

**WALTER BENJAMIN'S TRANSIT:**  
**A DESTRUCTIVE TOUR OF MODERNITY**

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**TEXT  
BOUND INTO THE  
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## **Abstract.**

This thesis focuses specifically on Walter Benjamin's philosophical insights into the emerging climate of fascism, in Europe, between the two World Wars. These were inseparable from a challenge to modern understandings of history. For Benjamin official histories function to record the spoils of the victors effectively erasing the losing side from the annals of history. This has particular resonance given that Benjamin, a German Jew, was himself under constant threat of cultural erasure during the course of his writing, thus making him in a way the embodiment of a certain constellation of fascist forces. The theme of an 'embodied' fascism will be applied to Benjamin's corpus as well as to other's directly involved and affected by the rise of German fascism. Throughout this thesis I chart the ways in which Benjamin applies alternative methods to reading history, in order to unearth the violence beyond his present situation of fascism. Benjamin argued that violence subtends all modern state function, insofar as its power is won and maintained by the silent suppression of its citizens. Such suppression was the cause of periodic eruptions of violence with society. It was built into the very fibre of what we call civil society as it is generated through culture. This reading of Benjamin hones in on vital areas of modern cultural production such as rhetoric, photography, language, spatiality and communications technology and attempts to situate them within the scope of Benjamin's concerns about violence. In addition to critical theory, my research incorporates the field cultural studies, as Benjamin's main concern was with the ideological role that certain cultural objects played within the social economy in the era that preceded German fascism's consolidation of power. Benjamin's investigations of violence, and its relationship to various technologies at the start of the 20th Century, form an invaluable source of insight with which to evaluate the current critical debates about fascism.

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## Introduction.

Michel Foucault writes in the preface to Deleuze and Guattari's book, *Anti-Oedipus* that 'one might say that *Anti-Oedipus* is an *Introduction to a Non-Fascist Life*.'<sup>1</sup> I find this comment somewhat troubling as to my mind it is very unlikely that one can be either for or against fascism, anymore than one can be for or against violence, or for that matter for or against love. This is so because I suspect that is near to impossible to eliminate a tendency toward fascism within ourselves since it is something that has been nurtured within us throughout our recent history, and continues to prevail throughout our institutions. I also believe that Foucault's goal of a non-fascist life is somewhat misguided, as I would argue that it is near to impossible for individuals to achieve an absolute 'consciousness' of being fascist or non-fascist in their comportment. Perhaps it is even the case that all of us have a *Little General* lurking inside, somewhere in the folds of our sensibility. I would even venture so far as to say this is not a bad thing, if we appreciate that fascism is something that is beyond good and evil, something that is more an affect of power relations, which are constantly shifting and weighing, than a nasty political attribute roundly worthy of elimination. Indeed such an abolitionist policy in itself is at risk of becoming potentially fascist as such. Indeed if we understand fascism as an extremity of realisation amongst the political possibilities open to a life, than analysis of fascism's expression within life can take place within far wider parameters.

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<sup>1</sup>Deleuze, Gilles, and Guattari, Felix, *Anti-Oedipus*, Trans. Robert Hurley, Mark Seem and Helen R. Lane, Preface by Michel Foucault (London: The Athlone Press, 1984), p. xiii.

This brings us back to Foucault and to the point at which I meet in agreement with him: his succinct definition of Deleuze and Guattari's strategy on thinking 'fascism.' Foucault is quick to assert that their pivotal understanding of fascism considers not 'only historical fascism, the fascism of Hitler and Mussolini – which was able to mobilise and use the desire of the masses so effectively –but also the fascism in us all, in our heads and in our everyday behaviour, the fascism that causes us to love power, to desire the very thing that dominates and exploits us.'<sup>2</sup> Beyond this point, however, I am once again compelled to part company with Foucault's understanding of Deleuze and Guattari's enterprise. Foucault describes their work as a pursuit of 'ethics,'<sup>3</sup> which for me begs the question of which ethics? I would see it as a Spinozist ethics, insofar as it is more concerned with the comportment of bodies than it is with the disclosure of a free standing moral code. The ethics is not in any way prescriptive but rather observant in carrying out its function. As Spinoza himself proposed 'We do not yet know what a body can do.'<sup>4</sup> Thus life is still in its experimental stages, still being shaped at any given moment of its duration by a play of forces. Bearing this in mind, I find it difficult to endorse Foucault's comment that after reading *Anti-Oedipus* one will be able to assume a 'being anti-oedipal' as being some sort of 'a life-style, a way of thinking or living.'<sup>5</sup> One has no more chance to *be* oedipal, or anti-oedipal, for that matter, than one has to *be* man or woman, or for

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<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p. xiii.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., p. xiii.

<sup>4</sup> Deleuze, Gilles, *Spinoza: Practical Philosophy*, Trans. Robert Hurley, (San Francisco, CityLights Books, 1988) p. 125.

that matter to *be* a fascist. These are moral conceits that have no place in Deleuze and Guattari's conceptual framework which expresses the necessity of an ethical and moreover, durational process of *becoming*.

The failure to see living as a complex and even self-contradictory series of temporary formations of becoming makes Foucault's series of questions regarding fascism amount to little more than a litany of false problems. He asks 'How does one keep from being a fascist, even (especially) when one believes oneself to be a revolutionary? How do we rid our speech acts, our hearts and our pleasures, of fascism? How do we ferret out the fascism that is ingrained in our behaviour?'<sup>6</sup> To ask such questions presupposes fascism to *be* a solid, rigid formation that must be cut out of the body politic like a cancer. Moreover it implies that we know what fascism is, that it is recognisable, that we can easily identify it, that it possesses a binary logic, - it can be there or not be there - that it is a stable entity or even that it is an entity. The *level* of Foucault's response to Deleuze and Guattari indicates that a true intellectual survey of fascism has hardly commenced. Not after 1945 and not after 1968, where Foucault begins his investigations.<sup>7</sup>

However, Foucault's greatest difficulty is yet to come. This happens when he chooses to associate his campaign against the 'major enemy'<sup>8</sup> fascism with the

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<sup>5</sup> Deleuze, Gilles, and Guattari, Felix, *Anti-Oedipus*, Trans. Robert Hurley, Mark Seem and Helen R. Lane, Preface by Michel Foucault (London: The Athlone Press, 1984), p. xiii.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, p. xiii.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, p. xi.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, p. xiii.

church's moral crusade. Indeed, he makes explicit reference to 'the Christian moralists who sought out the traces of the flesh lodged deep within the soul.'<sup>9</sup> He then draws a parallel between their activities and those of Deleuze and Guattari, whom he suggests for their part, 'pursue the slightest traces of fascism in the body.'<sup>10</sup> Here Foucault would appear gravely mistaken on two fronts. The first is his confusion of morals with ethics, which as a means of appreciating the way fascism operates on the ground proves to be utterly useless, since often unbeknownst to us, in day to day relations, fascism continues to vary its operations in a manner that profoundly accedes morality's ability to ferret out its location. Fascism rarely manifests itself as an individual, type, or party. It is much more likely to manifest itself in a mode of temporary conduct, an approach, or a management style. The second underestimation on Foucault's part comes with his suggestion that Deleuze and Guattari pursue the menace of fascism through "traces." They would argue that, to the contrary traces form the biggest massifications of fascism to be found anywhere, institutionally speaking. They even go so far as to describe the trace as dangerous, as something that 'injects redundancies and propagates them.'<sup>11</sup> In this way traces become pathological and block up the critical relations amongst peoples, leading to amongst other things the proliferation of fascist dictates, which in turn further proscribe fascist behaviours.

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<sup>9</sup> Ibid., p. xiii.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., p. xiii.

<sup>11</sup> Deleuze, Gilles, and Guattari, Felix, *A Thousand Plateaus*, Trans. and Foreword by Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987), p. 13.

Ultimately, Foucault will be responsible for perpetuating an even greater offence, that of neutralising and literalising the very term 'fascism.' Whilst he manages to free it from strictly historical containment, he then quickly and falsely accuses it of being some essential evil, which can easily be expelled from the realm of a righteous (read leftist) political atmosphere. Foucault goes so far as to suggest that the task of expelling fascism can be made even easier if one adopts an optimistic attitude. Remember 'one doesn't have to be sad in order to be militant...'<sup>12</sup> His statement is directly at odds with Deleuze's assertion that 'The use of philosophy is to sadden.'<sup>13</sup> Moreover he adds, 'A philosophy that saddens no one, that annoys no one is not a philosophy. It is useful for the harming of stupidity, for the turning of stupidity into something shameful. Its only use is the exposure of all forms of baseness of thought.'<sup>14</sup> Foucault's simplistic rhetoric connotes nothing so much as the stolid atmosphere of that other base, totalitarian offshoot of fascism: Stalinism. It is outrageous insofar as it assigns feelings of happiness and sadness 'humour' and 'seriousness' to a formation, fascism, that figures in itself no such relation. Rather, and more in keeping with Deleuze and Guattari's description of fascism, one could say that if it does possess qualities in any sense at all they are comprised out of speeds and intensities, and not out of rotten feelings.

Waging a war against fascism, one where we would be 'tracking down all varieties of fascism, from the enormous ones that surround us and crush us to

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<sup>12</sup> Deleuze, Gilles, and Guattari, Felix, *Anti-Oedipus*, Trans. Robert Hurley, Mark Seem and Helen R. Lane, Preface by Michel Foucault (London: The Athlone Press, 1984), p. xiii.

<sup>13</sup> Deleuze, Gilles, *Nietzsche and Philosophy*, (London: The Athlone Press, 1983), p. 150.

the petty ones that constitute the tyrannical bitterness of our everyday<sup>15</sup> would in reality mean waging a war of all against all in some even more embittered retro-Hobbesian fantasy. A fantasy moreover which completely precludes the reality that fascism, even its historical guise, connotes an invisible war, a total war, a perpetual war that cannot be fought nor won, but rather must be engaged as an ethical combat within oneself on a plane where politics equals everyday life. How we confront the singular events of our lives will show how successful we have been. It is here that the true problem of how to locate fascism becomes proximate to the life of a body, on this occasion Walter Benjamin's life and body in particular. A life moreover, that sought not to be non-fascist but rather to become fascism's greatest ethical observer, so as to raise alarm bells within its most extravagant perpetrator, the average citizen. It is through observing Benjamin with the greatest respect for this impetus for a life, that I am able to embark upon this thesis and to orient my own task along the lines of critical observation. Benjamin's dedication to a methodology that sought to demonstrate and not to judge the terms on which history rests, has impressed upon me a certain critical need to withhold for the most part judgement of any of the terms in which the debate about fascism gets temporarily housed in Benjamin's body over the course of his lifetime. Rather it will be my task to transport the reader over the difficult terrain of these terms to locations of particular behest to Benjamin's view of fascism.

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<sup>14</sup> Ibid., p. 150.

<sup>15</sup> Deleuze, Gilles, and Guattari, Felix *Anti-Oedipus*, Trans. Robert Hurley, Mark Seem and Helen R. Lane, Preface by Michel Foucault (London: The Athlone Press, 1984), p. xiv.

Before looking at the organisation of this thesis I should alert the reader to a particularity of its approach, as self-consciously defined against the industry that has sprung up under the rubric of 'Benjamin Studies.' This study is not an attempt to set the record straight on Benjamin's writings, nor is it to become his closest reader, nor to become his most loyal and accurate biographer. This project represents something radically different to those approaches. It is an attempt to work *with* Benjamin to devise a new set of political coordinates viable for the current thinking of contemporary fascism. The work then becomes a mediation at the margins of Benjamin's project, an activity that concerns itself with *extending* the parameters of understanding and of thinking that Benjamin left for us as a kind of intellectual schema. In carrying out this operation I am not working *over* Benjamin, to recondition him if you like, (indeed as a body I believe he is been worked over quite enough for other's lamentable ends in the last 30 years), rather I attempt to work *on* Benjamin, that is survey his contributions to a thinking of fascism from within the boundaries of his experience and times. Here I wish to map out the singularities of a life, Benjamin's life in this instance, insofar as currents of German fascism traverse it.

From there I hope to extend the lines of receptivity outward as means of detecting the fascisms that make themselves singularly known in our own bodies and in our own times. Therefore I am never just talking *about* Walter Benjamin, as though his life is merely a case of here and there, rather I seek to make a delicate measure of a body which has already met the events that will define it, that have made a life, Benjamin's life; that have allowed for certain strains of thought to be actualised precisely within his person. It is through such

measurement that his coordinates can in some instances be joined up and aligned with a broader critical project of thinking a politics of mannerism over essentialism, a politics of means rather than ends, that hopefully and perhaps most significantly calls for the redeployment of a long-awaited task: to think fascism. Finally, Benjamin and I are on tour - together - through a certain terrain of fascism that still bears critical survey today, that still makes modernity its sounding board, that still instils in us a philosophical value toward destructive aims, aims that search through the rubble of a life to find the histories which carve out its duration, make a life worthy of the events that join it. This study therefore aims not to mark the body of fascism as simply a political body, or even a body politic, but to mark it within bodies, as a means to chart its sustenance as a counterpart to civilisation as we have come to condone it in our midst.

This is a Benjaminian politic, a politic concerned with observation, reading against the grain of popular understanding, a reading of history that is aware of the constant relay of the past with the future, of which the spark of the present stands out as merely a dim indication. It is the sort of network that Benjamin conceived and I think is worthy of being resuscitated, a network that could potentially alert us to what we should heed in Benjamin that still remains to be worked through, to be prosthetically extended through the methodology he proposed explicitly in his last work, 'The Theses for a Philosophy of History.' That document asserted that through the exertion of the right combination of forces history can be brought under temporary arrest, so that the dormant histories of the past that never got a chance to be properly voiced might yet rise to the surface of our understanding in a future epoch. Benjamin termed the

observation of this phenomenon 'monadology.' Its results indicates that there is an enormous contiguity between both the past and the future in any given era of mankind and further that there exists an endless transit of Events along that trajectory. In other words at every moment of our lives we are connected to the lives and experience of others who have preceded us, and those who will follow us. The covenant of generations includes within it a standard feature of Nietzschean eternal return, of an additive difference coming out of the apparent sameness, or facticity, of the human condition. It is this difference or transmutation of Events that signals the entrance of the future.

Chapter 1, 'Transit Lines: Walter Benjamin's Destructive Landsurveying of History' puts us onto the trail of mapping Benjamin's recursive action against the limitations of his historical situation. With his property rights on existence becoming increasingly infringed upon in Berlin, Benjamin responds by wilfully cutting himself off from Germany and choosing to make himself the landsurveyor of European Culture. In the experience of Kafka's K, there is no precedent for Benjamin's role; he enters the village of cultural criticism without authorisation. Deleuze and Guattari (*Kafka: Toward a Minor Literature, A Thousand Plateaus*), the only critics willing to stumble upon a strategic modus operandi within Kafka's work, provide great assistance in here for my attempts to lay the groundwork for a topography - as opposed to a biography - of Benjamin's life.

In chapter 2, 'Sternphotographie: A Constellation of Walter Benjamin's Moscow Diary' I chart Benjamin's attempts to spatialise his relationship to Asja Lacis through an initially ill-defined journey to the newly Sovietised Moscow.

This spatialisation takes place through a kind of eccentric cartography, a 'minor science' of urban affects that Benjamin cultivates in order to transform the referents of objects into pure affect. During his stay in Moscow Benjamin is introduced to love for the first time as an extreme solidity, a material so tough it will mould his body on to the operations of a war-machine, with all the attendant, though thankfully temporary fascistic affects. Benjamin takes great lessons out of Moscow concerning political and erotic excesses that not only affect him personally, but also seem to have distributed their affects throughout the capital of world revolution. It is here that Deleuze and Guattari's work on smooth and striated space starts to figure in the understanding the experiments Benjamin conducts himself in the Moscow Diary.

Chapter 3 'Catastrophising the Epoch: Walter Benjamin's Atlas of Fascist Historiography' attempts to define the perimeters of catastrophe in Benjamin's world of the 1930s. Benjamin's conviction that the 'world-historical experiment' unfolding in Soviet Russia underwrote his own experimental ventures in Marxist thinking; it was a conviction further nurtured under the influence of the noted Marxist theatre director Bertolt Brecht. Over the course of that politically tumultuous decade, Benjamin increasingly situates Brecht as the test subject for a political reality to come, one that cannot yet be demonstrated but whose portent generates the very aesthetico-political atmosphere surrounding the age. Benjamin tries to extrapolate from the portent his reflections on Brecht, an image of a new species of human, the man who is prepared to survive culture itself, a human whose emergence at this juncture of culture heralds nothing less than the truth of the paramount maxim of life lived under a state of emergency, that exception has become the rule, with all the accompanying brutality implied by such a statement.

Chapter 4 'What Calls Technology? Or Walter Benjamin's War' outlines the ground for understanding Walter Benjamin's War. It is based on the fundamental principle that World War II never left the world stage. In response to this assumption, new understandings of fascism, history, technology, and war have to be forged in ways different from archival, historicist methodologies that threaten to block forever any real thinking of fascism and its current portent. In the early 1930s, both Benjamin and Martin Heidegger expressed an acute awareness of the more discreet movements within National Socialism; in particular their ability to outwardly shape the populist masses through various spectacles of speech and gesture. At the same time culture, if not civilisation appeared to be nearing its end, as the masses were drawn further into an insidious pact between humanity and technology, coupled with politics, whose most likely outcomes seemed to point in the direction of global annihilation. The task of diagnosing and critiquing the malady of the age, nihilism, was set to become the object of philosophical enquiry in the age of perpetual war.

Chapter 5 'Idle Talk' continues to track the philosophical preoccupations raised in Chapter 4, but sets them specifically on the field of language and the rhetoric of war. Those who have expressed opinions on war as a joining up forces, linguistic and otherwise are given specific attention here. Included amongst them are Ernest Jünger, Christian Florens Rang, and Immanuel Kant whose commentaries on the ethos of world war and its relationship to technology on one hand, and German Idealism on the other, did much to shape our perception of its meaning and consequence. These writings were particularly salient for Benjamin as well as for Heidegger.

Finally, Chapter 6 'Warring Vocabularies' takes a sober look at nihilism's progress in deteriorating linguistic accountability in the German-speaking world after WWI. In response to this situation, Benjamin's writing of the early 1930s, concerns itself with how to cope with communicatory loss within the German language, specifically through the articles 'Theories of German Fascism' and 'The Storyteller,' which address the paucity of description coming from men having first hand experience of trench warfare coming out of WWI. Moreover, he argues, due to the unprecedented amount of war reportage coming out of the First World War, information has managed to unseat knowledge as the standard fare for supplying understanding. This has led to a boom in the related economies of propaganda and speculation. These immaterial economies are then free to mingle with the material economies of property and bodies, leading to disastrous results, the worst outcomes of which are found in the total war and global annihilation. It would seem that language coupled with technology had bred an unimaginably dangerous line of abolition in the movement of National Socialism. One that Benjamin's discourse must tackle far in advance of the last shot of World War being fired and long after it, as debates around fascism grew increasingly hushed in the later half of the twentieth century.

Finally, a brief note about the use of photography in this project; its function will be outlined in detail in the first chapter. Essentially the images are presented as an example of 'minor photography,' corresponding to Deleuze and Guattari's notion of 'minor literature.' They write 'the three characteristics of a minor literature are the deterritorialization of language, the connection of the individual to political immediacy, and the collective assemblage of enunciation'<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Deleuze, Gilles and Guattari, Felix, *Kafka: Toward a Minor Literature*, Trans. Dana Polan, Foreword by Reda Bensmaia, (University of Minnesota Press: Minneapolis, 1986), p. 18.

In that spirit that the images included should be embarked upon, not as *sedentary snapshots*, but rather as *a series of series*, a collective of images which converge, diverge and scatter repeatedly as we survey the terrain of proto-fascism. These images settle lightly, ambiguously within atmospheres similar to the one's Benjamin ventured into throughout his lifetime, always with the intent to tread upon them more than once so as compromise their apparently well-ordered spatial logics. This prolific approach to an ambiguous sequence of instances sets up a challenge to the whole notion of escape as something that is required both of the fugitive photographic image, in terms of framing, and as something that is required of an exiled man trapped within culture. The answer is not to resign oneself to evacuate these spaces, but rather to overcode their differential areas to the point where the majority can no longer deny their repletion and as such the repletion of meaning becomes a reckonable force in its own right. The best way to start is with a renewed purpose in looking, in *surveying* the cultural landscape. Foucault, in his introduction to *Anti-Oedipus* encouraged us to 'believe that what is productive is not sedentary but nomadic.'<sup>17</sup> Bearing this in mind one should be prepared to make 'mobile arrangements,'<sup>18</sup> to view these images thorough various instances of merger and digression with the typography of the text.

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<sup>17</sup> Deleuze, Gilles, and Guattari, Felix, *Anti-Oedipus*, Trans. Robert Hurley, Mark Seem and Helen R. Lane, Preface by Michel Foucault (London: The Athlone Press, 1984), p. xiii.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, p. xiii.

## TransitLines or Walter Benjamin's Destructive Landsurveying of History.

When is drawing a line a means of escape? When is freedom no longer the object, but simply 'a way out, "right, or left, in any direction" so long as it is as little signifying as possible?'<sup>1</sup> When does a surveyor begin charting a course? Perhaps it is the case, that his task begins him. That he finds himself in the middle of a charter of events already in progress. Events which beseech him to take on a *their* course as much as his own. Perhaps this was the case with Kafka's character K. from *The Castle*, who when he arrived at the inn one snowy night, seemed to surface from nowhere, only to pick up an official telephone and impulsively identify himself as the landsurveyor. Through this single gesture he was instantly and yet unwittingly part of the culture in the village. Perhaps this was also the case with Walter Benjamin at a point when his property rights on existence became so infringed upon in Berlin, that he responded by wilfully cutting himself off from Germany and alternatively identifying himself the landsurveyor of European Culture. His experience is similar to Kafka's K., insofar as there is no precedent for Benjamin's role; he enters the village of cultural criticism without authorisation. Like K. he must spend his time both devising his function and courting higher-ups, and above all biding his time – always from a strategic distance. Indeed, Benjamin retains his post in life in a way similar to how K. retains his post in the Castle, that is to say through earnest follow up on an absurd course of contestation, misrecognition and postponement of his job description. The crucial factor with Benjamin, like K. before him, will be

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<sup>1</sup> Deleuze, Gilles and Guattari, Felix, *Kafka: Toward a Minor Literature*, Trans. Dana Polan, Foreword by Reda Bensmaia, (University of Minnesota Press: Minneapolis, 1986), p. 6.

an ability to obscure his points of entry, in such a way that he makes an anti-genealogy for his intellectual and personal motivations.

This sort of approach requires a fair bit of meandering around one's ostensible goal. And indeed, what critics find so maddening about Benjamin is the seemingly endless meandering of his thought, whose outcomes moreover can be readily described as Kafkaesque.<sup>2</sup> In a somewhat reactionary stance many critics seem to approach Benjamin's work with a mind toward bureaucratisation, obsessively seeking out ways to reorganise and recatalogue his *Schriften*. What they disregard is that maintaining a disordered strategy of mind was quite possibly the most advantageous intellectual practice for a man in Benjamin's situation. Here is a man who finds himself dropped in the middle of a modernist ethical scheme whose political programme institutes a position of dire scarcity (fascism), or replete abundance (communism), either of which is founded on a shaky platform of humanism. Benjamin as someone wary of those projects, is nonetheless implicated in them, as he variously inhabits societies for which there is a termination scheme imposed upon those who are believed to fail compliance with these human regulation programmes.

Indeed, for our purposes in mapping Benjamin's political and cultural whereabouts, it is crucial to bear in mind that his co-ordinates are always already joined in a constellation of proto-fascism, not beginning in 1933, but rather in 1892, the year of his birth. He is in the unique position to claim that he was born

into a generation of men, German Jews, whose lifetimes were determined from the start to end in cultural and historical obliteration. From the outset Benjamin had to confront a possible failure of traces. The Nazi's determination to rub out figures like Benjamin from the historical record failed, but others less obviously succeeded in blurring his conceptual project so far as to obscure it in our readings of his work.

One of the greater elements of that project, which remains somewhat obscured in current readings of Benjamin, is his interest in deploying writing *as* politics. It is widely known that Benjamin was a great admirer of Kafka's literary approach. What is less known is the degree to which he relied upon Kafka's literary work to cast his own politic in the later years of his work. Deleuze and Guattari (*Kafka: Toward a Minor Literature, A Thousand Plateaus: 'On The Line'*), are the only critics willing to stumble upon a political *modus operandi* within Kafka's writing, and therein provide great assistance in an attempt to lay the groundwork for a topographical historiography - as opposed to a biography - of Benjamin's life. This topographical exercise has its beginnings in a rather conspicuous assumption, one that Deleuze and Guattari will come to associate with Kafka, and I later with Benjamin. Simply put the assumption is that 'there is no ideology, and indeed there never has been.'<sup>3</sup> Thus it becomes evident to all parties that it is useless to choose political strategies, outside of your own. Even then, for the sake of expediency, this position too must be periodically voided. Therein there are no hard and fast demarcations of belonging, positionality, or as

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<sup>2</sup> Meltzer, Françoise, "Acedia and Melancholia" in *Walter Benjamin and the Demands of History*. Ed. Michael P. Steinberg (New York: Cornell University Press, 1996), p. 145.

<sup>3</sup> Deleuze Giles and Guattari, Felix, *A Thousand Plateaus*, (London: The Athlone Press Ltd., 1988). p.10.

K. calls it 'fit,' but rather a geography extending outward composed of politicised gestures. Ideology or fit would imply that these are solid configurations, when in fact they are simply put, a matter of flows. Initially, K. will complain to the teacher, 'I don't fit with the peasants, nor, I imagine, with the Castle.' The teacher will reply, 'There is no difference between the peasantry and the Castle.'<sup>4</sup> Why is this so? Because as groups they are constantly negotiating for the same territory and in so doing rhythmically take on the characteristics of each other. In Deleuze and Guattari's words, 'they form a rhizome.'<sup>5</sup>

A rhizome is not a matter of fit, but rather a concern of mutual transformation. K. soon realised after making this assertion that he would need rethink his approach and it so doing enter into mutual relations with *both* Barnabas, a Castle functionary and Frieda, a peasant both of whom have intimate contact with the Castle. There is no room for imitation in these relationships. Nor is any identification made between his and their position. Instead, K.'s presence works to shift the ground of Barnabas and Frieda's relationship of obedience to the Castle. Ironically, in doing so K. is becoming more and more engaged in his role as Castle functionary. K. deterritorializes their position, as the same moment that he reterritorializes his own. Conversely, it is Barnabas and Frieda, who act to block K.'s total absorption into Castle law. They function as blocks to encourage his continued strategy of building an adjacent relationship to the Castle, a way out that does not resemble escape, so much as it reassembles the lay out of the whole territory. K. is the land surveyor after all, and the blocks he finds on his

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<sup>4</sup> Kafka, Franz, *The Castle*, Trans. Willa and Edwin Muir, (London: Penguin Books, 1992). p. 17.

<sup>5</sup> Deleuze, Gilles, and Guattari, Felix, *A Thousand Plateaus*, Trans. and Foreword by Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987), p. 10.

way to the Castle extend his capability to deterritorialise its significance while dodging an understanding of it as a discreet signifier.

K.'s task eventually reveals itself not to be getting to the Castle, but rather getting around it. This approach is fundamentally related to Benjamin's project of a consistent realignment of our approach toward History. Real life figures like Asja Lacis, Gershom Scholem, Theodor Adorno and Bertolt Brecht play similar roles to Kafka's characters Frieda and Barnabas, insofar as they act as pressuring forces that periodically 'harden' or 'solidify' a contemporary position around Benjamin in regard to the entity of State politics. Through a series of intense encounters with these individuals, Benjamin is able to at once determine a political position for himself, and at the same time extend his professional viability by occupying an ostensible position within a particular political milieu. Indeed, he manages to operate quite convincingly within these milieus, using the reflective extension of what is told to him by the others. In point of fact he possesses no deep-rooted understanding of Leftist debates, seldom enough to back himself up concretely within these arenas. He relies almost solely on his rhetorical prowess to get him by. This is not to say that Benjamin operates as a political charlatan, for at no point does he explicitly identify himself as a Bolshevik, Zionist, Critical Theorist, or even as a Marxist. Rather it is much more the case that through contact with the figures of Asja Lacis, Gershom Scholem, Theodor Adorno and Bertolt Brecht respectively, he is able to extend, for a certain period of time, his own personal capability in tackling the subjects. That is how he manages to carve out a provisional place within all these ideological camps. One example of this happens during his visit to Moscow in 1926. Here Benjamin employs Asja Lacis as his guide through the local terrain of Marxist

thinking. Within a matter of days of being there, he has cause to remark in his diary that, 'once again I realised just to what extent the possibility of tacking these subjects depends on my contact with her.'<sup>6</sup> This situation of seeming political dependency on Lacis does not appear to trouble Benjamin. On the contrary, he is quite happy for these sorts of majoritarian Politics with a capital 'P' to flow over him, and for them to remain a point of contingency indefinitely. This is the case so long as he maintains loyalty to a more pressing political objective, the task of assembling an intimate minor geography of European proto-fascistic terrains.

This is perhaps the reason why Walter Benjamin never really made it to Central Park.<sup>7</sup> Indeed, when recalling Benjamin's writings, we confront another territory altogether. A territory transversed by a series of long distance calls, signals coming in from a Europe that has long since been levelled, a summons that perhaps may even travel beyond the zone of Benjamin's personal finitude. There is no history of Benjamin's discursive impact in this century that does not have a past like that, an unworked through dialling route beginning and in some ways ending along a Berlin based circuit. We must take care not to undermine the significance of the disappearance of Berlin and indeed of Europe as the fundamental aporia within the Benjaminian project. Benjamin does not wish to be emancipated from the scene of Europe's devastation, but instead wishes to come to its defence, to argue for its continued recognition as a place beyond the realm of fascism, to argue for its future, its worthwhile position in the world,

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<sup>6</sup> Benjamin, Walter. *Moscow Diary*. Ed. Gary Smith. Trans. Richard Sieburth, Preface, Gershom Scholem, (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1986), p. 18.

<sup>7</sup> This comment is a reference of Benjamin's failed effort to come and join the Frankfurt school in New York and to the title of his article 'Central Park.'

despite Hitler's appropriation of the place, and against the ever encroaching forces of Americanism on one side and Stalinism on the other. What Deleuze and Guattari characterise as '*diabolical powers knocking on the door*.'<sup>8</sup> If need be Benjamin would prefer to greet these diabolical powers on the common ground of a European corpus, and by extension on the territory of his singular body as he understands it to be fundamentally European.

With this attitude in mind, it should come as no surprise that the nomadic Benjamin of the 1930s was wary of joining Adorno and Horkheimer in New York. He took out his insurance policy with Kafka roughly twenty years before that, and had read the fine print carefully. When Kafka, in the opening lines of "The Stoker" describes the Statue of Liberty as holding aloft a sword, rather than a torch, Benjamin meticulously takes note of it. This was not a territorial defect on the part of Kafka, one made by a man who could barely convince himself ever to leave Prague. Rather it reads for Benjamin as a substantive prediction of what America was to become in the first years of the twentieth century: a territory devoting itself to isolationism and armed with a nationalistic defence policy against so-called 'outsiders.'

Kafka is ironically positive about this throughout *Amerika*, convinced that everyone has a place in the circus of American life. Indeed, every man can happily play at being himself so long as he remains oblivious to that fact that behind him 'already are the secretaries, officials, professional politicians, all the

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<sup>8</sup> Deleuze, Gilles and Guattari, Felix, *Kafka: Toward a Minor Literature*, Trans. Dana Polan, Foreword by Reda Bensmaia, (University of Minnesota Press: Minneapolis, 1986), p. 41.

modern satraps for whom [he] is preparing the way to power.”<sup>9</sup> Populism such as this exacts its control through, different though no less beguiling channels in a technocratic America, than it does in a proto-fascistic Austro-Hungarian empire. All function to diminish the rights of the citizen against the State apparatus in ways that somehow naturalise the process of infringement. Benjamin first started reading Kafka’s work in 1927,<sup>10</sup> and it may have been *Amerika* that first convinced Benjamin that he and Kafka had a similar outlook on State violence, as something that is not altogether unpalatable to the average citizen. It is most probably, “In the Penal Colony,”<sup>11</sup> however that awaked Benjamin to the fact that writing had some definite part in carrying out its outcomes.

Kafka had difficulty getting this story published. In a letter to his publisher Wolff, who had initially rejected it as “too repulsive,” Kafka replied “By way of an explanation, I will merely add that is not only my latest narrative which is distressing; our time in general and mine in particular have been and still are distressing, and mine has even been so for longer than our time in general.”<sup>12</sup> “In the Penal Colony,” was written during World War I, when wartime sovereign exception had led to a toughening of the penal code and permitted infringements upon a private citizen’s basic rights of privacy. Fear of denunciation, arbitrary scapegoating and bureaucratic restriction began to form part of everyday life in Prague. These conditions were shortly to arrive in Berlin.

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<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 57. This is also the way Kafka would describe proto-fascism to Gustav Janovoch in a conversation of 1928.

<sup>10</sup> See Brodersen, Momme, *Walter Benjamin A Biography*, Trans., Malcolm R. Green and Ingrid Ligers, Ed., Martina Dervis, (London: Verso, 1997), pp. 218-219.

<sup>11</sup> Kafka, Franz, “The Penal Colony,” *The Transformation (‘Metamorphosis’) and Other Stories*, Trans. and Ed. by Malcolm Pasley (London: Penguin, 1992).

<sup>12</sup> Excerpt from the Catalogue for *The City of K.. Franz Kafka and Prague*, Centre de Cultura Contemporània de Barcelona, 20 July- 19 September 1999, (Barcelona: Centre de Cultura Contemporània de Barcelona, 2002), p. 123.

The official assures the visitor that “Our sentence does not sound severe. The Harrow will write whatever commandment the man has disobeyed onto his body. This condemned man, for instance, (...) will have written on his body: honour thy superiors.”<sup>13</sup> This is the same sentence is rendered in numbers on the bodies accounted for by the National Socialist regime. The sheer numbers of prescriptions written onto the bodies of those it holds responsibility for allows for a certain mobility, that is to say that it allows the regime to mobilize through the various doctrinal signification these bodies communicate and display on their surfaces. The proliferation of messages therein get transported ‘off the backs of’ citizens. Such corporeal branding allows National Socialism to spread in numbers through bodies in a way concurrent with its aggressive annexation strategies. In this way National Socialism assumes the character of a molecular flow. Deleuze and Guattari stress that under Nazi protocol, ‘the number is no longer a means of counting or measuring, but of moving: it is the number itself which moves through space.’<sup>14</sup> And therein results a proliferation of conflicting and often contradictory messages from the regime onto bodies as they move through the spaces of its ever-expanding Reich.

One example of this messaging strategy appears as part of the brochure ‘State and Health,’ of 1942 which was meant to promote the success of Nationalist Socialist policy to countries like France and Denmark. It was authored by, amongst others, Otto von Verschuer, whom Giorgio Agamben describes as one of the key persons responsible for the medical politics of the Nazi

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<sup>13</sup> Kafka, Franz, “The Penal Colony,” *The Transformation (‘Metamorphosis’) and Other Stories*, Trans. and Ed. by Malcolm Pasley (London: Penguin, 1992), p. 131.

<sup>14</sup> Deleuze, Gilles, and Guattari, Felix, *A Thousand Plateaus*, Trans. and Foreword by Brian Massumi, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987), p. 389.

Party. As von Verschuer inscribes it, 'this politics begins first of all with the establishment of a budget to account for the living wealth of a people and proposes to assume the care of the "biological" body of the nation. While Helferich estimated the German national assets to be about three hundred and ten million marks, there is also a "living" wealth worth one thousand and sixty marks.'<sup>15</sup> This "living" wealth, beyond being a means of accounting for bodies, becomes something that authorises the State to rank them in terms of viability. In order for a body to remain viable it must carry on (it) the mandate of certain discursive economics. Any resistance to the assumption of such messages is understood as something that is bad for State business. Therein anytime bare life resists its discursive politicisation a flow of potential State wealth escapes and in so doing reduces Nation worth. The State struggles at all to maintain and increase the quality of its 'living' wealth through rhetorically and materially promoting various biological improvement campaigns. This process of enforcing the State's rhetorical health policy is by no means a stable system and fluctuations are a constant reminder to the State that it must bear down upon or even eliminate bodies that do not comply sufficiently with such corporeal reform strategies.

In keeping with the theme of flows in our discussion, it is significant to note that Von Verschuer adds to his comments the assertion that, 'Fluctuations in the biological substance and in the material budget are usually parallel.'<sup>16</sup> Such fluctuations however must remain in check, and the State attempts to do this through various tracing techniques which include a combination of statistics,

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<sup>15</sup> Agamben, Giorgio, *Homo Sacer Sovereign Power and Bare Life*, Trans. Daniel Heller-Roazen (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998), p. 145.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 145.

biological determinism and binary logic. These epistemological practices reinforce the overall notion of what Deleuze and Guattari refer to as a 'pretraced destiny, whatever name is given to it - divine, anagogic, historical, economic, structural, hereditary or syntagmatic.'<sup>17</sup> Deleuze and Guattari would remind us that the trace always involves an alleged "competence."<sup>18</sup> The appearance of State "competence" can be periodically undermined and this can occur either through the introduction of a new diagram, or map of the State's operations which temporarily removes blockages and allows long disused connections to function again. However, a more likely scenario to take place from within this overcoded structure is that the trace itself becomes intense and in so doing takes on a diagrammatic, as opposed to 'grammatic' character trait. That is to say that it no longer subtends the solidified grammar of the State, but rather forms out of that grammar a map of its utterances in such a way that it begins to assemble a radical parabasis to the State's discursive logic, loosening the foundation of its signifiers along the way. Deleuze and Guattari illustrate how this might happen: 'Accounting and bureaucracy proceed by tracings: they can begin to burgeon nonetheless, throwing out rhizomatic stems, as in a Kafka novel. An intensive trait starts working for itself, a hallucinatory perception, synesthesia, perverse mutation or play of images shakes loose, challenging the hegemony of the signifier.'<sup>19</sup> In this instance the trace might expose the rhetorical signifier of life in the Nazi State to be something - that in material terms - equates itself with death, with a death dealing force. This is force that goes on to exploit the living wealth by choosing to annihilate its own servants rather than terminate its own process.

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<sup>17</sup> Deleuze, Gilles, and Guattari, Felix, *A Thousand Plateaus*, Trans. and Foreword by Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987), pp. 12-13.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 12.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 15.

This is the moment at which the messages of National Socialism stops resonating in a State apparatus and causes them to interact with the war machine. The overall effect being that a line of destruction takes up just so many bodies both docile and resistant with it in a massive march toward abolition.

In response to the appearance of this telling trait in National Socialism, Benjamin is compelled to wage a last critical deterritorialization of literature. He does so through his essay of 1938, which resurrects "Franz Kafka on the Tenth Anniversary of the Author's Death." In it he identifies Kafka as someone uniquely able to put the writing on the wall – to document violence, and moreover proto-fascism, portraying them both as a routine affect of the machinery of modernisation. Kafka's job at the Accident Insurance Company was endured for reasons having nothing to do with a consistently stalled writing technique, but rather it was utilised as a means to train his skills of observation and reportage. Kafka's writing raised the tenor of bureaucracy to a political programmatics, making his own line of flight contingent on being wedged permanently in the bureaucratic apparatus of the office. Benjamin writes 'the modern citizen ... knows that he is at the mercy of a vast machinery of officialdom whose functioning is directed by authorities that remain nebulous to the executive organs, let alone to the people they deal with. (It is known that one level of meaning in the novels, particularly *The Trial*, is encompassed by this.)<sup>20</sup> Deleuze and Guattari concur with Benjamin and offer further that 'If Kafka is the greatest theorist of bureaucracy, it is because he shows how, at a certain level (but at which one? it is not localisable), the barriers between offices cease to be a

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<sup>20</sup> Benjamin, Walter, *Illuminations*, Trans. Harry Zohn, Intro. Hannah Arendt (New York, Fontana Press, 1969), p. 139.

definitive “dividing line and are immersed in a molecular medium (*milieu*) that dissolves them and simultaneously makes the office manager proliferate into microfigures impossible to recognise or identify, discernible only when they are centralizable: another regime, coexistent with the separation *and* totalisation of the rigid segments.’<sup>21</sup> In Kafka’s world the office manager becomes something of an inadvertent rhizomatic figure. Like the trace, he is able to break free of the overcoded bureaucratic environment and burgeon his appearance in such a way as to become his own boss, a general manager onto himself, one who starts to have an hallucinatory perception of his own power. He becomes paranoid and begins to mutate the bureaucratic codes to his own ends, imagining other ways they could appear, or be understood.

In keeping himself within that nebulous milieu, Kafka exposes himself to these figures on a day to day basis and is then able to appreciate that these proto-fascist managers were at heart, over-industrious bureaucrats, who took the rigidity of totalitarianism, sped it up, causing it to become a molecular flow which consequentially poured into all segments of society. Bureaucracy still very much exists under National Socialism, but instead of functioning sensibly, manageably on a mass level as in other totalitarian State apparatuses, it becomes something cellular and therein capable of travelling anywhere it wishes within the body politic. The fact that violence in these bureaucracies took a superior, classificatory tone, bespeaks of the magnitude of networks of penetration it encompassed. The modern citizen could hardly say where the violence began and the law ended, only that the law seemed to exist both nowhere and

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<sup>21</sup> Deleuze, Gilles, and Guattari, Felix, *A Thousand Plateaus*, Trans. and Foreword by Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987), p. 214.

everywhere within proto-fascistic societies and therein it was understood as a kind of mythic entity. Benjamin's 'Critique of Violence,' shares the modern citizen's preoccupation with 'violence outside the law,'<sup>22</sup> which finds its cohort examples in the description of K.'s offices in the *Trial*.

Benjamin explores the issue of an 'unassignable' law in his correspondence with Gershom Scholem. In a letter dated September 20, 1934, Scholem defines the relation of the law described in Kafka's *Trial* as the "Nothing of revelation," intended by this expression to name "a stage of life in which revelation does not signify yet affirms itself by the fact that it is in force. Where the wealth of significance is gone and what appears, reduced, so the speak, to the zero point of its own content, still does not appear (and Revelation is something that appears), there the Nothing appears."<sup>23</sup> According to Scholem a law that finds itself in such a condition is not absent but rather appears in the form of its unrealisability. "The students of whom you speak, he objects to his friend, are not students who have lost the Scripture...but students who cannot decipher it."<sup>24</sup>

Benjamin's finds Scholem's understanding of a law being in force without significance objectionable based on his opinion that "a law that has lost its content ceases to exist and becomes indistinguishable from life: whether the students have lost their Scripture or cannot decipher it in the end amounts to the

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<sup>22</sup> Benjamin, Walter, *One Way Street and Other Writings*, Intro. Susan Sontag Trans. Harry Zohn. (London: Verso, 1979) ,p. 154.

<sup>23</sup> Scholem's correspondence quoted from Agamben, Giorgio, *Homo Sacer Sovereign Power and Bare Life*, Trans. Daniel Heller-Roazen (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998), p. 50.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 50.

same thing, since a Scripture without its key is not a Scripture but life, the life lived in the village at the foot of the hill on which the castle stands."<sup>25</sup>

Giorgio Agamben credits Scholem's formulation of 'being in force without significance' as a faultless description of 'the ban,' (the term Agamben uses to describe the relationship between bare life and the form of law), that our age cannot master, something which is directly akin to the status of the law in Kafka's novel.<sup>26</sup> He gleans further from Scholem's comments, that

For life under a law that is a force without signifying resembles life in the state of exception, in which the most innocent gesture or the smallest forgetfulness can have the most extreme consequences. And it is exactly this kind of life that Kafka describes, in which the law is all the more persuasive for its total lack of content, and in which a distracted knock on the door can mark the start of uncontrollable trials... in Kafka's village the empty potentiality of law is so much in force as to become indistinguishable from life...The existence and the very body of Joseph K.. ultimately coincide with the *Trial*, they become the *Trial*.<sup>27</sup>

Moreover, Agamben contends this transformation of the body into law persists so long as 'law is maintained as pure form in a state of virtual exception, [and] it lets bare life (K.'s life, or the life lived in the village at the foot of the castle) subsist before it. Law that becomes indistinguishable from life in a real state of exception is confronted by life that, in a symmetrical but inverse gesture, is entirely transformed into law.'<sup>28</sup> I would argue that it is on this point of

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<sup>25</sup> Benjamin's correspondence quoted from Agamben, Giorgio, *Homo Sacer Sovereign Power and Bare Life*, Trans. Daniel Heller-Roazen (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998), p. 53.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 50.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 52-53.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 55.

subsistence versus absorption before the law that the virtual fate of the bare life meets with its real life consequence. It is here, in a real state of exception, that Benjamin's formulation of an assignifying law outstrips the virtual limitations of Scholem's configuration of that same principle and emerges as the real life threshold of this new era of biopolitics. For in a biopolitical era, bare life is compelled to fold back upon itself, to invert its liberties toward a proliferation of state orders, to offer the body itself as a foundation for the assertion of sovereign power, for the transference of an assignifying law. Ultimately, Agamben too comes down on the side of Benjamin's formulation as the definition of the law which best described the political parameter of the status of the law in this present era.

Moreover Benjamin grasps, better than most critics of his time, how this condition of life under a law that is for all intents and purposes assignifying, influences writer's like Kafka to transform themselves and their characters in response to tremendous pressures exerted on the organic body and 'assume the form things assume in oblivion,' meaning that 'they are distorted.'<sup>29</sup> Benjamin goes on to cite a litany of examples of this distortion: 'The 'cares of the family man,' which no one can identify, are distorted; the bug, of which we know all too well represents Gregor Samsa is distorted; the big animal, half lamb, half kitten, for which 'the butcher's knife' might be 'a release' is distorted. These figures are connected by a long series of figures with the prototype of distortion, the

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<sup>29</sup> Benjamin, Walter, *Illuminations*, Trans. Harry Zohn, Intro. Hannah Arendt (New York, Fontana Press, 1969), p. 129.

hunchback.’<sup>30</sup> These creatures occupy a corporeality that is composed solely out of writing, as such they could hold a place in a world so distorted that the virtual exception of the law now exists as a real state of exception. Under such a state of affairs these demonic creatures will continue to proliferate in their aberrant forms and can only ‘disappear with the coming of the Messiah,’<sup>31</sup> ‘when the law ‘being in force without significance has come to an end. For the Messiah will only be able to enter after the door of the law has been closed.’<sup>32</sup> Persisting in this state of distortion helps these abysmal creatures to elude what Agamben calls ‘the absolute intelligibility of a life wholly resolved into writing’ which ‘corresponds to the impenetrability of writing that, having become indecipherable now appears as life.’<sup>33</sup> This is the condition a true-life figure like Benjamin faces. ‘Only at this juncture of reality ‘do the terms distinguished and kept united by the relation of ban (bare life and the form of the law) abolish each other and enter into a new dimension.’<sup>34</sup> Benjamin would argue that the cusp of this dimension has already emerged within proto-fascist Berlin, through an era in which, as Agamben would have it, ‘that state of exception turned into rule signals law’s fulfilment and its becoming indistinguishable from the life over which it ought to order. Confronted with this imperfect nihilism that would let nothing subsist indefinitely in the form of a being in force without significance, Benjamin

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<sup>30</sup> Ibid., p. 129.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid., p. 129.

<sup>32</sup> Agamben, Giorgio, *Homo Sacer Sovereign Power and Bare Life*, Trans. Daniel Heller-Roazen (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998), p. 57.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid., p. 55.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid., p. 55.

proposes a messianic nihilism that nullifies even the Nothing and lets no law remain in force beyond its own content.'<sup>35</sup>

Prior to the arrival of this nullification, the existence and body of Walter Benjamin are left to coincide with National Socialism, destined to contend with its influence, as the state of exception could not be separated out from the bare life of any individual residing in Berlin in the era National Socialism came to envelope. Under such an exceptional rule of law his existence, his very body coincided with National Socialism to such a profound extent it began not just to resemble, or imitate the affects of National Socialism on his person, but to actually rhizomatically manifest them. His body thus written over with a force of law that was at once asignifying and profoundly consequential, meant that for Walter Benjamin one's only form of agency was to become a point on a point of view on the Events which followed in its immanent wake, to become National Socialism's reporter.

It was Leibniz 'who subjected the points of view to exclusive rules such that each opened itself onto the others only in so far as they converged. Nietzsche, contrary to Leibniz argued that the point of view is opened onto a divergence which it affirms. In other words each point of view becomes the means of going all the way to the end of the other, by following the entire distance. In Nietzsche's scheme divergence is no longer a principle of exclusion, and disjunction no longer a means of separation.'<sup>36</sup> The convergence of disjunctive events is now a means of communication. Everything thereafter

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<sup>35</sup> Ibid., p. 53.

<sup>36</sup> Deleuze, Gilles, *The Logic of Sense*, Trans. Mark Lester with Charles Stivale, Ed. Constantin V. Boundas, (London, Athlone Press, 1990), p. 174.

'happens through a resonance of disparities, point of view on a point of view, displacement of perspective, differentiation of difference, and not through the identity of contraries.'<sup>37</sup> The violence that Benjamin defines in the 'Critique of Violence' as divine moves along on a similarly disjunctive principle. Following in line from Agamben's arguments, it is 'situated in a zone in which it is no longer possible to distinguish between exception and rule.'<sup>38</sup> As such divine violence functions as 'a dissolution of the link between violence and the law. Benjamin can say that divine violence neither posits nor conserves violence, but deposes it. Divine violence shows the connection between the two [positing and preserving violence] and even more between violence and the law – the single real content of the law.'<sup>39</sup> For Benjamin divine violence with its characteristic mode of 'impossibility' emerges in the modern age as the State's most powerful agent for communication and perpetuation of an assignify law, namely the law of sovereign power'<sup>40</sup>

In the last paragraph of 'Critique of Violence, Benjamin asserts that 'the critique of violence is the philosophy of its history – the philosophy of this history, because only the idea of its development makes possible a critical, discriminating, and decisive approach to its temporal data.'<sup>41</sup> In analysing this data Benjamin cautions that we must not take the short view: 'A gaze directed only at what is close at hand can at most perceive a dialectical rising and falling

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<sup>37</sup> Ibid., p. 175.

<sup>38</sup> Agamben, Giorgio, *Homo Sacer Sovereign Power and Bare Life*, Trans. Daniel Heller-Roazen (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998), p. 65.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid., p. 65.

<sup>40</sup> Deleuze, Gilles, *The Logic of Sense*, Trans. Mark Lester with Charles Stivale, Ed. Constantin V. Boundas, (London, Athlone Press, 1990) p. 174.

<sup>41</sup> Benjamin, Walter, "Moscow," in *One Way Street and Other Writings*. Intro. Susan Sontag Trans. Harry Zohn. (London: Verso, 1979), p. 153.

in law-making and law-preserving violence. The law governing their oscillation rests on circumstances that all law preserving violence, in its duration, indirectly weakens the law-making violence represented by it, through the suppression of hostile counter-violence.<sup>42</sup> The only means to break this cycle of this duration, and in doing so bring upon 'a new historical epoch' is through 'the suspension of the law' and 'the abolition of state power.'<sup>43</sup> The agent necessary to carry such an operation would be revolutionary violence, what Benjamin refers to as 'unalloyed'<sup>44</sup> violence, implying that it is a pure form of violence, perhaps related in some sub or superhistorical sense, to law in its pure form. For Benjamin use of such violence is possible. What is 'less possible and also less urgent for humankind, however, is to decide when unalloyed violence has been realised in particular cases.'<sup>45</sup> That the appearance of this unalloyed violence persists as an uncertainty is largely due to the fact that it remains invisible to the judgement of mankind. Furthermore Benjamin argues 'the expiatory power of violence itself is invisible to men.'<sup>46</sup> This expiatory power violence relates to history insofar as it grants it the power of redress.

What I am pointing the way toward is Benjamin's final materialist document, *The Theses for a Philosophy of History*, which essentially promotes a rhizomatic approach to history; a situation where the future and past are constantly in the process of becoming each other. Undoubtedly some transhistorical material is always getting into the works of those becomings:

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<sup>42</sup> Ibid., p. 153.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid., p. 153.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid., p. 154.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid., p. 154.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid., p. 154.

what Benjamin refers as the Messianic. History then emerges as something far beyond the reach of mimetic historicism, the trace getting preempted by the code, history emerging as the 'capture of a code, the code's surplus value, an increase in valence, a genuine becoming,'<sup>47</sup> porosity. In this essay, Benjamin is influenced by Nietzsche's "Of the Use and Abuse of History," quoting him as saying 'We need history, but not in the way a spoiled loafer in the garden of knowledge needs it.'<sup>48</sup> Thus Benjamin is telling us that he is striving for an operative history, rather than a nostalgic one. Rather than looking to 'enslaved ancestors,' Benjamin wished to direct our focus to their 'liberated grandchildren.'<sup>49</sup> This is an 'untimely' view of history insofar as it seeks out futural probabilities for the coming moment, from the clues embedded within our understanding of the past. Benjamin:

Historicism contents itself with establishing a causal connection between various moments in history. But no fact that is a cause is for that very reason historical. It became historical posthumously, as it were, through events that may be separated from it by thousands of years. A historian who takes this as a point of departure stops telling the sequence of events like the beads of a rosary. Instead, he grasps the constellation which his own era has formed with a definite earlier one. Thus he establishes a conception of the present as the 'time of now' which is shot through with chips of Messianic time.<sup>50</sup>

For Nietzsche the historical formulation is slightly different, he opposes historicism not to the eternal, but to the subhistorical or superhistorical: the Untimely, which is another name for becoming,

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<sup>47</sup> Deleuze, Giles and Guattari, Felix. *On the Line*, Trans. John Johnston. (New York: Semiotext(e), 1986), p.19.

<sup>48</sup> Benjamin, Walter, *Illuminations*, Trans. Harry Zohn, Intro. Hannah Arendt (New York, Fontana Press, 1969), p. 251.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 252.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, p 255.

“The unhistorical is like an atmosphere within which life can germinate and with the destruction of which it must vanish. It is true that only by imposing limits on this unhistorical element by thinking, reflecting, comparing, distinguishing, drawing conclusions, only through the appearance within that encompassing cloud of a vivid flash of light – thus only through the power of employing the past for the purposes of life and of gain, and introducing into history that which has been done and is gone – did man become man: but with an excess of history man again ceases to exist, and without that envelop of the unhistorical he would never have begun or dared to begin. What deed would man be capable of if he had not first entered into that vaporous region of the unhistorical?”<sup>51</sup>

Benjamin relates Nietzsche’s concept of the ‘unhistorical’ to the sign of a Messianic cessation of happening’ which enables the materialist historiographer effectively to blast ‘a specific life out of the era or a specific work out of the lifework. As a result of this method the lifework is preserved in this work and at the same time [elevated]; in the lifework, the era; and in the era, the entire course of history.’<sup>52</sup> Thus making history as well as biography dependent on a series of breaks and constant realignments, a vehicle of its own changing significance over time. One way to actively effect these sorts of ruptures of history, both social and personal, is to develop a reliance on short-term memory, therein allowing for the replay of events in their singularity, as opposed to contiguity, in relation to all other surrounding happenings. This practice undermines historicism insofar as short term memory eliminates the drive to focus on the totalised account of what happened. In line with Deleuze and Guattari’s thinking on the subject, even the molar categories of history and biography can deterritorialised through use of the faculty of short term memory. Qualitatively speaking, ‘short term memory is

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<sup>51</sup> Nietzsche, Friedrich, *Untimely Meditations*, Trans. R.J. Hollingdale, Intro. J.P. Stern.(Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), pp. 63-64.

<sup>52</sup> Benjamin, Walter, *Illuminations*, Trans. Harry Zohn, Intro. Hannah Arendt (New York, Fontana Press, 1969), p.254..

of the rhizome or diagram type and long term memory is aborescent and centralised (imprint, engram, tracing or photography).<sup>53</sup> With those distinctions in mind it would appear that short term memory has some distinct traits which make it amenable as an agent of deteriorialisation. Deleuze and Guattari characterise short term memory as being 'in no way subject to a law of contiguity or immediacy to its object.'<sup>54</sup> What is more, short term memory 'can act at a distance, come or return a long time after, but always under conditions of discontinuity, rupture or multiplicity.'<sup>55</sup> These attributes which Deleuze and Guattari's associate with short term memory are common to both Nietzsche's 'unhistorical' and Benjamin's 'monadology' when it comes to defining a spatial relation to events in history. This is also true of short term memory's approach to time, which is one of disjointed recurrence as opposed to seamless continuum. Moreover it extends to the very conceptualisation of how to write history and to the idea of history of itself, which is at a certain level profoundly integrated with the idea of memory. Deleuze and Guattari would argue for a charting of history in which 'one writes using short term memory and thus using short term ideas, even if one reads or rereads using long term memory for long term concepts.'<sup>56</sup> Through this approach history is not the present, which becomes static through its recording, but history as a functionary of short term memory which 'includes memory as a process.'<sup>57</sup> Historical memory then 'merges not with the instant but instead with the nervous temporal and collective rhizome.'<sup>58</sup> This approach does

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<sup>53</sup> Deleuze, Gilles, and Guattari, Felix, *A Thousand Plateaus*, Trans. and Foreward by Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987), p. 16.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 16.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 16.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 16.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 16.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 16.

not signal the elimination of long term memory, but rather effects an alteration in the way it organises material. Long term memory (family, race, society, of civilisation) traces and translates, but what it translates continues to act in, from a distance, off beat and in an “untimely” way.<sup>59</sup>

When applied to personal history, short term memory takes on a quality of ‘experimentation in contact with the real.’<sup>60</sup> In his essay *Moscow*, Benjamin countenances revolutionary life as one where, “each thought, each day of life lies here as on a laboratory table. And as if it were metal from which an unknown substance is by every means to be extracted, it must endure experimentation to the point of exhaustion.”<sup>61</sup> Adopting such a comportment for himself, Benjamin spews out before him a political field (similar to Foucault’s ‘episteme’) that is neither imaginary nor symbolic, instead it represents a heterotopic register of political spaces yet to come, whose possibility for emergence still lies dormant beneath the strata of ‘the American technocratic apparatus or the Russian bureaucracy or the machinery of Fascism.’<sup>62</sup> Foucault points out that one of the features of heterotopias is their capability to juxtapose ‘in a single real place several spaces, several sites that are themselves incompatible.’<sup>63</sup> These are the spaces Benjamin wishes to excavate, to find their mineral as well as molecular contents, to locate their technical enplacements, and to discover beyond these their monadology. History according a materialist historiography is then borne

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<sup>59</sup> Ibid., p. 16.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid., p. 12.

<sup>61</sup> Benjamin, Walter, “Moscow,” in *One Way Street and Other Writings*. Intro. Susan Sontag. Trans. Harry Zohn. (London: Verso, 1979), pp. 185-186.

<sup>62</sup> Deleuze, Gilles and Guattari, Felix, *Kafka: Toward a Minor Literature*, Trans. Dana Polan, Foreword by Reda Bensmaia (University of Minnesota Press: Minneapolis, 1986), p. 12.

<sup>63</sup> Foucault, Michel. *Of Other Spaces, diacritics*, Spring 1986, p. 25.

of out of a history of abrupt blockages, what Benjamin terms monads. These monads configure themselves according to a logic of forces: 'When thinking suddenly stops in a configuration pregnant with tensions, it gives that configuration a shock, by which it crystallises into a monad.'<sup>64</sup> For Benjamin thinking, and in this instance the thinking of politicised spaces, 'involves not only the flow of thoughts, but their arrest as well.'<sup>65</sup> For Benjamin this blockage presents us with a tremendous opportunity: 'a revolutionary chance in the fight for an oppressed past.'<sup>66</sup> Therein thinking is always rhizomatic, a becoming encountering a blockage, encountering another becoming.

Benjamin's thought approaches politics as though it were 'an experimental machine, a machine for effects.'<sup>67</sup> He learns this approach from Kafka whose work for him was to be taken literally insofar as when viewed from a certain perspective, it functioned on the surface of its signs and that the issue was not – at least, not *only* – to try and interpret it but above all to practice it...'<sup>68</sup> Benjamin's enforced transience by those political formations, meant that he conducted many of these experiments on himself, as a political operative by other means. Literally then his writing becomes a means of giving authority to himself, not through anything resembling a Fascist dictate, but rather by materialising a space in which he might proliferate his political campaign through various cultural formations that were not strictly speaking authorised

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<sup>64</sup> Benjamin, Walter, *Illuminations*, Trans. Harry Zohn, Intro. Hannah Arendt (New York, Fontana Press, 1969), p. 254.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 254

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*, p.254.

<sup>67</sup> Deleuze, Gilles and Guattari, Felix, *Kafka: Toward a Minor Literature*, Trans. Dana Polan, (University of Minnesota Press: Minneapolis, 1986) p. xi.

<sup>68</sup> This quote was altered from a comment made by Reda Bensmaia in the fore ward to *A Thousand Plateaus*, *Ibid.*, p. xi.

for his perusal. Basically then Benjamin's work might be viewed as a trespass, a kind of unauthorised intervention taking place at the crossroads of various historical formations paving the road to a universally adopted totalitarianism, one I might add that would dwarf the German war-machine of Fascism according to Benjamin's estimations. It is my opinion that we have yet to pick up on Benjamin's signal in this regard. In a political discussion in 1938 with Brecht in Denmark Benjamin notes, 'I felt the impact of powers equal to those of Fascism, powers that sprang up from the depths of history no less deep than Fascist powers.'<sup>69</sup> Surely these depths will rise up again and require our most sober attentiveness. We can begin to chart these historical uprisings by examining Benjamin's preoccupation with combinations, what Benjamin referred to as 'an awakening combination, at once a modern surface and an archaic depth, 'signal' and 'oracle!'<sup>70</sup>

I mentioned earlier Benjamin's vision of what it means to become a materialist historiographer; it is to become a critical thinker who is able to 'grasp the constellation which his own era has formed with a definite earlier one.'<sup>71</sup> Thus Benjamin's historical preoccupations with series, events that join up in places never thought of, never concerned to be closely situated. The topographical map Benjamin gives to history is similar to the one Deleuze and Guattari describe as "the most striking topography in Kafka's work: two diametrically opposed points bizarrely reveal themselves to be in contact."<sup>72</sup> For

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<sup>69</sup> Wohlfarth, Irving, "No-man's Land On Walter Benjamin's Destructive Character" in *Walter Benjamin's Philosophy*, Ed., Andrew Benjamin (London: Routledge, 1994), p. 164.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 164.

<sup>71</sup> Benjamin, Walter, *Illuminations*, Trans. Harry Zohn, Intro. Hannah Arendt (New York, Fontana Press, 1969), p. 255.

<sup>72</sup> Deleuze, Gilles and Guattari, Felix, *Kafka: Toward a Minor Literature*, Trans. Dana Polan, Foreword by Reda Bensmaia (University of Minnesota Press: Minneapolis, 1986), p. 73.

Benjamin's part, he chooses to expose these sorts of alignments in history along the faultlines of political objective. Thus, Benjamin's approach to historical formation resembles something of a geological study, a plate tectonics of the will of nations. Benjamin's early concepts of the ruin and porosity in *Naples* suggest that he was conducting a kind of archaeological dig into history to recover its lost features. Thus Benjamin's approach surveys history on the level of the matrixial and molecular, beginning with the *Trauerspiel* and carrying right the way through to his *Theses on the Philosophy of History*. This happens well in advance of Deleuze and Guattari's combined use of the molar and the molecular as a means of assembling their views about the epochal events of history. This statement is not meant to inaugurate some stratified competition of philosophical might, but rather to demonstrate how molecules of Benjamin's thought have lodged themselves into Deleuze and Guattari's battle plan on the Signifier.

It is important to recognise that Benjamin's is a tactical approach much more subtle than any taxonomic history standing alone. Benjamin's interest lies in the potential of historical adjacencies, he is reticent about registering divisions since he does not accept that they materially exist. 'The historical materialist leaves it to others to be drained by the whore called 'Once upon a time' in historicism's bordello.'<sup>73</sup> An historical materialist cannot do without the notion of a present which is not in transition, but in which time stands still and has come to a stop. Historical materialism supplies a unique experience with the past. The historical materialist remains in control of his powers, and thus is 'man enough to blast open the continuum of history'<sup>74</sup> Benjamin is acting at the elemental level

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<sup>73</sup> Benjamin, Walter, *Illuminations*, Trans. Harry Zohn, Intro. Hannah Arendt (New York, Fontana Press, 1969), p. 254.

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*, 254.

to remap the coordinates of historical understanding. This fits in line with Deleuze and Guattari 's assertion that 'what distinguishes the map from the tracing is that it is entirely orientated toward an experimentation with the real.'<sup>75</sup> Such an experimental approach enables Benjamin, in the role of history's land surveyor to, with one hand detonate historical materialism, and with the other hand blast over a mimetic code of historical destruction.

In that same spirit of experimentalism Benjamin himself might be approached as a map, a territory mapped onto himself, following Deleuze and Guattari's interpretation of the map as 'open and connectable to all dimensions,' as well as 'detachable, reversible,' and 'susceptible to constant modification.'<sup>76</sup> Moreover, they assert that as opposed to a trace, 'the map can be torn, reversed, adapted to any kind of mounting, reworked by an individual group, or social formation.'<sup>77</sup> Deleuze and Guattari also give us ultimate licence for situating a map; for instance 'It can be drawn on the wall, conceived of as a work of art, constructed as a political action or as a meditation.'<sup>78</sup> Since Benjamin's project inherently occupies most of these potential locations, there is a great cause for it to manifest itself here along similar lines of formation. What is not made manifest in Benjamin's body of work is the proverbial 'map drawn on a wall.'<sup>79</sup>

The absence of this map raises both a crucial omission and a crucial opportunity in the survey of Benjamin's opus. It spurs the imagination toward an

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<sup>75</sup> Deleuze Giles and Guattari, Felix, *A Thousand Plateaus*, (London: The Athlone Press Ltd., 1988). p. 12.

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 12.

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 12.

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 12.

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 12.

opening out of the territorial locations that lay dormant through his writing. But in doing so one must remain cautious about the means with which one endeavours to expose these zones in the body of the text. If they are inscribed too much they run the risk of being overcoded. On the other hand too subtle a survey of them would leave them vulnerable to obscurity, or worse still to open to endless bouts of aestheticisation. What is required is not a tracing out of these areas, but rather a mapping technique that could relate them through diagrammatic extension, one aimed at composing series of gestures as opposed to pinning down a singular meaning; one moreover that could install productive blockages as well as opportunities for subverting them. The apparatus most suited to this task would be photography. This is not of course the most obvious tool of deterritorialization. Particularly when we take into account Deleuze and Guattari's views on photography, as something associated with long term memory, something that 'blocks desire, makes mere carbon copies of it, fixes it within a strata, cuts it off from all of its connections.'<sup>80</sup> When asked if they feel there is any potential for it to become a deterritorialising tool their response is tongue in cheek, playing up a Jewish sense of humour 'But, what, then can we hope for? It is an impasse. Nonetheless, we can realise that even an impasse is good if it forms part of rhizome.'<sup>81</sup> Benjamin quotes Kafka as having once said 'there is an infinite amount of hope, but not for us.'<sup>82</sup> Most people thought he was expressing desperation. Deleuze and Guattari read him as expressing humour. It is a politicised humour that they clearly wish to emulate, a humour which they credit in Kafka as forming 'A micropolitics of desire, a politics that

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<sup>80</sup> Ibid., p. 18.

<sup>81</sup> Deleuze, Gilles and Guattari, Felix, *Kafka: Toward a Minor Literature*, Trans. Dana Polan, Foreword by Reda Bensmaia (University of Minnesota Press: Minneapolis, 1986), p. 4.

<sup>82</sup> Benjamin, Walter, *Illuminations*, Trans. Harry Zohn, Intro. Hannah Arendt (New York, Fontana Press, 1969), p. 142.

questions all situations... Everything leads to laughter starting with *The Trial*. Everything is political starting with the letters to Felice.<sup>83</sup> It is that way with *A Thousand Plateaus*, as well as their book on Kafka. A politics that questions all situations, which can see levity even in the most molar formations can also allow for a different formation of photography to appear. A photography that challenges memory, challenges the narrative form, and challenges the regime of signification that reigns over the majority of photographic enterprises. This approach moreover could bring an alternative practice of photography into being to serve a linguistic enterprise.

What I am proposing is a 'minor' approach to photography, that would meet the criteria of Deleuze and Guattari's for a minor literature. Namely, that the images are 'affected by a high coefficient of deterritorialisation,'<sup>84</sup> 'that everything in them is political'<sup>85</sup> insofar as each individual frame is 'connected immediately to politics'<sup>86</sup> and that every image 'takes on a collective value...another possible community and to forge the means for another consciousness and another sensibility.'<sup>87</sup> Photography as a 'thing that no longer forms anything but a sequence of intensive states, a ladder or circuit for intensities that once can make race around on one sense or another, from high to low, or from low to high. The image is the race itself; it has become becoming...'<sup>88</sup> This mode of photography has the potential to become something

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<sup>83</sup> Deleuze, Gilles and Guattari, Felix, *Kafka: Toward a Minor Literature*, Trans. Dana Polan, Foreword by Reda Bensmaïa (University of Minnesota Press: Minneapolis, 1986), p. 42.

<sup>84</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 16.

<sup>85</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 17.

<sup>86</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 17.

<sup>87</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 17.

<sup>88</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 22-23.

deterritorialising, that would have no particular fidelity to a place, or for that matter in a signifying placement. It would produce images that form a rhizome with their surrounding texts. Deleuze and Guattari have already suggested that images might be further along than words, in their potential to deterritorialise. They offer *The Trial* as being an example of such a deterritorialised becoming for the photographic image:

This take place through the vehicle of proliferation: 'The proliferation starts at the beginning with Fraulein Brustner's room-photos that have the power to metamorphose those who look at them... From the photos of Fraulein Brustner we move to the obscene images in the judge's book, then to the photos of Elsa that K. shows to Leni (as Kafka did with his Weimar photos in his first encounter with Felice), then to the unlimited series of Titorelli's tableaux, about which one could say a la Borges, that they contain so many differences from each other because they are absolutely identical. In short the portrait or the photo that marked a sort of artificial territoriality of desire now becomes a centre for the perturbation of situations and characters, a connector that precipitates the movement of deterritorialisation. An expression freed from its constricting form and bringing about a similar liberation of contents.<sup>89</sup>

Therein the category of the photographic no longer slavishly responds to the commands of the symbolic meaning, but instead proliferates those commands onto infinity, creating a series of transformations of meaning based on an intimate connection with a viewer who is able to import them in line with his own unique zone of expression, dispersing them within his own visual idiom if you like.

Rather than contextualise the writings, minor photographs are meant to speed the narrative, but not toward any particular outcome. Instead, they are meant to indicate something gestural as opposed to symbolic for the viewer.

Benjamin describes Kafka's work as something that 'constitutes a code of gestures which surely had no definite symbolic meaning for the author from the outset; rather the author tried to derive such a meaning from them in ever-changing contexts and experimental meanings.'<sup>90</sup> A minor photography operates in a similar way, through series, pairings, repetitions and deviations of the appearance of ordinary locations. These images then are not 'linked' but instead form a constellation of little dramas. Benjamin in describing how gesture functions in Kafka's work, explains that 'Each gesture is an event- one might even say- a drama in itself.'<sup>91</sup> Therein these gestures form a map of constantly shifting happenings, one that neither concerns itself with the vagaries of timing, nor space, but rather with the instant. As Benjamin had observed in *The Theses on the Philosophy of History*, 'The true picture of the past flits by. The past can be seized only as an image which flashes up at the instant when it can be recognised and is never seen again.'<sup>92</sup> This is very much the work of the photographer, to seize upon moments that are fleeting from existence. However, the photographic act does not have to be one of memorial to the dead or drained instant, rather it can be used as a signposts for instants yet to come which share the same fleeting appearance.

A 'minor' photography is able to get involved in the proliferation of these instants, merging them into a collective rhizome, rather than isolating them and

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<sup>89</sup> Ibid., p. 61.

<sup>90</sup> Benjamin, Walter, *Illuminations*, Trans. Harry Zohn, Intro. Hannah Arendt (New York, Fontana Press, 1969), p. 117.

<sup>91</sup> Ibid., p. 117.



forcing their attenuation. Building up such a visual dossier on Benjamin is a perilous assignment, requiring recovering tactics of a different order than the archivizing tendency of the trace can offer. This is why a minor approach is necessary, one that refuses to entertain any desires to house Benjamin, to remember him, to replace him as displaced figure, to mollify him. Instead these composites hope to speed his signalled departure to send it racing into a series of departures and connections. Through a certain distribution of terms this can certainly be accomplished. Amongst these are '*Connection*. The construction of singular series. Also *Conjunction*. The construction of convergent series. And finally *Disjunction*. The distribution of a divergent series. These three tactics together equal an affirmation of mobility and of duration. Divergence however acts as the 'teeth' the interlock the sequences, which are subdivisible in their respective series.'<sup>93</sup> It is this quality of divergence that also allows me to affirm distance over locatedness, as a starting point of view.

In the book *Logic of Sense*, Deleuze holds that

With Nietzsche, the point of view is opened onto a divergence which it affirms; another town corresponds to each point of view, each point of view is another town, the towns are linked only by their distance and resonate only through the divergence of their series, their houses and their streets. There is always another town within the town. Each term becomes the means of going all the way to the end of the other, by following the entire distance.<sup>94</sup>

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<sup>92</sup> Ibid., p. 247.

<sup>93</sup> Deleuze, Gilles, *The Logic of Sense*, Trans. Mark Lester with Charles Stivale, Ed. Constantin V. Boundas, (London, Athlone Press, 1990), p. 154.

It is in this sort of town that the flight of a minor photography can commence from end to end, term to term, series to series, convergence to divergence and further on out from there. This then becomes about my plugging Benjamin into a very Kafkaesque topographical scenario, one motivated by Deleuze and Guattari's comments made in regard their prior survey of Kafka's literary impetus in the form of a photographic image of his father. For my purposes in surveying Benjamin, I am jettisoning the image of the Father, in favour of an image of Berlin. Indeed I started this chapter with the image of a Berlin which had so disenfranchised Benjamin, that he responded by radically distancing himself from Germany and transferring his adherence to an image Europe beyond all national boundaries, from there his task of surveying culture would be projected on to 'the geographic, historical and political *map* of the world in order to reach vast regions of it.'<sup>95</sup> 'One might say that by projecting [Berlin] onto a map of the world, [Benjamin] unblocks the impasse that is specific to the photo and invents a way out of this impasse, putting it into connection with a whole underground network, and with all the ways out of this network...the problem isn't that of liberty it is of escape. It is a matter of deterritorializing [Berlin] in the world instead of reterritorializing everything in [Berlin] and [Europe].'<sup>96</sup> It is a matter making a map that finds ways out of fascism where [Berlin] didn't find any.<sup>97</sup> A map that will extend to regions that

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<sup>94</sup> Ibid., p. 174.

<sup>95</sup> Deleuze, Gilles and Guattari, Felix, *Kafka: Toward a Minor Literature*, Trans. Dana Polan, Foreword by Reda Bensmaïa (University of Minnesota Press: Minneapolis, 1986), p. 10.

<sup>96</sup> Ibid., p. 10.

<sup>97</sup> Ibid., p. 10.

are in contact with Berlin but at a distance - sometimes poles apart - but where signals still might get through and be received by various Parties.

Benjamin faces a scenario of events where getting through might be just as bad as being disconnected, a somewhat horrifying prospect for anyone setting out. Benjamin's journey is 'a prodigious operation which translates this horror into a *topography of obstacles* (where to go? how to arrive? Berlin, Moscow, Paris?)'<sup>98</sup> The surveyor has no choice but to journey onward, as he is compelled by forces beyond his true understanding, diabolical forces that are knocking at the door, jamming up the signal, confusing the network as to vital task at hand. That task comes down a redirection of the 19<sup>th</sup> century's course of understanding, through twentieth century communication tactics which could potentially act as line of flight, a means of distribution of a particular thesis; one requiring the transformation of the image of thought and of history back into a minor discourse. We'll have to see how far this gets Benjamin. As it stands now he is in the middle of the night, setting a course for Moscow, keeping a diary and finding out that words 'can be the final station only when they are never the first ...'<sup>99</sup>

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<sup>98</sup> Ibid., p. 31.

<sup>99</sup> Ibid., pp. 80-81.

## Sternphotographie: A Constellation of Walter Benjamin's Moscow Diary.

### STERNPHOTOGRAPHIE.

In Walter Benjamin's essay 'Metaphysics of Youth'<sup>1</sup> there is a section called 'The Diary.' In it, Benjamin puts forth the idea that through the diary one is able to direct words as though they formed a ray of light. Later through a course of translations, this ray of light might then come to articulate itself as a ray of time. Indeed, what can best be wished for in writing a diary over time, according to Benjamin's guidelines, is the literal petrification of one's words, transforming what had initially been experienced in life as a series of hypersubjective flashes of recognition into something immortal, fossilised, and finally perfected through script. A youthful Benjamin believes that words recorded in his diary will have a momentous afterlife long after he has passed away. Whilst he is still alive each of the flashes of recognition he records in his diary further inform his experiences, which in turn spark the words to burn more brightly. The heat from these words spark still further, causing words to fuse the course of events into a constellation, which is then able to join up with an older, related configuration - the subject's own previously wished for outcomes.

In this section it would seem that Benjamin's ultimate wish as a diarist is nothing short of human liberation from mortality, a victory of youthful energy over the ravages of time. He finds however, that it is not bodies, nor the self

tyrannically encased in the 'I,' which get to mingle with immortality. Instead, he finds it is the word alone that has the privilege to glow of its own accord, and prosper beyond the realm of human dimension. For Benjamin, the word's glow possesses a quality similar to twilight, in that its radiance springs from an ambiguous origin. Indeed, the word's luminosity must be related to more prosaic phenomenon, namely the author's experience, in order to comprehend its nuance, its meaning, its placement within the order of things. Such associative thinking comes into play in Benjamin's description of twilight as a juncture 'where ideas relate to things as constellations to stars.'<sup>2</sup>

Moreover it would seem that as we grow in experience, these associations align themselves with a constellation of previously held pleasures. These pleasures most often coincide with a 'yearning for the self, a desire for youth, a lust for power, a desire to pass calmly through the days to come, and the pleasures of idleness'<sup>3</sup> make themselves known in momentary flashes when these desires would seem to be actualised. This actualisation however is illusory insofar as these flash ups of desire take a parallel route to experience, rerouting themselves through the pages of the diary. How is this possible? Benjamin describes the diary as 'the unfathomable document of a life never lived, the book of a life in whose time everything that we experienced inadequately is transformed into experience perfected.'<sup>4</sup> By that same token we can assume that

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<sup>1</sup> Benjamin, Walter, *Selected Writings, Vol. 1, 1913-1926*. Eds. Marcus Bullock and Michael W. Jennings. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1996. pp. 6-17.

<sup>2</sup> Benjamin quoted in Cadava, Eduardo. *Words of Light*. Princeton NJ: Princeton University Press, 1997, p. 28.

<sup>3</sup> Benjamin, Walter, *Selected Writings, Vol. 1, 1913-1926*. Eds. Marcus Bullock and Michael W. Jennings. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1996. p. 11.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 11.

desire too is perfected in this act of documentation.

This begs the question of how Benjamin, 'who will write in his diary only at intervals and will never complete it, because he will die'<sup>5</sup> can expect to attain such perfection having left behind so many examples of incomplete documentation? A clue lies with Benjamin's phrase, 'it is the document of a life never lived.'<sup>6</sup> Indeed, it would seem that Benjamin is arguing that diary is in fact a document of counteractualisation. That its function is nothing short of the counteractualisation of a life and therein of desire itself if we understand desire to be a process of living and not life's outcome, its lack, its blockage. Benjamin's comments imply that the diary is a kind of rogue assemblage of desire which need not concern itself with the proclivities of 'calendar time, clock time, and stocking exchange time' which send its author 'trembling' on the brink of mortality.<sup>7</sup> By contrast the 'I' of our diary plunges into this brink happily and with abandon. It, unlike its author, is free to make its own time, be its own agent; intimating all the while that it holds inside it 'the value of *what could have happened*.'<sup>8</sup> Its words 'mime what effectively occurs' in the experience of the author, and therein in it works to double the actualisation [of those events] with counter-actualisation,<sup>9</sup> creating a radical parabasis between the author and the diary itself. This margin allows the author to identify with the events that befall him, but with the added advantage of viewing them at a critical distance. Therein the diary would appear to double events in such a way as to 'give the truth of the

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<sup>5</sup> Ibid., p. 11.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., p. 11.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., p. 11.

<sup>8</sup> Deleuze, Gilles, *The Logic of Sense*, (London: The Athlone Press), p-161.

event the only chance of not being confused with their actualisation.’<sup>10</sup>

This is not to say that events do not catch up with the author himself, but they do so along the lines of a fault of character as opposed to fate. In one of the last sentences of this section Benjamin writes ‘we shall befall ourselves,’<sup>11</sup> meaning that it is none other than ourselves which we contend with in life. It is nowhere else, than the dark recesses of our character, the folds of the self, that we confront our greatest challenge as individuals, as authors of the illusive ‘I.’ Therein the diarist must always begin his account in the middle of the night, by describing the darkness that enfolds him, the circumstances that obscure his perception, his unique zone of expression.

By the same token if the author has lost his way, if his narrative drive forward has been dimmed by the forces beyond his true understanding, if his door has been darkened with ‘terrible bad luck,’ then he must go by the way of light: he must look to the stars. He must write himself out of this dilemma. Moreover, he must chart a course parallel to the events that befall him, parallel with a course in which he befalls himself. He can only move events by starting his journey with a detour away from words, starting instead with a quest for personal enlightenment, for meaning within his own life. Benjamin writes in a letter of 1916 to Herbert Belmore:

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<sup>9</sup> Ibid., p. 161.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., p. 161.

<sup>11</sup> Benjamin, Walter, *Selected Writings, Vol. 1, 1913-1926*. Eds. Marcus Bullock and Michael W. Jennings. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1996. p. 14.

We are in the middle of the night. I once tried to combat it with words ... At the time I learned that whoever fights against the night must move its deepest darkness to deliver up its light and that words are only a way station in this major life struggle: and they can be the final station only when they are never the first ...<sup>12</sup>

Even at this early stage Benjamin is aware that he must circumvent words in order to eventually, strategically direct them. Therein, Benjamin's long range thinking becomes preoccupied with the notion of delivering up the light of discourse. In the short term, and as a means of training himself toward this greater task, he occupies himself with the task of confronting the limits of his own character. He commences this task in earnest in December of 1926, by somewhat haphazardly depositing himself into another politico-linguistic context altogether, that of Soviet Moscow in the early years of Communist Party rule. For Benjamin this is a place, at least potentially, where the illuminating device of discourse, in particular leftist discourse, might be directed *differently* than in Benjamin's local neighbourhood of West Berlin. The particular leftist discourse that guides Benjamin there emanates from the Bolshevik revolutionary theatre director Asja Lacis, his former intimate and the inspiration for his most recent piece of writing, *One Way Street*.

It would seem to be both their understanding that she will call the course of events in Moscow, as she speaks the language and appears at least initially to hold reign over all the vital Communist connections that Benjamin wishes to acquire for himself once in the city. Most significantly however, this present role casts her as an experienced manipulator of political discourse. Indeed, Benjamin anticipates relying on her solely in this endeavour as his barometer of the leftist political climate in Moscow. This is not the first time Benjamin will rely upon

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<sup>12</sup> Ibid., pp. 80-81.

Asja to carve out an alliterative field for him. The details of such transactions to take place in Moscow however, as I will illustrate below, were worked out months, if not years, in advance of Benjamin's arrival there. These previous encounters have intimate through-lines with his other destinations and exist as rough drafts of the encounter he ultimately stages with Asja in Moscow.

## **ACTIONPHOTOGRAPHY.**

The first of these alliterative fields is Riga, in November 1925, a place arguably that provided an 'ordinance' for Benjamin's trip to Moscow. Benjamin came to Riga unannounced in 1925 to see Asja Lacis. He records his clandestine entry into the city in a section entitled 'Ordinance' in *One Way Street*, published the following year in 1926. A copy was subsequently brought to Asja in Moscow. Once there, Benjamin gave her the original dust jacket designed by Sasha Stone, and announced his dedication of the volume to her. The section he chose to read to Asja one early evening on that trip was 'Wrinkles.' It was very much intended as a demarcation of the territory of their mutual admiration. It directly spells out Benjamin's enduring preoccupation with her as a subject. The other section 'Ordinance' performs a very similar rhetorical operation to that of 'Wrinkles' insofar as it carves out a minor occupancy for Benjamin within Asja's ordained space, Riga. The place is ordained with excessive meaning for Benjamin simply by the anticipated presence of Asja Lacis within its scheme. And indeed, it will be instantly *ordinanced* by her, when she makes her first appearance within its spatial order. It is up to Benjamin then, in choosing to arrive here unannounced, to temporarily disorder that space by coming in as a complete outsider. What Benjamin is undertaking than becomes a reconditioning of Riga as a smooth

space, what for Deleuze and Guattari amounts to nomadic space on the ground.

This is also the way Benjamin authorises it when he writes his initial account:

I arrived in Riga to visit a woman friend. Her house, the town, the language were unfamiliar to me. No one was expecting me, no one knew me. For two hours I walked the streets in solitude. Never have I seen them so. From every gate a flame darted, each cornerstone sprayed sparks, and every streetcar came toward me like a fire engine. For she might have stepped out of the gateway, around the corner, been sitting in the streetcar. But of the two of us I had to be, at any price, the first to see the other. For had she touched me with the match of her eyes, I should have gone up like a magazine.<sup>13</sup>

What Benjamin is employing here is something of an eccentric cartography, a scientific survey of urban affects if you like, something that is necessarily minor in its conceits. This makes it no less of a scientific model, but instead of approaching the landscape as an (meta) physical survey, Benjamin chooses a model which is 'vortical,' one that Deleuze and Guattari assert 'operates in an open space throughout which things-flows are distributed, rather than plotting out a closed space for linear and solid things.'<sup>14</sup> It is here that objects, as words had done before in his diaries, take on the function of rays of light. Benjamin refers all belie this transformation of meaning into affect. Flames, sparks and fires are the things that incite Benjamin in this projectile landscape. The forms that potentially spawn them seem to be immolated by the force of his concerns, and by the still greater force of anticipatory energy building inside him when confronted with this open frontier of happenings. Implicitly one understands that this incitement demonstrates neither the desire nor the provision within it to locate either Asja's street name or her house number. This

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<sup>13</sup> Benjamin, Walter, *One Way Street and Other Writings*, Trans. Harry Zohn, Intro. Susan Sontag (London: Verso, 1979), pp. 68-69.

<sup>14</sup> Deleuze, Gilles, and Guattari, Felix, *A Thousand Plateaus*, Trans. and Foreword by Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987) p. 361.

small detail however marks the difference between what Deleuze and Guattari term smooth (vortical, projective, or topological) space and a striated space (metric) space: in the first case 'space is occupied without being counted,' (as it was in Riga) in the second case 'space is counted in order to be occupied, (as it will happen in Moscow).'<sup>15</sup> Through this distinction we are yet again admitted into the space of the Moscow Diary, as a model, similar to Deleuze and Guattari's model of 'nomadic science,' which proves to be 'problematic,' rather than 'thereomatic': where figures are considered from a viewpoint of the *affections* that befall them: sections, ablations, adjunctions, projections,<sup>16</sup> as opposed to their specific of differences or essential characteristics.

The supposedly solid figure that forces Benjamin back from the brink of the object world in Riga is the same as the one in Moscow. It is none other than Benjamin's supreme subject of desire, Asja Lacis. Indeed it is the Soviet's pseudo-characteristic solidity that ultimately makes Asja the only probable engineer for this tale. Indeed it is an if the 'insider knowledge' Benjamin assigns to Asja's position within Soviet Moscow, makes it so that in order to be equal to that task she is necessarily 'caught between a rock and a hard place, between the war machine that nourishes and inspires' the people's revolution and 'the State that imposes upon them an order of reasons.'<sup>17</sup> A position Deleuze and Guattari would characterise as the as the borderline between nomadic science and State science, in other words between a revolutionary wish to promote 'becoming, heterogeneity, infinitesimal [shifts], passage to the limit and continuous variation in the social field, and a State desire to eliminate such variables in favour of

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<sup>15</sup> Ibid., p. 361.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., p. 361.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., p. 361.

imposing 'civil, static and ordinal rules.'<sup>18</sup> Caught between solidity and fluidity, 'the figure of the *engineer* (in particular the military engineer), with all of its ambivalence, is illustrative of the situation'<sup>19</sup> Benjamin confronts when entering into this overly striated territory of Soviet life and despite this fact ultimately wanting to cut through it using the tools of a nomadic [political] science.

The pretext for this approach is cut through Benjamin, in the first sentence of *One Way Street* when he asserts that this 'street is named Asja Lacis Street after her who as the engineer cut it through the author.'<sup>20</sup> The question here then becomes one of authorisation. Who is authorised to make this sort of cuts through Walter Benjamin Street, affecting a detour, and yet at the same time forcing upon Benjamin a tyranny of political direction: a *One Way Street*? This situation could be described as a borderline phenomenon. One which illustrates perfectly Deleuze and Guattari's assertion that at all times, what is happening is that 'nomad science exerts pressure on State science, and conversely, State science, appropriates and transforms the elements of nomadic science.'<sup>21</sup> It is never a question of which is better or worse, more libratory, more revolutionary. The significance of these alignments happens elsewhere, indirectly onward from such exertions of force. What I am arguing is that this type of street cut is not made to the 'Wrinkles' in the fabric of Benjamin's Communist idealism, but rather to something far more nuanced and illusive in his constitution. Specifically, what I am pointing the way toward is Benjamin's first discovery of love as one of the key gears in building up one's own intimately designed war

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<sup>18</sup> Ibid., p. 363.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., p. 362.

<sup>20</sup> Benjamin, Walter, *One Way Street and Other Writings*, Trans. Harry Zohn, Intro. Susan Sontag (London: Verso, 1979), p. 45.

<sup>21</sup> Deleuze, Gilles, and Guattari, Felix, *A Thousand Plateaus*, Trans. and Foreword by Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987), p. 363.

machine, an energy that necessarily runs outside of State-imposed ordinance. Love as a counter-‘ordinance’ to the state as it were; giving a rogue order to make love and war. Moreover this is a love taken to extremes as a means to delve past the limit and into other territories of unregulated violence, namely fascism and its unregulatable war machine. What we in fact encounter in Moscow is a topology of extreme, yet banal limitations and endurance beyond what is initially deemed tolerable in the first instance of Benjamin’s diary writing. This is where engineering becomes relevant to Benjamin and to our discussion insofar as it is a key element in the outcomes of desire.

‘Desire,’ for Deleuze and Guattari ‘is never an undifferentiated instinctual energy, but itself results from a highly developed, engineered set up rich in interactions: a whole segmentarity that processes molecular energies and potentially gives desire a fascist determination.’<sup>22</sup> Deleuze and Guattari add that ‘leftist organisations will not be the last to secrete microfascisms. It’s too easy to be antifascist on the molar level, and not even see the fascist inside you, the fascist you yourself sustain and nourish and cherish with molecules both personal and collective.’<sup>23</sup> Fascism does not arise when the masses passively submit to power, or want to be oppressed by a strict regime, nor are they tricked by an ideological lure, rather it is through the desire to add a little suppleness to the system, to make things better that leads to the proliferation of microfascisms. In postures, attitudes, perceptions, expectations, semiotic systems, molecules of fascism are brewing everywhere. They happen when we underestimate the magnitude of the affairs we are a party to for better and worse, feel that our

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<sup>22</sup> Ibid., p. 215.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., p. 215.

paranoia about a situation is based on imaginary factors, and finally through judgemental thinking about the other party.

These sorts of microfascisms are what Benjamin is reporting on in his Moscow diary. This is what he was picking up on in Moscow, when he describes a particular evening as Asja's apartment when 'a violent argument breaks out in Russian about Meyerhold's production of the *Inspector General*. The point of contention is his use of velvet and silk, fourteen costumes for his wife, the performance moreover lasts more than five hours.'<sup>24</sup> Add to this the story of the playwright and Soviet activist Ernst Toller, who 'was welcomed with unbelievable pomp. Throughout the city posters proclaim his arrival. He is given a staff of assistants, translators, secretaries, beautiful women. There is, however, a session of the Comintern taking place in Moscow at the same time. Paul Werner, an archenemy of Toller, is among the German delegates. He requests or writes an article in *Pravda*: Toller betrayed the Revolution, is responsible for the collapse of one of the German Soviet Republics. *Pravda* adds a short editorial note: Our apologies, we were unaware. Whereupon Toller becomes a persona non grata in Moscow. He arrives at the auditorium where he is to deliver a much publicised lecture – the building is closed. The Kameneva Institute informs him: Our apologies, the hall was unavailable. (Someone had forgotten to telephone him).'<sup>25</sup> On top of this are Benjamin's dealings with figures like journalist Joseph Roth of whom he tells 'the long and short of it: he came to Russia a (nearly confirmed) Bolshevik and was leaving it a royalist. As usual, the country is left footing the bill for the change in colour that occurs in the convictions who arrive here as

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<sup>24</sup> Benjamin, Walter. *Moscow Diary*. ed. Gary Smith. Trans. Richard Sieburth, Preface, Gershom Scholem, (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1986), p. 11.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, pp.12-13.

scintillating reddish-pink politicians (under the banner of 'leftwing' opposition or idiotic optimism). He face was all creased with wrinkles and he had the look of a snoop.<sup>26</sup> The compounded outcomes of these and numerous other exposures to microfascisms within the Left make a strong impression on Benjamin, hounding his political conscience for many years to come.

To understand how this transpires we must decipher a difficult formula for how to conduct nomadic science on the ground. Deleuze and Guattari schematise it in the following way. For my part I will now proceed through their formula, plugging in the specifics of the potential components we are dealing with here in Moscow: 'Well first off one does not go by specific differences from a genus [Berlin + the Berlin Chronicle] to its specifics [Benjamin = Berliner] or by a deduction from a stable essence [Benjamin = child + proto-fascistic Berlin] to the properties deriving from it [Benjamin = an anti-fascist philosopher], but rather from a problem [y = unrequited love] to the accidents that condition and resolve it [Answer: Benjamin's war machine].'<sup>27</sup> A nomadic approach to reading into Benjamin's amorous predicament in Moscow therein 'involves all sorts of deformations, transmutations, passages to the limit, operations in which each figure designates an 'event' much more than an essence...'<sup>28</sup> Despite what Lacan might say in the operating systems manual on desire to come after World War II, 'the problem is not an 'obstacle' it is the surpassing of the obstacle, a pro-jection, or in other words a war machine.'<sup>29</sup> Desire is rather a process, it is continuous, sometimes to the point of self-abolition or the abolition of others. This is a disturbing knowledge that Benjamin would come to partially attain as an

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<sup>26</sup> Ibid., pp. 29-30.

<sup>27</sup> Deleuze, Gilles, and Guattari, Felix, *A Thousand Plateaus*, Trans. and Foreword by Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987), p. 361.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid., p. 361.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., p. 361.

outcome of his experiences in Moscow. Terrifyingly it is an insight that Goebbels, in his memoirs, would associate with Hitler in 1940: 'In the world of absolute fatality in which Hitler moves, nothing has meaning any longer, neither good nor bad, time nor space, and what other people call success cannot be used as a criterion ... Hitler will probably end in catastrophe.'<sup>30</sup> A line of abolition results, which ends finally, according to Goebbels, with Hitler deciding 'to join forces with his enemies in order to complete the destruction of his own people, by obliterating the last remaining resources of its life support system, civil resources of every kind (potable water, fuel, provisions, etc.)''<sup>31</sup> Doomed to ride out Hitler's mutated circuit, Benjamin would also end in catastrophe. But his would follow on from an alternate, though intersecting line: the Communist line. In choosing to support leftist solutions to the problem of a rising German fascism until it was too late to turn course sufficiently, Benjamin was in effect manning a derivative prototype of war machine from the imposed German model. Indeed leftist thinking of the 1930s was often characterised by a mixture of reactionary rhetoric to fascism, bourgeois idealism and a rigid adherence to programmatic outcomes, one only need look at Benjamin's diaries to find evidence of this in his exchanges with Party loyalists. To some extent even his own Marxist model of releasing free radicals culled from historical debris, into a corrupt historical engine of historicism is tinged with too crude a dialectal understanding of history, giving too much significance to the striated spaces of historical accounting. Deleuze and Guattari caution that 'We must remind ourselves that smooth space and striated space only exist in mixture: smooth space is constantly being translated into a striated space; striated space is constantly being transversed into a smooth space; striated space is constantly being reversed, returned to a smooth space.'<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> Ibid., p. 231, Footnote 32.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid., p.,231.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid., p. 361.

Benjamin does experience glimmers of understanding of this through his journey to Moscow, in particular through his struggles in his relationship with Asja Lacis. Indeed, it is through trials on his own heart, and upon leaving Moscow, that Benjamin is able to launch in earnest into his study of 19<sup>th</sup> century Paris, the Arcades Project, which in directory-like form stages a pre-eminent display of the working interlogistics between smooth and striated space. A foretaste of this understanding comes to light on 6 December 1926, Benjamin enters into a station that will change his life course forever. He makes provisions should he not be awaited in his arrival at this crucial junction:

In the train I had made a mental note of the name and the address of a hotel in case there is nobody waiting for me at the station. (At the border they had made me pay extra to travel first class, claiming there were no more seats in second) I was relieved that there was no one there to see me emerge from the sleeping car. But there was no one at the platform either. I was not overly upset. Then, as I was making my way out of Belorussia-Baltic railway station, Reich appeared.<sup>33</sup>

Benjamin has already started from a point of striation as a German Bourgeois when he entering Soviet Moscow. However, even at that, his striation has already been transversed by an introjection of smoothness when he comes up against the impossibility of coming off the train as a second class passenger, which would seemingly lodge him back into the space of the German bourgeoisie. However, this is suddenly of no consequence, when there is no one to witness his departure from the train. With no one at the platform to meet him, Benjamin is allowed to regain a smooth entry into the Belorussian-Baltic space of the railway station. That is until Reich appears, and forces him back into the striated space of recognition. Nonetheless, the smooth space of an unknown

Moscow was awaiting him beyond the journey from the station and Benjamin will learn to employ other more successful nomadic approaches to the city as the weeks go by. These are the sort of hydraulic models, what Deleuze and Guattari group with the affects of nomadic science and the war machine, 'consist in being distributed by turbulence across smooth space.'<sup>34</sup> It is these types of force of flow that will speed Benjamin's entire experience here, transporting him from one point to another. As a result of allowing himself to be taken up and buffeted by these hydraulic forces, Benjamin will emerge simultaneously affected by all the points along the way. He will emerge as the machine both of his discontents and his likenesses, his upsets and victories. Only then can Benjamin become the motor of this installed programmatic of endurance incarnate, trudging forward to face the steep terrain of fascism, to taking its suicide gambit like a true engineer by outwitting its shutdown mechanisms and realigning them into a stall pattern.

### **NERVEPHOTOGRAPHIE.**

An unfortunate set of circumstances converges with the birth of this mission to Moscow, circumstances which are overshadowed by an uncanny spectre of suicide. It almost seems as if Moscow marks a point of deviation from Benjamin's given course of fatality, academic and otherwise in that same year. By 1926 Benjamin had entered into a collision course with fate, which brought with it the culmination of various trials including those of unrequited love with Julia Radt, chronic depression based on his financial woes, professional devastation

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<sup>33</sup> Benjamin, Walter. *Moscow Diary*. ed. Gary Smith. Trans. Richard Sieburth, Preface, Gershom Scholem. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1986), p. 9.

<sup>34</sup> Deleuze, Gilles, and Guattari, Felix, *A Thousand Plateaus*. Trans. and Foreword by Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987), p. 363.

with the rejection of his habilitation thesis, and death, through the loss of his father with whom he had been locked in unresolved financial conflict for several years. The shock of these events overloaded Benjamin's psychic capacity, resulting in a nervous breakdown. Benjamin conspicuously characterises the term 'nervous breakdown' as 'a soothing phrase' with which to describe his condition.<sup>35</sup> Given that there was little left that was readily classifiable in Benjamin's experience at the time, it is little wonder why the term poses just that slight bit of ironic relief for him.

Benjamin speaks of his nervous breakdowns as a series: 'more precisely I had one after the other.'<sup>36</sup> This repetition can be registered in Benjamin as nothing less than a signal, a signal to alert him to the ultimate power failure to come at the end of the line. If we understand that repetition on the order of experience will cause the chain of signification to ignite again and again, we are then, like Benjamin, also able to recognise these system failures as something ultimately feeding into a power surge. Now it was Benjamin's task to discover the location with which to spark a necessary transformation in the way he functioned, to act as switch-point for him to discard this faulty logic of perception that had led him so far off his envisaged route. The key to selecting this space for Benjamin, became how to tap into an already existing and much larger rush of energy in Moscow; both as a city scape, and in the embodied form of Asja Lacis. That his descriptions of the city he finds there and Asja's condition within it mingle so effortlessly in the page after page of the diary attest to his desire for these two formidable bodies together to yield some palpable change in

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<sup>35</sup> Witte, Bernd. *Walter Benjamin*. Trans. James Rolleston. Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1991. p. 99.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, p.99.

his perceptions, and in doing so in some way alter the course of his interior demolition before it is too late.

## **POSTERIORPHOTOGRAPHIE.**

Though Benjamin abruptly starts his Diary on 9 December, in a resounding gesture resembling nothing so much as an engine going from stall to ignition, the story begins much earlier. In Gary Smith's edited version of the Diary Smith chooses to preface this first abrupt entry with an essay by Gershom Scholem. This is somewhat of an odd choice given that Scholem was already residing in Jerusalem for some time and therefore was not a party to the planning stages of Benjamin's visit to Moscow. As far as the intimacy of their correspondence went, Scholem makes it clear that Benjamin gave him neither a definitive idea of why he was going nor any indication of what was happening in Moscow when he got there, in the one letter Benjamin sent to him from there. Moreover, this letter is dated December 10, precisely one day after his arrival. Surely this is a defensive move on Benjamin's part so that Scholem would have no way of knowing the extent to which Benjamin's passion for Asja determined his stay there, and indeed she is mentioned nowhere in the short letter. Instead, Benjamin focuses his letter on happenings in Berlin and his recent professional achievements. Scholem rationalises Benjamin's decision to leave him in the dark on what could potentially be a failed mission to Moscow by asserting 'retrospectively' that 'It was clear that he did not care to share his almost certain misfortunes in undergoing this journey.'<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> Ibid, p. 7.

This rather conspicuous comment inadvertently sheds light on another facet of Benjamin non-writing, the crucial omission of Asja Lacis. Benjamin's lack of correspondence on her specifically leaves Scholem's analysis to deal with her simply as a troubling and irritating enigma. The fact is that at the time Scholem had no real idea of who Asja Lacis was, nor the decisive role she played in Benjamin's decision to go to Moscow. After Scholem gets hold of the diary himself and as late as 1982, he still remains reluctant to rank her as the greatest factor figuring into Benjamin's decision to go. Instead, he seems determined to cling to the idea that Benjamin's dilemma of whether or not to join the German Communist Party was the essential motivating factor. Any communist orientation on Benjamin's part however, seems very hard to demonstrate given the consistently bourgeois perspective Benjamin provides us with throughout the narrative of the diary. Indeed, his greatest preoccupations in Moscow apart from Asja Lacis seem to revolve around shopping for presents, eating exotic meals out and attending the theatre in the evening. It could hardly be argued that Benjamin was trying out the proletarian lifestyle during his stay.

As far as Scholem's ability to assess Asja's longstanding impact on Benjamin's life, it is enough to say that he was not even aware of her name until she came to Berlin in 1925. Benjamin met her the previous year in Capri. Scholem only ever heard tell of her in that year on two occasions. On the first occasion, Benjamin described her in a letter to him as simply 'the Bolshevik from Riga.' In a second letter from Capri, Benjamin referred to her as a 'Russian revolutionary,' who was according to that same account 'the most remarkable woman [he] ever met.'<sup>38</sup> Given this last statement it seems ironic that Benjamin chose not to remark

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<sup>38</sup> Benjamin, Walter. *Moscow Diary*. ed. Gary Smith. Trans. Richard Sieburth, Preface, Gershom Scholem, (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1986), p. 7.

upon her further, as late 1926, the time of his letter to Scholem from Moscow. It seems particularly odd given that at that point the couple had been involved with each other for over two years. Benjamin's reticence about this relationship indeed seems to have left Scholem with little choice but to conclude at least in 1926, that Benjamin's trip was one preoccupied more so with getting to grips with a political economy rather than an erotic one.

Nonetheless, Scholem's account manages almost inadvertently to come to grips with some rich insights into how Benjamin's portrayal of Moscow was to figure in his later works, and also how it might have been linked with other critical inquiries at the time about Moscow and its situation amongst Leftist thinkers. Nevertheless, it will require a radical re-territorialization of Scholem's comments to unearth such insights. It requires us to relay the ground of Benjamin's departure from Moscow in several ways. Again we must redirect light differently and read by way of a circumspection of sorts of Scholem's account, in order to arrive at what seems to be nothing short of a ghostwritten preface to Benjamin's appearance in Moscow. Often this kind of surveying activity reveals to us contiguity within Benjamin's account that is not immediately apparent. Indeed what at first seem unrelated and even diametrically opposed elements reveal themselves upon closer inspection to be a select group, or pack of contiguous themes in the work. In order to unearth these themes we must loop our terrain, looking for molecular 'houses,' rather than molar landmarks such as St. Basil's Cathedral. Benjamin writes of these 'houses,' 'It is only after you have crept along a series of them in search of a very specific one that you come to learn what they contain.'<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> Ibid., p. 25.

## PERIMETERPHOTOGRAPHIE.

The first loop in our circumspection of the Moscow journey starts with a quote from Scholem outlining the three factors that contributed to Benjamin's journey to Moscow.

First of all his passion for Asja Lacis, and second his desire to get a closer look at the situation in Russia and perhaps to even establish some sort of official tie with it, thereby resolving the issue of his eventual membership in the German Communist Party, a question he had been weighing for over two years. A further contributing factor was no doubt provided by the literary obligations he had assumed before setting out on his journey and which committed him to writing an account of the city and its inhabitants, in short rendering a 'physiognomy' of Moscow.<sup>40</sup>

What Scholem assumes here was that all these factors are 'contributing' to Benjamin's journey, rather than immanent factors which must be raised in order to precipitate Benjamin's trip, forces which are contiguous with one another. Certainly, the ground for Benjamin to come to Moscow was laid out in 1924, when he met his first Soviet Revolutionary in the flesh and fell in love with her. This event then hastens Benjamin's more than-two-year struggle of whether or not to join the Party. This concern is then joined to his accumulation of literary obligations, which are invariably tied up with financial obligations. Benjamin must make Capitalism and Communism join together to back him. In terms of Capitalism, the support comes in the form of the literary advances he receives prior to his trip and in terms of Communism in the form of State subsidies. It is Benjamin's wish that a happy dialectical understanding between the two systems can be reached. However, it will emerge only if he properly aligns these interests.

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<sup>40</sup> Ibid., p. 7.

It is only then that these two systems that dog him ideologically, can be resolved into a satisfying materialist economic strategy. Toward this end, Benjamin seeks advances in Germany as rigorously as he seeks subsidies in the Soviet Union.

Scholem finally concedes, 'after all, he partially financed his trip by various advances received for these pieces.'<sup>41</sup> Even then, Scholem can only see the advances. In light of the economic advances Russia poured into Germany at the time, both culturally and financially, largely from communist circles, one cannot help but wonder if Scholem's biased audit of Benjamin's accounts isn't corrupted by some strain of nationalism. Furthermore, he fails throughout to acknowledge the Russian subsidies, both monetary and emotional, that really enabled Benjamin to carry on in Moscow once he got there. Even as he is acknowledging these advances as a crucial factor to the feasibility of Benjamin's plan, he is at the same time failing to appreciate the efforts that Benjamin must have gone to in order to secure these advances. Indeed, Benjamin would have had to be far more concerned with convincing his colleagues that these on site accounts were necessary. Given that Joseph Roth had been commissioned by the *Frankfurter Zeitung* to report on his travels from the Soviet Union from late August until December 1926,<sup>42</sup> Benjamin would have to convince editors that a further commentary was needed. Especially one that would come literally on the heels of Roth's departure. Indeed, the last of Roth's accounts wouldn't even have been published until January 1927,<sup>43</sup> a month into Benjamin's stay. Scholem also fails to recognise that the Benjamin's motivation to seek out these commissions to begin with is fuelled by his passion for Asja Lacis and a desire to see her in Moscow, making this again somewhat of a circular enterprise.

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<sup>41</sup> Ibid., p. 5.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid., pp.28-29 Footnote 51.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid., pp.28-29 Footnote 51.

Scholem then adds in a further awkward comment, asserting that the Moscow Diary is an 'astounding'<sup>44</sup> bit of writing. Such a startling reaction on his part however can only take place through a failure to see the Diary as a complex system of justifications for Benjamin's being in Moscow. The 'intense blend of observation and imagination,'<sup>45</sup> Scholem experiences largely comes out of Benjamin's determination to survive in a space that is at first completely uncharted to him and one which he will have to struggle daily to locate his own vital territorializations. Scholem also remarks upon Benjamin's 'futile' attempts in the city, not taking into account that within what appears to be futility is actually Benjamin's making a utility out of his apparent failures. Benjamin in the Diary is constantly moving on from his apparent failures, making a virtue of his transitory status to replace untenable figures that exist on the scene of his visit. Even Asja loses her central importance to the narrative half way through, and is replaced with several other more serviceable figures such as Reich, the theatre director Meyerhold, and Asja's companion, Basseches, the Austrian journalist and engineer, finally Rachlin, Asja's roommate when she moves out of the sanatorium.

This last figure Rachlin, who appears late in the narrative, seems to provide Benjamin with an alternative, if ambivalent source of erotic attraction. We see Benjamin in the last several pages trying to elude her advances, and at the same time utilising them as a means of comparison, to assure himself of his continued attachment to Asja. By the end of the narrative all that was assumed to be unproductive space in Moscow has advanced and what was initially thought

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<sup>44</sup> Ibid., p. 6.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid., p. 6.

to have been conquered territory has dwindled in its importance. All the circuits are reversed and Benjamin attempts to intellectualise the experience are abandoned in favour of what he refers to in a letter to Martin Buber of 23 February 1927 as a 'creatural' turn in his writing, perhaps referring the title of the journal itself *Die Kreatur*.

Moreover, Benjamin displays what can only be described as an almost ferocious approach to the completion of what will eventually be known as the 'Moscow' essay. In just three short weeks its arrival to Buber's editorial desk appears imminent, in a Kafka-like feat of masterworking - this is a dare say Benjamin's 'Metamorphoses.' He writes to Buber:

My presentation will be devoid of all theory. In this fashion I hope to succeed in letting the creatural speak for itself: in as much as I have succeeded in seizing and rendering this very new and disorientating language that echoes loudly through the resounding mask of an environment that had been totally transformed. I want to write a description of Moscow at the present moment in which 'all factuality is already theory' and which would thereby refrain from any deductive abstraction, from any prognostication, and even within certain limits from any judgement - all of which, I am absolutely convinced cannot be formulated in this case on the basis of spiritual 'data' but only on the basis of economic facts of which few people, even in Russia, have a sufficiently broad grasp. Moscow as it appears at the present reveals a full range of possibilities in schematic form: above all the possibility that the Revolution might fail or succeed. In either case, something unforeseeable will result and its picture will be far different from any programmatic sketch one might draw of the future. The outlines of this are already brutally and distinctly visible among the people and their environment.<sup>46</sup>

It is at this point that one must recognise that we cannot approach Benjamin's Moscow Diary as theory. Nor can it be understood through theoretical paradigms, for to do so would deny its fundamental 'creatural' the

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<sup>46</sup> Ibid., pp. 6-7.

resonance of its emotional, immanent life. Perhaps this is why critics of Benjamin have largely shied away from this piece of Benjamin's writing. Indeed, there are precious few critical analyses of the Diary. Most choose to view it as a fairly plodding, politically naive account of a failed mission to the Soviet Union. This is why I have chosen Deleuze and Guattari's work to figure so crucially in my editing of this text. Their work is meant to act as a user's manual, a mechanics of reading texts conjunctively, experimentally, alchemically. Deleuze and Guattari's work, unlike a standard theoretical apparatus, acts in continuity with the microelements already at work within the text. It does not act as disciplinary force on the text, seeking to reform its excesses as though it was a disobedient child.

Reading the Moscow Diary alongside Deleuze and Guattari enables criticality to instead become a tool of edition. Editing in the sense of not a cutting into a text, but instead re-networking its long neglected connections, using wires presumptively thought to have crossed, triggering off communication which relies on discursive receptors beyond the here and now and what can be materially understood. If Benjamin's documentation of Moscow is intended to be read as creatural, then we must take it on its own terms, its becoming text becoming animal with all the seeming limitations that brings. One of those limitations will be an expectation that Benjamin's creatural text will somehow imitate a creature, that it will gnaw, howl, bite at the object within its reach, Moscow. To imagine this scenario, would be to totally miss the point of what Deleuze and Guattari are hoping to conjure with the notion of becoming-animal, or in this instance with Benjamin's text, with becoming-creatural. Using their model of becoming, we can only say that Benjamin's text is becoming-creatural when 'it enters into composition with something else in such a way that the

particles emitted from the aggregate thus composed will be [creatural] as a function of the relation of movement and rest, or of molecular proximity into which they enter.<sup>47</sup> In other words, a text is becoming, animal, creatural, woman, child, whatever only when it temporarily incorporates the manner of the thing it is becoming, and not when it incorporates its molar, organic form. When Benjamin describes the text's creaturality, it happens through the activity of 'seizing and rendering this very new and disorientating language,'<sup>48</sup> and not through the qualitative nature of its prose. The diary does not resemble a creature, in as much as its approach periodically adopts aspects of creaturality such as seizing and rendering to carry out its desired affect. Simple put, the text is emitting creaturality, it is creating.

As Deleuze and Guattari schematise it, 'the becoming-animal effectively shows a way out, traces a line of escape, but is incapable of following it or making it its own.'<sup>49</sup> This limit doesn't force Benjamin's Diary to go elsewhere. Rather, it forces it into becoming something out running the slow prudent pace of theory, and thereby entering into a velocity where 'all factuality is already theory.' Therefore its rate of progress cannot be stabilised, nor at the end of this run can it ever be brought down like a lame dog. No, Benjamin's creaturality is stronger than one might imagine, much stronger than it is accounted for by a distanced reader like Scholem.

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<sup>47</sup> Deleuze, Gilles, and Guattari, Felix, *A Thousand Plateaus*, Trans. and Foreword by Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987), p. 363.

<sup>48</sup> Benjamin, Walter. *Moscow Diary*. ed. Gary Smith. Trans. Richard Sieburth, Preface, Gershom Scholem, (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1986), p. 132.

<sup>49</sup> Deleuze, Gilles, and Guattari, Felix, *Kafka Toward a Minor Literature*, Trans. Dana Polan, Foreword Reda Bensmaia (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986). pp. 36-37.

What Benjamin senses out of Moscow is as a result unforeseeable to most city planners, who remain blind to the extent of the parameters of this new bureaucratic economy, and even more so to its violence. Benjamin will ask himself: How can anyone ever be for or against violence? Anymore than anyone can be for or against love? Not surprisingly, there is even a link between violence and becoming animal it is 'because it is accompanied by, at its origin, as an undertaking, by a rupture with the central institutions that have established themselves or seek to become established.'<sup>50</sup> This rupture creates a leakage in some very powerful institutions such as the family, religion and the State. The rupture that is created allows power to shift into the hands of the oppressed, prohibited, those in revolt, those on the fringe of recognised institutions. One of course recognises in Benjamin the fundamental belief that civil society is subtended constitutionally by violence, and therein the politics of becoming-animal becomes that much more ambiguous insofar as its tactics also comprise violent outcomes. It then comes down to a question of alliances and of allowing one to become contaminated with a certain molecular strain of political appropriation.

With this in mind, it is Martin Buber, and not Gershom Scholem who Benjamin will choose to align himself with in his time of communicatory need coming out of Moscow. 'My esteemed Herr Buber ...'<sup>51</sup> It is Benjamin's letter to Buber, which decisively marks the switch point of the smooth space of Moscow into the creatural terrain of Benjamin's understanding, the becoming animal of his critical analysis. The justification for this turn is apparently based upon some

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<sup>50</sup> Deleuze, Gilles, and Guattari, Felix, *A Thousand Plateaus*, Trans. and Foreword by Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987), p. 247.

<sup>51</sup> Benjamin, Walter. *Moscow Diary*. ed. Gary Smith. Trans. Richard Sieburth, Preface, Gershom Scholem. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1986, p. 132.

elusive 'economic facts' that 'most Russians cannot grasp.'<sup>52</sup> What Benjamin does not say, but rather implies is that the term economy in this work has been made to take flight of its ordinary signification and to enter into another territory (one altogether apart from any Communist Manifestation.) The creatural line of escape Benjamin has the foresight to follow is characterised by Deleuze and Guattari as something that 'vacuums up in its movement all politics, all economy, all bureaucracy, all judiciary: it sucks them like a vampire in order to make them [sur]render still unknown sounds that comes from the future - Fascism, Stalinism, Americanism, *diabolical powers that are knocking at the door.*'<sup>53</sup> These diabolical powers are not to be avoided as such, but instead molecularly absorbed in such a way as to establish affinities and not filiations with them. These affinities can then be recoded and spread through Benjamin's minoritarian networks (which included the likes of 'Bertolt Brecht or Karl Korsch, both Marxist of unusual pedigree – genealogically outsiders – with troubled relations to the Party)<sup>54</sup> as a form of redirecting political understanding and delivering up the light of discourse. This must be accomplished by a creatural approach to writing where 'all factuality is already theory,' where theory is understood to operate like a 'burrow'<sup>55</sup> digging ever deeper in the recesses of language and of understanding. Deleuze and Guattari contend that 'because expression precedes content and draws it along (on the condition, of course, that it is nonsignifying): living and writing, art and life, are opposed only from the point of view' of a majority literature.'<sup>56</sup> What Benjamin is constructing in his writing however is a

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<sup>52</sup> Ibid., p. 132.

<sup>53</sup> Deleuze, Gilles, and Guattari, Felix, *Kafka Toward a Minor Literature*, Trans. Dana Polan, Foreword Reda Bensmaia (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986). p. 41.

<sup>54</sup> Benjamin, Walter. *Moscow Diary*. ed. Gary Smith. Trans. Richard Sieburth, Preface, Gershom Scholem. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1986), p. 138.

<sup>55</sup> Deleuze, Gilles, and Guattari, Felix, *Kafka Toward a Minor Literature*, Trans. Dana Polan, Foreword Reda Bensmaia (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986), p. 3.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid., p. 37.

minor literature and therein he is installing the means by which all of these nodes of expression, his various works, can at least potentially converge and communicate with one another. However at the time of Benjamin's writing, the force of a rising Stalinism was 'still too close, still too perceptible, too individuated'<sup>57</sup> for the diary to suffice as a proper format in which to engage these concerns. Indeed what Scholem praises in the long essay 'Moscow' that eventually appears in Buber's journal is its 'unbelievable precision, and 'unusually intense blend of observation and imagination.'<sup>58</sup> Qualities, moreover, that for Scholem are seemingly lacking in the diary. It is not a coincidence that at the exact moment that Benjamin begins writing 'Moscow' 'he abandons becomings-animal for a more complex assemblage.'<sup>59</sup> He does so because he becomes fundamentally aware that a molar formation of Communism has taken on a new and more powerful valance through the proliferation of molecular totalitarianisms throughout Moscow. Indeed, in later years the beast of totalitarianism would take on a sophisticated molecular form enabling it to inhabit and infect codes across the social strata of Soviet life. Benjamin in Moscow was simply picking up on a relatively weak strain of that contagion, compared to virulence it would attain in years to come.

## DEPTHPHOTOGRAPHIE.

Gary Smith, the editor of the Moscow Diary in English asks us to read 'as if through a palimpsest.'<sup>60</sup> Do we go along with such a theory of editorial

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<sup>57</sup> Ibid., p.37.

<sup>58</sup> Benjamin, Walter. *Moscow Diary*. ed. Gary Smith. Trans. Richard Sieburth, Preface, Gershom Scholem. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1986. p. 6.

<sup>59</sup> Deleuze, Gilles, and Guattari, Felix, *Kafka Toward a Minor Literature*, Trans. Dana Polan, Foreword Reda Bensmaia (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986). p. 37.

<sup>60</sup> Benjamin, Walter. *Moscow Diary*. ed. Gary Smith. Trans. Richard Sieburth, Preface, Gershom Scholem, (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1986), p. 137.

superimposition, by Benjamin, by Smith? It is clear that something has been 'rubbed out' in Benjamin, but just how serious or extensive this effacement was remains indeterminate. What we do know is that Benjamin's overwrite is never meant only to bear traces of earlier writing, but rather to describe what might potentially emerge. On this level, it is fundamentally not 'a programmatic sketch one might draw of the future.'<sup>61</sup> Instead it occupies 'a different space of broadcast altogether.'<sup>62</sup> An intensely personal one. All of Benjamin's work throughout the 1930s lies immanently in the Moscow Diary.

Smith also cites Benjamin's debut in writing for radio, as an event whose source material is located in the journal.<sup>63</sup> This might not have happen in the obvious way Smith seems to imply. Instead is the architecture of Moscow which draws Benjamin's attention to a potentially 'different shape' in which to appreciate the impact of broadcast. Benjamin: 'I saw the enormous Moscow radio transmitter, whose shape is different from any other I have seen.'<sup>64</sup> Nevertheless, Smith continues to rely upon literal referencing and thus goes on to footnote no less than 15 occasions in which Benjamin addresses, in essay form, a Moscow based theme.<sup>65</sup> 'Many of the motifs of the Diary that Smith cites including general discussions of theatre, film, poetry and toys'<sup>66</sup> emerge as key areas of interest for Benjamin's cultural criticism in the intervening years between 1927 and his death in 1940. I would go so far as to say that they form some of the crucial outlines of Benjamin's final work, the Arcades Project. If it were not for Moscow, Benjamin might never have stepped into the area of radio broadcast, or had the courage to

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<sup>61</sup> Ibid., p. 132

<sup>62</sup> Ibid., p. 132.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid., p. 137.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid., .p.112.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid., Footnote 3, pp. 137-138.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid., p. 137.

introduce such bold dialectics with his own era into the Arcades Project. Indeed Moscow at this time competes with Paris of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, in terms of a city's ability through its infrastructure, to capture and exemplify the ideology shapes of the mass's imagination. Benjamin writes: 'There are people here who don't care what things are called and simply accept them as they are, children for example lacing their skates in the street.'<sup>67</sup> It is this kind of cultural politic which fascinates Benjamin and bespeaks volumes about what subtends the day to day operations of Stalinization in Moscow.

Smith asserts that the text 'engages readers familiar with Soviet cultural politics at the earliest stages of Stalinization.'<sup>68</sup> I would argue strongly that it holds more interest for those who know what would emerge so soon afterward. Indeed, Smith characterises the period of Benjamin's stay as 'the final winter of literary independence, Stalin was winning the struggle against Trotsky for succession to Lenin's place, and cultural policy was hardening.'<sup>69</sup> Benjamin even in that 'final winter of literary independence' could sense something ominous to come in the atmosphere that surrounded him on his visit. Furthermore, his letter to Buber absolutely confirms this. Benjamin writes: 'Moscow, as it appears at the present reveals a full range of possibilities in the schematic form: above all, the possibility that the Revolution might fail or succeed. In either case, something unforeseeable will result and its picture will be far different from any programmatic sketch one could draw of the future. The outlines of this are at present brutally and distinctly visible amongst the people and their environment.'<sup>70</sup> If Benjamin's *Moscow Dairy*, however, fails to present an

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<sup>67</sup> Ibid. p. 31.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid., p. 138.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid., p. 137.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid., p. 132-133.

adequate prognostication, for Smith and others, convincing enough to suggest a sophisticated understanding of the situation I would argue it was not because Benjamin was in the dark so to speak as an outsider in Moscow. Indeed, his intimacy with Lacis and later Reich lead him onto insights far greater than any casual visitor could hope to obtain. Rather, the reason for his unwillingness to acutely schematise Moscow comes down to two factors: firstly, Benjamin's intellectual commitment to historical materialism, and secondly, his loyalty to a tradition in Jewish mysticism which holds that attempting to predict the future is strictly forbidden. An exchange with Asja Lacis demonstrates how these biases divulge themselves in Benjamin's Moscow Diary.

On January 13, before he begins reading to her from the Diary he mentions 'Lukac's thesis that historical materialism was at base applicable to the history of the workers movement.'<sup>71</sup> Asja appears 'tired' at the moment. To counter this Benjamin must 'resort to the Moscow Diary' where he reads her 'random' passages that happen to catch his eye. Things go 'less well in this case' as Benjamin had chanced upon the part where he dealt with 'communist education.' 'It's utter nonsense,' said Asja. '

She was annoyed and claimed I knew nothing about Russia. Obviously I could not argue with this. Then she herself began to speak: what she was saying was very important, but she became very agitated as she talked. She spoke of how she herself had not understood Russia at least at the outset, how she wanted to go back to Europe a few weeks after her arrival because everything seemed finished in Russia and the opposition was absolutely correct. Gradually she realised what in fact was taking place here: the conversion of a revolutionary effort into a technological effort. Now it is made clear to every communist that at this hour revolutionary conflict does not signify conflict or civil war, but rather electrification, canal construction, creation of factories. I replied by bringing up Scheertbart, since I had already endured so much talk on account of him

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<sup>71</sup> Ibid., p. 82.

from Reich and Asja: no other author had so clearly emphasised the revolutionary character of technological achievement. (I regret not having used this excellent formulation in the interview.) With all this I managed to delay the time of her departure by a few minutes.<sup>72</sup>

It is through this exchange with Asja Lacis that the real work of the Moscow Diary begins. It starts with Asja's conversion, a process by which she will come to understand herself not as a revolutionary but instead as a technocrat. It will come down to the point of her changing her signification from a state warrior to an electrician; (Benjamin's fantasy of her as an electrical engineer seems to have been a realistic one after all). Benjamin responds by bringing up Paul Scheerbart, whose book *Glasarchitektur* (1914) was a favourite of both he and Scholem.<sup>73</sup> This volume greatly influenced Benjamin's work on the Arcades in later years. For now though it seems to provide a structural component to Benjamin's interpretation of what 'technology' is meant to signify for Reich and Asja. Bringing up the reference also seems to suggest that this understanding of 'technology' exists mainly as a rhetorical reality. Thus, Benjamin is able parenthetically to regret not using it at his interview, which one is left to surmise, is with communist party officials.

It may seem that this debate takes place only in and around rhetorical grounds, but in fact its significance extends much further. This small excerpt is an example of the micropolitical climate in Moscow. It is as important as any detailed discussion of Stalin, in revealing what forces, including rhetorical ones, are immanently present in the Soviet Union to fuel the manufacture of a Stalinist infrastructure in micropolitical bodies as well as macropolitical sites. What Benjamin manages to delay in waging this debate with her are a few precious

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<sup>72</sup> Ibid., p. 82.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid., Footnote 54. p. 31.

years before she falls victim to the pathology of her own rhetoric. In 1936, after publishing a book on German avant-garde theatre, she was interned in Kazakhstan for over a decade. She would not be allowed to work as a director in Russia again until 1956.<sup>74</sup>

It is not just Asja who will suffer the material consequences of Benjamin's belief, that what results in the Soviet Union will be far different from any programmatic already sketched out by the Party. Indeed, an early striation of Stalin's crackdown is almost immediately visible in the limits imposed on Moscow's intelligentsia as early as 1927. The outcomes are not visible, simply because there were no outcomes yet, but only potential lines of flight to be taken by the people and their environment. The most virulent molecules of totalitarianism had yet to germinate amongst these people, cracking through the tenuous layers of revolutionary rhetoric, until they eventually fissured into Stalin's crackdown.

Using Deleuze and Guattari's work on totalitarianism and lines of flight we are able to fill in some features of the communism to emerge under Stalin's regime. First of all, the administration of communism required the appearance of 'a great organised molar security.'<sup>75</sup> However, what it really attended to was 'the management of petty fears, establishing within its strata a permanent molecular insecurity.'<sup>76</sup> In Moscow Benjamin 'observes how many times a meeting has to be arranged here before it finally takes place. Nothing ever happens here as planned or expected – this banal formulation of life's complications is borne out so

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<sup>74</sup> Ibid., p. 143.

<sup>75</sup> Deleuze, Gilles, and Guattari, Felix, *A Thousand Plateaus*, Trans. and Foreword by Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987) p. 216.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid., p. 216.

implacably and so intensely in every single instance here that you quickly come to grasp the fatalism of the Russians. However slowly the calculable advance of civilisation progresses within the collectivity, its initial effects will only further complicate individual existence. One is better off in a house that only has candles than in one that has electric lights that don't work because of constant power failures.<sup>77</sup> On the other hand, without her union card, Asja 'would have had no medical care and might possibly have died.'<sup>78</sup> She now has a place at the sanatorium and her daughter is housed at the children's centre whilst she recovers. Therein the Soviet Union was run simultaneously through 'a macropolitics of security and a micropolitics of insecurity'<sup>79</sup> that ran through the bodies of its comrades. When Stalin consolidated his power, 'it was as if a tiny line of flight 'blasted these two segmentary political series apart, making them capable of their worst appearances, bouncing them off the wall of Marxist ideology, making communism fall into a black hole, taking the path of greatest regression and its vagaries constructing the most rigid of segments.'<sup>80</sup> Perhaps, it was at first as Benjamin had imagined it, just 'a tiny trickle to begin with, leaking through the segments, escaping their centralisation, avoiding their totalisation under the present system.'<sup>81</sup> The change in values of the people and their environment was however, busily overcoding the machine, agitating comrades like Asja Lacis so badly that they ended up with nervous breakdowns or worse.

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<sup>77</sup> Benjamin, Walter. *Moscow Diary*. ed. Gary Smith. Trans. Richard Sieburth, Preface, Gershom Scholem, (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1986), pp. 30-31.

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 34.

<sup>79</sup> Deleuze, Gilles, and Guattari, Felix, *A Thousand Plateaus*, Trans. and Foreword by Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987), p. 216.

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 205.

<sup>81</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 216.

'A molecular flow was escaping,' in the city. 'It was minuscule at first, then swelling, without, however, ceasing to be unassignable.'<sup>82</sup> Benjamin had tried to trace it through his tram rides with Rachlin at the very end, but got sidetracked worrying over Asja's well being. The reverse, however, was also taking place. After all 'molecular escapes and movements would be nothing if they did not return to the molar organisations to reshuffle their segments, their binary distributions of sexes, classes, and parties.'<sup>83</sup> It was here that the avant-garde opposition really got caught out in Moscow. They didn't know how to redistribute themselves after their social contracts were voided. This is when Benjamin's acquaintances and colleagues in Moscow get caught in the shuffle of reconsolidated power. It is then that the line of escape for them really goes dead.

Scholem illustrates what happened next in the following statement: 'to the extent that I have been able to trace their fates sooner or later... They would all become victims of Stalin's rule once it began to consolidate power.'<sup>84</sup> Scholem reports that even Benjamin's 'friend Asja Lacis would be forced to spend many years in a camp in the wake of Stalin's 'purges.'<sup>85</sup> Stalin's regime then becomes molarised, 'consolidated' through the imposition of these 'purges;' a systematic of forcible leaks consolidated in the regions where minor leaks had already occurred. Leaks that once occupied the smooth space of Moscow as minoritarian identifications, (Scholem's vague identification of Benjamin's group of peers as 'Trotskyites,')<sup>86</sup> were reterritorialised and striated by Stalin to signify a fluid criminal element. Once identified this community had to be shut down at its

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<sup>82</sup> Ibid., p. 216.

<sup>83</sup> Ibid., pp. 216-217.

<sup>84</sup> Benjamin, Walter. *Moscow Diary*. ed. Gary Smith. Trans. Richard Sieburth, Preface, Gershom Scholem. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1986), p . 7.

<sup>85</sup> Ibid., p. 7.

<sup>86</sup> Ibid., p. 7.

source, and ultimately overpowered by a tidal wave of anti-intellectualism; one that had already been swelling up in the city.

Scholem's account acknowledges Benjamin's courage in 'plumbing' the depths of these dangerous leaks. Scholem: 'In addition, Benjamin's growing awareness of the opportunism of many of his closest acquaintances, dictated either by fear or cynicism, was something he could not ignore and in the end lead to violent confrontations, even with Asja.'<sup>87</sup> Indeed, what further eroded the pipeline for Benjamin was the matter of a dirty little secret in the rigid segmentarity of Soviet Moscow. The members of the artistic and political opposition (a grouping meant to include all of his contacts in Moscow) were in point of fact, in league with the spirit of anti-intellectualism that characterised the immanent crackdown. Smith asserts that one factor that influenced Benjamin's decision not to join the Party, came out of his anxiety about the 'proletarianization of the cultural sphere'<sup>88</sup> that was taking place all around him in Moscow. Indeed, following the performance of Meyerhold's staging of Gogol's *The Inspector General* mentioned earlier, Benjamin is forced into a lengthy debate, in which the judgement of the individual critic is displaced by the 'articulation of the initially eruptive, wordless mass verdict.'<sup>89</sup>

Benjamin could not fail to see 'the upheavals caused by this monster force,'<sup>90</sup> on Soviet culture. Nor could he suffer the open secrecy of his colleague's opportunism in response to these staged critical agitations, not when it was

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<sup>87</sup> Ibid., p.7.

<sup>88</sup> Ibid., p. 144.

<sup>89</sup> Ibid., p. 145.

<sup>90</sup> Deleuze, Gilles, and Guattari, Felix, *A Thousand Plateaus*, Trans. and Foreword by Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987) p. 205.

'threatening to bring everything tumbling down.'<sup>91</sup> The outrage that Benjamin felt as a result of these experiences in Moscow opened a window of insight for him on how the Stalinization of culture might progress. In his mind, the chances were slim that this rigidification of culture would fail, as the critical factors were already in place for it to happen whilst he was there.

This awareness makes the Moscow Diary somehow resonate with such singular desolation in spite of its initial message of elation sent onto Scholem on that second day. 'It is as if at the very moment when things might come to resolution, its undertaking is threatened by something reaching down into' Benjamin's core; 'by a death, a demolition,' that would later force him to revisit his Moscow Diary as a Spanish Journey.<sup>92</sup> Although this time in the guise of the Destructive Character. That the critical messages to Asja Lacis contained with the Diary were withheld from publication until after her death in 1980 adds yet another veil of tragedy onto this literary affair. This was another publishing mistake, no less harmful than the one that sent Asja Lacis to an internment camp for a decade, and not releasing her again until Benjamin was long dead. How could she have known that what Benjamin had written about her was not 'nonsense,' but rather a heartfelt attempt to address her situation, to listen to her earnestly, and to learn solemnly the importance of the lessons she was imparting to him?

Scholem suggests that 'She functions merely as a friendly ear for his accounts of his activities, as the almost always elusive object of his courtship, and finally and not exactly infrequently, as his adversary in hostile, wrenching

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<sup>91</sup> Ibid., p. 205.

<sup>92</sup> These sections are a reworking of Deleuze and Guattari's comments found on Ibid., p. 206.

disputes.<sup>93</sup> It would seem as though Scholem remains profoundly deaf to Asja's role as a sounding board for Benjamin's emergent political voice. It is precisely through the channel of Asja's ear, that Benjamin is able to draw out - through a complicated process of resonance - an opinion of the situation there. To say that she is 'merely a friendly ear' is an absurd conclusion to draw if indeed as he says their relationship was overwhelmingly 'adversarial.'<sup>94</sup> If the reader concentrates more closely on what is being said, as opposed to the tone of the address, he can discern a tremendously valuable set of political co-ordinates that can be realigned so as to reveal the real wiring of that intimate relationship. Including the fact that Asja was most certainly Benjamin most important political calling companion, in this she was not elusive, but eternally faithfully, even at times when her presence on the line could not be materially registered, it was always felt by Benjamin with all its weight of anticipation.

Beyond that, the frequent 'hostile, wretched disputes' were the sparks that joined their passionate connection. They also belie the communicatory violence that kept the circuit of this connection in running order. It was through this antagonism that hope was kept alive, that both believed the survival of their association worth fighting for despite the constant incurred losses in understanding from year to year.

December 31. The snow that night had the sparkle of stars. (On another occasion, I saw snow on her coat such as probably never occur in Germany.) When we arrived in front of her house, I asked her more out of defiance and more to test her than out of any real feeling, for one last kiss in the old year. She wouldn't give me one. I turned back, it was almost New Year's, certainly alone but not all that sad. After all, I knew that Asja,

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<sup>93</sup> Benjamin, Walter. *Moscow Diary*. ed. Gary Smith. Trans. Richard Sieburth, Preface, Gershom Scholem. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1986, p. 8.

<sup>94</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 8.

too, was alone. A bell started ringing faintly just as I reached my hotel. I stood there for a while and listened.<sup>95</sup>

This is a constellatory moment. A moment that could never take place in Berlin. It is a moment when Benjamin has come to Asja's home, only to inflict upon her another violent, amatory summons. In defiantly asking for what he knows he cannot have, Benjamin's is somehow sealing the pact of their libidinous contract, perpetuating the fact that this denial on her part can only further conjure a disruptive promise of his return. Thus, the two will be fated to return to this spot again, perhaps in another city, for this ritual display of unrequited love to play itself out again. Even as Benjamin is turned back alone and on the street, he is not all that sad, because he knows that Asja too is made alone, in her sadness through his abrupt departure. This sadness triggers the summons all over again. The bells start ringing as soon as he reaches his destination apart from her. This is the thing that stops Benjamin, calls him to attention, reconnects the telephonic circuit between them.

Deleuze and Guattari speak of Chekhov, the great creator of novellas, in a way that 'brings up an aparallel evolution of the two men who have absolutely nothing to do with each other'<sup>96</sup> –beyond words. What the critic Shetov says of Chekhov is not unlike what Scholem, says of Benjamin following the Moscow visit: 'There can be practically no doubt that Chekhov exerted himself, and something broke inside him. And the over strain came not from hard and heavy labour; no mighty overpowering exploit broke him, he stumbled and fell, he slipped. ... The old Chekhov of gaiety and mirth is no more ... Instead, a morose

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<sup>95</sup> Ibid., p. 57.

<sup>96</sup> Deleuze, Gilles, and Guattari, Felix, *A Thousand Plateaus*, Trans. and Foreword by Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987) p. 10.

and overshadowed man, a 'criminal.'<sup>97</sup> Deleuze and Guattari question what actually happened to Chekhov. They ask whether it is possible to exert oneself or break something, without falling into a black hole of bitterness and sand. They ask if Chekhov really fell. And if that is not to judge him entirely from the outside. Finally they point out however grimly Chekhov portrayed a character he always carried 'a hundred pounds of love for him.'<sup>98</sup>

This final point in Chekhov is a way in, a way to read the Moscow Diary around the space of the lines that compose it. A way to check Benjamin's melancholia, his criminality, against a passionate leap of faith. A faith that must always be exerted, broken even - for Benjamin to emerge beyond Moscow, to move past the middle of the night and onward into mourning. Mourning like that is like holding a hundred pounds of love in one's chest and climbing a mountain range. There is no choice but to stumble and fall, to slip on the sand beneath one's feet, when carrying such a burden.

This load is the supple segmentarity keeping Benjamin an 'and' or 'plus' with Asja. Their relationship is based on a certain geometry, what Deleuze and Guattari describe as 'a multiplication of a double at the limit of what they can endure in their state [of convalescence]' and 'with tacit understandings serving them as internal messages'<sup>99</sup> - no matter how long-distanced the calling. 'Finally, there is a line of flight, all the more when they are separated, or vice versa, each of them the clandestine of the other, a double all the more successful now that nothing has importance any longer.'<sup>100</sup> How could it, each having been interned

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<sup>97</sup> Ibid., p. 206.

<sup>98</sup> Ibid., p. 206.

<sup>99</sup> Ibid., p. 206.

<sup>100</sup> Ibid., p.206.

in their own time? 'Now everything can begin anew, since they have been destroyed but not by each other.'<sup>101</sup> Each imprisoned within their formerly idealised terrain, Benjamin in France, Asja in the Soviet Union. The Moscow Diary insures that 'Nothing will enter memory, everything was on the lines, between the lines, and the AND that made one *and* the other imperceptible, with disjunction or conjunction but only by a line of flight forever in the process of being drawn, toward a new acceptance, the opposite of renunciation resignation.'<sup>102</sup> For Benjamin could this mean 'a new happiness?'<sup>103</sup> A redirection of purpose, a realignment of love into other territorial outposts? Content in knowing something always evades, and surpasses even seemingly fatal blockages.

#### FALLOUTPHOTOGRPHIE.

Scholem concludes that the Moscow Dairy 'as a narrative of courtship that remains frustrated almost to the very end of his stay, the diary is desperate in its outright urgency.'<sup>104</sup> It is not the run up to 'a failed courtship' that most preoccupies Benjamin toward the second month of his stay. Indeed, urgency could never characterise Benjamin's dealings with Asja; delay is the very means by which the courtship is sustained. Rather it is the case that such an urgency in Benjamin's work can only belie something of far great political urgency: the loss of innocence in his brief love affair with Communism. Urgency factors in here more than a distress signal, one that is triggered by the anxiety over a power

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<sup>101</sup> Ibid., p. 206.

<sup>102</sup> Ibid., pp. 206-207.

<sup>103</sup> Ibid., p. 207.

<sup>104</sup> Benjamin, Walter. *Moscow Diary*. ed. Gary Smith. Trans. Richard Sieburth, Preface, Gershom Scholem. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1986, p. 90.

surge to come. It operates on a more subliminal level as an erotic charge within Benjamin's person, one that in some ways competes for his attention towards the end of his stay. Benjamin, January 8:

It is precisely this transformation of an entire power structure that makes life here so meaningful. It is as insular and as eventful, as impoverished and yet in the same breath as full of possibilities as gold rush life in the Klondike. The dig for power goes on from early morning to late at night. The entire scheme of existence of the Western European intelligentsia is utterly impoverished in comparison to the countless constellations that offer themselves to the individual here in the space of a month. Admittedly this can lead to a certain state of inebriation in which it becomes almost impossible to conceive of a life without meetings and committees, debates, resolutions, and ballotings (all of which are the wars or at least the manoeuvres of the will to power). But this [...] is the [precise goal] that so unconditionally forces one to take a position, that poses the dilemma as to whether one is going to remain in the hostile and exposed, uncomfortable and draughty spectator area, or whether one is going to adopt some sort of role in the commotion on stage.<sup>105</sup>

Here Benjamin characterises the progressive bureaucratisation of the Soviet State as the 'wars or at least the manoeuvres of the will to power.' He describes this process as 'inebriating,' as people become increasingly intoxicated with the inflation of their position through the newly bestowed title of comrade, and the purported influence that will be granted through such recognition. Benjamin too feels the pull to be included somehow. His dilemma of whether or not to join the stage of these activities, will be a question that will plague him throughout the entire decade of the 1930s, and ultimately Benjamin's ambivalence about participating in anything involving a commotion will mean that he will be forced to devise an entrance into the political debate perhaps by more a subtle means of political encounter.

One of the crucial ways he is able to foster such encounters is through the intimate contacts he establishes in Moscow. Through these sort of contacts the cause for urgency can be more discreetly raised. In the course of his stay, Benjamin befriended Nickolaus Basseches. Basseches was an Austrian journalist and engineer; he was born in Moscow, the son of the Austrian consul general. Benjamin spent many evenings dining with him during his stay in Moscow. Crucially, he helped Benjamin with the formalities of his departure. On the night of January 16, Benjamin and Basseches dined with 'a certain Dr. Kroneker' who worked in Moscow as 'the Austrian representative of a large Russo-Austrian firm.'<sup>106</sup> Basseches told Benjamin he was a Social Democrat. Benjamin writes, 'But he struck me as quite intelligent, had travelled widely, and spoke to the point. In the course of the conversation, we got onto the subject of gas warfare. I made a number of comments that impressed them both.'<sup>107</sup> The fact that he finds it difficult to identify Kroneker as a conservative through this exchange, clearly surprises Benjamin. The peculiarity of this political exchange, nonetheless, will not prove to be an anomalous occurrence on the road to the maturation of Benjamin's political stance. It stands here as an early glimmer of what will amount to the much ruder awakening Benjamin is to face when it comes to choosing his political alliances in the dark days when fascism rapidly consolidated its power in Germany. It is then that the real inadequacy of such of right/left allegiances becomes painfully apparent to Benjamin. The inability to readily draw distinctions about who is and who is not vulnerable to the gleaming technocratic mandate of fascism belies the party's great power to draw

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<sup>105</sup> Benjamin, Walter. *Moscow Diary*. ed. Gary Smith. Trans. Richard Sieburth, Preface, Gershom Scholem. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1986, p. 72.

<sup>106</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 90.

<sup>107</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 90.

up constituencies from nearly every group in society, including within its eventual ranks all classes and backgrounds.

## FRAGMENTPHOTOGRAPHIE.

Scholem's final remark asserts, 'Part of the puzzle [of Moscow] therefore remains unsolved, which is entirely appropriate to a life such as Walter Benjamin's.'<sup>108</sup> I don't find this an acceptable conclusion, and neither I would surmise would Walter Benjamin. Here I am not so much concerned with locating the part of the puzzle that remains unsolved, but rather with the very idea that Benjamin was seeking resolution on this trip. It seems to me that very early on in the narrative, and perhaps even before its commencement, Benjamin's aims lie not with conclusion but rather with a potentially fundamental shift in his ideographic co-ordinates.

Scholem is correct insofar as he is keen to assert that Asja Lacis alone does not stand in as a motivation for Benjamin's journey, and that indeed Moscow does figure in as a significant factor in its own right. However, not in the way he imagined. As quickly as Benjamin learns first hand about Soviet Moscow, he quickly unlearns the conceits of ideology. What Benjamin finds in Moscow is not Party politics, but rather an intimately overlapping network of economies that are seldom readily apparent. Indeed what Benjamin can and does manage to see around him are people and the environment in which they are immersed. It is through their bodies that all other potential networks emerge and this is what Benjamin is journeying toward in his understanding of the Soviet situation. This

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<sup>108</sup> Benjamin, Walter. *Moscow Diary*. ed. Gary Smith. Trans. Richard Sieburth, Preface, Gershom Scholem. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1986, p. 8.

is not necessarily a journey that can be undertaken with the expectation of positive outcomes. Again, Scholem seems to sense this is a rationalisation of Benjamin's decision not to immediately communicate his findings in Moscow.

As regards to their relationship Scholem tells us that Benjamin and Lacia 'were together in Berlin in 1924 and in Riga in 1925 and perhaps again in Berlin on one more occasion before he set off to Moscow primarily to see her.'<sup>109</sup> It is that occasion I want to conjure now. It is the missing piece of the puzzle that is not an end to the narrative but something a-signifying, something that effectively pre-empts everything that will transpire- by a-voiding it. Effectively this means that the diary is never allowed to begin or end without a crucial but determinant omission. This omission is the thing that later enables Benjamin to surpass the systemic violence the city inflicts on Love. It will enable him to run powered on Baudelaire alone for a decade after Benjamin ceases to have anything like regular communication with Asja Lacia.

## TELEPHOTOGRAPHIE.

It starts with a telephone call to his apartment in Berlin in January 1926, several months before Benjamin sets off for Moscow. Asja Lacia is on the line. Later she will effectively serve as a line of flight. Right now Benjamin is listening for her tone. There is a little light music in the background. She answers always in the affirmative to Benjamin's Berliner ear, 'Asja,' 'Ach, ja,' 'Oh, yes.' Instantly Benjamin recalls that Asja 'absolutely loves to say important things by telephone.'<sup>110</sup> This will be the first time she will 'speak of wanting to live with

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<sup>109</sup> Ibid., p. 7.

<sup>110</sup> Ibid., p. 105.

Benjamin in Grunewald.<sup>111</sup> This time he will say yes, but first will she come to Berlin? Oh, yes. Berlin. For a time every note of the visit to come Asja makes floods into Benjamin's mind. He feels the joy pour through him, saturating all his modes of receptivity. He allows himself to be happy to hear her. Then there is static on the line and the conversation fades out. He whispers down the receiver, 'I love you insofar as you know...' Later on, Asja, who will mishear it as only the end to the conversation, will echo this sentiment.

It is the beginning. Benjamin is just warming up. For Moscow. The declaration he makes to himself after that will be the most powerful. A silent declaration that they will meet, that he has called upon her and that she has answered. Oh, yes. What he has not yet been made aware of is that in summoning her to Berlin he has also summoned other events. Forces that he can't recall just now, as he hangs up the receiver, effectively suspending what is about to happen, what perhaps would happen on one other occasion to come. Forgetting to say that is what becomes important. He will spend all his time after Moscow trying to find the words again. One could say that he avoided saying them one could say that at a certain crucial stage, the line went dead and Benjamin had to find an alternative means of dialling out. Others would say he simply stopped putting his faith in long-rang thinking. I would say he is still holding the line.

What happens in the void of that conversation that Benjamin feels he must keep devoid from us? Is that void at the site of a journey, which might somehow be raised elsewhere in the Moscow Dairy, perhaps in the following

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<sup>111</sup> Ibid., p. 105.

account where he confesses his a-voidance of the possibility of sharing a future with Asja? Does it matter to Benjamin or to us if that was a direct or indirect line of escape, or for that matter if a line of flight emerged out of it that now brought us to the place of our present concerns? Benjamin:

December 20. On three or four occasions I directly or indirectly avoided sharing a future with her: when I didn't 'run off' with her in Capri, but how? – when I refused to accompany her from Rome to Assisi and Orvieto, when I didn't follow her to Latvia in the summer of 1925 and didn't want to be tied down waiting for her in Berlin that winter. What came into play were not the financial considerations, nor even the fanatic urge to travel, which had diminished in me over the past two years, but rather the fear of those hostile elements in her which only now do I feel I can confront.<sup>112</sup>

Benjamin's confession allows us to trace out nothing of his desire, save for the critical blockages that allowed him to avoid acting on his feelings for Asja. In staying put, refusing to enjoin her advances, not following along, remaining free, playing at being broke, or transient - what ostensibly motivates Benjamin in all these particular scenarios of flight is an underlying fear of confrontation. Still, this does not void Benjamin out of the proceedings, nor protect him indefinitely from harm, but rather it creates a gap, an abyss in which all failed meetings will someday have to be met. It creates in Benjamin the cavernous sensation of falling, falling backward, falling into traps that in the past he somehow avoided. Only by falling into each one simultaneously in Moscow can Benjamin say that he is ready to confront her hostility, which has been avoided up until this point largely through a strategy of topographical evasion. In Moscow Benjamin will learn that it is not so important to stay out of the line of danger, as it is to stealthily keep one's ground when one is intimately near to it.

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<sup>112</sup> Ibid., p. 35.

These non-journeys exist as dormant monads whose future is pending the eruption of tensions between Benjamin and Asja; eruptions that Benjamin says he is now willing to precipitate in Moscow. These pregnant monads if deployed strategically 'can be converted, in a cross-historical switchboard or cultural mnemonics, to produce new possible configurations of futures.'<sup>113</sup> (Example: Benjamin was to have had a child with Asja.) Monad 'is a term, as we noted, allied to an alteration of systems of reference as such. The time of this eruptive occasion with Asja, like the non-present of so-called *Jetztzeit* (Benjamin's now time of virtuality) a 'state of emergency' or *emergence* implies a momentary voiding of received contents –as if by the sheer assertion of *formal* or material elements.'<sup>114</sup> Thus, the understanding is that the task of the Diary is always somehow or other the transvaluation of history. Nominally, this event takes place in the Moscow Diary on January 13.

From there all of Benjamin's illusions about his future with Asja, Moscow's future are shockingly and systematically expelled. The result being that his future takes a violent turn toward politicisation, effectively territorialising over a formerly smooth amorous terrain with a splintery aortatory factionalism. Benjamin's weakened heart is broken by Asja's repeated campaign to wage hostilities against him. One example of this is had on January 14, when Benjamin and Asja were walking side by side when suddenly Asja asked him to lend her some money. Benjamin:

The previous day I had discussed with Reich the possibility of borrowing 150 marks from him for the trip home, so I told Asja that he had no money, still not knowing what the money was needed for. She replied that I never had any money when one needed it, and proceeded to make

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<sup>113</sup> Cohen, Tom, *Ideology and Inscription*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), p. 10.

<sup>114</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 10.

other reproaches, mentioned the room I had never got for her in Riga, etc. I was quite exhausted that day, and, moreover extremely exasperated by the subject she had so tactlessly broached. It turned out she had wanted to rent an apartment she had heard was available. I wanted to turn off in another direction, but she held me back, hanging onto me as she had almost never done before, not letting up on the topic. Finally, beside myself with anger, I told her that she had lied to me. She had assured me that by letter that she would immediately reimburse me for my expenses in Berlin, and so far neither she nor Reich had breathed a word about this. This struck home. I became more violent, continued to pursue my attack, in the midst of this she finally bolted and rushed off down the street I did not follow her; *instead I took a sharp right and proceeded home.*<sup>115</sup>

During the course of these intimate battles, his political resolve has become strengthened. It is the politicised efforts that have ironically strengthened his heart muscle along the way. The beat goes on. What is Benjamin listening out for in Moscow? It is 'the sound of the contiguous future, the murmur (*rumeur*) of new assemblages of desire, of machines, and of statements, that insert themselves in the new assemblages and break with them?'<sup>116</sup> Is that sound of breaking what gets forever redistributed in the void of our understanding of political phenomena like Stalin, desiring topographies like Moscow, machinic bodies like Asja Lacis, who produce the sounds that at once terrify and enthrall us onwards despite our fears. Or rather as ever more elaborate assemblages, sounding boards on which to test our fears about the future. Is Benjamin the child who goes out into the world to learn what fear is, to make a record of it, to cause others to heed a familiar refrain of history that is both 'diabolical and innocent or both at the same time?'<sup>117</sup>

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<sup>115</sup> Benjamin, Walter. *Moscow Diary*. ed. Gary Smith. Trans. Richard Sieburth, Preface, Gershom Scholem, (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1986), p. 84. Italics mine.

<sup>116</sup> Deleuze, Gilles, and Guattari, Felix, *Kafka Toward a Minor Literature*, Trans. Dana Polan, Foreword Reda Bensmaia (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986). p. 83.

<sup>117</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 83.

If so what makes Asja Lacis more important than any particular listener? I would maintain that it comes down to her unique gift of receptivity, which requires a beloved combination of intimately decoded playback and reflexive emitting of the homing signal of love that if present would envelop the listener in a wall of protective sound. Benjamin:

December 24. We were very close that night. Asja got a lot of laughs out of some of the things I was saying to her... She couldn't make her mind up to leave, she was feeling good and tired. But in the end it was not even eleven when she left. I went right to bed because my evening had been full, however short it may have been. I realised that solitude does not exist for us as long as someone we love, although they are somewhere else way beyond our reach is feeling alone at the same time. The feeling of solitude would therefore seem to be basically a reflexive phenomenon that only strikes us when emitted back to us by people we know, and most often by people we love, whenever they enjoy themselves socially without us. And even the person fundamentally alone in the world only experiences his solitude when he thinks of a woman, even an unknown woman, or of anybody else who is not alone and whose company he, too, would cease to be.<sup>118</sup>

Why does this signal corrupt so often when the two are together? It is the magnetised grooves in the recording that draws them together, that are too much, that tears them apart? Oddly, their relationship seems to work better on the telephone. It takes only one day after their reunion in person to bring long held tensions to the fore. Suddenly, conversation ceases, an uneasiness fills in and both struggle not to speak in code, desperately decoding every word, every gesture, terrified that each would speak in humiliating tones of exposed feeling, longing that is too great not to be harmfully articulated. It will most certainly end in tears.

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<sup>118</sup> Benjamin, Walter. *Moscow Diary*. ed. Gary Smith. Trans. Richard Sieburth, Preface, Gershom Scholem. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1986, p. 43.

The second day of Benjamin's visit, 10 December, Asja and he attend a performance of Stanislavsky's *The Czar's Bride*. Benjamin explains to Asja during the break that he senses she feels uneasy in his presence. 'During the final entr'acte, the administrator approaches us. Asja speaks with him. He invites me to the next new production (*Eugene Onegin*).'<sup>119</sup> This of course is a performance of Pushkin's sweeping tale of unrequited love, what amounts to a foreshadowing of Benjamin's dismal adventures here. From here a maniacal overcoding will ensue as an initial means of recovering the situation, an extreme of feeling will pervade - the rising fascism of the lover's commitment. Such a set of determinations engineers the early outcomes of Benjamin's experience in Moscow. However, the economy of fascist overcoding that categorises Benjamin's desire for Asja at any early stage in the narrative; as evidenced by his extremist quality of reportage on her as a subject, his petty fears about her affection towards him, and his constant judgment of her situation forming a system of just so many black holes, undergoes increasingly more frequent moments of being over-ridden by unforeseen political developments in the text whereby Benjamin finds himself directly effected by the city's new Stalinist atmosphere. These factors, at least initially, seem to take precedence at times when his hopes are dashed by her and his mind turns outward to larger political agendas. The first crucial instance of this takes place on the morning of 15 December - just 5 days after the incident at the theatre - when Benjamin is meant to meet Asja in the morning and she never turns up. Instead he spends part of the morning with Reich, Asja's partner,

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<sup>119</sup> Deleuze, Gilles, and Guattari, Felix, *Kafka Toward a Minor Literature*, Trans. Dana Polan, Foreword Reda Bensmaïa (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986) p. 16.

whose influence on Benjamin on this visit will become surprisingly valuable. The first lesson he implicitly imparts to Benjamin takes place in the form of a translation. Reich translates Kamenev's speech to the Comintern for him:

One only knows a spot once he has experienced it in as many dimensions as possible. You have to have approached a place from all four cardinal points if you want to take it in, and what's more, you also have to have left it from all these points. Otherwise it will quite unexpectedly cross your path three or four times before you are prepared to discover it. One stage further, and you seek it out, you orientate yourself by it.<sup>120</sup>

This advice redistributes the possibilities of what Benjamin might actually stumble upon here, given enough determination. He finds himself fortunately placed back at the starting point, and therefore able to perform a transvaluation of his experience in Riga leading into this trip. Benjamin suddenly becomes attuned to the perimeters of the task of spatialisation he must accomplish here, and on the many levels this will need to happen. Again it is helpful for him to turn to the stars to establish his directive compass. Kamenev's words remind Benjamin that desire never locates itself simply at a fixed point, but rather is open to endless readjustments, as vagaries of language and understanding shift constantly under one's feet, making no place nor individual actually available for possession. Again reading constellations of events, and not singular occurrences become key to Benjamin's success. 'When Benjamin chooses to rely upon the reading of the stars, however, reading is not meant to be understood in terms of possession: the nonsensuous similarity of stars prevents them from

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<sup>120</sup> Benjamin, Walter. *Moscow Diary*. ed. Gary Smith. Trans. Richard Sieburth, Preface, Gershom Scholem. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1986, p. 25.

being seized either by the language that they now are or by understanding in general.<sup>121</sup> Instead he accepts that space must be constantly reconfigured around oneself, and therein constantly reconstellated above one's apprehension. That is not to say that a determination of sorts cannot be made, as we see through the strategies of territorialisation, striation and molarisation. These however must always be regarded as temporary formations, always open to renegotiation and modification. For the time being and the foreseeable future Benjamin still chooses to plot his alignment in close course with Asja's movements. Indeed, to pick up on Tom Cohen's theme of the monadic network, it would seem that Benjamin's constellation is working overtime as a mnemonic switchboard. Benjamin asks himself the question, 'Was I always going to go on looking at the moon and thinking of Asja?'<sup>122</sup> in hopes that it will reprogram or reproject what has happened here indefinitely in the universe of his mind. Indeed, when the tape loop on this experience seems to be straining, Benjamin believes he can turn it around. He runs the following edit through it:

She stood there for a long time, waving. I waved back from the sleigh. At first she seemed to turn around as she walked away, then I lost sight of her. Holding my large suitcase on my knees, I rode through the twilit streets to the station in tears.<sup>123</sup>

Still there is always time to transform one's understanding of a place. Benjamin in the end reconciles Moscow according to the fatality portended by the journey through the following maxim:

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<sup>121</sup> Cadava, Eduardo, *Words of Light*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997), p. 27.

<sup>122</sup> Benjamin, Walter. *Moscow Diary*. ed. Gary Smith. Trans. Richard Sieburth, Preface, Gershom Scholem. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1986, p. 121.

<sup>123</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 108.

Nothing ever happens as planned or expected – this banal formulation of life’s complications is borne out so implacably and so intensely in every single instance here that you quickly come to grasp the fatalism of the Russians.<sup>124</sup>

Benjamin’s willingness to take on board this fatalism, and bring it back from Russia to Berlin, meant that it was immanently due to re-emerge in the relationship between Benjamin and Asja Lacis, following its relocation to that city. Asja lived with Benjamin in Berlin from December 1928 to January 1929, repeating the periodical cycle of Benjamin’s Moscow journey. In that time Benjamin starts divorce proceedings against his wife Dora, in hopes that it will free him to marry Asja. The bitterness of Benjamin’s quarrels with his wife over these proceedings ironically proves too much for Asja to bear, its continuation eventually prompts her to leave Berlin. Scholem reports that ‘as far as he knows, she never saw Benjamin after that, although she continued to correspond with him until her arrest under Stalin.’<sup>125</sup> This cut off of correspondence from her, whether or not he chose to respond to it, must have deeply disturbed Benjamin, fuelling his imagination toward the worst possible outcomes.

Even before that time a foreboding moratorium on discussing her became apparent in his correspondence with Scholem: ‘As far as him, after his letter of September 18, 1929 he never referred to her again in his communications.’<sup>126</sup> Scholem adds ‘Thus this side of his life remained completely dark to me.’<sup>127</sup>

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<sup>124</sup> Ibid., p. 31.

<sup>125</sup> Scholem, Gershom, *Walter Benjamin The Story of a Friendship*, (London: faber and faber, 1982), pp. 158-159.

<sup>126</sup> Ibid., p.158.

<sup>127</sup> Ibid,p. 158.

Another side of Benjamin's life would also remain obscure from Scholem's vantage point, and one perhaps equally fundamental: Benjamin's political agenda in writing. Indeed his true mission in Moscow, in shaping his political character and furthermore that of delivering up the light of discourse, is something that only succeeds in furthering puzzling Scholem on the issue of what Benjamin's life was really about. Given his obvious dimness to the subtleties of Benjamin's motivations, it is not surprising that Benjamin chose to keep him in the dark about the whole love affair between he and Asja in Moscow. Indeed, Scholem would only hear tell of it many years later in 1980, when the German-language version of the Moscow Diary was set for publication. This would also account somewhat for Scholem's failure to predict the devastating, if acute effect her departure from Berlin would eventually have on Benjamin. In the short period before this consequence ensues, he is only able to see Asja's departure as one of critical relief for Benjamin. At the time Scholem is still convinced that her departure has somehow motivated Benjamin to display some astonishing ability to cope, never witnessed before in him: 'Something that remained astonishing in this year [1929] of greatest excitements, upheavals, and disappointed expectations in his life was his capacity for concentration, his openness to intellectual matters, and the harmonious style of his letter. There was in him a profound serenity – only poorly described as *stoicism* – that remained untouched by the awkward situations in which he found himself at the time and the upheavals designed to throw his existence off course.'<sup>128</sup> The prognosis was too good to be true. The upheavals were still there, waiting to destabilise Benjamin time and again. This short period merely represented the

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<sup>128</sup> Ibid., pp. 158-159.

calm before the storm of their next eruptive appearance. The next month Benjamin suffered a nervous breakdown.

Just a page onward from these hopeful sentences, Scholem must report: ‘... the untoward circumstances took their toll. He wrote me that in October he had suffered a breakdown connected with agitation over the divorce suit and had been completely immobilised for ten days.’<sup>129</sup> Benjamin: ‘I was unable to make a phone call and talk to anyone, let alone do any writing.’<sup>130</sup> If we take anything away from this essay, it is that such a communicatory paralysis could only be accelerated the worst possible suffering on Benjamin’s part. Following that bout of anguish, he fell completely silent for almost three months –evidently the month after Asja’s departure to Moscow. According to Deleuze and Guattari silence is the ‘pure, moving material of expression.’<sup>131</sup> It is what Tom Cohen identifies as the ‘prefigurative occasion that is heard, today, in what Benjamin calls *reine Sprache* or pure language.’<sup>132</sup> Such a long silence eventually transformed itself into a mode of quiet productivity for Benjamin. Though when he emerges from it he is only able to make a nonsignified reference to Asja’s departure in 1930. Nonetheless this is an operative development insofar as it coincides with a second prefiguration of the Arcades Project, which he refers to in a letter of that same year to Scholem as ‘the theatre of all my struggles and all my ideas.’<sup>133</sup> It is not all cause for celebration, however as this theatre more seriously signals the

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<sup>129</sup> Ibid., p. 160.

<sup>130</sup> Ibid., p. 160.

<sup>131</sup> Deleuze, Gilles, and Guattari, Felix, *Kafka Toward a Minor Literature*, Trans. Dana Polan, Foreword Reda Bensmaïa (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986) p. 65.

<sup>132</sup> Cohen, Tom, *Ideology and Inscription*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), p. 12.

other theatre, Asja's theatre of Moscow, a prefigural theatre of war in a war to come. The stage set in Moscow has now been transposed to Paris, which will surely emerge as yet another critical theatre of struggle over an advancing totalitarianism that will directly intersect Benjamin's own path. For the time being though, in 1930, it marks the start of a new, fraught constellatory relationship for Benjamin between a woman and a city, this time with Baudelaire's passer-by acting in the role of a reticent Asja; acting indirectly as the fourth great love of his life. Again, as in Moscow he chooses to follow the stars through this city at its twilit hour. When one's door has been darkened with 'terrible bad luck,' then one must go by the way of light: he must look to the stars. This is the start of the refrain, and another mythically illuminated verse in Benjamin's Dairy. A call somewhere is being placed. This time to Bertolt Brecht. He had been introduced to Brecht by Asja Lacis. Within a single year of their meeting in 1929, Benjamin 'had produced a folder of diaries about his conversations with Brecht and an historic, ten-year [political dialogue] was launched.'<sup>134</sup> Its time now to account for the impact of some of those entries.

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<sup>133</sup> Scholem, Gershom, *Walter Benjamin The Story of a Friendship*, (London: faber and faber, 1982), p. 160. Benjamin, Walter. *Moscow Diary*. ed. Gary Smith. Trans. Richard Sieburth, Preface, Gershom Scholem. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1986, p. 142.

<sup>134</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 142.

# Catastrophising the Epoch: Benjamin's Atlas of Fascist Historiography.

This is a story about catastrophe. A different kind of catastrophe than anybody had ever thought of. A catastrophe that happens simply because 'things just go on' as they had been going without ever any notice being taken. This is the stuff that keeps you awake late into the night, once you've realised it - always too late. That 'it could happen to someone looking over his life. That he realised that almost all the deeper obligations he had endured in its course, originated in people on whose "destructive character" everyone agreed. He would stumble on this fact one day, perhaps, by chance, and the heavier the blow it deals him, the better his chances of picturing the destructive character.'<sup>1</sup> This is the sort of catastrophe that befalls everyone eventually.

It just happened to get to Walter Benjamin in the summer of 1938. He was visiting Bertolt Brecht in Denmark that summer. In Brecht's son's bedroom there was a map of New York. From it, Benjamin took a peculiar interest in Central Park. One night when looking at it he remembered a foreboding sensation he had felt earlier that day. He entered his recollection of it into his diary that evening as follows: 'I felt the impact of powers equal to those of Fascism, powers that sprang up from the depths

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<sup>1</sup> Benjamin, Walter. *One Way Street and Other Writings*. Intro. Susan Sontag Trans. Harry Zohn. (London: Verso, 1979) p. 157.

of history no less deep than Fascist powers.<sup>2</sup> That at night these monstrous powers climbed the walls of Benjamin's bedroom. This was a nightmare no less frightening than the one he had reported to Scholem in a letter of 3 March 1934; the one in which he suggested that he could construct a pictorial atlas of the secret history of National Socialism assembled from the content of his dreams.<sup>3</sup> Still, the humiliating reality that Benjamin was experiencing day to day was far more terrifying, making the difference between waking and sleeping through fascism that much harder to distinguish - especially by 1938, when no end to the nightmare was in sight.

Benjamin was inside this nightmare of secret histories, or at least he was too closely involved with its protagonists, to turn away from its foreboding implications. There was not one but several catastrophic figures lurking there. Hitler was not amongst those figures. Indeed, it has been remarked upon on several occasions that Hitler was not the figure of primary interest for Benjamin.<sup>4</sup> Instead he turned his attentions to figures he considered to be more revolutionary in their catastrophic game plans. In Brecht's opinion a true revolutionary can only spring forth from the soil of 'baseness and vileness.'<sup>5</sup> If Benjamin wished to get anything accomplished, he too would have to dig deep to find his inspiration on

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<sup>2</sup> Benjamin, Walter "Conversations with Brecht," Ernst Bloch, Georg Lukacs, Bertolt Brecht, Walter Benjamin, Theodor Adorno Afterward Fredric Jameson, *Aesthetics and Politics*, Translation Editor: Ronald Taylor (NLB: London, 1977), p. 98.

<sup>3</sup> Cadava, Eduardo, *Words of Light*. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998), p.

<sup>4</sup> Cohen, Tom, *Ideology and Inscription*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), p. 107.

such grounds. Taking things as it were in anterior direction, though down through the same pathways as fascism, Benjamin is economical in his planning, 'he has few needs, and the least of them is know what will replace what has been destroyed,'<sup>6</sup> after the present diabolical path of history has run its course. Rather he focuses his attention on loosening the past, making it discharge in such a way that another ground for being might emerge from the one he is now basing himself on.

Breaking such ground allowed his imagination to conjure the destructive character, a neo-revolutionary type before him, all the while Brecht furiously challenging him to register his next move against fascism. So impatient Brecht had grown with Benjamin, that one day he suggested a reinvention of the terms of play. In a diary entry of July 12, 1938 on Karl Korsch, Benjamin writes:

Yesterday after playing chess, Brecht said: ' You know, when Korsch comes, we ought to really work out a new game in which the moves do not always stay the same; where the function of a piece changes after it has stood on the same square for a while: it should wither become stronger or weaker. As it is the game doesn't develop, it stays the same for too long.'<sup>7</sup>

Brecht ultimately wanted to up the stakes. Even higher. In response, Benjamin ostensibly retreated from the game, in signature fashion, which amounted to a sign off to his Arcades Project, to be had in

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<sup>5</sup> Benjamin, Walter, "A Radio Talk on Brecht," *New Left Review*, October, (Oxford, Alden Press, 1980), p. 93.

<sup>6</sup> Benjamin, Walter. *One Way Street and Other Writings*. Intro. Susan Sontag Trans. Harry Zohn. (London: Verso, 1979) p. 157.

*Zentral Park*. At first this essay reads as a dead man's wish list, but when considered over the whole of Benjamin's life, one realises that it is really a map, through which Benjamin placing himself into an entirely different sort of circulation. Precisely by placing himself out of circulation and into another time scale of existence: the infinite. It was a territory Brecht couldn't touch. Indeed, the element Gershom Scholem found lacking in Brecht was 'a delight with infinity, of which there was nothing in Brecht, where everything boils down to only the revolutionary manipulation of the finite.'<sup>8</sup> This implied a 'strait gate' to the demise of capitalism. Whilst Brecht continued to tinker with a capitalist economy for the foreseeable future, Benjamin was busy playing in other markets, markets of cosmic duration no less. The same markets the German fascists hoped to corner through their insatiable campaigns to plunder the past treasures of antiquity; ill amassed by other so-called victors over the course of history. The commodification of such objects, were meant to shore up their epic power, to serve as talismans, ensuring the Nazi's triumph thousands of years into the future. According to Benjamin's this was in line with the Nazi's death star logic, 'The labyrinth is the correct route for those who always arrive at their goal early enough anyway. The goal is the market.'<sup>9</sup>

The socially disenfranchised of course have no true luxury of dallying, and therein always arrive somehow too late to bargain with the

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<sup>7</sup> Benjamin, Walter "Conversation's with Brecht" Ernst Bloch, Georg Lukacs, Bertolt Brecht, Walter Benjamin, Theodor Adorno Afterward Fredric Jameson, *Aesthetics and Politics*, Translation Editor: Ronald Taylor (NLB: London, 1977), p. 88.

<sup>8</sup> Scholem, Gershom *Walter Benjamin: The Story of a Friendship*, (London: Faber: 1982), p. 208.

dictates of historical duration. Instead, they must rely on the black market of gambling, flanerìa (strolling), and collecting –activities wagered against *spleen*. Benjamin’s wariness about the reformation of ‘the market’ to ultimately remunerate his losses indicates that he is not playing Brecht’s game– on the straight and narrow. That is to say with a clock set by stock-exchange time, the time of *mortalitie*,<sup>10</sup> a duration that amounts to little more than a silent alarm set for annihilation. Benjamin reports that he found that little detonation device hidden as one of the anagrams for Paris in *Spleen 1*.<sup>11</sup> With this knowledge in hand he chooses to rely on another anagram altogether. One that can be found in his pseudonym in 1938, Detlev Holz, presenting the reader with a theological cross to bare, or given stock exchange time, a crossroads with which to fork outcomes from within the scope of a progressive survey of the political landscape.

Irving Wohlfarth tells the story of how Benjamin

under a simple but telling title *Deutsches Menschen* and the editorial pseudonym Detlev Holz, a relatively complete, but practically unnoticed, edition of letters eventually came out in Switerland – further confirmation of Benjamin’s claim that all genuine German Jewish dialogue had been banished from the public sphere.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Benjamin, Walter. “Central Park” in *New German Critique* Winter 1985 p. 40.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 47.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 47.

<sup>12</sup> Wohlfarth, Irving, “Manner aus der Fremde”: Walter Benjamin and the German Jewish Parnassus,” *New German Critique*, Number 70 Winter 1997, p. 49.

And therein the market. As it turns out 'Exclusion and exile were the fate of Benjamin's little book but also its underlying theme. In an unpublished introduction he writes that his intention is to show

the face of that "secret" Germany that one likes to look for nowadays behind the shrouds of murky fog. For there is indeed a secret Germany. But its secrecy is ... the work of noisy, brutal forces which, in refusing it public access, have condemned it to efficacy of a secret kind.<sup>13</sup>

Wohlfarth writes: 'The latter day mystique of a "secret Germany" is, Benjamin here hints, in more or less tacit league with the forces of the day; and these forces have been all along the self – same ones that reduce the truly other Germany – the one with which Benjamin aligns himself – to secrecy of quite a different material kind. It is thus not merely Judaism that has "secret relations" and "hidden traditions," Germany does too. And it is between these several hidden traditions, German and Jewish, that the truest, noblest, most revolutionary exist. The truly secret Germany has nothing foggy or occult about it: 'it is the clandestine tradition of revolution epitomised by [intellectuals] like Benjamin who were reduced to poverty and even into exile.'<sup>14</sup>

In Benjamin's "Radio Talk on Brecht" he speaks of Brecht's object as this poverty.<sup>15</sup> Brecht defines poverty in a truly Baudelairean fashion, through a logic of modernity which dictates that 'The state should be rich

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<sup>13</sup> Ibid., p. 50.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., .p. 50.

but many should be poor, the state should be permitted to do much, but man should be permitted to only a little.<sup>16</sup> Benjamin 'to put it as briefly as possible' categorises the condition that results as 'the physiological and economic poverty of a man in the machine age.'<sup>17</sup> Is this not the condition experienced by Brecht as the lyrical playwright in the age of high modernism? Brecht wears such characteristic poverty as 'a kind of [professional] uniform, and well suited to give anyone who consciously wears it high rank.'<sup>18</sup> This rank however also is accompanied by a far bit of class rage. Brecht screams out that the Nazis have 'proletarianized me,'<sup>19</sup> which sounds a deep echo of Baudelaire's lament that Louis Napoleon de-politicised him. For each man respectively, the outrage comes from the regime that comes into power against their personal will, only adds further insult to them by forcing on them a literalisation of their political rhetoric. They become damned to live out the ends of their figurative political dictates. One who cries out for depoliticisation will suffer as one depoliticised, one who cries out for proletarianisation will suffer as one proletarianised. Worse still they will suffer as someone silenced by the hand of their own political discourse turning against them.

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<sup>15</sup> Benjamin, Walter, "A Radio Talk on Brecht," *New Left Review*, October, (Oxford, Alden Press, 1980), p. 95.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 95.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 95.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 95.

<sup>19</sup> Benjamin, Walter "Conversations with Brecht" Ernst Bloch, Georg Lukacs, Bertolt Brecht, Walter Benjamin, Theodor Adorno Afterward Fredric Jameson, *Aesthetics and Politics*, Translation Editor: Ronald Taylor (NLB: London, 1977), p. 98.

To paraphrase Brecht himself, 'this is an age which lays hands upon itself.'<sup>20</sup>

Brecht laments 'It isn't just that they've taken my house, my fish-pond and my car from me; they have also robbed me of my stage and my audience.'<sup>21</sup> Benjamin attempts to resist such ends by setting himself up from the outset as a political 'strategist,' one taking the offensive position as opposed the defensive one, one might assign to Baudelaire and Brecht, as a pair of political reactionaries. From Benjamin's point of view, a good cultural critic does not react only when a crisis erupts, but rather sees the everyday political situation as a mounting crisis. Benjamin's defines his role as a critic as being one of 'a strategist' in the ongoing 'struggle for literature.'<sup>22</sup> A campaign that is not acute but chronic.

Indeed, in *Deutsches Menschen* 'the letters included are written from 1783-1883, a period which spans the rise and decline of German humanism,' a period moreover some would say is far in advance of the crisis of German fascism, and yet Benjamin would have it that they represent 'the opening of age when the bourgeoisie can maintain only its positions, and not the spirit in which they had conquered them.'<sup>23</sup> Benjamin had attempted to reinstate this spirit of this

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<sup>20</sup> Benjamin, Walter. *One Way Street and Other Writings*. Intro. Susan Sontag Trans. Harry Zohn. (London: Verso, 1979) p. 271.

<sup>21</sup> Benjamin, Walter "Conversations with Brecht" Ernst Bloch, Georg Lukacs, Bertolt Brecht, Walter Benjamin, Theodor Adorno Afterward Fredric Jameson, *Aesthetics and Politics*, Translation Editor: Ronald Taylor (NLB: London, 1977), p. 98.

<sup>22</sup> Wohlfarth, Irving, "No-man's Land On Walter Benjamin's Destructive Character" in *Walter Benjamin's Philosophy*, Ed., Andrew Benjamin (London: Routledge, 1994), p. 50.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 51.

German humanist project when he characterises the task of *Deutsches Menschen* as being that of 'saving a few samples of genuine humanity from antediluvian times.'<sup>24</sup> Indeed, he refers to the project as 'an Ark built after the Jewish model' which might survive when 'the Fascist flood began to rise.'<sup>25</sup> Such Messianic projections makes the posthumous signature Walter Benjamin equally tricky to bring to a conclusion as that of his pseudonym Detlev Holz, i.e., to singularly verify any identification of Benjamin as Benjamin. Instead such ambiguity stands in as shorthand for a number of possible immanent historiographical outcomes - one didn't say 'infinitely' better ones. Redemption does not equal progress. Anymore than revolution necessarily signifies change. Meanwhile catastrophe is starting all the time, starting with the catastrophe you have sensed all of your life, the catastrophe of persistence without change. The catastrophe that Benjamin and I now enjoin you to short-circuit. To arrest. To apprehend. Benjamin: 'To the image of "redemption" belongs also a firm, apparently brutal grasp.'<sup>26</sup> And finally 'The question is to be pursued as to what extend the extremes to be grasped in redemption are those of the "too early" and the "too late."<sup>27</sup>

Whilst staying with Brecht in Svendborg on 25 August 1938, Benjamin records the following Brechtian maxim in his diary: 'Don't start from the good

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<sup>24</sup> Wohlfarth, Irving, "Manner aus der Fremde": Walter Benjamin and the German Jewish Parnassus," *New German Critique*, Number 70 Winter 1997, p. 53.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., p. 53.

<sup>26</sup> Benjamin, Walter. "Central Park" in *New German Critique* Winter 1985, p. 46.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid., p. 50.

old things but the bad new ones.’<sup>28</sup> Benjamin responds to this with utter silence. In an earlier instance, Benjamin characterises Kraus’ cadence of speech as “a silence that catches the storm of the event in its black folds, billows, its livid lining turned outward.”<sup>29</sup> Such a silence is now practised by Benjamin who in engaging the event this way is able to turn Brecht’s maxim inside out to reveal *its* most livid implications, and therein impose the antithetical starting point in his own investigations: namely the stubborn persistence of bad old things, which always seem to forestall any good new things from escaping the bounds of obscurity. What must be imposed then is an alternative philosophy of duration, a revolution that runs outside of the dictates of clock time. In “Some Motifs on Baudelaire,” Benjamin credits Bergson in with coming up with such a philosophy - one that asserts that ‘the actualisation of *duree* rids man’s soul of obsession with time.’<sup>30</sup> As a historiographer of the future, Benjamin’s destructive character would have it that ‘we live our lives as automatons that resemble Bergson’s fictitious characters who have completely liquidated their memories.’<sup>31</sup> As Benjamin wrote of the Destructive Character,

Some pass down things to posterity by making them untouchable and thus conserving them. Others pass on situations by making them practicable and thus liquidating them. The latter is called destructive.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> Benjamin, Walter “Conversations with Brecht” Ernst Bloch, Georg Lukacs, Bertolt Brecht, Walter Benjamin, Theodor Adorno Afterward Fredric Jameson, *Aesthetics and Politics*, Translation Editor: Ronald Taylor (NLB: London, 1977), p. 99.

<sup>29</sup> Benjamin, Walter. *One Way Street and Other Writings*. Intro. Susan Sontag Trans. Harry Zohn. (London: Verso, 1979) p. 262.

<sup>30</sup> Benjamin, Walter, *Charles Baudelaire*, Trans, Harry Zohn, (London, Verso, 1997), p. 138.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, .p. 135.

<sup>32</sup> Benjamin, Walter. *One Way Street and Other Writings*. Intro. Susan Sontag Trans. Harry Zohn. (London: Verso, 1979) p. 158.

Not surprisingly, destruction is linked to duration in Benjamin's critical practice from 1930 onward. This combination also figures into Benjamin's conceptualisation of the relationship between natural science and theology. The constellation of these forces at work in Benjamin's thinking can be seen through the concept of 'monadology' as it is ultimately cast in his final work of 1940 "Theses on the Philosophy of History."

It is in the years between 1927 and 1940 that the lines of natural science and theology begin to collide in and around Benjamin. The year 1927 also marks the collapse of an arborescent project of 'understanding' fascism for Benjamin. Such a project is carefully jettisoned somewhere between Moscow and Svenborg, in favour finally of a nomadic re-education in what it meant to break the cover of leftist party politics and go by way of default onto a territory unlike any other: into the prehistory depths of the violence presently 'known' as 'fascism.' The training begins in Stalin's Moscow of 1927 – a journey at least speculatively prompted on Brecht's provocative suggestion. Moreover such a programme is undertaken within the contours of a prehistoric, almost primeval sensibility gleaned through the writings of Kafka. These contours emerge time and again a means with which to strategically cope with what will be a litany of provocation from Benjamin's formidable follow up of the Brechtian line. Not surprising, the line had to be patched through, at least initially by an engineering team of sorts, which included amongst its figures none other than the revolutionary figure *par excellence* for Benjamin, Asja Lacin.

## Breaking the Waves

Asja Lacin in her memoir, *Profession: Revolutionary*, contests the critically held opinion that May 1929 was the year Benjamin first made the acquaintance of Bertolt Brecht in Berlin. Rather, Lacin posits the date of their meeting nearly three years before that, in late 1926, just prior to Benjamin's imminent trip to visit her in Moscow. This little known meeting is said to have been arranged through Lacin, who had worked alongside Brecht as a theatre director. This bit of information is included in one of the very first footnotes in the English version of the *Moscow Diary*.<sup>33</sup> In the text itself, Benjamin notes Brecht as his first urgent topic conversation with Lacin; i.e., not the status of *their* relationship, which is only vaguely addressed later in the day. The fact that these two references to Brecht are located so early on in the text suggests that one might conduct a subsequent reading of the *Diary* with covert reference to Brecht's well-known Marxist politics.

Beyond that it functions to destabilise the 'official' story on how Brecht and Benjamin actually came into acquaintance and leads to speculation about the role politics may have played in speeding their meeting about, and also in Benjamin's desire to assess the situation Moscow for himself. In Lacin's version Benjamin comes to Moscow primarily based on his desire to further a relationship with her. The early reference to Brecht as well as the footnote, serve to contradict that reading insofar as they indicate that one can just as easily read between the lines of their ongoing exchanges for a nascent influence of a specifically *Brechtian* brand of politics. One must therein not underestimate Brecht's resonance on Benjamin's Moscow record.

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<sup>33</sup> Benjamin, Walter. *Moscow Diary*. ed. Gary Smith. Trans. Richard Sieburth, Preface, Gershom Scholem. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1986), p. 9, footnote 5.

This influence would of course become highly amplified subsequent to their 'second' meeting in 1929, so much so that his other intimate friends and associates could not help but take note of it at that time. This also holds true for Benjaminian scholars. Given their record of the situation it is relatively easy to ascertain that Brecht by 1929 had come to eclipse Asja's Lacis' one-time formidable (political) influence on Benjamin. This was indeed so much the case as to bring what Benjamin described Brecht as a 'new *elemental force* in the truest sense of the word, into his life.'<sup>34</sup> What becomes less obvious, when taking into consideration a possible earlier meeting between the Brecht and Benjamin are the strains of Brechtian thinking, in other words 'crude thinking' that may have potentially made their way into the Moscow Diary.

As we recall from the previous chapter, Benjamin, upon his arrival back in Berlin in early 1927, wrote a letter to Martin Buber describing his forthcoming essay on Moscow for Buber's journal *Die Kreatur*. In it, Benjamin had explained that his primary aim in writing about Moscow would be 'seizing and rendering this new and disorientating language that echoes loudly through the resounding mask of the environment that has been totally transformed.'<sup>35</sup> This statement comes in line with Benjamin's ongoing critical aim of generating a tension between conflicting concepts of language.<sup>36</sup> However after his experiences in Moscow he prepares himself to go one step further dialectically speaking and adds by way of a further explanation: 'I want to write a description in which all

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<sup>34</sup> Scholem, Gershom *Walter Benjamin: The Story of a Friendship*, (London: Faber, 1982), p. 159.

<sup>35</sup> Benjamin, Walter. *Moscow Diary*. ed. Gary Smith. Trans. Richard Sieburth, Preface, Gershom Scholem. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1986), p. 121.

<sup>36</sup> Wohlfarth, Irving, "No-man's Land On Walter Benjamin's Destructive Character" in *Walter Benjamin's Philosophy*, Ed., Andrew Benjamin (London: Routledge, 1994), p. 167

factuality is already theory and which would thereby refrain from any deductive transaction, from any prognostication, and even within certain limits from any judgement.<sup>37</sup> This approach effectively liquidates the decisive potential of any of these categories, which are ostensibly the tenets of moral reasoning in civilised society. It is for this very reason that they must be liquidated.

In the last year of this decade Benjamin, will come to assert 'that there is no document of culture that is not also a document of barbarism.'<sup>38</sup> Irving Wohlfarth will argue that it is Brecht who offered the idea to Benjamin of 'effacing the traces,' of such violent, politicised judgements that make up the sanctity of language and linguistics. It was the example given by Brecht's 'alienation techniques' that motivated Benjamin's subsequent crusade 'to liquidate the barbarity of formulaic language.'<sup>39</sup> If Brecht exerted his initial influence on Benjamin as early as 1926, this notion of barbarity could well have impacted on Benjamin's formulaic of a 'creatural' approach to language and knowing. Creatuality, an alternate notion to barbarism, might function as a way of acutely acknowledging the violence always inherent to the becoming-animal of all revolutionary language. Brecht's crude thinking made material through crude writing. Irving Wohlfarth writes: 'On his return from Moscow, Benjamin had written that, at the 'turning point in historical events' that was 'announced, if not posited, by the fact of 'Soviet Russia,' the question at issue was not which reality –Western or Soviet – was 'better,' but only which reality was inwardly convergent with the truth. It was a 'world-historical experiment' unfolding in

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<sup>37</sup> Benjamin, Walter. *Moscow Diary*. ed. Gary Smith. Trans. Richard Sieburth, Preface, Gershom Scholem. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1986), p. 132.

<sup>38</sup> Benjamin, Walter, *Illuminations*, Trans, Harry Zohn, Intro. Hannah Arendt, (New York: Fontana Press, 1969), p. 248.

<sup>39</sup> Wohlfarth, Irving, "No-man's Land On Walter Benjamin's Destructive Character" in *Walter Benjamin's Philosophy*, Ed., Andrew Benjamin (London: Routledge, 1994), p. 167.

Soviet Russia that underwrote his own experimental ventures into Marxist thinking, notably "The Author as Producer" (1934) and "Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction" (1935).<sup>40</sup> The question that dogged him throughout these projects, however was 'Which truth was inwardly preparing itself to converge with the real?' 'The Hitler-Stalin pact of 1939-1940 'represented for Benjamin the final irrevocable divergence of Soviet reality from the Communist idea.'<sup>41</sup> In 1930, however, an experimental venture within the bounds of Communism could still be undertaken in earnest.

An experimental venture of this type was taken up by Benjamin in 1930, in response to Brecht's *Versuche*, or 'Experiments,' the first literary writings to which he could give his critical backing 'with reservations, gave the most probing analysis Benjamin maintained of existing socio-political tensions.'<sup>42</sup> In a radio programme devoted to Brecht of 1930 Benjamin writes:

The 'Experiments' are points of application for Brecht's talent. What is new here is that the full significance of these applications is unconcealed; for their sake the writer takes leave of his 'work', and like an engineer drilling for oil in the desert, directs his attention to precisely calculated points in the desert of the present... 'The publication of *Versuche*', the author begins, 'comes to a point in time when certain projects should be no longer confined to individual experiences, but should rather be directed to the transformation of particular institutes and institutions.' This is not a proclamation of renovation, but a manifesto of rebellion.<sup>43</sup>

By 1931 Benjamin too will take leave of his own 'work' and like an engineer drilling for oil in the desert of civilisation, direct his attention precisely on the

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<sup>40</sup> Wohlfarth, Irving, "Manner aus der Fremde": Walter Benjamin and the German-Jewish Parnassus," *New German Critique* Number 70 Winter 1997, p. 55.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 55.

<sup>42</sup> Wohlfarth, Irving, "No-man's Land On Walter Benjamin's Destructive Character" in *Walter Benjamin's Philosophy*, Ed., Andrew Benjamin (London: Routledge, 1994), p. 156.

<sup>43</sup> Benjamin, Walter, "A Radio Talk on Brecht," *New Left Review* October 1980, (Oxford: Alden Press), pp. 92-93.

crossroads of history that formed the desert of civilisation that was present-day Europe. It is 'through the wretchedness of the interior' of that history, as a sometime 'prisoner' in his West Berlin neighbourhood, that Benjamin is at once able to experience 'claustrophobia' and vertigo. 'Russia, figures conversely, as an answer to the need for fresh air,'<sup>44</sup> and grounded thinking. As such it is the Archimedean point from which the old world might be moved. Inklings of Benjamin's physics to come are on the rise during this time and will become evident in the essay on Kafka, the Work of Art Essay, and finally culminating in the concept of monadology "Theses on the Philosophy of History."

Thus Benjamin's own point of trajectory eventually shifts and narrows its axis to Brecht's thatched-roof house in Svendborg in 1938. This decision is reached after Asja Lacis is moved to the gulag and feared dead. This micro base of operations does not stop Benjamin from seeking to initiate an equivalent process to this 'world-historical experiment' in social transformation Brecht's 'work' had engaged. A critical distance between their respective projects would soon arise, however, when Benjamin made the decision to relocate his project to even more arid regions of culture than Brecht dared venture. Namely those of exile, a culture's evacuated spaces - a vacuum in which solutions to the antinomies of bourgeois society could be worked out on a micro-level with the due pressure of the extremity of the circumstance duly noted as a functional, destructive element. Brecht would scarcely recognise that Benjamin had chosen him as his primary test subject. He would 'work' on him in the decade to come as scrupulously as he worked on his other subject of studied devotion, Baudelaire.

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<sup>44</sup> Quotes from Irving Wohlfarth, "No-man's Land On Walter Benjamin's Destructive Character" in *Walter Benjamin's Philosophy*, Ed., Andrew Benjamin (London: Routledge, 1994), p. 173.

## Publication of a Friendship

In June 1929, Benjamin would finally write to Scholem to inform him about the close acquaintanceship that had been developing between he and Brecht. Benjamin could only say at that time, 'There is a lot to say about it and about him.'<sup>45</sup> Three weeks later he mustered this report: 'You will be interested to know that a very friendly relationship between Berlolt Brecht and me has recently developed, based less on what he has produced (I know only the *Three Penny Opera* and the ballads) than on the well founded interest one must take in his plans.'<sup>46</sup> Clearly, Benjamin himself was preparing the way forward, through to what end still remains unknown. What we can be gathered though from Benjamin elusive comments, is that things were already starting to break up, and that former lines of communication as a result would have to be redrawn. That he expected Brecht's contributions to have an elemental effect on him is apparent, no one however could surmise at this moment how severely Brecht would shake the foundations of Benjamin's own comportment in the world.

By 1930, the first real signs of a fundamental break down of Benjamin's trajectory started to appear, clearing the way for something else. Scholem comments, that it wasn't until that year that he was fully able to acknowledge the importance of this relationship for Benjamin. This realisation occurred when Benjamin announced that he had scrubbed 'his plans to learn Hebrew *ad acta* for good.'<sup>47</sup> This decision coincided with another one Scholem would equally term

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<sup>45</sup> Scholem, Gershom *Walter Benjamin: The Story of a Friendship*, (London: Faber, 1982), p. 159.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 159.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 159.

catastrophic, namely Benjamin's stormy attempts to divorce Dora Pollack in that same year, in order to free himself up for marriage to Asja Lacis. The divorce went through after a protracted period, however the strain of the events caused Asja Lacis to flee back to Moscow, effectively ending the relationship forever in its amorous aspects.<sup>48</sup> As a result of the coincidence of all of these incidents combined Benjamin suffered a nervous breakdown and fell into silence. Before this breakdown of communication could be legitimately authorised however, he had one additional task to attend to, dislodging his beholdeness to Adorno, in favour of Brecht. Benjamin writes to inform Adorno about 'great chunks of conversation in meetings with Brecht, whose crashing surf has not reached you yet.'<sup>49</sup> Indeed, given Benjamin's plans at redirection of his entire course of writing just three short years later, it never would. The force of this impact would be lost on Adorno far off in America; however mutual friends who were on Benjamin's side of the continental divide, were far less oblivious to what was happening to Benjamin. An alarmed Sigfried Kracauer described Benjamin's attitude toward Brecht as being 'slavish and masochistic.'<sup>50</sup> What this slavishness and masochism was really about however, failed to crest upon him. Benjamin was going to entertain something of the finitude he had avoided all his life, in the company of Brecht, he was going to lay himself open to something that was nothing short of a 'revolutionary manipulation' at the hands of Brecht, a self described maniac, ahead of his time, a man for whom the finite was the limit. Nonetheless, he was the only one that could harness the power moreover of what he was planning.

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<sup>48</sup> Ibid., p. 160.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid., p. 164.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid., p. 164.

Brecht commanded that Benjamin get more concrete in his political positions; the constant antagonism to do so was the thing that Benjamin was meant to have masochistically endured over the ten years of their friendship. Brecht wanted Benjamin to become a Communist activist, as he believed himself to have become through his staging of agit-prop theatre. Benjamin literally takes onboard what Brecht is only meant to have figuratively suggested, in the writings he will produce over this decade. He does so with the tacit understanding that there was never a figurative statement on Brecht's part, only literal ones. Commands. Statements that bellowed at him from imposing heights, Brecht shouting from the coast, 'Rest not on the wave that breaks against your feet, so long as it stands in the water, new waves will break against it.'<sup>51</sup> Benjamin however was far more of a political navigator than Brecht or anyone else might have imagined, indeed he learned a thing or two from a fleeing Asja Lacis, who was the only one in Benjamin's intimate circle to have even come close to predicting where Benjamin would end up, or which waves he was prepared to crest to get to that end. These waves, understood literally by Scholem and Adorno, stood figuratively between the Jewish asylum poles of Jerusalem and New York. Despite their opinion, Benjamin's land surveying continued to convince him otherwise For Benjamin, they persisted in being located on European turf.

Benjamin did concur with Scholem and Adorno's opinion on another point; that a national crossing was due to take place. But for him personally that crossing would have to happen on a far more modest scale. Benjamin got as far as Svendborg. As far as Brecht's house. A place where his distress signals might

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<sup>51</sup> Benjamin, Walter, *Understanding Brecht*, Trans. Anna Bostock, Intro. Stanley Mitchell, (London, NLB, 1973), p. 13.

be kept to a seismic level he could record. One could perceive this decision as masochistic, that an exiled Benjamin, after 1933, was *choosing* to install himself into another theatre of war. And one not altogether apart from Berlin. This judgement fails to perceive Benjamin's quite sadistic desire to obtain a private theatre of war from which to observe the developments of German fascism on a miniaturised scale. This theatre was of course the epic-theatre-in-exile of Brecht's house. Indeed, how Benjamin chose to situate himself in Brecht's house amounts to nothing short of setting up a test environment for purposes of experimentation. The science of understanding fascism that Benjamin was to develop in this context was nothing less than astonishing. That we fail at amazement to this day only belies the fact that Benjamin was onto something of seismic proportion. Firstly, though one must credit this new type of experimentation to Brecht. Only a consciousness set up by Brecht in the intervening years beforehand could have prepared him for what he was to observe in his home. Indeed, his time in Svendborg gradually enabled him to 'treat elements of reality as though he were setting up an experiment with the conditions at the end of the experiment and not at the beginning. Thus they were not brought to the spectator Benjamin but distanced from him. When he recognises them as real conditions, it is not, as in naturalistic with complacency, but with astonishment.'<sup>52</sup> This is history brought to a crescendo of its finite means. It was epic theatre which was to Benjamin's mind the impetus to make life 'spurt up high from the bed of time, and for an instant, hover iridescent in empty space. Then its puts it to bed.'<sup>53</sup> This was monadology turned inside out, interrupted, history made vertiginous, folded outward to reveal in elemental contents. Human life in this way was to discover its animality, its creaturality.

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<sup>52</sup> Ibid., p. 4.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid., p. 13.

Benjamin had reported on this subject once before and not so long ago, in Moscow. Now he sensed he was climbing the stairs of the labyrinth again, was he inside or outside of it, this time he could not tell either, and something just then made restless, entering into a sleepiness without sleep, a fitful awakeness. He thought of calling in Brecht, it was too late. It was now six months since his last visit to Brecht's house. It was the summer of 1934. The nightmare of National Socialism was now officially in progress. Benjamin was already climbing toward his destiny.

22 June. I was in a labyrinth of stairs. This labyrinth was not entirely roofed over. I climbed; other stairways led downwards. On the landing I realised that I had arrived at the summit. A wide view of many lands opened up before me. I saw men standing on other peaks. One of these men was suddenly seized by dizziness and fell. The dizziness spread; others were now falling from other peaks into the depths below. When I too became dizzy, I woke up.<sup>54</sup>

There is never just one man standing on the summit of such awakenings. So too, it was never the case that Benjamin was the only man standing on the summit of his epoch, but rather there were several men standing at any time on other peaks of understanding in the crisis that was fascism. I can think of several other men who might be part of a pack like that, one of them of course was Bertolt Brecht. In becoming-dizzy alongside these men, Benjamin joins there pack, becomes proximate to them, joins their multiplicity in surveying those peaks. He is a dog, like the other Germans who stand as he does on the apex of a potential end to history. This is a woeful outlook if it is the case that 'everything that is German is bad,'<sup>55</sup> as it was at least according to Brecht's estimations.

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<sup>54</sup> Benjamin, Walter "Conversations with Brecht," Ernst Bloch, Georg Lukacs, Bertolt Brecht, Walter Benjamin, Theodor Adorno Afterward Fredric Jameson, *Aesthetics and Politics*, Translation Editor: Ronald Taylor (NLB: London, 1977), p. 93.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 97.

Another dog in this pack could be identified as Georg Lukacs, whom Brecht accused of being 'a German by choice' one that as a result, has 'run completely out of steam.'<sup>56</sup> And therein presumably left behind by the pack to suffer from it alone. Benjamin worries about this consequence for himself, of the time to come when he will be presumed to have run out of steam as a German - by choice, only to be left behind by the pack. This is why Benjamin is tempted into becoming a diarist of figures like Kafka, like Brecht – who have already opted out of that category ironically as a way of being 'landed' in their territories without actually having to lay claim to a 'frontier area.'<sup>57</sup> The true desire of any dog. Obedience without mastery. Cunningly, by relating his position to them as a diarist Benjamin is able to remain on the edge of the crowd, at the periphery of the frontier without ever having to trespass it himself, or at least not yet. Taking this distanced approach however, he belongs to it nonetheless, holding on to the edges by perhaps a hand or a foot, so that he does not plunge completely into the nether regions of its zones. To avoid that plunge he engages in another type of swimming - into their discursive eddies - to the antipodes even, just so that he can remain at the periphery of their implications. He knows that he would die if he were drawn into the centre of the current, as surely as he would if he left go of the others in his same boat. This is not an easy position to stay in, its not an easy position to hold, for these men are in constant motion, leaping up at you, peer over you claiming to be more authoritative on the subject of fascism then they should safely be.<sup>58</sup>

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<sup>56</sup> Ibid., p. 97.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid., p. 90.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid., 94. Benjamin records Brecht's behaviour in a diary entry of June 22, 1938: He assumes a cunning, furtive expression, stands in front of the chair in which I am sitting - he is impersonating 'the State' - and says, with a sly, sidelong glance at an imaginary interlocutor: 'I know I *ought* to wither away.'

Their movements are unpredictable and follow no rhythm. They surge forward despite the forces at work against them - go to North, go east, go to London, Moscow, as Benjamin sees it 'Brecht's plans stretch out to the period beyond exile.'<sup>59</sup> He is not the only one left in perpetual motion by the diasporic consequences of fascism; none of the individuals in the crowd remain in the same position in relation to the others. Although all will lament exile as 'not being a proper base for plans and projects,'<sup>60</sup> they seem simultaneously to revel in their exile, giddy from a certain pressure to maintain cultural stability in the midst of chaos. Why identify as a dog any longer, when the wolves have been let loose on you? So too is Benjamin in this position of being hounded, chased off his turf and yet he remained doggedly loyal to its periphery. This disenfranchised reality forces one into perpetual motion, gripped by a mania to generate new ideas in the arid regions of this vast tautology Jewishness, Communism, this endless rehearsal of one's 'outlaw' condition for the consumption of others; all of this demands a high level of tension, but on another level gives Benjamin a feeling of violent, almost vertiginous, happiness –energies near enough to become its observer, its sage.

There is at least a temporary happiness for Benjamin in Denmark, a sensation of productivity, because although he was not able to do it with Kafka, in choosing to pack alongside Brecht has meant that he was able to stumble onto something of a dizzying find. 'Jewish' fascism. A black hole in a black hole. Not the kind of holeiness that Brecht accuses Kafka of or for that matter Benjamin; not an identificatory piety, but something far more maniacal, far more

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<sup>59</sup> Ibid., p. 92.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid., p. 92.

'permissible.'<sup>61</sup> He is so close to this phenomenon in Denmark that by 1938 that he can feel it breathing down his neck, inciting in him day after day in a series of conversations with Brecht, night after night a series of dreams he reports to Scholem, in a series of happenings that compel him to wager everything on hand toward the potential of making a pictorial atlas of the 'secret' history of German fascism out of materials reaped from its Others that have been publicly put down like dogs: Jews, gypsies, Communists, and homosexuals.

This might seem a mad idea at first, even to Benjamin, until it dawns on him through Brecht's concept of alienation effects that 'progress is inseparable from regression, culture from barbarism, and the so-called exception is the rule.'<sup>62</sup> Who but the forcibly alienated, i.e., Germans like himself who were brutally exiled in line with the Nazi programmatic of 'total reterritorialization' of German soil, would voluntarily bind themselves to travel along its unstable national periphery, holding on by a hand or a foot to the grounds of a Germanic culture they believe is still theirs? Surely this decision would have to be an affect generated from within a culture which over twenty years generated such a black hole within State operations and within its citizenry functioning, that no one could remember who they were before the time of war. All they could cling onto was a myth of Germania. A territory that had never quite materialised in reality, but to which at least imaginarily, everyone had formerly been sovereign to. The 'Jewishness' that emerges from this belief system goes a long way towards

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<sup>61</sup> Benjamin, Walter "Conversations with Brecht," Ernst Bloch, Georg Lukacs, Bertolt Brecht, Walter Benjamin, Theodor Adorno Afterward Fredric Jameson, *Aesthetics and Politics*, Translation Editor: Ronald Taylor (NLB: London, 1977), p. 87.

<sup>62</sup> Wohlfarth, Irving, "Manner aus der Fremde": Walter Benjamin and the German-Jewish Parnassus," *New German Critique* Number 70 Winter 1997, p. 55.

shaping what becomes a schizo<sup>63</sup> position to occupy from beyond the vantage point of fascist Germany. Wohlfarth asserts that,

For Benjamin there is no question of his not wanting to preserve the whole of German culture in tact. It never was 'in tact' for him, as it was for others of his status. Indeed, for him 'to oppose 'culture' or 'progress' to 'barbarism' in the name of say the Popular Front was to ignore their complicity. The crisis did not date from the sudden, personal disaster of enforced emigration: the bourgeois humanist heritage was long since shattered. The only viable strategy was, in Hegel's phrase "to enter the enemy's strength," the better to turn his destruction against itself.<sup>64</sup>

Such strength had been building in Benjamin since his trip to Moscow in 1927. By tracking the moves of this phenomenon in diarist form, beginning with Moscow, Benjamin meets some of the demands of creaturality in reading that totalitarianism requires. It's a good thing that Benjamin picked up these techniques through Asja's domineering lessons, and ones that a dog like Brecht seldom let out of sight of his mastications. Potential usage of this technique was demonstrated when Brecht, in conversation with Benjamin, spoke of a 'worker's monarchy.'<sup>65</sup> Benjamin resisted this notion and compares this creature to certain 'grotesque sports of nature dredged up from depths of the sea in the form of horned fish or other monsters.'<sup>66</sup> What Benjamin is delving into here in recording the phenomenon of a figure like Brecht is a rhizomatic formation, of a creature and its environment, something that comes across to us as a monster of another type, but no less a monster. For Benjamin the search to identify this hybrid

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<sup>63</sup> Phrase borrowed from Deleuze, Gilles, and Guattari, Felix, *A Thousand Plateaus*, Trans. and Foreword by Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987), p. 34.

<sup>64</sup> Wohlfarth, Irving, "Manner aus der Fremde": Walter Benjamin and the German-Jewish Parnassus," *New German Critique* Number 70 Winter 1997, p. 48.

<sup>65</sup> Benjamin, Walter "Conversations with Brecht," Ernst Bloch, Georg Lukacs, Bertolt Brecht, Walter Benjamin, Theodor Adorno Afterward Fredric Jameson, *Aesthetics and Politics*, Translation Editor: Ronald Taylor (NLB: London, 1977), p. 99.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 99.

creature becomes all about tracking indivisible distances. Distances that are ceaselessly transformed, which cannot be divided or transformed without their elements changing in nature all the time. How does one chart a political field like that? The answer is always to be ready for the next required contingency, to always listen hard, so hard that one cannot see. Not because there is nothing to see. Indeed, that there is something to see was at the heart of Brecht's criticism of Kafka as a visionary: 'he saw what was coming without seeing what is.'<sup>67</sup> Rather it is the case more often that that which *is* visible is not productive to describe. On the other hand, what is not visible, what is not materialised in the sense of what becomes remarkable, becomes something equally important. It is what Deleuze and Guattari cite as that which becomes 'a formation, a pack, a legion.'<sup>68</sup> It does not concern itself with 'totalisation or hierarchization,'<sup>69</sup> but rather with 'modes of expansion, propagation, occupation, contagion, coupling.'<sup>70</sup> 'Canetti notes that even in a pack each member is alone even in the company of others; each takes care of himself at the same time as participating in the band,....when the pack form a ring around the fire each man will have a neighbour to the right and to the left, but no one behind him; his back is naked and exposed to the wilderness.'<sup>71</sup> Deleuze and Guattari 'recognise this as a schizo position, ... on the edge in the line of duty,'<sup>72</sup> one occupying at any one time the position on the edge veering back to the centre, the centre always veering to the edge, and so goes the constellation of forces toward the summit of the event.

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<sup>67</sup> Ibid., p. 88.

<sup>68</sup> Deleuze, Gilles, and Guattari, Felix, *A Thousand Plateaus*, Trans. and Foreword by Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987),

<sup>69</sup> Ibid., p. 33

<sup>70</sup> Ibid., p. 239.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid., p. 33

<sup>72</sup> Ibid., pp. 33-34.

This is how we find Benjamin in his dream on the summit, waking himself up when he sees the others getting dizzy and falling. The last man he sees do that is Brecht, who experiences his own vertiginous happiness, alone, dreaming of fascist regimes that extend thirty thousand years into the future, a long way down by anyone's estimation, and as he is falling into the depths of this reverie fails to see that it is getting him anywhere, whereas an alerted Benjamin picks up this signal and decides to diary his plummet. This decision would coincide with the one where he decides to re-learn Marxism from ground level. Choosing this position the second time around was not accident. 'Nor was it an accident – although regrettable – that at the end of his life Engels turned to the natural sciences'<sup>73</sup>as a means of delving into the various strata and types present within the social hierarchy. As for Brecht, what he really lacked was the ability to adopt a creatural sensibility and in so doing get to fascism's degree zero: its ability to turn a pack mentality into the beginnings of a war machine. In terms of gaining an insight into how molar creatural formations like National Socialism operate, 'Nothing can be more valuable ... than the love of nature and a comprehension of the natural sciences, in particular zoology.'<sup>74</sup> Zoology operates as a machine that proliferates before it infinite minutiae of interrelated specifications of type. Its hierarchic system prides itself on knowing that it is always already the case that there are 'packs in masses and masses in packs.'<sup>75</sup> By the same token, there is always the potential for one formation or type pass into the space of another. By the late nineteenth century some of the major classificatory principles of zoology would get reterritorialized by a new categorical sphere, that of sexology.

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<sup>73</sup> Benjamin, Walter "Conversations with Brecht," Ernst Bloch, Georg Lukacs, Bertolt Brecht, Walter Benjamin, Theodor Adorno Afterward Fredric Jameson, *Aesthetics and Politics*, Translation Editor: Ronald Taylor (NLB: London, 1977), p. 96.

<sup>74</sup> Deleuze, Gilles, and Guattari, Felix, *A Thousand Plateaus*, Trans. and Foreword by Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987), p. 38.

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 34.

Foucault, describes this new science as concerned with the 'specification of individuals.' Using the example of the nineteenth century homosexual Foucault describes an individual who became

a personage, a past, a case history, and a childhood, in addition to being a type of lifestyle, a life form, and a morphology, with an indiscreet anatomy and possibly a mysterious physiology. Nothing went into his total composition that was unaffected by his sexuality. It was everywhere present in him ... The sodomite had been a temporary aberration; the homosexual was now a species. So too were all those minor pervers whom nineteenth century psychiatrists entomologized by giving them strange baptismal names, there was Krafft-Ebing's zoophiles and zooerasts, Rohleder's auto-monosexualists, and later mixoscopophiles, gynecomasts, presbyophiles, sexoesthetics inverts, and dyspareunist women. These fine names for heresies referred to a nature that was overlooked by the law, but not so neglectful of itself that it did not go on producing more species, even where there was no order to fit them into.<sup>76</sup>

As a keen scholar of 19<sup>th</sup> century epistemologies, Benjamin would have been very familiar with of such 'specification of individuals,' though it is not clear whether or not he would have necessarily associated such individual typing as 'processing of data in the fascist sense.'<sup>77</sup> It is rather more likely that he would have kept such scientific systems classification in mind, when studying Brecht as a new 'species' of fascist.

Regardless of these theoretical concerns, practically speaking it was summer now, the year 1934 and his applied research was about to commence in earnest. Benjamin had taken the plunge into exile, he resurfaced in Svendborg, nonetheless his had familiarised himself already with the depths it required to get there. It was in a conversation with Brecht of the same day that he advised

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<sup>76</sup> Foucault, Michel, *History of Sexuality, Vol. I*. Trans. Robert Hurley, (London: Penguin Books, 1990), p. 43.

<sup>77</sup> Benjamin, Walter, *Illuminations*, Trans. Harry Zohn, Intro. Hannah Arendt, (New York: Fontana Press, 1969), p. 212.

Benjamin that 'Depth doesn't get you anywhere at all. Depth is a separate dimension, its just depth - and there is nothing whatsoever to be seen in it.'<sup>78</sup> Both Brecht and Benjamin were technically short sighted, it was only Benjamin that chose, however, to overlook this natural defect, the peer downward when one's vision failed to procure the long view. In this way he believed he was outwitting optics, outwitting the thing also that was right under his nose. He aimed his gaze slightly higher in that case, and found himself facing Brecht once more. Benjamin:

To conclude the discussion I told B. that penetrating into depth is my way of travelling to the antipodes. In my essay on Kraus I actually got there. I know that this one on Kafka doesn't come across to the same degree: I can't dismiss that he landed me in a diarist style of notation. It is true that the frontier land defined by Kraus and, in another way by Kafka preoccupies me a great deal. In Kafka's case, I haven't yet, I said, completed my exploration of this area. I am aware it contains a lot of rubbish and waste, a lot of pure mystification. But I can't help thinking the important thing in Kafka is something else, and some of that I touched upon in my essay ...<sup>79</sup>

Benjamin here is confessing to be 'landed' in a diarist style of notation. This is not to say that he is 'land-locked' as the frontier he assures us is always in sight. But then, this mission does require an expansive knowledge, so much as it does, again, require a fair bit of depth. Depth insofar as a clearing away, of rubbish and waste that goes a long way down, that wades within a lot pure mystification, that is so phenomenologically slippery that it evades Benjamin's grasp, whose dimensions can only be touched upon. Prompted by all this philosophical meandering Brecht responds with an almost knee-jerk cut- off reaction - of true

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<sup>78</sup> Benjamin, Walter "Conversations with Brecht," Ernst Bloch, Georg Lukacs, Bertolt Brecht, Walter Benjamin, Theodor Adorno Afterward Fredric Jameson, *Aesthetics and Politics*, Translation Editor: Ronald Taylor (NLB: London, 1977), p. 90.

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 89-90.

epic proportion - he interrupts Benjamin's depth train of thought on fascism in favour of an official report from Austria. Benjamin: 'The conversation broke off, as it was ten o'clock and time to listen to the news from Vienna.'<sup>80</sup>

Kafka in a position of observer would surmise of Brecht: 'One who listens too hard cannot see. As for poor Benjamin, his predicament is that he is convinced he 'need say nothing, only show.' That strategy is lost on a Brecht who makes his actors wear signs around their necks to identify their political positions, furthermore the nodding ass in his office has a sign around his neck that says 'Even I must understand.'<sup>81</sup> There is no room for subtlety in this relationship, but that is exactly the diaristic treatment '*a la Nietzsche*'<sup>82</sup> Benjamin is determined to give the situation. In a conversation of 6 July, Brecht mentions to Benjamin the prophetic aspect of Kafka's work. He asserts that 'Kafka, had one problem and one only, he says, and that was the problem of organisation.'<sup>83</sup> Brecht meanwhile has the opposite problem he is over-organised, over prepared for fascism, so much so that this over-organisation *against* it becomes a fascism of its own, with all of the attendant pleasures of such extremity. Deleuze and Guattari assert that such blinding assurance that one has an insight into the workings of fascism gives 'everybody and anybody the mission of self-appointed judge, dispenser of justice, policeman, neighbourhood SS man.'<sup>84</sup> Having seemingly 'overcome fear, ... sailed from the shores of security,' Brecht has entered into 'a system no less concentricized, no less organised: the system of petty insecurities that leads everyone to their own black holes in which to turn

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<sup>80</sup> Ibid., pp. 89-90.

<sup>81</sup> Ibid, p. 89.

<sup>82</sup> Ibid., p. 89.

<sup>83</sup> Ibid., p. 88.

<sup>84</sup> Deleuze, Gilles, and Guattari, Felix, *A Thousand Plateaus*, Trans. and Foreword by Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987), p. 228.

dangerous, possessing a clarity of their situation, role, mission even more disturbing than the certitudes of the first line'<sup>85</sup> of Nazism. Benjamin gives evidence for this phenomenon happening to Brecht in his diary entry: 'Brecht, in the course of yesterday's conversations: 'I often imagine being interrogated by a tribunal.'<sup>86</sup> For Brecht the coming tribunal exists as a space of productivity, of appropriate recognition finally coming his way, only the most politically subversive figures could garner such an audience. For a man ironically deprived of his audience by such interrogatory forces, the happiness of them finally getting around to commissioning him to perform, can only solicit the most perverse joy, the most vertiginous operations of satisfaction. In reacting to such a fantasy formation Benjamin too, must adjust his perceptions. His must match Brecht's devout Marxism with his own personal counter strike against him, in this case, using the agent Kafka, his most internalised figure of identification as a *fall guy*. What is already falling as Nietzsche observed, needs to be kicked.<sup>87</sup>

5 August. Kafka was a Jew-boy living in a world where literature was the primary reality offered, if not the only one, a sorry, dismal creature, a mere bubble on the glittering quagmire of Prague cultural life, nothing more.<sup>88</sup>

Was not Benjamin in the same position in Berlin in the 1920s, during his early journalist period, *the time where he was actually able to secure his own commissioning?* Benjamin cannot sustain this opinion. Within a matter of weeks

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<sup>85</sup> Ibid., p. 228.

<sup>86</sup> Benjamin, Walter "Conversations with Brecht," Ernst Bloch, Georg Lukacs, Bertolt Brecht, Walter Benjamin, Theodor Adorno Afterward Fredric Jameson, *Aesthetics and Politics*, Translation Editor: Ronald Taylor (NLB: London, 1977), p. 88.

<sup>87</sup> Comay, Rebecca, "Walter Benjamin's Endgame" in *Walter Benjamin's Philosophy*, Ed., Andrew Benjamin (London: Routledge, 1994), p. 173.

<sup>88</sup> Benjamin, Walter "Conversations with Brecht," Ernst Bloch, Georg Lukacs, Bertolt Brecht, Walter Benjamin, Theodor Adorno Afterward Fredric Jameson, *Aesthetics and Politics*, Translation Editor: Ronald Taylor (NLB: London, 1977), pp. 89.

he realises this and feels the need to retaliate, this time outwardly so, against Brecht.

31 August. The night before last a long and heated debate about my Kafka. Its foundation: the charge that it promotes Jewish fascism. Its increases and spreads the darkness surrounding Kafka instead of dispersing it. Yet it is necessary to clarify Kafka, that is to say, to formulate the practicable suggestions which can be extracted from his stories. It is supposed to be that such suggestions *can* be extracted from them, if only because of their tone of superior claim. But these should be sought in the direction of the great general evils, which assail humanity today. Brecht looks for the reflection of these evils in Kafka's work. He confines himself, in the main, to *The Trial*. ... Brecht calls *The Trial* a prophetic book. "By looking at the Gestapo you can see what the Cheka might become." Kafka's perspective is of a man caught under the wheels.<sup>89</sup>

Benjamin who was listening intently to Brecht, might have performed another staging of the Gestapo, not taking the cue from Brecht's intimation of them as piggish working-class city cops, but rather one gleaned from *The Trial* no less, where K. is confronted at the end, by two piggish bourgeois men in top hats as his deadly assailants. Men appearing to be of his same class, in other words. Indeed, 'K. was sitting also dressed in black and putting on a pair of gloves that fit tightly over his fingers,'<sup>90</sup> when he was importuned by their visit. He takes their appearance for a farce, surely they must be actors, and not real gentlemen. K. says to himself, 'Tenth-rate actors they send for me,' glancing around again to confirm the impression. 'They want to finish me off cheaply.'<sup>91</sup> K. is indeed under the wheels, but of which apparatus? That of the homeowner, the petty bourgeois who necessarily gets it in the neck?<sup>92</sup> Benjamin: 'His situation is

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<sup>89</sup> Ibid., p.90-91.

<sup>90</sup> Kafka, Franz, *The Trial*, Trans. Willa and Edwin Muir, Epilogue Max Brod, (London: Vintage, 1999), p. 245.

<sup>91</sup> Ibid., p. 245.

<sup>92</sup> Benjamin, Walter "Conversations with Brecht," Ernst Bloch, Georg Lukacs, Bertolt Brecht, Walter Benjamin, Theodor Adorno Afterward Fredric Jameson, *Aesthetics and Politics*, Translation Editor: Ronald Taylor (NLB: London, 1977), p. 89.

Kafka's. But whereas the type of petty bourgeois familiar today – the fascist, in other words – resolves to combat this situation by means of his invincible iron will, Kafka scarcely offers any resistance; he is wise. Where the fascists bring heroism into play, Kafka asks questions.<sup>93</sup> The irony is that “They're not prepared to answer questions,” said K. to himself and went to fetch his hat.<sup>94</sup> Benjamin observes that Kafka's ‘boundless pessimism is free from every tragic sense of fate. For not only is his expectation of disaster based entirely on empirical realities (although there it is total), but, in addition, the criteria of ultimate success are attached with an incorrigible naivete to the most trivial and commonplace activities, such as the visit of a commercial traveller or an inquiry addressed to a government department.’<sup>95</sup> That these things evade Benjamin as well, make him aware that he is attached to this condition through a similar naivete concerning the banal, and therein prey to fall victim to its clutches in future.

### Exile Fascism

3 August. Brecht: I know they will say of me that I was a maniac. When the present has passed on to the future, the capacity to understand my mania will pass on with it. The times we live in will make a backdrop to my mania. But what I should really like would be for the people to say about me: he was a moderate maniac.’- On German fascism: ‘We must neglect nothing in our struggle over that lot. What they're planning is nothing small, make no mistake about it. They're planning for thirty thousand years ahead. Colossal things. Colossal crimes. They stop at nothing. That is why we too must think of everything. They cripple the baby in the mother's womb. We must on no account take leave of the children.’ While he was speaking like this I felt a power being exercised over me that was

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<sup>93</sup> Ibid., p. 90.

<sup>94</sup> Kafka, Franz, *The Trial*, Trans. Willa and Edwin Muir, Epilogue Max Brod, (London: Vintage, 1999), p. 246.

<sup>95</sup> Benjamin, Walter “Conversations with Brecht,” Ernst Bloch, Georg Lukacs, Bertolt Brecht, Walter Benjamin, Theodor Adorno Afterward Fredric Jameson, *Aesthetics and Politics*, Translation Editor: Ronald Taylor (NLB: London, 1977), p. 90.

equal in strength to the power of fascism, a power that sprang from the depths of history no less deep than the power of the fascists. Its was a very curious feeling, and new to me. Then Brecht's thoughts took another turn that further intensified this feeling I had. 'They're planning devastations on a mind-chilling scale. That's why they can't reach agreement with the Church, which is also geared to thousands of years.'<sup>96</sup>

At the crossroads of the German fascist project, Brecht and Benjamin are looking in opposite directions for the Messiah who will bring about redemption to this crisis. Brecht's maniacal cry that we must no account take leave of the children goes against the grain of Benjamin's thinking in the "Theses on the Philosophy of History." Although, Benjamin here attributes this trait to Social Democracy, it is equally a classic Marxist position to 'assign the working classes the role of the redeemer of future generations, in this way cutting the sinews of its greatest strength.'<sup>97</sup> Benjamin charges that 'this training made the working classes forget both its hatred and its spirit of sacrifice, for both are nourished by the image of enslaved ancestors rather than that of liberated grandchildren.'<sup>98</sup> That Brecht himself takes this view shows that in a political climate where extremity reigns 'even the dead will not be safe from the enemy if he wins.'<sup>99</sup> Therein one must not only think of the baby in the womb, but of whole generations who have passed away under a tide of violence and warmongering. Whilst Brecht is wary of the thirty thousand years to come, Benjamin is looking thirty thousand years into the past for answers, to the prehistory of what we are now calling 'civilisation.' In terms, of criminality, what separates a Communist criminality from Fascist one, when indeed criminality for Brecht marks the true strain of a potentially revolutionary? Benjamin is aware of this too, 'the Messiah,'

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<sup>96</sup> Ibid., p. 89-90.

<sup>97</sup> Benjamin, Walter, *Illuminations*, Trans, Harry Zohn, Intro. Hannah Arendt, (New York: Fontana Press, 1969), p. 252.

<sup>98</sup> Ibid., p. 252.

<sup>99</sup> Ibid., p. 247.

he says, 'comes now only as the redeemer, he comes as the subduer of the Antichrist.'<sup>100</sup> One must approach the moment of danger, insofar as 'the danger affects both the content of tradition and its receivers.'<sup>101</sup> The 'curiosity' that Benjamin feels again is the sensation of falling. By the end of his summer in Brecht's company he understands that he must take the fall. Compare this to an earlier diary entry, this one from Franz Kafka:

In order to be as heavy as possible, which I believe to be an aid to falling asleep, I have crossed my arms and put my hands on my shoulders, so that I lay there like a soldier with his pack.<sup>102</sup>

Benjamin offers 'Quite palpably being loaded down is here equated with forgetting, the forgetting of a sleeping man.'<sup>103</sup> However, what is also detectable here is a form of vigilance, because a soldier with his pack on is only permitted to sleep lightly, to only sleep so as to save his strength for the next battle. Even whilst he is slumbering, he cannot fail to remember that 'the enemy has not ceased to be victorious.'<sup>104</sup> That is the discipline of his training, the method that 'only the historian will have' in order to fan the flames of hope in the past...<sup>105</sup> One sleeps as a soldier when one cannot be a vigilante in his skin.

For Kafka everything was gesture, and this is why Benjamin claims 'he could see least of all.'<sup>106</sup> Nonetheless 'each gesture for him was an event –one

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<sup>100</sup> Ibid., p. 247.

<sup>101</sup> Ibid., p. 247.

<sup>102</sup> Ibid., p. 129.

<sup>103</sup> Ibid., p. 129.

<sup>104</sup> Ibid., p. 247.

<sup>105</sup> Ibid., p. 247.

<sup>106</sup> Ibid., p. 117.

might even say a drama - in itself.'<sup>107</sup> At Brecht's house Benjamin too is forced to act, to act out the nightmare of this fascism on the small stage of his personal relations, a place the Gestapo cannot penetrate, and yet somehow, curiously, the terror found here is more frightening, more palpable on a one-to-one basis. The stage on which this might be seen to be taking place in Brecht's home. Kafka however would make the more bold gesture of classifying it as something that takes place 'in the World Theatre,' one that reaches up toward heaven. Kafka, is not afraid 'to tear open the sky behind every gesture.'<sup>108</sup> For an Expressionist, the 'gesture itself would be the decisive thing.'<sup>109</sup> For Kafka it's both the gesture and what looms behind it.

What Brecht's epic theatre is missing out on is this tearing down of the staging of the social, instead it prefers to make its stage out of a black hole, out of stark emptiness, passing itself off as accessibility. Again one thinks of the ass in Brecht's office with the sign around his neck 'Even I must understand it.'<sup>110</sup> And of Brecht's actors who would wear signs around their necks as well, to gesture at their political identifications in his 'alienating' theatre productions. The trouble was that the alienation effect here related itself to the actor's body alone. The public never itself faced the threat of wearing its identifications around its neck, even when they were apparent to all in attendance. This is similar in a way to the failings of the Marxist intelligentsia, who saw the ass in the office, but

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<sup>107</sup> Ibid., p. 117.

<sup>108</sup> Ibid., p. 117.

<sup>109</sup> Ibid., p. 117.

<sup>110</sup> Benjamin, Walter "Conversations with Brecht," Ernst Bloch, Georg Lukacs, Bertolt Brecht, Walter Benjamin, Theodor Adorno Afterward Fredric Jameson, *Aesthetics and Politics*, Translation Editor: Ronald Taylor (NLB: London, 1977), p. 89.

never recognised it as a reflection on them. Brecht included. For Benjamin this realisation takes place in line with his work on Kafka, who inhabited a literary universe where everyone was wearing signs around their necks betraying their political ignorance. Kafka demonstrated this with his descriptions of the Oklahoma Nature Theatre where everyone is able to contribute to a populism that covers over a much more sinister aim of political conformity than the colourful propagandic posters would belie. Anyone is free to be a Communist and all should act now toward a better life. What is not said is that one who fails to join the party line, for whatever reason will be brought down, will face consequences, in a similar way that 'bad (social) actors' get booed off the (political) stage and seem to disappear from public discourse. Alternatively there is no other way to act, but to risk such appraisals in a society where no one has the tools with which to play himself or herself, to be what they claim to be. Benjamin understands this lesson through his work on Kafka. His appraisal of the world like Brecht's was aligned to the metaphor of the stage. However, the productions these two men had in mind could not have been more different in terms of the crudity of their pronouncements about the future of statecraft.

Benjamin explains:

Kafka's world is a world theatre. For him, man is on stage from the very beginning. The proof in the pudding is that the Nature Theatre of Oklahoma accepts everyone. What the standards for admission are cannot be determined. Dramatic talent, the most obvious criterion seems to be of no importance. But this can be expressed in another way: all that is expected is that the applicants play themselves. It is no longer in the realm of possibility that they could; if necessary, be what they claim to be.<sup>111</sup>

What ensues is an endless rehearsal of that guilt throughout the span of the Weimar era emerges as the Expressionist movement. This guilt was felt to be unique to the times. However, it too possessed a prehistory. In a similar way fascism was also part of a continuum stretching back in time to the first fall of man from Paradise.

### **Falling Down**

It was in the essay on Kraus from 1931, that Benjamin was first able to comment on ‘the falling sickness’ caused ostensibly by guilt over the pervasive decline that had befallen Viennese society from the previous decade. Benjamin would note “ I share the guilt...” This is so ‘Because this has a ring of the manifestos of an intelligentsia seeking to call to mind the memory of an epic that seemed to be turning away from it, there is something to be said about this guilty feeling in which private and historical consciousness so vividly meet.’<sup>112</sup> This type of guilt will always lead to Expressionism, from which Kraus’ mature work was nourished by the roots that cracked open their soil. The slogans are well known – with what scorn did Kraus not himself register them: “*gebalt*”, “*estuft*”, “*gestseilt*” [clenched, stepped, steeped], stage sets ... were composed.<sup>113</sup>

The figures that might have comprised such a setting, Benjamin could see retrospectively, that is to say from behind, with their stepped, steeped, terraces of human shoulders, necks and backs. They appeared much like the mysterious figures depicted in medieval miniatures, ‘leaning,’ ‘inclining,’ together with

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<sup>111</sup> Benjamin, Walter , *Illuminations*, Trans, Harry Zohn, Intro. Hannah Arendt, (New York: Fontana Press, 1969), p. 121.

<sup>112</sup> Benjamin, Walter, *One-Way Street*, Trans. Harry Zohn, Intro. Susan Sontag (London: Verso, 1979), p. 274.

<sup>113</sup> *Ibid.* p. 274

'wide open eyes.' They looked as if 'falling sickness had overtaken them thus, in their running which is always precipitous, they lean toward one another.'<sup>114</sup> This position echoes that of the exiled intellectuals looking out from their respective peaks in Benjamin's dream. Their available pathways were blocked due to this same pack mentality.

These men for Benjamin displayed a radical 'curvature' or 'concavity' most explicitly viewed from behind. Clenched or huddled in 'steep steps' which despite appearances 'leads less toward heaven than downward to and even under the earth.' The nameless power to which their backs are bent is the unsignified guilt. 'Whatever powers may have fought out their spiritual powers on these shoulders, one of them, from our experience of the condition of the defeated masses immediately after the end of the war, we are able to call by its name. What finally remained of Expressionism, in which an originally human impulse was converted almost without residue into a fashion, was the experience and the name of that nameless power to which the backs of people bent: guilt. "That an obedient mass is led into danger not by an unknown will but by an unknown guilt makes them pitiable," Kraus wrote as early as 1912.'<sup>115</sup>

Guilt does not equal redemption. This was made clear from the other frontiersman of the Benjaminian project (including Buber, Hoffmannstahl, Korsh, Bloch, Lukacs) who stood beside Brecht and Kafka in considering the dilemmas of the age. Kafka starts his own subterranean journey through the Austria-Hungarian Empire from another set of terms all together. If figures like Brecht and Kraus were thinking of the German question 'in terms of ages, Kafka thinks

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<sup>114</sup> Ibid., p. 274.

<sup>115</sup> Ibid., p. 275.

of [it] in terms of cosmic epochs.’<sup>116</sup> That is how Kafka is able to prognosticate fascism, but not show its dimensions. Hitler’s survey plans for German fascism were always sketched on a cosmic scale. Kafka has the uncanny ability therefore through the vehicle of the word *Sprache* to project these outcomes on both a micro and macro level. He too works in staging events, but ones before they transpire in real time. This brings us back to Brecht’s theatre and his opinion as well that Kafka is a prophet. Benjamin disagreed with that statement, and instead credited his powers of perception to something far more prosaic, tradition, ‘Kafka listened to tradition, and he who listens hard cannot see.’<sup>117</sup> Perhaps vision is overrated anyway, especially at a time when ‘a typical German man’s pathway is blocked by his own frontal bone’<sup>118</sup> which not coincidentally, supports his vision. But then again we are searching out something else altogether. Deleuze and Guattari would assert that ‘Whatever minor visions Kafka does come up with in the process of his literary explorations have no value within themselves, at least not much beyond ‘ what Benjamin judges them to be: ‘a lot rubbish and waste, a lot of pure mystification.’<sup>119</sup> However, this ostensible visual waste material, the emptied contents of the waste bin of bureaucracy, ‘is to be expanded beyond all bounds,’ in Kafka’s universe, from there it ‘will be projected onto the geographic, historical and political *map* of the world in order to reach vast regions of it...’<sup>120</sup> Kafka takes as his starting point the word, and through the arid landscape that is language, he makes words ‘vibrate with a new

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<sup>116</sup> Benjamin, Walter , *Illuminations*, Trans, Harry Zohn, Intro. Hannah Arendt, (New York: Fontana Press, 1969), p. 126.

<sup>117</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 141.

<sup>118</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 121.

<sup>119</sup> Benjamin, Walter “Conversations with Brecht,” Ernst Bloch, Georg Lukacs, Bertolt Brecht, Walter Benjamin, Theodor Adorno Afterward Fredric Jameson, *Aesthetics and Politics*, Translation Editor: Ronald Taylor (NLB: London, 1977), p. 89.

<sup>120</sup> Deleuze, Giles, and Guattari, Felix. *Kafka Toward a Minor Literature*, Trans. Dana Polan. Intro. Reda Bensmaia, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986), p. 10.

intensity.’<sup>121</sup> As Klaus Wagenbach says, “The word is master, it directly gives birth to the image.”<sup>122</sup> In using the word in this way Kafka ‘never stops operating by exhilaration and overdetermination and brings about as a result all sorts of world wide reterritorializations.’<sup>123</sup>

For Benjamin, ‘Kafka’s word is a world. The word will lend salvation as we await the Messiah, who in any case comes always a day late. Salvation is not a premium on existence but the last way out for a man whose path has been blocked...’<sup>124</sup> Hence his head is bent against the perceived ceiling of his own existence. ‘The law of this theatre is contained in a sentence tucked away in ‘A Report to an Academy: “I imitated people because I was looking for a way out, and for no other reason.”’<sup>125</sup> Benjamin is making his own report on Brecht, and in doing so he endeavours to ‘lose his rigidity’ through imitating Brecht’s Marxist party line, he subsumes this categorisation into himself, ‘in order to proliferate or prepare an upheaval in which he will fall into new lines of intensity.’<sup>126</sup> Why do Kafka, Brecht, and Benjamin all choose the theatre as their basis for their lines of intensification, their revolution pathways? This motive, though seemingly obvious with relation to the mass, remains unclear on the level of a person to person. What is clear is that they want to carry this communications operation off with as little signification as possible. This means that exchanges must be discreet, though telling. ‘Before the end of his trial K. seems to have some intimation of these things. He suddenly turns to the two gentlemen wearing top

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<sup>121</sup> Ibid., p. 19.

<sup>122</sup> Ibid., p. 23.

<sup>123</sup> Ibid., p. 19.

<sup>124</sup> Benjamin, Walter, *Illuminations*, Trans, Harry Zohn, Intro. Hannah Arendt, (New York: Fontana Press, 1969), p. 121.

<sup>125</sup> Ibid., p. 121.

<sup>126</sup> Deleuze, Giles, and Guattari, Felix. *Kafka Toward a Minor Literature*, Trans. Dana Polan. Intro. Reda Bensmaia, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986), p. 6.

hats who have come for him and asks them: "What theatre are you playing at?" "Theatre?" asked one, the corners of his mouth twitching as he looked for advice to the other, who acted as if he were a mute, struggling to overcome a stubborn disability. The men do not answer this question, but there is much to indicate that it hit home.<sup>127</sup>

Benjamin concludes then without concluding his views on Kafka, from the position of a motion sickness, which comes out of a stagnant political climate. There he takes our judgement of Kafka beyond the speculation that is practised by a maniacal Brecht, and brings it some way toward the cosmic playing fields on which catastrophe operates:

It is easier to draw speculative conclusions from Kafka's posthumous collection of notes than to explore even one of the motifs that appear in his stories and novels. Yet only these give some clue to the prehistoric forces that dominated Kafka's creativeness, forces, which to be sure, may justifiably be regarded as belonging to our world as well. Who can say under what names they appear to Kafka himself? Only this much is certain: he did not know them and failed to get his bearings among them. In the mirror in which the prehistoric world held up before him in the form of guilt he merely saw the future emerging in the form of judgement. Kafka, however, did not say what it was like. Was it not the Last Judgement? Does it turn the judge into the defendant? Is the trial not the punishment? Kafka gave no answer. Did he expect anything of this punishment? Or was he rather concerned to postpone it?<sup>128</sup>

Such postponements are what catastrophe monitoring is all about. The catastrophe will never culminate at a single moment but rather will come at us like a constellation of little events, microgestures that result in the political picture becoming cracked at its foundations. Benjamin never calls for a victory over these disturbances but rather preaches a constant attentiveness. Catastrophe

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<sup>127</sup>Benjamin, Walter, *Illuminations*, Trans, Harry Zohn, Intro. Hannah Arendt, (New York: Fontana Press, 1969), p. 121.

is not the event come; rather it is the present moment awaiting its eruption. That moment is here in a multitude of formations and yet is largely invisible to us. The task of bringing this moment to light, allowing us to read its signals, perhaps for the first time, constitute a politics by other means what I will plot in detail in the next three chapter as Walter Benjamin's War.

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<sup>128</sup> Ibid., pp. 1241-125.

## What Calls Technology? or Walter Benjamin's War.

There are certain things you don't see coming, certain things you'd rather remain blind to. They are nonetheless present and mounting, signals piling atop one another in quick succession, subtly pressing upon you the signal for a confrontation that is always already yet to come. Yet it is a confrontation that is already here in a multitude of formations. Nonetheless, you choose ignore all the signals around you. That there is a war taking place everyday, for every hour. That the terms of that war form all around you, at every instant. That you avert your to gaze to their proximity to your person almost maniacally day in, day out. Some will refer to this daily bout with present-to-distant desire as technology. Some will refer to it as politics by other means, a mechanics of the will. Walter Benjamin's War.

Benjamin names the terms of this coming war in a short piece from 1925 entitled 'The Weapons of Tomorrow: Chlorazetophenol, Diphenylamchorlizine and Dichlorlathyl-sulfide.'<sup>1</sup> In this piece Benjamin points the finger directly at I.G. Farbens Hoescht, Agfa, and Leverkusen plants as well as other respectable laboratories and institutes responsible for the suffocating death of mankind on the steps of the capitalistic enterprise. Kafka addresses this situation when he talks about the dirt of the officials. 'She could not understand why there were office hours for the public in the first place. To get some dirt on the front staircase - this is how her question was once addressed by an official, who was probably annoyed, but it made a lot of sense to her.'<sup>2</sup> Benjamin concludes from this passage, that 'uncleanliness is so much the attribute of officials that one could

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<sup>1</sup> Benjamin, Walter, 'Franz Kafka,' *Illuminations*, Trans. Harry Zohn, Intro. Hannah Arendt, (New York, Fontana Press, 1969), p. 110.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 110.

almost regard them as enormous parasites wasting at the energy of the caste that is compelled to serve them from below. This, of course does not refer to the economic context, but to the forces of reason and humanity from which this clan makes a living.<sup>3</sup>

Kafka's officials eventually become class warriors 'pushing the German economic crisis ever further to actualise an agenda that guarantees further sources of profit.'<sup>4</sup> Meanwhile, 'the parallel contract with the public is being broken by the officials, the one meant to be held between technology and the proletariat.'<sup>5</sup> Instead its bodies are being lost to the putrid stench of trenches riddled with the fall out of technology's wrath. 'One single aeroplane, loaded with gas bombs, carries all the necessary power to cut off civilian amenities and life. The development of military technology enables the tremendous empowerment of the officials.'<sup>6</sup> The dirt that gets on the steps now that officials have formed a partnership with the fascist war machine, comes from the detritus of a society under ruination. The economic conditions of wartime makes for a centralisation of violence in their offices.

It is no coincidence that these men were in the business of insurance in the time of Kafka, in the business of mobilisation, and preparedness in the time of Benjamin, and are now in the business of risk management and damage control as we enter the 21st century. The terms of operation here are always the same, they consist of dullness, decay and dirt. Filth is the element of the officials,<sup>7</sup> the logistics of disposal likewise is their domain. Here we get onto the grounds of

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<sup>3</sup> Ibid., p. 110.

<sup>4</sup> Leslie, Esther, *Overpowering Conformism*, (London: Pluto Press, 2000), p. 31.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., p. 7.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., p. 31.

<sup>7</sup> Benjamin, Walter, 'Franz Kafka,' *Illuminations*, Trans. Harry Zohn, Intro. Hannah Arendt, (New York, Fontana Press, 1969), p. 110.

historicism and its always already failed whitewash operation carried out on history. As Benjamin understood it, 'Fascists do not historicise destructivity.'<sup>8</sup> A wilful underreading of technology is included in that course. Benjamin demands an alertness not only to the destructive side of technology, but also to the conditions which transform that destructivity as a possibility into an actualisation the first instance. The terms that are recruited in waging the coming war correspond then not with a partial blindness in the reporting of technology's hand in warfare, but rather with a recognisance by other means: specifically by scavenging through the terms by which technology has been authorised from the first world war onward. This sort of investigation hones in roughly at the sites where the stink is allowed to rise from the rubbish heap of history: sites such as Nazi Germany. Those are however only ever initial points of entry, filth and purity seem to run in a parallel existence anytime you have something forming like a history, anything which seems to be gesturing a coming into being of the event.

## Offence Analyses

Paul Virilio argues in *Pure War*<sup>9</sup> that in fact, the Second World War never ended. Technically, 'it's not finished, at least not to the legal specifications of any international body of law.'<sup>10</sup> Martin Heidegger, in his statements regarding the war, in the (in)famous volume 'What is Called Thinking?' would go so far as to say that for him the war essentially 'has decided nothing...in the sense that it concerns solely man's essential fate on this earth.'<sup>11</sup> Rather it seems that man's confrontation with nihilism had only been postponed by events. Despite its delay,

<sup>8</sup> Leslie, Esther, *Overpowering Conformism*, (London: Pluto Press, 2000), p. 30.

<sup>9</sup> Virilio, Paul, *Pure War Revised Edition*, (New York: Semiotexte, Columbia University Press, 1997), p. 14.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., p. 14.

<sup>11</sup> Heidegger, Martin, *What is Called Thinking?*, Trans. J. Glenn Gray, (London: HarperTorch Books, 1968), p. 66.

the moment of that confrontation was indeed still a necessary one, and in due course it would arise again.

What it had done decisively from Heidegger's point of view, was to inaugurate total mobilisation as it had been predicted previously in Ernst Jünger's writings of the 1920s and 30s, a dream of tidy efficiency in war making, a total co-operative fusion between industry and the military. The dream of 'efficient' killing, if not 'clean' killing was ultimately met through the atomic bomb ironically marketed as a weapon to put an end to the necessity of mass warfare. Indeed it was positioned to tip the balance of causalities in favour of the victors, so that the losers would have to count the dead. From its inception it was thought to be so powerful that it was regarded as beyond multiplicity in its application, it stood alone as the singular threat to the future.<sup>12</sup> In the shadow of the atomic bomb, and later the nuclear bomb, something was ironically allowed to proliferate: the illusion of Total Peace as the ultimate goal of producing weapons of mass destruction. The goal itself having been assumed after WWI found its place in the post-WWII vernacular as 'deterrence' a term destined to become the new international buzzword clamouring the Cold War and later the Star Wars initiative.

Wartime technology seems to have managed quite easily to obtain an international business class passport, even as the Second World War 'has yet to be put out,'<sup>13</sup> or perhaps the more fitting term here is deported, from the economic VIP list of Western nations. Moreover wartime technology is increasingly able to slip into all fields, bypassing most customs agents, including the intellectual gate. This is how Martin Heidegger can start re-authorising the

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<sup>12</sup> Poggeler, Otto, 'Heidegger's Political Self Understanding,' *The Heidegger Controversy*, Ed. Richard Wolin, (London: MIT Press, 1993), p. 229.

<sup>13</sup> Virilio, Paul, *Pure War Revised Edition*, (New York: Semiotexte, Columbia University Press, 1997), p. 14.

place of technology into the field of Big Science in Europe after the War. In his writings - starting in the early 1950s and 60s, science is assessed alongside technology as a matter of product assessment as something akin to intellectual quality control. As early as 1933, Heidegger would assert in his rectoral address that 'authentic science (philosophy) was the highest mode of...man's being-at-work.'<sup>14</sup> This comment critically joined the fate of philosophy to that of technoscience. Indeed, as the century wore on, technology, in combination with science, was increasingly meant to combine the highest outputs of philosophy with the work ethic, synthesising a *product*, which is increasingly classified in its use value according to its *intelligence*. Indeed in America, the job of bringing German fascist know-how into marketability as US domestic technology was largely carried out as an ideological refit operation to fit the standards of such post-war values. An administrative order was placed for the redesign and redistribution of fascist rhetoric to fit into the always already retro space age vernacular of the bomb, starting with WWII and progressing through the cultural lexicon well into the Cold War era.<sup>15</sup> A domestic neglect of fascism was allowed to take place, because we believed that with the dawn of the nuclear age we had increasingly more space to think about fascism as an anachronistic politic relegated to the first half of the century. This could hardly be considered as important as the democratic future to come, one fuelled conspicuously by technology. As for historical fascism, it continues to inhabit the marketplace of ideas as a space of *Denkfaulheit*, Walter Benjamin's term for the expiration or falling off of thinking; what Avital Ronell later will translate as **mindrot**.<sup>16</sup>

This sort of rot ensues as a result of a subtle refusal on the part of the West to acknowledge that this rot actually has its place outside of the gas chambers of

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<sup>14</sup> Zimmerman, Michael E., *Heidegger's Confrontation with Modernity*, (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana State University Press, 1990), p. 67.

<sup>15</sup> For a further discussion of this situation see, Ronell, Avital, 'Starting from Scratch,' *Finitude's Score*, (London: University of Nebraska Press, 1994), pp. 207-218.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 211.

Auschwitz and that the rot has received a transfer to the Academy. As Benjamin predicted, 'gas warfare has obviously eliminated the distinction between civilian and military personnel...'<sup>17</sup> in terms the bodies given over to the task of manufacturing and promoting strategic rhetorics for deployment - in suring up or breaking down as the case may be - the already embattled disciplinary fields of the arts and sciences. The anxiety produced in the call to fabricate a resulting order, has left us with the symptom of a widespread clouding over of what is called thinking a history of technology within the university system post-WWII. This condition is further aggravated by the fact that a large portion of institutional funding since the 1950s, in the US at least, has come directly, or more often indirectly, from the coffers of military research and development schemes. This economy would seem to favour the sciences, and yet without rhetorical buttressing the humanities produce the campaigns of future war, i.e. invisible and perpetual war, cannot be effectively sustained. What occurs as a result, Benjamin argues, is that international law is removed to facilitate the transfer of the rhetorical debates which feed into, again indirectly, the movements of the war machine as a kind of pre-programming. This leaves us largely in the rhetorical fog of something vaguely intimated to be a matter of national defence, as opposed to what it more clearly is: an ongoing defence of nationalism. That was Benjamin's short-term projection for the coming war. With a view to the long-term effects, it seems to me that this disbanding of traditional affinities of inter-nationalism, has also resulted in an intra-nationalism on debates around fascism. Each nation in turn performing an internal examination of its role in the old school work of totalitarianism whilst remaining blind to the appearance of ever burgeoning micro-fascisms within their own respective, current political bodies.

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<sup>17</sup> Benjamin, Walter, 'Theories of German Fascism,' *Selected Writings Volume 2 1927-1934*, Trans. Rodney Livingstone and Others, Eds. Michael W. Jennings, Howard Eliand, and Gary Smith, (London: The Belknap Press of Havard University Press, 1999), p. 315.

This makes for a massive increase in the production of contemplative ruination, but not of the redemptive sort Benjamin had in mind in the late 1930s when writing the 'Theories of German Fascism'<sup>18</sup> essay. Rather, this ruination is technically remastered using the same tuning 'forks' the Nazis were forced to turn over along with many other looted possessions of their cultural victims, after fascism had been forcibly taken off the air. Nonetheless, what we are talking about here persists in being looped into that era, one that is seeming unsurpassable, one that is showing the same signs of static regression as German fascism broadcast at its supposed end. Thus the era following on from German fascism is metaphysically hindered by the very real threat of repossession by its similar controlling techniques. War always seems an arena where infernal uses are made of prosaic technologies. Realisations such as these take a long time to digest in the gut of humanity perhaps it is as Nietzsche suggested, that we need two sets of guts to be able to pass through our own history. Instead of satiating ourselves on contemplative ruination, perhaps its high time we swallowed the necessity of a contemplative rumination. A process whereby the flatulence of the Event as part of due course is released into the atmosphere of thinking instead of getting trapped along the circuitous passages of our singular guttural breakdown system. Avital Ronell alerts us to the fact that

There is a general movement to close things off, to get back to where we belong, a desire to defect and bond orificial openings ... from which uncontrollable utterances might be stopped. One of the dreams shared by the body politic, the academy, and the forces of the body police consists in shutting down the flow... The latency period of the archival, viral, historical underground seems to be linkable to the structures maintaining a secretly cycling poison, the hidden terrorisms that have taken up residence in the rhetorical bloodlines and bacillary negotiations, all requiring applications of hyperdetection and a new examination of the shit we keep walking into...<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Benjamin, Walter, 'Theories of German Fascism,' *Selected Writings Volume 2 1927-1934*, Trans. Rodney Livingstone and Others, Eds. Michael W. Jennings, Howard Eliand, and Gary Smith, (London: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1999).

<sup>19</sup> Ronell, Avital, *Finitude's Score*, (London: University of Nebraska Press, 1994), p. 223.

The question becomes how to get on better terms with that shit, intellectually speaking, without falling victim to the logistics of the systems that control it. One must remain particularly alert to such pitfalls, especially when one recognises just whom we are up against. The general movement Ronell is alluding to is a State sponsored campaign of stupidity. Following Nietzsche, stupidity must not be considered just some disinterested element, something endemic of a lackadaisical attitude toward distinguishing the nuances of what constitutes truth or falsity, nobility or baseness. Rather stupidity must be given its proper due as the enemy of truth is so far as it uses it as its raw material to construct stupidity discourses and proliferate them behind a banner of truth. Stupidity pursues its course through an understanding that it is *by right* that its truth should dominate. This is a base way of thinking and therefore is the lowest possible employment of truth. Such an activity turns the believer into one possessed of a slave mentality, and an unthought adherence to the status quo. Nietzsche's concern therein lies with tracking the movements of this baseness housed under the rubric of stupidity. As he battles his time Nietzsche's denunciations of stupidity are constant; 'what baseness is necessary to be able to say this, to be able to think that!'<sup>20</sup>

It is philosophy's job more fully to become the surveyor of stupidity, to work out a topology for it in every epoch, to acknowledge its complicity in having perpetuated it through out the ages, and above all to take a sober attitude towards stupidity in its ability to terrorise understanding and to poison thought. In *Nietzsche and Philosophy* Deleuze asks, 'Is there any discipline apart from philosophy that sets out to criticise all mystifications, whatever their source and aim, to expose all the fictions without which reactive forces would prevail?

Exposing as a mystification the mixture of baseness and stupidity that creates the

<sup>20</sup> Deleuze, Gilles, *Nietzsche and Philosophy*, (London: The Athlone Press, 1983), p. 105.

astonishing complicity of both victims and perpetrators. Finally, turning thought into something aggressive, active and affirmative.<sup>21</sup> Deploying such a force for Deleuze would result in nothing short of 'Creating free men, that is to say men who do not confuse the aims of of culture with the benefit of the State, morality or religion.'<sup>22</sup> These individuals would find affirmation through 'Fighting resentment and bad conscience which have replaced thought for us.

Conquering the negative and its false glamour. Who has an interest in all this but philosophy?'<sup>23</sup> Herein philosophy meets a dual task: it must 'not only be vigilant of stupidity, it must also be its active opponent, it must seek it out in order to stop its progression, it must unveil it at every opportunity, and moreover its job is to seek out situations in which the demystification can be achieved. This is a dangerous task because even philosophy can fall victim to mystification and reactive thinking.'<sup>24</sup> Moreover thought must acknowledge and affirm the necessity of its own violence if it hopes to consistently overpower the forces of stupidity. The general movement advancing the cause of canonical knowledge and 'information gathering' like nothing better than to see the force of thought incapacitated, mollified and dissimulated, way before it ever gets to impact the minds of the general public.

In *What is Philosophy?* Deleuze and Guattari pose the question, 'What violence must be exerted on thought for us to be capable of thinking; what violence of an infinite movement that, at the same time, takes away from our power to say "I"?'<sup>25</sup> They credit the work of Blanchot and Heidegger as philosophers who have engaged this second characteristic. But alas even their suggestions appear to fall short when we consider yet a potential third

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<sup>21</sup> Ibid., p. 106.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid., p. 106.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., p. 106.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., p. 106.

<sup>25</sup> Deleuze, Gilles, and Guattari, Felix, *What is Philosophy?*, Trans. Graham Burchell and Hugh Tomlinson, (London: Verso, 1994), p. 55.

characteristic of this dilemma: 'an "Incapacity" for thought.'<sup>26</sup> They maintain that 'This incapacity rests at the core of thinking even after it has acquired the capacity determinable as creation. It is then that a set of ambiguous signs arise, and become diagrammatic features of infinite movements and which take on a value by right whereas in other images of thought they were simple derisory facts excluded from selection ... though as such begin to exhibit snarls, squeals and stammers; it talks in tongues and screams which leads it to create, or to try.'<sup>27</sup> What Deleuze and Guattari are describing is the emergence of immanent forces which might potentially enhance our ability to think fascism in now time, and moreover in that time span to think both in and out of transcendental or causal systems of thought. Such a revaluation of these immanent forces away from the margins of philosophy, toward the advanced regions of understanding represents our best hope towards commencing a thinking of fascism. This in light of the glaring failures piously transcendental philosophies have had in coming to terms with it even categorically.

### **Code Word Fascism.**

Much of the intellectual work produced around thinking fascism, in the last twenty years 'seems to have proceeded less in the manner of methodology and more in the manner of a dog that seems to be making uncoordinated leaps.'<sup>28</sup> 'We have no reason to take pride in this image of thought, which involves much suffering without glory and indicates a degree to which thinking has become increasingly difficult...'<sup>29</sup> If thought searches it does so as a junkyard dog prancing through the debris of modern life.

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<sup>26</sup> Ibid., p. 55.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid., p. 55.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid., p. 55.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., p. 55.

Often thinking fascism amounts to academic journalism,<sup>30</sup> a proliferation of seemingly factual reports addressing and redressing the vastly disorientating and seemingly contradictory events that took place in the Nazi era. These events more often than not then get grafted onto a much larger humanist agenda: the need to reassess the project of mankind in its supposed entirety following such a unthinkable trauma. Fascism in these accounts remains an isolated historical event, one that is consistently conflated with the Holocaust on one hand and Nazism on the other. Handled in this way its situation resembles nothing so much as an historical quarantine, its fundamental immorality a scourge threatening otherwise healthy reports on the progress of civilisation in the last century. Historians, who dare to examine this era, do so carrying the recommendation that 'they blot out everything they know about the later course of history.'<sup>31</sup>

There is no better way of characterising the method with which Benjamin's historical materialism has broken. Benjamin in the 'Theses on the Philosophy of History' warns that this concept of the historical progress of mankind cannot be sundered from the concept of its progression through 'a homogenous, empty time.'<sup>32</sup> On the contrary, history is the subject of a structure whose site is not homogenous, empty time, but 'time filled with the presence of the now.'<sup>33</sup> In light of this view, Benjamin calls for a critique of the concept of such progression.<sup>34</sup> One that is founded upon 'a criticism of the concept of progress itself.'<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> See Ronell, *Finitude's Score*, (London: University of Nebraska Press, 1994), p. 255.

<sup>31</sup> Benjamin, Walter, 'Theses on the Philosophy of History,' *Illuminations*, Trans. Harry Zohn, Intro. Hannah Arendt, (New York, Fontana Press, 1969), pp. 247-248.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 254.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 255.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 252.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 252.

The start of that critique might commence with an overthrowing of the assumption that progress necessarily signals healthy, categorical outcomes. Again it is Benjamin who asserts that all the progressive events of civilisation thus far have 'emerged in step with a triumphal procession of the victors, whose course invariably treads over those lying prostrate in defeat.'<sup>36</sup> Consequently, it would cause great unrest, and even suffering for one to discover the spiritual afflictions underlying any era of *apparent* triumph. Those who would wish to equate the progress of civilisation with euphoria would obviously seek to avoid that route of inquiry. This not to say however, that this route up until now has remained unchartered. Benjamin quotes Flaubert, whom whilst writing within the milieu of France's Second Republic was compelled to observe: 'Few will be able to guess how sad one had to be to resuscitate Carthage.'<sup>37</sup> Perhaps though it is not enough merely to acknowledge the loathsome taint of barbarism in the documents handed down to us over the ages as civilisation. It may very well be the case that one must go further in our treatment of civilisation. It is not necessary to blow the lid off civilisation in order to 'blast an era out of the homogenous course of history,'<sup>38</sup> and therein expose its true diabolical origins. Rather it is better to reserve such judgements and instead consider the build up of pressures amongst eras that created the conditions for such an unsavoury alignment of forces. Only then would it be possible to expose and perhaps then to diagnose the forces at work creating such underlying grievances.

Our priority is not one siding with good, nor evil, victor or victim. Rather it is in observing the historical climate that might produce such a relation of forces affecting one another. Temporally, the concern must lie with the now time of German fascism, but never in isolation of an appreciation of this eras

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<sup>36</sup> Ibid., p. 248.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid., p. 248.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid., p. 254.

resonance with others that have contiguity to it. To diagnose German fascism in isolation is to narrow the terms in which we are able to make our historical diagnoses and therein our potential to treat 'fascisms' as they exist within our present age.

'It was Nietzsche who first put forth the idea that artists and philosophers are physiologists, physicians of culture, for whom phenomena are signs and symptoms that reflect a certain state of forces.'<sup>39</sup>Nietzsche therein took it upon himself to diagnosis the disease of his age, nihilism, by isolating its symptoms, (*ressentiment*, bad conscience, the ascetic ideal), by tracing its aetiology to a certain relation of active and relative forces (the genealogical method), and by setting forth a prognosis (nihilism defeated by itself) and a treatment (the revaluation of values).<sup>40</sup> A similar strategy could be applied to diagnose the disease of the era of National Socialism, fascism.

'To even begin to anticipate such a project one must first accept that history presupposes a delay of knowledge such that an event must remain 'unlimited' and continuous' within a greater plane of innumerable happenings.<sup>41</sup> Consequently, the delay of knowledge itself becomes 'unlimited and continuous because it does not stop adding one segment of happening to another, contiguous to another, operating piece by piece, in order to always push the limit of understanding farther back.'<sup>42</sup> When one attempts to chart the development of any segment of history, one quickly finds oneself in a net of spatial complexity, such that history always emerges in some respects as the inverse of catastrophe. 'In catastrophic events there is not a single fixed point at which a catastrophe

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<sup>39</sup> Deleuze, Gilles, *Essays Critical and Clinical*, Trans. Daniel W. Smith and Michael A. Greco, (London, Verso, 1998) p. xvii.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, p. xvii.

<sup>41</sup> Deleuze, Gilles, and Guattari, Felix, *Kafka Toward a Minor Literature*, Trans. Dana Polan, Foreword Reda Bensmaïa, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press 1986), p. 52.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 52.

occurs but rather a zone of potential events that are described by cusps [between events] which are themselves defined by multiple possible interactions, implying, with more or less probability multiple fluid thresholds. What is common to all catastrophic events is an inability to define exactly the moment at which a catastrophe occurs.<sup>43</sup> This condition makes for a perpetual crisis of history, insofar as its potential for catastrophic eruptions is always continuous. This is so 'because it is always on the side of 'the event' that history takes place.'<sup>44</sup>

History then can be understood as a process itself, the tracing of the field of past developments. These developments occur on a plane of organisation, history, one that is literally organising itself. Deleuze and Guattari tell us that this plane of organisation however, really is two planes acting in sequence with one another. The first is the plane of transcendence which 'organises and develops forms' for history to take place and 'assigns and develops subjects'<sup>45</sup> to act as agents toward that development. The second plane is the plane of immanence 'where there are only speeds and slownesses between unformed elements' of Events, and 'affects between nonsubjectified powers...'<sup>46</sup> The two 'continually pass into one another, by unnoticeable degrees and without being aware of it, or one becomes aware of it only afterward. Because one continually reconstitutes one plane on top of another, or one extricates one from the other.'<sup>47</sup> This process relies on a constant reterritorialization of the plane of transcendence by making history solidify into something with dimensional depth, giving it a marked duration, or halting its take off into other directions of cause and meaning. At the same time as this is taking place there is a constant deterritorialization on the

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<sup>43</sup> Lynn, Greg, 'Architectural Curvilinearity The Folded, the Pliant and the Supple' p. 11 in *Architectural Design*, AD Profile 102 'Folding in Architecture' vol. 63. No. 3/4, 1993 Mar./Apr.

<sup>44</sup> Deleuze, Gilles, and Guattari, Felix, *Kafka Toward a Minor Literature*, Trans. Dana Polan, Foreword Reda Bensmaïa, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press 1986), p. 52.

<sup>45</sup> Deleuze, Gilles and Guattari, Felix, *A Thousand Plateaus*, Trans. and Foreword by Brian Massumi, (London: University of Minnesota Press, 1987) p. 267.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 267.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 270.

plane of immanence making history break apart. This deterritorialization operates by causing particles of Events to spin off the continuum, scrambling forms of causal understanding by speeding up or slowing down the way we have come to understand an unfolding of Events, or breaking down groupings of activities and reassembling them other in ways.

Any diagnoses of history must than in turn concern itself not with charting the succession of systems (First, Second, Third, *Millennial Reich*), but rather with tracing the coexistence of these planes and how they, through acting together, have compelled Events to emerge. The features of speed up and delay - attributes of all recountings of history - can then be acknowledged variously as modes of reterritorialization. Features that act as 'a gain rather than a loss, as something perfectly positive and active - something that goes a long way toward the undoing of the systematic machine of historicism, replacing it instead with the composition of an assemblage, always one piece next to another.'<sup>48</sup> How these pieces hang together at a given moment is largely a feature of the speed at which events congeal. Therein what ultimately constitutes a history on the plane of composition 'to be precise, are connections, all the connections that operate in disassembly.'<sup>49</sup> Such disassembly can only be apprehended through an appreciation of the variance of speeds at which historical events display themselves to us at a given juncture in History, always oscillating and tempering themselves in terms of the urgency of duration we assign to the present moment.

Deleuze and Guattari - through this concept of a plane of organisation - intimate that history might be viewed as a type of machine, with the plane of

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<sup>48</sup> Deleuze, Gilles, and Guattari, Felix, *Kafka Toward a Minor Literature*, Trans. Dana Polan, Foreword Reda Bensmaia, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press 1986) p. 52.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 82.

organisation acting as a Body without Organs<sup>50</sup> [that is to say with all the attendant metabolic flux such an anorganic body might generate externally within its milieu.] 'In this BwO model the depth of the technology is not so much the concern, as is the surface [skin] of the machine's assemblage that is given to function through connections outward to networks of other assemblages. The details of the operational plan(e) of such a machine must be improvised, the reading of its guidelines comprised of a combination of transcendent assemblages and immanent interassemblages, [skin as an organ in communication with other organs both internal and external contiguously, creating thusly folds of communication.]'<sup>51</sup> This approach differs significantly from Heidegger's notion of a destined ontological plan; one that necessarily aligns the course of nihilism in tandem with a total mobilisation of being over Being, in a series of disastrous historical movements that will effectively lay down the last destruction chapter at the end of metaphysics. In sharp opposition to Heidegger's transcendental brand of eschatology, Benjamin advocates a distributional approach to history's seemingly destructive affects. Evidence of this can be found in the historical materialism that Benjamin advocates in 'Theses for a Philosophy of History,' which is comprised along a similar network of transcendent assemblages and immanent interassemblages to that of Deleuze and Guattari in terms of its method of historiography.

This superficial feature of historical happening coincides with what Deleuze and Guattari refer to as the plane of consistency: 'Here there are no longer any forms or developments of forms nor are there any subjects or formations of subjects. There is no structure, anymore than there is genesis. There are only relations of movement and rest, speed and slowness between

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<sup>50</sup> For a detailed discussion of the Body without Organs see Deleuze, Gilles and Guattari, Felix, *A Thousand Plateaus*, Trans. and Foreword by Brian Massumi, (London: University of Minnesota Press, 1987) p. 163-166.

<sup>51</sup> Deleuze, Gilles, *Essays Critical and Clinical*, Trans. Daniel W. Smith and Michael A. Greco, (London, Verso, 1998) , p. xxxviii.

formed elements that are relatively unformed, molecules and particles of all kinds...'<sup>52</sup> Nothing develops, but things arrive late or early, and form this or that assemblage depending on their compositions of speed. This plane we are told is necessarily a plane of immanence. It is here perhaps that a new type of historical reading might be taken. One that each time it is played out produces different time characteristics, different understandings of what constitutes an epoch. Deleuze and Guattari offer that history conjectured this way should read out as an act of dissonant time reco(r)ding as opposed to historicism.

This reading would coincide with Benjamin's assertion in 'The Theses on the Philosophy of History' that after the continuum of history has been exploded through revolution a new calendar is introduced. 'The initial day of calendar serves as a historical time lapse camera.'<sup>53</sup> 'It is that same day that keeps returning as a point of remembrance for that event. Therein these calendars do not measure time as clocks do; they are monuments of a historical consciousness of which not the slightest trace has been apparent in Europe in the past hundred years.'<sup>54</sup> That consciousness is revolutionary consciousness. He recalls that 'in the July revolution an incident occurred which showed that this consciousness is still alive and recounts that on the first evening of fighting it turned out that the clocks in the towers were being fired on simultaneously and independently in several places in Paris.'<sup>55</sup> Benjamin reports that an eye-witness, whom he may have owed his insight into the rhyme, wrote as follows:

Who would have believed it! we are told that new Joshuas  
at the foot of every tower, as though irritated with  
time itself, fired at the dials in order to stop the day.<sup>56</sup>

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<sup>52</sup> Ibid., p. 270.

<sup>53</sup> Benjamin, Walter, 'Theses on the Philosophy of History,' *Illuminations*, Intro. Hannah Arendt, Trans. Harry Zohn (New York: Fontana Press, 1969), p.253.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid., p. 253.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid., p. 253.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid., p. 253.

In this formulation revolutionary consciousness is witnessed as a lapse of hegemonic timekeeping, as it is enforced by bourgeois convention. Without timekeeping there is no longer any means of recording development, or charting a continuum of progress which are the very foundations of bourgeois civilisation. Stopping the day inaugurates new possibilities, new directives for what constitutes happening, including that of retroactivity. For instance: The French Revolution is able reterritorialise itself, 'to view itself as Rome incarnate'<sup>57</sup> a symbol of a replete now time without missing a beat, before it is gradually deterritorialised by the ruling classes who slowly subsume such an evocation into a fashionable topicality. The strength of Revolution here is presented as a velocity game, a means of temporarily outstripping body-politics of their apparent logic, of forging a new set of retroactive, immanent logistics in order to carry out a temporal refit operation both on civilisation and understanding what makes history tick. The historian here must be capable of staving off determinate logistics built into the metaphysical project. This determination is the ghost in the ontological machine of modernity, one that persists in clocking our human History unproblematically as the history of progress and eventually the history of technology as a means to that end.

Messianism is one way that Benjamin's historiography counters historical determinism, i.e, the notion of a linear, causal concept of historical progress. As a counter-offensive the historical index we are dealing with under messianism cannot be measured successively in discreet units of days, months, years, or even centuries. Rather it exists on such a scale as to include the whole of human happening. Moreover, Benjamin's messianism is founded on the belief that 'a covenant of responsibility exists amongst all the generations of humanity, both living and dead, as well as generations to come, and it includes all of the actions

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<sup>57</sup> Ibid., p. 253.

of humanity ever performed. The covenant therein surpasses the yoke of any one generation and must be the responsibility of all humanity collectively.<sup>58</sup> It is the responsibility of the historian to make us aware that an ethical summons on the state of man's conduct can be called up at anytime, affecting every agent which has proceeded in its making. Benjamin cautions us that 'the Messiah comes not only as the redeemer, he comes as the subduer of the Antichrist. Only the historian will have the gift of fanning the spark of hope in the past who is firmly convinced that *even the dead* will not be not be safe from the enemy if he wins. And this enemy has not ceased to be victorious.'<sup>59</sup>

This diabolical account of history on the part of Benjamin is tempered with a more laudatory understanding of history as a field of remembrance rather than of acute prediction. Even the soothsayers of old in Benjamin's estimation relied on a heterogeneous and replete summoning of the past, rather than recourse to futural investigations. The magic of the future, perhaps, stripped of its opacity becomes - for the Jews who share this messianic covenant - a means with which to remain open to the possibility of redemption at every moment despite a past of apparent oppression. In other words, a past remembered heterogeneously cannot be interpreted as a past not won for the victors alone. Recalled at other speeds of happening, the possibility of victory for the persecuted is still potentially upon us.

In another portion of the 'Theses' Benjamin asserts that 'the past can be seized only as an image which flashes up at the instant when it can be recognised and is never seen again.'<sup>60</sup> He utilises this assertion to criticise the workings of historicism and quotes Gottfried Keller as saying, that 'the truth will not run

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<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 246-247. Benjamin writes: 'The past carries with in it a temporal index by which it is referred to redemption. There is a secret agreement between past generations and the present one. Our coming was expected on earth. Like every generation that proceeded us, we have been endowed with a weak Messianic power, a power to which the past has a claim. That claim cannot be settled cheaply. Historical materialists are aware of that.'

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 247.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 247.

away from us.<sup>61</sup> To Benjamin's thinking it is outpacing us by leaps and bounds. Travelling virtually at the speed of light, so much so that 'For every image of the past that is not recognised by the present as one of its own concerns threatens to disappear irretrievably.'<sup>62</sup> Ironically how this occurs is often through a failure of communications within the organic body of the historian himself, to paraphrase Benjamin his 'good tidings of the past brought with throbbing heart may be lost in a void the very moment he opens his mouth.'<sup>63</sup> This threat is brought on as an affect of the technological age, but also of as an affect of a victor's mentality toward what registers as the historical itself. So long as the big events in history are manufactured through a recording of warfare, distortion will play through that record such that minor events transmitted from mouth to mouth will be lost to a flood of war books documenting what is essentially military history. Therein the esteem for accuracy in warfare gets a post war transfer off the battlefield and onto the page of the written account. In an essay on Karl Kraus, Benjamin quotes the Viennese satirist's complaint that in wartime the journalist and the warrior merge into a journalist warrior who is in a prime position to rewrite the actual experience of war. Baudelaire in the 1860s was the first to connect journalism and war reportage with the flaneuristic modern eye through his essay 'The Painter in Modern Life.' 'Baudelaire finds war's repertoire of images, battlefields strewn with corpses, ruined structures and munitions, a valuable archive and writes about the terrible poetry of the battlefield. Aestheticisation of the battlefield is peculiarly spliced with technology;<sup>64</sup> its wiring adjusted to reinforce the ideal of an optical connection with the world dating back to Cartesian metaphysics. This scopical regime persistently operates to the virtual exclusion of the other senses in terms of garnering understanding. It will have its day of reckoning on the same one as civilisation, both afflicted with the same blindness when it comes to

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<sup>61</sup> Ibid., p. 247

<sup>62</sup> Ibid., p. 247.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid., p. 247.

<sup>64</sup> Leslie, Esther, *Walter Benjamin Overpowering Conformism*, (London: Pluto Press, 2000) p. 27.

valuing the thingy and the 'object' of nature. This blindness is symptomatic of the illness that befalls the age; nihilism with all its attendant stupidity, its constituents racked with boredom about their own being in the world.

### **Experiencing Our Losses.**

In his essay 'Experience and Poverty' of 1933 Benjamin addresses these jaded folk with the hope that they are still capable of emerging as a human constituency to come. He addresses them in the guise of a Nietzschean philosopher-physician deftly attempting 'to interpret the phenomena of the age as symptoms, whose sense must be sought in the forces'<sup>65</sup> at work that produce them. From there he asks 'What is the mechanism of this "sickness?"'<sup>66</sup> taking as his point of trajectory its overarching symptom: 'Experience has fallen in value.'<sup>67</sup> Upon closer examination it would seem that the fall off in experiencing appears to have coincided with the fall off in thinking. Beyond that we are working 'Amid a generation which from 1914 to 1918 had to experience some of the most monstrous events in the history of the world.'<sup>68</sup> This combination of ailments prompts Benjamin to switch into the role of diagnostician, and make his first preliminary assertion: 'Perhaps this sudden fall of experience 'is less remarkable than it appears.'<sup>69</sup> Indeed, 'There is nothing remarkable about that [series of affects] if one takes into account that experience has never been contradicted more than thoroughly than in this era.'<sup>70</sup>

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<sup>65</sup> Deleuze, Gilles, *Nietzsche and Philosophy*, Trans. Hugh Tomlinson (London: The Athelone Press, 1988), p. 75.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 75.

<sup>67</sup> Benjamin, Walter, *Selected Writings Volume 2: 1927-1934*, Trans. Rodney Livingstone and Others, Eds., Michael W. Jennings, Howard Eiland and Gary Smith (London: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1999), p. 731.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 731.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 732.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 732.

It is here that Benjamin migrates over to another Nietzschean role, that of philosopher-typologist. Herein he begins to model the various types of experience which have fallen sway to the present atmosphere of contradiction at work. From there he attempts to situate them within their displaced localities: 'strategic experience has been contravened by positional warfare; economic experience by the inflation; physical experience by hunger; moral experiences, by the ruling powers.'<sup>71</sup> It is through the logic of this step that Benjamin's critique takes on a logic reminiscent of Kant. Gilles Deleuze criticises Kant's critique on several points. Firstly, in the *Critique of Practical Reason* Kant appears to have confused the positivity of critique with the humble recognition of the rights criticised.<sup>72</sup> Moreover, Deleuze criticises Kant's use of critique 'merely pushes an old concept of critique to the limit, a conception which saw critique as a force which should be brought to all claims to knowledge and truth, but not on knowledge and truth themselves; a force that should be brought to bear on all claims to morality but not on morality itself.'<sup>73</sup> Thus, he asserts that the 'critique turns into the politics of compromise: even before the battle of the spheres of influence have been shared out.'<sup>74</sup>

Furthermore, for Deleuze the *Critique of Judgement* asserts 'that the only object of Kant's critique is justification, it begins by believing in what it criticises.'<sup>75</sup> This approach seems at first to resonant with Benjamin's use of critique in assessing the impact of technology on civilisation. He writes, 'With this tremendous development of technology, a completely new poverty has descended on mankind.'<sup>76</sup> Technology itself is never criticised in its own right

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<sup>71</sup> Ibid., p. 732.

<sup>72</sup> Deleuze, Gilles, *Nietzsche and Philosophy*, Trans. Hugh Tomlinson (London: The Athelone Press, 1988), p. 89.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid., p. 89.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid., p. 89.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid., p. 90.

<sup>76</sup> Benjamin, Walter, *Selected Writings Volume 2: 1927-1934*, Trans. Rodney Livingstone and Others, Eds., Michael W. Jennings, Howard Eiland and Gary Smith (London: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1999), p. 732.

rather it is judged under the assumption of its misuse or 'contradictory applications.'<sup>77</sup>

However, Benjamin would appear to triumph over the limitations of Kant's mode of critique as Deleuze would characterise it, by forming a critique of experience that is based upon immanent as opposed to transcendent principles. At first it seems as though Benjamin's argument is slipping into a similar transcendental trap to Kant. Indeed, his first attempts to describe a 'poverty of experience' appear to indicate that experience in and of itself should always be a rich and subtle category. He speaks of 'an oppressive wealth of ideas'<sup>78</sup> which has come along to burden experience, to swamp people instead with ideas, some of which come as a revival of astrology and the wisdom of yoga, Christian Science and chiromancy, vegetarianism and gnosis, scholasticism and spiritualism.<sup>79</sup> Benjamin offers, however, that 'this is not a genuine revival but a galvanization.'<sup>80</sup> Something in culture has rigidified to allow this consolidation to happen. Rather than looking at it as a sign of the times Benjamin refers back to art as a means with which to index this crisis of experience insofar as it can be acknowledged in a parallel relation to actual experience, that is to say by tapping into this generation's domain of fantasy. This approach takes up art in the Nietzschean sense that the philosopher-artist is meant to generate a plurality of understanding phenomena, and some instances to herald the new forms to come. The artist also is credited in Nietzsche with introducing pluralism into our appreciation of truth. To commence this line of inquiry Benjamin pointedly raises the work of the painter James Sydney Ensor, a Belgian artist whose paintings and prints are known for their troubling fantasy, explosive colours, and subtle social commentary.

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<sup>77</sup> Ibid., p. 732.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid., p. 732.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid., p. 732.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid., p. 732.

...Ensor's magnificent paintings, in which the streets of great cities are filled with ghosts; philistines in carnival disguises roll endlessly down the streets, wearing distorted masks covered in flour and cardboard crowns on their heads...These paintings are...the reflection of the ghastly and chaotic renaissance in which so many people have placed their hopes...our poverty of experience is just a part of a larger poverty that has once again acquired a face -...that of a beggar in the Middle Ages.<sup>81</sup>

Here Benjamin seems to be saying that with the dearth of experience in this generation in its own right, the experience of societal, spiritual poverty is one that must borrow its appearance from the darkest eras of previous generations. Moreover it must embellish them in even more grotesque ways, in order to stir the senses in a period where the extremity of unfeeling seems to have reached new heights. The horror of the modern age is received as a garish imitation, a death mask resembling in itself the ghastly and chaotic aspects of medievalism and transmitting them to the future in a heightened diabolical guise. The characters in this present tragedy keep the company of ghosts and philistines; in this instance the ghosts of the wartime casualties and the philistines are dogmatic political commentators. These social actors are called from the right as well as the left. It is their voices which phantasmatically herald the messianic judgement to come. Meanwhile, a ruination of a different order in the realm of aesthetics is being fantastically summoned by the Expressionist movement. Benjamin however has no interest in forging a counter-aesthetic movement to represent his view of this horror and upset. Instead his comments call for another approach all together apart from aesthetics, in this instance focusing on the bare value of culture itself.

For what is the value of our culture if it is divorced from experience? Where it all leads when that experience is simulated or obtained by underhanded means is something that has become clear to us from the horrific mishmash of styles and ideologies produced in the last century - too clear for us to not think it a matter of honesty to declare our

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<sup>81</sup> Ibid., p. 732.

bankruptcy. Indeed (let's admit it), our poverty of experience is not merely poverty on a personal level, but poverty of human experience in general. Hence, a new kind of barbarism.<sup>182</sup>

The sense behind the mishmash is one of nihilistic, dialectical approach toward difference. All difference synthesised and reduced to sameness, means that one experience is as good as another, one particular worldview equal in value to any other, one style just as pleasing or by turns disturbing as any other which is hungrily embraced. The bankruptcy here figures not from failed acquisition, but rather from the bingeing that has taken place on a seeming wealth of ideas, which has in reality nothing to nourish an ailing body politic. Benjamin's generation has gone hungry from a lack of intellectual sustenance. Now they must construct from the crumbs of culture, rather than endlessly seeking to coat them, or rearrange them pitifully to conceal how meager they have become. If we read further on in his critique, however we happen upon something entirely different offered on Benjamin's part, that is to say, the introduction of 'a new, positive concept of barbarism'<sup>183</sup> which in my view amounts to an affirmation of the category in all its forms and connotations. Benjamin asks, 'What does the poverty of experience do for the barbarian? It forces him to start from scratch...looking neither right nor left...there have always been the inexorable ones who begin by clearing the tabula rasa.'<sup>184</sup>

What does it mean to affirm barbarism in the Nietzschean sense; to go beyond the judgmental categories of good and evil, to conceive of a new era of barbarism that is not entwined with an instinct toward revenge. Rather than see it as a source of social negation, to view it as a category potentially for personal liberation, as a bastion of creative wealth in the face of spiritual poverty.

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<sup>182</sup> Ibid., p. 732.

<sup>183</sup> Ibid., p. 732.

<sup>184</sup> Ibid., p. 732.

What could it mean to attempt to clear the debt on this term's moral depravity and to enter into a new rhetorical economy, beginning with the task of assigning a new barbarism? In order to begin barbarism would have to be separated out from a legacy of revenge, and an association with the vengeful politics of the victors of civilisation. Therein, it must be acknowledged that 'the instinct of revenge is the force which constitutes the essence of what we call psychology, history, metaphysics and morality.'<sup>85</sup> 'The spirit of revenge is the genealogical element of *our* thought, the transcendental principle of *our* way of thinking.'<sup>86</sup> 'We do not know what a man denuded of such a spirit of revenge would look like, a man who we would not accuse of depreciate existence -would he still be a man, would he think like a man?'<sup>87</sup> Benjamin would claim that this man has already walked the earth, that 'there have always been the inexorable ones who begin by clearing the *tabula rasa*.'<sup>88</sup> These persons seem to have few material requirements other than a surface off which to draw their insights. Benjamin: 'They need a drawing table; they were constructors.'<sup>89</sup> These constructors are always figures who seem to draw off the rumble of crumbling worlds. For Benjamin,

'Such a constructor was Descartes, who required nothing more to launch his entire philosophy than the single certitude, "I think, therefore I am"... Einstein, too, was such a constructor; he was not interested in anything in the whole wide world of physics except a minute discrepancy between Newton's equation and the observations of astronomy. And this same insistence on starting from the very beginning also marks artists when they follow the example of the mathematicians and build the world from stereometric forms like the Cubists, or modeled themselves on engineers, like Klee. For just like any good car, whose every part, even the bodywork, obeys the needs above all of the engine, Klee's figures too seem to have been designed

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<sup>85</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 35.

<sup>86</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 35.

<sup>87</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 35.

<sup>88</sup> Benjamin, Walter, *Selected Writings Volume 2: 1927-1934*, Trans. Rodney Livingstone and Others, Eds., Michael W. Jennings, Howard Eiland and Gary Smith (London: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1999), p. 732.

<sup>89</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 732.

on the drawing board, and even in their general expression they obey the laws of the interior. Their interior, rather than inwardness; and this is what makes them barbaric.<sup>90</sup>

Could it just be a coincidence that the men that Benjamin is choosing to credit as the great constructors of modernity are equally esteemed by him as some of the greatest contributors to barbarism in the modern era? On what foundations does the twentieth century in particular rest if not on Cartesian metaphysics, Einsteinian physics, and Kleeian art? Indeed it could be argued that these three major components together are largely responsible for constructing perception in the modern world. Benjamin lauds these thinkers as engineers, who when posed with a problem look to the blueprint of how it was previously assembled and make alternations based on necessity. They are not afraid to confront singularities, minute discrepancies, to follow other's examples, or build from unauthorised materials. Their main concern is the engine which fuels them onward. They have little reverence for what has conventionally gone before them, instead their interest lies with tapping into the anomalies of the recent past, with minor points of divergence or disjunction which might act as the lever that causes whole mechanisms of thought to collapse, in favour of a violent eruption of the new.

The whole begrudging legacy of Cartesian metaphysics only begins when it leaves behind the supersitious dust of medievalism and inaugurates a new epoch of rationalism. Einstein's theory of relativity similarly inaugurated a new era of modern Atomic Physics, leaving behind the rational outcomes of Newtonian experimentation models in favour of thereoms based on absolute relativity. Art as conceived by figures like Klee is most constructive when it borrows from the equipment of science and mathematics, to engender new forms of perception to take hold. These approaches would establish a new value of interiority, that

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<sup>90</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 732-733.

stresses not so much inwardness as the isolation of a problem. Through such isolation a problem can be confronted and eventually put down, it can be dealt with efficiently, brutally in some cases. These are barbaric undertakings insofar as they are unrefined and care nothing of society's eventual reception of them.

This orientation brings us back to the issue of critique. Critique in order to be effective must also eschew social normatives. Deleuze tells us that 'Critique must not be a critique ... by feeling, by experiencing or by any kind of external instance.'<sup>91</sup> Discourses must be judged from the inside without the task of being their own judge. Philosophy, science and art, have to be judged from within the space of their operational domains, without using these the domains themselves as a point of justification for their categorial persistence. The question should not be what is art, but rather which art? In 'The Author as Producer' Benjamin implicitly criticises Marxist critique. Marx believed that work should be assessed vis a vis the social relations of production of its time. Benjamin suggests this approach is limited by 'its answer being too mediated by various factors and therein 'not always unambiguous.'<sup>92</sup> Instead he proposes that one examine 'the position of a work *within* the relations of production.'<sup>93</sup> That is to say to critique it directly in terms of its technique, as opposed to its manifest facticity as an artform. He speaks of the possibility of an alternative materialist analysis based upon the examination of a 'functional interdependency that always, and under all conditions, exists between the correct political tendency and progressive ... technique.'<sup>94</sup> Therein, what must be appreciated, critically speaking, is the 'correct determination of a relation between tendency and quality, from the outset.'<sup>95</sup>

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<sup>91</sup> Deleuze, Gilles, *Nietzsche and Philosophy*, Trans. Hugh Tomlinson (London: The Athelone Press, 1988), p. 91.

<sup>92</sup> Benjamin, Walter, *Selected Writings Volume 2: 1927-1934*, Trans. Rodney Livingstone and Others, Eds., Michael W. Jennings, Howard Eiland and Gary Smith (London: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1999), p. 769.

<sup>93</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 770.

<sup>94</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 770.

<sup>95</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 770.

All of the technical developments that Benjamin speaks of above are a production of transmutation, or internal genesis; with them we finally get away from the conditional game of historicism and onto a new mode of inquiry which reads history against the grain, which takes the exceptional as mark of cultural stirrings, as a signal of coming epochal change. This process goes hand in hand with a process of affirmation, a generative mechanism, providing parts for the engines of the future, from a transmutation of former obsolete workings, forming in this instance what Benjamin is calling 'a new barbarism.' Those who practice this new barbarism must have, according to Benjamin, 'A total absence of illusion about the age and at the same time an unlimited commitment to it - this is its hallmark....A complex artist like the painter Paul Klee and a programmatic one like Loos - both rejected the traditional, solemn, noble image of man festooned with all the sacrificial offerings of the past... <sup>96</sup>

It is not the specific ideology that these men possess which makes them thinkers for the future to Benjamin's mind, but rather their willingness to sacrifice the idea of sacrifice which stood as a hallmark of an epoch where ascetic principles ruled. Rather they aim to take a sober look at the man of the future, to look to upon his struggle, vulnerability, and unfetteredness as creative assets rather than as deficits. Assets that with any luck will attract a merger with other kinds of beings. Benjamin cites the novelist Paul Scheerbart as someone who in the realm of science fiction explored the potential apposability of new human types with the machine world.

Scheerbart's ideas would seem to lend equal sway to technology and linguistics in forging possible alternations on what can be understood as human.

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<sup>96</sup> Ibid., p. 733.

Not only do Scheerbart's interests point the way toward mankind's sensory elevation on a radical scale, he also predicts a rise in machinic consciousness, AI, to a level in which machines will achieve a sentience for themselves totally exterior to human input. He also predicted that technology might be introduced into the very genesis of the human being, something that might still read as flesh and not mechanical robot, and indeed this has already come to pass through IVF and other genetic fertility programmes. Scheerbart's other concern, linguistics stood as a potential arena where humanity's capabilities could be prosthetically altered beyond what had been conceived of in conventional thinking, brought forward to a stance beyond authenticity, beyond organicity. Scheerbart envisaged creatures of the future who could 'talk in a completely new language. And what is crucial about this language is its arbitrary, constructed nature in contrast to organic language...No technical renovation of language, but its mobilisation in the service of struggle or work -or at any rate, of changing reality instead of describing it.'<sup>97</sup>

For Scheerbart this is happening programmatically from the beginning of the Soviet Union. Moreover it is not happening based upon a goal of technical superiority, but tellingly one of transformation of already standing forms, which are brought into mobilisation in totally innovative ways. Humanism is rejected as a category of stagnation that can no longer stand if progress is to be made in the happy merger of humanity with technology. People in this epoch are conceived of as movers and thus summoned in favour of those ideals that promote change. Here the illusion of overall description is jettisoned for a short hand signal to evoke the event in its spirit rather than in its static content. This makes for a better digestion of events in an epoch where events seem to travel with ever increasing rapidity. Those who languish in the search for realness for authenticity do so at their own expense. Those not visionary enough to adapt to the new

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<sup>97</sup> Ibid., p. 733.

simplicity called for in thinking modernism will be left behind in a society opposed to the endless acquisition of thoughts under a rationalist metaphysical programme. Benjamin is acutely aware of their condition.

They have "devoured" everything, both "culture and people," and they have had such a surfeit that it has exhausted them. No one feels more caught out than they by Scheerbart's words: "You are all so tired, just because you have failed to concentrate your thoughts on a simple but ambitious plan." Tiredness is followed by sleep, and then it is not uncommon for a dream to make up for the sadness and discouragement of the day - a dream shows us in its realised form the simple but magnificent existence for which the energy is lacking in reality. The existence of Mickey Mouse is such a dream for contemporary man.<sup>98</sup>

Mickey Mouse as *ubermensch*. A comic strip figure whose representative existence outstrips man's current capabilities, a rodent who will over run man, over run society, in the perfect semblance of dream time, a time which is alarmingly gaining on our own. Who then is a mouse and who is a man? In some sense, Mickey Mouse represents for Benjamin the prototype for a new physis for contemporary man, a figure who is as much animal as he is technobody. A figure who borrows his lifestuff from both his supporters and his persecutors, from the object world that surrounds him and from the raw material nature. Mickey Mouse is resourcefulness incarnate. He simultaneously a product of nothing and everything. He is a product of a late nineteenth century technoromantic society whose modern industrial forms were given over to a facade of mythical imperial grandeur in all its traditional pagentry. Born of out this heady phantasmorgic atmosphere, he emerges in the early twentieth century as a perfect fantasied merger between the epochs of medievalism and modernity, a twentieth century wonder of technology sprung right from the cabinet of curiosity: 'In terms, of 'the wonders of technology' appear quite without any machinery to have been improvised from the body of Mickey Mouse, out of his supporters and

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<sup>98</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 733-734.

persecutors, and out of the most ordinary pieces of furniture, as well as from trees, clouds, and the sea. Nature and technology, primitiveness and comfort, have completely merged.<sup>99</sup>

In an formerly unpublished fragment written on 'Mickey Mouse'<sup>100</sup> from 1931, a far less optimistic picture of Mickey Mouse's place in the social register emerges. Benjamin tells us that these particular insights were gleaned in conversation with Gustav Gluck and Kurt Weill, (Gluck being the character figured in Benjamin's essay 'The Destructive Character' of that same year.) We imagine Benjamin scribbling the following comments down in a heated discussion. 'Property relations in Mickey Mouse Cartoons: here we see for the first time that it is possible to have one's own arm, even one's own body, stolen.'<sup>101</sup> This a comment that eerily prefigures the Nazi co-optation not just of Jewish private property, but of the Jewish body in its entirety. 'The route taken by Mickey Mouse is more like that of a file in an office than it is like that of a marathon runner.'<sup>102</sup> Mickey Mouse goes nowhere, yet remains in transit, under the endless relocation programme of bureaucratic purgatory. He is circulated from department to department, desk to desk never arriving, perpetually held up. This figure - similar to Kafka's man - belies no endurance only resignation. 'In these films mankind makes preparations to survive civilization.'<sup>103</sup> In doing so, Mickey Mouse first raises the stakes of 'live animation' to the impossible heights of indestructability, moreover he manages to do so on a comic scale, thus making the demise of humanity something we can laugh out loud about.

'Mickey Mouse proves that a creature can still survive even when it has

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<sup>99</sup> Ibid., p. 734.

<sup>100</sup> Ibid., p. 545.

<sup>101</sup> Ibid., p. 545.

<sup>102</sup> Ibid., p. 545.

<sup>103</sup> Ibid., p. 545.

thrown off all resemblance to a human being. He disrupts the entire hierarchy of creatures creatures that is supposed to culminate in mankind.<sup>104</sup> He reverses the hierarchy of evolution to the point where bestiality is raised to an art form. Therein he promotes a kind of ethereal position. Mickey Mouse is the first posthuman in the sense that he outstrips human attributes of their humanness and makes something of them that is nonhierarchical, noncharacterisable and ultimately nonidentifiable. What are mice if not interchangeable beings, always already a plurality, vermin? Who can say what the personality of Mickey Mouse is other than one of maligned and outraged citizen of the [Disney] World, a man without a voice, a man who can only futilely from time to time raise an unintelligible squeal at his oppressors.

'These films disavow experience more radically than ever before. In such a world, it is not worthwhile to have experiences.'<sup>105</sup> If experience does amount to something in the Disney world it is on the order of endless repetition without disruption, an eternal return that is diabolical in its perpetual restaging of the same events, it is a world in which one need never grow up, grow old and transmutate in anyway, Mickey Mouse looks the same everytime, everyplace, and yet is a man without qualities, somehow a lost individual with no attributes and thus is a profoundly unlocatable figure no matter how many times his likeness pops up in representation. We have no experience of Mickey Mouse and thus have no reason to fear him. As a figure of 'nature' Mickey Mouse embodies a 'complicity with liberated man,'<sup>106</sup> a man who has overcome his fears, overman.

It is this characteristic that lends the Mickey Mouse film a 'Similarity to

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<sup>104</sup> Ibid., p. 545.

<sup>105</sup> Benjamin, Walter, *Selected Writings Volume 2: 1927-1934*, Trans. Rodney Livingstone and Others, Eds., Michael W. Jennings, Howard Eiland and Gary Smith (London: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1999), p. 545.

<sup>106</sup> Benjamin, Walter, 'The Task of the Translator,' in *Illuminations*, Trans. Harry Zohn, Intro. Hannah Arendt, (New York, Fontana Press, 1969), p. 101.

fairy tales. Not since fairy tales have the most important and vital events been evoked more unsymbolically and more unatmospherially. ... All Mickey Mouse films are founded on the idea of leaving home to find out what fear is.<sup>107</sup> This refers to a fairy tale of the Brother's Grimm - "The Boy Who Left Home in Order to Learn the Meaning of Fear." Certainly this tale could apply to the path taken by Walter Benjamin himself. The Brother's Grimm were living of course in an era where one could still identify fear through experience, and not just through its imitation and simulated responses. As for the lack of symbolism and atmosphere in the Mickey Mouse film, Benjamin would conclude simply that no one can be bothered to create such things when circumstances and consequences seem so far removed from the personal. Even in the event of war, the public cannot be summoned away from dreamlike dependence on such images and prefer to dally a bit longer in Disney's World as opposed to this one.

'So the explanation for the huge popularity of these films is not mechanization, their form; nor is it a misunderstanding. It is simply the fact that the public recognises its own life in them.'<sup>108</sup> Or rather life as it would wish to be. Or alternatively, its disavowal of life on a more radical scale than previously thought possible. In ending his essay 'Poverty and Experience' Benjamin argument takes on a stark, cautionary tone:

We have become impoverished. We have given up one portion of the human heritage after another, and have often left it in the pawnbroker's for a hundredth of its true value, in exchange for the small change of "the contemporary." The economic crisis is at the door, and behind it is the shadow of the approaching war. Holding onto things has become the monopoly of a few powerful people, who, God knows, are no more human than the many; for the most part, they are more barbaric, but not in a good way.<sup>109</sup>

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<sup>107</sup> Benjamin, Walter, *Selected Writings Volume 2: 1927-1934*, Trans. Rodney Livingstone and Others, Eds., Michael W. Jennings, Howard Eiland and Gary Smith (London: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1999), p. 545.

<sup>108</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 545.

<sup>109</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 735.

Here Benjamin accuses humanity of practicing a kind of 'bad' economics with its value systems; of devaluing humanity's heritage whilst at the same time maniacally inflating the value of the contemporary object world in all its hellish novelty. Such economic folly is the privilege of the few, and yet comes to us at the cost of many. It is the majority who moreover will have to cope with the spiritual poverty of the society which ensues from such ill-conceived dealings: 'Everyone else has to adapt-beginning anew and with few resources. They rely on the men who have adopted the cause of the absolutely new and have founded it on insight and renunciation. In its buildings, pictures, and stories, mankind is preparing to outlive culture, if need be.'<sup>110</sup>

Benjamin proposes that another type of newness altogether is required for the majority of people, a newness which coincides with a kind of absolution of culture such that what comes after is characterised by being both irreparable and resilient. A tactical logic would emerge which says: 'When we have used up all our lament, we can start to draw on our mirth.'<sup>111</sup> A few years prior to this essay Benjamin had cause to write of Karl Kraus, 'the great type of satirist never had firmer ground under his feet than amid a generation about to board tanks and put on gas masks, a mankind that has run out of tears but not laughter. In him civilization prepares to survive, if it must...'<sup>112</sup> Benjamin continues, 'And the main thing is that it does so with a laugh. This laughter may occasionally sound barbaric...Let us hope that from time to time the individual will give a little humanity to the masses, who will one day repay him with compound interest.'<sup>113</sup>

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<sup>110</sup> Ibid., p. 735.

<sup>111</sup> Benjamin, Walter, 'Karl Kraus,' *One Way Street and Other Writings*, Trans. Edmund Jephcott and Kingsley Shorter, Intro. Susan Sontag, (London: Verso, 1997), p. 278.

<sup>112</sup> Ibid., p. 278.

<sup>113</sup> Benjamin, Walter, *Selected Writings Volume 2: 1927-1934*, Trans. Rodney Livingstone and Others, Eds., Michael W. Jennings, Howard Eiland and Gary Smith (London: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1999), p. 735.

Benjamin would assert that such laughter is essential insofar as it reminds mankind of the absurdity of its tragic predicament and thus its humanity in all its foibles. Such a realisation should engender generosity amongst men as they attempt to build out of the rubble of their own self-generated destruction as a race. Thus the new barbarism requires mankind to be adaptable, to adopt the new by throwing off the idea of sacrifice along with the idea of suffering, and to embrace disposability as its model behaviour. No longer can mankind afford the luxury of monuments, monuments are the money bags of cultural excesses holding civilisation down, making it impossible to get economically, sentimentally lean enough to make the crossover from the finitude of culture into some other form of subsistence. Mankind must take its cue from Mickey Mouse, adopt his *infra-sense*, of putting himself back together after his body has so rudely been pulled apart, or abducted. Mankind needs to adopt Mickey Mouse's sensibility in order to laugh in the face of a dissipating world as it is tearing at the very fabric by which the foibles of humanity are clothed.

Even if his attitude seems pessimistic by 1931 Benjamin is still holding out for affirmation of a sort, and it is on this point that it is helpful to return to one of the earlier concerns of this section: critique. Benjamin, 'For the true critic, the actual *judgment* is the ultimate step -something that comes as a struggle after everything else, never the basis of activities. In the ideal case, he forgets to pass judgment.'<sup>114</sup> Perhaps there is no cause to judge Mickey Mouse as a symbol of the direction in which culture appears to be going in, perhaps there is every cause to observe him, to locate him within larger social schema and therein willfully to forget to pass judgment in favour of an immanent critique. A critique that shows up not coincidentally at a place when symbolism and atmosphere meet:' The

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<sup>114</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 547

"Lunaparks" as a prefiguration of the santoria<sup>115</sup> in the section entitled 'To the Planetarium' in *One Way Street* which will aid an ailing humanity back onto the path of becoming the living - as opposed to the undead creatures inhabiting that other world ironically part of an art called animation. Animation for Benjamin is a still a cosmic dream and not merely a celluloid one.

### **Cosmically Bound.**

In *One-Way Street* in a section entitled 'To the Planetarium' Benjamin speaks of man's former absorption with the cosmos. This absorption ceased with the adoption of an optical orientation toward the heavens at the dawn of the modern age with the advent of astronomy as a modern science. This new approach signalled a rupture between man and nature. It was only through convening with the cosmos that man was able to gain perspective on the universe to the extent that he was able to gain a certain knowledge of what was nearest and remotest to him and never one without the other. This resulted in an understanding that man occupies multiple realms of distancing from the things that populate his universe. Given this variability no man standing individually could hope to reify an estimation of such distances. With that in mind any reading of the heavens by mankind was pursued as a communal effort. This activity was seen as an invaluable contribution to mankind collectively.

By contrast, modern man gravely chooses to confine the significance of the universe to mere poetics or stargazing. This attitude results in an underestimation of the cosmos time and again throughout the modern era, threatening both nations and generations with calamitous outcomes when mankind attempts to comingle with the cosmos under the assumption of its

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<sup>115</sup> Benjamin Walter, 'To the Planetarium' in *One Way Street and Other Writings*, Intro. Susan Sontag, Trans. Edmund Jephcott and Kingsley Shorter, (Verso: London, 1997), p. 104.

supremacy over the heavens. Benjamin gives the example of how World War I signalled an attempt at new and unprecedented cominglings with the cosmic powers that ended in nothing short of disaster:

Human multitudes, gases, electrical forces were hurled into the open country, high frequency currents coursed through the landscape, new constellations rose in the sky, aerial space and ocean depths thundered with propellers and everywhere sacrificial shafts were dug deep into Mother Earth. This immense wooing of the cosmos was enacted for the first time on a planetary scale, that is, in the spirit of technology. But because the lust for profit of the ruling class, sought satisfaction through it, technology betrayed man and turned the bridal bed into a blood bath.<sup>116</sup>

Here Benjamin is referring to WWI and the heretofore unimagined of joinings the earth and technological warfare. Though highly aestheticised in their descriptions, these activities were at base highly destructive. Rather than producing glorious offspring, these ill-conceived capitalistically inspired mergers more often than not resulted in the ruin of the nature world and the false edification of the economic one.

In Benjamin's configuration of man's conflict with nature, technology acts as the arbiter of the relationship, keeping mastery over the balance of power between the two. Should man attempt to gain a hold over nature, technology would intervene so that the effect is that technology unleashes itself on the cosmos to trigger off a retaliation against mankind below on earth. Benjamin associates mankind's hubristic attitude toward nature with a kind of adolescent mentality which has neglected to acknowledge the power of the cosmos. He comments that man as a species completed their development thousands of years ago; but mankind as a species is just beginning his,<sup>117</sup> and goes onto suggest that technology is placing its input into organising that development. Such is the case

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<sup>116</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 103-104.

<sup>117</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 104.

that a physis or new collective, physical humanity, is being developed through a process described in corporeal imagery, as a dismemberment and reconstitution.<sup>118</sup> This reorganisation of mankind will in turn reorganise its relation to the cosmos away from the present forms of organisation: nations and families. This transformation will take place at different speeds from those of imperialism and world domination, as it is suggested by Benjamin's comment that 'One need only recall the experience of velocities by virtue of which mankind is now preparing to embark on incalculable journeys into the interior of time to encounter there the rhythms from which the sick draw strength...'<sup>119</sup> In the meantime, mankind must work off of concurrent timetables as a collective social body. Beyond this Benjamin offers an insight into the current state of play: 'In the nights of annihilation of the last war the frame of mankind was shaken by a feeling that resembled the bliss of an epileptic.'<sup>120</sup> The phrase suggests that a sensory reorganisation of mankind is also required to accommodate the power of nature in harmonious coexistence. Benjamin ends with this guidance for mankind: 'Living substance conquers the frenzy of destruction only in the ecstasy of procreation.'<sup>121</sup> Therein for the life stuff of mankind to persist beyond self destruction, it would have to make its way toward a productive procreation, one whose result is nothing short of a new mode of embodiment on earth. The issue for Benjamin is how to forge a material coexistence with technology, not as end onto itself, but rather as a means with which to forge harmonious relations with nature and by extension the cosmos.

This concern extends right the way through to Benjamin's historiographical method, which rests on the principle of making experience

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<sup>118</sup> Leslie, Esther, *Walter Benjamin Overpowering Conformism*, (London: Pluto Press, 2000), p. 22.

<sup>119</sup> Benjamin, Walter, *Illuminations*, Intro. Hannah Arendt, Trans. Harry Zohn (New York: Fontana Press, 1992), p. 104.

<sup>120</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 104.

<sup>121</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 104.

historical. That is to say, synchronising experience with technology. A significant part of that effort however, also has to do with mapping a number of misalignments that have taken place through the ages. By making us aware of these past imbalances in the relationships between technology and nature, in other words the force and relations which mete out production, in all sections of social functioning, Benjamin is encouraging us to correct those misalignments. Benjamin warns, that if these misalignments remain unchecked we are left to inhabit a world where everyone is ruled by commodities and dead labour and the exertion of machine power over people. The result being a further alienation on the level of human relations. Benjamin has a somewhat pessimistic view of what choices mankind, at least initially will make, and therein, 'The body annihilated, petrified, subject to attack, deformed by weaponry, the body as alien, the skin of the self hardening, inorganic matter, a thing: such images litter Benjamin's work.'<sup>122</sup> His response to this nightmare vision is to take up counter arms against this activity by becoming the Destructive Character, a figure on the horizon who 'knows only one watchword: make room; only one activity: clearing away.'<sup>123</sup> Before this clearing can take place however the rubble of mankind must be heaped again and again on itself. In Benjamin's view humanity has gone AWOL in the twentieth century, subsisting as the pre-organised techno-bodies of late capitalism, most akin to convalescents who await their salvation in a postcultural world.

Heidegger, like Benjamin, expresses grave concern for the future of these AWOL bodies, bodies whom for Heidegger have become increasingly 'uprooted from the earth,'<sup>124</sup> torn from it by the very hand of technology itself. Humanity

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<sup>122</sup> Leslie, Esther, *Walter Benjamin Overpowering Conformism*, (London: Pluto Press, 2000) p. 9.

<sup>123</sup> Benjamin Walter, 'The Destructive Character' in *One Way Street and Other Writings*, Intro. Susan Sontag, Trans. Edmund Jephcott and Kingsley Shorter, (Verso: London, 1997), p. 157.

<sup>124</sup> Heidegger, Martin, 'Only a God Can Save Us' Richard Wolin, ed. *The Heidegger Controversy*, (Cambridge, Mass.: The MIT Press, 1993), p. 105.

does not seem to be alarmed by this state of affairs, because of the apparent rewards such a distancing from the earth has given it, as evidenced by the array of creature comforts available to those living in the most technologically advanced parts of the world. For Heidegger this is exactly the root of the problem:

‘Everything is functioning. This is exactly what is so uncanny, that everything is functioning and that the functioning drives us to even more functioning...’<sup>125</sup>

According to Heidegger, this ceaselessly functioning is actually dissumilating a much largely malfunctioning in the spiritual bond held between mankind and the earth. This situation has dangerous consequences for the future of mankind. This danger is based very much on the fact that ‘we still have no way to respond to the essence of technology.’<sup>126</sup> Heidegger offers that: ‘I was at any rate frightened when I saw pictures coming from the moon to earth. We don’t need any atom bomb. The uprooting of man has already taken place. The only thing we have left is purely technological relationships. This is no longer the earth on which man lives.’<sup>127</sup> From this statement it would appear that for Heidegger the resulting decline of mankind is a foregone conclusion. However, he raises the point that the situation has gone beyond the realm of judgement and as long as it is the case that ‘Pessimism and optimism are attitudes which we are trying to consider... they do not go far enough.’<sup>128</sup> These attitudes express too instrumental a view of technology. Rather Heidegger is at pains to express that, ‘Above all, modern technology is not a tool and has nothing to do with tools.’<sup>129</sup> Rather it is a frame around which our world is circumscribed, moreover we have found no way as of yet to overcome that framework, to transcend it to reveal a greater understanding on the part of mankind of his connection to the earth. Until this happens we remain in a state of befallenness in the face of global technological domination.

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<sup>125</sup> Ibid., p. 105.

<sup>126</sup> Ibid., p. 105.

<sup>127</sup> Ibid., pp. 105-106.

<sup>128</sup> Ibid., p. 106.

<sup>129</sup> Ibid., p. 105.

Heidegger, does have some hope that this can be achieved at some point in history, provided that thinking is eventually honed adequately enough to this task. He says, 'I do not see the situation of man in the world of global technology as a fate which cannot be escaped or unraveled. On the contrary, I see the task of thought to consist in helping man in general, within the limits allotted to thought, to achieve an adequate relationship to the essence of technology. National Socialism to be sure moved in that direction. But those people were far too limited in their thinking to acquire an explicit relationship to what is happening today...'<sup>130</sup> That he assigns National Socialism credit for having moved in that direction, bespeaks of his belief that metaphysics and its consequential inauguration of an era of nihilism in the nineteenth century, signalled an end to philosophy's ability to help mankind. Rather, a purely a thinking of technology was the only way forward out of mankind's predicament. But how to go about forging this this line of thought? Heidegger contends that the first step may be 'the preparation of a readiness...According to my view, this is connected with the fact that what I name in the word Being, a word which is of longstanding, traditional, multifaceted, and worn out, needs man for its revelation, preservation and formation.'<sup>131</sup> Therein mankind's first step in formulating a response to technology would be to attempt to recover his lost relationship to Being.

The first preparatory task toward a readiness for that step, may be for humanity to acknowledge that somewhere along the line of human transmutation their AWOL bodies turned away from Being. 'This does not mean that Being and the being now part ways; instead, they remain without relation.'<sup>132</sup> According to Giorgio Agamben, 'This is the direction in which the late Heidegger's thought

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<sup>130</sup> Ibid., p. 111.

<sup>131</sup> Ibid., p. 107.

<sup>132</sup> Agamben, Giorgio, *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*, Trans. by Daniel Heller-Roazen, (Stanford, Calif : Stanford University Press, 1998) p. 60.

seems to move, if still insufficiently, with the idea of a final event or appropriation (*Ereignis*) [the end of metaphysics] in which what is appropriated is Being itself, that is, the principle that had until then determined beings in different epochs and historical figures. This means that with the *Ereignis*, the "history of Being comes to an end", and the relation between Being and being consequently finds its "absolution."<sup>133</sup> This is why Heidegger can write that with *Ereignis* he is trying to think "Being without regard to the being," which amounts to nothing less than attempting to think ontological difference no longer as a relation, and Being and being beyond every form of a connection.<sup>134</sup> This sort of thinking on Heidegger's part 'implies nothing less than an attempt to think the politico-social factum no longer in the form of a relation. This would signal the coming of a community without interest.'<sup>135</sup> Furthermore this community would be inoperative insofar as its worth was not determined by the sum of its relations, or collective activity, but rather by the unproductive characteristic of the being together of being. A status of community where Being doesn't have the form of a relation. Categories of identity, property, attribute, would no longer be the criteria for a man belonging to a community of men. By mere virtue of its being it would belong. Its only remaining issue, or interest would lie with Being itself. Such a proposal for an ontology of non-relation on Heidegger's part however is far from innocuous. It allows factual life to become the paramount political object, beyond all other forms of belonging, or relation. There are material consequences to this privileging of factual life to be found both in the racial biology of Nazi Germany, but also in the ways in which we organise our concept of what registers as the desirable characteristics of posthuman life. It is specifically when relations breakdown without alternative cultural provisions being built up that Benjamin's physis programme falters, along with the bodies meant to be orchestrating it. What ensues is not exactly a silence on the whole question

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<sup>133</sup> Ibid., p. 61.

<sup>134</sup> Ibid., p. 61.

<sup>135</sup> Ibid., p. 61.

concerning humanity, but rather an infernal humming, gurling, cracking of whole systems of what we understand to constitute the threshold between life and death, inside and outside, value and use, bodily and state functions. Is it ever going to be possible given present conditions, to relate to that breakdown or do we simply go into a zone of operative inoperativity as Heidegger is suggesting that we already have? To answer that question of non-relational relation we have to chart the movements of today's postcultural survivors. To envisage the bodies as they stand.

### **AWOL BODIES.**

When war cries are allowed to proliferate unchecked in the homes of civilians who dream of being dead warriors, or fallen victims to playstations, we are back on the territory of Expressionism and are dangerously close to a mass consumer slumber, or at least in the neighbourhood of mass technological addiction. Every body post-fascism is potentially a dead body, or even a deadened body stimulated only through attachment to technological prostheses, which as Benjamin predicted are invisible and abundant. We may refer to those same prostheses as tuning forks in a subliminal buzz of intense boredom around the category of life, in an era that heralds itself as posthuman. Nonetheless, as long as there is a category of the undead to be located in the unidentifiable and thereby uninternable holocaust victim, then the rest of us who are technically survivors are already dead to anything that might resemble the future. 'It is here that the [Deleuzian] body without organs becomes a model of Death co-extensive with Life. A moment when the functioning of the organs stops dead, as the intensities approach a limit where intensity equals zero... it is at this moment that a gradient is crossed, a threshold surpassed or retreated from, a migration is brought

about.<sup>136</sup> The body *feels* itself becoming something else.

For Martin Heidegger that threshold was technology and in retreat from its disagreeable affects he migrated into another zone of Being, the zone of National Socialism. What he resisted in technology was its potential capacity to be an issue for itself, that technology when joined to the body's modes of perception in particularly intimate ways would eventually become not only self-reflexive, but empathic, and thus instrumental in influencing the activities of factual life. In response Heidegger wanted to retaliate, to surmount technology and it was here that he came initially into league with National Socialism. He sought to make 'an arrangement with a supertechnical power like National Socialism,'<sup>137</sup> hoping that the Nazi's heavy handed programmatic would put technology back in its place. Ronell offers that, 'Later he would locate himself at a remove from the National Socialism by linking the movement to technology.'<sup>138</sup> In light of that fact, Heidegger could only view the brutal demise of millions of bodies under the Nazi regime as a failure to properly reckon itself with technology, its falling victim to its sway merely constituting the symptoms of the last stage of metaphysics, an era destined to culminate in modern, technological nihilism. In this instance of going beyond metaphysics, that is to say to its end, it is man who is being declared dead in the face of a mass technological power that has finally proven to be indifferent to him.

Heidegger's infamous 'silence' on the issue of the Holocaust might be telling us something after all insofar as it spells out a lack of hope for a change of course in this final stage of systemical metaphysical breakdown. A position which is indeed spelt out in detail in his lecture 'Overcoming Metaphysics' written

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<sup>136</sup> Deleuze, Gilles, *Essays Critical and Clinical*, Trans. Daniel W. Smith and Michael A. Greco, (London, Verso, 1998), p. xxxviii.

<sup>137</sup> Ronell, Avital, *The Telephone Book* (London: University of Nebraska Press, 1989), p. 16

<sup>138</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 16.

over the decade spanning 1936-1946. A decade of thinking which coincides with amongst other events, his lecture series on Nietzsche, otherwise understood by Heidegger and his followers as his personal war against nihilism.

### **Overcoming Nihilism.**

In the essay 'Overcoming Metaphysics' Heidegger speaks of 'a decline that has already taken place.'<sup>139</sup> 'This decline occurs through the collapse of the world characterised by metaphysics and at the same through the desolation of the earth stemming from metaphysics.'<sup>140</sup> Heidegger speaks of the 'unhistorical element' of this 'completed metaphysics' or 'metaphysics at its end,' who will take on the 'strigent' appearance of what we are calling today technology.'<sup>141</sup> This name for Heidegger 'includes all areas of beings which equip the whole of beings: objectified nature, the business of culture, manufactured politics, and of ideals overlying everything.' This technology for Heidegger, 'does not signify the separate areas of production and equipment of machines.'<sup>142</sup> The name 'technology' is understood here in such a way that this meaning coincides with the term completed metaphysics. The name technology is understood here in such a way as to make it possible 'for the planetary factor of the completion of metaphysics and its dominance to be thought without reference to historiographically demonstratable changes in nations and continents.'<sup>143</sup> Instead it is suggested that these changes might have their reference point stored within mankind itself.

The battle with nihilism is Heidegger's invisible war to come. His chief

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<sup>139</sup> Heidegger, Martin, 'Overcoming Metaphysics,' in Wolin, Richard, ed. *The Heidegger Controversy*, (London: The MIT Press, 1993), p. 69.

<sup>140</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 69.

<sup>141</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 74.

<sup>142</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 74.

<sup>143</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 75.

target for annihilation in this battle is 'the Being of nihilism'<sup>144</sup> whose history is essentially comprised 'of abandonment of Being in that it there occurs the self-release of Being into machination. This release takes man into unconditional service. It is by no means a decline and something 'negative' in any sense. Indeed, for Heidegger this type of humanity has to be brought into Being in order to achieve 'the unconditional completion of nihilism.'<sup>145</sup> This Being is not just any kind of humanity, it comes equipped with cries about ideas and values and has moves which include 'the indiscriminate back and forth proclamation of deeds and indispensibility of "spirit."<sup>146</sup>

For Heidegger, 'The 'world wars' and their character of totality are already a consequence of the abandonment of Being. They press toward a guarantee of the stability of a constant form of using things up. Man, who no longer conceals his character of being as the most important raw material, is also drawn into the process. 'Man is the most important raw material because he remains the subject of all consumption...'<sup>147</sup> For Heidegger such phenomenon simply corresponds to a global trend whereby 'everywhere there are enough beings and it is increasingly everywhere and always not enough for the will to will escalating itself, technology has to jump in, create a substitute and consume raw materials.'<sup>148</sup> The raw material being mankind. Therein the programmatic of genocide corresponds then with a certain technocratic mandate to use up mankind, as part of an escalating drive to power, following an increasingly diabolical line of consumerism. This drive toward an endless consumerism, the ban between war and peace must be lifted, so that this production line of bodies who have turned away from Being's call to presence, never have cause to be off line in accepting

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<sup>144</sup> Ibid., p. 83.

<sup>145</sup> Ibid., p. 83.

<sup>146</sup> Ibid, p. 83.

<sup>147</sup> Ibid., p. 83.

<sup>148</sup> Ibid., p. 83.

the call to annihilation. Heidegger:

The world wars are an antecedent form of the removal of the difference between "war" and "peace,"...the question of when there will be peace cannot be answered... because the question already asks about something which no longer exists, since war is no longer anything which can terminate in peace. War has become a distortion of the consumption of beings which continued in peace... The long war in its length slowly eventuated ... in a condition in which warlike characteristics are longer experienced as such at all and peaceful characteristics have become meaningless and without content.<sup>149</sup>

There is much controversy about Heidegger's decision never to revoke his Nazi Party membership, but given Heidegger's comments above it seems obvious that for him the war never ended. Indeed, the World Wars inaugurated nothing short of an epoch of total war. A war about the manufacture of manufacture, the will to will, the disposal of mankind by his own hand, through a relentless nihilism.

In 1949 he addresses genocide by way of focusing on it as one in a series of effects brought on by the age of consumption: 'Agriculture is now a motorized food industry-in essence the same as the manufacture of corpses in the gas chambers and extermination camps, the same as the blockading and starving of nations, the same as the manufacture of hydrogen bombs.'<sup>150</sup> Heidegger expresses no particular sympathy for the victims of the Holocaust, instead he pointedly registers them as part of a series of routinised causalities that mount up in an epoch of total war held under the sway of technology. The idea that there is no phenomenological difference between the manufacture of corpses and the manufacture of hydrogen bombs suggested that the Jews were technically *processed* in the concentration camps. Indeed, each of the categories mentioned are parlayed into use value during a wartime without end. In such an era

<sup>149</sup> Ibid., p. 84.

<sup>150</sup> Heidegger quoted in Ferry, Luc and Renault, Alain, *Heidegger and Modernity*, (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1988) p. 71.

everything is available for processing. The fact that the motorised food industry is mentioned amongst these other categories of wartime manufacturing, suggests that there is a thin line between that method of processing consumption and other forms of manufacture whose ultimate goal is to annihilate lives of certain beings that have been put under target and deemed dispensible.

In 'Overcoming Metaphysics' a more complicated picture of his position toward genocide emerges when Heidegger comments: 'Man is the most important raw material, one can reckon with the fact that someday factories will be built for the artificial breeding of human material based on present day chemical research. The research of the chemist Kuhn, who was awarded the Goethe prize of the city of Frankfurt, already opens up the possibility of directing the breeding of male and female organisms according to plan and need.'<sup>151</sup> This sort of directive accomplishes a furthering of the eugenic project, whilst a certain segment formerly promoted the genocide of a portion of humanity, another subsequent segment concerns itself with the breeding of a superiorly designed humanity to fit the needs of consumption. One should not assume that this is merely about building a master race of men and women as it was conceived of under Nazi auspices, but rather portends an even larger scale effort to breed mankind into classes of standing-reserve for future use in the ongoing war humanity is waging on itself in league with technological nihilism.

Meanwhile for Heidegger continued to steadily predict that

The consumption of materials including the raw material man, for... the production of everything is determined...by the complete emptiness in which beings... are suspended. This emptiness has to be filled up. But since the emptiness can never be filled up...especially when this emptiness can never be experienced as such, the only way to escape is to incessantly arrange beings in the constant possibility of being ordered as a form of guaranteeing aimless activity. Viewed in this way technology is the

<sup>151</sup> Heidegger, Martin, 'Overcoming Metaphysics in Wolin, Richard, ed. 'The Heidegger Controversy, (London: The MIT Press, 1993), p. 86.

organisation of a lack, since it is related to the emptiness of Being contrary to its knowing.<sup>152</sup>

This kind of thinking creates a vacuum in its wake for the fate of a humanity, whose fate under the sway of technology always seems to end in a paucity of existence, with all the attendant idleness of lambs awaiting the slaughter. Beyond that it is the case that man is simply unaware of the dangers that surround him in this vacuum, and that in his ignorance he is incapable of taking responsibility for the decline of society. In 'Overcoming Metaphysics,' Heidegger classifies 'the devastating events of world history in this century as failure on the part of Western metaphysics, and therein in no way the responsibility of any people, and most definitely not to burden of the German people alone.'<sup>153</sup> Heidegger would indeed argue that if anything should be mourned it is the way technology was lead astray by the deviations inherent within the path of metaphysics in this century. One of the deviations, however in this line of argument was that Heidegger himself was a practicing metaphysician. And as Ronell points out 'it is precisely owing to his theory of technology that he was engaged in the Nazi Party Line.'<sup>154</sup> This line of course proved to be one of the most destructive lines of flight ever conceived. Mournfully, it is precisely when Heidegger gets on the metaphysical frontline of the Party that the real terror ensues. Dating as far back as 1927 Heidegger willfully underread technology, and therein Ronell manages to lift its indictment as well as his own as something, or someone who 'can be identified with the self-constitution of National Socialism.'<sup>155</sup> His famous defense of course is that he was accused by the party of practicing a 'private national socialism' which for me amounts in real terms to

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<sup>152</sup> Ibid., pp. 86-87.

<sup>153</sup> Letter from Martin Heidegger to Herbert Marcuse, *Ibid.*, p. 163.

<sup>154</sup> Ronell, Avital. *The Telephone Book*, (London: University of Nebraska Press, 1989), p.

<sup>155</sup> Indeed, Jacques Derrida will site Heidegger's inability to overcome metaphysics itself that lead him into a complicity with National Socialism and it is this event that marks the failure of Heideggerian deconstruction, for details of the argument see Derrida's volume *Of Spirit*, Trans. Geoffrey Bennington and Rachel Bowlby, (London: University of Chicago Press, 1987), p. 229.

practicing a 'private form of ontological terror.'<sup>156</sup> Heidegger's private war of course wages another war on another front in the pages of *Being and Time*, in the name of something other than nihilism, though not unrelated to it, the devaluation of language, what Heidegger refers to specifically as rumour 'Idle Talk.'<sup>157</sup>

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<sup>156</sup> Ronell, Avital. *The Telephone Book*, (London: University of Nebraska Press, 1989), p.

<sup>157</sup> Ronell, Avital. *Finitude's Score*, (London: University of Nebraska Press, 1994), pp. 217-218.

## Idle Talk.

According to Avital Ronell 'War traces back etymologically to 'confusion.'" Heidegger writes in *Being and Time* of *Nachrede* the temporal afterlife or afterwards that marks rumour in the German language.<sup>2</sup> The route of rumour or passing the word along creates a condition in which things are so because one says so. Rumour is constituted in a process by which its initial lack of grounds to stand becomes aggravated to complete groundlessness. Furthermore, 'rumour is the possibility of understanding everything without making the previous thing one's own.'<sup>3</sup> Ronell argues further that:

With Heidegger...rumour...cannot be assimilated. But it does not stand in a relationship of strict exteriority to those systems of utterance from which it has been bounced. Having its place neither inside or outside such a language, whose measure of authenticity would be privileged proximity to Being, rumour, however, places in question the Heideggerian difference between authentic and inauthentic *Sprache*, a language whose greatest fear would be to fall, into the abyss of *Gerede*. Rumour, by its very nature, Heidegger argues is a closing off, since to go back to the ground of what is talked about is something it leaves *undone*.<sup>4</sup>

Benjamin's 'Theories of German Fascism' subtitled 'On the Collection of Essays *War and Warriors* by Ernst Jünger' attempts to trespass on that closed off area. As an area of contention about the authenticity of the first world war; rumour had in recent years ceased to strictly fall under state jurisdiction, and received transfer instead into the auspices of literature and literary criticism. Benjamin lays the blame for its devaluation in the hands of these new minders and asserts somewhat contemptuously that 'It was the failure of the powers of the state in the face of war that instigated the first independent thinking of the authors gathered here.'<sup>5</sup> Not coincidentally these authors also happen in most cases to be instigators of the

<sup>1</sup> Ronell, Avital, *Finitude's Score*, (London: University of Nebraska Press, 1994), p. 216.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 217.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 217.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 218.

<sup>5</sup> Benjamin, Walter, 'Theories of German Fascism,' *Selected Writings Volume 2 1927-1934*, Trans. Rodney Livingstone and Others, Eds. Michael W. Jennings, Howard Eliand, and Gary Smith, (London: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1999), p. 320.

*Nachkrieg*,<sup>6</sup> the German unofficial postwar war that took place in the interim period between the first world war and the second. To Heidegger's mind this independent postwar thinking which organised itself under the banner of *Nachkrieg* was nothing short of a revolution in thinking. Here it had much in common with rumour at least insofar as it was meant to share with a characteristic daring. Heidegger asserted that 'rumour is essentially related to the most daring thinking.'<sup>7</sup> 'Or rather, a daring writing enjoys a relationship of enslavement to something like rumour, utterance's murky rumbling... More clearly, then, writing that is open is fundamentally open to rumour.'<sup>8</sup> 'Whoever dares to say such things, and what is more, and writing which is open to the public, knows only too well how prematurely and easily these words, which only like to induce some reflection are only shut off as murky rumblings, rumours or are rejected as arbitrary announcements.'<sup>9</sup> While still under the shadow of negativity, rumour nonetheless acts as an enabler, the ground and horizon for the founding of 'a more original and more careful thinking.'<sup>10</sup>

To Benjamin's mind such thinking on the part of the writer's included in Jünger's collection of essays could not be more banal, or more clumsy in their announcements: 'Falscher notes could not be sounded; more inept thoughts could not be written; more tactless words could not be uttered.'<sup>11</sup> Benjamin specifically criticises their excessive description of the battle state, 'Only a suitor who embraces his beloved awkwardly is so loquacious. And indeed these suitors are awkward in their embrace of thought.'<sup>12</sup> He accuses them further of complying with 'the desires of the bourgeoisie, which longed for the decline of the West, the way a school boy longs for an inkblot in place of his wrong answer. They spread decline, preached decline, wherever they went.'<sup>13</sup> An insight into the fundamental disagreement of Heidegger and Benjamin

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., p. 315.

<sup>7</sup> Ronell, Avital, *Finitude's Score*, (London: University of Nebraska Press, 1994), p. 86.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., p. 87.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., pp. 86-87.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., pp. 87-88.

<sup>11</sup> Benjamin, Walter, 'Theories of German Fascism,' *Selected Writings Volume 2 1927-1934*, Trans. Rodney Livingstone and Others, Eds. Michael W. Jennings, Howard Eliand, and Gary Smith, (London: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1999), p. 314.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., p. 314.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., p. 314.

over the *War and Warrior* essays might be found in the distinction Benjamin draws between rumour and gossip wherein rumour belongs to the ec-static while gossip has something to do with assuring a community's stasis. Benjamin: 'gossip comes about because people do not wish to be misunderstood.'<sup>14</sup> Benjamin would rather confront a community mired in stasis, rather than entertain a radically anterior thinking based on dangerous stupidities and hasty futural miscalculations.

The campaign *Nachkrieg* waged involves a type of linguistic behaviour that has always been associated with warfare, 'since at least the time when Homer sent Rumour, Zeus's messenger speeding through the battlefield.'<sup>15</sup> As usual, rumour has advanced on its proper place of disclosure, in the advance guard of any pronouncement one would presume to make about it. The other field of inquiry then, [concerning *Nachkrieg*] will be the restless advancement of rumour. This raises the question of what Neil Hertz has called 'epistemological anxiety': can you believe your ears?'<sup>16</sup>

Once a rumour has been circulated it persists, exceeds even the line of finitude, becomes open to an endless passing along. In this way it speaks the language of technology in its ability to be relentlessly appended, made democratic in its populism, and ultimately become user friendly. A rumour will never die off once activated. Rumour acts as the spook; the undead castoff of language. In that way it shares something with technology itself as it 'remains unmournable, that is to say, undead.'<sup>17</sup>

There is of course something unnatural, even inorganic at the base of these desires and that is the possibility of the 'worst' coming forth. The same 'worst' that Heidegger in the 1940s would rather indict at all costs, that to slay the dragon of his dependency on the figure of technology - a figure he gives [*est gibt*] responsibility to herald the hubristic judgements modern man has already made against himself.

<sup>14</sup>Ronell, Avital, *Finitude's Score*, (London: University of Nebraska Press, 1994), p. 90.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., p. 212.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., p. 212.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., p. 228.

Benjamin, in line with Kraus, gives that responsibility over to history. Heidegger's reliance on technology to perform that task only brings us closer to his reading of Ernst Jünger. A reading that later enables him to propose lining up the 'History of Being,' with the attendant features of authenticity and biography, into a framework that could potentially be the basis for historical understanding, as well as a means with which 'enframe' the phenomena of technology.<sup>18</sup> Benjamin will categorise such a programmatic of history - that is in no way a unique development since the French Revolution - as a history of the victors, where victory is largely determined through a volatile contest of technological superiority, both strategic and material. Ronell asserts that Nazism is the 'worst' moment in the history of technology. She asserts however, that the term 'worst' is not meant as an indication of closure. On the contrary for Ronell it seems that technology might not have an off switch, but 'only a modality of being on.'<sup>19</sup> Heidegger's ontology functions off a similarly self-perpetuating operating system, a system modelled not incidentally off the back of Jünger's ready concept of 'Total Mobilisation' gleaned from none other than the *War and Warriors* collection.

### **Totalitarian Mobilisation.**

By the early 1930s Heidegger was openly making alliances away from the phenomenological camp, publicly calling attention to the fact that he now conceived the historical situation in terms of Ernst Jungers works: the essay 'Total Mobilisation' from the 1930 volume *War and Warrior* and the 1932 book *The Worker* based upon it.<sup>20</sup> These of course are the same texts that form the impetus for Benjamin's critique of fascism in the essay 'Theories of German Fascism.'

Heidegger was know to have discussed these works in a small circle with his assistant Werner Brock and tried to grasp the idea that from now on within the context of planetary history everything stands in the light of the universal rule of the

<sup>18</sup> Wolin, Richard, ed. 'Introduction,' *The Heidegger Controversy*, (London: The MIT Press, 1993), p. 15.

<sup>19</sup> Ronell, Avital, *Finitude's Score*, (London: University of Nebraska Press, 1994), p.228.

<sup>20</sup> Poggeler, Otto, Heidegger's Political Self-Understanding,' *The Heidegger Controversy*, Ed. Richard Wolin, (London: The MIT Press, 1993), p. 211.

will to power 'whether its called communism, fascism or world democracy.'<sup>21</sup> The notion of a planetary history, and universal rule, are tropes that in the intervening years will stand out at the forefront of Nazi propaganda campaigns. This totalising rhetorical impulse has some of its earliest beginnings in Jünger's style of argumentation, which at least rhetorically presses all of life into the service of the war. Following societal trends coming out of the First War, Jünger asserts that all forms of production including commerce, foodstuffs and armament are geared toward the expectation of a coming war. Indeed, this assertion will come into being for all industrialised nations in the post World War I period with the advent of the military-industrial complex. It follows on from there, that what Jünger saw as the significant change in warfare with the arrival of World War I, was a shift in class distribution amongst its participants, no longer was war the purview of the middle and upper class, but rather it had become the duty of the working class.

Jünger first came to prominence during the 1920s as foremost chronicler of the front experience of World War I. His well-nigh lyrical descriptions of trench warfare and the great battles of *the materiel* that is, of those aspects that made this war unique in human history in works such as 'In the Storm of Steel' (1920) and 'War as an Inner Experience' (1922) earned him a reputation as an 'aesthete of carnage.'<sup>22</sup>

World War I was unique in human history because it was the first war that strategically relied on the amassing of technological capabilities, over the capabilities of the soldier at the front. For Jünger this meant that soldiers were then allowed free reign to confront within themselves the primordial impulses of annihilation, death and terror that ran through them on the battlefield. Jünger attempted again and again in his articles of the late 1920s, (published in leading organs of Germany's conservative revolutionary movement) to arouse these impulses in his readership, many of whom were soldiers at the front. It is this movement which first understood that if Germany

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<sup>21</sup> Ibid., p. 211.

<sup>22</sup> Jünger, Ernst, 'Total Mobilisation,' *The Heidegger Controversy*, Ed. Richard Wolin, (London: The MIT Press, 1993), p. 119.

were to win the *next* war she would have to amass a technological arsenal. Indeed, the whole society would have to be transformed to meet the demands of the new industrial era. What would eventually take place in Weimar Germany happened when it reached the point where the degree of technological concentration outstripped the cause for bourgeois liberalism. No sector of society was allowed to remain unintegrated in the call for a total mobilisation of the nation toward the will of technology. Wolin asserts 'that for Heidegger National Socialism in the early 1930s was the legitimate embodiment of the society of workers that had been prophesied by Jünger...'<sup>23</sup> Indeed, it was through his series of conversations with Brock, that Heidegger was eventually able to draw parallels between Nietzsche's metaphysics and Jünger's concept of history, and the contemporary situation in western Europe.

In the 1945 essay 'The Rectorship 1933-34: Facts and Thoughts,' Heidegger would note that it was through Jünger's writings, and 'even more essentially on the basis of their foundations,' in Nietzsche's metaphysics, that he and Brock were able to 'reflect on what was to come...'<sup>24</sup> 'Again an air of prophesy permeates these reflections.'<sup>25</sup> A year prior to that in the essay, *An Introduction to Metaphysics* (1935) he would remark in a manner consistent with his readings of the doctrines of Nietzsche and Jünger; that there would soon be the resurgence of a new historical ethos, 'a will to power,' that would place Germany in the forefront of the movement directed to the self-overcoming of bourgeois nihilism. In 1936 Heidegger was to launch a programmatic for his own 'private form of National Socialism' in the guise of a critique of Nietzsche's metaphysics in a series of lectures on the subject of 'nihilism.'<sup>26</sup>

Therein for Heidegger the insights of Nietzsche and Jünger are to some degree nascent forms of a what an alternative National Socialist philosophy, if not programmatic, would look like. Indeed, Jünger begins his essay 'Total Mobilisation' with the task of identifying 'the special nature of this great catastrophe,' World War I,

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<sup>23</sup> Ibid., p. 121.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., p. 121.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., p. 121.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid., p. 121.

'by the assertion that in it, the genius of war was penetrated by the spirit of progress. He refers to this progress as the Nineteenth century's most popular church' moreover, 'the only one enjoying real authority and uncritical faith'<sup>27</sup> into the Twentieth. Under the sign of progress, total mobilisation comes to dictate warfare as the responsibility of anyone who can bear arms. Under an economic system of total mobilisation, there exists 'a stretching of all possible credit, so that even a taxation of the last pfenning saved, is necessary to keep the [war] machine in motion.'<sup>28</sup>

In the same way, the image of war as armed combat merges into the more extended image of a gigantic labour process. In addition to the armies that met on the battlefields, originate the modern armies of commerce and transport, foodstuffs, the manufacture of armaments the army of labour in general. In the final phase...there is no longer any movement whatsoever be it that of the homemaker at her sewing machine without at least indirect use for the battlefield...It makes the World War an historical event superior in significance to the French Revolution.<sup>29</sup>

Benjamin also chooses to commence his essay *Critique of Violence* with an historical assessment 'the terrorism in the French Revolution.'<sup>30</sup> Benjamin credits this ideology with instilling the notion within the citizen 'that violence may be used means to just ends.'<sup>31</sup> It is just this sort of generalised belief that enables the systemics of total mobilisation to emerge. The rhetorical conflation of the citizen and the worker, also dates back to the French Revolution and not coincidentally marks out the territory of another conflation to come - in World War I, there is no significant rhetorical distinction between the worker and the soldier. This distinction allows for an unmarked erasure of gender to take place along the way to all industrialised peoples becoming ideologically machinic bodies. Women in particular are for the first time being drawn indirectly onto the frontlines of war and in another way, being drawn directly onto the frontlines of another battle altogether, the one for economic superiority and market world domination. Again America will master this lesson

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<sup>27</sup> Ibid., p. 129.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid., p. 126.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., p. 126.

<sup>30</sup> Benjamin, Walter, *One Way Street and Other Writings*, Trans. Kingsley Shorter and Edmund Jephcott, Intro, Susan Sontag, (London: Verso, 1979), pp. 132-133.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid., p. 132.

more efficiently than Germany, or Italy at the time by not forcing such a transformation in the appearance of women, nor veil such transformations in the guise of a return to *volk* traditions. After World War I American women were fully aware and prepared to accept their consumer duty toward active mobilisation in step with the trend toward modernisation: a defence of both home and country.

Indeed, in the eyes of many German women the rise of National Socialism was linked with a rise in independence for women and exhibited with its doctrines something that for them resembled a nascent feminism. This idea would later take on an odd resonance with cold war rhetoric in America 'within the kind of displacement that has been suggested for the sixties oppositional rhetoric of making war or making love.'<sup>32</sup> This implied that most women were as easily prepared to make war, as they were love, and moreover that the act of making war was somehow meant to signify something as equally liberatory, and perhaps even revolutionary.

Liberation is not of course a desired feature of a totalitarian programmatic, as Heidegger is quick to assert. An individual's intellectual freedom in particular under these mounting regimes was 'false because it was only negating. It meant predominantly a lack of concern, arbitrariness in one's intentions and inclinations, a lack of restraint in anything that one does.'<sup>33</sup> Jünger, as well criticises this notion of an individual's intellectual freedom, asserting that such a privilege has always been questionable. 'Such an assault takes place in Russia and Italy and then here in Germany; its aim is to deny the existence of anything that is *not* a function of the state.'<sup>34</sup> Moreover, it aims to deny the existence of anyone that is *not* a function of the state, within its bounds of authenticity (i.e., faulty Daseins, Jews, Gypsies, homosexuals). Jünger predicts the crackdown that will take place against these groups when totalitarianism stakes its claim to society: 'We can predict a time when all

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<sup>32</sup> Ronell, Avital, *Finitude's Score*, (London: University of Nebraska Press, 1994), p. 212.

<sup>33</sup> Heidegger, Martin, 'The Self Assertion of the German University,' *The Heidegger Controversy*, Ed. Richard Wolin, (London: The MIT Press, 1993), p. 34.

<sup>34</sup> Jünger, Ernest, 'Total Mobilization,' *The Heidegger Controversy*, Ed. Richard Wolin, (London: The MIT Press, 1993), p. 127.

countries with global aspirations will have to take up the process, in order to sustain the release of new forms of power.<sup>35</sup>

These new forms of power centre around functions which promote a policy of total mobilisation, what Paul Virilio presently cites as the function of deterrence.<sup>36</sup> Often these new forms of power distribute themselves amongst nodes of popular culture. Jünger cites 'the model America has offered-already in peacetime for co-operation between industry and the army'<sup>37</sup> as one of the first to maintain a *social* policy of total mobilisation outside of wartime. This policy is achieved and maintained moreover, not through overt militaristic propaganda, but rather through 'German war literature' which 'raised the issues touching on the very essence of armament, forcing the general public to make judgements about matters of war (if somewhat belatedly and rarely anticipating the future).'<sup>38</sup> Similarly today the military industrial network is upheld by communications technologies that encourage the public to simulate war games in their very own private theatre of war, the living room or bedroom. Every member of the family is the readied and open for attack. Jünger predicted this outcome of total mobilisation as well: 'Still not only attack but defence demands extraordinary efforts, and here the world's compulsions perhaps become even clearer. Just as every life bears the seeds of its own death, so the emergence of the great masses contains within itself a democracy of death. The era of the well-aimed shot is behind us. Giving out the night-flight bombing order, the squadron leader no longer sees the difference between combatants and civilians, and the deadly gas hovers like an elementary power over everything that lives. But the possibility of such a menace is based neither on partial or general, but rather total mobilisation. It extends to the child in the cradle, who is threatened like everyone else-even more so.'<sup>39</sup>

What Jünger is suggesting is that in the space between the two World Wars a whole

<sup>35</sup> Ibid., p. 127.

<sup>36</sup> Virilio, Paul, *Pure War Revised Edition*, (New York: Semiotexte, Columbia University Press, 1997), p. 14.

<sup>37</sup> Jünger, Ernest, "Total Mobilization," *The Heidegger Controversy*, Ed. Richard Wolin, (London: The MIT Press, 1993), p. 127.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid., p. 127.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid., p. 128.

generation was primed for combat. Girls and boys were artificially nurtured on the promise of a war to come, one in which they could surmount the secure banality of the bourgeoisie in favour of the summons to a more primeval call to Being in being-towards death: 'The volunteer sensed it in his exultation, the German demons voice burst forth mightily, the exhaustion of the old values being united with an unconscious longing for a new life. Who would have imagined that these sons of a materialistic generation could have greeted death with such ardour?'<sup>40</sup> What promise does such ardour hold within it? The promise no less of a new race: 'The agitation around us which is the mark of a new race: one that cannot be satisfied by any of the words, ideas, or images of the past. A fruitful anarchy reigns here, which is born from the elements of fire and earth, and which hides within itself the seeds of a new form of domination. The war is the means of the Germans self-own realisation. And for this reason, the new form of armament, in which we have already for some time now been implicated, must be a mobilisation of the German nothing else.'<sup>41</sup> This mobilisation pointedly does not touch upon death, but rather asserts a strange mixture of corporeal regeneration and redesignation. What must be mobilised to achieve this outcome in not the raising an army, but rather the raising a superior type of citizen, an uberman - a man of singular destructive purpose in society - the German. The question then becomes how will he be summoned? The question as well as the answer from here on in will be fought and refought for the next decade onward largely on rhetorical grounds. Amongst other things, what is truly innovative about World War I, in the history of war-making, is the sophistication of its rhetorical arsenal. Its is against this very arsenal that Benjamin deployed his counter-initiative on fascism.

### **Combating Bodies.**

Deleuze and Guattari caution that 'It is essential not to confuse these planes of immanence with the concepts that occupy it. Although the same elements may appear twice over, on the plane and in the concept, it will not be in the same guise,

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<sup>40</sup> Ibid., p. 128.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid., p. 139.

even when they are expressed in the same verbs and words.<sup>42</sup> Having said that, once established concepts like fascism which have developed in 'a zone of neighbourhood'<sup>43</sup> with National Socialism and take on an immanent life of their own. Various components of this concept therein are prone to re-emergence time and again at different points in history. This means that even after the National Socialist State had been destroyed, the microfascisms persisted that gave it an unequalled ability to act upon the masses. These microfascisms persist today affecting a body that is increasingly referred to as posthuman. This is a body that necessarily operates in a social war zone that is both unlimited and continuous,<sup>44</sup> one that also always shares some of the neighbourhood where fascism, under the guise of National Socialism, had previously claimed its turf.

Mankind necessarily constitutes a greater portion of these zones, Esther Leslie maintains that it is particularly the proletariat for whom Benjamin assigns the task of conspiring with technology toward the make up of 'an organic-technological techno-body.'<sup>45</sup> Herein 'technology and humanity would scheme together to form a collective social body.'<sup>46</sup> 'The mass revolts that follow a world war, are for Benjamin, the first failed attempts by the developing collective historical subject, the proletarian mass, to bring its new-born techno-body under control'<sup>47</sup> and in doing so successfully throw off the cult of bourgeois subjectivism. The body that Benjamin predicted would emerge from that struggle would be a collective body; one that would operate as a massive assemblage of functions geared towards utilising technology as means with which to harmonise the operations of man with nature. According to Leslie, Benjamin imagines 'an intepenetrative collective body and *Technik*... therein tools and instruments are not external to people, but organs of communal life in the collectivity... This collectivised body is then proposed as a site of a bodily collective

<sup>42</sup> Deleuze, Gilles and Guattari, Felix, *What is Philosophy?*, Trans. Graham Burchell and Hugh Tomlinson, (London: The Athlone Press, 1994), p. 39.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 19.

<sup>44</sup> Deleuze, Gilles and Guttari, Felix, *Kafka Toward a Minor Literature*, Trans. Dana Polan, Intro. Reda Bensmaia, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986), p. 52.

<sup>45</sup> Leslie, Esther, *Walter Benjamin Overcoming Conformism*, (London: Pluto Press, 2000), p. 6.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 6.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 6.

enervation, which acts as a charge for revolutionary activity.<sup>48</sup> This uncritical reliance on the proletariat as the only class capable of becoming revolutionary is a weakness both in Benjamin's argument and of Leslie's analysis of it, such a determination falls in line with the 'vulgar' Marxism of the interwar period. That this attitude is being resuscitated now by 'leftist' intellectual figures such as Leslie suggests that this concept has sprung up again in another more contemporary neighbourhood of thought one whose adherents gather around to mourn the passing of materialism in the age of 'virtual reality' and its supposed ushering in of the posthuman condition. This group also clamours for a return to a representational body politic, not realising that representation itself issues the founding violence of a Cartesian epistemological model. To be represented, is to be presented in terms of a mastery based on what is already assumptively 'known' about a thing. The cause waged in the name of materiality strives to situate and ossify those knowledges, and therein exists as an overdetermination of what can be known and quantified about a subjective being.

The body then enters into an economy where its life force can be harnessed and economised as a living wealth that can in turn be capitalised upon. The only way to slip the net of such quantifications of life force is to transmute the category of life into something else - into a *dysfunctionality*. 'This word should not be made to coincide with *nonfunctionality*,' but instead with 'a nervous 'breakdown' within' the implicit normativity of a healthy, functioning human being,' may be viewed as an after effect of 'Dasein's technological turn.' The posthuman body can then be understood as 'a complicated engine' which wilfully 'short circuits its own performance,' engaging itself constantly in a 'three pronged metamorphosis' which borrows rites from 'organicity,' 'machinal structures' and finally as Heidegger suggested at the end of the *Der Spiegel* from 'cybernetics.'<sup>49</sup> 'The electrical charges which result have simultaneous currency inside the body' and with network 'tools' that operate outside of it. The body here becomes 'a manifesto against literature,' and prefer instead to

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<sup>48</sup> Ibid., p. 23.

<sup>49</sup> Heidegger, Martin, 'Only a God Can Save Us,' *The Heidegger Controversy*, Ed. Richard Wolin, (London: The MIT Press, 1993), p. 108.

receive input in easily collapsible code.<sup>50</sup>

According to that same historical imaginary - which comes to us as fallout from the posthuman condition - the dehumanised subject wants to be dead, much more than the already dead want to be alive. The undead then is a composite not only of the profile of the holocaust survivor, but of every one of us who is deadened to the persistence of micro-fascisms, dotting the landscape of a passively assumed era of post-fascism. The condition of never reaching sobriety on that fact means that we continue to be held back under the sway of further regimes of technology.

### **Proto-Techiks.**

In 'Theories of German Fascism' Benjamin classifies the inorganic joining of automobiles and warfare in Leon Daudet's comments 'a surprising association of ideas.'<sup>51</sup> This remark is not made out of an ignorance on the part of Benjamin, concerning the function of the war machine, but rather functions as a feint, so that Benjamin can maintain the advantage of stealth in laying down his explosive analysis. This element of surprise will be crucial to the formulation of Benjamin's judgements against technology; technology as a type of political strategy that promotes the characterisation of consumer function as only *incidentally* destructive. Benjamin asserts that this idea of warring consumer drives is 'based on a perception of an increase in technical artefacts, in power sources, and in tempo generally that the private sector can neither absorb nor use adequately but that nonetheless demand vindication.'<sup>52</sup> What Benjamin suggests here is that the consumer is being sped up both in his lifestyle and his demands in order to absorb the overflow of saturated marketplaces. When this is not possible the consumer wishes to find redress for this mania of need. During their quest for vindication, for essentially what amounts to a

<sup>50</sup> Ronell, Avital, *Finitude's Score*, (London: University of Nebraska Press, 1994), Comments based on p. 343, footnote 11.

<sup>51</sup> Benjamin, Walter, 'Theories of German Fascism,' *Selected Writings Volume 2 1927-1934*, Trans. Rodney Livingstone and Others, Eds. Michael W. Jennings, Howard Eliand, and Gary Smith, (London: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1999), p. 312.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 312.

rising consumer burn out, the civilian population turns its gaze to technology and decides to destroy its objects. War. War however cannot take on the lost subtly, the key element of conflict being a lack of vindication, which eventually the population wishes to satisfy off the stores of energy housed in the old conflict between technology and bodies. Benjamin: 'But vindication can only occur in antithesis to harmonious balance, in war, and the destructive power of war provides clear evidence that social reality was not ready to make technology its own organ, and that technology was not strong enough to master the elemental forces of society.'<sup>53</sup> The struggle that Benjamin lays out before us signals that a compromise was somehow forced when prosthetics came into battle in this long-standing war. Some crucial prosthetic devices that entered into Nazi Germany's rhetorical war machine seem to have been originally introduced by foreign markets, namely America.

Benjamin shifts the ground of our argument slightly, when he moves on from economic calculations of war to moral ones: 'Without approaching the surface of the significance of economic causes of war, one may say the harshest, most disastrous aspects of imperialist war are in part the result of the gaping discrepancy between the gigantic power of technology and the miniscule moral illumination it affords.'<sup>54</sup> One can then ascertain that the future of this concept has its place in the logic of cultural and economic imperialism, wherein moral illumination constantly yields to the gigantic power of market interest. The greatest consumers of cultural and economic imperialism are of course the bourgeoisie which 'immorally,' remain blind to that fact. Benjamin explains their motivation to do so using the following logic: 'Indeed, according to its economic nature, bourgeois society cannot help but insulate everything technological as much as possible from the so-called spiritual, and cannot help but resolutely exclude technology's right of co-determination in the social order.'<sup>55</sup> Here Benjamin appears to be exposing a crucial consequence of these international markets, the unacknowledged co-determination of the social order through a merger

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<sup>53</sup> Ibid., p. 312.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid., p. 312.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid., p. 312.

of the gigantic power of technology with the bourgeois market. This merger results in the internalisation of a techno body-politic which necessarily operates outside the zone of morality.

There is a flaw in Benjamin's Marxist logic here. It comes from the fact that it relies solely on moral calculations, treating their components as stable forces that could readily be summed up into transcendent values. The forces that Benjamin is attempting to juggle are anything but stable. To begin with technology is not a gigantic power standing against the common man. Its formidable existence emerges as a feature of imperialist war, not as its root cause. Spinoza suggests that 'we know nothing about a body until we know what it can do.'<sup>56</sup> In other words, if we think of technology itself 'as a body, what its affects are, with the affects of another body,' man, the options left to it are either 'to destroy that body or to be destroyed by it, either to exchange actions and passions with it or to join with it in composing a more powerful body.'<sup>57</sup> This is the real dilemma of co-determination for those individuals faced with the body of National Socialism with all of its attendant forces and variations, in the zones of economy and morality to name but two. Deleuze cautions 'It would be wrong to think that these [forces and variations ] logically entail one another like propositions, rather they resonate or reverberate, and form a thick fog around the plane of immanence from which the attributes of such zones emerge.'<sup>58</sup> These developments come out of the plane of immanence, which tends to engender hallucinations, erroneous perceptions, bad feelings. Spinoza listed four great errors, but for Deleuze the list is infinite. For him 'the illusion of transcendence perhaps comes before all others, followed then by the illusion of universals when concepts are confused with plane of immanence itself.'<sup>59</sup> Even the most vigilant thinker can fall victim to his own self-deceptions, mystifications and reactive thinking along the way towards overcoming these illusions which are plotted everywhere in the modern grid

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<sup>56</sup> Deleuze, Gilles, *Spinoza and Expressionism*, (London: Zone Books, 1991), p. 256.

<sup>57</sup> *Ib id.*, p. 256.

<sup>58</sup> Deleuze, Gilles and Guattari, Felix, *What is Philosophy?*, Trans. Graham Burchell and Hugh Tomlinson, (London: The Athlone Press, 1994), p. 50.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 49.

system of Cartesian metaphysics.

It is easy to see how Benjamin might get sidetracked at this juncture by dialling in a Marxist moral code in order to locate his anti-coordinates against a potentially fascist social order. The call that must come in however, to interrupt this line of thought, is to slow down. To observe technology rather than to judge it, to calculate its affect on bodies, rather than to put out the call for their exposure. Deleuze asserts that to adopt a Spinozist code of ethics means that 'one does not allow for a system of moral judgement to persist.'<sup>60</sup> To begin one must endeavour 'to supplant the opposition of values and in doing so introduce the concept of qualitative difference in modes of existence'<sup>61</sup> into one's analysis. Ethics therein emerges as 'a topology of immanent modes of existence'<sup>62</sup> one that might effectively bring Benjamin closer onto the assembled turf of fascism. Dialling beyond the calling zone of Marxism would mean for Benjamin effectively 'breaking up the field of moral stasis one is overpopulated with transcendent values.'<sup>63</sup> What would remain in its place is 'the plane of immanence where everything is a composition of fast and slow speeds, of capacities, of affecting and being affected.'<sup>64</sup>

Technology runs at a slower pace when observed under these ethical conditions. Is *the* thing that must be preserved from within the consumer's fold of being. I say fold pointedly, because there is a fold in the place where the body merges with technology, and the cut of subjectivity disappears. Along this fold spirituality haunts the subject, to remind him of a time when his only world attachments were that of god and man. However, when one has technology as his master, one finds determination not to be the work of divine right, but rather of rapid and routine joinings with a trajectory, technically determined both in and outside the body. As a consequence anything resembling a social order, goes not the way of dependency-not onto one's social other,

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<sup>60</sup> Ibid., p. 125.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid., p. 125.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid., p. 125.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid., p. 125.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid., p. 125.

but onto one's mechanical others. It is no wonder that the civilian population can find no means with which to make technology its organ, technologies such as love, career, family, and school have long stood outside the discreet body, and yet still managed to powerfully function. Technology is not about steel; it is about flesh, mechanisms of technology, which even when ostensibly outside the body are flesh in their co-determination of the individual in any state. For Jünger the realisation of that type of individual took place through feeding the energy of life onto the more powerfully energised circuit of technology; specifically in its military function. Indeed that was *the* task of total mobilisation: 'an act which, as if through a single grasp of the control panel, 'conveys the extensively branched and densely veined power supply of modern life towards the greater current of martial energy.'<sup>65</sup>

This trend in the direction of human energy is what leads Benjamin to echo Nietzsche's somewhat bombastic statement from the 'Genealogy of Morals'<sup>66</sup> that 'Each coming war will also be a slave revolt to technology.'<sup>67</sup> How might this conflict arise one might ask and on what battlefield would it emerge? Benjamin sets this conflict within the class politics of the early 20th century. The overriding political factor of the structures is ownership, relations of production, this promotes a subversion of the natural elective alliance between the proletariat and technology, to which technology responds by revolting. When the proletariat under the high command of capitalism, seeks to turn technology against nature, technology responds by diabolically waging war on the cosmos. The proletariat is sacrificed as part of the build up of technology's self-organising war machine, left powerless in the destructive siege of the earth wrought in the name of technological progress. 'To begin such a revolt would surely indicate that a time had been reached when combat had replaced judgement.

And no doubt that combat would appear as a combat against judgement, against its

<sup>65</sup> Jünger, Ernest, 'Total Mobilization,' *The Heidegger Controversy*, Ed. Richard Wolin, (London: The MIT Press, 1993), pp. 126- 127.

<sup>66</sup> Benjamin's comment modifies Nietzsche's comment concerning '*the slave revolt in morality...*' Nietzsche, Friedrich, *The Genealogy of Morals*, Trans. Walter Kaufmann and RJ Hollingdale, Ed. and Commentary Walter Kaufmann, (New York: Vintage, 1989), p. 34.

<sup>67</sup> Benjamin, Walter, 'Theories of German Fascism,' *Selected Writings Volume 2 1927-1934*, Trans. Rodney Livingstone and Others, Eds. Michael W. Jennings, Howard Eliand, and Gary Smith, (London: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1999), p. 312.

authorities and personae.<sup>68</sup> Deleuze would offer however, that conflict is located more profoundly elsewhere, namely between the combatant and his own parts. How do we interpret this statement if we understand his parts as ones that are always already in an assemblage with various technologies, both ephemeral and material? This field of battle then emerges within the bounds of this technological network, 'this conflict would apply to the forces within that either subjugate or are subjugated, between powers that express these relations of force'<sup>69</sup> in dealing with technology. Judgement is itself a technology of the state used to order violence, effectively acting to make periodic revolts null and void. Judgement need not only be a state owned and operated technology, often its is an interpersonal dynamic that endeavours to do the state's will on a microlevel, effectively spreading its gestures amongst bodies.

Deleuze uses the example of Kafka's work, which he asserts could be entitled 'Description of a Combat: the combat against the castle, against the father, against the finances.'<sup>70</sup> Conflicts such as these seem to operate simply on a micropolitical scale, but in fact they yield macropolitical consequence insofar as these conflicts can be transposed to indicate that

All gestures are defences, or even attacks, evasions, ripostes, anticipations of a blow one does not always see coming or of an enemy one is not always able to identify: hence the importance of the body's' postures. But these external combats, these combats against, find their justification in the combats between that determine the composition of forces in the combatant. The combat against the Other must be distinguished from the combat between Oneself.<sup>71</sup>

Therein an appreciation of gesture, for Deleuze has strategic implication for the process of territorialisation. These gestural zones are the turf of the coming battle with technology - a battle waged from within bodies. Deleuze explains: On one hand 'the combat against tries to destroy or repel a force (to struggle against the the diabolical

<sup>68</sup> Deleuze, Gilles, *Essays Critical and Clinical*, Trans. Daniel W. Smith and Michael A. Greco, (London: Verso, 1998), p.132.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 132.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 132.

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 132.

powers of the future), but the combat between in contrast, tries to take hold of a force to make it one's own.<sup>172</sup> An understanding of this relationship was what Benjamin was gesturing toward when he said that the only viable strategy was, in Hegel's phrase to enter the enemy's strength, the better to turn his destruction against itself.<sup>173</sup> The gesture has nothing whatsoever to do with further incorporating the resentment at base in technology's revolt against the collective for us by collective mankind, rather it affirms the whole of technology in its essence, not only its destructive elements and is therein able to diffuse the unmatched fury of technology before it detonates.

How does this sort of conflict relate to the technological war already in progress? Deleuze reminds us firstly 'that combat is not war.'<sup>174</sup> War is only a combat against, a will to destruction, a judgement of God that turns destruction into something 'just.'<sup>175</sup> This statement corresponds with Benjamin's wartime strategy. War necessarily takes as its line of flight a path of destruction, insofar as it must deplete the energy of an already established set of forces in order to accomplish its aims. Deleuze comments 'Even when war takes hold of other forces, the force of war begins by mutilating these forces, reducing them to the lowest state. Combat by contrast is a powerful nonorganic vitality that supplements force with force, and enriches whatever it takes hold.'<sup>176</sup> The combatant herein must become a Spinozist body without organs, for we do not even know what a [combat] body can do. When Spinoza said this it was practically a war cry.<sup>177</sup> But this sort of exhortation itself, as Spinoza acknowledged, is just idle talk. 'We speak of consciousness and its decrees, of the will and its effect, of the thousand ways of moving the body, or dominating the body and the passions'<sup>178</sup> without ever acknowledging the network of operations making the body an existential possibility at any moment. The body without organs itself is at least a partially inorganic force by design. Its vitality always emerging from an elsewhere. In waging combat as opposed

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<sup>172</sup> Ibid., p. 132.

<sup>173</sup> Ibid., p. 48.

<sup>174</sup> Ibid., p. 134.

<sup>175</sup> Ibid., p. 133.

<sup>176</sup> Ibid., p. 133.

<sup>177</sup> Deleuze, Gilles, *Spinoza and Expressionism*, (London: Zone Books, 1991), p. 255.

<sup>178</sup> Ibid., p. 255.

to waging war 'herein perhaps lies the secret: to bring into existence and not to judge.'<sup>79</sup> Rather one must appreciate that the technical being in everyone of its constitutive parts raises the possibility for technological advancement. As such Being is effaced in favour of the possibility of joining parts or functions. Therein, if one is going to put oneself in the business of co-determinations one cannot separate out co-dependent terms of existence such as this.

War might just be about destruction, but the work of the technical being which carries out its day to day operations is very much about acquisition and the reterritorialization of spaces which are essentially of market value. The constantly adapted and upgraded body of the technical being is as much a commodity of warfare as aeroplanes and guns. One needs to remind oneself yet again that our war is comprised of technologies which exceed visibility, whilst nonetheless advancing the distribution of need. All future war will achieve the countenance of technological advancement, through such an economic application of diminutive or invisible forces. Forces whose necessary destruction make way for the next match up of forces. For Nietzsche war is the lowest degree of the will to power, its sickness. Such is the plague of war making whose death drive operates at a constant low throttle. According to Leslie, 'Benjamin's *Technik* possesses a certain natural disposability...'<sup>80</sup> technology's dynamic is an unfolding of energy that will out its demands in war.

### **National Servicing.**

Benjamin's aim in writing 'Theories of German Fascism' was to write the historiography of a specifically German kind of warfare, which far from being eternal had something of a telescopic workings. Benjamin's ability to have sections of his historical analysis of war slide into one another from past, present and future, meant that he could add a density to his view of events that far exceeded a singular linear

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<sup>79</sup> Deleuze, Gilles, *Essays Critical and Clinical*, Trans. Daniel W. Smith and Michael A. Greco, (London: Verso, 1998), p. 134.

<sup>80</sup> Leslie, Esther, *Overpowering Conformism*, (London: Pluto Press, 2000), p. 34.

perspective. For example, he was readily aware of that fact that 'behind the recent war is a technological war,'<sup>81</sup> meaning that the war could be read on at least two levels: that of the event itself and its rhetorical aftermath. Indeed, Benjamin will carry on with his comments to suggest that there is something further beyond technology that makes this war special, and that is the feature of Germany having lost it. Thus he says, 'It was not only one of material warfare but also of a war which was lost. And in that special sense it was the German war.'<sup>82</sup> It almost seems as though Benjamin is making an indictment of German technology. However, upon closer inspection, one is able to pick up on a more subtle indictment: that technology not only was used as a cause to make war, but also as a way of recovering from the losses endured as a result of losing at war.

The specific technology that Benjamin chooses to indict is surprising: the technology of the self. Far from the obvious innovations of war-making such as aeroplanes and gas warfare, Benjamin's true vitriol is reserved for the neo-essentialism of post-war Germany: 'To have waged war out of their innermost existence, this they cannot claim. What is special about the present and latest stage in the controversy over the war, which has convulsed Germany since 1919, is the novel assertion that that it is precisely this loss of the war which is characteristically German.'<sup>83</sup> What Benjamin is claiming here is that this cliché of an 'innermost existence' of the German people, is nothing other than 'a novel assertion,' or new technology in the rhetorical struggle to keep the public fascinated by an idealisation of warfare. 'One can call this the latest stage because these attempts to come to terms with the loss of the war show a clear pattern. These attempts begin with an effort to pervert the German defeat into an inner victory by means of confessions of guilt which were hysterically elevated to the universally human.'<sup>84</sup> This is a crucial development insofar as war-making and defeat have now shifted pattern from the characteristically German

<sup>81</sup> Benjamin, Walter, 'Theories of German Fascism,' *Selected Writings Volume 2 1927-1934*, Trans. Rodney Livingstone and Others, Eds. Michael W. Jennings, Howard Eliand, and Gary Smith, (London: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1999), p. 315.

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 315.

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 315.

<sup>84</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 315.

to the universally human. That they have done so on the side of universal guilt as opposed to characteristic innocence, suggests that an outward victory would only be attainable through the repossession of one's losses on the world stage.

### **Equivocal Response**

At this moment in 'Theories of German Fascism' Benjamin hands over the enclosure of events to an alternate messenger, his late friend Florens Christian Rang, whose programme notes to World War II were made public prior to his death in 1924. If this sounds peculiar, it may be helpful to bear in mind that Rang was signalling to the undead at least as early as the birth of German Idealism. Thus he is free to comment in the following way on the topic of the typical German's character in war:

... without regard for life, flinging it down for an idea-this cloud impregnated night that has hovered over us for millennia and in which, instead of stars, gives us only stupefying and confusing thunderbolts to guide the way, after which the night only envelops us all the more in darkness: this horrible world view of world-death instead of world-life, whose horror is made lighter in the philosophy of German Idealism by the notion that beyond the clouds there is after all a starry sky, this fundamental German spiritual tendency in its depths lacks will, does not mean what it says, is a crawling, cowardly, know-nothingness, a desire not to live but also a desire not to die either<sup>85</sup>

What Rang sees as 'the German half-attitude towards life' corresponds with Benjamin's assertion that 'A German seldom understands himself. If he has once understood himself, he will not say so. If he does say so, he will not make himself understood.'<sup>86</sup> Rather the German seems to fall victim time and again to a contrariness when it comes to deciding the value of life, life for himself and for others. This creates what Benjamin calls a 'comfortless distance' from his fellow man and from his own will. This distance 'was increased by the war, but not merely through the real and legendary atrocities that Germans are reported to have committed. Rather, what

<sup>85</sup> Benjamin, Walter, 'Theories of German Fascism,' *Selected Writings Volume 2 1927-1934*, Trans. Rodney Livingstone and Others, Eds. Michael W. Jennings, Howard Eliand, and Gary Smith, (London: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1999), p. 316.

<sup>86</sup> Benjamin, Walter, *One Way Street and Other Writings*, Trans. Kingsley Shorter and Edmund Jephcott, Intro, Susan Sontag, (London: Verso, 1979), p. 57.

completes the isolation of Germany in the eyes of other Europeans...is the violence, incomprehensible to outsiders and wholly imperceptible to those imprisoned by it, with which circumstances, squalor and stupidity here subjugate people entirely to collective forces, as the lives of savages alone are subject to tribal laws.<sup>87</sup> So heavy is the pressure from these collective forces, that they penetrate the very psyche of the German individual compelling him to exercise what Jünger refers to 'as an inner lawfulness,'<sup>88</sup> which at the same time compels him to carry out the most anti-social functions in order to remain loyal to the tribe mentality. Jünger tells us that this is so much the case, that the mere 'phrase "for Germany" could send volunteer regimes on a course of attack.'<sup>89</sup> 'In Theories of German Fascism,' Benjamin draws a parallel between the formulae of idealism and the waging of war.<sup>90</sup> It is a question of the German's nature vs. the call to nationalism, 'war is the diagonal'<sup>91</sup> drawing them together. Benjamin has little sympathy for these volunteers. Referring to them as 'chthonic forces of terror,' he compares them to children, stating bitterly that these men who 'carry Klages in their packs, will not learn one-tenth of what nature promises it's less idly curious but more sober children, who possess in technology not a fetish of doom but a key to happiness.'<sup>92</sup> Such happiness cannot take seed, however in a landscape that continues to be dominated by warfare and as Benjamin so ruefully states:

as far as one could see over the edges of the trenches, the surroundings have become the very terrain of German idealism. Each shell-crater was a problem, each wire entanglement an antimony, each barb a definition, each explosion a thesis. And the sky overhead, by day was the cosmic inside of a steel helmet, at night the moral code above you.<sup>93</sup>

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<sup>87</sup> Ibid., p. 57.

<sup>88</sup> Jünger, Ernst, 'Total Mobilisation,' *The Heidegger Controversy*, Ed. Richard Wolin, (London: The MIT Press, 1993), p. 134.

<sup>89</sup> Ibid., p. 134.

<sup>90</sup> Leslie, Esther, *Walter Benjamin Overcoming Conformism*, (London: Pluto Press, 2000), p. 31.

<sup>91</sup> Benjamin, Walter, 'Theories of German Fascism,' *Selected Writings Volume 2 1927-1934*, Trans. Rodney Livingstone and Others, Eds. Michael W. Jennings, Howard Eliand, and Gary Smith, (London: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1999), p. 319.

<sup>92</sup> Ibid., p. 321.

<sup>93</sup> Quote from Benjamin in Leslie, Esther, *Walter Benjamin Overcoming Conformism*, (London: Pluto Press, 2000), p. 31.

This moral code connects the line of volunteer troops back to one ideological progenitor, Immanuel Kant. Leslie offers that 'In Kant, for the theoretician of absolute ethical conduct, had called for just such a man who declares: 'the immensity of the heavens above me, the imperative of my conscience within me. Alluding perhaps to the ethical basis of dominant justificatory discourse of the Great War, Benjamin insinuates that a pure ethical stance can be used to justify an idealist withdrawal into the unethical conduct of war.'<sup>94</sup> For Ronell it is helpful to bear in mind that war may in fact respond to the vision Kant conjures up in his 'perpetual peace treaty' a vision of the endless and absolute, perpetual resting in peace.'<sup>95</sup> Moreover, Ronell reasons that 'if Kant can only draw a philosophical sketch of peace, this is because his leanings push him toward the edge of undecidability where absolute peace, like war, means you're dead. To get out of this peace cemetery, Kant will have to institute performative speech acts; in other words, he will have to declare a certain type of war on war.'<sup>96</sup> Following on from Ronell's suggestion here, I would assert that Kant's strategy in waging a war on war is to conjure it rhetorically at its extreme, before withdrawing from or rejecting out of hand its potential to reach such an extremity. One can see where a frustration with Kant might therein be fostered. However, I would like us to turn our critical attention not to the ultimate moral high ground, seeming to shield Kant himself away on as the mortar falls around the rest of us, but rather for us to linger at the calculations Kant is setting up prior to his evacuation of the grounds on which to base a thinking on war.

In article 6 of Kant's 'Perpetual Peace a Philosophical Sketch' (1759) he writes 'No state at war with another shall permit such acts of hostility as would make confidence impossible during a future time of peace. Such acts would include the employment of assassins or poisoners, breach of agreements, the instigation of treason within the enemy state etc.'<sup>97</sup> For Kant these are 'dishonourable stratagems.'<sup>98</sup> He

<sup>94</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 31.

<sup>95</sup> Ronell, Avital, *Finitude's Score*, (London: University of Nebraska Press, 1994), p. 209.

<sup>96</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 286.

<sup>97</sup> Kant, Immanuel, *Kant Political Writings*, Ed., Intro., and Notes by Hans Reiss, Trans. H.B. Nisbet (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), p. 96.

<sup>98</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 96.

argues that, 'it must still remain possible, even in wartime, to have some sort of trust in the attitude of the enemy, otherwise peace could not be concluded and hostilities would turn into a war of extermination.'<sup>99</sup> He remains mute on the point of where this trust might come from. Nonetheless he does manage to stumble upon the ground of something truly salient. Indeed, it is truly astounding to see Kant use a term like extermination nearly two centuries prior to the Holocaust. Moreover, the condition for meeting such a harrowing event are uncannily prefigured in what Kant describes as 'a war of punishment between states.'<sup>100</sup> Although he would describe this as being 'inconceivable' in his epoch, 'since there is no relationship of superior to inferior'<sup>101</sup> amongst states, he speculates that nonetheless it 'follows that a war of extermination, in which both parties and right itself might all be simultaneously annihilated, would allow perpetual peace only on the vast graveyard of the human race.'<sup>102</sup> Therein one can make out the spectre of the holocaust emerging in an era in which states would cohere to this arrangement of superior to inferior. Kant cautions briskly that 'A war of this kind and the employment of all means which might bring it about must thus be absolutely prohibited,'<sup>103</sup> but vacillates, and ultimately concedes that of course, 'the means listed above would inevitably lead to such a war, because these diabolical arts, besides being intrinsically despicable, would not long be confined to war alone if they were brought into use. This applies, for example, to the employment of spies, for it exploits only the dishonesty of others(which can never be completely eliminated). Such practices will be carried over in peacetime and thus will completely vitiate its purpose.'<sup>104</sup>

Despite Kant's excessive protestations, what he is outlining in this sixth article are nothing short of a laundry list of the diabolical arts: assassination, poisoning, breaching of agreements, instigating of treason within the enemy state; that when brought together in a series of events would ultimately contribute to the emergence of

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<sup>99</sup> Ibid., p. 96.

<sup>100</sup> Ibid., p. 96.

<sup>101</sup> Ibid., p. 96.

<sup>102</sup> Ibid., p. 96.

<sup>103</sup> Ibid., p. 96.

<sup>104</sup> Ibid., pp. 96-97.

not only of world war, but of total mobilisation, in adherence with Jünger's subsequent definition. Add to that one state feeling that it would need to prove its superiority over another state who by definition if it lost the war would be proven in its inferiority, and you have a lethal combination of forces. Forces that might certainly lead to the immolation of the globe. Forces that when carried over into peacetime, would surely invalidate the very idea of such a time. The sketch of perpetual peace than looks more and more like one of perpetual war, drawing a likeness that Kant doesn't seem ready to own up to. Kant's sketch has been inadvertently instructive, though of course not as a peace manual per se, but rather as a diabolical prophecy of a fighting force operating in disassembly that categories modern understandings of total war. That is to say a war carried out simultaneously on many fronts, which routinely distributes acts of terrorism that have long since 'taken up residence in the rhetorical bloodlines and bacillary negotiations'<sup>105</sup> of Western civilisation, irregardless of whether it is peacetime or wartime, making those sorts of distinctions effectively null and void for the present age. Benjamin writes in "Theories of German Fascism" that 'The most recent war has already shown that the total disorganisation imperialist war entails and the manner in which it is waged, threaten to make it an endless war.'<sup>106</sup> The significance of moral law drops out the picture in this instance only to be replaced by an ever burgeoning industry which seeks to report on war, as it devolves less into a campaign for national self-mastery and more into a campaign for rhetorical gamesmanship. How does mankind account for the suffering such a contest involves? Moreover, what in the grammar of the age allowed for all of this contemplative ruination to congeal into an endless recitation of our material losses? Benjamin's summons these questions to the fore, challenging the very vocabularies of war which threaten to engulf the possibility of thinking beyond fascism towards future in which technology can be restored to its more beneficent means.

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<sup>105</sup> Ibid., p. 97.

<sup>106</sup> Benjamin, Walter, 'Theories of German Fascism,' *Selected Writings Volume 2 1927-1934*, Trans. Rodney Livingstone and Others, Eds. Michael W. Jennings, Howard Eliand, and Gary Smith, (London: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1999), p. 314.

# Warring Vocabularies.

Cut to footage of Correspondent Benjamin transmitting on loudspeaker:

**What does it mean to lose or win a war? How striking the double meaning is in both words! The first, the manifest meaning, clearly refers to the outcome of the war, but the second meaning-which creates that peculiar hollow place, the sounding board in these words-refers to the totality of the war and suggest how the war's outcome also alters the enduring significance it holds over us. This meaning says, so to speak, the winner keeps the war in hand, it leaves the hand of the loser; it says, the winner conquers the war for himself, makes it his own property, the loser no longer possesses it and must live without it. And he must live not only without the war per se but without every one of its ups and downs, even the subtlest of its chess moves every one of its remotest actions. To win or lose a war reaches so deeply, if we follow language, into the fabric of our existence that our whole lives become richer or poorer in symbols, images and sources. And since we have lost one of the greatest wars in world history, one, which involved the whole material, and spiritual substance of a people, one can assess the significance of this loss.<sup>1</sup>**

One can anticipate that there will need to be some significant, if seemingly minor changes in the wording of Benjamin's report after World War II, specifically around the word and the neo-linguistic warfare that was being waged in the post-war West:

*What does it mean to win or lose a word? How striking the double meaning is in both wars! The first, manifest meaning, clearly refers to the outcome of the word, but the second meaning-which creates that peculiar hollow space, the sounding board of these wars-refers to the totality of the word and suggest how the word's outcome also alters the enduring significance it holds over us. This meaning so to speak, the winner keeps the word in hand, it leaves the hand to the loser; it says the winner no longer possesses it and must live without it. And he must not only live without the word per se but without everyone of its ups and downs, even the subtlest of its chess moves, every one of its remotest actions. To win or lose a word reaches so deeply into the fabric of our existence that our whole lives become richer or poorer in symbol, images and sources. And since we have lost one of the greatest words in world history, one which involved the whole material and spiritual substance of a people, one can assess the significance of this loss.*

The specific word that has been *lost* after the second war is *Holocaust*, a term at

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<sup>1</sup> Benjamin, Walter, 'Theories of German Fascism,' *Selected Writings Volume 2 1927-1934*, Trans. Rodney Livingstone and Others, Eds. Michael W. Jennings, Howard Eliand, and Gary Smith, (London: The Belknap Press of Havard University Press, 1999), p. 315.

once generated and lost in a firestorm of unintelligibility that could have been seen coming as far back as World War I, if only we would have been willing to telescope backward to the romantic expressionism Benjamin alludes to in the *Trauerspiel*. As far back as this study, Benjamin was able to begin charting the path of expressionism for its multivalent significance, its becoming other, its becoming war. The aestheticisation of expression became a modern phenomenon in Germany around 1919, 'a novel assertion'<sup>2</sup> of a technology everyone possessed and yet none were willing to admit they were capable of using. It was not until 1933 that defeat started to lift from association with this term, and by that time expression was shifting linguistic position with concentration. Concentration, a term, of course, which was soon to encamp with genocide, made destruction once again the task of the universally human, the co-determinant enterprise of a characteristically German advancement of society. This was the fall out campaign of yet another linguistic minefield: German Idealism. In 'Theories of German Fascism' Benjamin is playing with the lens once again, building them up and collapsing them down, telescoping to a future telecast of the coming war as it is broadcast seemingly everywhere in the nineteenth century. A time one could refer to romantically as proto-structuralist -when all of this linguistic suffering was yet to secure its mappings of what would become the future theatres of war: communication technologies. Not coincidentally this was also a time when capitalism could be referred to as a capitalism of concentration, for production and property.<sup>3</sup> Thus the whole economy of communication is reliant upon the singular enclosure of meaning.

In the twentieth century this becomes a situation of meaning that cannot persist in its market stability with the advent of networked communication, and to some extent the networked foreclosure of meaning that is brought about with the deployment of the neologistic referent of the Holocaust. What must be contended here is a logistics of allegory; as the proverbial ghost in the war-machine. The effect of the allegory, according to Benjamin's *Trauerspiel* study, seems 'startling' and 'momentary,' like a

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<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 315

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 312.

'flash of lightning which suddenly illuminates the dark night,' or the 'sudden appearance of a ghost.'<sup>4</sup> In Ronell's work on Paul de Man and allegory, it appears that de Man had picked up where Benjamin left off. Where Benjamin had concerned himself with the proto-fascist uses of allegory, de Man examined the fall out of its understanding in seemingly post-fascist intellectual terrains. Nonetheless, there are definitive resonances of the effect of the Holocaust in de Man's rhetoric. Ronell: 'For de Man, there appears to be something clearly foreclosive about the nature of allegory, something that will only appear, though without substantially manifesting itself, in a violent aftermath.'<sup>5</sup> This statement in some way serves as an allegorical precursor to the way the public scandal concerning de Man's own referential association with a fascist media outlet, *Le Soir* in the 1940s, would be acutely and violently divulged in the form of a foreclosive media blitz forty years later.

Such a foreclosure by 1986 allows Derrida to pose the question 'Which war?'<sup>6</sup> in his defense of de Man's past activities, as if somehow World War II had fallen out of the scope of the deconstructionist movement, in favour of the Algerian War or the Vietnam War. It seems that these events are overdetermined as the critical postmodern developments, along with the cold war obviously, that signaled the build up of an entirely new type of war-machine of almost militant concern to deconstructionist practice of the 1970s. These wars coincided with the events of May 1968 in Paris, which were considered by participants as nothing short of a war against the establishment forces of education, and therein those responsible for systematic discipline of meaning. Furthermore, these objections were raised underneath the banner of Communism. Allegory on the other hand works most efficiently in line with a capitalist deployment of meaning, 'to the extent that allegory is payrolled by foreclosure.'<sup>7</sup> Therein 'the effects of a manifestation are bound to be startling ... resembling the sudden appearance of a ghost.'<sup>8</sup> Which begs the further question of why

<sup>4</sup> Benjamin, Walter, *Origin of the German Tragic Drama*, Trans. John Osborne, (London: NLB, 1977), p. 167.

<sup>5</sup> Ronell, Avital, *Stupidity*, (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2002) p. 108.

<sup>6</sup> Derrida. Jacques, "Like the Sound of the Deep Sea within a Shell: Paul de Man's War," *Critical Inquiry* 14, (Spring 1988) p. 590.

<sup>7</sup> Ronell, Avital, *Stupidity*, (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2002), p. 109.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 109.

the de Man scandal only came to light posthumously? The question leads one to ponder something else, 'The suddenness of an unwanted return to a condemned site.'<sup>9</sup> It would seem that in maintaining loyalty to the appearance of de Man's ghost, those sites are ironically open to the contested space of both proliferation and disappearance. In the meantime, there will be other instances of rattling up citations on the undead that are contemporary to Benjamin's own wartime media post that also affiliates itself within a foreclosive atmosphere. It is time now to switch the registers back, beginning with yet another journalist reterritorialized in the immanent wake of German fascism, Karl Kraus.

### **In These Great Times -Listener's Supplement**

In the essay 'Karl Kraus,' Benjamin relates the outbreak of World War I to the 'shabby, obtrusive abundance of ... coffee-houses, press and society scandals' that were 'only a minor manifestation of the foreknowledge of that immanent event.'<sup>10</sup> It was only two months later that Kraus condemned the members of this crowd to their fate. In this address Kraus' prose conjures a force that is nothing short of demonic, it exists as a reckoning, a wake held for the grim future to come. Its summons is, in Benjamin's words, 'not content to call on the world as witness to the misdemeanours of a cashier ...' but instead aims to 'summon the dead from their graves.'<sup>11</sup> Thus the economic register that Kraus is tapping on is firmly beyond finitude, beyond the superficiality of the monumental suffering of the present age. Indeed, 'to summon the dead from their graves' would suggest that Kraus has tapped into the deep recesses of torment concealed within the German culture, a torment that has necessarily been transferred over the ages, taking up a disturbing plot within the Idealist landscape, the blood and soil of the Volk. Therein the summons would extend its task to summoning the dead from their age; specifically calling upon one group, the medieval Germans who were always already deadened to their times through a similar epochal

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., p. 109.

<sup>10</sup> Walter, Benjamin, *One Way Street and Other Writings*, Trans. Kingsley Shorter and Edmund Jephcott, Introduction Susan Sontag (London: Verso, 1979) p. 261.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., p. 261.

burden of rehearsed grief in life. Kraus puts himself forward as the channeler of their furious unexorcised grief.

In following after Kraus Benjamin grows uneasy with this summons and equates Kraus' *exorcise* with a further spreading of the torment of his age: 'All the demons that had populated this possessed man passed into the herd of swine who were his contemporaries.'<sup>12</sup> It is as though the audience for Kraus' writing not only becomes absorbed with him, but with all the infernal forces that possess his body and imagination. Kraus is aware of the frenzy of interest he has created around himself, and also of the fact that his audience in reading him is swept up in the same energy of societal detritus. Indeed, it is this very momentum of this social decay that has kicked up a cultural maelstrom worthy of Kraus' moral outrage. The height of this outrage peaks with the delivery of his tract 'In this Great Age' which for Benjamin signaled the pivotal moment of a tactical shift in Kraus' writing; that is to say Kraus' new found determination to unleash his messengerial furore on the crowd of his listeners:

In these great times, which I knew when they were small, which will be small again... in these grave times that laughed themselves to death at the possibility of growing serious and, overtaken by their own tragedy, long for distraction... in these loud times, booming with the fearful symphony of deeds that engender reports, and of reports that bear the blame for deeds; in these unspeakable times, you can expect no word of my own from me. None except this, which just preserves the silence from misinterpretation... In the empires bereft of imagination, where man is dying of spiritual starvation while not feeling spiritual hunger, where pens are dipped in blood and swords are dipped in ink, that which is not thought must be done, but that which is only thought is inexpressible... in the room where someone writes the noise is so great, and whether it come from animals, from children, or merely from mortars shall not be decided now... Those who now have nothing to say because it is the turn of deeds to speak, talk on. Let him who has something to say step forward and be silent!<sup>13</sup>

The question violently bursts forth from the listener, 'Why can we expect no word from Kraus?' If it is as Kraus suggests, the turn of deeds to speak, what deeds might those who invade Kraus's space of writing? Furthermore what noisy deeds are

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<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 261.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 261-262.

animals, children, mortar shells capable of that there should be cause enough for the rest of us to grow silent? What Kraus is suggesting for Vienna - as Benjamin had done for Moscow in the late 1920s- is not that the deeds of the age remain unaddressed, but rather rhetorically mimic their most disturbing movements as a way of understanding what is happening within society. Through mimicry animals, children, and mortar shells are able to audibly mirror the fearful or bewildering activities that take place around them, often as a means of communicating distress. Often this is done through a deterritorialization of language. Fear is no longer the domain of words to categorise, language as the means normally associated with communicating danger gets turned inside out, so that deterritorialized sound alone can pierce the silence brought about by unspeakable events. Within the zone of crisis animals bellow, children cry, mortars scream. How noisy everything grows, everything in language that is inhuman is allowed to mimic on its own terms the inhumanity of man. The mouth itself has been deterritorialized by the violence that has opened it, making it a gaping reminder of the loss of understanding information has brought to society. Such was the case with the First World War.

Benjamin asks in 'The Storyteller:'

Was it not noticeable at the end of the war that men returned from the battlefield grown silent- not richer, but poorer from communicable experience? What ten years later was poured out in a flood of war books was anything but experience that goes from mouth to mouth. And there was nothing remarkable about that. For never has experience been contradicted more thoroughly than strategic experience by tactical warfare, economic experience by inflation, bodily experience by those in power. A generation that had gone to school in horse-drawn streetcar now stood under the open sky in a countryside in which nothing remained unchanged but the clouds, and beneath these clouds, in a field of force of destructive torrents and explosions, was the tiny, fragile human body.<sup>14</sup>

What could be more creatural than the mouth as an organ of communicable experience? It is through the experiences of tactical warfare, inflation and bodily

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<sup>14</sup> Benjamin, Walter, 'The Storyteller' *illuminations*, Intro. Hannah Arendt, Trans. Harry Zohn, New York: Fontana Press, 1969) p. 84.

experience overall, despite having contracted out the space of the mouth, are not prepared to make payment anytime in the future. The tiny, fragile human body grows silent, not out of awe, but of a paucity of organs with which to take in what has transpired. What has been forgotten is that the mouth in the exchange of communicable experience is not merely an organ of output, but intake as well. The atrophy of this function in the post-war period causes the citizen back from the front to enclose everything learned in the shallow slot of information, as the gulf formerly reserved for understanding has been filled to capacity with the relentless shocks of self-shattering experience. Benjamin:

Every morning brings us news of the globe, and yet we are poor in noteworthy stories. This is because no event any longer comes to us without already being shot through with explanation. In other words, by now almost nothing that happens benefits storytelling; almost everything benefits information. In storytelling 'the narrative achieves the amplitude that information lacks.'<sup>15</sup>

The story then has to necessarily be told by others, others whose humanity has yet to be sealed up in the aggression as non-aggression pact of language, something that later gets set up between Hitler and Stalin, two men who if anything met language with disbelief. They doubt in the same way soldiers on the battlefield lost sight of the limits of finitude; which is of course language's false promise to the subject, specifically that the conflict of being will someday end.

Kafka was all too aware of the potential falsification of all ontological contracts sealed with the stamp of international law. He had the good sense to stay in Prague, at least up until the time shortly before his death in 1925 when he came to a proto-fascistic Vienna. And quite possibly then to get closer to the noise emanating from Kraus' room in the wee hours. It was a sound that not incidentally mimicked his own space of authority-as-bodily-possession, taking place in the wee hours of creation that modern man has mostly forgotten. Kraus and Kafka are a similar animal, one whose courage comes largely from a ritual of becoming-writing. Kafka will eventually claim

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<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 89.

he has no need for an organic body, that he is made of writing, 'only of writing.'<sup>16</sup> Such a transformation is insurgent business, one often picked up only as a near to a silent operation, the reception of course making it register as far more docile than it is. The clamorous noise produced by writing then largely falls into 'the receptacles of the forgotten.'<sup>17</sup>

According to Deleuze and Guattari sound like that 'does show up here as a form of expression, but rather as the *unformed material of expression*, that will act on other terms.'<sup>18</sup> Words for Kafka and Kraus constitute a sonority that ruptures in order to break away from a chain that is still all too signifying. Those sub-authorial creatures, children, animals, mortars - possess the ability to listen for the most forgotten of noises, silence. Not surprisingly they also possess 'the greatest opportunity for reflection.'<sup>19</sup> Kraus' ability to grow anxious in the presence of these attentive creatures suggests that he too had an ear close to the ground, his homing signal poised in the region of 'distorted life.'<sup>20</sup> Benjamin would come to survey the same region, starting from his encounter as a boy with the Little Hunchback for whom he kept vigil at night.

This sort of vigilance 'reminds one of the reluctance with which children go to bed; after all, while they are asleep something might happen that concerns them.'<sup>21</sup> This is perhaps why both writers work takes on a sense of prophetic vigilance that is largely lost to the world of the fathers. The sons meanwhile are keeping up a distressing silence until the time is ripe for disclosure. Still these crisis times are knocking on the door. Kraus' speech then mimics the cadence of this knocking, which in its own great age will become a battering.

<sup>16</sup> Canetti, Elias, *The Other Trial: Kafka's Letters to Felice*, (New York: Schocken Books, 1974), p. 304.

<sup>17</sup> Benjamin, Walter, 'Franz Kafka' *Illuminations*, Intro. Hannah Arendt, Trans. Harry Zohn, New York: Fontana Press, 1969) p. 128.

<sup>18</sup> Deleuze, Gilles and Guattari, Felix, *Kafka, Towards a Minor Literature*, Trans. Dana Polan, Intro. Reda Bensmaïa, (London: University of Minnesota Press, 1986) p. 6.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 6.

<sup>20</sup> Benjamin, Walter, 'Franz Kafka' *Illuminations*, Intro. Hannah Arendt, Trans. Harry Zohn (New York: Fontana Press, 1969), p. 132.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 132.

Kafka and Kraus practiced their own respective forms of vigilance - ones whose line of flight commences with chronic insomnia. For them the emergence of the micro trait of insomnia became symptomatic of the macro social disorder of the age. Insomnia therein became an essential mode of production, a process manifesting itself in long bouts of nocturnal writing. Benjamin comments that Kraus' night 'is a not maternal, or a moonlit, romantic night: it is the hour of between sleeping and waking, the night watch, the centrepiece of his threefold solitude: that of the coffeehouse where he is alone with his enemy, of the nocturnal room where he is alone with his demon, and of the lecture hall where he is alone with his work.'<sup>22</sup> Kraus is constant on duty as the observer of his age. He writes in his log book entitled fittingly *By Night*, that he worked 'day and night.'<sup>23</sup> As a result he explains, 'I have a lot of free time, to ask a picture in a room how it likes work, to ask the clock whether it is tired and ask the night how it slept.'<sup>24</sup> These comments at first glance might seem peculiar, even mad and yet they are representative of a kind of lucidity that overcomes the insomniac as inhabits his nocturnal environment.

Deleuze proposes that insomnia, 'this dreamless sleep is not a state in which we fall asleep, but one that transverses the night and inhabits it with a frightening clarity.'<sup>25</sup> Insomnia is a dreamless sleep in which one does not fall asleep, does not dream, rather insomnia sweeps the dream along as far as insomnia extends, so that dreams become something one has alongside insomnia - as a way of registering events whilst perpetually deferring any imposition of a judgment. Insomnia through its alongside-ness emerges as a mode of immanence. Whereas 'the dream erects walls, feeds on death and creates shadows, shadows of all things in the world, shadows of ourselves,'<sup>26</sup> insomnia, the dreamless sleep, the dream of the night can be detected,

<sup>22</sup> Benjamin, Walter, *One Way Street and Other Writings*, Intro. Susan Sontag, Trans., Edmund Jephcott and Kingsley Shorter, (London: Verso, 1979), p. 277.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 277.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 277.

<sup>25</sup> Deleuze, Gilles. *Essays Clinical and Critical*, Trans. Daniel W. Smith and Michael A. Greco, (London: Verso, 1998)p. 130.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 130.

appropriated, repopulated with other worlds to come, other peoples to come. Meanwhile in the 'In the dream of the night I see gray dogs, creeping forward to devour the dream.'<sup>27</sup> This dream must be called out to, summoned, but silently so as not disrupt the dream in progress but rather to overtake it, like a storm that seemingly comes from nowhere, one that announces itself only through the lightening strike.

Benjamin characterises Kraus' cadence of speech as 'a silence that catches the storm of the event in its black folds, billows, its livid lining turned outward.'<sup>28</sup> *The catastrophe is fascism. For now though the storm is still gathering its forces. Benjamin alerts us early on to the fact that 'Kraus lived in a world where the most shameful act was still the faux pas; he distinguishes between degrees of the monstrous, and does so precisely because his criterion is never that of bourgeois respectability, which once above the threshold of trivial misdemeanor becomes so quickly short of breath that it can form no concept of villainy on a world-historical scale.'<sup>29</sup> So Kraus is not a man daunted by usual bourgeois limits on intake. And he clearly operates with a stronger set of lungs than most men of his age. What is less easily inspired from Kraus' writing, is that eventually these lungs will grow monstrous, and become weak and rotten as the breath of fascism subsumes them. It happened to Kafka as well, who diagnosed his tuberculosis as the malady of his age, the animal within roaring to emerge.*

In this vein, Benjamin approaches Kafka as someone who 'just as K. lives in the village on Castle Hill, modern man lives in his body; the body slips away from him, is hostile toward him. It may happen that a man wakes up on day and finds himself transformed into vermin.'<sup>30</sup> Or as a mute demon as was the case with Kraus. 'Exile - his exile - has gained *control* over him.'<sup>31</sup> This control centres on Kraus's former networks of hyper control - language. It sudden catches in his lungs. 'The air in this

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<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 130.

<sup>28</sup> Benjamin, Walter, *One Way Street and Other Writings*, Intro. Susan Sontag, Trans., Edmund Jephcott and Kingsley Shorter, (London: Verso, 1979), p. 262.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 262.

<sup>30</sup> Benjamin, Walter, 'Franz Kafka' *Illuminations*, Intro. Hannah Arendt, Trans. Harry Zohn (New York: Fontana Press, 1969), p. 122.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 122.

village is not free of all the abortive and overripe elements that form such a putrid mixture [of discourse]. This is the air Kafka had to breathe.<sup>32</sup> This putrid discourse, of course, also feeds into the materiality of Kraus' age, the breath of an age that he in part shared with Kafka. Benjamin provocatively asks: 'How was he able to survive in this air?'<sup>33</sup> The answer of course is that he *ostensibly* fell victim to it.

This final statement of Benjamin acts as a forecast for a villainy that will soon catch in the air on a world historical-scale; an air that will become as putrid in Vienna and Berlin, as it was for K. on Castle Hill, Kafka in Prague. This arid sense of villainy lurking on the Hill, relates back to Benjamin's earliest experiences in West Berlin, poised on the speculative suburban hilltops outside the city centre. A young Benjamin was constantly confronted with a deep sense of alienation and foreboding, whenever he witnessed the blunderings of his class. It was a class that seemed to a boyhood Benjamin curiously lacking in the necessary provisions to cope with the growing bluster of the age. This is evident in Benjamin's account of his father's attempts to counter the burglars who invaded his West Berlin home when he was a child

I noticed... my mother and father coming quietly into my room at an unusual hour ... A numerous band of burglars had ascended on the house in the night. Fortunately, the noise they made gave an indication of their number, so my mother had succeeded in restraining my father... had wanted to confront them. The dangerous visit lasted almost until morning ... Much later they were caught... It made me proud that I was questioned about the events of the previous evening – for a complicity was suspected between the housebreakers and the maidservant ... What made me even prouder, however, was the question why had I kept silent about my dream, which I now, of course, narrated at length as a prophecy.<sup>34</sup>

When the time is right again, at the end of World War I, Benjamin hones in on a demonic aspect of Adalbert Stifter's work, which in later years will seem to convey a foreknowledge of his communicatory dilemma in regard to the rise of National Socialism. Benjamin writes, 'The demonic aspect that characterises his writing to a

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<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 122.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 122-123.

<sup>34</sup> Benjamin, Walter, 'A Berlin Chronicle,' *One Way Street and Other Writings*, Intro. Susan Sontag, Trans., Edmund Jephcott and Kingsley Shorter, (London: Verso, 1979), p. 341.

greater or lesser degree is based on [the] inability [to express shock as it must primarily be expressed in speech] and is most clearly manifested where he chooses a surreptitious line of advance because he is unable to discover the liberating utterance that lies near at hand and would assure his salvation.<sup>35</sup> What would it mean to make a liberating utterance, to spell out the name of evil and therein diffuse it of its mysticism? Identifying evil for Benjamin is more a case of exposing flawed thinking than castigating true villainy. Such an exorcise of evil is carried out by Emmanuel Levinas when in an article of 1934 entitled 'Some Reflections' he asserts namely that 'Nazism as an "elemental evil" has its condition of possibility in Western philosophy and in Heideggerian ontology in particular: "a possibility that is inscribed in Being's care for Being -for the being from whom Being itself is an issue in its being. There could be no clearer statement that Nazism is rooted in the same experience of [immanent] facticity from which Heidegger departs. While the greatest achievement of Heidegger's philosophy was to have elaborated the conceptual categories that kept [immanent] *facticity* from presenting itself as [concretized] *fact*, Nazism ended with the incarceration of factual life in an objective racial determination and, therefore with the abandonment of its original inspiration.'<sup>36</sup> Its concerns could no longer separate bare life from politicised life. All politics therein literally became biopolitics. This dire convergence for Levinas, was always potentially evident in the very beginnings of Western philosophy and in Heideggerian ontology through its privileging of self care and self-willing over the care and consideration of others, and in the understanding of individual domain in terms of visual proofs, recorded facts than with auditory conformation, the pliant voice of the other. As described by Benjamin, Stifter suffers from a similiar metaphysical fault to the one Levinas describes.

Benjamin accuses Stifter of being 'able to create only on the visual plane.'<sup>37</sup>

<sup>35</sup> Benjamin, Walter, "Stifter," *Walter Benjamin Selected Writings Volume 1913-1926*, Eds. Marcus Bullock and Michael W. Jennings, (London: The Belknap Press of Harvard University, 1996)p. 112.

<sup>36</sup> Agamben, Giorgio, *Homo Sacer*, Trans. Daniel Heller-Roazen, (Stanford California: Stanford University Press, 1998), p. 152.

<sup>37</sup> Benjamin, Walter, "Stifter," *Walter Benjamin Selected Writings Volume 1913-1926*, Eds. Marcus Bullock and Michael W. Jennings, (London: The Belknap Press of Harvard University, 1996), p. 112.

Benjamin: 'This does not mean that he reproduces only visible phenomena, for as an artist he possesses style. The problem of his style is that he takes all things as an approach to the metaphysically visual sphere. One immediate consequence of this is that he has no way of perceiving any revelation that can only be *heard* - that is, which belongs to the metaphysically acoustic realm. This also explains the role of the basic characteristic of all of his writings: their emphasis on peacefulness. For peacefulness, is above all, the absence of any acoustic sensation.'<sup>38</sup> This assertion ironically corresponds with Kraus's prognosis that the coffee-houses, press and social scandals were nothing short of a noisy cacophony summoning the chaos of the coming war into being.

### **Nerve Gas.**

'...How much irony lie in the curious struggle for the 'nerves,' the last root fibres of the Viennese literary scene to which Kraus could still find Mother Earth adhering.'<sup>39</sup> These nerves are also summoned in Jünger when he asserts that total mobilization requires 'extension to the deepest marrow, life's finest nerve.'<sup>40</sup> The most obvious place to look for the nerves is at the finger tips as was the case with Loos article of 1908 'Ornamentation and Crime' which links the connoisseur's running of fingers over engravings and reliefs to the eventual advent of a criminal type known as the art thief. The type is equivalent in offence to the hack journalist in all his crude rapaciousness. Kraus became the public defender against such crimes of private life, whilst defending his own nerve centre against 'police, press, morality, and concepts, finally against neighbours in every form, constantly finding new enemies, became his [alter] profession.'<sup>41</sup> Here manifests the strange interplay between reactionary theory and revolutionary practice that is met everywhere in Kraus.

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<sup>38</sup> Ibid., p.112.

<sup>39</sup> Benjamin, Walter, 'Karl Kraus,' *One Way Street and Other Writings*, Intro. Susan Sontag, Trans., Edmund Jephcott and Kingsley Shorter, (London: Verso, 1979), p. 265.

<sup>40</sup> Jünger, Ernst 'Total Mobilisation' Richard Wolin, *The Heidegger Controversy*, (Cambridge, Mass.: The MIT Press, 1993), p. 126.

<sup>41</sup> Benjamin, Walter, 'Karl Kraus,' *One Way Street and Other Writings*, Intro. Susan Sontag, Trans., Edmund Jephcott and Kingsley Shorter, (London: Verso, 1979), p. 259.

Later Ronell, will accuse Benjamin the DC, who was always 'on the way to language which is always out of the way, drifting, rubbing over the scratch that separates the creator from the destroyer.'<sup>42</sup> Like Nietzsche, and Stifter for that matter, 'his need for fresh air and open spaces is stronger than any hatred.'<sup>43</sup> Indeed, Benjamin's quest for pure language follows a similar pathway to hell as does Kraus. In the process of delving into the bowels of language, he is 'clearing away the tracks for our own age, the destructive character is a device whose transmissions need ears that hear, public ears.'<sup>44</sup> 'Just as the creator seeks solitude, the destroyer must be constantly surrounded by people, witnesses to his efficacy. The destructive character is a signal.'<sup>45</sup> Benjamin: 'In this fight - and only for it- his followers also have their use, since it is they who must sublimely ignore the anonymity with which the satirist has tried to surround his private existence, and nothing holds them in check except for Kraus's decision to step in person before the threshold and pay homage to the ruins in which he is a private individual.'<sup>46</sup>

Kraus passes judgement above all on people for what they say, as opposed to who they are and even what they do. His sentencing takes on a pre-emptive character, as it is almost exclusively deduced from the single fragment, word or intonation revealingly uttered from his opponent's mouth. For Benjamin, what emerges for Kraus in this is 'a sinister identification that constantly creates the illusion that deeds are reported on before they are carried out, and frequently also the possibility of a situation, in which in any case exists, that while war correspondents are not allowed to witness events, soldiers become reporters.'<sup>47</sup> This is borne out of the considerable influence of writers, notably Jünger amongst them in that period, whose articles first appeared as accounts of warfare in the popular press: the soldier Jünger turned into

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<sup>42</sup> Ronell, Avital, *Finitude's Score*, (London: University of Nebraska Press, 1994). p. 90.

<sup>43</sup> Benjamin, Walter, 'The Destructive Character,' *One Way Street and Other Writings*, Intro. Susan Sontag, Trans., Edmund Jephcott and Kingsley Shorter, (London: Verso, 1979), p. 157.

<sup>44</sup> Ronell, Avital, *Finitude's Score*, (London: University of Nebraska Press, 1994). p. 90.

<sup>45</sup> Benjamin, Walter, 'The Destructive Character,' *One Way Street and Other Writings*, Intro. Susan Sontag, Trans., Edmund Jephcott and Kingsley Shorter, (London: Verso, 1979), p. 158.

<sup>46</sup> Benjamin, Walter, 'Karl Kraus,' *One Way Street and Other Writings*, Intro. Susan Sontag, Trans., Edmund Jephcott and Kingsley Shorter, (London: Verso, 1979), pp. 265-266.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 267.

would-be war correspondent.

Benjamin has said of Kraus: 'The dark background from which his image detaches itself is not formed by his contemporaries but in the primeval world or the world of the demon. The light of the first day falls on him - thus he emerges from the darkness. But not in all parts, others remain that are more deeply immersed in it than one suspects. An eye that cannot adjust the darkness will never perceive the outline of this figure.'<sup>48</sup> Benjamin's criticism of Stifter implies a similar suspicion of cloaking one's darker appearance, in a way that those who have an eye to darkness can detect, leaving those without utterly vulnerable to the sway of the prose.

Kraus has said "Anti-Semitism is the mentality ... that means seriously a tenth part of the jibes that the stock-exchange wit holds ready for its own blood,' he thereby indicates the nature of his own opponents to himself. There is no reproach to him, no vilification of his person, that could not find its own legitimate formulation in his own writings, in those passages where self-reflection is raised to self-admiration...In this way his style comes into being, and with the typical reader of *Die Fackel*, for whom the subordinate clause, in particle, indeed a comma, fibres and nerves quiver; from the obscurest and driest piece of fact, a piece of his flesh hangs.'<sup>49</sup> From the beginning Benjamin held that Kraus would perform a Shakespearean turn, by crafting a bio 'sheet full of war and pestilence, of cries of pain and murder, of danger from flood and fire, spreading everywhere'<sup>50</sup> into the 'latest news emanating from the modern day Shylock whose story sometimes ends with one turning the knife on himself'<sup>51</sup> so to speak as a means of cutting one's losses and getting out. 'I am' Kraus has said, 'perhaps the first instance of a writer who simultaneously writes and acts out his own writing.'<sup>52</sup> In his daring commentaries Kraus's own voice tries on the abundance of personae inhabiting the performer-persona: that through which sound

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<sup>48</sup> Ibid., p. 268.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid., p. 269.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid., p. 258.

<sup>51</sup> See volume introduction Ibid., p. 14.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid., p. 270.

passes - and about his fingertips, dart the gestures of the figures populating his voice. He imitates his subjects in order to insert a crowbar of hate into the finest joints of their posture. As Shylock reveals in the citizens of Venice, 'their venality, and garrulity, ignominy and bonhomie, childishness and covetousness, gluttony and dishonesty'<sup>53</sup> through his public character, so does Kraus in the citizens of Vienna. 'When the age laid hands upon itself, he was the hands, Brecht said'<sup>54</sup>

For Benjamin Kraus's satire adjudicates the Last Judgement in its foresight, in a way not dissimilar to the way Shylock's dubious blood libel drew on the barbarism of his age. Indeed, 'To worship the image of divine justice in language ... is genuinely a Jewish somersault by which he [Shylock, Kraus] breaks the spell of the demon.'<sup>55</sup> Kraus, like Shylock in his trial accuses the law in its substance, not its effect. His charge is the betrayal of justice by the law. As to witness this betrayal, 'Kraus portrayed himself as a hopelessly subjugated demon; in the pandemonium of the age he reserved for himself the most melancholy place in the icy wilderness lit by its reflective flames. 'The Last Day of Mankind': 'I have taken the tragedy, which is divided into scenes of decaying humanity, on myself, so that it might be heard by the spirit who takes pity on the victims, even though he may have renounced for all time his connection with a human ear. May he receive the keynote of this age, the echo of my bloodstained madness, through which I share the guilt for these noises. May he accept it as redemption!'<sup>56</sup> This guilt for Benjamin always lead to Expressionism...

Unmistakable - and the Expressionists themselves proclaim it- is the influence of medieval miniatures on the world of their imagination. With these figures 'it is as if a falling sickness has overtaken them ... these backs are plied ... into terraces of human necks, of human shoulders that, really clenched in steep steps, lead less toward heaven than downward, to and even under the earth. What finally remained of Expressionism, in which an originally human impulse was converted almost without residue into a fashion, was the experience and the name of that nameless power to which

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<sup>53</sup> Ibid., p. 270.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid., p. 271.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid., p. 272.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid., pp. 273-274.

the backs of people bent: guilt.<sup>57</sup>

This Expressionistic impulse managed eventually to plunge a whole culture onto a steeped path of hellish defeatism after World War I. The expression Kraus mimicked in Benjamin's article, 'I share the guilt ...' culminated in a society's obsessive rehearsal of that guilt until the authenticity of guilty feeling around the nation's defeat was thoroughly obscured by the mounting inauthenticity of its fashionable representation, which was in and of itself precipitous. What follows on from the artistic movement is an equally disturbing one, art for art's sake, which is Benjamin's mind was only ever able to take place so long as 'poetry was made to shine only against a foil of hack journalism' seemingly making 'love stand out against perversion.'<sup>58</sup> It is perversion itself however that marks out the dark depths of this movement. Moreover it is where Kraus's task makes the transition to monstrosity. In so doing it contrives a unique place of culpability for Kraus as the chief satirist of the age.

As that profession goes, a satirist in the style of Kraus, 'never had firmer ground under his feet than amid a generation about to board tanks and put on gas masks, a mankind that has ruled out tears but not laughter. In him civilization prepares to survive, if it must, and communicates with him in the true mystery of satire, which consists of devouring the adversary.'<sup>59</sup> Benjamin proscribes that 'one would need to understand *Die Fackel* from the first number on, literally word for word, to predict that this aesthetically oriented journalism, without sacrificing or gaining a single motif, was destined to become the political prose of 1930.'<sup>60</sup> 'Thus drawing on the frontiers between the private and public spheres, which in 1789 was supposed to inaugurate freedom, became a mockery.'<sup>61</sup>

This aesthetically oriented journalism for Benjamin quite simply failed to address the dark threat posed by National Socialism, instead preferring to review the

<sup>57</sup> Ibid., p. 274.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid., p. 275.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid., p. 278.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid., p. 278.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid., pp. 278-279.

political situation as a dreamy hangover of social decadence, which soon would dissipate with the inauguration of policies for stricter public discipline. Ironically, the utter uselessness of the press industry's stance on Germany's social crisis was revealed 'in the deep nonsense of public discipline - whether it be of the upper ten thousand, a dance floor or a military state - the deep sense of private licentiousness opens a dreamy eye.'<sup>62</sup> Benjamin continues: 'And what as language might have been judicial strictness, renouncing discrimination, becomes cunning and evasion, obstruction and postponement...'<sup>63</sup> A counter-voice is needed. It arrives in the figure of Kraus who refuses to lull the public into a dozy, false assurance, to indulge it any further in the lazy passivity of its pondering indecision. 'The voice of Kraus speaks rather than sings this inner music, he tears aside the curtain, and suddenly reveals the interior of his cabinet of horrors.'<sup>64</sup> Something therein finally gets enacted. In so doing, Kraus forms a demonic affinity with another public observer and political commentator, William Shakespeare. 'Shakespeare had foreknowledge of everything'<sup>65</sup> that was to transpire historically as the legacy of the post-Enlightenment world, culminating allegorically in the figure of Kraus.

'Shakespeare portrays inhuman figures ... Nature would produce such a creature if she wished to create something befitting the world as your kind have fashioned, something worthy of it.'<sup>66</sup> Such a creature is Kraus. Such is a creature for whom Benjamin as his own Shakespeare will fashion that same year, 1931, into the Destructive Character for whom a job description can be found in the last two paragraphs of this essay starting from a notorious declaration from Loos 'If human work consists only of destruction, it is truly human, natural noble work'<sup>67</sup> and ending with the name of that nameless power: Angelus - the messenger who rushes forward crying aloud the news of the destruction of our present day. One of these prescient messengers of the day appeared in the figure of Martin Heidegger, who had in mind a

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<sup>62</sup> Ibid., p. 279.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid., p. 279.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid., p. 280.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid., p. 280.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid., p. 280.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid., p. 289.

particular target of destruction, nihilism. He was convinced that for nihilism to meet its timely demise another social actor would have to be called in, National Socialism; only it didn't seem to quite know its lines, or rather preferred to obscure them so as to prolong its auditory reception amongst the *cognoscenti*. This raises all sorts of issues of understanding and misunderstanding in these great times in which tacit compliance has become the characteristic goal of the majority of rhetorical campaigns, playing to increasingly selective audiences.

### **Am I Being understood?**

In *An Introduction to Metaphysics* (1935) Heidegger wrote controversially: 'The works that are being peddled about nowadays as the philosophy of National Socialism ... having nothing whatever to do with the inner truth and greatness of the movement (namely the encounter between technology and modern man)....'<sup>68</sup> This sentence has since fueled a great debate about whether the version delivered in 1935 already included the explanatory parenthesis that one can read in a version published in 1952. Even though the point is much debated, Heidegger has always maintained that the parenthesis appeared in the manuscript for the lecture but that, convinced of 'the proper understanding of my listeners,' he hadn't considered it advisable at the time to utter it.'<sup>69</sup>

Many Heideggerians have argued in the past that it is often the case that there are significant points at which Heidegger's arguments fail articulation and yet these points remain crucial to the interpretation of his words. In responding to the criticism however, Heidegger himself did not challenge the arguments against him on the grounds of the written word. Nor did he turn over the written manuscript for inspection, but instead he balanced his defence on a point of utterance, or more precisely non-utterance to an audience whom Heidegger assumes would have at that

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<sup>68</sup> Heidegger quoted in Ferry, Luc and Renaut, Alain, *Heidegger and Modernity*, (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1988) p. 55.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 56.

time properly understood him.

All of these rhetorical feints around the content of Heidegger's speech hold great significance for our understanding of how a tacit exploitation of *misunderstanding* may have played a key role in the success of Nazi rhetorical strategy as a larger whole. Goebbels explains the Nazi strategy regarding propaganda: 'The art of propaganda is to gather completely, confused, complex and composite ideas into a single catch slogan and then to instill this idea into the people as a whole.'<sup>70</sup> Thus propaganda is resolutely in cahoots with unintelligibility.

There is another slogan related to Nazism, and this one hits upon our keyword *Holocaust*, specifically on the moral call placed to surviving Jews after the Holocaust, 'Jews Remember,' which falls ironically into tandem with the slogan 'Germans Awake,' when articulated. Ostensibly there is a radically different political programme with regard to intent within each slogan. Yet their aims seem to violently converge on one point: that of absolute expectation. Absolute expectation is a form of expectation that can be subject to no rules of exception, and thus anticipates a situation of total compliance. Total compliance then becomes a requisite of belonging to and answering the call to the very category of Jew or German. Jews, by virtue of being Jews, must remember, Germans by virtue of being Germans, must awake. Those who refuse fail categorically. And yet they are doomed to fail at this mandatory interpolation based on the fact that each slogan is meant to incite this listener to perform an action that cannot logically progress. How can a German be called to awaken, when presumably he had to have been already awake to in order to hear this command? Similarly, how can a Jew be called to remember, when presumably he had to have been already alert to these events in order to heed this command? What each of these slogans are in fact doing are heralding an event that can never take place in present of our understanding. Consequently, it is either too early or too late to actually respond to their instructions.

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<sup>70</sup> Cadava, Eduardo, *Words of Light*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998) p. 143, footnote 68.

What these statements do then is create a linguistic possibility, where no actual possibility can enter and take course. This failure does not signal the defeat of this technique by any means. The terms of success are of a far different aim. These statements actually form an extremely powerful and effective means of installation of political technologies into the citizen. This installation is all the more powerful because it occurs at a site that can never actually, intelligibly take place, neither in the body nor the polis. Indeed, this apparatus can only materialise its success temporarily in the moment of articulation. This installation essentially is the symbolic law of language. As law it has no interior of its own, and thus no formal appearance. The law has never been seen, and perhaps this is why justice is blind. In any case, this linguistic system is fundamentally non-partisan; it is the tool of all discourses indiscriminately. It assembles itself anew with every speech act, (including silence and unintelligible speech) and creates exactly the subjective climate, of confusion, complexity and composition, that internally foster political gadgets like propaganda in the folds of the politicised citizen.

This linguistic operation is essentially a wet works, plugging into a body whose vital organs of information gathering exceed anything resembling an organic body, and repeatedly flow out of its orifices, the favoured one being the mouth, which must be remembered as an instrument of two-way access. The energy comes from the body itself, whose desire has it generating more sophisticated and conflicting machines of response at every hour. Every human after modernity in the West fancies himself a loud speaker. It must be noted that the technocratic overseer of Nazi propaganda, Goebbels, refers to this practice as an art and not a science. Moreover, Goebbels infers that the political use of language is artful, and not scientific, that it, like technology, cannot be controlled, but unlike technology its outcomes can be readily manipulated.

The Hedeiggerian notion of preparing an audience for an understanding that need not be articulated is similar in basis to waging a war without visibility. It doesn't

get you away from the system of language. Proper understanding on the part of the listeners in this case is to pick up on silent allusions, to detect an understanding in what defies the appreciation of the general polis. Thus there can be no democracy, no wide spread freedom, built into a linguistic force field that willfully obscures the encounter between man and technology, so that its allusion will only come to those whose hearing has become selective. Those are the same selective listeners who might well turn around and lend a blind eye to their political system's injustices and improprieties. It is no accident of speech that in 1938, In 'The Onto-theological Constitution of Metaphysics' Heidegger would place a call for 'the technological interpretation of our age.'<sup>71</sup> That is for one to accept modifications on what is called a speech act, to include that which is not directed nor completely uttered yet nonetheless sounds a call for our attention.

What determines success or failure in modernity is the capacity to respond to the call of technology. Heidegger's position has it that he saw France's failure and Germany's victory as representative of concrete examples of what separates out democracy from another political system less deaf to this call. The system capable of a less deafness of course is Nazism and its system of warfare. Benjamin provides supporting evidence of this goal of a less deafness in German military strategy after World War I: 'Now and then someone hears of something 'reassuring' such as the invention of a sensitive listening device that registers the whirl of propellers at great distances. A few months later a soundless airplane is invented.'<sup>72</sup> This ideal of soundlessness, is also followed up in Heidegger's philosophy when he advocates an internal correspondence between Nazism and modernity, systems that apparently communicate within the same body of understanding, thus skipping over the need for external articulation of their conjoined aims.

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<sup>71</sup> Heidegger quoted in Ferry, Luc and Renaut, Alain, *Heidegger and Modernity*, (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1988) p. 56.

<sup>72</sup> Benjamin, Walter, 'Theories of German Fascism,' *Selected Writings Volume 2 1927-1934*, Trans. Rodney Livingstone and Others, Eds. Michael W. Jennings, Howard Eliand, and Gary Smith, (London: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1999), p. 313.

One thing that had to be articulated still in Heidegger's mind, despite this circuit of knowing, (Cartesian internal metaphysics) was a third term that would distance Germany from the influences of, on one hand, Russian Communism and the other American Liberalism. The term of course that cried out within his thinking, was National Socialism. It too had to come a long distance, to find its authority to raise its political voice, all the way back to the essence of the German race. This is a race built for a highly mechanised outcome, or using a favourite of Heidegger's phrases, "destiny." This destiny, however, appears to be strangely hushed in marking its arrival. Even Junger's young volunteer regimes of WWI seem to be muttering their diehard determination under their breath, "For Germany," as they charge from the trenches. It would seem they are lacking not in resolve, so much as a will to express it. This despite this self-assertion seems to be a key rectoral trope coming out of Germany's defeat in WWI and the call to join one's resolve with the rising party of National Socialism.

Heidegger, in his rectoral address of 1933, 'The Self-Assertion of the German University,' refers to the great necessity for self-assertion amongst the German people, and yet in the same breath calls for absolute restraint in freely exercising one's opinion. Moreover, throughout this speech, he routinely advocates deeds over words. Heidegger goes to great lengths to stress the importance of civilian and military forces, silently carrying out one's duty to the Volk, and therein forging the greatest possible loyalties to the emergent community of National Socialism. Furthermore, Heidegger writes curiously, 'Each individual has *a part* in deciding this, even if, and precisely if, he seeks to evade this decision.'<sup>73</sup> In other words, whilst every individual might potentially have a say, it is better for everyone, if one evades the task of speaking out and instead directs one's self-determination elsewhere to aid the movement. If it were left up to Heidegger alone, he would wish to let destiny speak through the Volk, as opposed to having the Volk speak for itself, a self whom it has ceased to know and recognise, as it is so far away from the essence of its Being.

<sup>73</sup> Heidegger, Martin, 'The Self-Assertion of the German University' Richard Wolin, ed. *The Heidegger Controversy*, (Cambridge, Mass.: The MIT Press, 1993) p. 38.

In the interview 'Only a God Can Save Us' Heidegger is quoted as having said in the fall of 1933, 'Do not let doctrines and ideas be the rules of your Being. The Furher himself and he alone is the present and future of German reality and its rule.'<sup>74</sup> When he is confronted with this quote by his interviewers, Heidegger maintains that 'These sentences were not found in the rectoral address, but only in the local *Freiburg Students Newspaper*, at the beginning of the 1933-1934 winter semester. When I took over the rectorship it was clear I would not see it through without some compromises...even by 1934 I would no longer write such things.'<sup>75</sup> Heidegger does not add a further comment however, regarding his willingness to still make such statements, after 1934. Whether he had or not still remains largely a matter of speculation, interpretation and hearsay. In terms of asserting a full understanding, Heidegger would only allow the final sentence of his rectoral address to carry out that rarely fulfilled task in his writing: 'We can only fully understand the glory and greatness of this new beginning, however, if we carry within ourselves the deep and broad thoughtfulness upon which the ancient wisdom of the Greeks drew in uttering the words:... "All that is great stands in the storm,"'<sup>76</sup> Thus understanding is placed within the category of a private affair, its utterance reserved strictly for internal use only, resulting in everyman possessing a strong resolution from within.

Here we witness the first stirrings of Heidegger's assertion of a "private National Socialism,"<sup>77</sup> which would later commence in his opinion, into a full fledged 'confrontation with National Socialism,'<sup>78</sup> during the summer semester of 1937, when Heidegger began his series of lectures on Nietzsche. Heidegger's idea of keeping a private form of National Socialism is evident as early as 1933, for all who care to hear it in his inaugural speech as rector, and indeed it signals an early split with the official

<sup>74</sup> Heidegger, Martin, 'Only A God can Save Us,' Richard Wolin, ed. *The Heidegger Controversy*, (Cambridge, Mass.: The MIT Press, 1993), p. 96.

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 96.

<sup>76</sup> Heidegger, Martin, 'The Self-Assertion of the German University' Richard Wolin, ed. *The Heidegger Controversy*, (Cambridge, Mass.: The MIT Press, 1993), pp. 38-39.

<sup>77</sup> Ronell, Avital, *The Telephone Book*, (London: University of Nebraska Press, 1989), p. 19.

<sup>78</sup> p. 103.

populist party line. A line which appeared at least, to encourage Germans to feel that their individual, contributing voices, (raised of course in party solidarity), were an outstanding virtue of the National Socialist revolution to come. It was envisaged to the public, that each voice would contribute to a chorus of workers harmonised to the din of a technological will, impeccably orchestrated under the most powerful and booming voice of all, that of the Führer himself.

### **Artful Dodging.**

For Benjamin this call to solidarity was German fascism's most potent strategy, giving every citizen the assurance, at least in theory, that he could speak out, and that his individual voice mattered. Marxism in contrast told every man that his voice was no greater or lesser than any other, thereby signaling a canceling out of his individual influence. Marxism's inability to select for voices in its vast political strata meant that it would have no way of structuring foreign political influences. In the end this blundering discursive inefficiency is left with no more recourse than to respond to Fascism: see the Hitler-Stalin pact. It is as if Marxism had been slumbering all along, whilst Fascism was getting on with the business of imperial warfare on one hand, and on the other a most extraordinary campaign of aesthetic and rhetorical control. Given that Fascism has such a lead on Marxism, as far as tactical, vocal aestheticism went, it became ironically in Benjamin's best interest to dismantle the Führer's switchboard using the Führer's tools. It was widely known to his friends and colleagues that he was reading Klages and Schmitt alongside Marx in the late 1930s. Thereby, when given Adorno's outmoded rhetorical instructions, Benjamin's tendency is to switch the contours of the game, and to willfully redirect these instructions onwards toward a borderline of 'deceptive reception;' where they might finally head up the enemy around his own lines of transmission. Firstly, though, Benjamin had to draw up his own counter-instruction manual to the traditional Marxist copy. He did so by borrowing some pages out of Heidegger's 1935 work, 'An Introduction to Metaphysics.'

There are systemic overlaps between Benjamin and Heidegger all the time which call for an awareness on the part of the listener. Whereas Heidegger might choose to go the way of evacuating categories by denying them truth and authenticity, Benjamin goes the way of overvaluing categories insofar as he is willing to overpredict the environmental impact these systems have on the human condition. This Kantian critique gives us a read out on today's war, with its economic climate instability hinged on excessive technology, concentrated wealth and short-term planning.

What is being unnaturally stimulated in this economic model is a reliance on the property system. Benjamin is suggesting political systems such as Capitalism and Fascism that constantly overvalue their products of technology create an unnatural need for their continued progress and proliferation. If there is a devaluation of the property, such is meant to ideally occur under Marxism, then the excesses of productive desire, created as a byproduct of any technology, are less likely to promote violent means to redistribute wealth. 'Human materials' under these regimes are conspicuously manufactured, in such a way that there is always an excessive workforce. This built in excess creates a system of appearance whereby unemployment is linked to inutility, and where the class system is highlighted as a 'natural' social formation.

Benjamin is arguing that this overgrowth of goods and consumers exists as nothing short of a denial of the natural order that tends toward balance, and not disharmony and excess. Society's troubles come therefore not as a signal of a natural error, but as one of human ignorance to utilise technical means toward creating an effective balance of humanity with nature. Instead, technology is directed toward an almost maniacal pattern of destruction and clearing way. That this happens so frequently and indiscriminately in Western nations attests to a profound denigration of the aura. The aura, whose very nature demands an economy of esteem, is forced, through the proliferation of a perpetual asetheticisation of war, to shatter under the coveted sign of invisibility. The status of visibility borders on the cultish by the late

twentieth Century, ironically to much the same extent as the aura once did prior in the 17th Century.

If the natural utilization of productive forces is impeded by the property system, the increase in technical devices, in speed, and in the sources of energy will press for an unnatural utilization, and this is found in war. Imperialist war is a rebellion of technology which collects in the form of 'human material,' the claims to which society has denied its natural material. Instead of draining rivers, society directs its human stream into a bed of trenches; instead of dropping seeds from airplanes, it drops incendiary bombs over cities; and through gas warfare the aura is abolished in a new way.<sup>79</sup>

The broadcast of that fact in Benjamin's remarks, is not so very different from Heidegger's environmental report against the 'the subjugating demand' by which the hydroelectric plants sets the Rhine to supply its hydraulic pressure, which then sets the turbines turning...<sup>80</sup> By the 1960s Heidegger will be turned onto the new meteorological technology, which have the potential to monitor earth's climates from space. The atomic age signaling the nuclear age, as something within the airstream of progress.

Heidegger will use this upgrade of technology to once again launch his campaign for National Socialism: In the 'atomic age' as in the civilization of consumption,' the modern era is consistently characterized by humanity's desire to have the totality of beings within reach and to acquire the greatest possible power over this totality through the control of all natural energies, including those of destruction: this will to 'make completely providable everything that is and can be,' and this reduction of the real to an 'inventory' available for 'using up' define the technological relation to the world, 'this unrestrained and complete technicalization of man and of

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<sup>79</sup> Benjamin, Walter, 'Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction' *Illuminations*, Trans. Harry Zohn, Intro. Hannah Arendt, (New York: Fontana Press, 1969), p. 235.

<sup>80</sup> Heidegger, Martin, 'The Question Concerning Technology,' *The Question Concerning Technology and Other Essays*, Trans., and Intro. William Lovitt, (London: HarperTorch Books:1969), p. 12.

the world which makes modern man 'the functionary of technology.'<sup>81</sup> Natural energies then in Heidegger's view, are highly destructive, as opposed to Benjamin's view of them as highly productive; so much so as to be productively manipulative to the point of excess. Destruction under the rubric of metaphysics it seems, for Heidegger is the main economic provider for the world's needs. Man becomes therein a functionary to a system that never allows him to cut his losses by any other means than war. War becomes the only sanctioned means of checking over-production and effectively destroying what exceeds inventory i.e., the Real, and replacing its capital with the smaller r of massive reduction. Technology itself then becomes a functionary of destructive energies far and away more efficiently than modern man, insofar as technology has no seeming desire to will itself, whereas man has desires that exceed his will. Nietzsche is due to arrive in the production plant at a later stage in our discussion, for a detailed demonstration of this pseudo-scientific principal. For now, though, its time to head back to the research and development laboratory for a quick science lesson.

### **The Science of War.**

Whilst, Heidegger never ceased to call for thinking of technology on the basis of its essence...' <sup>82</sup> Benjamin never ceased to call for a thinking of technology on the basis of its formulation. This formula for Benjamin had two distinct, though not discrete elements, a mix of politics and technology. Heidegger was also massively concerned with this the subtleties of this combination. The difference in their approach came out of Heidegger's wish to distill the essentials of this formulation, whereas Benjamin wished to determine the elements as a way of screwing around with the efficacy of these formulations. Benjamin argues:

War and only war can set a goal for mass movements on the largest scale

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<sup>81</sup> Heidegger quoted in Ferry, Luc and Renaut, Alain, *Heidegger and Modernity*, (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1988) p. 57.

<sup>82</sup> Heidegger, Martin, 'The Question Concerning Technology,' *The Question Concerning Technology and Other Essays*, Trans., and Intro. William Lovitt, (London: HarperTorch Books:1969), p. 6.

while respecting the traditional property system. This is the political formula for the situation. The technological formula may be stated as follows: Only war makes it possible to mobilize all of today's technical resources while maintaining the property system. It goes without saying that the Fascist apotheosis of war does not employ such arguments.<sup>83</sup>

It seems then that Fascism is concealing the lack of distribution in some of its liquid assets. It is at once calling for the property rights of the German race to the land and to the blood, while remaining silent on the fact that a class system has already distributed that wealth in advance of the outcomes of warfare. This had been accomplished through the long-standing installation of the traditional property system in Germany, heretofore known as TPS. On the technological front it must dodge the fact that TPS's holdings are stable regardless of technological advancement and proliferation, in the civilian and military sphere. Wealth will always be determined far more by long-term holdings, than recent acquisitions. It may seem to the listener that this has turned into a talk about economics and not politics. Such is the case, because after World War I war can only function on a circuit of politics by other means. These means, along with the high cost of technology, war usually ends up intersecting with an economic track. It is crucial to bare in mind, that such tracks operate on an increasingly complex system of switch points. Often with other points of entry than what was initially imagined. Hence they seldom get directly linked in with Fascist arguments. There are emergent economic terrains of proto-fascism as early as 1919 in Germany. Indeed, Benjamin appears ready to give us a spreadsheet on their expansion and growth by 1925, when he invites us on his *Tour of German Inflation* in *One-Way Street*. This volume is arguably a technical achievement in its own right, a mechanism built for demonstrating the general levels of political fragmentation the average Berliner experienced in the inter-war inflationary period. What is precisely inflated in this economy of the disenfranchised citizen is expression in its commodified form.

### **Reading Inflation.**

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<sup>83</sup> Benjamin, Walter, "Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," *Illuminations*, Trans. Harry Zohn, Intro. Hannah Arendt, (New York: Fontana Press, 1969), p. 234.

The formal title of this section in *One-Way Street* on German inflation is 'Imperial Panorama,' and indeed Benjamin's analysis lends a wide-view of a German society in which wartime inflation has signaled a fall of the bourgeoisie. This class in particular, by the later 1920s, seems to have fallen into a sort of distorted relief; one that resembles nothing so much as an Otto Dix painting. This marketing-image of decadence has made its way from the aesthetic extremes of the Expressionist avant-garde into the stance of the average citizen; one who stands idly by, while the polis crumbles around him. He sees himself as nowhere in this scene of rapid social disintegration, and yet is effected by its every movement and fluctuation. He sees Berlin's destruction as inevitable, and yet does not so much as stir as the rumble piles around him. All the while he is seen clutching his property entitlements so as to redress his wounds.

Benjamin begins his assault on this figure with the following character deconstruction:

In the stock phraseology...of the German bourgeois...referring to the impending catastrophe...things 'can't go on like this... The helpless fixation on notions of security and property... keeps the average citizen from perceiving the quite remarkable stabilities of an entirely new kind that underlie the present situation. Because of the relative stabilization of the prewar years benefited him, he feels compelled to regard any state that dispossesses him as unstable. But stable conditions need by no means be pleasant conditions, and even before the war there were strata for which stabilized conditions amounted to stabilized wretchedness....<sup>84</sup>

Two motifs stand out here: one of decline, the other of rescue. Decline is what is anticipated, whereas rescue is what is denied. What is invisible in this scene, yet droning in the background, is the strata of poverty, which never benefited nor lost as a result of the war, but rather was kept at a stable level of destitution throughout. It is then only the bourgeois who are presently feeling the ground buckle beneath their feet. The poor by implication have never had the luxury of sensing foundations at any

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<sup>84</sup> Benjamin, Walter, 'One Way Street,' *One Way Street and Other Writings*, Trans. Edmund Jephcott and Kingsley Shorter, Intro. Susan Sontag, (London: Verso, 1979), p. 54.

historical moment. These are the population who have made a virtue out of instability, out of moving onwards, whereas the bourgeois have always relied on societal entrenchments to keep them rooted in place. It is the bourgeois who have territory to defend, losses to amass. It is the bourgeois who make of property a war.

Benjamin refers to these as the 'People in the national communities of Central Europe.'<sup>85</sup> These are people who according to Benjamin,

... live like the inhabitants of an encircled town whose provisions and gunpowder are running out and for whom deliverance is...scarcely to be expected-a case of which surrender, perhaps unconditioned should be most seriously considered. But the silent, invisible power that Central Europe feels its opposing does not negotiate. Nothing therefore remains but...the perpetual expectation of the final onslaught, on nothing except the extraordinary event in which alone salvation now lies...for the suffering of individuals as of communities there is only one limit beyond which things can not go: annihilation.<sup>86</sup>

Thus the energies put into entrenching oneself behind one's property and one's goods, ultimately lead to a kind of mass paranoia of the bourgeoisie. This paranoia which started as an affect of the TPS, spreads like wildfire, creating what amounts to a mass hysteria around defense. Defense then builds upon itself to the point where its only reassurance can be gotten through extraordinary conflict with the outside and unseen forces which it believes relentlessly threaten its apparent stability. Things of course can and will go on like this, with the war machine building up and spending its resources, with the only alternative being annihilation. Mass annihilation being the only provision made available in modernity that no one seemingly would dare to profit from or accumulate in a civilized Europe. 'Annihilation,' the final word on the statement 'things cannot go on like this' ultimately hits upon the Holocaust as its case for exception; its exceptional moment of foreclosure. Thus its expectation creates not an end to the reality of wartime human economies, but its harrowing escalation in the realisation that 'Things can go beyond this,' as the frontier of paranoia and defense

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<sup>85</sup> Ibid., p. 54.

<sup>86</sup> Ibid., pp. 54-55.

looms even greater in the future. Benjamin indicts the 'decay of the intellect,'<sup>87</sup> as the sole reason that this statement cannot revert back to its true question: the question concerning technology and its perpetual imbalance with the state of nature. That society can only see this on self-reflective terms, that is to say as a social grievance alone, bespeaks of a nihilism that has afflicted 'the entire German bourgeoisie.'<sup>88</sup> In order to get at this maligned question again, things must be opened, further than they have been before, airing out philosophically speaking, to extend beyond metaphysical standpoints to much greater phenomenological sphere than the human subject standing alone. Making a distance from that subject will provide the contiguity needed to lay the groundwork for another kind of understanding to broach the social encounter, and therein interpenetrate the social world with its natural surroundings. Before that can happen thought, a lot of obscurity will have to be breached and mankind might indeed have to brace for its darkest hour; a nightmarish comeuppance for its utter failure of vision and fortitude in seeing this battle gathering on the veritable horizon line of what is called thinking.

### **The Will to Plan.**

Where did the philosophical blueprint for 'the question concerning technology' come from to begin with? To answer this question it might be helpful to bare in mind Benjamin's concept of origin as 'not intended to describe the process by which the existent came into being, but rather to describe that which emerges from the process of becoming and disappearance.'<sup>89</sup> With that intention in mind it is possible to deconstruct the question from a standpoint outside of Heidegger's metaphysics, something which essentially sounds out technology-as-co-constitutive-of-being. Following Benjamin's site map, the origin of technology is ultimately one distanced from present reality. As a phenomenon it is unassertively located somewhere beyond

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<sup>87</sup> Ibid., p. 54.

<sup>88</sup> Ibid., p. 55.

<sup>89</sup> Benjamin, Walter, 'Epistemo-Critical Prologue,' *Origin of the German Tragic Drama*, Trans. John Osborne, (London: NLB, 1977), p. 45.

the reality of our timely existence (one doesn't always know where) and in the shadowy regions of potential disappearance within our cultural-historical imagination. Therefore it is not surprising that the question concerning technology originally came out of Kant's nightmare.

The trajectory of the existent technology of Being as a phenomenon starts with Kant's disturbing, unwilling insight, and is picked up again in Heidegger's dark technologising of the will, via Nietzsche's intermediate will to retire an old model man through a process of unequivocal affirmation of the will.

Kant's interpretation of *I think as I want* and particularly his doctrine of the autonomy of the *will* set the stage for a technological interpretation of the world. As an essential link in the process of the technologizing of the real, 'the autonomy of the will,' as Kant understood it, could in fact be separated from the ultimate absoluting of the will by a still indispensable mediation: the Nietzschean theory of the will to power. This will to power being 'the second to the last stage of the process.'<sup>90</sup>

With the Nietzschean will to power, an image of the will looms forth that seems to want something other than itself. According to an interpretation found in Heidegger's lectures on Nietzsche starting in 1936, it actually wants more power (more domination) merely the better to test itself indefinitely as the will mastering the real. In short, 'the being of the will to power can only be understood as the will to will.'<sup>91</sup> The will to will however does not necessarily bring upon itself freedom in the accumulation of power. Indeed, for Heidegger this excessive want on the part of the will ultimately joins up with a desire for control, a self-imposed totality of drive, thrownness as an authentic purpose to being.

What Heidegger imagines of the will in Nietzsche now becomes in effect a manifesto, of technology for technology's sake, one that is not so very different sounding to the call of *art pour l'art*:

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<sup>90</sup> Heidegger quoted in Ferry, Luc and Renaut, Alain, *Heidegger and Modernity*, (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1988) p. 59.

<sup>91</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 58-59.

the modern 'mechanical economy,'... requires a new humanity...It is not enough to possess tanks, airplanes, and radio; nor is it enough to have individuals available who are capable of manipulating engines and instruments of this kind; it is not enough even that men should be able to master technology as if it were something inherently neutral, beyond profit and loss, gains and damages, construction and destruction... a humanity is needed that will be thoroughly conformable to the basic and singular essence of modern technology and its metaphysical truth...a humanity that will allow itself to be totally dominated by the essence of technology...<sup>92</sup>

Heidegger's comments suggest a proto-type of man, which fully becomes part of the 'mechanical economy.'<sup>93</sup> The commodity of greatest value to fascist rhetoric again emerges as the body. No other weaponry is as readily controlled as it potentially could be given some crucial modifications. The most significant of those being the total compromise of the individual will to the technology good. Assuming here that technology is always a series of positive developments; which of course with fascism was not the case. Heidegger's opinion on the failure of the Nazis to be good engineers of totality will be discussed further on in this section. However, before turning to Nazi-trained military bodies, one has to deal with the civilian Heidegger imagined on the ground, well in advance of Nazi troops. These are the intelligentsia of the German University.

In the Rectoral Address of 1933, Heidegger makes his first attempt to train them up when he stigmatizes the idea of freedom. He criticizes the Academy directly on this point, asserting that freedom when understood in the university as 'academic freedom,' confuses true freedom with the simple 'freedom of concern, as well as with the arbitrariness of intentions and inclinations.'<sup>94</sup> He contrasts it with what he calls 'the highest freedom,' 'to give law to oneself'; or better, he stresses that in the act of 'self-assertion' as 'authentic autonomy,' whether by the university or by the people, 'we ... will ourselves.'<sup>95</sup> Is this not the same argument Heidegger is making above for

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<sup>92</sup> Ibid., p. 63.

<sup>93</sup> Ibid., p. 63.

<sup>94</sup> Ibid., p. 62.

<sup>95</sup> Ibid., p. 62.

humans in general, that to exceed the will to be free, one must actually concede to a totality of control? That this discourse remains rooted in the body of the individual is evidenced by Heidegger's exhortation that the highest forms of domination can only be carried off through the means of 'self-control.' Authentic autonomy then becomes associated not with the greatest conditions of liberty, but instead with permitting oneself to submit to the will of group. In this instance it is the university, or the people, with whom one might collectively will himself, in order for an efficient means of control to take hold. Thus what Heidegger is attempting to create is a discursive machine of the university, in which each scholar plays his part in the running off its ideas in timed conformity with a technological order.

National Socialism failed in a particular way that joins up with and exploits Heidegger's 'self-care' programmatic. According to Heidegger, the Nazis failed by never being able to reach a progressive stage of appreciation on what was to be recognised as the posthuman. Instead, they choose to tactically put modernity's human body to the test of its extremes. This of course did not happen with bourgeois German bodies, which were far too precious to submit to such harm, but those of another group, a group which could be successful marketed as a having disposable bodies, the bourgeois Jews. The wealth and property of this group could be portrayed as excessive, and therefore a strain on the ailing inter-war economy. Through such rhetoric they could then be transferred to an area of political use dominated by technology, and strategically placed into areas of potential developmental gain such as motorized food production and biomedical trial. Which are the sorts of way Jews were utilized in the Holocaust - as a means of product testing for Nazi ideologies. More directly, however, they were used as the guinea pigs to test the limit of the body against the force of technology.

Unfit systems of thought, in a way similar to unfit bodies in a much later stage of National Socialism, will have to be modified through bold thinking and technological innovation. National Socialism seems to be emphasizing completion in

this scenario, as something modernity is calling out for, and indeed through the militarism that will come out of National Socialism it got its wish for a strategic tactic of infinite preparedness. This rhetoric around preparedness, or what the Nazis preferred to refer to as 'awakeness' or 'alertness,' is foregrounded by the fact that a vigilance towards preparedness, and indeed the necessity to move on from one preparatory phase to the next, (as it was suggested by Nietzsche) founds the very justification for a move toward the fascist stage of willing; fascism as the politic most aware of the need for societal progress at the level of the will. This is something that is fact post-political insofar as the old politics of modernity dealt on the level of individual will, and not with its excesses. The Nazis will argue that these excesses mirror the course of technology insofar as technology relies on excess to accomplish its objectives. Essentially what National Socialism is, according to this logic, is nothing less than a post-politics running the operations of a post-human community project. The one that would happen post-World War II, the one which in fact has never been put down in the West and still remains on the planning board for how to cope with the postmodern condition. Eerily a great deal of this planning is arriving via the university, as Heidegger predicted qua Nietzsche, as the next stage of post-developments in a technologically defined global space, in other words a casting of the will of the West toward non-development. A non-development which takes hold in the same moment as the flooding of the world market with military r and d leftovers, happily snatched up by the civilian core as accessories of freedom, for example: AI, the internet and mobile telephones.

According to Heidegger the greatest concern of the Nazi movement was helping 'man as such achieve a satisfactory relation to the essence of technicity.'<sup>96</sup> In his opinion, the Nazis while going in that direction, were people who 'were far too poorly equipped for thought to arrive at a really explicit relation to what was happening today and what had been underway for the past three hundred years. The Nazi goal of 'fashioning a 'free relation to the technological world,' a relation capable of

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<sup>96</sup> Ibid., p. 67.

counteracting 'Americanism,' i.e., the flooding of products of technology all over the earth. According to Heidegger's analysis after the war, this trend has turned the earth into 'a world market.'<sup>97</sup> Heidegger is quick to add, however, that what poses the threat is of course less 'American' as such now that the 'American flood' expresses 'the inexperienced nature of technology.'<sup>98</sup> One is left to wonder if technology has finally moved on into its adolescent stage with the dawn of digitisation, bringing with it the unprecedented capability of instantaneous broadcast of war around the globe. A broadcast service which is largely and pointedly dominated by the Americans, begging the question which parts of postmodernity are embedded with the fall out of a fascist technological operating system?<sup>99</sup> Ronell offers that 'television was canceled out of the secret service of facisoid transfixion,' and therein television was only put back on the air as a 'mass invasion' tool after the Second World War.

...TV is not so much the beginning of something new, but instead the residue of an unassimilable history. Television is linked crucially to the engima of survival. It inhabits the contiguous neighbourhoods of broken experience and rerouted memory. Refusing in its discourse and values to record, but preferring instead to play out myths of liveness, living colour and being there, television will have produced a counterphobic perspective to an interrupted history.<sup>100</sup>

Television allowed bare life to get on with the programme by other means than history. It joined forces with life in attempt to come to some sort of reconciliation with postwar survival. Television helped life cope with a certain illuctable violence that seemed to pass through every given time zone, every registered time slot, every situated memory no matter how much you played it out, or in as many variations. One couldn't really hope any longer to shake that chord of violence, which like some staggering umbilicus connecting humanity to everything it helped produce along the way. Television taught people how to stop wanting to always record stuff and instead pointed the way postculturally to just being there - on - so that every interruption of

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<sup>97</sup> Ibid., p. 67.

<sup>98</sup> Ibid., p. 67.

<sup>99</sup> See Ronell's argument, in Avital Ronell, 'Trauma TV: Twelve Steps Beyond the Pleasure Principle,' *Finitude's Score*, (London: University of Nebraska Press, 1994).

<sup>100</sup> Ibid., p. 308.

history somehow wins points for the other side, for those who no longer see such interference as hostile, but rather as a curious flicker from an remote, obsolete mode of biopolitical transmission.

Walter Benjamin theorised the difference between *uberleben* and *fortleben*, surviving and living on. Television plays out the tensions between these modalities of being by producing narratives that compulsively turn around crime. These narratives, travelling between real and fictive reference, allow for no loose ends but suture and resolve the enigmas they name. Television produces corpses that need not be mourned because, in part, of the persistence of surviving that is shown. Still, television itself is cut up, seriated, commercial broken, so that its heterogeneous corpus can let something other than itself leak out.<sup>101</sup>

What is the relationship between surviving and living on as it relates to the crime scene of the death of God, who in Nietzsche's autopsy notes reads as having been murdered by mankind and yet obviously hasn't been according to Heidegger's criticism formally reconciled?<sup>102</sup> Could it be that television has acted as a postevent accomplice, compelled to rerun the death of God season after season, not in hopes of reaching some solace, but rather so as to establish a parallel infinity to the corpses it itself manufactures. Television revels in producing corpses who like the New Testament God, Jesus Christ, die only to return - if not in prime time like some new Messiah, at least perennially reappear thanks to syndication. Television gives life to such phenomena not by depleting off its own stores, but rather from borrowing without interest from the various redigested materials that pass through its continuity. It borrowed this trick from posthuman life which did away with its organicity in favour of network affiliation, and digital satellite capability. The body like television now operates from a distance, working as a conglomerate of different operational needs. There is a down side to all this incidental, disinterested merger, this cold flow of survival streaming through, living on, on a continuous basis: our promised technobody future. We forget the thing that was so important in the first place: bare life, a life without politics at the helm, life without a sales pitch attached. Now all life is about tradeoffs and tradeins, upgrades and first classes, and above all

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<sup>101</sup> Ibid., p. 308.

<sup>102</sup> Again pace Ronell, Ibid., p. 308.

filling in the place where all those organs used to rest.

...the historical event we call the death of God is inscribed within the last metaphysical spasm of our history as it continues to be interrogated by the question concerning technology. The event of the death of God...is circuited through much of technology... In an era of constitutive opaqueness - there is no transcendental light shining upon us; we dwell in the shadows of mediation and withdrawal; there will be no revelation, can be no manifestation as such -things have to be tuned in, adjusted, subjected to double takes and are dominated by amnesia. Without recourse to any dialect of incarnation, something however beams through, as though interruption itself were the thing to watch. <sup>103</sup>

Its in choosing to focus on that interruption, that hiatus between events, that we rejoin with our divinity as humans; each a product of uniquely stored singularities gleaned from the residue of events. By going through technology, as opposed to being subsumed under its heading as something less evolved, by allowing ourselves to become more austere, more selective in our styles of receptivity, by finally accepting a life lived under the haze of opacity, a means can be found with which to fine tune an appreciation of what lives beyond culture. That is to say beyond culture as it has so far existed more often than not, as an endurance test, rather than a potential test. By accepting that things out last people in this century, something fundamentally will shift. We do not yet know what a body can do. We do not yet know the effect repetition and amnesia will have on bodies without organs, on thinking when it no longer is coming out of a substantive location. What humanity is faced with today is life flickering under the shock of its proliferation without the guarantee of furthered persistence. Meanwhile the spectre of total war never seems to take a day off.

### What is Called War?

The chapter began by alluding to Clausewitz's formula: 'War is the continuation of politics by other means.'<sup>104</sup> The question is altered after World War II when the ground

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<sup>103</sup> Ibid., p. 308.

<sup>104</sup> Deleuze, Gilles and Guattari, Felix, *A Thousand Plateaus*, Trans. and Foreword by Brian Massumi, (London: Athlone Pres, 1988) , p. 419.

of political technology shifts in such a way that our focus is no longer on the realization of war, but on the appropriation of the war machine.<sup>105</sup> The concept of the war machine of course belongs to Deleuze and Guattari, who argue that 'It is at the same time the State apparatus *appropriates* the war machine, subordinates it to its 'political' *aims*, and gives war its direct *object*.'<sup>106</sup> Now that Fascism has ostensibly exited from the stage of war-making, Capitalism is free to take up the production slack. Indeed, the factors that make State war total war continue to be linked with political economies. The particular combination of factors adopted by Capitalism according to Deleuze and Guattari, are 'an investment of constant capital in equipment, industry and the war economy, and the investment of variable capital in the population in its physical and mental aspects (both as warmaker and victim of war). Total war is not only the war of annihilation but when annihilation takes as its 'center' not only the enemy army, or the enemy State, but the entire population and its economy.'<sup>107</sup>

As for Fascism its lurks elsewhere in the machinery of a worldwide war machine, which directs war as 'an unlimited movement with no other aim than itself'<sup>108</sup> which follows a similar doctrine to Heidegger's spin on Nietzsche with the will to will programme. Secondly, there involves a 'third stage' of this will that is post-Fascist, which ironically becomes 'a war machine which takes peace as its object directly, as the peace of Terror or Survival.'<sup>109</sup> Again Kant's nightmare enters into our equation of war bringing with it Heidegger's formulation of a disturbing joining of the will to technology, whereupon the will has as it's only aim the surpassing of its self. The dream of perpetual peace, according to Deleuze and Guattari's calculation falls nowhere short of surpassing 'total war itself, toward forming a peace which is more terrifying still.'<sup>110</sup> The war machine reforms a smooth space that now claims to control, to surround the entire earth. The statement echoes Heidegger's assumption that a totalising technology would ultimately require a totalising control. This is the point at

<sup>105</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 420.

<sup>106</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 420.

<sup>107</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 421.

<sup>108</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 421.

<sup>109</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 421.

<sup>110</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 421.

which Clausewitz's formula is effectively reversed; entitling one to say that politics is a continuation of war by other means. It is not enough to invert the order of the words as if they could be spoken in either direction; it is necessary to follow the real movement at the conclusion of which the States, having appropriated the war machine, and having adapted it to their aims, reimpart a war machine that takes charge of that aim, appropriates the States, and assumes increasingly wider political functions.

Deleuze and Guattari contend that it is the earth itself which resists the war machine. Therein they argue that it 'asserts its own powers of deterritorialization, its lines of flight, its smooth spaces that live and blaze their way for a new earth.'<sup>111</sup> They also say that the earth is in a constant process of reterritorialization. In this way, the earth's reterritorialization is largely heralded not by war, but by information technologies. Such technology however, does not always take on the most ostensibly sophisticated forms. Something as simple as the publication of a newspaper article, idle chat on the internet, a telephone call, could be seen as an agent of reterritorialization across thought networks. Such an event could spark off a revolution, even a micro-war on the surface of rhetorically conflicted areas.

### **Fascist-Post-Script.**

There is one last war to be waged before we close our arguments up, that is of course Paul de Man's war. A war whose ground we have up until now failed to cover, failed on some level to enclose into a network of what Avital Ronell will sub-categorise as 'The Hook up: Stupidity, Irony, Mechanicity and Testing.'<sup>112</sup> What I will be hooking up to is Ronell's expose on de Man insofar as it is exposing him literally as the technician of deconstruction. The subheading reads 'he would not have claimed, as did Heidegger to friends, that his greatest accomplishment was the thinking of

<sup>111</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 423.

<sup>112</sup> Ronell, Avital, *Stupidity*, (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2002), p. 97.

technology. Nonetheless, de Man's work is essentially engaged with and inflected by the question concerning technology.<sup>113</sup> How de Man earned his title is very much through 'his persistent reliance on the unanalyzable, disruptive power of the text, which devolves from the technicity of a power failure.'<sup>114</sup> Such a textual loyalty made de Man a unique character, one who suffered profoundly, and on more than one occasion, for the grammar of his age.

What does it mean to take on the grammar of an age? To take its pain as the starting point for a series of performative actions? To profit from a silent admission of failure, one that nonetheless is able to yield revenue and power through an assemblage of trusts patched together out of 'indeterminacy and aberration?' These are some of the questions Paul de Man must ask himself when taking on the violent inflections bound up with the question concerning technology. Not only that he must be seen to be taking them onto such a degree that they vibrate, resonate with a 'stupefying repetitiveness'<sup>115</sup> - the very repetitiveness demanded by all mechanicity and cognitive stupor it necessarily spreads.

Then again this is not an act of transcendence by any means. The toing and froing, 'the shuttling'<sup>116</sup> as Avital Ronell calls it, that de Man is noted for having performed against the grain of the written word seems to have evaded what we have come to understand as 'our age of technological dominon.'<sup>117</sup> Of de Man Ronell writes: 'De Man converted the logic of parabasis into a technological insight, marking amongst other things, the priority of the values of disruption and interference over those of historically established continuity...'<sup>118</sup> This is a logic that falls alongside the path of immanence, it is one that makes of technology an emerging constellation of potential affects. It therefore resists making the history of technology into a series of historically progressive events. This pathway toward understand technology requires a

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<sup>113</sup> Ibid., p. 97.

<sup>114</sup> Ibid., p. 97.

<sup>115</sup> Ibid., p. 98.

<sup>116</sup> Ibid., p. 97.

<sup>117</sup> Ibid., p. 97.

<sup>118</sup> Ibid., p. 97.

willingness to unhinge the organicity of the process of technological development so dear to figures like Heidegger, to step away from the grounds of the figural, in favour of a group of attributes. Attributes which require a greater precision of naming, which rely less on a type than on a pattern of behaviour. A pattern that Spinoza would say was perfect from the fact of its very becoming the thing that it is and persistence in becoming that thing again and again toward the absolute. After a time such a thing would develop a machinic diction, and index on itself. The textual body that was Paul de Man when transformed entirely on attribute gets morphed into a textual machine: shedding his text-as-body to become another animal.

All this happened supposedly after World War II, but I would argue it happened at a much earlier developmental stage, indeed from the time de Man the boy was exposed to experimental levels of radiation by his (meta)physician father.<sup>119</sup> A lot of people call this exposure from a young age to isolation, to toxicity, an accident. But how can it be an accident when the whole question concerning technology begins from a moment of irreversible contamination? Now this is Heidegger asking on behalf of de Man. The same Heidegger who would have claimed to friends that his greatest accomplishment was the thinking of technology. Nonetheless it is de Man and not Heidegger that puts his body on the line in search of the truth of technology in allowing the mechanical nature of its grammar to do its violence against both his body and its historical meaning. In doing so de Man becomes his own machine, he becomes something like the grammar of the text when it is isolated from rhetoric, who when joined again to the Rosseauian *Social Contract* can do little but stumble and predict his own critical downfall. As Ronell has observed, 'De Man's work has shown how cognition and performance diverge.'<sup>120</sup> That is why Spinoza calls out to us in the way that he does; you do not know what good or bad you are capable of; you do not know before hand what a body or mind can do, in a given encounter, a given arrangement, a given combination.'<sup>121</sup> Indeed, one of the early discoveries made by father and son

<sup>119</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 105.

<sup>120</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 98.

<sup>121</sup> Deleuze, Gilles, *Spinoza: Practical Philosophy*, Trans. Robert Hurley, (San Fransico, CityLights Books, 1988) p. 125.

involved the non-intentional process of signification. How could the father have known his was inscribing a lifetime of suffering onto the son's body by irradiating it? Was his intended goal not ironically to effectively disinfecting it from pathology in future? The fact is that the machine of language took over. A technical grammar took over the controls. Finally, a mechanical effect became responsible for effects of meaning generated by sheer contingency, elements of uncontrol and improvisation. Ronell offers that 'the disjuncture of performance from meaning or from an intention, if not always from a revelation, amounts to something of a humanist affront, a scandal. The disparity between the intentional, meaningful dimension of the work and its sheerly mechanical, formal component implies violence...'<sup>122</sup> A random or mechanical aspect of language exists that 'cannot be assimilated to a system of intentions, desire or motives.'<sup>123</sup> Therein no morality has the luxury of sticking to the codes of languages.

In the end de Man suffers technically from a breakdown of the very system the grammar of his father's faith in technology was meant to shore up, his humanistic faith in the simple processes of understanding. In other words an interest in truth. De Man learns the painful lesson that the truth is limited to a linguistic potential, and that it is practically unrealisable under the conditions of factual life. A counter-actualization of language is thus somehow required for meaning to persist. De Man appreciated that such a counter-actualization required the sort of switchboarding of language and meaning. It is those difficult, resistant, or even ostensibly non-existent connections that de Man felt within himself to be worth suffering most for. This is suffering is what eventually matures and becomes worthy of (in)forming the ambiguous grounds on which the project of deconstruction itself are set. In regard to this subject, Deleuze asks the question 'How can the individual transcend its form and its syntactical link with a world in order to attain the universal communication of

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<sup>122</sup> Ronell, Avital, *Stupidity*, (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2002), pp. 98-99.

<sup>123</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 99.

events?'<sup>124</sup> In 'On Language as Such and the Language of Man'<sup>125</sup> Benjamin asserts that 'what is communicated in language cannot be externally limited or measured, and therefore all language contains its own incommensurable, uniquely constituted infinity. Its linguistic being, not its verbal meanings, defines its frontier.'<sup>126</sup> It is this type of infinity within the bounds of language, the indiscernability of language's frontier, which makes the possibility of the transfer of an event outside of its immediacy possible, despite the immediacy inherent to language. This question is later taken up by Benjamin in his final work 'Theses on the Philosophy of History.' It is here that he inscribes the historiographical use of monadology as a means through which to alert the worldwide generation that would come *after* the fall of National Socialism, of the grave danger fascism in its nascent forms would continue pose in the future. A danger moreover that it had posed in other epochs prior to Nazi Germany. Benjamin's answer was to speed this 'state of emergency'<sup>127</sup> as a defense against fascism, 'to brush history against the grain'<sup>128</sup> as a means of forcing the grammar of these fascisms within history to surface so as to correspond with present understanding.

Taken up by Heidegger finding an answer to Deleuze's question amounts to telephoning up the Greeks for prophetic advice, and hearing the advice in German. Afterward, Heidegger would offer that 'Since the Greek poets and thinkers first produced the grammar of the West – their view of Being – as essence and existence has prevailed. But that view that man and Being as Being is the essence of Truth, has lead to a "flattening," to the nihilistic struggle over "values," to the reign of technology, and to have "fallen out of Being without knowing it." As a consequence, the "historical destiny of the West" has culminated in a fatal "enfeeblement of the spirit," a weakness rendering it incapable of standing up to the singular task of repeating the primordial achievement of the Greeks at the outset of Western history – of

<sup>124</sup> Deleuze, Gilles, *The Logic of Sense*, Trans. by Mark Lester with Charles Stivale, Constantin V. Boundas, ed., (London: Athlone Press, 1990) p. 149.

<sup>125</sup> Benjamin, Walter, 'On Language as Such and on the Language of Man,' *One Way Street and Other Writings*, Trans. Edmund Jephcott and Kingsley Shorter, Intro. Susan Sontag, (London: Verso, 1979).

<sup>126</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 109-110.

<sup>127</sup> Benjamin, Walter, *Illuminations*, Trans. Harry Zohn, Intro. Hannah Arendt, (New York, Fontana Press, 1969) p. 248.

<sup>128</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 248.

constituting a new beginning.<sup>129</sup> In order to do this one must move back into the primordial realm of the Greeks. The means with which to do so are found through language, but not just any one, the German language is uniquely able to meet this task. Indeed, it is its historical destiny to do so. In the *Der Spiegel* interview Heidegger speaks of an 'inner relationship of the German language with the language of the Greeks and with their thought.'<sup>130</sup> This approach however is fundamentally rooted in seeking out a purity of syntactical origins, rather than networking across them so as to construct a switchboard of various lines of communicatory flight over time.

It is that sort of switchboarding of language and meaning that Benjamin felt within himself to be worth suffering for. Worthy of having the event act through him, in language. How does one interpret such a gesture? In *The Logic of Sense*, Deleuze asserted that 'A wound is actualised in a state of things or in the lived experience of an individual; but in itself it is a pure virtuality on the plane of immanence that sweeps one along a life.'<sup>131</sup> Here he quotes Joe Bosquet, a French poet shot in World War I, who writes, 'My wound existed before me. I was born to embody it.'<sup>132</sup> Within the context of his discussion on Bosquet, Deleuze defines ethics in terms of 'the relation of the individual to the singularities it embodies: an active life is one that is able to affirm the singularities that constitute it, to become worthy of the events that happen to it. A reactive life by contrast, is driven by *ressentiment* of the event, grasping whatever happens as unjust and unwarranted.'<sup>133</sup> Deleuze asserts 'Either ethics makes no sense at all or this is what it means and has nothing else to say: not to be unworthy of what happens to us.'<sup>134</sup> This is what it means to ethically re-stage Paul de Man's War. This is what it means to have picked up on Walter Benjamin's radar signal, his infinite transmission of a life lived *through* the grammar of German

<sup>129</sup> Rabinbach, Anson, *In the Shadow of Catastrophe*, (London: University of California Press, 1997), p. 104.

<sup>130</sup> Heidegger, Martin, 'Only A God can Save Us,' Richard Wolin, ed. *The Heidegger Controversy*, (Cambridge, Mass.: The MIT Press, 1993) p. 113.

<sup>131</sup> This quote from the Introduction ' "A Life of Pure Immanence" : Deleuze's Critique et Clinique" Project' by Daniel W. Smith in Deleuze, Gilles, *Essays Critical and Clinical*, Trans. Daniel W. Smith and Michael A. Greco, (London: Verso, 1998), p. xxix.

<sup>132</sup> Deleuze, Gilles, *Logic of Sense*, Trans. Mark Lester with Charles Stivale, Ed. Constantin V. Boundas, (London: Athlone Press, 1990) p. 148.

<sup>133</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 149.

<sup>134</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 149.

fascism, whilst always striving to report from its frontiers.

Finally in dealing with Benjamin one must consider the language in which he dealt. A language at times of Chinese courtesy, a language in effect of endurance.<sup>135</sup> This was a kind of organised speech, one that was 'masked by friendliness, or the most scrupulous manipulation.'<sup>136</sup> This is how Benjamin was able to build philosophical bridges, bridges that stretched far beyond the line of finitude. He did so by laying each line of thought down carefully in his mind, by holding up phrases carefully honed by others. Each one attempting to allow for an ordinary man to have his unique and responsible place in assembling the world atlas of thought. Benjamin's strategy of thought reminds one of Kafka's story 'The Great Wall of China' where the workers build the wall in fragmentary style, one section apparently distanced from the other, yet contiguous insofar as when the moment of joining takes place its inception will be a transcendental happening, a testament to the divinity of a combined human labour. The labour core of the Great Wall is organised so that no one group will have to endure the totality of its construction, instead a construction detail is sent out only to fill in a particular gap, when that gap is blocked, they are quickly sent far onward to block another gap and so on. It is the filling in of the gaps over great distances, that becomes the agent of relations between divergent peoples and methods, that allows them, from various points of view, to see the wall empirically as a series of undulating blocks and gaps. The spatial relationship Benjamin applied to his philosophy also held true for his relationships with people, his courtesy toward them a matter of diffident respect for the gaps in relations that might on some occasion yield a fortuitous block in the way of his thinking. Kafka defined such organisation as destiny. This organisation of language in its most scrupulously conducted sense re-assembles fate, makes of fate something only akin to causality, insofar as causality springs from belief. Belief has no use for truth, rather it occupies itself only through the vagaries of translation.

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<sup>135</sup> 'Using a word that was also applied to Kafka by those who knew him, Scholem speaks of "the almost Chinese courtesy" that characterised Benjamin's relations with people.' Walter, Benjamin, *One Way Street and Other Writings*, Trans. Kingsley Shorter and Edmund Jephcott, Introduction Susan Sontag (London: Verso, 1979) p. 15.

<sup>136</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 15.

Translation is nothing if not a stop gap system of understanding, a way of making the finite word contiguous, continuing a conversation by hedging through a scrupulous series of textual impasses, in order to get not at the truth, but at the unlimited possibilities signalled by its meandering figural bypasses. Perhaps this is not a new image of thought, but rather a new understanding of the importance of its transfer.

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