the loss of food in nature by a short procedure: he ate two Greeks without sauce, finding this number to be the daily dose of guests to be eaten.

Odysseus used multiple tricks: he introduced himself to Polyphemus by the name of Nobody, got him drunk on pure wine (Greeks thought that only the barbarians did not mix wine with water), sharpened and ignited a stake and pierced the drunk and asleep giant's only eye with it. When Polyphemus started whining to the other Cyclops in their scattered caves about his bad luck, he was asked who attacked him. And he sincerely answered: Nobody. A cunning coastal inhabitant outsmarted a brutal highlander, fleeing under the belly of his sheep, and embarked on his trans-Mediterranean barge; then he continued sailing, allowing himself one excess: He shouted his name directly to Polyphemus, or, more precisely, he threw his name into the face of the Cyclops. It was no longer self-defense, not even vengeance, but hubris (*hýbris*): an arrogant, humiliating haughtiness.

In myth, which often offers morals, as a punishment for *hýbris* there follows *némesis*, divine justice, because Nemesis is a goddess who loathes and under that sensation the only person able to change a fate from which otherwise neither people nor gods can escape.

Polyphemus cried to his father, Poseidon, asking him to kill Odysseus in revenge. Or, at least, to kill all his crew so the winner at Troy would come back home late, as a beggar, also humiliated. Nemesis heard him.

The mytheme about a blinded giant and a hero vagrant who tricked him with a fake name is, presumably, much older than Homer. Researchers found it in the myths from Berbers and Basques in the west to Kiowa and Apache in the Far East (d'Huy 2013: 48), taking into account that Native Americans moved to their continent from Asia through Bering isthmus before it sank, around 20,000 years ago.

Julien d'Huy enumerated 29 versions (d'Huy 2012: 49), then 44 (d'Huy 2013: 49), arguing that they moved along with the migration of haplogroup X2 from prehistoric Europe to North America (d'Huy 2012: 51-52). It should be taken into account that Jennifer A. Raff and Deborah A. Bolnick (2015: 297-304) challenged this haplogroup migration direction, but the myth passed that way, by removal or by contamination.

The peripeteias of that mytheme are not important for us but the fact that in the *Odyssey* this mytheme was, for the first time, embedded in the anthropological opposition of coastal inhabitants and highlanders. Just as the mytheme of fratricide is found in many religions, from Osiris and Seth to Romulus and Remus, it is only in Genesis (4, 2) that the anthropological conflict of cattle raising versus farming economy is embedded.

As Genesis is written from the point of view of pastoral people and its cattle raising nomadic epopee, the anabasis from the lost Eden to the Promised Earth, so is the *Odyssey* an expression of the hopes and fears of the people whose anabasis started at the Mediterranean Sea, expecting earnings, possibly colonies where the demographic surplus could be placed, fearing shipwrecks and hostile locals.

Should we be surprised that this fear is embodied in the mythical Other, portrayed as a monstrous giant? He is a herdsman, different, hirsute, simple minded, *monstrum in fronte, monstrum in animo*, simply: a savage.

One elaborate product of a trope about highlanders in the late Renaissance and Early Baroque is Shakespeare's Caliban in *The Tempest*, described as 'a calvaluna or mooncalf and a freckled monster' (Prospero, I.2.283), so its distinctness against the civilized Prospero and, of course, the airy Ariel, is sufficient reason to be forced into custody.

Description of the other, the indigenous, and native as a savage also serves colonialism as a moral justification in the Mediterranean, from Jason to D'Annunzio and Mussolini. This pattern is embedded in the literature from Hesiod to the space opera. That kind of science fiction extends its Mediterranean all over the Galaxy: *mare nostrum* is a metonym for *spatium nostrum*. This pattern is offered to future argonauts in computer games, where as soon as possible more and more cosmic savages have to be exterminated.

Thus, *mutatis mutandis*, even mutilating Polyphemus can now be seen as a non-heroic clash of the intellectually and technologically powerful with the natural, comparable to the easy task of killing offered by the Playstation (Ria 2014), shooting a lion in a nature reserve, an ecological offense nothing smaller than the excess of Saint George contributing to the eradication of dragons (and Harry Potter and Daenerys Targaryen, amongst others, meet the need of literary audiences to stand on the side of expelled and humiliated dragons, but this is a topic for another article).

The colonial aspect of the clash between Odysseus and Polyphemus was noted by Salvatore Quasimodo. Bart van den Bossche (2001: 31) claims that Quasimodo is at least partially identifying with Polyphemus because 'the rough and wild reality embodied in Polyphemus is also a reality of his own origin.' Polyphemus is to Quasimodo an 'emblematic image of Sicily which, through history, was invaded, harassed and violated'; for him that 'chthonic reality is autochthonous.'

Watching from Sicily, the evil Other is the one who attacks from the sea, just like the People of the sea in Egyptian writings from

the time of Ramses II, incarnated in Leviathan, the sea dragon, mentioned in Job, Psalms and Isaiah. 'Hell is other people' (Sartre 92).

In these opposing views, in the archetypal descriptions given to each other by mortal enemies, we have to search for one of the important sources of the iconic image of corrupt coastal inhabitants and brutal highlanders, represented by Odysseus and Polyphemus and so many of their literary descendants.

#### 4. Good Savages

In the European literature, a relatively important segment of fabulation on highlanders describes Dalmatian Morlachs as both factual and fictitious. Throughout the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries in Venetian terminology the name of the Morlachs was established for the whole Christian population of the Adriatic hinterland under direct Turkish rule, incorporated into the eyalet of Bosnia (also called the Bosnian pashalik). All Venetian officials used the term Morlach for all the peoples of Christian faith in Turkey close to their boundaries, as they were until the year 1699.

The stereotype of Morlachs, like the patriarchal 'good savages,' started even before Fortis, thanks to some travel writers such as George Wheler (1682: 158) and of course, Voltaire. This stereotype, thanks to both Fortis and other random travelers, was completed in the collective imaginary of the West. The *Viaggio in Dalmatia* also influenced the travel writers who passed through Dalmatia and its hinterland - Zagora: from Joseph von Seenus (1768, though his *Beschreibung einer Reise nach Istrien und Dalmatien* was not published until 1805), then Balthasar Hacquet (s.a. [1801-1808]), then Lavallée (who proposed to translate the 'Illyrian poems' - 1802: 42- 43) and his illustrator Cassas, and Giacomo de Concina (*Viaggio nella Dalmazia littorale*, 1809), and later writers from the Habsburg era who worked on popularization, both Dalmatian (Šime Ljubić, 1846) and foreign (Ida von Düringsfeld, 1857), all the way to Charles Yriarte (1878).

Here are the key features: the Morlachs live in patriarchal cooperatives, they are hospitable regardless of their possible impoverishment, respecting their guests, they have the moral norms of their patriarchal community ('honesty'), they have picturesque customs (such as fraternity and sisterhood, godparenthood connected to first haircut of children, etc.), picturesque beliefs (e.g. in fairies, Fates, werewolves, and 'tenci,' i. e. vampires, in wildfires), picturesque clothing, unusual music (*ojkanje*), unusual musical instruments (especially *gusle* and *svirala* i.e. a pipe), unusual poetry - they, like the old Greeks, gather around a rhapsodist (usually a blind man) who sings about heroism, and like the Greeks, they dance in a circle (*kolo*). They are tall and heroic; children grow up naturally like

Spartans (they bathe newborns in icy water, let the naked child wander around, let them die or toughen); women are beautiful, but they do not take care of themselves and in their thirties are already old.

Their flaws are no less interesting: they are stagnant, backward, lazy, dirty, used to sleeping with cattle in the same room, unfamiliar with farmland and fruit-growing, naive and victims of cheaters and usurers; they drink and smoke immoderately; are vindictive, brawlers and violent; they are often prone to banditism (*hajduci*)<sup>7</sup>

A description given by Giuseppe Modrich<sup>8</sup> (1892), also known as Joso Modrić, is not far from this. He reports to the Italian public that the Morlach is not a member of a special nation, that they are 'Slavs from Dalmatian Zagora,' members of the same population inhabiting Serbia, some parts of Croatia, Bosnia, Herzegovina and Montenegro, and that any differences arise from 'dalle particolari circostanze storiche e politiche' (particular historical and political circumstances) (Modrich 1892: 343). For Modrich as well, Morlach is a 'conservatore autentico' (authentic conservative), who, regrettably, in Zadar became a synonym for the savage, just as in Dubrovnik where they is called 'Vlah.'<sup>9</sup> Even if rich, he is living in a preadamite house (four walls, doors, a thatched roof or made of stone) so as not to be distinguished from their environment and become 'ridicolo' (ridicule), the worst that could happen. The real Morlach never or very rarely undresses. Since they were in diapers they are used to the worst misery and the most unpleasant adversities. The mother gave birth to them while taking care of her businesses. If they survive from the fourth to the tenth year, they would end up working as a shepherd, allowed to go to school only when their parents were forced to do so, then they become a worker. At the age of twelve they forget literacy, and shortly after the young man marries the girl his father chose for him to forge a friendship or quit hostility with another family. A Morlach who cannot drink at least 30 liters of wine in a day does not go to other Morlach's wedding; he kidnaps a girl not from heroism, but in agreement with her, his beloved, to reduce the unbearable costs of the wedding that he would otherwise be paying off for at least a year. He courts a girl by fist fighting others and

7 *Hajduk*: brigand, in Bohemian, Bosnian, Croatian, Hungarian, Northern Macedonian, Polish, Romanian, Serbian etc. Probably from Tur. *hajdūt* (bandit).

8 Josip "Joso" Modrić, also signed as Giuseppe Modrich, landowner and entrepreneur, industrialist and politician after having been a professor and newspaper correspondent from the most distant foreign countries. A descendant of Morlachs, among who he lived in his native Benkovac under the Habsburg monarchy. Wrote in Italian.

9 Modrich is partially wrong: in Dubrovnik then and now, 'Vlah' has been a pejorative name for an Orthodox Christian ('Vlaška crkva' is a colloquial term for the Orthodox Church in Dubrovnik), whether in the hinterland of Zadar 'Vlaj' (a čakavian version of 'Vlah') has been a pejorative exonym for villagers, equally Catholic and Orthodox.

strongly pinching her, and when he becomes the head of the family he is indifferent to his wife because she is now a thing or a 'useful animal' needed for calming his instincts and for her service to the family, and the Church (Orthodox) treats her the same way, imposing a humiliating ceremony of 'purification' (from which crime?" is Modrich's maieutical question) 40 days after childbirth. A Morlach is 'lazy to the bone,' in love with his cattle, and blackmailed by usurers threatening his cattle, a bad planner, eats little, but drinks immoderately (and criticizes the wine that cannot make him drunk on the second glass). He is an ideal type of highlander, concludes Modrich, adding that the Morlach is not born a savage, but grows wild in the midst of a hundred circumstances that do not depend on his free will.

Only in the beginning of the last century Hermann Bahr, in his *Journey Through Dalmatia* (*Dalmatinische Reise*, 1909), will offer a new pattern, in the Mitteleuropean optics, when on the anatomical table is no more found a corpse of a Morlach (as a fictional return to the golden ages), but Austria Felix (as a fictional supranational empire), deadly wounded in 1848.

Although the Morlachian name was used earlier, especially in Italy, in various extents and meanings, the 17<sup>th</sup> century Venetian meaning was still accepted in the European West. This name remained in use since part of that population went to the Venetian territory during the the Cretan War (the War of Candia), and since the Venetian Republic by the Treaties of Karlowitz in 1699 and of Passarowitz in 1718 gained larger parts of the *sanjak* of Krka, Klis and Herzegovina from which it 'cleansed' the Muslims by expelling, converting, or executing them.

Morlachs - as we have already written (Bešker 2007: 5) - were absorbed into European literature in 1740, when Voltaire in *The Philosophy of History* (1740, Chapter VII: 'Of Savages' [1785/XVI: 31]) includes Morlachs, together with Icelanders, Laplanders, and Hottentots, among the savages that act in accordance with their instincts, 'like ants, geese, sheep.' His caustic analysis eventually becomes an introduction to the *Essay on the Customs and the Spirit of the Nations* (1754: 47). In Chapter CLXXXVI ('The Continuation of Italy in the XVII Century' 1785/XIX: 254)], Voltaire distinguished Morlachs by saying they are 'known as the most wild people in the world,' close to Venetia, at the doors of Italy which is honored by all the arts, but where Istria, Croatia and Dalmatia are almost barbaric' countries.

They swarmed in the European collective imaginary in 1774, when Fortis in *Viaggio in Dalmazia* (English edition: *Travels into Dalmatia*, London 1778) presented them, destroying some stereotypes, but accepting most of those already existing in the Venetian documents and descriptions of their first western neighbors. With this work the Morlachs became no longer merely a Dalmatian reality and a Venetian peripheral subject, but also a notion present in the European mainstream culture of that era.



The book caused quite a reaction in Italy, which resulted in translations around Europe.

It produced a thematic writing fashion that remained *en vogue* for several decades.

*Morlachism* would be a suitable title for that series. This term is intertwined with the concept of *morlachity* as a mentality, or the set of features of the Morlachs, real or mystified (see Bešker 2002). Giulio Bajamonti,<sup>10</sup> the main informant of Fortis, in his essay *Il morlacchismo d'Omero* (*The Morlachity of Homer*, 1797: 78), argues that "Homer's poems are closest to Morlachian taste," i.e. that "today the Morlachi people, like their songs, are most analog to Homeric taste." The emphasis - at the beginning of Morlachism - was not so much on the analysis of the specificity of Morlachian reality (real or imagined) but to underline the difference towards this "other world," the barbaric versus the civilized Europe, the pure (untamed) versus the preciousness of civil society that was being born.

Here is how Charles Nodier,<sup>11</sup> in the novel *Jean Sbogar* (s.a. [1818]: 43), adorns the Morlachs through a description of their chant. The protagonist of the novel heard, somewhere near to Trieste, a coach driver's

...Dalmatian *pismé* (song), a kind of romance that is not without charm when the ear is used but which dissonates with its unusual savage mode when it is heard for the first time, and whose modulations are of so strange taste that only the inhabitants of that country know their secret. [...] It is quick, alternate imitation of the loudest noise, the most sharp cries and, above all, what inhabitants of deserted places hear in the darkest night through roaring of wind, thundering of storm, howling of terrified beasts, concert

10 Giulio Bajamonti (Split 1744-1800), a physician in Split, Kotor and Hvar, was a versatile leterate, polemic, essayist, playwright, poet, translator of Ovid, Racine, Rousseau, etc., a linguist (especially Anglicist), a bibliographer, an encyclopaedist, ethnographer, historian, archaeologist, economist, agronomist, chemist, composer, organist, choir director and theoretician of music. Voltairian by vocation, he was a member of some academies in Dalmatia and Italy, and founder and very active member of the Split Business Society. Forgotten by the Italians, ignored by Croats until the 1990s (although in his writings he called Croatian "our language"), Bajamonti was and remains one of the most learned, most versatile and fertile personalities of all the history of Dalmatia (and Croatia as well). Democrat and progressive, but not revolutionary or Francophile. He was a great-grandson of the poet Cavagnin, and direct descendant of the Split influent noble families of Capogrosso and Papalić, voted for humanism and letters), Bajamonti inherited from his forebears the largest library in Dalmatia: it also included books belonging to the famous Marko Marulić, founder of Croatian literature. The library was unfortunately destroyed in a fire in the first Bajamonti Palace in 1787.

11 Jean-Charles-Emmanuel Nodier (Besançon, 1780-Paris, 1844), writer, bibliographer and French lexicographer, found of the natural sciences. From December 1809 to August 1813, he was in Ljubljana as a state librarian, journalist, and finally secretary of Joseph



of plants coming from lonely jungles at the beginning of hurricane when everything in nature gets a voice to moan, all the way to the branch that wind broke without separating it entirely from tree and which whiningly hangs on string of bark ...

In the same way Morlachian literature (i.e oral tradition) is seen, in which a song and a poem are not differentiated: for both the term '*pisma*' (song) is used. The uneducated did not declaim it, they would just sing it, and all the so-called oral tradition was a singing tradition, as long as it was not uprooted out of everyday life and bound into books.

On the basis of this form of dichotomy - between the savage highlander Morlachs and the gentle civilization of the European West - 'morlachism' has emerged as a myth. The most important chapter of Fortis's book, 'Manners of the Morlacchi' (*De' costumi de' Morlacchi*), was dedicated to the ex-PM John Stuart, Earl of Bute. The Scottish Earl was the patron of the journey by the abbot of Padua, but also financed James MacPherson, the author (1765) of *Poems by Ossian* (*Fingal* 1761; *Temora* 1762), who attributed them in his poetic mystification to a highlander Celtic bard from the 3<sup>rd</sup> century). Bute also financially supported Melchiorre Cesarotti, who translated *Ossian* into Italian and influenced Fortis. In the introduction, Fortis makes a connection between *Ossian* and the wild originality of the Morlachs. So the highlanders of Dalmatia are depicted through an Ossian-like mystification. A special kind of 'sub-mystification' is contained in the fact that Fortis published, as a typical Morlachian '*pisma*,' the Bosnian Muslim ballad *Asan-aghiniza*, neither by its content nor by the mentality of Morlachian derivation, one of the first examples of 'women's writing' in the literature of Southeast Europe. Clemens Werthes, in Bern 1775, a year after Fortis' original was edited, published a German translation of the chapter on the Morlachs, and, in 1776, the entirety of Fortis' book. Already in 1775 Goethe commented the translation of *Asan-aghiniza* from Italian into German. In 1778 Herder included Werthes' translation in his *Volkslieder*. In the same year translations into French and English were published. The ballad *Asan-aghiniza* was then translated by the romantic poets Charles Nodier, Prosper Mérimée, Gérard de Nerval, Walter Scott, Niccolò Tommaseo, Aleksandr Puškin, Adam Mickiewicz, Johann Runeberg, and other poets all the way to Anna Akhmatova and other 20<sup>th</sup> century poets - a total of more than 50 different translations (Isaković 1974: 503-504).

Fouché, Marmont's successor as governor of the Illyrian Provinces. From August to December 1813, he was in Trieste. He also wrote about the history and geography of the Illyrian countries," the Illyrian" language and oral poetry in that language.

The notion of Morlach highlanders in the general imaginary of Fortis' era is quite easy to understand as Fortis polemically rejects such commonplaces in the introduction of the chapter *De' costumi de' Morlacchi*:

You have, no doubt, often [...] heard the Morlacchi described as a race of men who are fierce, unreasonable, void of humanity and capable of any crime. [...] The inhabitants of the sea coast of Dalmatia tell many frightful stories about cruelty of those people that, induced by the avidity of plunder, they often proceeded to the most atrocious excesses of violence, by fire and sword. But these facts [...] are either of ancient date, or if some has happened in later times they ought rather, from the characters they bear, to be ascribed to the corruption of few individuals then to the bad disposition of the nation in general. (Fortis 1778: 44)

The Morlachs are, therefore, described in these 'rumors' as savages. Fortis will - not using that term - agree that the Morlachs are savages in a few things, but that they are good: therefore *good savages*, *bons sauvages*, another topic that will become common in that form. Moreover, when recognizing the partial validity of these charges, Fortis finds reason to excuse the causes of unacceptable behaviors, attributing them, for example, to war which corrupts people.

Fortis sees the main features of the Morlachs and the main difference between these *bons sauvages* and civilized Europeans as a different morality. Indeed, Fortis claims, their morality makes them so good that Westerners (and especially the closest ones, the Italians) exploit them, taking simplicity and sincerity as a sign of exploitable naivety.

Fortis gave a simple instruction: 'It is enough to treat the Morlachs as human beings in order to achieve all possible civility and to make them cordial friends. Hospitality is a virtue not only of the opulent among them but also of the poor. [...] Hospitality is not just for a stranger, but for anyone in need' (Fortis 1774: I-56).

Therefore, here we recognize *xenía* again, but on the opposite, highlander's side.

Fortis exactly there sees the values of dwellers uncorrupted by civilization, naïve and insufficiently tricky. On the other hand, a *bon sauvage* is a trusted friend, which is the next key feature of morality that Fortis ascribed to the Morlach, who is as reliable as the last of the Mohicans, in opposition to the European who is corrupted by layers of civilization. Like friendships, hostilities are also difficult to be terminated among the Morlachs of Fortis, according to the mythical pattern of the *good savage*.

Revenge is, without a doubt, an important element in Fortis's description

of the Morlachs. It is logical that an observer from the Venetian ecumene - who had a long relationship with both Morlachs and Albanians - saw the blood feud, this element of ancestral addiction, as a link between Morlachs and Albanians. And in the words of Fortis, where he strongly rejects this custom (which is not only typical for the interior of the Balkans) it is easy to unveil the high emotional charge that the blood feud provokes among the pre-Romantics of the Enlightenment (later we will see how this motive touches, for example, Mérimée in *Colomba*, located among the Corsicans, as in *Guzla*, placed in the midst of the Morlachs). Even more characteristic is the motive of revenge, summed up to the proverb 'Who does not take revenge - is not consecrated' and in its sacredness,<sup>12</sup> which Fortis carefully noticed on both etymological and semantic levels.

Purity (as a reflection of the natural state - like the one in Eden before the original sin) is yet another important element in the description of the Morlachs (and all the *good savages* revealed in Rousseau's age).

## 5. "Morlachism"

In 1788 Justine Wynne introduces the Morlachs of Fortis to western literature with her novel *Les Morlaques*. In the pursuit of interest that Fortis provoked, Wynne presented the Morlachs as 'a people who think, speak and act in a way that is very different from ours' (Wynne 1788: s. p.). She started a trend: Mme de Staël, famous for being a successful follower of trends, in one episode of her novel *Corinne ou l'Italie*, based on a lesser-known work of Wynne's. Camillo Federici wrote the five-act comedy *Gli antichi Slavi, ossia le Nozze dei Morlacchi*, which had been written for the Carnival of 1793 (it had five editions in 26 years) and served abbot Giulio Artusi as the foundation for the ballet of *Le Nozze dei Morlacchi* and then to Gaetano Gioia for the ballet *I Morlacchi*. The ballet *Sale of Slaves*, based on a Morlachian topic, was performed in Paris, and in Vienna the opera *Zelina und Gorano oder Die Morlaken-Hochzeit* by Paul Wranitzky.

Nodier studies the real (*Poésies illyriennes*) and confabulates counterfeit Dalmatians (*Jean Sbogar*), Mérimée (*La Guzla*) succeeds in defrauding even Slavs like Mickiewicz and Pushkin, who accepted without doubt eleven of his mystifications as originals and published them in the book *Songs of the Western Slavs* (*Pěsni zapadnyh slavjan*).

At some point in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the interest in this literary stereotype was so intense, especially in the French and Italian literary and theatrical scenes, that Arturo Cronia (1958: 331-332) wrote about 'Morlachomania.'

12 An analysis of the social and anthropological sacredness of the quoted proverb is offered by Tado Oršolić (2012).

The theme is not entirely neglected until the late 20<sup>th</sup> century in Western literature.

When the trend in the West was already declining, and when even *gusle* became (in Gautier) a common term for an exotic reverie, separate from the instrument and the music, Dalmatian authors who wrote in Italian remembered the Morlachs, like Marco de' Casotti (*Berretto rosso ossia Scene della vita morlacca*). Morlachian motives occur in the West even later, when mystification is not in fashion anymore, so they are found mainly as common places and illustrations, in Alphonse Daudet (*Les Rois en exil*), Jules Verne (*Matthias Sandorf*), and Karl May (*In den Schluchten des Balkan*). These common places are mostly clichéd, often contaminated by ignorance. It is a curiosity that Agatha Christie mentions Morlachs. The dawn of *science fiction* brought a new and unpleasant reminiscence of Morlachs and a stereotype about them: without that stereotype H. G. Wells (*The Time Machine*) probably would not have called his underground cannibals, a projection of the future of mankind, Morlocks. Luckily for the term, some names that differently marked Western literature of 20<sup>th</sup> century - Guillaume Apollinaire (*L'Otmika*), David Herbert Lawrence, and Marguerite Yourcenar (*Nouvelles orientales*) also used Morlachian motives.

Morlachian themes are present in Croatian literature even today (Vjekoslav Kaleb in *Na kamenju*, Vladan Desnica in *Zimsko ljetovanje*, Mirko Božić in *Kurlani*, Ivan Raos in *Prosjaci i sinovi*, Ivan Aralica in *Graditelj svratišta*, Ante Tomić in *Čudo u Poskokovoj Dragi*, and others).

The novel *Les Morlaques*, which begins a thematic series of Morlachism in literature, already mystifies the Morlachs in the introduction, not only as an indigenous population, more ancient than any other, but also as a people totally different from those living in the Catholic West. This procédé was, clearly, logical, perhaps inevitable, in the pre-Romanticist discourse in which *Les Morlaques* fits to a considerable extent, for the economy of its discourse of the mystification of not only the highlanders but also even of the highlander's landscape, was needed: in the center, there is the 'pretty plateau of Dicmo' (Wynne 1798: 37).

In this context, Wynne presents her version of Morlachian customs and habits, explains the fraternities and sisterhoods, describes *hajduks*, and other various unseen miracles.

Among the Morlachian customs and habits in the novel *Les Morlaques*, fraternity and sisterhood, courtship, kidnapping, a wedding and guests, childbirth, the first haircut of the child, godparenthood,<sup>13</sup> murder, a bloody shirt, revenge, a duel and a murder, a funeral and a funeral feast are described - a cycle of life and death. There are depictions of a harvest

13 *Šišano kumstvo*, A good explanation of it, called *Haarschneidepatenschaft* in German, is offered by Haser (2003: 148).

celebration, the story of how a bear was created from an angel (and other 'old folk beliefs' that portray animals as humans' brothers because they all once lived in Eden in harmony with our progenitors) - the cycle of fertility and harmony in nature.

The author also includes her beliefs in favor of the natural upbringing of children, respect for women, overcoming superstition, a rational economy, and enhancing the standard of living, including the expansion of education, but within the ideal of the natural state - the harmony of nature and society. Viewed from that angle, Stojković (1929: 265) considers *Les Morlaques* a tendency novel ('Tendenzroman'). Miodrag Pavlović is much more precise (1982: 23) in calling it a 'novel-chronicle,' but it would be entirely precise to call it a mystified chronicle.

Nevertheless, among all those motives with which Wynne decorates the Morlachs highlanders of Voltaire and Fortis, revenge is and remains crucial.

## 6. Revenge and its Cult

The motive of revenge and, above all, of the blood feud, permeates the imaginary of the highlanders as well as the imaginary about the highlanders since the beginnings of Mediterranean poetry: is it not revengeful anger the driving motive of the *Iliad*, first of Menelaus, and then of Achilles?

In fact, this has been true since the beginning of Mediterranean mythology and its religions.

Vengeance fought for its place in the Mediterranean pantheon as a means of re-establishing the right order.

The Albanian Medieval principle 'kok për kok' (blood for blood), written in the so-called Kanon of Lekë Dukagjini, in one aspect differs from the Law of Moses found in Exodus (21: 23-25): 'thou shalt give life for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot, burning for burning, wound for wound, stripe for stripe.' The Albanian Shepherds also knew the 'tranquility of blood,' the righteous compensation that ceased the cycle of revenge, which, as coming from God, Jewish shepherds considered absolute two and a half millennium ago. In the meantime, an unusual Jew, Jesus from Nazareth, intervened, teaching: 'Ye have heard that it hath been said, An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth: But I say unto you, That ye resist not evil: but whosoever shall smite thee on thy right cheek, turn to him the other also' (Matthew 5:38-39). As it happens, many have been attached to him throughout the following centuries, but they did not remember to hold to his teaching. Therefore, it would not be right to criticize only highlanders and shepherds and to see in them a crowd of cloned Polyphemus.



In the Greek pantheon (basically highlandish, older than the Argonauts, feasting on the top of Olympus mountain pastures) one deity was not enough for revenge. It was incited by three Erinyes (Erinýes), born of a drop of blood from Uranus (spilled while his son Kronos was castrating him), three sisters: Tisiphone (punisher of murderers), Allecto (implacable) and Megaera (having the evil eye), who punish all the unavenged crimes of people on earth and in Hades.

They are placated when revenge is fulfilled: in Sophocles's *Oedipus at Colonus* the self-blinded murderer of his father, his mother's husband, the deplorable father of the mutually murdered Polynices and Eteocles and Antigone, buried alive, after all that punishment finally found peace in the grove of Erinyes.

Aeschylus' Orestes and Euripides' Electra, even for today's readers and viewers, have something to say about Erinyes, simply because of the spirit of revenge - both personal and, worse still, collective - has not left the mentality of the highlanders nor that of the others. Allecto, Megaera, and Tisiphone found fertile ground in the mythology of highlandish Etruscans (who obviously did not buy only ceramics and statues from Greece), and then in Romans (who did not learn from Etruscans just to build vaults and soothsay from livers). The slight difference is that Romans call the three sisters Furiae, thus conveying this concept to us, their heirs.

After all, what can be more infuriating than Medea who kills her own children to punish their father (regardless of the dilemma, whether this is part of an older myth or if it has been invented by Euripides, or even Neophron)? And this kind of revenge does not abate even today, although there are more frequent cases of furious men who "punish" women because they have not agreed to be property owned by a macho owner.

Revenge - with betrayal - is a central, axial moment in highlander narratives, not only among the Morlachs or in the wider milieu of the mountainous Balkan Dinarides. When it comes to Morlachs, both Fortis and his opponent Lovrich dealt with revenge. Wynne used it widely. Mérimée (who based *Colomba* on the vendetta) does not bypass it. It permeates the relative majority of the decasyllabic epic in the Balkans, and it is the central motive of most of the songs in the collection of Andrija Kačić Miošić. It is the main plot mechanism in *Gorski vijenac* by the Montenegrin orthodox bishop Petar II Petrović Njegoš and in *Smrt Smail-age Čengića* written by the Ban of Croatia (viceroi), Ivan Mažuranić, and in many other works.

Revenge by itself is not an exceptional subject in literature since its beginnings: it drives not only the aforementioned Atreides, leader of the people in the *Iliad*, but also many of the heroes of European and Far Eastern literature.



In Romanticism revenge as a topic penetrated into even smallest corners of creativity, not bypassing musical drama or vaudeville, and the literary descriptions of avengers have been permeating the collective imaginary that even an escaped political criminal, the former Italian Prime Minister Bettino Craxi, found it appropriate to sign his dispatches from exile as Edmond Dantès, like the central character of Dumas' *Count of Monte Cristo*.

In the Balkans and along the eastern coast of the Mediterranean, revenge is differentiated by one of its most horrendous aspects: a collectiveness that makes it permanent through the ages. Elaborating this aspect of mentality would be inseparable from the politics in which it is reflected and which, if it does not explain it, at least illustrates the persistence of Balkan and Levantine crises.

It is not, therefore, either always or primarily revenge for a crime of an individual. Together with the power of the archetype, the idea holds sway of an undeserved injustice, unfairness and offensiveness, which the group opponent (in fact: different by faith, by origin, by language, even by customs) has inflicted on our 'group.' This injustice can last over time, suffered but not accepted, invoking an equally collective revenge.

Of course, the idea of collective revenge is not an exclusive Balkan patent: *Carthago delenda est*.

This attitude, witnessed countless times in human tradition, transmitted and passed over the centuries to modern national and civil societies, mostly replicated through literary works (but also through repetitive works of the oral tradition from poems to proverbs), today looks suppressed until it emerges because of a crisis – and the last century on the Mediterranean was not void of them. Only in later times, on the scale of the same matrix, but by re-examining values, a different view begins to take place: that crimes should not 'be remembered' but that it is necessary that 'the human memory of all that is ugly should die and that the children do not sing songs about revenge,' as Meša Selimović writes at the very beginning of his *Tvrđava* (Selimović 1970: 7). Commonly accepted prejudices might be confused by the fact that this thought, which would easily be marked as Christian, was laid out by a writer of the Muslim circle. An optimist will remember that Jesus was from Palestine, and the pessimist that he was a minority.

On the other hand, as we have already seen, in the highlander's narratives, revenge - both personal and collective - assumes a sacral character that positions it above the moral fences.

In this respect, Corsica became famous, and the merit goes to Prosper Mérimée, essentially a materialistic-rationalist and therefore surprisingly interested in irrational passions, Romantic motives of fantasy and mystery, unknown regions and strange customs, 'exotic' and the 'local color.'

*Colomba* is the story of a blood feud, about a girl who is an incarnation of revenge as a moral duty, strong enough that she changes the point of view of her brother, Orso Della Rebbia, a civilized officer in a continental way (where officers are trained to kill by relying on the technology of extermination, not on passion). But *Colomba*, despite her pigeon name, has the spirit of a hawk and the power of a person mortally in love and who struggles for revenge, dreams about it, awaits it with the fervor and persistence of one dreaming of their beloved and awaiting an encounter with him. This is how Thérèse of Lisieux dreams about Christ and *Colomba* about revenge. For Mérimée, and later audiences *Colomba* was undoubtedly more interesting.

Carmen was even more interesting, Carmencita, *romi* (as she defines herself in the finale of the story). Her *rom* (man, husband) has the right to kill her, she says. Following her, a woman who fascinates him but whom he cannot understand (as the fascinated Des Grieux had never understood Manon by whom he was infatuated), he ruined his life, his military career as a noncommissioned officer, his civic honor. Unlike Des Grieux, a sacrificing intellectual, Carmen's *rom* is not willing to sacrifice himself; he will sacrifice the woman who refuses to be his object, a mere thing. He is not a Rom by nationality but a Basque, a paradigmatic highlander for both the French and Spaniards. He kills and buries her as she wanted, in the mountain (the symbol of freedom for Burns, for Goran Kovačić, and for many Macedonian and Aromanian poets), surrenders to the police but never reveals where the grave is.

The highlander is for Westerners almost equally unknown and unintelligible as Carmen is to don José: he is neither immoral nor amoral, he has his own moral; he respects justice, not the one of the State, but his own heroic justice. It is almost as if we could talk about a misunderstanding, even about a clash of civilizations – but the term is brutally abused.

## 7. Seducers and Enviars

Odysseus, who sees through Achilles' peplos, plants the Trojan horse, conceals the surviving comrades under the belly of Polyphemus' sheep and so on - is the archetype of a seaside cunning individual, audacious and daring, to whom the ingenious outsmarting of others is not just a tactical quip, but an ontological strategy.

He is no exception, Odysseus is not a miracle in the world (similar to the mythical Heracles or even the historical Friedrich II, called the *stupor mundi* at some other time). Ulysses is rather the paradigmatic *korymbaios* of a series of (mostly monomaniacal) characters, both actual and factual. Julius Caesar and his quasi-namesake Cesare Borgia taught the world that

it is possible at the same time to abhor and admire somebody. Literary historians have loaded pages with heroes that an honest man, even a seaside, would not be willing to have behind his unguarded back.

The very similarity of that archetype to the highlander archetype is found in the term "heroic freedom" which ignores institutional law, and subordinates institutional morality to his own goals.

It is a major difference in this context that the highlander's "heroic freedom" is collective, whereas the "heroic freedom" of Odysseus and Caesar's followers is essentially individual. It differs from the civil concept of liberty in so far as its boundaries are not freedom or the rights of others. The imbedded seaside is an egoist and egocentric in a pure state - or at least his highlander opponent sees him that way: "Neither the measure in the sea nor the trust in Latin," is a Balkan Orthodox invective at the expense of a Catholic neighbor, located in Zadar or some other coastal city.

The monomania of a corrupt seaside is not always focused on power. Its driving engine can be money (Danglars in *Count of Monte Cristo*), social position (Maupassant's *Bel-Ami*), a desire for many women (Don Juan, Casanova, et al.), a desire for one woman (Fernando Mondego), a desire for, simply, evil-doing (Iago).

The "indigenous" villain is a Mediterranean myth of on its own that stems from mythical prehistoric times. Those from the West find the Levantines to be mean, those from a particularly close East see Venetians as mean, and to the latter, the citizens of Dubrovnik are mean: each has their own nemesis. Shakespeare, obsessed with the Mediterranean (although trying not to irritate the democracy of his homeland where Swift's ear was cut for less), picks his exemplar mean persons even from the Levant (Shylock, whom he gives deeply human monologue on equality of men) and the South (Iago, whom he makes a reflection of the devil in human skin).

The cunning one does not necessarily have to be imbedded. A response on the level of class, as a consolation to the public, is served by the cunning servant of a simple master, a classical *servus callidus*, such as Sosia/Mercurius in Plautus (*Amphitryon*), Pseudolus, Palestrion (*Miles gloriosus*), and Tranion (*Mostellaria*). Hence Marin Držić - because he sees the cunning servant in his own and not in the antique reality - imagines him even with his own survival skills: he is Pomet himself, while Munuo (*Skup*) is taken from *Aulularia*. Such is also Zanni in *commedia dell'arte*, or Figaro, taken by Beaumarchais from the western edge of the Mediterranean. He is not a sinister personality, such as we can find in the folk and literary tradition in Central and Western Europe. Unlike the Hungarian Mátyás Garabonciás Diák or a German version of Till Eulenspiegel, the *servus callidus* outsmarts others to help his master.

Alternatively, he rescues his beloved, like Portia (*The Merchant of Venice*), because love is a bad contract of dependence that does not guarantee any earnings.

Writers from other parts of Europe (especially Protestant or Anglican provenances, pervaded by a loathing towards the Catholic environment) sometimes took the Mediterranean as a common place of wickedness. Using it in an ironic key, Pär Lagerkvist placed his sinister *Dwarf*, physically and morally spooky, in the Renaissance Mediterranean castle, as a natural habitat of intrigues and conspiracies.

In a benign version, the cunning one is simply an unconstrained spirit, someone whom a view of the infinite horizon of open sea taught that vastness spreads before liberty does, if you know how to navigate it: a typical example is Kazantzákis's<sup>14</sup> character Aléxis Zorbás, not very responsible, a confabulator, unconstrained and cynical. This folk thinker says: 'Man is a brute .... If you're cruel to him, he respects and fears you. If you're kind to him, he plucks your eyes out.' Perhaps it should be noted that Níkos Kazantzákis, a Cretan from Kandiye, was a nihilist with the appropriate definition of freedom: 'I do not expect anything. I fear nothing. I am free.'

It is easier to identify with this attitude on paper than in action.

Perhaps the mechanism of identification with the main character contributed to the fact that the audience is mostly prone to a serial seducer – historically: the libertine<sup>15</sup> – of all of the seaside cunning types, including villains.

In the context of the Age of Enlightenment, a libertine is defined as a person who thinks freely and without any burdens, a person deprived of dogma or taboo, a free thinker, or even an impious unbeliever (in the report on Cagliostro's death, chaplain Fr. Cristoforo da Cicerchia describes the deceased adventurer as 'a terrible example for all those who indulge themselves to the intemperance of pleasures in this world and to the deliria of modern philosophy').<sup>16</sup>

14 Níkos Kazantzákis (Kandiye, now Iráklion, 1883-Freiburg im Breisgau, 1957, Greek writer, nominated for the Nobel Prize in Literature nine different years (in 1957, he lost the Prize to Albert Camus by one vote). Famous for *Zorba the Greek*, *Christ Recrucified*, and *The Last Temptation of Christ*. Instead of Katharevousa, a lofty Greek who flirts with antiquity, used by the writers of his time, Kazantzákis opted for Dimotikí to capture the spirit of the people, and to make his writing resonate with the common Greek citizen, as he stated. Moreover, he wanted to prove that the common spoken language of the Greeks was able to produce artistic, literary works. In the same spirit he translated the *Iliad* and Dante's *Divine Comedy* into modern Greek

15 A denomination referred previously to a freed Roman slave or a medieval freeman outside feudal chains.

16 '[...] esempio terribile per tutti coloro che si abbandonano alla intemperanza de' piaceri in questo mondo, e ai deliri della moderna filosofia' (Augias 2014).

On the other hand, the strengths that we could define as representative of these dogmas and taboos insist especially on the sexual aspect of libertinism. If bishops, cardinals or popes have children, women or mistresses, this is treated as a temporary deviation that is rectified with repentance and some prayer and penance. If kings or magnates have mistresses and extramarital children, it is part of the prerogatives of their socio-economic status. If libertines have them, it is proof of their sinful atheism and nihilism.<sup>17</sup>

The libertine gained his glory at a time when the enlightenment sought to rationalize, and the Rococo was oriented to kitsch - neither of them extending into the lives of the vast majority of the people who, at least in the little carnal pleasures they had, lived much more freely than it befits. Although the libertine at that point in time reached its full 'maturity,' as a literary type, or even a model, it was conceived in the Baroque as a satire and allegory. Neither form would succeed if they did not resemble a chronicle, perhaps not as common (the Baroque wanted to show the miraculous, not necessarily the chaste), but also not unknown.

The libertine archetype is Don Juan, proverbial in today's dictionary as well. Don Juan is the main character of *The Trickster of Seville and the Stone Guest* (*El burlador de Sevilla y el convidado de piedra*), attributed to Tirso de Molina. This work, published in 1616, is a satire that takes, as believed, a real historical figure as its starting point. We do not know anything reliable about him, even if his name was really Don Juan Tenorio.

Writing a supposedly moralistic comedy, the author cleverly veiled praises to the seducer with a *revenge from the afterlife* motif. The question is how much piety there is in, supposedly instructive, the end of Don Juan Tenorio, allegedly a real-life character (in Andalusia the balconies are long open as well as in some short stories of Boccaccio). Don Gonzalo, the father of the dishonored lady, whom, above all, Don Juan killed in a duel, transformed into a sculpture over the grave, then drove the seducer back to hell because he missed the last opportunity to repent. Really, hell? Obviously, he did not come from the heavens, though he did not come (only) to avenge.

The stone Guest has remained, in the collective imaginary of Southern Europe, a common place, more common in newspaper headlines than as the divine Nemesis, but the hero, in every sense of term, remains Don Juan.

A whole series of great and not so great authors, from Molière to Byron,

17 Vanini, one of the three famous philosophical libertines, had no love affairs, but despite it he was burned in Toulouse because he was labeled an atheist, and that was enough.



to Ivanac and Saramago<sup>18</sup> (mainly men, as can be noticed) – dealt with Don Juan paraphrasing, epiphrasing, even antiphrasing, or used him in other ways, through comedy, tragicomedy, satire, even apotheosis, in verse, prose, music, and finally film.

From the Hugo's immediately banned five act play *The King Has Fun* (*Le Roi s'amuse*, 1832), Verdi's librettist Francesco Maria Piave inserted two precisely "donjuanites" arias in *Rigoletto* (1851), slightly massacred by Austrian censorship in once libertine Venice. In one of those arias the Duke of Mantua announces that he does not care which one of girls' or women's turn it is, everyone is good, especially if a lover or husband are raging about it (*Questa o quella per me pari sono*, act I), even more because woman is fickle like a feather in the wind, whether crying or smiling (*La donna è mobile*, act III). This manifesto of machismo has surpassed, in the collective imaginary, all other of Verdi's love motives, from the lachrymose to the heroic. The reason for that is hardly Piave.

One of the amusing paraphrases of the Don Juan myth from the Baltics belongs to Ingmar Bergman, who, taking as a pattern the theatrical comedy of Oluf Bang, wrote a screenplay and in 1960 directed the movie *The Devil's Eye* (*Djävulens öga*), by his own definition a *rondò capriccioso*. In the movie Beelzebub sends Don Juan from Hell to Earth to deceive a modest girl who wants to be married as a virgin, but the poor guy falls in love, does not accomplish anything, and falls back to Hell, while his servant (here called Pablo) seduces Pastor's wife because he who is destined does the act, not he to whom it is said.

If only a dozen of these works had been deployed during those dozen centuries of antiquity, we would without any doubt speak about the myth of Don Juan. Because it flourished during the last centuries, approximately four, we can only talk about the character of a Latin lover, whom was borrowed even the literatures beyond the Mediterranean. Albeit those who

18 Among them are: Giovan Battista Andreini (*Il nuovo risarcito convitato di pietra*, 1651, the first opera on Don Juan); Molière (*Dom Juan ou le festin de pierre*, 1665); Antonio de Zamora (*No hay plazo que no se cumpla ni deuda que no se pague*, 1713); Carlo Goldoni (*Don Giovanni Tenorio*, 1735); Lorenzo da Ponte and Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart (*Il dissoluto punito ossia il Don Giovanni*, 1787); Lord Byron (*Don Juan*, 1819-1824, unfinished because of death); Christian Dietrich Grabbe (*Don Juan und Faust*, 1829); Alexander Pushkin (Каменный гость, 1830, according to Da Ponte); Prosper Mérimée (*Les Âmes du purgatoire*, 1834, where the soul of Don Juan is saved by the historical figure of Don Juan de Marañón); Alexandre Dumas (*Don Juan de Marañón ou la chute d'un ange*, 1836, based on Mérimée); José de Espronceda (*El estudiante de Salamanca*, 1840, where the character Don Félix de Montemar is made an example of Don Juan); José Zorrilla (*Don Juan Tenorio*, 1844); George Bernard Shaw (*Don Giovanni explains*, 1887); Edmond Rostand (*La dernière nuit de Don Juan*, 1922); Azorín (*Don Juan*, who converted in the Christian manner, 1922); Ödön von Horvath (*Don Juan kommt aus dem Krieg*, 1936); Max Frisch (*Don Juan or Die Liebe zur Geometrie*, 1953); Ivica Ivanac (*Odmor za umorne jahače ili Don Juanov osmijeh*, 1961); Gonzalo Torrente Ballester (*Don Juan*, 1963); Dacia Maraini (*Don Juan*, 1976); José Saramago (*Don Giovanni ou O dissoluto absolvido*, 2005); etc.



have put a copyright on the myth of Faust - the one who does not seek only knowledge but a moment in which he could finally say: 'Ah, stay a while! You are so lovely!'"<sup>19</sup> - Don Juan was used more frequently than Faust.

Ready to lightly irritate and provoke within the permissible limits of order, Molière also accepted Don Juan as the erotic version of Don Quijote (in Molière, the great seducer has the problem to accomplish anything when he enters the scene and all his conquests are from the time before the curtain was lifted, so that his score is positively like that of Caballero de la Triste Figura (Knight of the Ill-favoured Face"), while the voice of cynical realism, instead of the fatty Sancho, is spread by the starving servant Sganarelle, who is the only one who represents religious morality, but so that he becomes even more laughable to the audience.

Religion is the link and division between Tirso's (?) and Molière's seducer. Molière's declares himself an atheist, and remains truly astonished when the Stone Guest enters his house. Tirso's, on the contrary, is a practising Catholic of the traditional Mediterranean type: he thinks that he is a sinner, knows that he is a sinner, but understands that in the Catholic version the sacrament of reconciliation can act as an effective detergent of the soul, so he counts on having enough time until his libido falls and piety grows, and only then will he repent and enter into the privileged part of Paradise, with other noblemen, no matter when they convert to the virtuous path.

Don Juan, however, is not the only serial womanizer: in *Burlador* his competitor is Marquis de la Mota, who takes over Don Juan's cap and robe, and not the servant Catalinón (in Molière, a portion of undeserved beating in that moment is given to Sganarelle).

Nevertheless, another master, better than maybe Tirso or surely Molière, was found, if not better than the two of them, with the brilliant share of the third.

The first master is from the outskirts of Venice, Lorenzo Da Ponte, a dissolute cleric and a freemason, an ironic observer, capable of summarizing his views into the sparse rhymes of a libretto. As a librettist, Abbot Da Ponte suggested to Mozart Molière's hero, which in his Italian version became *Don Giovanni*. A helping hand was given to him by the born Venetian, legendary serial seducer Giacomo Casanova, author of the infamous and therefore very much read memoirs *Histoire de ma vie*. The former Catalinón, then Sganarelle, was again renamed and becomes Leporello, the servant in charge to keep a precise record of the seductions. He explains to Donna Elvira that it is a futile effort to dream about don Giovanni as a faithful husband who will finally calm down in his own wife's bedroom.

19 "Verweile doch! Du bist so schön!" (Goethe, *Faust*, I, Studio 2, verse 1700).

According to Leporello's catalogue, the tireless seducer made love to 640 women in Italy, 231 in Germany, 100 in France, 91 in Turkey, and, at that time, 1003 in Spain. Among them were villagers, maidens, citizens, countesses, baronesses, marchionesses, and princesses: women of all classes, figures, and ages. Talking about a blonde, he praises her elegance, about a black-haired woman, her persistence, about a white-haired woman, her tenderness (but not wisdom, in any of them). He is even picky: in the winter he prefers fatty, in the summer skinny. He yearns for a tall and magnificent woman but a tiny one is even more hankered after. He seduces old ladies just to extend the list. Nevertheless, his greatest pleasure is in a young novice. He does not care if she is rich, ugly, or beautiful: "It's enough that she wears a skirt, and you know what he does to them," Leporello points out, mumbling in pleasure.

Well, credit for that mumble goes to a third, always inclined to skirts though, they say, one faithful to his charming wife, a freemason as well, genius of the geniuses, briefly: Mozart, who gave the music to it, and edified it as an artistic monument to the *Latin lover*, the seaside villain of whom so many adulterers are envious.

In 1797 Goethe points out that the action is full of ambiguities - both textual and musical - that Mozart has involved throughout whole opera, and thinks that it is, by his opinion, an insurmountable work.<sup>20</sup> It is not a musicological opinion, of course, but a poetic one, and from an author who puts in the mouth of Faust a confessional cry to Wagner: "Two souls, alas, are dwelling in my breast."<sup>21</sup> In the "ambiguous" *Don Giovanni* each event provokes another, usually unpredictable.

Goethe thought that *Don Giovanni* was an insurmountable opera. In *Don Giovanni*, where "the music itself speaks," which rejects an imitation of nature in favor of the symbolic communication of the ideal truth,<sup>22</sup> he could sense the spirit of "Sturm und Drang."

This great intellectual and aesthetic movement begins to undermine the duality of neoclassical thought: the Aristotelian dichotomy of Good and Evil, Moral and Sin, Beautiful and Ugly, and begins opening the whole spectrum of nuances and relativisms. This dialectical permeating of nuances, both agogic and dynamic, produced at that time a new instrument in Italy which astonished the *wunderkind* of Salzburg - pianoforte or piano, and because of it he rejected fortepiano, the favorite of Leopold Mozart.

Goethe's view of *Don Giovanni* hails from the philosopher Søren Kierkegaard. In his magnum opus *Enten-Eller (Either/Or)* he also introduced

20 In the letter to Friedrich Schiller 3 / V / 1797, *Goethe & Schiller* Vol I, 1955: 311.

21 "Zwei Seelen Wohnen, ach! In meiner Brust", Faust, I, Vor dem Tor, verse 1112.

22 Letter to Schiller 30 / XII / 1797 (ibidem).

a seducer, who is not similar to Don Juan or anyone in the Mediterranean archetype, although he knew him in detail. However, in this work he incorporated the 'The Immediate Erotic Stages or the Musical Erotic' treaty, where, as one of the starting points, he uses the erotic charge of Mozart's music. Taking Mozart's opera - which counts as one of his favorites - as a starting point, Kierkegaard speaks of the 'erotic-sensual genius' of the Don Juan myth (Kierkegaard 1843 [1987: 48]).

In the case of Kierkegaard, Mozart himself was a hell of seducer (with the pinch of romantic emphasis): 'Immortal Mozart! You to whom I owe everything - to whom I owe that I lost my mind, that my soul was astounded, that I was terrified at the core of my being - you to whom I owe that I did not go through life without encountering something that could shake me, you whom I thank because I did not die without having loved, even though my love was unhappy' (1843 [1987: 49]). For this Danish philosopher, Mozart saved, combining fascination and rejection within the character of Don Juan, ideas of medieval Christianity, according to which every individual, even the most disgusting, possesses his own and inalienable value. So does Don Juan, of course.

For Kierkegaard, Don Giovanni, as Mozart and librettist Da Ponte imagine him, represents the demonism of the senses, completely Earthly, unlike Faust - the other myth, which got a hold of Goethe and lured Mozart - and which evokes a spiritual, supernatural level. Kierkegaard, a predecessor of Existentialism and a child of Romanticism, celebrated Mozart's ability to unite what the hegemonic - absolutist, dogmatic, clerical - thought separated into mutually untouchable spaces. Mozart's *Don Giovanni* does not exclude moral condemnation, but undoubtedly surpasses it.

As stated above, a helping hand was given to Da Ponte by the born Venetian, and legendary serial seducer, Giovanni Giacomo Casanova, the self-proclaimed knight de Seingalt, the author of the notorious and therefore readily read memoirs *Histoire de ma vie*. It would be unjust not to pay some attention to his work because the memoir too is part of literature (it allowed Churchill to get the Nobel Prize for Literature).

Casanova died in 1798, at a time when his enlightening, libertarian, and gallant century was already suffocating in blood.

He was the central figure of the Venetian Carnival in 1998, at the 200<sup>th</sup> anniversary of his death. Philosopher Massimo Cacciari, at that time the mayor of Venice, suggested him as an emblem. All this within a picturesque scene of the city which is a monument of itself, an immense *proskenion* made of stone lace for an open-air live theater, where everyone is invited to play a part at their will or just watch the show. Da Ponte met Casanova in Paris in 1783, and visited him in Dux/Duchov, where the aged lover was a librarian of the freemason count Waldstein and it seemed that Casanova had visited Da Ponte and Mozart in Prague while they created *Don Giovanni*.

Casanova came to Dux already old, arthritic and toothless, impoverished, having crossed half of Europe, and escaped, allegedly the only one in history, from the Venetian dungeon *Sotto i Piombi* (so terrible that the passage leading to it from the Doge's Palace is called the Bridge of Sighs). In the meantime, he earned a lot of money on the stock exchange and squandered it... Waldstein gave him a salary and a servant, and Casanova paid him back by organizing an enormous library (40,000 volumes). Irritating and intolerant, he quarreled with the male servants, but he was still chasing after women. Casanova died in Dux of cancer that hit him in the zone he was practically most proud of: in the prostate. In his final months he did not allow anyone, except Waldstein and his nephew Carlo, to see him: ashamed for being toothless. He dictated his last letter on June 1, 1798, three days before his death, which was directed, of course, to a lady: I cannot read, I cannot write, I have to thank my nephew that I can send You this message."

Unlike the fictional Don Juan, a myth that fascinated both male and female audiences, a focused collector of seduced women whom apparently he did not love, at least not as persons (it is not needed to be in love with the lamb to eat it, for some it could even be deemed inappropriate), Casanova was *The Man who Really Loved Women*.

Thus claims Lydia Flem, a Belgian psychoanalyst who made herself famous with books on racism, Freud and his patients, on panic, etc. However, the original title of her book was: *Casanova or the Art of Happiness*, but in later editions it has been altered as mentioned above.

Counting all the ladies Casanova included in his late memoirs, Flem reduces the suspected number of 600 to 122 - an almost insignificant figure compared to the alleged 3,000 ascribed to President John F. Kennedy (to whom they served as a painkiller during headaches, as quoted by Flem) or with 10,000 as Georges Simenon announced (a Belgian and thus far from our Mediterranean focus). It is important to Don Juan to note how many women he has been able to possess at some time in some place, and to Casanova how many times he managed to satisfy the same woman in a certain period. He is not interested in being with seven women in Marseille, for him it is important to generate seven orgasms in one night to the same woman in Marseille," writes Flem (1995: 87).

Psychoanalysts assume that obsessive seducers do not even remember faces or names of their 'successes,' let alone a key feature of their character, while Casanova, the eponymous Mediterranean seducer, has remembered all the details of each of his 122 mistresses, so he was able to write an autobiography with such lively, precise memoirs: writing his memoirs he managed to remember every woman in person, meeting and words whipped on those occasions. And to live his wonderful life twice," writes Flem, not hiding her enthusiasm for a man of many loves and no

marriage, who did not accept the later thesis about the transformation of quantity into quality.

Soon after Lord Byron started working on *Don Juan*. He was fascinated by the Mediterranean. He fought for it, in Greece, and there found his death. He sings about the Greek Islands in *Childe Harold*, follows his Don Juan from Seville, across Cádiz, to Cyclades, and to Istanbul... (we are really not interested in following him any further).

Byron's *Don Juan* - his magnum opus, unfinished at the moment of his death - is a satirical epic poem in which Don Juan does not chase women, but fails to escape their desires because he, with a strong masculinity and weak determination, cannot resist.

It is therefore an everyday, almost banal story of the male gender, essentially different from that of the mainstream to which *El Burlador de Sevilla* opens the water gate. Byron is not interested in this "Titan of Embodied Evil," as the classical Don Juan with a pinch of envy was summarized by Ernest Hartley Coleridge,<sup>23</sup> rather than a humorous paradoxes, as the poet explains in a letter to Thomas Moore.

He picked him up on the Mediterranean and sent it on a sort of "big tour" across Europe, as Thomas Mann would pick his fraud Felix Krull in Rhineland and sent him to show his talents (especially seductive) in the Mediterranean, celebrating them by a triumphant whinny of the seduced mother of a seduced girl.

At the end of the first chapter of *Eugene Onegin* Alexander Pushkin points out that his hero will go along the same paths Byron's Don Juan had passed - but there ends Onegin's similarity with Byron's seduced seducer, and with *El Burlador* there were none.

Like the latter Krull, Byron's seducer is mainly a picaresque, not erotomaniac character. After all, from the West of the Mediterranean oecumene, from Granada (where Moorish and Jewish influences affected the Ibero Catholics), there came Don Diego Hurtado de Mendoza, who is firmly believed to be the author of *Lazarillo de Tormes*, the first picaresque novel, whose hero acts as a serial *servus callidus*.

It would be unjust to reduce the Mediterranean archetypal seducer only to the libertine, whether fictitious or factual. His history begins much earlier.

Ovid's *Ars amatoria* did not recoil before the "holy fortress" of a marriage which, seriously endangered, August tried to protect with the marriage law (*Lex Iulia de maritandis ordinibus*, 18 BC). That poem on the Love Skill and an undefined mistake ("carmen et error," *Tristia*, 2,207) was the reason

23 In taking Don Juan for his "hero," Lord Byron took the name only, and disregarded the "terrible figure" of the Titan of embodied evil, the likeness of sin made flesh" (Coleridge, 1903: XVI) From the Introduction to *Don Juan*, *The Works of Lord Byron*, Poetry. Vol. VI. In the foreword to the *Selections from the Works of Lord Byron*, by A.C. Swinburne, 1885, p. xxvi)



for his exile in Tomis, along the Black Sea coast, forever far away from the City where he was happy and glorified.

While in antiquity the poet could be guilty, in the Middle Ages the culprit could be the book of romantic, adulterous love (in the concrete case of the Knight Lancelot and Queen Guinevere, as troubadour Chrétien de Troyes recorded around 1177 in the poem *Lancelot, le Chevalier de the Charrette*). This is in the Mediterranean oecumene memorized by Dante Alighieri in the famous episode of the historically-inspired adultery of Francesca da Polenta from Rimini with Paolo Malatesta. For Paolo's first trembling kiss (*la bocca mi baciò tutto tremante*) the culprit, really the procurer was a book and who wrote it" (*galeotto fu l libro e chi lo scrisse*," *Divina Commedia, Inferno*, V, 133 -138).

If someone is a seducer in the Mediterranean, a real and permanent one, that is – foremost they are a writer.

## 8. Conclusion

The highlander and the seaside survive, among the archetypes created in the Mediterranean cultural ecumene, as a pair of not only different but also specular types, even rivals, from Homer to the present day. In works thematically located on the Mediterranean, European literature accepts and replicates the same scheme.

Both the highlander and seaside imagotypes, as literary patterns, are the consequences of their own territorial, economic, or cultural affiliations. It was not until later that they have sometimes been transposed across ethnic or national keys.

Those imagotypes owe a great deal of their typically recognized characteristics to the prejudices expressed by the opposite narrative, especially by the seiders on the highlanders.

It is amazing how long some of these prejudices last, through millennia, regardless of the tremendous epochal changes in the meantime. The literature in that field acts also as an indicator, disseminator, and sometimes as an amplifier.

Neither one of the archetypes is uniform. Literary figures based on the same archetype can be characterized by different properties.

The highlander is usually displayed as a primitive, brutal (Polyphemus), freaky on a corporal and spiritual level (Caliban), credulous and simple-minded (Stanac), primarily revengeful (don José) or secondarily, as under the pressure of a cultural pattern (Orso Della Rebbia), etc.

The seaside is curious despite dangers (Jason), cunning (Odysseus), sly (Portia), a confabulator (Zorbás), a libertine (Don Juan), and a seducer (Casanova).



Such characters and features were found to be suitable and appropriate by authors from other geographic areas too: Shakespeare, Voltaire, Pushkin, Joyce, Yourcenar, Lagerkvist, and many others.

It seems that the Mediterranean produces not only more religions than the whole world needs, more history than it can withstand (what Churchill explicitly applied to the Balkans), but especially more literary topics and characters than it is capable to exploit by itself, leaving them to migrate to spiritually deeper regions.

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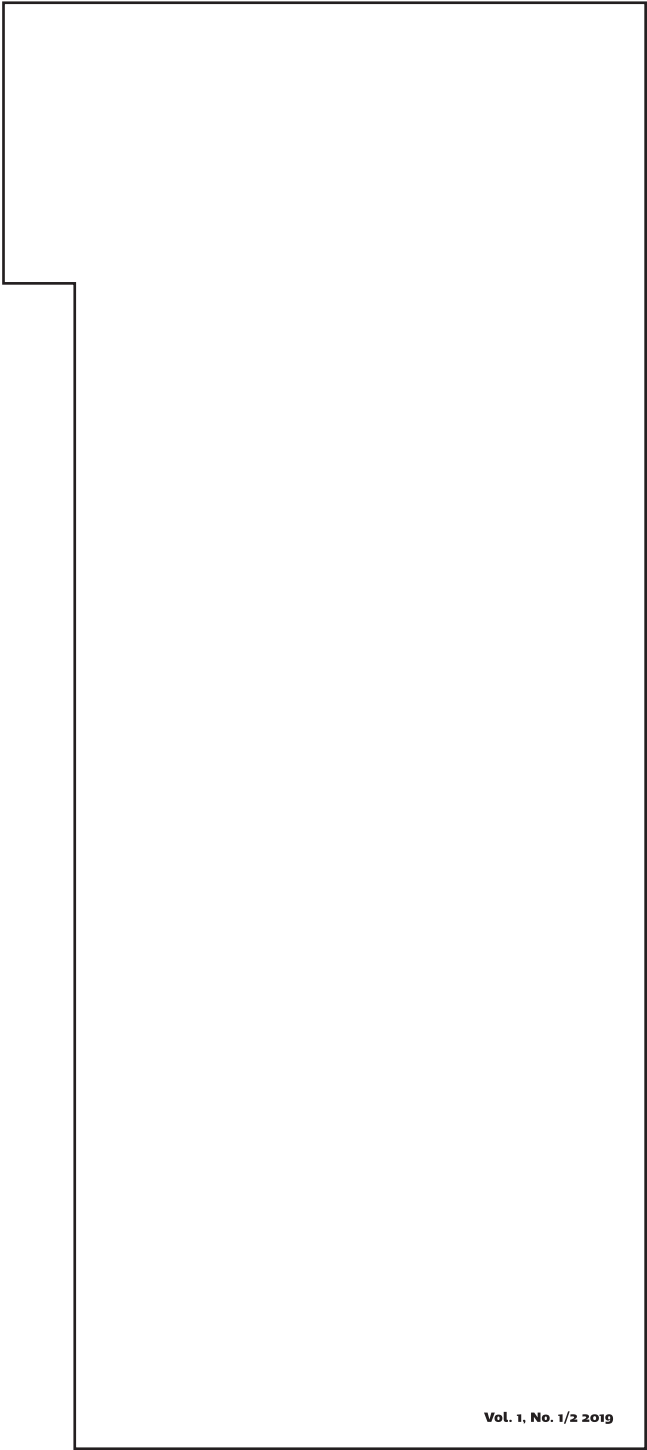
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# Cross Cultural Studies Review

A journal for comparative studies  
of culture, literature, and the arts



Translations - Luka Bekavac





# Luka Bekavac

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The translations included in this issue are the first and last pieces from Bekavac's first short-story collection, *Galerija likovnih umjetnosti u Osijeku. studije, ruševine* (*The Gallery of Visual Art in Osijek. Studies, Ruins*), published in 2017. The book brings together several episodes of cultural history of a city. It takes the form of a fake gallery catalogue, including visual images and a vinyl record tucked into its back end pages.

In each story, an autobiographically masked narrator explores a half-forgotten 'case,' embarking on a line-by-line approach to documents, forgery, and fiction. Most varied, and sometimes opaque areas (electroacoustic music, contemporary theater, conceptual art, pseudoscience, dystopian ecology, digital culture) are opened on this twisting path between 1958 and 2045, painted with a spectrum of tones ranging from lyrical and elegiac to reportage or black humor.

Although this story cycle appears to be an independent whole, the studies and ruins of its subtitle can also be taken as drafts of yet unpublished books as well as objects which lie on the periphery of the author's novels. All of Bekavac's work shares characters, themes, and ambiances, revolving around a carefully constructed, semi-fictional version of the city of Osijek, Croatia.

# Noise

**Ignac Schlesinger, 1994**

For almost everyone who has had any kind of contact with the humanities, noise has turned into some kind of a petrified metaphor; upon hearing this word, pronounced in any context, no one thinks about sound any longer, but rather only the corrosion of information, the eroded wreckage of messages captured in the communication channel. I did not avoid this banal professional deformation either, which is boring to speak about; however, the occasional work on electronic sound processing, in which the second, or the first type of noise still has priority, makes the word 'noise' ricochet off the wall of semiotics in my head – as if the psyche consists of real spaces after all, or at least resembles a darkened room for squash – and then, like the nodding of a head or the confirmation of a bouncing ball, slowly come to a halt on the invisible surface of acoustics or contemporary music.

\* \* \*

Everything I described happens in the first second or two after I hear the word 'noise'; however, as soon as my brain begins to create more complex networks around this concept, I recall, without a desire to illustrate any kind of thesis, a story that activates both meanings of noise. It is a series of seemingly incidental events, but in their epicentre lies the Gallery of Fine Arts in Osijek: it feels like I have always known it, but also as if it's coming into being here and now, in front of my closed eyes, perhaps through granular synthesis, arising from a grain of noise and ashes, like an apparition that might lack any material durability, only temporarily emerging from the random arrangement of these particles, ready to dissolve and disappear at the first movement of eyelids. Therefore one has to remain careful: one has to choose words very carefully in everything that follows.

The Osijek Summer of Youth has been in existence for almost thirty years as a permanent project of the Student Center; the programs are not, however, only held in the Center or in front of it, but throughout the city, as well as in the Gallery, that monstrous construction of concrete, steel and glass, erected in the middle of the largest English garden in Osijek, whose informal beauty only makes its geometric contours even more extra-terrestrial and abominable. Precisely through these channels, several artists from the French record label Metamkine, the supreme house of contemporary electroacoustics, reached Osijek in 1994 – Lionel Marchetti,

Michel Chion and label head Jérôme Noetinger (perhaps there were others, Bertrand Dubedout or Christian Zanési, but I am not sure anymore). Their performance couldn't be scheduled for the main part of the Osijek Summer, ending in late June, but it happily coincided with the celebration of the World Day of Echolocation, August 20th, and the presentations of bioacoustic work of some scholars from IBAC which were held within the same two-day program. At that time, I never even thought about going to Chion's lecture on Parmegiani's *L'œil écoute*, which I am regretting today; actually, at that time, this kind of music held no interest to me outside of its local variances, and they had less to do with my academic preoccupations and more to do with some kind of misplaced work of mourning. So I do not remember Marchetti's concert too well either, just an unpleasant and, of course, thoroughly inaccurate impression of the randomness of painfully sharpened noises which, after about ten minutes, managed to drive out nearly the entire audience from the darkened ground floor of the Gallery. In the foyer, I listlessly spent the fee I have just received from *Heroína Nova* magazine on two CDs, *L'heure alors s'incline...* by Christine Groult and *Tabou* by Michèle Bokanowski, less because of the music, and more because of their unusual miniature format. I no longer know where they are: I tried hard to listen to them in the following days, and then I left them to some of the parasites that used to surround me. I have no excuse, these years passed me by in their own kind of dull fog, and it is difficult to explain many of my actions of the time. For me, as it will be seen, the key event of the whole evening was actually something else, altogether marginal – a moment in which, waiting in front of the Gallery for the concert to begin, buried alive in the thick summer twilight, I caught the voice of a girl whose face was also hidden in the shadows; she said something I did not hear quite clearly, something relating to a music archive in the basement of the Gallery, which has been open since the late seventies. That was all: I tried to eavesdrop on the rest of that conversation and precisely differentiate her voice from the surrounding gloom, but all my efforts remained futile.

I wanted to go to that basement right away but, of course, I did not do it, distracted by some personal shortcomings that are not the subject of this text. Besides, it seemed to me that I did not have a credible excuse for doing so. One person who meant a lot to me, and of whom I have lost every trace, left behind a miniature opus of electronic music, and the only reason I was visiting similar events was the hope of tracking down the owners of private collections which held the rare remaining copies of her work. I repeat, at that time I had no formal interest in these compositions; I dreamed about them as the only, probably futile, nearly spiritistic form of establishing contact with her. All this is irrelevant; this is a text about something

else. Much later, around 2002, when the Gallery itself looked markedly different, and actually was something different, I went below ground, to a depth of almost ten meters, where no streetcar could be heard passing overhead. I did not find her. There was, however, a small archive of sound recordings: a few dozen audio cassettes, old reel-to-reel tapes with no reproduction equipment, fifteen vinyl records and a dozen CDs, among which only two or three were originals, and the rest mediocre computer transfers from tape and vinyl, preparing the material for a new archive or a final destruction. In these disorganized, already half-dismantled holdings, my eyes immediately fell on one object; the connection of that object to the twilight in August 1994 is the reason I am writing this text.

It was a drab and worn-out single, actually an EP, set in a white cardboard sleeve without a title; it contained a recording of one of the early, notoriously unavailable electroacoustic sessions performed in the studio of Radio Osijek. The catalogue card showed that in 1961 the record was distributed with a hundred copies of the first issue of *Revija* magazine, but that was a wrong clue; the release was not related to *Revija* but to the magazine's promotion at the Gallery where it was simply given out to visitors for free. Looking further through the catalogue, I found a number of flexi discs, singles, and even entire albums of "experimental music" from Osijek that the Gallery sold or handed out as late as 1991, but these records disappeared from the archive and ended up in private collections or in garbage dumps. Incredibly, each title was printed in an edition of a hundred copies. The record in my hands did not bear the name of the composer, nor any indication that it was actually published by the Gallery of Fine Arts in Osijek; on a black label, large silver letters spelled out "RADIO OSIJEK – DIFFUSION 1958," which was incorrectly entered in the catalogue as the title of this anonymous single. The "editor" of the edition was, however, mentioned as "I. Schlesinger"; some insights I gained much later, completely unrelated to this story, revealed to me a distinctly ominous note in this reliably wrong attribution. The titles of the compositions were found on the soundtrack itself: the recording was apparently taken directly from the radio transmission, so at the beginning of each side the sepulchral voice of the speaker announced what we will listen to. Side A, *Syllepsis – a flock of roses*, presented an aggressive eight-minute mix of raw sound objects, a collage of almost untouched *musique concrète*; I do not remember much of its dramaturgy (or even if it had any), only the thunder of electricity, violently counterpointing with the din of unknown machines, and something like the creaking of a cello or double bass slowly emerging through its gears, wires and

tubes. The other side was more interesting, even a bit eerie in a way that is difficult to explain; the title could not be heard in its entirety because the sediment of the dust in its opening grooves obscured the first word with a sharp noise, so all that remained was ...*under the river, her deep hair*. The monotonous weave of sounds documented the ambiance of the summer twilight in the parks along the Drava, the distant voices of strollers on the promenade, bicycles, insects and birds, dogs and wind in the treetops, and even something like the slow splashes of spectral swimmers on some deeper, ashen Copacabana; the radically processed synthetic elements, occasionally piercing through this wallpaper like sombre, elusive strands of distant melodies, managed to retain their crystalline purity despite the bad vinyl, the poor print, and the time that had passed. I managed to listen to the entire record only once, on the record player and with the headphones that were in the archive; they did not allow me to copy the recording or to take it with me, rightly assuming I would steal it. When I searched again for the archive and the record at the time of this writing, neither could be found.

The reason I am reporting on this sequence of events right here has the shape of a cochlea, and I can only illustrate it, not explain it. The statements about the past should have the form of a narrative chain that connects *state a* to *state b*, but I can only present the appearance of a straight line of progression, a static *state a* which, through a detour of more or less intangible or imaginary *states b*, spirally returns to itself or to its own mirror image. A modest clipping from *The Voice of Slavonia* newspaper was inserted into the record sleeve – an incoherent review of Metamkine's visit which had lead me to the archive in the first place, and which was separated from the sounds on this record by a forty year gap. In a state of mental paralysis, I returned that piece of paper to its sleeve and then took it out again, not knowing what to do with it. On its back-side there were three incomplete columns that belonged to some other text. It took me a few minutes to realize that one of them contained the name of that lost person whose trail I still occasionally follow, mostly underground. Parts of some sentences in the slivers of the first column spoke of a painter whose exhibition, it seems, was set up in the Gallery in the middle of that August. They described his new figurative cycles as 'neo-expressionism *à la* Bacon,' but only in passing; they focused more on the omnipresent motif of mammals with airy wings, similar to bats or airplane models. In the second column it was said that bats of this type, the exceptionally rare 'flying greyhounds' (*Pteropus griseus*), were discovered in the early 1980s by a British biologist who was, by a bizarre coincidence, also called Francis Bacon. The third column belonged to the same text, but its link to the previous paragraphs was unclear – it



mentioned Silvestar Rafay and a prototype of a paper aircraft that could support human weight.

\* \* \*

This, basically, is the place where I have to stop. Everything I have tried to write down actually ends up in a dead angle. A causal noise has brought me here with its irregular paths: it had long since died down, and its aberrations can't be reconstructed from here. In addition, after the Great Flood of 1998, it is almost impossible to verify whether the Gallery I am writing about ever even existed. All of that leads to the confused reaction of the first readers of this text: three don't consider themselves competent because they have never been to Osijek; six do not believe *I* was ever in the Gallery; four think that the music I described is actually mine; two claim that Radio Osijek was not founded until 1978; twelve say that electronic music is not music at all; eight believe that I have made all this up simply in order to pad out my text for the *Dictionary* of the Croatian Radio's Third Programme; everyone thinks that there is something wrong with the chronology of this story.

However, it must be clear that this confusion does not spread like an indiscriminate wave, randomly running wild in the information network: the origin of the disorder can easily be located at *a single source*. There is a good, constitutive reason for the apparent inconclusiveness of this text, and I think I have already indicated it, but I cannot discuss it any further now. I will just say that it is inappropriate to treat noise as a metaphor as long as I am here, because *here*, in this kind of statement, noise is something completely different – and completely real. It is the reason why nothing that I have written, as well as nothing that follows, can really be called fiction, though no one in their right mind would ever recognize it as the truth. The consequences of the described events are almost tangible for me, but I cannot prove that any of this really happened. The act by which I reproduce them here, as well as its result, are no longer subject to verification. The nature of this act, of this experience, or a short circuit whose name I am not allowed to say, or something that precedes writing – or is created along with it – and disrupts its growth into a coherent statement, into a wave that will oscillate steadily: this is, in fact, the place where this story begins.



# Rumore

**Ignac Schlesinger, 1994.**

Il rumore, per chiunque che abbia avuto a che fare con le scienze umanistiche, si è tramutato in una sorta di metafora lessicalizzata. Udendo quella parola, in qualsiasi contesto, nessuno pensa più al suono, ma soltanto alla corrosione dell'informazione, alla carcassa corrosa del messaggio incastrata nel canale di comunicazione. Neanch'io sono riuscito ad evitare questa banale deformazione professionale di cui mi dà noia persino parlare. Sennonché, il mio saltuario lavoro nel campo dell'elaborazione elettronica del suono, in cui la seconda tipologia, ovvero la prima specie di rumore ha ancora la precedenza, fa sì che il termine „rumore” nella mia testa – come se la psiche fosse fatta da spazi reali, o almeno fosse una palestra da squash, oscurata - rimbalzi prima contro il muro della semantica per poi, come nel movimento dell'annuire o come se la pallina rimbalzasse su e giù, quasi volesse affermare qualcosa, finendo col fermarsi lentamente sulla superficie invisibile dell'acustica o della musica contemporanea.

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Tutto quanto appena descritto ha luogo durante il primo secondo o due dopo che mi capita di sentire la parola „rumore”. Non appena, però, il mio cervello inizia a creare dei reticolati più complessi attorno al concetto, mi ritorna in mente, senza desiderio di illustrare alcuna tesi, una storia che attiva ambedue i significati del rumore. Si tratta di una serie di eventi all'apparenza casuali, ma che hanno come epicentro la Galleria delle Belle Arti di Osijek. Mi sembra di conoscerla da sempre, ma anche che si formi qui e adesso, davati ai miei occhi chiusi, forse proprio con sintesi granulare, dai grani di rumore e di cenere, come se fosse un'apparizione della cui esistenza materiale non posso essere certo o che si lasci intravedere temporaneamente nella casuale disposizione di quelle particelle, pronta a dissolversi di nuovo e a sparire al primo movimento delle palpebre. Bisogna, quindi, stare all'erta: in tutto quel che segue bisogna scegliere parole con molta cura.

Le Eitati della Gioventù di Osijek esistono ormai da una trentina di anni, come progetto permanente del Centro studentesco. Gli appuntamenti in programma non hanno, però, luogo soltanto all'interno del Centro o nel cortile, ma in tutta la città, quindi anche all'interno della Galleria, quella costruzione mostruosa in cemento, acciaio e vetro, eretta nel bel mezzo del più grande parco all'inglese di Osijek, la cui informale beltà non fa altro

che rendere i contorni geometrizzati della Galleria ancor più extraterrestri e mostrenchi. È attraverso i canali appena citati che era giunto fino a Osijek uno sparuto gruppo di artisti dell'etichetta discografica francese Metamkine, quanto di meglio ci potesse essere in fatto di elettroacustica contemporanea – Lionel Marchetti, Michel Chion e il capo dell'etichetta, Jérôme Noetinger (forse qualcun altro ancora, Bertrand Dubedout oppure Christian Zanési, ma non ne sono più sicuro). La loro esibizione doveva essere un fuori programma rispetto all'Estate della Gioventù, che si chiude a fine giugno, ma finì col coincidere, fortuitamente, con il 20 agosto, la Giornata mondiale dell'ecolocazione, e con le presentazioni dei lavori di un piccolo gruppo di bioacustici dell'IBAC, tenutesi nell'ambito della stessa due giorni di programma. All'epoca non mi passava neanche per la testa andare a sentire la conferenza di Chion su *L'oeil écoute* di Parmegiani, cosa di cui oggi mi pento. A dire il vero, quel tipo di musica, all'epoca, non mi interessava al di fuori delle sue varianti locali e nemmeno a quelle mi sentivo particolarmente legato da preoccupazioni accademiche, quanto forse da una sorta di lavoro dislocato della tristezza. Non ricordo, dunque, benissimo né il concerto di Marchetti, tenutosi nell'atrio buio della Galleria – solamente la sgradevole e, chiaramente, del tutto inesatta impressione dell'arbitrarierà dei rumori dolorosamente arrotondati che dopo una decina di minuti avevano cacciato via il pubblico quasi per intero. Nell'atrio, controvoglia e privo di qualunque interesse, meno per la musica in sé, cioè, e più per il loro inusuale formato ridotto, ho speso il denaro che mi aveva appena pagato *Heroína Nova*, in due cd, *L'heure alors s'incline...* di Christine Groult e *Tabou* di Michèle Bokanowski. Non so più dove siano: nei giorni a venire mi sono sforzato di sentirli e poi li ho lasciati a qualcuno dei parassiti di cui al tempo mi circondavo. Non ho scuse, erano anni in cui vivevo avvolto da una sorta di nebbia ottundente e mi riesce difficile elaborare parecchie cose legate alle mie azioni d'allora. Per me, come poi si vedrà, l'evento chiave dell'intera serata era rappresentato da qualcosa di diverso, del tutto marginale – il momento in cui, aspettando l'inizio del concerto davanti alla Galleria, sepolto vivo dal denso crepuscolo estivo, ho captato la voce di una ragazza il cui volto era anch'esso celato dalle ombre. Aveva detto qualcosa che non avevo sentito bene, qualcosa che si riferiva all'archivio musicale nello scantinato della Galleria che è attivo lì fin dagli anni settanta. Era tutto: tentai di origliare ancora e separare la sua voce con più precisione dal vocò circostante, ma fu uno sforzo vano.

Mi venne voglia di scendere subito nello scantinato, ma naturalmente, non lo feci, bloccato com'ero da alcune manchevolezze di natura personale che esulano dall'argomento di questo testo. Inoltre, mi era parso di non avere una scusa convincente per farlo. Una persona a cui tenevo tanto e di cui si era persa traccia, aveva lasciato dietro di sé un opus in miniatura di musica elettronica e l'unica ragione per cui andavo a eventi

simili era la speranza di imbattermi nel proprietario di qualche collezione privata in cui erano sparse le copie dei lavori di lei. Ripeto, a quel tempo quelle composizioni non destavano in me alcun interesse formale; ne sognavo come dell'unico, probabilmente vano, quasi spiritistico modo di entrare in contatto con quella persona. Tutto ciò non ha importanza. Questo testo non parla di quello. Soltanto molto più tardi, all'incirca nel 2002, quando anche la stessa Galleria aveva un aspetto molto differente ed era anche diventata qualcosa di molto differente, sono sceso sotto terra, ad una profondità di quasi dieci metri, dove non si sente neanche il passare del tram sulla testa. Non l'ho trovata. C'era, sì, un archivio, non grande, di registrazioni audio: alcune decine di audiocassette, alcuni nastri da magnetofono senza l'equipaggiamento per la loro riproduzione, una quindicina di dischi in vinile e una decina di cd, tra cui soltanto due – tre originali mentre il resto non andava oltre i mediocri riversaggi da nastri e vinili fatti al computer che servivano a preparare i materiali per il nuovo archivio ovvero la distruzione definitiva. In quel fondo disordinato, già dismesso a metà, lo sguardo mi era subito caduto su un oggetto. Il legame tra quell'oggetto e quel crepuscolo è la ragione alla radice della scrittura di questo testo.

Si trattava di un disco singolo, affatto appariscente e usurato, era in realtà di un *extended play*, dentro una custodia di cartoncino bianco, senza scritta alcuna. Conteneva la registrazione di una di quelle pionieristiche, oggi leggendariamente introvabili, sessioni elettroacustiche tenutesi nello studio di Radio Osijek. La scheda del catalogo aduceva che nel 1961 il disco venne distribuito assieme al centinaio di copie del primo numero della *Rivista*, ma si trattava di una pista falsa: quell'edizione non era legata alla *Rivista*, ma alla sua presentazione che ha avuto luogo nella Galleria dove venne semplicemente regalata ai presenti. Cercando ancora nel catalogo, trovai una serie di *flexi disc*, dei singoli, ma anche album interi, con „musica sperimentale” di Osijek che la Galleria vendeva o regalava fino al 1991, ma quei dischi sparirono dall'archivio e finirono nelle collezioni private o nell'immondizia. Ogni titolo era stato impresso nell'incredibile tiratura di cento copie. Il disco che tenevo nelle mani non recava né il nome dell'autrice né dell'autore come mancava anche un qualsiasi riferimento al fatto che il disco fosse stato pubblicato dall'etichetta della Galleria delle Belle Arti di Osijek. Sull'adesivo nero, a grandi caratteri argentati, c'era scritto „Radio Osijek – Diffusione 1958”, il che nel catalogo veniva erroneamente indicato come titolo di quel singolo non firmato. L'edizione, a dire il vero, esce „a cura di I. Schlesinger”. Alcune scoperte a cui sono arrivato più tardi, in maniera del tutto sconnessa da questa storia, mi hanno portato a individuare, in quell'attribuzione certamente errata, una nota particolarmente malefica. I titoli delle composizioni erano contenuti nella stessa registrazione: la registrazione era stata,

apparentemente, ripresa direttamente dal programma radiofonico e all'inizio di ogni lato del disco la voce oltretombale del presentatore annunciava quello che avremmo ascoltato di lì a poco. Il lato A, *Siless* – *Stormo di rose*, consisteva in un aggressivo montaggio di otto minuti di crudi oggetti acustici, un collage di *musique concrète* quasi affatto trattato; non ricordo molto della drammaturgia del pezzo – ammesso che ne avesse una – ma piuttosto dei violenti contrappunti tuonanti d'elettricità col frastuono dei macchinari ignoti attraverso i cui ingranaggi, fili e tubi emergeva lentamente qualcosa di simile allo stridere dei violoncelli e dei contrabassi. L'altro lato era più interessante, in una maniera difficilmente spiegabile, e leggermente spettrale; il titolo non era del tutto comprensibile per via dei depositi di polvere nei solchi incisi che hanno avvolto la prima parola di un rumore secco lasciando soltanto *...nel fiume, i suoi capelli profondi*. La tessitura monotona dei suoni documentava l'ambiente del crepuscolo estivo nei parchi lungo la Drava, con voci remote dei passanti sul lungofiume, biciclette, insetti e uccelli, cani e il vento nelle fronde degli alberi, e persino qualcosa come dei schizzi rallentati dei nuotatori fantasma su una più profonda, cinerea Copacabana, e gli elementi sintenici radicalmente rielaborati che di tanto in tanto si facevano strada in quello sfondo quasi fossero delle ciocche uggiose, sfuggenti di una melodia lontana, sono riusciti a conservare la loro purezza cristallina nonostante il cattivo vinile, la stampa di scarsa qualità e il passo del tempo. Sono riuscito ad ascoltare quel disco soltanto una volta, al gramfono con le cuffie che si trovavano nell'archivio; non mi hanno permesso di farne una copia o di portarlo con me, supponendo a ragione che l'avrei rubato. Quando, prima di scrivere questo testo, sono andato di nuovo a cercare l'archivio e il disco, né l'uno né l'altro c'erano più.

La ragione per cui mi trovo a rendicontare circa quella sequela di avvenimenti ha la forma di una coclea e posso soltanto figurarla, non certo spiegarla. Le narrazioni del passato dovrebbero avere la forma di una catena narrativa che colleghi lo stato di cose A con lo stato di cose B, mentre io invece non riesco a rappresentare che la parvenza di una progressione rettilinea, lo statico stato A che, con una tangente che passa per dei B più o meno intangibili o immaginari, ritorna come una spirale a se stesso o alla sua immagine speculare. Nella custodia del disco era inserito anche un ritaglio di giornale, non grande, dalla *Voce della Slavonija* – una recensione inarticolata della performance di Metemkine che mi aveva spinto ad andare in archivio e che rispetto alla scritta sul disco era distante quarant'anni. In uno stato di paralisi mentale rimettevo quel pezzo di carta nella custodia e poi lo tiravo fuori di nuovo, non sapendo bene cosa farmene. Sul dorso c'erano meno di tre colonne appartenenti ad un altro testo. Mi ci sono voluti alcuni minuti per rendermi conto che in una di esse c'era anche il nome di quella perduta persona sulle

cui tracce mi ritrovo ancora a camminare, qualche volta, per lo più sottoterra. Le parti di frasi nel frammento della prima colonna dicevano del pittore la cui mostra, a quanto pare, era stata allestita nella Galleria verso la metà di quell'agosto. Definivano i suoi nuovi cicli figurativi „neoespressionismo baconiano', ma di sfuggita. Si parlava molto di più del leit motif dei mammiferi dalle ali diafane, simili ai pipistrelli o ai modellini di aeroplani. Nella seconda colonna si diceva che la specie di pipistrelli in questione, i „levrieri volanti', specie estremamente rara (*Pteropus griseus*) non venne scoperta che agli inizi degli anni ottanta da un biologo britannico che si chiamava, per puro e bizzarro caso, anche lui Francis Bacon. La terza colonna faceva parte di quello stesso articolo ma il suo legame con i frammenti precedenti non era molto chiaro - veniva fatta menzione di Silvestar Rafay e di un modello di velivolo in carta in grado di portare il peso dell'uomo.

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È, più o meno, il punto in cui mi devo fermare. Tutto quanto ho provato a scrivere termina in realtà in un angolo morto. Mi ci ha portato, con le sue traiettorie irregolari, un rumore causale che ora è assente da tempo e le sue aberrazioni da questo punto in poi non sarei in grado di ricostruirle. Inoltre, in seguito alla Grande alluvione del 1998 è praticamente impossibile verificare se la Galleria come quella di cui ho scritto sia esistita o meno. Tutto ciò ha come conseguenza le reazioni confuse dei primi lettori di questo brano: tre di loro non si considerano competenti perché non sono mai stati a Osijek; sei non credono che *io* sia mai stato nella Galleria; quattro credono che la musica che ho descritto sia in realtà mia; due ritengono che la Radio Osijek non sia stata fondata prima del 1978; dodici di loro sostengono che la musica elettronica non sia musica; otto credono che tutto questo me lo sono inventato in una sorta di forzato tentativo di ampliare il mio *Dizionario del Terzo Programma*; tutti credono che ci sia qualcosa che non vada con la cronologia di questa storia.

Ciononostante, deve essere chiaro che la confusione di cui sopra non si espande come una sorta di ondata non selettiva che imperversa a caso nella rete delle informazioni: la fonte del disturbo si fa presto a localizzarla in *una sorgente*. Esiste una buona ragione, costitutiva, per il finale all'apparenza inconcludente di questa narrazione e io credo di averla indicata già e ora non posso discuterne più oltre. Dico solo che ritengo fuori luogo metaforizzare il concetto di rumore finché sono qui perché *qui*, in una narrazione come questa, il rumore rappresenta qualcosa di completamente diverso – di completamente reale. Esso è la ragione per cui nulla di tutto quanto io abbia scritto, come anche di tutto quello che segue, non possa essere chiamato finzione anche se nessuno normale

lo riconoscerebbe come verità. Le conseguenze degli eventi narrati sono per me quasi tangibili, ma non posso dimostrare che alcuno di loro abbia effettivamente avuto luogo. L'atto con cui qui li riproduco, come anche il suo risultato, non sono più verificabili. La natura di quell'atto, di quell'esperienza, o il cortocircuito il cui nome non posso pronunciare, o qualcosa che precede la scrittura – o si crei assieme ad essa – rendendo impossibile il suo plasmarsi in una narrazione coerente, in un'onda che vibri regolarmente: questo è, in realtà, il punto in cui questa storia ha inizio.

Traduzione italiana di Srećko Jurišić



# Network

Ema Pichler, 1991

This theory has become comfortable by now, like a thought of home: something that has no end, no edge or center, something reminiscent of a blank crossword puzzle or a grid that extends into an undefined dark place, like an interstellar spacecraft in a vacuum, from where it descends toward the lower spheres, toward the material world and time, only in discrete and partial packets, random replicas, mere hints of a *whole* which is written down in a more subtle medium. But what if my position, so similar to the corpse of a Roman monument in the lapidarium of a provincial museum, surrounded by similar shards and traces of some extinct civilization, a flock of fraternal phenomena in forgotten ephemerides, is actually much more complex? If none of us exists just in one system, but is simultaneously included in a series of others, in a whole chain of parallel networks that extend below and above 'ours' in fine, untouchable fragile layers, out into infinity? All these disembodied networks would have to work simultaneously with one and the same material, because nothing else exists, *there is no other world except this one*. In such a universe, it would be pointless to think about whether other 'versions' of me exist and live some other lives, who knows where, who knows when; one should ask: what is at work upon me at this moment, using me without my knowledge; which worlds contain my body, this body, the only one that I have, *here and now*?

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Every autumn, as early as the end of September, sometime around my birthday, I get trapped by psychosomatic problems: more or less severe digestive disorders for which, after almost fifty years, I've still not found a diagnosis. The only shift that I see in this otherwise completely repetitive feeling of potentially fatal rot, which has recently become even stronger, lies in interpretation: over the years, this *disturbance* in the communication channel between myself and the world has become to me less and less like a simple noise and increasingly more like an *interference*, the breaking through of a message from an unknown transmitter, an echo of the turbulence from some neighboring life. The intense feeling of being possessed, which always accompanies these weeks, I find more

and more difficult to keep within tolerable limits: it's as if, along with the half-digested foods and the membranes of my organs, the time that holds them together is slowly dissolving. The forgotten moments and ambiances, the ancient dreams and daydreams, all come back, followed by indecipherable images which I can no longer relate to my experience, mental photos forwarded to me by someone unknown; *I remember* the smallest details of being in an entirely alien body, world, and time, but the intuitive reaction that these heterogeneous materials elicit is the exact opposite of any expected aversion: it's all *mine*. In recent years, these memories or anticipations have become increasingly intertwined with a peculiar September or October 1991, although the dates may not matter (I know a man for whom this bridge to the outer regions opens in *June* 1991); in addition, there are very solid numerical justifications for my assumption about the equivalence of *April* and October 1991, less a calendrical and more an astrological opposition between them, like the unclear but stable balance of the poles of a sidereal year. One thing is always the same: I see cold water, gray-pink; some snowflakes or rare sleet falling into it; a chessboard abandoned in the middle of a match, onto which, through a window that someone forgot to close, land dry ruddy leaves, borne by the wind; the contours of the human body filled with darkness and stars.

However, I would like to say something about the occasion when that feeling caught me out of time, caused by purely technical reasons. Somewhat unexpectedly, one late morning in November 2011, I got a call from Ema Pichler, a longtime member of the curatorial team of the Gallery of Fine Arts in Osijek; we've known each other for almost thirty years, although without really being close, so it didn't surprise me that she was calling me about my writing, rather than for personal reasons. The real surprise, however, came when I realized that this was not about a possible collaboration, or even about my already published fabrications about the Gallery: she heard that I'd written a "sequel" to my first novel, the story of two sisters, set in the distant future, and their contact with someone from a different time stream. Without going into detail, she said she would call me from the Stationary Store when she had a few hours off, and the phone actually rang the next afternoon as I was staring aimlessly out the window, dazed by the play of sunspots within the birch canopies as well as by the distant voices of children and dogs. The building from which she called me (from a private line"), which had that mysterious nickname bestowed by her assistants, does not belong to the Gallery in the narrow sense, but despite the fact that its purpose is not clearly defined, I do not believe that I just imagined its aura of mystery: its location is still unknown today, if it was ever really a single place (I always, and I don't know why, got the impression that it was situated far away from

any populated area, perhaps hidden somewhere on the southwestern periphery, or in the fields across the Drava). Ema spoke until the first stars emerged, taking breaks only to light another cigarette, and I wrote down everything I could, mostly in the form of notes; preparing this text, I expanded them with a more or less futile search for any slight internet traces of the case, which, at its peak in August 1999, even reached *The Voice of Slavonia* newspaper in an article titled 'Hackers Attack the Gallery,' with the subheading 'Lower Town Demolition Announced – Croatian Lobbyists in Brussels Threatened.'

At that time, the Gallery regularly maintained a forum on its official site: they posted announcements to which no one would respond, announced programs, guest appearances and lectures (despite the fact that reminders for these were also located in the main page menu), and commentary on some of their exhibitions would appear here and there, mostly in the form of lazy platitudes ('thank you. a wonderful experience,' 'you're awesome,' and the like). I was more amused by the rare critical, aggressive, or threatening posts: I remember how in those years the obscure Catholic association Larvatus, which has in the meantime fallen apart, metastasizing into entities which are active on the national level, wasted time harassing the Gallery curators every time the program excessively moved away from landscapes, portraits, or heritage art; I didn't always have the patience to read their long, analphabetic demands, but I do remember a pitiful protest by this supposedly 'civic initiative' when, after the announcement of a three-day international body art festival at the Gallery, a bus coming down European Avenue from an unknown direction disembarked a small group of pushy old ladies who spent the next few hours teetering around with anti-abortion pamphlets, rosaries and banners that read 'YOUR BODY IS NOT YOURS ALONE.' Of course, I cannot imagine that anyone regularly followed the forum during those years: it seemed to me that the whole space was a typical digital cemetery of a state institution that simulated communication with its mute, deceased users, like in a necromantic ritual; everything was updated too late, everything was redundant, everything was gaping there, gloomy and empty, pretty much like the Gallery itself, at least during the mandates of some of its directors.

At one point, absolutely atypical, almost unreadable messages signed with the username aquaTarkus began to appear under the topic of the Osijek Summer of Youth festival, which partially took place at the Gallery that year: the administrator didn't know who Emerson was and he probably, and quite understandably, thought this was a virus. The messages were published at perfectly regular intervals of 240 minutes, but with the wrong dating: under a blank square without an avatar there appeared dates between September 13<sup>th</sup> and October 26<sup>th</sup> 1991, and one of the earliest

posts announced: 'THIS MUSEUM – NOW – MAR 11 1991'; moreover, the posts seemed to have been created by a machine, not by someone's conscious intention: a fleeting sense only occasionally struggled to appear in the chaos of signifiers, as if some program chopped up and then mixed different documents or strings of randomly generated symbols before compressing them into a block of text without spaces. I find it particularly inexplicable that these were actually graphic files: a printout that resembled a ZX Spectrum font, printed with an old dot matrix device, was poorly photographed or scanned and finally uploaded to the forum as an *image*, but at that moment no particular attention was paid to all of this; together with the rest of the internet junk, nationalist slogans, and trade ads, all messages like this were routinely deleted. In mid-July, after settling the final affairs of the current season, the collective vacation began; Ema turned off her official cellphone and traveled, if I remember correctly, to Italy or Greece. She returned to Osijek on August 20<sup>th</sup>, unpacked her bags, and turned on a computer that, in those days, she could still leave behind every summer, together with the entire virtual world; by pure inertia, after checking her mail, she went to the Gallery page, and nothing could prepare her for what awaited her.

In the forum, under the name 'LET PROpls=84\*IX," a new topic had opened that at that moment had over 4,000 posts. Hundreds of curious people, and about fifteen constant commentators and 'analysts," swarmed around a core of incoherent and wrongly dated messages; they looked very similar to those from late spring, but now, apart from 'aquaTarkus," they were signed by 'zeitstrom" and '2109via1991" (though there was no difference between their messages, as if they had really been generated by machines and not real people). Emma is immune to the disease of affectation and rhetorical exaggeration, a pandemic that reigns among all our colleagues, but she told me, after a dramatic pause that seemed alarmingly long over the phone, how she was immediately sure, in a single second, before she was even able to fully study and analyze what she saw, that it was all coming from some 'other place," from 'another time." It wasn't just about the dating: she mentioned two names that were completely exotic to me – ARPANET and CYCLADES – attempting to illustrate something ancient, pre-internet in the design of these posts, and after writing the first version of this text, I really did dig out the debate on one closed Facebook group of students at the Faculty of Electrical Engineering, about whether all of this could have been the result of linking some RNG software to material from someone else's long-dead 8-bit processors. (As expected, elsewhere they considered the FEE students themselves, who were simply trying to systematize some possible solutions, responsible for the whole case, the internet equivalent of a violation of public peace and order.)

All this would remain interesting only as a technological curiosity if the content of the posts was banal or negligible, but it was clear at first glance that these dozens of texts, written on the ‘walls of the Museum’ (as the senders called the forum), consisted of almost incompatible elements. These bizarre, frequently even polyglot messages were dominated by a quasi-religious tone and vocabulary, although it is difficult to imagine the denomination to which such preachers would belong: in addition to some new and seemingly technical terms (*weltlignes*, luminocorpus, ὀλογραφικών), they contained recognizable clues of some kind of theory (‘information travels FASTER THAN LIGHT [in reverse]’) or indications of dogma (‘stuck in amber – now/here – WHOKNOWSWHEREWHOKNOWSWHEN – time not time – 3 layers [flows + passes] 4 layers [ex sists]’), as well as blurry suggestions of ethics (‘WE ARE TWINS’). However, with a slight shift in perspective, many sentences lost any allegorical dimension and were transformed from a vague parable into a series of literal, quite specific and precise technical specifications. Ema talked about how this was discovered by a brilliant high school student (pretending to have forgotten her name); most of the posts contained *instructions*, but this was just the beginning of the puzzle. They contained a combination of some standards of a strictly engineering nature (the density of certain alloys, the permeability of silicon dioxide fibers, static calculations related to the load-bearing structures and underground floors of a building) and fragments of something that resembled *software* (it’s quite surreal that they occasionally called it CHARDIN, although it wasn’t even certain whether it was the name of a particular *program* or an unknown programming *language*), but some insane moments made it difficult to interpret all this: they obdurately insisted on the preparation of a small object made from steel plates, springs and foils, that needed to be screwed into a certain wall of a building on Radić Street before the whole ‘emission’ could even begin. I could glimpse something through that web of information that Ema had spilled out over the phone, but I couldn’t understand it all, or even memorize it, so the bigger picture eluded me; mathematically and technically I’m completely illiterate, so reconstructing this part of the story has caused me great difficulties, but I don’t think it was clear to anyone whether one should eventually run a program, erect an object, or make one happen through the other as the final goal.

However, as the afternoon floodlights were turning off along the cliffs of the surrounding buildings, Ema moved more and more quickly over these magical details to arrive at what had actually overwhelmed so many usually disinterested people that summer. At first completely neutrally, but more ambivalently and even more manipulatively as the readers’ interest increased, someone on the other side began releasing information that could be taken as forecasts, if not sovereign claims,



about institutions, devices or events that were yet to come, about a future that, from the height on which the messengers clearly stood, seemed as transparent as past events. There were some unverifiable particles of reality (that moment 15 VI: the first sign of rain 12:46 Jäger's passage --- she throws a »school bag« [into the air] – book KEMISTRIE will fall on the pavement 9 cm from her left foot”), some obvious blunders or ridiculous nonsense (perturbations in the »Dalj-Erdut basin« : DRAVA = river bed moved 50 m [JW], 1 VI 2012 *Unterstadt* does not exist” or, better yet, Green Field launch ramp 1980-86 a swarm of 12 satellites \* 2086 only 2 active”), and some staggering messages that were perceived as a serious political provocation (this »territory« – BASILEIA – they are Union now [EEC] – 1 VII 2013 : Reagaen”). Completely predictably, those hundreds or thousands of comments could not be attributed solely to enthusiasts from the Technical Culture Centre or to the disappointed and completely perplexed scandal vultures directed there by *The Voice of Slavonia*: by that time, some kind of panic had already overpowered a particularly disadvantaged part of the public due to the unfortunate coincidence of these events with the total solar eclipse of August 11<sup>th</sup>, and for several days any thesis about signs of the apocalypse was taken as a legitimate interpretation, including the idea that the Gallery of Fine Arts in Osijek was a portal through which the Antichrist addresses us personally (the situation certainly got worse when on the actual feast day of the Assumption of Mary a message arrived with the madly repeated syntagm “ü\> format MARIA: oxoo 777”), but the overwhelming majority of the posts were pleas, if not prayers, requests and queries, desperate attempts to press this virtual oracular center, as if it were a local, disembodied, microprocessing version of the Tarabić prophets, for a harbinger of a *personal* medical, romantic, or financial destiny, and get at least a glimmer of hope or perspective, a hint of what is to come.

However, that distant, computer-shaped future did not answer any questions. Given the “instructional” tone of most messages, it was actually extremely strange that the person (or persons, or program) concerned had at the same time avoided any real *communication*. Perhaps the comments on the Gallery's digital walls did not reach *the other side* at all; Ema was under the impression that something was appearing there that we shouldn't have seen, not necessarily some kind of secret, but certainly an internal communication. She couldn't remember their first post, but it was intoned as “how about here?” or “we have contact” or “I receive you,” and in that light everything that followed could be read as a technical test, but no one knew of *what*. Something unknown became visible in that short interval, and then disappeared, that's all.

Namely, it was never revealed who was behind all this. Better connoisseurs of the conceptual art scene of that time were firmly convinced that



the main candidate for the authorship of that anonymous work was Nada Kraljević, an Osijek artist who had recently received the Radoslav Putar prize for her project *49 Lovran Street*: she created a website (still available at [www.tenantcouncil.com](http://www.tenantcouncil.com)) which was designed as a large, well-developed and very active tenant forum of a twelve-story building in the South 2 neighborhood. The building and all the tenants were, of course, completely fictitious, but during the twelve months that the project lasted, Nada gradually expanded a number of topics on a daily basis, writing thousands of posts, carefully emplotting current political issues, finally succeeding, by the grace of her incredible gift for characterization, in creating the impression of a wholly authentic ambience whose credibility was not diminished even by her 'moderator-administrator' metanarrative interventions and *transcommunications*, and in which the main draw for vaguely voyeuristic readers (participation was not possible) was not only the immediate recognizability of the narrated spaces (apartments, elevators, corridors and a worn-out roof, a nearby Konzum supermarket, the park and a children's playground, as well as the façade of the building, whose restoration was the main subject of a yearlong controversy), a whole cast of psychologically completely rounded characters (some of which I still can't get out of my head, although many were only present through clues, and others scattered throughout a large number of usernames), or the endless cycle of their strife over staircase plants, pets, and political pasts (a good part of the discussions was about forgotten OOURs and SIZs),<sup>1</sup> but also a few buried, barely discernable 'genre' storylines that had to be sifted from a mass of completely pragmatic and down-to-earth correspondence and divined from rare and disguised off-topic bits (a bittersweet adolescent love story with a happy ending, narrated only through friends, go-betweens, and quotes from pop music and TV shows; a pseudodetective investigation into an unusual series of apartment burglaries in the northeast wing of the building, exclusively targeting copies of *The Black Obelisk* from the ubiquitous *Selected Works* by E. M. Remarque; indications of a horror scenario in the reluctant allusions of some tenants to *those from the freight elevator* and to a votive stele bearing the figure of Osiris with certain undeciphered hieroglyphs, excavated at the archeological site on which the building was erected). However, Nada had nothing to do with this: she was still engaged in the

1 OOUR (*osnovna organizacija udruženog rada*) – basic organization of associated labor, during the time of self-management in Yugoslavia this was in theory the basic organization of workers to make collective decisions. SIZ (*samoupravna interesna zajednica*) – self-governing community of interest – a legal body involved in managing the implementation of self-management in fields such as education, culture, health, and pensions. Very few people fully understood how these organizations actually functioned. [Translator's note]

preparation of the extended CD-ROM edition of *49 Lovran Street* and was considering turning it into a book, the best Croatian novel of the decade that wasn't meant to be.

In the end, it all culminated during the beginning of fall, perhaps exactly on September 25<sup>th</sup>, when the entire page of the Gallery of Fine Arts in Osijek collapsed for a few hours. A comically urgent search for the administrator began (bearing in mind that at other times the site could have been dead for two weeks and no one would have noticed); by chance, he had picked up a serious infectious intestinal disease while on vacation and had been quarantined for some weeks in Dalmatian backwoods, mostly unconscious, certainly without access to a hospital telephone. That is why, through private channels, they brought in a fantastic programmer who, due to the last of a series of successful "internal transformations," had recently been fired by Croatian Telecom, so the technical malfunction partly disappeared, although the cause of the problem was still unclear: the site was back online, but the forum remained inaccessible, and when it reappeared a day or two later, its entire history was deleted. Ema vividly described the end of the story: it seemed to her that everyone was waiting in front of their screens for the stream of messages from the future to continue, first for several hours, then for several days, and maybe even weeks, but the oracle no longer spoke: the connection was broken, and again, we were left alone.

One evening, after all this had already half-slipped my mind, an email from Ema was waiting for me in my inbox, titled, with a conspiratorial wink, "Image Counter Image." There were only two words in it: "i forgot." The title came from evocations of September 1991 in which we entangled ourselves after the conversation about the Gallery, and in a huge attachment there was supposedly the only remnant of that forum: a series of photos that did not contain any text and which Ema had accidentally saved in a separate directory. I hesitated for a moment because it seemed that I should somehow prepare myself for a direct encounter with these kinds of materials; it was late, after midnight, my building was already drowsing, and the pedestrians were driven away by the wind from the concrete path in the park under the window, leaving only the stereotypical image of a dry and cool autumn: half-naked branches in motion, red leaves, the yellow glare on empty metal benches, solitary squares of light in a building across the park. However, I decided to try right away: like an apotropaion or an apport from another time, I pulled out a heavy, almost spherical, thick-bottomed glass from the kitchen cabinet, similar to 1970s minimalist lamps, which I almost superstitiously used in those crazy, darkest days; like an invocation, I poured an inch of thick, dark-purple juice into it, and almost immediately felt, before returning to the computer, strands of fog beginning to grasp for me, like sheets of

cobwebs that I would take off branches, running my shoulders through the bars of a forgotten coniferous forest.

By an unbelievable coincidence, at the moment I opened the ZIP archive she sent me, the Slobodna Vlast channel was broadcasting *Videostrangers*, an interactive evening webcast whose presenter, after the introduction, which I missed, played Prefab Sprout for someone, and it was 'Couldn't Bear to Be Special.' I don't remember the last time I heard it, but *Swoon* was one of the records that helped me survive the autumn of 1991, and when something resounded in the depth of the mix around the fiftieth second, it always seemed to me that cannon shells were falling on the other side of the city. As if they were following those sonic threads, the photos on my screen flickered like ancient silent films, a night program of its own kind: these spectres, sent from some false, artificial, or future 1991, actually resembled late TV news, dichromatic detonation flashes, perhaps NVD footage from oil wars pulsing between pale yellow and dark green. Something about them immediately reminded me of the washed out, muddy colors of video recordings from the early 90s, as if the tone of the uniforms that imprinted those days on my memory had, by some kind of dry radiation or a dispersion of Morgellons, spread through the night (that night which still prevails) and turned Osijek and the entire Osijek-Baranja County Police Administration into a dream woven out of light and SMB cloth.<sup>2</sup>

All these colorless grains, however, suggested that what they were showing us was not really *footage* of some unknown, perhaps even alien territories, but electronic figurations that had no deeper reality beyond that scintillation on screens. The deeper I dug through them, the more uncomfortable was the impression that these were images that an incomprehensibly advanced civilization or a higher intelligence arranges for its children, like a didactic fairy tale or a touchingly simple puppet show (after a thousand years, *Boulder Dash* and *The Sentinel* came to my mind), in order to explain something entirely else to them: a series of time codes (the dates were not random: 13 09 91, 27 11 91, 15 01 92) was superimposed on scenes which looked like the Moon's surface, and in a network of thin green lines which covered the screen, as in the clumsy exercise of conjuring perspective by primitive graphic programs, you could catch glimpses of silhouettes in protective outfits and space-suits, incomprehensibly shaped machines, highly developed unmanned industrial plants, star maps on which no known constellations could be found. At that moment it really felt like I had collapsed into something:

2 "SMB" stands for *sivo-maslinasta boja* or a grey-olive color. This was the color of the camouflage used by the Yugoslav People's Army. The color was considered to be quite bland and was used in a derogatory fashion to denote things of an unattractive hue (such as overcooked peas). [Translator's note]

gastrointestinal tremors, folding and stretching of time, some other space, everything I had already mentioned. There was nothing around me anymore, just the lacuna of those late hours – a black and bare midnight scaffolding, an industrial skeleton similar to an oil refinery where, apart from the robotic, almost dance-like rhythm of the electric bodies working in it, I could not even imagine some behind-the-scenes phantom, maybe just a lone reptile – but it didn't last long, that was the end, the moment of recognition had passed: Spandau Ballet's "Fight for Ourselves" was already coming through the speakers.

\* \* \*

No one can coherently interpret events of this kind, especially to prove that some of them are actually initiated from the future, but it is surprisingly difficult to get rid of the thrust of causality: every gram of substance that exists at this moment necessarily represents a germ, a projection of something that, over time, becomes the future. After everything disappeared, everyone came to their own conclusions. I imagined the texts that Ema was telling me about, searched the internet for something that looked similar, bought old magazines like *My Micro*, *Computer World* and *Home Computers*, and tuned in, like a receiver, to that tone, to something scant and mechanical, like a bad machine translation, to that monotony that creates a mesmerizing visual network, a tapestry in which, as through a series of optical illusions, a spectral, non-existent, impossible, and quite *tangible* world had become increasingly clear. I began to think about how my book might look a little different: I gave up on long descriptions and dreamy monologues, on art nouveau ornamentation and family trees that I had spent the past two years untangling under the working title of *Goat Blood*; it was too late to stop publishing the passages I had already handed over to *Travels in Nihilon*, a luxurious, multilingual magazine for dystopian art from Vojvodina, but after four issues it shut down and disappeared, and I turned a new page.

Somewhere in the middle of a dead stretch of summer 2014, the Gallery was quietly renamed the Museum of Fine Arts. I still wince every time I walk past that sign on European Avenue. As early as the fall of that year, *The Voice of Slavonia* announced that The John Justice Wheeler Foundation of Providence had signed a two-year co-financing project with the Museum that would more intensively open up contemporary scientific research to the possibilities of its artistic representation. The first of these, the "necroposting" concept titled *CSNET Hex Dump. Automated Thread Retrieval*, will actually be realized as a semi-annual artistic residency at the Jodrell Bank Observatory, which will be awarded to Nada Kraljević. Shortly afterwards, something else happened: after years of exhausting

hassles with the Rectorate and numerous overrides on various council meetings, the Faculty of Electrical Engineering finally and officially changed its name to the Evangelical Theological Seminary. The new dean of that new ETS, Monsignor Celestin Klasanović, welcomed the first generation of students in the spectacular conference hall of the newly built library with a galvanizing speech about the so-called *Horizon 2020* (subsequently published in his book *Final Commands* under the title 'PRINT  $\Omega$ : On Digital Christogenesis'). In his opinion, this renaming was crucial in constructing the regional partitions of the noosphere: a certain future sometimes truly communicates randomly with us, but the ultimate home of all cybernetic currents will only be found at that atemporal and nonlocal point from which everything is seen, and such an omniscience is first of all the question of fiber-optic cables. His closing words were greeted with a standing ovation: 'The Messiah may be a machine, and we must build it, just as God is that which does not yet exist, but might emerge at some point in the future.'

English translation by Brian Willems

# Rete

Ema Pichler, 1991

Oggi è ormai una confortevole teoria, il pensiero di casa: qualcosa che non ha fine, orlo, né centro, qualcosa che ricorda un cruciverba vuoto o una grata che si stende in uno spazio buio e indefinito, come una navicella interstellare nel vuoto, da dove discende verso le sfere più basse, il mondo materiale e il tempo, ma a rate comode e discrete, riversamenti casuali, mere intuizioni dell'*insieme* che è scritto in un mezzo più sottile. E se la mia posizione, così simile al tronco di una statua romana nel lapidario di un museo di provincia, circondato da cocci affini e da tracce di una civiltà assente, da uno stormo di fenomeni fratelli nelle dimenticate efemeridi, fosse in realtà molto più complessa? E se ognuno di noi non esistesse soltanto in un sistema, ma fosse parte di una serie di altri sistemi, di tutta una serie di reti parallele che, a strati fini, fragili al punto da non poter essere toccate, si stendono sotto e sopra la nostra, all'infinito? Tutte queste reti incorporee dovrebbero operare in simultanea usando lo stesso materiale, perché non esiste null'altro, non c'è *altro mondo oltre a questo*. In un universo del genere sarebbe senza senso pensare all'esistenza di altre versioni' di me che, chissà dove, chissà quando, vivono altre vite; bisognerebbe chiedersi: cos'è che in questo preciso istante opera su di me e mi usa senza che io lo sappia; in quali mondi, *qui e ora*, si trova il mio corpo, questo corpo, l'unico che ho?

\* \* \*

Ogni autunno, già alla fine di settembre, verso il mio compleanno, mi si ripresentano i problemi psicosomatici: problemi di digestione più o meno gravi a cui, dopo quasi cinquant'anni, non ho ancora trovato una diagnosi. L'unica miglioria in quell'altrimenti del tutto ripetitivo sentimento di putrefazione, potenzialmente fatale, la vedo, e in tempi recenti in maniera più forte, nell'interpretazione: col passare degli anni quel *disturbo* nel canale di comunicazione tra me e il mondo somiglia sempre meno a un semplice rumore, e sempre di più a un'*interferenza*, all'infiltrazione del messaggio da un trasmettitore ignoto, all'eco di una vita vicina. L'intenso sentimento di possessione, che accompagna sempre quelle settimane, mi è sempre più difficile da contenere nei limiti del sostenibile: come se, assieme al cibo semidigerito e le membrane dei miei organi, si decomponesse pian piano anche il tempo che li tiene insieme. Ritornano i momenti dimenticati e gli ambienti, sogni arcani e sogni ad occhi aperti, e poi tutte le immagini indecifrabili che non sono



più in grado di mettere in relazione con le mie esperienze, le fotografie mentali che mi ha inoltrato qualcuno sconosciuto; *ricordo* i dettagli più piccoli della permanenza in un corpo del tutto estraneo, mondo e tempo, ma la reazione intuitiva che quei materiali eterogenei causano è esattamente opposta alla prevedibile avversione: tutto ciò è *mio*. Negli ultimi anni a queste ricordanze o anticipazioni s'intreccia nella misura sempre maggiore sovente anche una specie di settembre o ottobre 1991 anche se forse le date non hanno importanza (conosco un uomo a cui questo ponte verso le aree esterne si apre col *giungo* del 1991); inoltre, esistono delle giustificazioni numeriche molto solide per la mia supposizione circa l'equivalenza tra *l'aprile* e l'ottobre 1991, non tanto di calendario quanto più prossima ad un'opposizione astrologica tra di essi, quasi si trattasse dell'equilibrio, non chiaro, ma stabile, dei poli dell'anno siderale. Sempre lo stesso: vedo l'acqua fredda, grigia e rosa; qualche fiocco di neve o rado nevischio che vi cade dentro; una scacchiera nel mezzo della partita sui cui, attraverso la finestra che qualcuno ha dimenticato di chiudere, scendono le foglie portate da vento, secche e rossicce; i contorni di un corpo umano riempiti di oscurità e di stelle.

Vorrei, però, dire qualcosa sul momento in cui tale sentimento mi ha colto completamente fuori dal tempo, innescato da cause di natura meramente tecnica. Un po' a sorpresa, un mattino di novembre 2011 mi telefonò Ema Pilcher, membro di vecchia data della squadra dei curatori della Galleria delle Belle Arti di Osijek; ci conosciamo da quasi trent'anni, ma senza mai essere realmente vicini; di conseguenza non ero sorpreso che mi chiamasse a proposito dei testi che scrivo e non per motivi personali. La vera sorpresa c'è, però, stata quando ho capito che non si trattava di una possibile collaborazione, né delle mie fabbricazioni già pubblicate sulla Galleria: aveva sentito che stavo scrivendo il seguito' del mio primo romanzo, la storia di due sorelle che vivono in un futuro prossimo e che comunicano con qualcuno da un canale temporale diverso. Senza entrare nei dettagli mi disse che mi avrebbe chiamato dalla Cartoleria appena sarebbe riuscita a ritagliarsi qualche ora di tempo libero e il telefono squillò davvero già nel pomeriggio del giorno dopo mentre guardavo dalla finestra, nel vuoto, stordito ai giochi delle macchie solari tra le fronde delle betulle e dal vociare lontano dei bambini e dei cani. L'edificio da cui mi chiamava (da una linea privata), e che quel enigmatico nome lo doveva alle di lei assistenti, non apparteneva alla Galleria in senso stretto ma nonostante il fatto che non avesse una funzione ben definita, non credo di essermi del tutto inventato l'aura di mistero che l'avvolge: la sua posizione esatta è ignota a tutt'oggi; ammesso che si tratta poi di un luogo solo (da sempre ho creduto, non so perché, che fosse dislocato rispetto all'abitato, forse persino nascosto da qualche parte nella periferia sudovest o nei campi al di là della Drava). Stavano

già emergendo, nel cielo, le prime stelle ed Ema stava ancora parlando, prendendosi delle pause soltanto per accendersi un'altra sigaretta e io mi segnavo tutto quel che potevo, appunti più che altro; preparando questo testo ho ampliato quegli appunti con le ricerche più o meno vane delle tracce trascurabili nella rete alla ricerca del caso che, nel suo periodo più caldo, nell'agosto del 1999, si era persino meritato lo spazio sulle colonne de *La voce della Slavonia* con l'articolo intitolato Gli hackers attaccano la Galleria' e sottotitolato Annunciata la demolizione della Città Bassa – Minacce ai lobbisti croati a Bruxelles'.

La Galleria a quei tempi, pro forma, sulla sua pagina web ufficiale aveva un forum: vi venivano affissi degli annunci a cui nessuno rispondeva, si annunciavano programmi, ospitate e conferenze (nonostante il fatto che i link agli stessi si trovavano anche nel menù nella home) e qua e là comparivano anche i commenti a qualche mostra, per lo più sotto forma di pigri luoghi comuni (grazie. esperienza bellissima, siete stupendi' e simili). Mi divertivano di più i rari post di natura critica, aggressivi o di minaccia. Ricordo che in quegli anni un'oscura associazione cattolica, Larvatus, che nel frattempo si è sciolta generando in seguito delle metastasi in forma di enti attivi al livello nazionale, perdeva tempo dando noia ai curatori della Galleria ogni volta che il programma si discostasse dalla pittura paesaggistica, dalla ritrattistica o da altre forme tradizionali; non avevo sempre la pazienza di leggere le loro richieste lunghe ed analfabete, ma rammento una triste protesta di questa sedicente iniziativa civile' in cui - dopo l'annuncio della tre giorni di festival di *body art* internazionale che doveva tenersi nella Galleria - un autobus venuto da una non meglio precisata direzione scaricò sul viale Europa un gruppo sparuto di vecchiette moleste che per alcune ore a seguire avrebbero vagato in giro facendo mostra di striscioni contro il diritto all'aborto, rosari e striscioni con la scritta IL VOSTRO CORPO NON È SOLO VOSTRO'. Non riesco a figurarmi nessuno che in quegli anni seguisse regolarmente il forum: avevo l'impressione che tutto quello spazio fosse il tipico cimitero digitale di un ente statale che - come in un rituale negromantico - stesse simulando comunicazione con i suoi muti, defunti, utenti; tutto veniva aggiornato troppo tardi, tutto era ridondante, tutto giaceva mesto e vuoto, grosso modo come la Galleria stessa, almeno durante certi mandati.

A un certo punto, all'interno del topic sulla parte del programma dell'Estate dei giovani di Osijek, che quell'anno si teneva presso la Galleria, avevano iniziato ad apparire dei messaggi assolutamente atipici, quasi illeggibili firmati con il nome utente aquaTarkus; l'amministratore di allora non sapeva nulla di Emerson e probabilmente, cosa del tutto comprensibile, credeva che si trattasse di un virus. I messaggi, però, apparivano a intervalli perfettamente regolari di 240 minuti ciascuno ma con date sbagliate: sotto il quadrato vuoto, privo di avatar, erano scritte

le date tra il 13 settembre e il 26 ottobre 1991 e uno dei primi post recitava QUESTO MUSEO – ADESSO- 11 III 1991'; inoltre, i post davano l'impressione di essere stati generati automaticamente, senza l'intenzione consapevole di qualcuno: in quel caos di segni giusto qua e là e non senza fatica si riusciva ad individuare un senso, come se un qualche programma avesse sbriciolato e poi mischiato i pezzi di documenti diversi o sequenze di simboli generati a caso per poi comprimerli in blocco di testo senza spazi. Trovo particolarmente inspiegabile il fatto che si trattasse di file grafici: una stampa che ricordava il font di ZX Spectrum, stampata con la vecchia stampante ad aghi, era stata fotografata male o scansionata e caricata sul forum come *immagine*, ma in quel momento a tutto questo non veniva prestata molta attenzione; insieme al resto dell'immondizia internetica, slogan nazionalisti e pubblicità, tutti i messaggi di quel tipo venivano di norma rimossi. Verso metà luglio, dopo aver chiuso gli ultimi impegni della stagione in corso, erano andati tutti in ferie; Ema aveva spento il cellulare aziendale ed era partita, se ricordo bene, per l'Italia o la Grecia. Era ritornata a Osijek il 20 agosto, aveva disfatto le valigie e acceso il computer che allora, assieme all'intero mondo virtuale, poteva ancora, ogni estate, lasciarsi dietro; per pura inerzia, dopo aver controllato la posta, era andata anche sulla pagina della Galleria e niente poteva prepararla a quello che l'aspettava lì.

Sul forum, col titolo di LET PROpls=84\*IX', era stato creato un topic che in quel momento contava oltre 4000 post. Centinaia di curiosi e una quindicina di visitatori abituali e analisti' sciamavano attorno alla sequenza centrale di messaggi incomprensibili e recanti la data sbagliata; erano molto simili a quelli apparsi a fine primavera, solo che ora, oltre che dal nick aquaTarkus' venivano firmati anche da zeitstrom' e 2109via1991' (anche se tra di essi non era possibile distinguere, come se fossero stati veramente generati dalle macchine e non esseri viventi). Ema è del tutto immune all'affettazione e all'ingrandimento retorico delle cose, una pandemia molto diffusa tra i nostri colleghi, ma mi disse, dopo una pausa drammatica che al telefono sembrava acquisire una lunghezza preoccupante, di aver subito, all'istante, ancor prima di esser riuscita a studiare e ad analizzare ciò che aveva visto, avuto subito la certezza che tutto ciò venisse da un altro luogo', da un altro tempo'. Non erano solo le date: menzionò due nomi che a me suonavano assolutamente esotici – ARPANET i CYCLADES – cercando di illustrarmi qualcosa di antico, preinternetico nella forma di quei post e io ho veramente scovato, dopo aver scritto la prima versione di questo testo, nel gruppo Facebook degli studenti della facoltà di Elettrotecnica, una discussione circa il fatto che tutto quanto potesse essere il risultato della connessione di un software RNG con i materiali dei processori da 8-bit morti da tempo e appartenuti a chissà chi. (In maniera del tutto prevedibile, in altre sedi gli stessi elettrotecnici',

che cercavano semplicemente di sistematizzare le soluzioni possibili, venivano indicati come i responsabili dell'intero caso, l'equivalente del disturbo della quiete pubblica, in rete).

L'interesse per tutta questa faccenda si sarebbe fermato al livello di curiosità tecnologica se il contenuto dei post fosse banale o trascurabile, ma già al primo sguardo era chiaro che quelle decine di testi, scritti sulle pareti del Museo' (i mittenti il forum lo chiamavano così), erano composte da elementi inconciliabili tra loro. I bizzarri, non di rado poliglotti, messaggi erano dominati da un tono e un vocabolario quasi religiosi anche se riesce difficile immaginare il culto a cui i predicatori simili potrebbero appartenere: oltre ai nuovi e all'apparenza tecnici termini (*weltignes*, luminokorpus, ὁλογραφικών) vi si lasciavano intravedere le tracce di una teoria (l'informazione viaggia più VELOCEMENTE DELLA LUCE [indietro]) o i segni di un dogma (imprigionati nell'ambra-adesso/qui – CHISSADOVECHISSAQUANDO- tempo non tempo – 3 strati [scorre + passa] 4 strati [sopra vive]), o anche delle fosche suggestioni etiche (NOI SIAMO GEMELLI'). A seguito di un impercettibile cambiamento di prospettiva, però, molte delle frasi perdevano la loro dimensione allegorica e dall'incerta parabola si trasformavano in una serie di specificazioni tecniche, del tutto concrete e precise. Ema disse che l'aveva scoperto una ragazza geniale del liceo linguistico (faceva finta di non ricordarne il nome): la maggior parte dei post conteneva delle *istruzioni* ma era proprio quello che faceva scattare l'enigma. Là dentro erano combinate delle normative strettamente legate al campo dell'ingegneria (la densità di determinate leghe, la porosità delle fibre al diossido di silicio, calcoli statistici legati alle strutture portanti e i piani sotterranei di un complesso edile) e i frammenti di un qualcosa che ricordava un *software* (che in alcuni punti, in maniera del tutto surreale, chiamavano CHARDIN, anche se non era dato capire se si trattasse del di un determinato *programma* oppure di un determinato linguaggio di *programmazione*) ma un'interpretazione più profonda veniva resa difficoltosa da alcuni punti folli: si insisteva sulla costruzione di un oggetto di dimensioni ridotte fatto di placchette d'acciaio, molle e di lamine che andava fissato con le viti su una determinata parete di un edificio in via Radić di modo che l'intera trasmissione potesse iniziare. Era possibile discernere qualcosa in questa rete d'informazioni che Ema riversava nella cornetta ma non riuscivo a capire tutto, né tantomeno a ricordarlo, per cui il quadro generale si ostinava a sfuggirmi; dal punto di vista matematico e tecnico sono del tutto analfabeta, la ricostruzione di questa parte della storia mi ha causato delle difficoltà incredibili ma credo che a nessuno sarebbe stato chiaro se in fondo bisognasse far partire un programma, sollevare un oggetto o fare una cosa in funzione dell'altra come scopo finale.

Ema, intanto, mentre i riflettori del pomeriggio si spegnevano sulle

facciate degli edifici circostanti, passava sempre più velocemente su quei dettagli magici per arrivare a quello che, quell'estate, davvero aveva destato l'interesse in un numero di persone che solitamente non nutrivano alcun interesse per cose simili. Dapprima in maniera del tutto neutrale, ma con l'aumento dell'interesse dei lettori in maniera sempre più ambigua, persino manipolatrice, qualcuno dall'altra parte aveva iniziato a servire informazioni che potevano intendersi come previsioni, se non come convinte asserzioni circa le istituzioni, dispositivi o eventi che ancora dovevano realizzarsi, sul futuro che, dal punto d'osservazione in cui evidentemente si trovavano gli emittenti, dava l'impressione d'essere una serie di eventi che furono. In alcuni punti si trattava di particelle non verificate di realtà (quell'attimo 15 VI: primo sentore di pioggia 12:46 il passaggio di Jäger - - - lei che lancia lo zaino di scuola' [in aria] - libro Chimika cadrà sul marciapiede a 9 cm dal piede sinistro'), altrove di evidenti cantonate o di stupidaggini ridicole (perturbazioni nel «bacino dalico-erdutico»: Drava = alveo spostato 50 m [JW], 1 VI 2012 non esiste l'*Unterstadt*' o, ancora meglio, rampa di lancio Campo verde 1980-86 sciame 12 satelliti \* 2086 attivi soltanto due') e in altri punti ancora di dichiarazioni stupefacenti che all'epoca venivano percepiti come gravi provocazioni politiche (questo «territorio» - BASILEA - adesso sono Unione [EEZ] - 1 VII 2013: Raegen'). In maniera del tutto prevedibile, quelle centinaia o migliaia di commenti non potevano essere attribuiti soltanto agli entusiasti della Casa della tecnica né tantomeno ai delusi e completamente confusi avvoltoi degli scandali che aveva trascinato lì *La voce della Slavonia*: fino a quel momento, anche se in una parte particolarmente deprivata dell'opinione pubblica, era già iniziato il panico per via dell'infelice coincidenza che questi eventi presentavano con la totale eclissi solare dell'11 agosto facendo guadagnare peso, per alcuni giorni, come interpretazione del tutto legittima, anche alla tesi del segno dell'Apocalisse, della Galleria delle Belle Arti di Osijek come di un portale attraverso cui ci parla l'Anticristo in persona (la situazione non trasse giovamento dal fatto che proprio il giorno della Festa della Madonna apparve il messaggio che ripeteva forsennatamente il sintagma ü: /format MARIA: oxooo777'); la stragrande maggioranza dei post, però, consisteva nelle richieste se non delle vere e proprie preghiere, domande e quesiti, tentativi disperati di avere qualche segno da questo centro oracolare virtuale, come se fosse un Tarabić locale, incorporato e microprocessuale, su questo o di quello, *privato*, medico, amoroso o finanziario destino, e di avere almeno un barlume di speranza o di prospettiva, il sentore di quello che sarebbe stato.

Quel lontano futuro, plasmato dai calcolatori, non forniva risposte. Considerando il tono istruzionale' della maggior parte dei messaggi risulta in verità particolarmente strano che la persona in questione (o



le persone o il programma) in contempo rifuggisse da qualunque *comunicazione* reale. Forse i commenti sulle pareti digitali della Galleria non arrivavano neanche all'*altro lato*; Ema aveva l'impressione che lì si era manifestato qualcosa che non dovevamo vedere, non necessariamente un segreto, ma quasi certamente comunicazione interna. Non riusciva a ricordare il primo post loro ma era qualcosa del tipo 'si può?' oppure 'siamo in contatto' oppure 'ti ricevo' e in questa luce tutto quello che era seguito poteva leggersi come un testo tecnico ma nessuno sapeva su cosa. Qualcosa di ignoto, in quel breve intervallo, era divenuto visibile, e poi era scomparso, tutto qui.

Non si seppe mai chi ci fosse dietro tutto ciò. Tra i migliori conoscitori della scena concettuale di quei tempi s'era diffusa la convinzione che la candidata principale per essere autrice di quell'opera anonima era Nada Kraljevic, un'artista di Osijek che aveva appena vinto il premio Radoslav Putar per il suo progetto Lovranska 49: aveva creato una pagina web (ancora oggi visibile su [www.kucni-savjet.hr](http://www.kucni-savjet.hr)) sotto la forma di un forum, grande, ben sviluppato e molto attivo, degli inquilini di uno stabile da dodici piani a Sud 2. Lo stabile e tutti gli inquilini erano, chiaramente, del tutto inventati, ma Nada era riuscita, per dodici mesi, tanto era durato il progetto, attraverso lo srotolarsi graduale e quotidiano di una moltitudine di argomenti, scrivendo migliaia di post, intessendo temi d'attualità politica e grazie a un dono incredibile per la caratterizzazione, a dare l'impressione di un ambiente autentico al cento per cento la cui credibilità non veniva minata neanche dai suoi interventi metanarrativi di moderatrice-amministratrice' o di transcomunicazione, in cui l'esca principale ai lettori un po' voyeuristici (la partecipazione non era possibile) non era rappresentata soltanto dalla diretta riconoscibilità degli spazi di cui si parlava (appartamenti, ascensori, corridoi e il tetto malandato, il vicino supermercato, parco e l'area giochi per bambini come anche la facciata dell'edificio la cui ristrutturazione era l'argomento principale della polemica durata un anno), come neanche l'intero bosco di personaggi a tutto tondo dal punto di vista psicologico (alcuni dei quali non riesco ancora a levarmeli dalla testa anche se erano presenti soltanto attraverso gli indizi, mentre altri erano dispersi tra più utenti), e neanche il ciclo infinito delle loro beghe riguardanti le piante nel vano scala, gli animali domestici o il passato politico (una buona parte delle discussioni riguardava gli OOUR dimenticati e i SIZ), quanto piuttosto qualche sepolta trama di genere' che dovevano filtrare dalla massa di messaggi di natura del tutto pragmatica e terrena, da decifrare dalle rare e celate briciole off-topic (un'agrodolce storia d'amore tra adolescenti a lieto fine, narrata esclusivamente per interposta persona, amici e amiche e citazioni dalla musica popolare e dalle serie tv; un'investigazione da pseudo detective riguardante la serie di svaligiamenti di case nell'ala



nordest dell'edificio, in cui venivano sottratte soltanto le copie dell'Obelisco nero dalle onnipresenti Opere scelte di Remarque; elementi horror nelle reticenti allusioni di alcuni inquilini a quelli del montacarichi e alla stele votiva raffigurante Osiride con geroglifici indecifrabili, rinvenuta nel sito archeologico su cui era stato eretto l'edificio). Nada, però, non aveva nulla a che fare con tutto ciò: era ancora impegnata a curare l'edizione aggiornata in CD-ROM di Lovranska 49 e riflettere sulla sua trasformazione in libro, il mancato romanzo croato del decennio.

Alla fine la situazione ha raggiunto l'apice a inizio autunno, forse proprio il 25 settembre quando, per alcune ore, l'intera pagina della Galleria delle Belle Arti di Osijek era venuta giù. Ebbe inizio la ricerca, tanto urgente da diventare comica, dell'amministratore (se si tiene presente che in altri momenti la pagina poteva restarsene morta anche per due settimane senza che nessuno se ne accorgesse); per puro caso questi si era beccato la forma grave di un virus intestinale durante le ferie ed era da settimane imprigionato in una località sperduta della Dalmazia, per lo più incosciente, ma soprattutto senza l'accesso al telefono dell'ospedale. Per via privata avevano così fatto venire un programmatore fantastico che in seguito all'ultima delle tante e riuscitissime trasformazioni interne' era stato licenziato dalla Telecom croata e così il problema tecnico era stato in parte rimosso anche se la sua causa era ancora poco chiara; la pagina era ritornata in rete, ma il forum era rimasto inaccessibile e quando, un giorno, forse due, più tardi era riapparso anch'esso l'intera storia era stata cancellata. Ema mi ha raccontato quel finale della storia in maniera vivida: aveva la sensazione che tutti se ne stessero davanti ai monitor in attesa che il flusso di messaggi dal futuro continuasse, prima per alcune ore, poi giorni e forse anche per settimane ma l'oracolo non dava più segni di vita: la linea era caduta, eravamo di nuovo soli.

Avevo ormai quasi rimosso l'intera faccenda quando una sera nella casella della posta in arrivo trovai una *mail* di Emma, recante il titolo dal tono cospiratorio Immagine contro immagine'. Dentro c'era soltanto una parola: dimenticato'. Il titolo le veniva dai ricordi di settembre 1991 in cui c'eravamo impigliati dopo la conversazione sulla Galleria e in allegato c'era tutto quello che era rimasto da quel forum: una serie di fotografie senza testo e che Ema per puro caso aveva salvato in una directory diversa. Per un attimo ho tentennato perché mi sembrava che bisognerebbe in qualche modo prepararsi per il contatto diretto con materiali simili; era tardi, mezzanotte passata, il mio palazzo sonnecchiava già e il vento aveva cacciato via gli ultimi pedoni dalla passeggiata in cemento nel parco sotto la finestra lasciando soltanto l'immagine stereotipata dell'autunno secco e fresco: i rami seminudi in movimento, le foglie rossicce, il riflesso giallo dell'illuminazione pubblica sulle panchine di metallo vuote, i solitari quadrati gialli di luce nell'edificio dall'altra parte del parco. Decisi

comunque di aprirlo subito. Dall'armadietto della cucina, come se fosse un oggetto apotropaico o residuo d'un altro tempo, presi il pesante, quasi sferico bicchiere di vetro dal fondo spesso, simile alle lampade minimaliste degli anni '70, che usavo in maniera quasi superstiziosa in quelle folli giornate, le più oscure; quasi fosse un'invocazione mi sono versato qualche centimetro di succo viola scuro sentendo quasi immediatamente, prima ancora di ritornare al computer, una nebbia sfilacciata che mi si attaccava addosso, come lenzuola di ragnatela che levo dai rami facendomi strada a spallate tra le grate di un obliato bosco di conifere.

Per puro e incredibile caso nel momento in cui aprii l'archivio zip che lei mi aveva mandato, nel programma *Il potere libero* davano i *Videostranieri*, il web cast interattivo da nottambuli la cui conduttrice, dopo l'introduzione che mi ero perso, stava passando per qualcuno Prefab Sprout, e per giunta Couldn't Bear To Be Special. Non ricordo l'ultima volta che l'ho sentita, ma *Swoon* era uno dei dischi con cui sono sopravvissuto all'autunno 1991, ed ho sempre avuto l'impressione, quando verso il cinquantesimo secondo qualcosa riecheggiava nel profondo del missaggio, che le granate pioveressero sull'altra parte della città. Come se seguissero quei fili sonori, le fotografie sul monitor davanti a me vibravano come vecchi film muti o un programma notturno di un particolare tipo: quei fantasmi, inviati da un finto, artificiale o futuro 1991 somigliavano comunque ai telegiornali in terza serata, ai lampi bicolori delle detonazioni, fors'anche alle registrazioni NVG delle guerre per il petrolio che pulsano tra il giallo pallido e verde scuro. Qualcosa in essi mi ha fatto subito venire in mente gli slavati, fangosi colori delle videoregistrazioni degli inizi degli anni novanta come se il tono delle uniformi per cui ricordo quei giorni come una secca radiazione, con la dispersione dei morgellons si fosse sparso nella notte (quella notte che dura ancora) trasformando Osijek e tutta la prefettura della regione di Osijek-Baranja in un sogno intessuto di luce e del panno militare grigio-olivastro.

Tutti quei grani grigi davano comunque a intendere che quello che rappresentano in realtà non sono *registrazioni* di territori ignoti, stranieri quanto piuttosto delle figurazioni elettroniche a cui non si accompagna affatto una realtà più profonda oltre a quello scintillio sui monitor. Più vi scavavo dentro, più cresceva il disagio dell'impressione che si trattasse d'immagini che una civiltà inconcepibilmente più avanzata o un'intelligenza superiore, come una favola didattica, teatro di marionette tanto semplice da essere toccante (dopo mille anni mi vennero in mente *Boulder Dash* e *The Sentinel*) mette in scena per gli infanti per spiegare loro qualcosa di completamente differente: una serie di codici temporali (le date non erano casuali: 13 09 91, 27 11 91, 15 01 92) era sovrimpressa a scene simili a quelle della superficie lunare, e nella rete di sottili linee verdi che coprivano lo schermo, come in un goffo esercizio di prospettiva nei

programmi di grafica primitivi, s'intravedevano sagome in abiti protettivi e scafandri, macchinari dalle forme incomprensibili, stabilimenti industriali molto avanzati senza la presenza di esseri umani, mappe del cielo stellato che non contenevano costellazioni note. In quel momento mi era parso veramente che fossi sprofondato da qualche parte: il tremore gastro-intestinale, il corrugamento del tempo e il suo tendersi, un altro spazio, tutto quanto ho già detto. Attorno a me non c'era più niente, soltanto la lacuna di quell'ora tarda – nera e nuda impalcatura della mezzanotte, lo scheletro industriale simile a una raffineria di petrolio dove, a parte quello robotico dei corpi elettrici che vi lavorano, che è un ritmo quasi da ballarci su, non riesco ad immaginare neanche un fantasma dietro le quinte, forse soltanto un rettile solitario – ma non è durata tanto, era la fine, il momento del riconoscimento era passato: dalle casse venivano già le note di *Fight For Ourselves'* degli Spandau Ballet.

\* \* \*

Nessuno può spiegare in maniera sensata gli accadimenti del genere, specie dimostrare che qualunque parte di essi venga veramente iniziata dai tempi futuri, ma è stranamente difficile sbarazzarsi della spinta della causalità: ogni grammo di materia che esiste in questo momento rappresenta necessariamente il germoglio, la proiezione di qualcosa che, col tempo, diventerà futuro. Dopo che tutto è scomparso, ognuno ha tratto le proprie conclusioni. Io immaginavo i testi di cui mi aveva parlato Ema, cercavo in rete qualcosa che vi somigliasse, compravo i vecchi numeri delle riviste *Il mio micro*, *Il mondo dei computer*, *I computers*, e mi sintonizzavo, come un ricevitore, su quel tono, qualcosa di scarno e di meccanico, simile ad una cattiva traduzione automatica, sulla monotonia che crea una rete visuale che stordisce, una tappezzeria in cui come in una sequenza di illusioni ottiche si intravedeva lo spettrale, l'inesistente, l'impossibile, del tutto *palpabile* mondo. Ho iniziato a pensare che il mio libro potesse avere un aspetto un po' diverso: ho rinunciato a descrizioni lunghe e i monologhi trasognati, a ornamenti in stile secessione e ad alberi genealogici che andavo decifrando negli ultimi due anni sotto il titolo provvisorio *Il sangue di capra*; era troppo tardi per fermare la pubblicazione dei brani che avevo già consegnato a una lussuosa rivista plurilingue della Vojvodina che si occupava di arte distopica, *Travels In Nihilion*, ma la rivista dopo quattro numeri si era spenta ed era sparita e io ho girato una pagina nuova.

Da qualche parte nel mezzo di una tappa morta dell'estate 2014, la Galleria venne silenziosamente ribattezzata in Museo d'arte moderna. Ancora oggi provo un sussulto ogni volta che passo accanto a quella scritta sul viale Europa. Già nell'autunno dello stesso anno *La voce della*

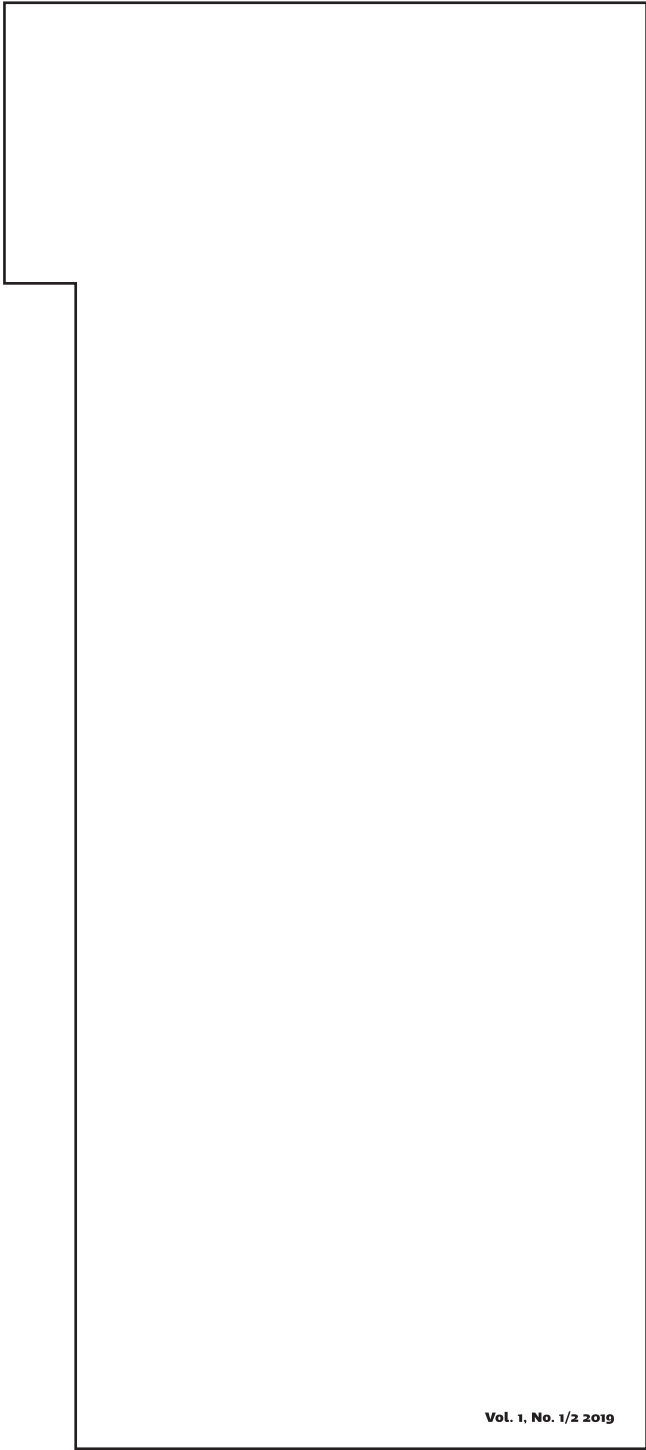
*Slavonia* ha pubblicato una notizia secondo cui The John Justice Wheeler Foundation da Providence stava firmando un contratto biennale con il Museo per cofinanziare progetti che avrebbero garantito un'apertura più intensa a ricerche moderne e alle loro rappresentazioni artistiche. Il primo di essi, il concetto necropostale' *CSNET Hex Dump. Automated Thread Retrieval*, verrà in realtà realizzato sotto forma di una residenza artistica semestrale presso l'osservatorio Jordell Bank, e verrà assegnata a Nada Kraljević.

Non molto dopo successe un'altra cosa: dopo il pluriennale ed estenuante tira e molla con i Rettorato nonché numerosi ballottaggi nelle votazioni dei consigli vari, la Facoltà di Elettrotecnica ebbe finalmente ed ufficialmente cambiato il nome in Facoltà Evangelica e Teologica. Il nuovo preside dell'FET, il monsignor Celestin Klasanović, diede il suo indirizzo di saluto nella spettacolare aula magna dell'appena costruita biblioteca davanti alla prima generazione di studenti con un discorso galvanizzante sul cosiddetto *Orizzonte 2020* (successivamente pubblicato anche nel suo libro *Gli ultimi ordini* con il titolo PRINT Ω: della cristogenesi digitale'). A suo parere il cambio di nome aveva un significato cruciale nella costruzione delle partizioni regionali della noosfera: certe parti del futuro a volte comunicano davvero con noi, a ondate, ma l'approdo finale di tutte le correnti cibernetiche sarà rappresentato soltanto dal punto atemporale e de localizzato da cui si vede tutto e un tale livello d'onniscienza è prima di tutto questione di fibre ottiche. Le parole finali vennero accompagnate dalle ovazioni: Il Messia forse sarà una macchina e noi dobbiamo costruirla, alla stregua di Dio che è qualcosa che ancora non esiste ma un giorno potrebbe essere'.

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Reviews





# **Luis Prádanos.**

## ***Postgrowth Imaginaries: New Ecologies and Counterhegemonic Culture in Post-2008 Spain.***

**Liverpool University Press, 2018.**

**ISBN 978-1-786-94134-3. 240 pages. £25.00**

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*Postgrowth Imaginaries* is the first monograph published by dr. Luis Iñaki Prádanos-García, Associate Professor of Spanish and Portuguese Studies at the University of Miami. Prádanos regularly writes in scholarly and media outlets on the subjects of degrowth, postgrowth, and associated posthumanist and decolonial pedagogies in the Anthropocene. This monograph synthesizes and develops on some of the ideas presented in his earlier scholarly pieces.

The book is best placed in 'green cultural studies' as it is methodologically grounded in environmental cultural studies on the one hand, and in the degrowth theory on the other. These two pillars intertwine in inspecting Spanish contemporary narratives, movements and art practices since the onset of the economic crisis (2008) and austerity measures greatly felt in the Iberian Peninsula. The cultural manifestations discussed in the book encompass fiction and nonfiction writing, films, TV shows, social movements, art collectives and practices, newspaper articles, graffiti, as well as comic books and cartoons.

The layered interrelations of economic paradigm, cultural practices, and ecological degradation are presented clearly at local, national, and global scales, while Prádanos develops his arguments affectively, directly and boldly. Though this writing style is refreshing in the context of the wider academic field, the so-called academic activism is less uncommon in environmental humanities, especially green cultural studies or ecolinguistics.

On the whole, *Postgrowth Imaginaries* is an accomplished and provocative book which traverses the diverse fields of the humanities, political

science, and economics while its writing remains accessible and easy to follow. This advantageous characteristic reminiscent of (good) environmental journalism enables novice readers to fully grasp the premises and arguments that the author makes (despite Prádanos using a wide breath of English and Spanish language bibliography), though some academics might find the book's directness or slight repetitiveness less appealing. However, *Postgrowth Imaginaries* is in for a radical critique of the status quo imaginary, in order to be able to imagine, narrate and manifest a more equitable, ecological worldview. Prádanos both critiques the hegemonic growth-oriented socioecological logic, neoliberal economics and politics, and presents and analyses the emergent and developing post-growth imaginaries - so as to ultimately aid their further development. Not shying away from explicitly political implications of his work, when speaking about growth ideology, the anthropological machine (Agamben), or the metabolic rift (Marx), for example, he uses conceptual metaphors of dis-ease, cancerous growth and lunacy (To continue to maintain that the pursuit of economic growth is the main objective of societies is not only unethical, but suicidal').

The first part of the book (Spanish Culture and Postgrowth Economics) is data-rich on Spain's biocapacity status and its unsustainable socio-economic policies, but here the author mostly lays out the basic premises of his argument. First, that degrowth is inevitable since in a finite biosphere there cannot be constant economic growth. Our present and future socio-political context, though, he claims, will shape the kind of post-growth society (or, societies) that will emerge. Second, he argues that the economic crisis is foremost a crisis of imagination, since neoliberal ideology either deletes or co-opts authentically alternative imaginaries. Still, at the margins of the dominant paradigm alternative imaginaries do emerge - such as the *indignados* movement, street art or permaculture design collectives that he analyses.

In using the term 'imaginary', he follows the philosopher Cornelius Castoriadis' notion of 'imaginary social significations', which Prádanos sees as complimentary to Gramsci's notion of hegemony. Imaginaries have deep material and semiotic consequences as social realities are constructed according to pervasive dominant conceptions and postulates about humans and their relations to each other and the world' (11). The dominant neoliberal social imaginary thus reduces social reality to the sum of competitive, atomised individuals focused on profits, side-lining alternative conceptualizations of people and their relationships to each other and the environment.

Readers novel to ideas of the Anthropocene, humanities' students in general, and in particular those interested in ecocriticism, will benefit from the first and introductory chapter which transverse the ideas of key

humanities' thinkers such as Agamben and Foucault, and earth systems science like Rockström, also providing an introduction to Spanish ecocriticism and the ecological humanities. Prádanos' ecocritical approach is transdisciplinary in theory and practice, and informed by post(neo) colonial theory, the environmental justice movement, new materialism (especially material ecocriticism and ecofeminism) and posthumanism. Such a methodological stance works at breaching the epistemological limitations of the humanities', trying to decolonize the imaginary', and bringing forward new socioecological imaginaries that counter the slow violence' (Nixon) and cruel optimism' (Berlant) of neoliberal ideology.

In discussion of degrowth and slow movements, the author also develops the argument that the Global South and the Mediterranean are regions in which a particular form of ecocriticism is (to be) practised and further developed, based on comparable experiences in a dynamic with the economically more powerful North. This contribution (and call) is an important step towards diversification of ecocritical voices, since those from Southern Europe and global South have yet in larger numbers to join the scene currently dominated by British and North American perspectives (with ecocriticism developing more steadily in Italy, Germany and Scandinavian countries).

In part two, Iberian urban ecologies are examined in relation to ideas of peak oil, petro-modernity, and crucially, to the idea of metabolic rift between ever-intensifying capitalist urbanization and the planet's limited biocapacity. In other words, cities' destructive linear metabolism (Petropolis) is critiqued and a new imaginary is envisioned, based on circular, zero-waste regenerative principles (Ecopolis). The transition is inspected through four (possibly overlapping) categories of narratives and cultural manifestations such as documentary and experimental films, novels, graffiti, cartoons, etc. First, the contemporary crisis of the city as a waste and precarity producing growth machine is discussed in films focusing on the agentive production and erasure of collective spaces and communities (be it by persons or objects such as cars and roads), the quality of spaces and communities they enable/disable (pathological or convivial), and the transgression of hegemonic urban-rural dichotomy. Second, post-petroleum narratives are discussed in SF novels. Montero's *El peso del corazón* (2011) as cybernetic thriller betrays difficulty of the dystopian genre to envision postgrowth imaginary in an politically emancipatory sense, while, argues Prádanos, Moreno's *Por si se va la luz* (2013) more successfully fulfils the role. Further, the author looks at past and present effects of agro-industry and tourism on working-class communities, and on those escaping the city in neo-ruralist narratives. He is however, unconvinced that that such folk politics' has a political force, since it remains isolated, insufficient and timid' against global

challenges and national co-optation, an opinion he somewhat shares with U. Heise, the proponent of eco-cosmopolitanism. Lastly, the fourth category portrays the Ecopolis and the practices towards it, as diverse as Madrid's guerrilla gardening movement, the launch of 15/15/15 journal, and transition stories' featured in *Tapas se un futuro pospetroleo* (2015) collection. In this chapter, Prádanos skilfully combines philosophical and ethical analysis of the narratives' imaginary with analysis of their stylistic and rhetorical features, as well as their media context and audiences. His analyses are exemplary for green cultural studies scholars aiming to inspect postgrowth imaginaries in their own national context.

Part three (Waste, Disaster, Refugees, and Nonhuman Agency) comprises two chapters. Chapter 3 features a material ecocritical approach (following on object oriented ontology by B. Latour, J. Bennett, and T. Morton, among others) on cultural manifestations (such as murals, fiction, cartoons, art collectives, films) that focus on trash and waste. Prádanos argues against the aestheticization and monetization of trash in eco-design or industrial use since this reform environmentalism keeps the dream of constant growth alive by implying that a few technological fixes and changes in management can solve the problem without addressing its structural and epistemological causes' (167). Instead, he argues for a political ecology of waste' which exposes the network of consumerism, socioecological issues and the proliferation of waste. Such an approach ultimately reveals that a waste producing system inevitably treats some humans (the poor, refugees) as disposable too. Chapter 4 inspects the limits of the catastrophe genre for espousing alternative political imaginaries (similar to Chapter 2). Sensationalist apocalyptic narratives which deal with extreme environmental events and feature heroic individuals mask the slow and widespread structural violence, Prádanos shows, especially in his reading of the popular English-language film *The Impossible* and TV series *El Barco*. Analysing emergent postgrowth ideas and their ideational antagonists in chapters 2-4, Prádanos jointly discusses literary/artistic texts and their contemporary scholarly interpretations, which is a valuable critical contribution of this book since the latter often remain inside the hegemonic frame.

As noted, this book works towards transcending the epistemological limitations of the humanities and the division of human and natural history to academically (and practically) engage with the issues we face in the Anthropocene. One of its take-home conclusions is that depicting and creating desirable postgrowth societies is (more, or more successfully) counterhegemonic than only critiquing the socio-political status quo. The films, novels, photographs and other cultural manifestations such as communal, art, and intellectual practices he inspects show that such postgrowth imaginaries are being developed/imagined in Spain. Those

emerging imaginaries are, as ecological and postgrowth, also decolonial, (eco)feminist, and postcapitalist, all paradigms that the author seconds. In general, the term 'postgrowth imaginaries' and the methodological apparatus applied in this book could prove useful to cultural studies, ecocriticism and environmental humanities scholars interested in the topics examined in this book.

Lastly, Prádanos is not alone calling for a new (socio-political and ecological) imaginary in/for the Anthropocene. Similar ideas have recently been voiced by, among others, the British journalist and author G. Monbiot (a new regenerative story'), the ecolinguist A. Stibbe (*Ecolinguistics. Language, Ecology, and the Stories We Live By*, 2015), and - most recently and mostly in line with Prádanos' work - by the economist K. Raworth. She portrays a new economic story' in *Doughnut Economics. Seven Ways to Think Like a 21<sup>st</sup> Century Economist*, (2019), a book that could indeed be read as an accompaniment to *Postgrowth Imaginaries* (or vice versa), since Raworth tackles issues around (de)growth policies that could not be inspected in depth in *Postgrowth Imaginaries*. For example, while Prádanos as a cultural critic unflinchingly starts from the assumption that, paraphrasing Raworth, growth is no longer (ecologically) possible, so that it cannot be necessary, Raworth in comparison with due consideration inspects the other (hegemonic) position: that it is still (socially) necessary, so that it must be possible. Opting for a growth agnostic position herself, Raworth paints a picture of an economy that makes us thrive, whether or not it grows'. Degrowth advocates, she shows, have more difficulty tackling global inequality or possible distributional conflicts, though her optimistic vision is more in line with Prádanos' aspirations. However, exactly where the economist's argument stops is where the work of the cultural critic starts: in discerning and inspecting emergent cultural imaginations of postgrowth societies - as we need to first imagine it to be able to think and work towards it. In that way, *Postgrowth Imaginaries* fills a gap not only in ecocritical Spanish and Iberian Studies, but in ecological cultural studies at large.





# Han Kang

## *The Vegetarian*

**Trans. Deborah Smith. Portabello Books, 2015.**  
**ISBN 978-1101906118. 208 pages. € 15.00.**

# Okja. Dir. Bong Joon-ho.

**Plan B Entertainment - Lewis Pictures - Kate Street Picture Company, 2017. Netflix, 2017. 120 minutes.**

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Jacques Derrida's concept 'carno-phallogocentrism' deconstructs the function of eating meat in the creation of human subjectivity. Extending his classic reading of 'phallogocentrism,' which critiques those structures and stylistics of language that reinforce traditional male dominance, *carno-phallogocentrism* conceptualizes the subject as created in relation to an ongoing differentiation of the human and 'the animal' (the lexeme that compresses the planet's entire non-human creaturely life into an antonym for man).<sup>1</sup> *Carnophallogocentrism* identifies how eating animals is a principle mechanism for sustaining human identity. The tribe gathers around the alterity of the animal, asserting domination and group identity; they consume its otherness in order to affirm social cohesion. Meat functions as a primal cultural object in the creation of the subject.

*Eating Animals.* Derrida's concept is revisited in two recent South Korean narratives: Han Kang's 2016 International Man Booker winning novel, *The Vegetarian* (2007, *English translation* 2015), and Bong Joon-ho's action-adventure movie *Okja* (2017). In Han's novel, the eponymous vegetarianism of protagonist Yeong-hye transforms her into an object of fascination in the eyes of the other characters. The novel is organized into three sections that are narrated, successively, by her husband, her brother-in-law, and her sister – rendering Yeong-hye a mostly voiceless object of their regard. Like Herman Melville's *Bartleby*, her character is pivoted on her pithy refusal

1 Derrida, Jacques. 1991. 'Eating Well'; or the Calculation of the Subject: An Interview with Jacques Derrida.' *Who Comes After the Subject?* Eds. E. Cadava, P. Connor and J.-L. Nancy. New York and London: Routledge. 112-3.

of social norms. 'I won't eat it' she states of a dinner with her husband's business associates, 'I don't eat meat' (Han 2015, 22). Though the other characters cannot stop looking at her and thinking about her, and it is their ceaseless regard about which the novel is structured, it is nevertheless her gaze that is felt as unendurable. Mr. Cheong, her husband, rushes to explain his wife's diet with a concocted story of gastroenteritis, which elicits a degree of relief among the guests. It is okay not to eat animals for pragmatic reasons – but her ethical and affective rejection of meat compromises the eating community that affirms its own unity via meat.

The betrayal of the shared communal values of contemporary middle-class Seoul is felt most acutely by the patriarchs of her life, Yeong-hye's father and her husband, Mr. Cheong. At a family meal Yeong-hye's refusal comes to a head. Furious at her intransigency, her father forces meat between her clenched teeth, which provokes her to cut herself with a knife. In this moment of breakdown, Yeong-hye's minimal resistance to food normativity exposes the proximity of human and animal flesh. For her brother-in-law, her fear is animalistic, and her violated body resembles meat. In deceptively casual similes, Han presents the decomposition of Yeong-hye's humanity – which will lead in the later sections of the novel to her fantasies of becoming vegetal, and ultimately to her death. Her vegetarianism unleashes an identity ambiguity that, in the context of her rigid eating community, becomes unsustainable – as well as unendurable to her carnophallogocentric guardians. Of the carnophallogocentric normativity mechanism that she rejects, Mr. Cheong warns his wife: 'Stop eating meat, and the world will devour you whole!' (Han 2015, 48).

The capitalization of this mechanism is more directly represented and opposed in Bong Joon-ho's *Okja*, released by Netflix direct to their online streaming platform. *Okja* is a genetically modified super pig developed by the sinister industrial meat manufacturer Mirando Corporation, headed by Lucy Mirando (Tilda Swinton). As publicity for their new meat, the Mirando Corporation send their super pigs around the world, to be cared for in traditional farming situations. For ten years *Okja* lives in rural South Korea, cared for by a young girl, Mija (Ahn Seo-hyun), and her grandfather. Despite her size, the computer generated *Okja* has an amiable lovability, somewhat resembling the hybrid of a hippopotamus and Studio Ghibli's Totoro, from Hayao Miyazaki's *My Neighbour Totoro* (1988). Likewise, tonally the idyllic first scenes of Mija and *Okja*'s friendship in the rolling hills of South Korea echo the fantasy relation of young Japanese girls Satsuki and Mei with Totoro in Miyazaki's now classic depiction of childhood innocence.

Yet innocence is all-too-brief in *Okja*. From its pastoral opening, the movie undergoes a postmodern series of genre transmutations. The movie centres on the attempts of the Mirando Corporation to recall *Okja* to the

U.S., opposed by idealistic members of the Animal Liberation Front. This results in series of high-speed action urban pursuit sequences through Seoul transportation networks and underground shopping centres. The return to the U.S. leads to ever-darker turns in the movie's tone, first to a series of sadistic tests performed by creepy, khaki short suit wearing TV zoologist Dr. Johnny (Jake Gyllenhaal), and later to a slaughterhouse sequence seen from Mija's eyes that is perhaps the most detailed and emotive description of industrial meat production thus far rendered in mainstream cinema: the vast scale of the mournful holding yard; the reluctant process of the super pigs coaxed by electroprod up the ramp; Hispanic workers squeegeeing floors pooling with blood; carcasses suspended by chains, hewn by industrial saws, partitioned into cellophane wrappers; the bolt gun and the knocking box. Charting the end of innocence, the film's deceptive family-friendly opening gives way to stark industrial violence, perhaps seeking to jolt its adult audience from complacency – and rendering it unsuitable for children. Coming after *Okja*'s characterization in the mode of pastoral innocence, the jarring shift to horror involves an uncannily aslant depiction of meat production: Totoro in the slaughterhouse.

*New Korean vegan aesthetic.* What Han and Bong share is the flipped view of carnophallogocentrism that they envision, each focusing on the uncanny flesh that is produced and obscured by the conventional socio-cultural function of meat. Rather than Derrida's top-down vision of social structures directing thought via symbolic imperatives, these works foreground the material fact of bodies processed into meat. This makes the new Korean vegan aesthetic an innovative revisioning of the uncanny. The uncanny, Freud theorizes, involves a flash of recognition that proceeds from the discomfiting familiarity of a strange object or affect, to a more deeply weird awareness of the strangeness of the familiar.<sup>2</sup> Uncanniness uncovers the otherness of the body to the self it incarnates. If Han's and Bong's narratives uncannily erode the repressive cultural structures that manage the interrelation of body, subjectivity and meat, yet their texts might seem to push beyond the closed loop of Freud's self-identifying strangeness. For Freud, the uncanny would evade politics, always circling back to the subject's unacknowledged self-knowing – and as such might be seen to short-circuit questions of the ecological catastrophes in which anthropocentric influence is currently rendering world systems unlike themselves. Unlike Freud, Han and Bong refuse to limit their texts to the human in this way. Developing cross-species kinships,

2 Freud, Sigmund. 1955. "The Uncanny." *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, Volume XVII (1917-1919): An Infantile Neurosis and Other Works. Trans. James Strachey. London: Hogarth. 217-256.

as Donna Haraway has recently theorized, is a vital task in the era of ecological catastrophe.<sup>3</sup> For Laura Wright, the emergent field of Vegan Studies likewise explores how the oppressions suffered by nonhuman animals, subaltern populations, minorities, the poor and the powerless are 'linked, intersectional and codependently reinforcing'.<sup>4</sup> For Aph and Syl Ko, the praxis and theory of Black Veganism targets systematic structural links between racism and animal exploitation, exploring the function of 'the animal' as a 'violence producing category'.<sup>5</sup> Han's and Bong's aesthetics should be considered part of this emergent intersectionality. Politicizing uncanniness, the new South Korean vegan aesthetic reveals the violence of meat, and the otherness of the flesh-most-deeply-known, as an opening upon a ground where kinships might be forged with other lifeforms.

3 Haraway, Donna. 2016. *Staying with the Trouble. Making Kin in the Chthulucene*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press. 99-103.

4 Wright, Laura. 2015. *The Vegan Studies Project. Food, Animals and Gender in the Age of Terror*. Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press. 15.

5 Ko, Aph and Syl. 2017. *Aphro-ism. Essays on Pop Culture, Feminism, and Black Veganism from Two Sisters*. New York: Lantern Books. 46.

# Clemens Apprich, Wendy Hui Kyong Chun, Florian Cramer and Hito Steyerl. *Pattern Discrimination*.

**Meson Press, 2018. ISBN 978-5179-0645-0. 124 pages. € 24.00.**

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*Pattern Discrimination* is a collection of four essays centered on the role algorithms play in creating and maintaining prejudice. The book is published by Meson Press in conjunction with the University of Minnesota Press. It is part of the *In Search of Media* series, which focuses on different key words in media practice, and includes other titles such as *Machine* and *Markets*. Each book in the series is co-authored by two to four contemporary thinkers or practitioners. This structure is meant to pair scholars from different continents in order to cross the "ten-year gap" that is said to exist between the production and reception of work in different languages. Thus their structure locates them within the field of cross-cultural studies. All books are available in print and as open-access PDFs, available on the publisher's website.

The book develops the scholarly discourse around the roles algorithms have in creating and shaping oppression. This discourse includes Cathy O'Neil's *Weapons of Math Destruction* (2016), which examines the ways vital numbers to our lives are calculated such as credit scores, Safiya Noble's *Algorithms of Oppression* (2018), which uncovers the way racism is programmed into algorithms such as search engines, and Caroline Criado-Perez's *Invisible Women* (2019), which specifically deals with the sexism found in data collection and use in such fields as health, snow removal, and public restroom design. However, *Pattern Discrimination* holds a distinct place in this field for two reasons. First, it is more general, meaning more theoretical, in its approach. Thus it allows much more space for exploring problems leading to the creation of discrimination in algorithms, as well as the damage they cause. On the other hand, it is more specific in how it often leans toward artistic examples of discrimination, as well as using art to develop possible ways forward.

One key concept running through all the essays in the book is Klaus

Conrad's apophenia, or the way unrelated data is believed to be connected. As artist and theoretician Hito Steyerl puts it in her contribution, apophenia can be found when 'narrative breaks down and causality has to be recognized – or invented – across a cacophony of spam, spin, fake, and gadget chatter.' There is too much information, and many of the tools for creating patterns out of it are problematic.

For example, information technology consulting company Booz Allen reports on a case of apophenia found in a luxury hotel chain. Data showed that a group of 17 wealthy teenagers from the Middle East often stayed at the hotels. However, the data was considered 'dirty,' or useless, because it did not conform to the worldview of the analysts: Brown teenagers, in this worldview, are likely to exist. Dead brown teenagers? Also highly probable. But rich brown teenagers? This is so improbable that they must be dirty data and cleansed from the system!' Steyerl's use of the term 'worldview' here is not accidental. It has a meaning both in cultural studies and in the way algorithms work. As Peli Grietzer shows in his PhD dissertation *Mood, Vibe, System* (2017), worldview is similar to the 'feature function' of autoencoder algorithms (algorithms that 'learn,' such as neural networks). The feature function denotes the values that an algorithm can process for  $x$ . In the example above, when  $x$  = valued hotel customer, one of the feature values for  $x$  was brown teenagers, but *rich* brown teachers was not. Thus actual hotel patrons became dirty data that did not fit into the worldview of the analysts. Rich brown teenagers simply could not be customers. They were not an available input. Thus they were invisible, and another explanation was needed. This is an example of apophenia.

Artistic reactions to the growing importance of data discrimination have a fairly deep history. In the *Counting Songs* performance from 1962, Fluxus artist Emmett Williams (and his collaborators) would stand on stage and assign a number to each audience member. Although this piece has been seen as an early example of performance art, Florian Cramer argues that 'As data processing, the piece thus contains the hierarchy of programmer, program, and data while selling the same illusion of participation and interaction with which interactive systems,' from computer games to social networking platforms, are being sold today.' Participating in social media, file sharing, and smartphone use in general is actually just a game to generate valuable data for the likes of Facebook and Alphabet. The control that data processing has over us has been seen in recent examples of Google image searches labeling black people as gorillas and Nikon cameras misreading Asians as blinking and trying to correct for this (similar to how Jean-Luc Godard boycotted Kodak because their film stock was tuned to pick up white skin). In one way, data collection is pervasive: we participate in it even when we are not aware. This was reflected in the German punk band Abwärts's song



Computerstaat" (Computer State) from 1980. The song which ends with a sample of Horst Herold, head of the Federal Criminal Police, warning Baader-Meinhof members that they will never escape, saying that *wir kreigen sie alle*" (we'll get them all). On the other hand, the worldview of data collectors and processors almost ensures that subjects will be ignored, manipulated, and oppressed.

Another term that can be coopted to describe the damage of pattern discrimination is 'homophily.' In her essay 'Queerying Homophily,' Wendy Hui Kyong Chun looks at the way that network science is often based on the idea that 'similarity breeds connection,' meaning that users are grouped into 'neighborhoods' according to their likes and dislikes. For example, 'underlying Asian' homophily are tendencies of South Asians to befriend South Asians; Chinese other Chinese, et cetera." This has profound implications for predictive technologies such as COMPAS, a software package widely used in US courts to determine whether a person is likely to become a repeat offender in the future. One problem with such tools is that they are based on the idea of 'no neighbors without common cultural traits.' Therefore, ethnic differences, for example, do not need to be directly tracked, since such features are already included in 'less crude' categories, such as 'industriousness, reliability, homicidal tendencies,' and so on. Once someone is placed in a neighborhood with others who have shown criminal tendencies, US courts will predict that you will show them too, and it will act on those predictions.

This double-tug between all-encompassing data collection and pattern misrecognition leads to a state of paranoia. On the one hand this state arises from apophenia, meaning that there is too much data to parse, so any connection becomes a good connection. Paranoia, in the words of Clemens Apprich, is the 'overproduction of meaning' that has turned into a contemporary form of hermeneutics. On the one hand there is a demand to sift the truth from the fake news. But maybe we are beyond that point. Fake bots, fake tweets, fake likes, and fake porn are no longer the exception, but the rule. Perhaps we should, as Steyerl put elsewhere, let this spam of the earth count for our representation so that we can go along with our daily lives, letting the fake exist as our data, in our place. So we need to learn to live in this world of paranoia, rather than change it back to a mythical set of truths that it never was. Pattern discrimination is here to stay. It should be understood, challenged, and changed. But it also needs to be lived with. For it is demanding new forms of life.



# Guidelines for Submissions

The papers should be sent as a Word file.

- For articles, the length is between 20,000 and 60,000 characters with spaces (including abstract, notes and Works Cited).
- For reviews and conference reports, a length of 1,000-2,000 characters with spaces is recommended.
- For translations, a length of 10,000-20,000 characters with spaces is recommended.
- Texts may use British or US spelling
- Please use as little formatting as possible
- Please use footnotes, not endnotes, but only when necessary.
- An abstract of 150-200 words should be included along with 3-5 keywords.
- Use in-text citations and please refer to the current MLA guidelines for all formatting questions. [https://owl.purdue.edu/owl/research\\_and\\_citation/mla\\_style/mla\\_formatting\\_and\\_style\\_guide/mla\\_general\\_format.html](https://owl.purdue.edu/owl/research_and_citation/mla_style/mla_formatting_and_style_guide/mla_general_format.html)

Common examples for Works Cited:

- Book: Last Name, First Name. Title of Book. City of Publication, Publisher, Publication Date.
- Article: Author. Title. Title of container (self contained if book), Other contributors (translators or editors), Version (edition), Number (vol. and/or no.), Publisher, Publisher Date, Location (pp.).
- Webpage: Author. Title. Title of container (self contained if book), Other contributors (translators or editors), Version (edition), Number (vol. and/or no.), Publisher, Publication Date, Location (pages, paragraphs and/or URL, DOI or permalink), 2nd container's title, Other contributors, Version, Number, Publisher, Publication date, Location, Date of Access (if applicable).

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