

HETERARCHIES AND MISSED ENCOUNTERS

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I declare the work presented in this thesis is my own

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Abstract

This project explores affects and effects of epistemic confusion through the figure of the missed encounter. In oblique dialogue with post-Althusserian studies, the project makes a new performative term available for debates on contemporary artistic practice and knowledge production. The missed encounter does not signal a lack of encounters, nor an encounter that should have taken place and/but/or did not for an (un)expected reason. The missed encounter is unstable, it can operate as: a missed prescription, the sad outcome of a failed meeting, a quarrel or a disagreement.

Drawing on diverse materials spanning conceptual art, science fiction, paraliterary production and European and Latin American philosophy the project performs and explores such missed encounters. Chapter One introduces Santiago-Castro Gómez's figure of the *heterarchy* and sets a template where artistic practices that deal with discursive and linguistic material come across affects of not-knowing. Chapter Two explores the notion of epistemic breakdown and knowledge by-products; it does so by reading the Strugatsky Brothers' Novella *A Billion Years Before the End of the World* (2014) and actualising Robert Smithson's *Tour of the Monuments of Passaic* (1996) in relation to it. Chapter Three reads Ricardo Piglia's *Theory of Complot* (2002, 2015) and its production of a com-*plot*: a machination of plots that activate suspicion and intrigue as conspiranoid drivers of epistemic production. Chapter Four follows Hugo Santiago's film *Invasión* (1969), exploring paraliterary situations of immanence, recurrence and non-exit through the retro-futural story of an infinite siege.

The material brought into play in this project engages with the performative and self-actualising dimensions of textual production, tackling linguistic surpluses and the limits of knowledge products. Following this thrust, the project probes the productive ranges of a writing of the missed encounter.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

List of Illustrations.....	9
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CHAPTER ONE

Language, Matter: Not-Knowing and Epistemic Confusion

Towards Generality	12
Generality: Language, Knowledge	18
Subsumption	21
Heterarchies	24
Missing the Encounter	31
(Re)reading Althusser	35
Language as Material	41
The Transparency of Transparency	43
Meta [...]	47
(Epilogue) on Surplus Referents	48

CHAPTER TWO

Always-Already: Homeostatic Capture and Knowledge (By-Products)

Pegaso NE-001 / Tsyklon-3	50
Desencuentro	56

Knowledge (as a) Production, Reading Passaic	66
Homeostatic Capture	72
Interlude One	84

CHAPTER THREE

Complot: Parallel Machinations

Recursive Complot	97
The Politics of Literature	104
(and) the paraliterary	107
Meta-(Fiction)	110
Bureaugraphy	117
Complot	120

Interlude Two	125
----------------------------	------------

CHAPTER FOUR

Invasión: Non-Exit, Failed Encounters

Resisting Resistance	132
Within/Immersion	138
Contemporary Art Is Postconceptual Art	140
Invasión	144
The Milonga of Manuel Flores	158

APPENDICES

APPENDIX ONE 169

APPENDIX TWO 173

APPENDIX THREE 174

BIBLIOGRAPHY 176

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

Figure 1: Bochner, M. (1970) *Language Is Not Transparent*. [online]. Available from: http://www.thislongcentury.com/wp-content/uploads/2009/04/tlc_mel_bochner_04.jpg (Accessed 19 August 2014).

Figure 2: Infalcon [user] (2013) *Primeras imágenes del Satélite Ecuatoriano NEE-01 Pegaso 16-05-2013 - YouTube* [online]. Available from: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7Dprd-40jOQ> (Accessed 28 October 2015).

Figure 3: EXA: Agencia Espacial Ecuatoriana (n.d.) [*Splash Image*] *Tierra-mano-exa-pegaso-krysaor.jpg*. [online]. Available from: <http://www.exa.ec/> (Accessed 19 October 2015).

Figure 4: Rafael Correa [Facebook user: MashiRafael] (2014) *Rafael Correa En El Lanzamiento Del Primer Satélite Ecuatoriano*. [online]. Available from: <http://peru21.pe/reportuit/fotos-rafael-correa-lanzamiento-primer-satelite-ecuatoriano-2128258> (Accessed 19 October 2015).

Figure 5: EXA: Agencia Espacial Ecuatoriana (2008) *Logo Agencia Espacial Civil Ecuatoriana*. [online]. Available from: <https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Logo-exa-circ-blkV4-esp.jpg> (Accessed 19 October 2015).

Figure 6: Msc. Carlos Alvarez [courtesy of], (Public Relations Office, EXA: Ecuadorian Space Agency)(2016) *Pegaso NEE-01 Paper Model*.

Figure 7: EXA: Agencia Espacial Ecuatoriana (n.d.) *Illustration of the Pegasus Cubesat with the Deployed Solar Wings*. [online]. Available from: <https://directory.eoportal.org/web/eoportal/satellite-missions/n/nee-01-pegasus>.

Figure 8: Zscout370 [user] (2010) *Flag of Ecuador.svg*. [online]. Available from: https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Flag_of_Ecuador.svg (Accessed 19 October 2015).

Figure 9: Ysangkok [user] (2010) *Coat of Arms of Ecuador.svg*. [online]. Available from: https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Coat_of_arms_of_Ecuador.svg (Accessed 19 October 2015).

Figure 10: Kosmonavtika.com [Nicholas Pillet] (2009) *Mik, Cosmodrome De Plesetsk, 24 Janvier 2009: Mise en Place de La Coiffe*. [online]. Available from: <http://www.kosmonavtika.com/lancements/2009/30012009/30012009photos.html> (Accessed 19 October 2015).

Figure 11: Smithson, R. (1996c) 'A Tour of the Monuments of Passaic New Jersey', in *Robert Smithson: The Collected Writings*. University of California Press. pp. 68–74.

Figure 12: Merzbow & Hasami, Abtectonics (1986) *Antimonument (Vinyl cover)*. [online]. Available from: <http://www.discogs.com/viewimages?release=720151> (Accessed 23 October 2015).

Figure 13: EXA: Agencia Espacial Ecuatoriana (2015) *NEE-02 KRYSAOR: 2do Satélite Ecuatoriano*. [online]. Available from: <http://exa.ec/krysaor/index.htm> (Accessed 23 October 2015).

Figure 14: Transitions (Snapshot Layout) Santiago, H. (1969) Invasión.

Figure 15: Architectures (Snapshot Layout) Santiago, H. (1969) Invasión.

Figure 16: Figure/Ground (Snapshot Layout) Santiago, H. (1969) Invasión.

Figure 17: Resistance (Snapshot Layout) Santiago, H. (1969) Invasión.

Figure 18: Herrera (Snapshot Layout) Santiago, H. (1969) Invasión.

Figure 19: Mappings, Irene (Snapshot Layout) Santiago, H. (1969) Invasión.

Figure 20: Map of Aquilea Santiago, H. (1969) Invasión; Becker-Ho and Debord's 'Game of War' Cornet, J. (2008) Guy Debord and Alice Becker-Ho play the Game of War. [online]. Available from: <http://www.cabinetmagazine.org/issues/29/galloway.php> (Accessed 19 October 2015).

Figure 21: 'Southern Frontier' (Snapshot Layout) Santiago, H. (1969) Invasión.

Figure 22: J.L Borges' Book: El Hacedor (Dreamtigers) (Snapshot) Santiago, H. (1969) Invasión.

Figure 23: Herrera's Squadron Ambushed (Snapshot) Santiago, H. (1969) Invasión.

Figure 24: Don Porfirio's Map (Snapshot Layout) Santiago, H. (1969) Invasión.

Figure 25: Chess Floor Death (Snapshot Layout) Santiago, H. (1969) Invasión.

Figure 26: Herrera's Death / Football Field (Snapshot Layout) Santiago, H. (1969) Invasión.

Figure 27: Deadly Snow. Oesterfeld, H. G. & Solano López, F. (1975) El Eternauta. Argentina: Ediciones Record.

Figure 28: La Agencia & Manuel Ángel Macía (2015) *Escuela de Garaje*. Bogotá: La Agencia.

Figure 29: La Agencia (2012) *Mapa Circular (Bogotá's Independent Art Scene Mapped by La Agencia)*.

CHAPTER ONE

Language, Matter: Not-Knowing And Epistemic Confusion

Towards Generality

The ever-increasing global expansion of capitalism has brought an unprecedented extension of the contemporary art world. This fact is, to a certain extent, a truism. In this crux, a crucial series of questions have emerged regarding contemporary art's legitimization as a specific modality of knowledge production. A reflection on the epistemic valences of art has surfaced, bringing about a range of thoroughly uneven, multifaceted and productive processes. These processes touch the core of the institutions that reproduce art's sociality and its modes of knowing and understanding. Art's legitimization as a process of knowledge production has become a demand. And this demand has in turn expanded intrinsically and extrinsically—within and beyond the confines of the global university. The ground is variegated and implies extensive and complex relations.

Tensions within this milieu remain disputed and move along through the processing of often irreconcilable contradictions. Ranging from intra-artistic debates on what sort of agency artistic practices have in the contemporary world; to disputes over the relevance of art-research programmes and their necessity and broad diagnostics to figure the role of art within the new knowledge economies (Holert, 2009; Hlavajova et al., 2008; Rogoff, 2013; Maharaj, 2009; O'Neill and Wilson, 2010; Rogoff et al., 2006). The list is not exhaustive, but it serves the purpose of illustrating the increasing interdependence of transnational connectivities of global capital and the meshes of cognitive work in which the contemporary art world exists. As artists, curators, cultural practitioners, among others,

we find ourselves to be thoroughly immersed in these situations. And I mean this in more than a theoretical way.

The dispute over how knowledge and artistic practice overlap has been definitively influential for me, all the more after having co-produced a project called *Escuela de Garaje* (translated as Garage School), an artistic collaboration with the artistic group LaAgencia (Bogotá, 2013). The project produced an informal temporary school that relied on three modules: 1. A reading group, 2. A programme of film screenings and 3. A set of open discussion sessions called *banquetes*.¹ The Garage School set to probe informal processes of discursive and knowledge production within the current artistic panorama of Bogotá. The city has seen a 'Cambrian explosion' of artist-run-spaces in the last five years, followed by a discourse that has often been fetishised and rapidly capitalised on by its own participants.

At the same time, the current project was being worked through. Even though several convergences could appear while figuring out uneven fields of production,² there seemed to be a strange effect that related the tiered process of writing with the production of a series of discussion platforms, projects and publications. These diverse sites of operation became all linkable under the category: language-based practices. A reliance on linguistic resources and an attention to modes of knowledge production bound these sites of operation together.

Stranded on the quarrel between knowledge production and its legitimisation, the dispute over linguistic production—and the productivity of language in the art scene in Bogotá—emerged in the sessions as more than a remote theoretical discussion. La Agencia was at that moment leaving its physical exhibition space in order to become a proto-curatorial organisation, aiming to explicitly shift its site of operation, in order to explore the affordances of such linguistic resources.

In a sense, the conversational premise that gave birth to the Garage School was based on questions that sprouted by acknowledging the increase in 'independent' and

¹ The term *banquete* is a deliberate mistranslation of Plato's *Symposium*. It recalls the relaxed nature of the discussions, presentations and events.

² Ranging from cooperatives, workshop spaces publication committees, to galleries and short lived spaces. See. *Appendix Two*.

'autonomous' art spaces in the capital.³ We set to ask the following questions: What kind of knowledge was being produced, shared or withheld among these budding institutions? Which new types of (knowledge) production were at stake? What models of practice were being legitimised and privileged through these processes of institutionalisation? Did the claims for independence and autonomy have any currency?⁴

Hosting a 'Garage School', as the name suggested, spoke to the precarious situation of knowledge institutions in the country. A 'garage university' is a derisive name for an improvised institution whose operational infrastructure is parallel to that of a parking lot (hence the negative connotation). A kind of 'makeshift' institution, the garage university is an institute that sells short courses and academic titles of devious provenance. Garage universities have the common goal of generating fast money and are a symbol of the deep neoliberalisation of knowledge work—a symptom of intense de-regularisation of the economy.

In recent years in Colombia, the student-led debate on free public education has had a tremendous public impact, and one of its most visible demands has been the funding of quality education with universal coverage ("2011 Colombian Student Protests," 2015, "Movilización Estudiantil en Colombia de 2011," 2015). Undoubtedly, the Garage School project wanted to underscore the uncertain situation in which these makeshift institutions thrive. Colombia is arguably, among the most intensely neoliberal countries in South America. Here, these improvised universities—clearly private and for-profit institutions—perversely capitalise on such the uncertain situation and unregulated business environment promoted by the government. The State's approach is premised on disengaged tolerance, an outsourcing to the invisible hand—probably because its own reproduction depends on the promotion of the fertile neoliberal regime where the garage universities flourish. In the current situation, the prototype of the garage university qualifies as an advanced and spontaneously organised technology of social control that operates through seemingly non-intrusive regulation.

³ The terms ('independent' and 'autonomous') are often debated in the artistic field in Bogotá; the terms are usually tinged with problematic assumptions of heroism (Esferapública, n.d.).

⁴ see Appendix One for a presentation of the *Garage School Project*.

Hosting the Garage School meant, at that time, that we would educate ourselves on such matters, while placing us in advance in the position of *not-knowing*, rather than occupying the role of experts who would assess the situation. LaAgencia, as an institution that sprouted in parallel to the dozen or so new art-spaces, could not afford the pseudo-neutral assumption of having an external gaze. In a specific way, the process had a self-reflective stance: LaAgencia wanted to think about its own process of institutionalisation vis-à-vis the broader articulations and conditions of emergence in the uneven logics that form the city of Bogotá. Setting a discursive scenario to probe this terrain was a logical—though embryonic—response.

The Garage School allowed me, both as a close friend of the institution and a ‘visitor’ who had left the city a few years ago, to link two very different processes, geographies, milieus and institutional imperatives. Processes which were producing demands that could be linked, but often in a rather nebulous way that was difficult to specifically pin down. As a PhD student at Goldsmiths who needs to explicitly and imperatively address the ‘production of new knowledge,’ being called to co-produce a discursive project in Colombia implied that I had to devise modes for thinking through often fluctuating demands. Demands that nevertheless, could be sensed as being thoroughly related. The processing of these requirements implied the necessity of thinking through new processes of valorisation—which can be seen as intersecting uneven articulations, such as the emergence of artistic spaces in Bogotá—and in the production of a sustained project of knowledge-work in London. An underlying affect, holding both instances together can be characterised as a broad sense of *epistemic confusion*, a thematic that now decidedly determines the present project.

It is no surprise to find that the field of discourse has become a privileged space for a type of artistic practice that is indissociable from modes of knowledge production. Liam Gillick argues that artistic practice has—over the last twenty years—increasingly modified its activity, to the extent of having effected a profound shift that constitutes what he calls ‘a discursive model of praxis’ (Gillick, 2009). This turn in contemporary art registers a new type of artistic-praxis, one that is increasingly premised on process and exceeds the construction of a definitive end product. This praxis heavily relies on the fertile grounds that linguistic resources make available. As a process that privileges diffusion over completion, Gillick (2009) defines the discursive shift as ‘the offspring of

critical theory and improvised, self-organized structures. It is the basis of art that involves the dissemination of information. [...] and as such '[i]t is indebted to conceptual art's reframing of relationships, and it requires decentered and revised histories in order to evolve' (Gillick, 2009). The inherent debt to conceptualism will need some clarification, since it forms the prehistory to the present condition of linguistic hyper-abundance in the contemporary art world (and the present chapter will visit a landmark of Conceptual Art to set this framework).

Gillick argues for

[The] need to examine the notion of the discursive as a model of production in its own right, alongside the production of objects for consideration or exchange. The discursive is what produces the work and, in the form of critical and impromptu exchanges, it is also the desired result (Gillick, 2009).

Implying a change of valences for the notion of specificity, the ends of the discursive are no longer based on the production of concrete objects (even though the processual inclusion of such objects is not denied). Discursive praxis relies instead on the broad 'specificity' of discourse-as-work. In other words, once the discursive is evoked, it retrospectively modifies object production.⁵ An artistic praxis resting on linguistic productivity should be set within this broader framework of linguistic operation. Since the discursive model of practice is often considered to be a breakthrough that serves to relax barriers and divisions, such as the blurring of boundaries between art and curating, it needs to be set against the backdrop of a production in a broader *generality*.

But, 'bracketing' the discursive as an autonomous notion implies a continuation of the division of (cognitive) labour within a different type of subsumption: the process of capitalist real subsumption. The discursive model of praxis entails a deliberate confusion of its two components (praxis/discourse; discourse/praxis) a move that also underscores an inevitably specific type of generalised linguistic productivity. By implying a relation between the terms praxis/discourse, the discursive turn in artistic practice underscores therefore the shared terrain where this project and the Garage School in 2013 are located

⁵ This is one sense in which Peter Osborne's maxim: 'Contemporary art is postconceptual art' operates (See Chapter Four).

—making them indissociable as parallel projections. The mode of production in case, being nothing other than a mode of production relying on *linguistic capacities*. Here, what appears as shift of register between an intra-artistic to a broader economic reading needs to be understood as an inevitable slippage. They slip into each other, these areas cannot appear as divisible or autonomous regions.

Registering the discursive shift is indispensable.⁶ The overarching aspect of generalised linguistic productivity that I have mentioned so far needs therefore, an introduction. I will expose a case for artistic praxis that relies on language as its resource and material. To do so, instead of following an approach that crystallises specific linguistic or a singular semiotic aspect, I will track an underspecified generality that relies on a broader shared capacity. This generality opens up to the heart of Gillick's suggestion: that discursive praxis *is* a form of contemporary production. And as such, it cannot be tackled through any reduction of its components. Tracking language's role in its 'generalist' tendency, opens up a richer field that sprouts from the limits of the discursive —without disavowing its importance. It is within this milieu that the affect of epistemic confusion can appear.^{7,8} This articulation is important, in order to justify epistemic confusion as something more than a vague notion: it is a materially expressive constitution.⁹ And the mentioned opening up arranges points of contact that allow for readings and disagreements in/with/and beyond contemporary artistic production. Instead of opting for linguistic reductionism, the broad generality I speak of here follows the sense of expansive generality that Marx found in the concept of the *general intellect*, towards which I turn to.

⁶ Gillick's take is rooted on two grounds: 1. Discursive art's historical relation to information (Conceptual Art histories) and 2. Discursive art's relation to an expanded economy through the notion of exchange (General production).

⁷ I follow Jon Beasley-Murray who—in the context of Latin American studies—differentiates affect from emotion as 'the impersonal and embodied flow of intensities that undermines any concept of a rational subject who could provide or withdraw his or her consent' (Beasley-Murray, 2010, p.x).

⁸ The term affect has a long and complex history. My take is limited to: (Deleuze, 1978; Massumi, 1987; Shaviro, 2010).

⁹ And this means that, even as a material constitution, it is difficult to pinpoint, given its resistant intrusiveness in each attempt to do so. The point of resistant intrusiveness runs throughout the present project.

Generality: Language, Knowledge

During the last decades of the previous century, Italian Autonomist philosophers defined a broad spectrum that served to conceptualise the role of language within the capitalist mode of production. Decisive for this project is what Matteo Pasquinelli has recently identified as the 'linguistic turn of Italian Operaismo,'¹⁰ (Pasquinelli, 2014, pp.10-12). This turn emphasises an understanding of the role of language as a productive force. The move is premised on Marx's concept of living labour as the basis for an assessment of real subsumption in contemporary capitalist logistics and the organisation of cognitive labour. It is worth visiting Marx's own famous (and omnipresent) Fragment on the Machines, from the manuscripts to Capital—published as the *Grundrisse* in 1939 [first English translation from the original date of 1858]. The Fragment provides the basis for Operaismo's innovative reading of the concept of real subsumption. Marx himself explains:

The development of fixed capital indicates to what degree general social knowledge has become a direct force of production, and to what degree, hence, the conditions of the process of social life itself have come under the control of the general intellect and been transformed in accordance with it (Marx, 1858, [online version]).

In order to understand Marx's relevance for today's economisation of language and knowledge, the question of (social) knowledge must be seen within a process of *generalisation*. By emphasising on such a generality, Marx enables the possibility of thinking how social knowledge, on a broader scale, has become a direct force of production. This is the basic reason why the term general intellect—which was left in English by Marx in the German version—is so crucial.

It is important to bear in mind that this generalisation is not necessarily stemming out of a mystified critique of technological and social specialisation. Marx is talking about machinery (hence the name) not only in reduced technical terms but through the lens of

¹⁰ Noting the valences given by different authors, diverse terms have been used to describe the diffuse project of radical Italian thought from the 1970's onwards: Operaismo, Compositionism, Autonomism. These can be read interchangeably in the present text, even though I stick to Operaismo, for the sake of consistency. Note that Berardi disagrees with the term Operaismo due to its journalistic tone, preferring the term 'compositionism' (Berardi, 2003). My choice serves communicational purposes and is non-polemical.

fixed capital—and importantly, through the perspective of a critique of *Political Economy*. A simple machine—understood as a technical instrument that improves and makes part of capital growth (i. e. a loom, a steam engine, etc.), is in a sense and also potentially, fixed capital. Fixed capital would seem to refer to the development of machinery in a reduced sense of the word, as the technical part of the process. But following Marx's quote, it is evident that machines are not simply detached or isolated technical instruments, but are indissociable from the modes of production that have both produced them and that they reproduce. This treatment of machinery as the embodiment—the objectification—of fixed capital is intriguing due to its contemporary relevance.¹¹

The importance of the fragment on the general intellect is not due to its fetishisation of technology—of technology *qua* fixed capital, in its most reductive instrumental capacities. In the sense that Marx assigns to it, fixed capital can also be thought as ‘the power of knowledge objectified’ (Marx, 1858). The objectification of knowledge in question exceeds an initial machinic determinism premised on a simplistic understanding of machines as mere technical instruments. Fixed capital is now also the bearer and trace of the powers of general social knowledge that have become a direct form of production. Marx's important contribution forecloses a materialist evidence of the workings of the general intellect in the development of fixed capital—the accumulations and transformations of living labour in the materialised abstractions of technological and capitalist change.

Carlo Vercellone explains how, ‘For Marx, the ascent of cognitive capitalism cannot be explained through a technological determinism that understands the new technologies and the knowledge incorporated in fixed capital as the principal motor of the passage to a new division of labour’ (Vercellone, 2007, p.32). It is therefore important to bear in mind that the thesis of the general intellect is not simply a mere interesting technological reflection made by Marx. Even though technology is only one part of the issue, Marx strives to look for the core of the inter-relations that bind production, technology and labour. The fragment is revealing in that it provides something more than an evidence of

¹¹ The dates of the Italian translation of the *Grundrisse* (1968–70) provide an interesting context to read Operaismo (“*Grundrisse: Dissemination*,” 2015).

the manifestation of living labour in the development of fixed capital, which extends beyond (but of course, also includes) its specific machinic qualities and enters the realm of a more comprehensive understanding of production, encompassing—as its name indicates—general capacities: cognition, intellection, language, understanding, calculation, etc. (Virno, 2007)

Re-reading the fragment: The ‘conditions of the process of social life itself have come under the control of the *general intellect* and have been transformed in accordance with it’ (Marx, 1858) what is at stake is the twofold operation directed to the imbrications in which general social knowledge becomes the *main force of production*. But as ever in Marx, things are never that simple: General social knowledge has come *under the control* of the general intellect and *has been transformed in accordance to it*. The mediation between these two parallel operations is of prime importance, since it is the bidirectional modification of statuses that reveals the inner workings of the self-revolutionising mechanism of capital and technology. This twofold movement links to an important process in the re-organisation of the general intellect under capitalism.¹² The mediating process referred to here is the process of *real subsumption*, which can be said to have reached a deeper level of development. Now, this development opens up the nebulous generality that this project addresses. The process in question is the process of *subsumption*.

¹² Virno explains how the ‘general intellect needs to be understood literally as intellect in general: the faculty and power to think, rather than the works produced by thought [...] In order to represent the relationship between general intellect and living labour in Postfordism we need to refer to the act through which every speaker draws on the inexhaustible potential of language to execute contingent and unrepeatable statements. Like the intellect and memory, language is the most common and least ‘specialised’ conceivable given’ (Virno, 2007).

Subsumption

Marx divides two aspects of subsumption in relation to capitalism:¹³

1. Formal subsumption: capitalism's shaping of existing relations of production that are not per se capitalist.
2. Real subsumption: the shaping of the modes and relations of production by capitalism, in order for them to work in a capitalist mode through and through.

Following the thread: the incremental acceleration and modifications of the institutions and materiality of knowledge production, signal a shift towards the process of real subsumption of cognitive labour. This trait is fundamental for the recent history of Capitalist mode(s) of production. As the Philosopher Stewart Martin argues,

the integration of more and more areas of human and natural life previously beyond the realm of commodification even suggests a shift beyond Marx's diagnosis of the subsumption of labour by industrial capitalism. Capitalism has come to appear natural, a way of life, even an inevitable stage of natural history. (Martin, 2009, p.482)

Forcefully concluding: 'art needs to be understood within the context of this expanded capitalist subsumption' (p.482).

Some of the most compelling recent contemporary theories have faced this problem through an embrace of the notion of the general intellect, as a principle for thinking the modes in which life becomes prey in this process of advanced subsumption. Knowledge and production have been faced up in this collusion, and the category of living labour has become more and more important, given how prone this process has been to *subsume life itself*—reverberating with Marx's own notion of living labour. Marx's notion of the general intellect has been repurposed in a 'vectorial' configuration that constructs a model for

¹³ My description here is taken from (Endnotes, 2010).

living labour in the crux of contemporary capitalism (Berardi, 2003). This vectorial formation implies an equivalently transversal configuration, which means it is non-hierarchical in a specific way—it is instead *heterarchical*, as I will soon argue. Capitalism paradoxically tends towards the production of a hierarchical regime that is nevertheless unevenly scattered. Transversality, here means an effort to conglomerate diverse spheres, which previously fell under the object of a single defined entity.¹⁴ And the thesis of the subsumption of the general intellect implies a renewed understanding of both knowledge and production, since it places its emphasis on process and change. Marx's notion of the general intellect—the power of knowledge objectified—has been repurposed in a transversal configuration that provides a renewed understanding of the category of living labour.¹⁵

This domain of a total subsuming capitalism as a haunting, yet un mappable force is the spectrum in which the issue of language/praxis is located—understood as a broad category that is not reducible to its component parts (i.e. the reduced process of semiosis, as in semio-capitalism). The sense of transversality I speak of here is better captured through Deleuze and Guattari's proposal for a transsemiotic: 'translations can be creative. New pure regimes of signs are formed through transformation and translation. Again, there is no general semiology but rather a transsemiotic' (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987b, p. 137). The prefix trans– brings a modulation and an interesting sense of dithering; instead of semiosis, trans-semiosis. The prefix trans- brings about a processual tone implying a line that traverses diverse layers.

The crux of the general intellect, looked from this perspective, has always been a question of knowledge. Paolo Virno actualises this claim by arguing that the general intellect is not literally—as Marx wrote originally—'embodied' in the machines. Or to be more precise; that the general intellect is *not necessarily* equivalent to fixed capital:

¹⁴ Berardi writes: 'Subjectivation takes the conceptual place of subject. This conceptual move is very close to the contemporary modification of the philosophical landscape that was promoted by French post-structuralism. Subjectivation in the place of subject. That means that we should not focus on the identity, but on the process of becoming. This also means that the concept of social class is not to be seen as an ontological concept, but rather as a vectorial concept' (Berardi, 2003).

¹⁵ Chapter Two deals with Fredric Jameson's notion of *cognitive mapping* (Jameson, 1992, pp.3, 10, 25, 49).

According to Marx, the general intellect—i.e. knowledge as the main productive force—fully coincides with fixed capital—i.e. the ‘scientific power’ objectified in the system of machinery. Marx thus neglects the way in which the general intellect manifests itself as living labour (Virno, 2007).

A secret plot binds Operaismo: contemporary capitalist real subsumption is a biopolitical modelling of living labour (Foucault, 2008).¹⁶ If one remains committed to thinking through the lens of biopolitics, subsumption becomes an interesting node, since it problematises how the active unit of power is defined: not only self-valorisation under the law of value, as in classical Marxism, but also subsumption of life under a proliferation of apparatuses of capture. It is imperative then, to pay attention to the multivalences of capture.

The turn to living labour as the main operator—the *social bios*—is the interpretation given by Operaismo to the crux of the problem of the general intellect: the crux of knowledge *lies on the re-formatting of living labour* (Hardt and Negri, 2000, pp.25,421). And the process of this re-formatting subsumption, ties biopolitics and linguistic capitalism. Hardt and Negri argue that

The analysis of the real subsumption, when this is understood as investing not only the economic or only the cultural dimension of society but rather the social bios itself, and when it is attentive to the modalities of disciplinarity and/or control, disrupts the linear and totalitarian figure of capitalist development (Hardt and Negri, 2000, p.43).

Operaismo re-articulates Marx's categories as contemporary analytical tools, in order to bring a different interpretive perspective of the situation of total subsumption. The disruption of the ‘linear’ and ‘totalitarian’ figure of capitalism means the disruption of a ‘vertical’ arrangement of power within the sphere of knowledge, linguistic, cognitive and epistemic production (in other words, the subsumption of the general intellect). Subsumption calls for a material ‘depth’—a profound and thickly granular comprehension—and for a more multipolar image of capitalism that is not historically nor geographically unilinear or one-dimensional. In order to approach this crux, I evoke the figure of the *heterarchy*.

¹⁶ Foucault's course is also a genealogy of liberalism, a point that vindicates this argument.

Heterarchies

The Colombian philosopher Santiago Castro-Gómez has produced extensive and remarkable renderings of Michel Foucault's categories in order to read the convergences between capitalism and coloniality in the New Grenade and contemporary Colombia (Castro-Gómez, 2007; Castro-Gómez, 2005). In this context, he has elaborated an understanding of power/knowledge articulations that he calls *heterarchies*,¹⁷ which he describes as:

complex structures in which a basic level that governs over the rest is non-existent. Instead, all levels exercise a degree of mutual influence in different particular aspects and attending to specific historical conjunctures. In a heterarchy, the integration of dysfunctional elements in a system is never complete as in a hierarchy, but is always only partial. This means that the degree of control exercised by the global system over more local systems, even if it tends to be hierarchical, is never absolute and in the best of cases, is maintained in its stability only through (political, social, economic and epistemic) violence or in a mode in which local levels install resonance with molarities in the system. We could say then that one characteristic of a heterarchy is its high degree of *residual indetermination*, referring here to the proliferation of grey zones or black holes that escape control and are not functional to the system. (Castro-Gómez, 2007, pp.170–171, emphasis original, translation mine)

It is necessary to declare that heterarchies must not be understood as open and free spaces of fragmentation, which in turn allow for infinite playfulness. Nor do they point to a lack of reticulations of power, nor a frictionless system of possibilities. Heterarchies are the methodological response to a simplistic conception of power that comes under strictly hierarchical terms, an approach that tends to articulate power in a binary vertical composition. Heterarchies acknowledge the potential and residual components that are always 'left out.' By virtue of this inclusion of residual modalities and surplus configurations, an analysis of the general intellect opens up to a wide range of valences: affect, information, intensities, desires, etc. It is in this way that the methodological

¹⁷ Castro-Gómez's project should be understood as an 'ontology of the present' in the Foucauldian sense, implying therefore that a pre-history of cognitive capitalism may be well read in the processes of formation of the matrix of modernity/coloniality, which goes beyond the 'Order of Things' of European Enlightenment (Castro-Gómez, 2012, p.213).

virtues of the heterarchy shine through. Heterarchies thus allow for a rich non-teleological terrain of fragmented and multiple power structures that operate in chain-like modes: they are the answer to the aforementioned (open) question of thickness, depth and granulation. A continuation of Hardt and Negri's impulse and demand to shift from the lineal and totalitarian version of capitalism—to the contemporary predicament of the subsumption of the general intellect (Hardt and Negri, 2000, p.43). Now, the relation between the heterarchy and subsumption is to be viewed through the prefix *sub*—: immersed and not set-against each other. The two processes are parallel, subsumption implying a horizontal proliferation of heterarchies that provide a complex but scattered understanding.

The moment of real subsumption of the general intellect is precisely the moment in which we find ourselves now. I will further follow Carlo Vercellone's category of cognitive capitalism, which is characterised by an amplification of the process of real subsumption. Vercellone explains this change in one elegant phrase: 'the general intellect as sublation of the real subsumption of labour to capital' (Vercellone, 2007, p.26). It is fundamental to acknowledge the ambivalent open ended nature of this shift, which is more transnational, more inclusive of a multiplicity of layers and brings with it a diversity of registers of a broadened sense of perception (understood in the following chapters as an expansion of sensoria). At the same time, a shift towards an understanding of subsumption is able to go beyond competing terms like Post-Fordism or Toyotaism, which are premised on lineal versions of the technical evolution of industrial capitalism (Vercellone, 2007, p. 14).¹⁸

Operaismo's shift towards the cognitive labour and the general intellect puts an emphasis on language as an ambivalent productive force: as the very stratum of human sociability, language is the basis for human cooperation and an increasing source of value extraction. The linguistic turn in question differs from the earlier 20th century's linguistic turn insomuch as it emphasises this material aspect. And this emphasis is its important contribution to the present. By transversally cutting across different fields (including a critique of political economy, governmentality, linguistics, performance, and

¹⁸ *Avant la lettre*, Marx's already proposes a critique of this basic lineal version of progression (Vercellone, 2007, p.14, footnote 2).

other fields) Operaismo's linguistic turn produces a deep understanding of the heterarchical matrix of knowledge/power. This understanding includes subjectivation, within the realm of biopolitical governance in the present global neoliberal regime.

The specific convergence of Operaismo's critique—and its most strategic manoeuvre—is its re-reading of Marx's Fragment on the Machines through the category of living labour (Hardt and Negri, 2000, p.52,185,209; Vercellone, 2007, p.29; Virno, 2004, p. 106; 2007). The Fragment on the Machines has brought about a theory of social cooperation and productivity that increasingly relies on language and common knowledge, this language/knowledge complex that forms the very substance of socialisation and figures as ambiguously enmeshed in the contemporary matrixes of capitalist valorisation.

Within Operaismo's schema that attends to shifts in the nature of capitalist subsumption, the thesis of the general intellect serves the purpose of bringing about this further stage of subsumption and a strange paradoxical conclusion: instead of narrowing down a field of operation, cognitive capitalism finds itself on a threshold of a multiplicity of intersections. The emphasis on generality serves to dispel any reductionist temptation in approaching the 'grammar' of neoliberal linguistic performativity. The renewed linguistic turn of Operaismo is able to speak to the present by avoiding a narrow epistemic field of operation for the general intellect. For Virno:

In Postfordism, [in the present case, cognitive capitalism] conceptual and logical schema play a decisive role and cannot be reduced to fixed capital in so far as they are inseparable from the interaction of a plurality of living subjects. The "general intellect" includes formal and informal knowledge, imagination, ethical tendencies, mentalities and "language games". Thoughts and discourses function in themselves as productive "machines" in contemporary labour and do not need to take on a mechanical body or an electronic soul (Virno, 201).

In this quote, Virno responds to the necessity of a critical (and I would add, heterarchical) approach that emphasises language as a broad productive field, including its vast array of contradictions and materialities. This does not mean that knowledge is a 'new' aspect of capitalist productivity. It rather means that *knowledge* has a *new function* within contemporary cognitive capitalism (Vercellone, 2007). This point needs to be grasped in its sprawling complexity, and not parcelled out. In a Fordist methodological vein, this

parcelling out would be a legitimate course of action. But, in order to analyse post-Fordist cognitive capitalism, not only new tools are needed, but new *conceptual machines*.

Artistic practice is enmeshed within this spectrum of capitalisation. In the process of the shifting towards cognitive capitalism, the life process itself is subsumed as the 'core' of production. Today, 'life' can no longer be detached from 'work'—a fact that remodels the key avant-garde aspiration to merge art and life. The wish has come true, this time as biopolitics. It is this situation that I want to analyse, asking what are the stakes of language-based artistic practice in this intersection, which appears within a context of real subsumption of life.

Recall Martin's call for understanding art within this process of subsumption. Within the development of cognitive capitalism, artists have been modelled as the perfect deregulated subjects.¹⁹ The semi-perfect figure of contemporary work can be modelled on the figure of the contemporary artist: the flexible 'creative' worker who—in the progression towards the total subsumption of life, has come to embody the archetype of contemporary work. Benjamin Noys has recently argued that this factor can be explained as the 'paradox of valorisation':

This paradox is simply stated: on the one hand, the artist is the most capitalist subject, the one who subjects themselves to value extraction willingly and creatively, who prefigures the dominant trend lines of contemporary capitalism: precarity, flexibility, mobility, and fluidity. The artist is the figure of contemporary labour—the most extreme instantiation of the present—and hence the one whose self-valorisation is most plugged into capitalism's self-valorisation. On the other hand, the artist is the least capitalist subject, the one who resists value extraction through an alternative and excessive self-valorisation that can never be contained by capitalism (Noys, 2011, p.1).

The reliance that tracks the figure of the artist back to the processes of living labour is the theoretical space in which the argument can be taken to a fully fledged proposition; in order to argue that the figure of the artist has become paradigmatic. In all its complexity,

¹⁹ Art is of course understood here as a producer of possibility and not as a victim.

an appeal to the general intellect is an appeal to the confusing moment in which the paradox of valorisation takes hold on artistic production.

An emphasis on the nebulous generality of the intellect serves to place artistic practice within the modalities of contemporary capitalist production. Such a placement does not appeal to any methodologically unsound strategy what would compartmentalise the faculties of language—and thus, fetishise their separability. The broad discursive praxis that Gillick mentions is itself not dissociable from today's biopolitical autonomous self-regulation of the life process, as totally subsumed in contemporary modes of capitalist production.²⁰

The figure of 'totality', so crucial for Fredric Jameson's strategy of *cognitive mapping*, gains a new valence here (Jameson, 1992, 1988). Totality is not a metaphysical, graspable 'all' of capital, but a figural notion.²¹ Total subsumption hints to that confusion, whose

²⁰ Liam Gillick's novel *Erasmus is Late* narrates a series of temporally disjointed meetings between a panoply of characters who are set to meet Charles Darwin's brother Erasmus for dinner in 1800s Central London. The story, which takes place in London between early 1800s and 1997, places the characters in diverse contexts—most importantly, placing Erasmus in the futural London of the 1990s—gathering an imagined discussion on preliminary encounters that would not have taken place otherwise (Gillick, 2009a, pp.48-100).

The book *Discussion Island/Big Conference Centre*, constructs situations and moments that explore: the frameworks for what a discussion on the future should/would be. The text operates as a script and that treats its fuzzy characters as secondary vessels, in order to emphasise on: processes, structures, and frameworks for decision-making, which negotiate their (in)dependence on personal traits. (Gillick, 2009a, pp.139-199)

These two pieces are immediately relevant to the present project in the following ways:

- Both treat speculative propositions, where temporal disjunctions allow for fictional potentials and linguistic exchanges that are not confined to a specific spatiotemporal setup. These exchanges are punctuated by the use of fiction, a mechanism that Gillick uses to explore the productivities of historical hesitation and improbable meeting points. Specifically, I owe to these uses of temporal concatenation and fictive historical projection the availability of a space to treat tropes such as: the discursive (Garage School), the 'retrofutural', (*Invasión*, Chapter Four) and the virtualities of futurity that haunt the present (Chapter Two).

- With the use of fiction, Gillick expands the possibilities of discursive-work and discursive set-ups, which in turn, allow for the installation of a broader understanding of subsumed linguistic production and its epistemic confusions (addressed on this chapter). Gillick explicitly thematises operations of confusion in the aforementioned works. For instance: Erasmus being lost not-knowing-what-to-expect in a vaguely familiar but mostly unknown and improbable future London; *Big Conference*'s oscillating discussion on the ideas of: utopia, formats and frameworks, which explore what a vacillating future may look like. Both works thematise moments before decisions are taken, before a course of action is decided upon.

²¹ Lyotard's book *Discourse, Figure* (2011) addresses the elusive notion of 'figure', by taking the side of the figural ('*le parti pris du figural*', the title of the book's first chapter). Taking the side

other is also the disturbing impossibility to know. This process will be addressed on Chapter Two, along with Jameson's definition of cognitive mapping.

The present introductory chapter effects the following moves in order to set the ground. It installs the *broad* relations between capital and language and their relation, which are claimed to be better understood through *subsumption*—and not subordination. In order to argue for this, it has been necessary to acknowledge important analyses of the technical means of aesthetic and political organisation and their roles in contemporary capitalistic technologies of subjection. Addressing language should come as no surprise, due to its contemporary relevance. Being the irreducible stratum of sociability and source of contemporary labour—and even more intensely, an increasingly important part of contemporary knowledge production—it qualifies as a crucial site for investigation. This means that, addressing the status of language in contemporary production, simultaneously aids an inquiry into the mesh of biopolitical management and neoliberal governmentality (and in turn, language's imbrication within these forms of power). Taking

of the figural against discourse, a move that implies radical connotations, giving sense to Lyotard's forceful declaration: 'the given is not a text'; '[the given] possesses an inherent thickness' (p.3). The given therefore, is not to be *read* but *seen*. The thickness in question operates as a difference: it is that which falls beyond the grids of capture that form the process of signification. In contrast, the limits of ocularcentrism underscore discourse's overarching capture.

The name of the book already hints towards that which the figural may be: *Discourse, Figure*—a relation to discourse, as that which is adjacent to, but is able to escape discourse's matrix of signification, even if momentarily. The typographic detail of the title's comma—an almost imperceptible visual sign—testifies to prove this intensity. The title indicates a crucial emphasis: Lyotard's proclivity towards the visuality (the eye) of language, which is not only given to be read but also read to be taken-as-given. Underscoring the inescapable figural basis that lies at the core of any process of signification. Following Lyotard, we should underscore the gap signs, the empty spacings between the words, and therefore open the argument towards the materialities of the printed page. An interesting typographic and semantic morphing of the title of the chapter 'Fiscourse, Digure' emphasises this claim (pp.327-355)

The discussion of the figural in question allows the Lyotard of *Discourse, Figure* to conclude that: plastic events are not 'understandable' or 'readable' events—they are libidinal events (p.4). Lyotard's guiding question—if one can ask such a thing to a book that so explicitly rejects the transparency of meaning—can be expressed as: What relation(s) to language operate(s) in a plastic event? This question opens up a crucial matter: that of 'the role of the figural in the libidinal economy of the visible' (Translator's Notes, p.398).

I do not explicitly treat aspects of a broader libidinal economy—although in a sense, the energetics of the libidinal and the role of the figural within this expanded field of exchange are inescapable. Even when they do not explicitly form the core of the present project, they may be present in other modes. Following Lyotard, on the other hand, such economies can never be fully addressed.

stock of a post-Foucauldian theoretical universe—the heterarchical knowledge/power ‘complex’—it can be said that this milieu is crucial to understand the collusion of aesthetics and politics at the beginning of this century.

It is important to acknowledge that the whole conceptual universe which I am drawing from irremediably stems from these (post-)post-Marxist perspectives, which have been amplified, criticised, distorted, misread, followed, enacted, debated, performed, deconstructed, narrated, repeated and spread out in the last century and a half, throughout a wide range of geographical locations. I situate myself in dialogue with these open-ended condensations, their theoretical articulations and disagreements. These in turn inform the positions in which I situate the following discussions.

This project acknowledges this fertile theoretical space and proposes modes for engaging with the confusing consequences in artistic and linguistic practices—all of which register as modalities of epistemic confusion. Since this thesis marks diverse emphases on uncertainties that often produce nebulous power effects, these effects are found to be always materially operative. The promotion of this nebulous scattering is therefore—not only crucial—but necessary. And this necessity in turn articulates the vantage point that I want to explore in this thesis: instead of aiming towards the production of a space of expert knowledge, I wish to explore the position of *not-knowing*.²²

In due time, I will ‘turn’ to a reading of a piece made by Mel Bochner in 1970, in order to support a case for a ‘return’ to language-based artistic practices that can be said to be ‘originary.’ The moment of conceptualism being the one where language most thoroughly intrudes as material into artistic practice. After having introduced the theoretical motif of the heterarchy—and before entering a discussion of opacity and transparency—it is necessary to digress into the motif of the *missed encounter*, so that a return to conceptualism can be articulated.²³

²² Sarat Maharaj asks: ‘[when speaking] of “visual art as knowledge production” [instead of asking] “what sort of knowledge?” [...] Should we not rather speak of *non-knowledge*—activity that is neither hard-nosed know-how nor its ostensible opposite, ignorance?’ (Maharaj, 2009, p.1, emphasis original). My take here asserts the affect of not-knowing, which emphasises confusion, rather than being an inquiry on the non-I of knowledge. This issue is the matter of Chapter Two.

²³ My notion of conceptualism is mult centred and expansive, following Camnitzer, Farver and

Missing the Encounter

This research project engages with the intersection between language-based artistic practices, contemporary debates on knowledge production and their capitalist subsumption. By exploring immanent effects of epistemic failure and confusion, it argues that their provoked affective proclivities are crucial for tackling contemporary debates on the capitalisation of knowledge. In order to achieve this, the dissertation will gravitate around the figure of the missed encounter: a ‘model’ for speculative propositions. The missed encounter does not signal a precise lack of encounters; nor is it an encounter that should-have-taken place and/but/or did not for an (un)expected reason. The missed encounter (*desencuentro*, in Spanish) can be read as: a missed prescription, the sad outcome of a failed meeting, a quarrel or a disagreement. I will pursue this notion as a distorted take and actualised re-reading of Althusser’s late writings on the Philosophy of the Encounter (1978. pp.163-207).

I first found the term missed-encounter when reading Bruno Bosteels’ book *Marx and Freud in Latin America* (Bosteels, 2012c), in which the author initially pairs it with its Spanish equivalent, *desencuentro*. The term is used in the context of a discussion on the roles of Marxism and psychoanalysis in Latin America (as the title aptly indicates). The book is a compilation of moments in which both disciplines find convergences or come to a clashing crossroad in the region. Bosteels explains:

The logic of the failed or missed encounter, as *desencuentro*, can be considered one name among others for the unequal development of capitalism in its global phase. This could even open up the space for a renewed appreciation of the idea of the encounter, not as a euphemism for the discovery and subsequent colonization of Latin America but in the sense in which the late Louis Althusser used the term to configure what he called the “underground current” of an “aleatory materialism,” based on random encounters, as opposed to the supposed determinism and stagism of traditional, dogmatic, or vulgar understandings of dialectical and historical materialism (Bosteels, 2012c, p.36).

Weiss’ exhibition *Global Conceptualism* at the Queens Museum of Art, New York in 1999 (Camnitzer et al., 1999).

Following Bosteels, the missed encounter is a mode of unleashing the unrecognised potentials of Althusser's late thought on the 'Materialism of the Encounter', underscoring the possibility of a futural convergence with the philosopher. This convergence promises a renewed perspective to re-visit the broad cultural impact of Marxism and psychoanalysis in Latin America. (Bosteels, 2012).

The term is in turn borrowed by Bosteels from a text by the current vice-president of Bolivia, Álvaro García Linera (García Linera, 2008). García-Linera uses the term twice in order to underscore the *desencuentro* (as a mis-encounter), between the two revolutionary currents in popular struggles in Bolivia from the previous decade—Indianism and Marxism, respectively. Bosteels argues that the encounter between historical materialism and psychoanalysis in 'Latin America' is an encounter that, having occurred in a chaotic fashion, still allows for a space in which a series of non-prescriptive encounters can take place in unexpected ways. I turn this impulse into a speculative position. The missed encounter functions here as a 'logic' to tackle effects that are able to signal diverging potentials; its logic is one that flees the immanent conditions of a situation and underscores the actuality of a discrepancy or disagreement. Althusser describes this process of dispersal as *déviation* (swerve) (Althusser, 2006, p.169).

In his writings on the Materialism of the Encounter, Althusser draws on a wide range of Western philosophical projects to trace an Underground Current of a Materialism of the Encounter (Althusser, 2006), a genealogy

[that would] bring out [...] *the existence of an almost completely unknown materialist tradition in the history of philosophy: the "materialism" [...] of the rain, the swerve, the encounter, the take [prise], [...] a materialism of the encounter*, and therefore of the aleatory and of contingency (Althusser, 2006, p.167, emphasis original).

This materialist undercurrent is a method that allows for a contingent understanding of relations and the possibility of change, which are nevertheless not necessarily linked or unified by teleology or intentionality.(Althusser, 2006, p. 199)

Althusser explains the meaning of what he calls the suspension of necessity by recalling Rousseau:

[...] the necessity of the laws that issue from the taking-hold induced by the encounter is, even at its most stable, haunted by a *radical instability*, which explains something we find it very hard to grasp (for it does violence to our sense of "what is seemly"):

that laws can change—not that they can be valid for a time but not eternally [...] but that they can change at the drop of a hat revealing the aleatory basis that sustains them, and can change without reason, that is, without an intelligible end (Althusser, 2006, p.195).

This does not mean in any way that the laws are non-existing but—clearly alluding to Mallarmé—that ‘a drop of a hat, a throw of dice’ might underscore the aleatory basis on which any seemingly determined order depends on (Althusser, 2006, p.195–196). The movement of this contingency is a sort of primary torsion, that signals the effect of radical instability that is always present in any material formation (and therefore, should be present in any materialism of contingency).²⁴

Bruno Bosteels underscores a parallel relation, bringing to attention this underground contradiction of the Althusserian project when he affirms:

One principle seems to me to be a crucial component of the legacy of Althusser’s structuralism, which as a result at once becomes a version of poststructuralism. I am referring to the principle of the uneven development of any given structure, which consequently appears as though dislocated from within, due to a series of gaps that are never the effect of purely external contingencies but instead signal the structure’s own immanent deadlock. Althusser’s favorite term for such gaps is *décalages*, typically translated in English as “dislocations” or “discrepancies.” Much later work from the hand of post-Althusserians such as Jacques Rancière and Alain Badiou continues to rely on the presence of such discrepancies within the social orders, political phenomena, and art objects that they are famous for analyzing (Bosteels, 2012a p.12).

The missed encounter is stranded within this torsion or immanent deadlock. I claim it is precisely the effect of this torsion. The missed encounter and its multiple valences comes out of an Althusserian principle: there will never be a complete encounter, since all encounters are contingent and may swerve towards different directions, articulate and crystallise in different formations. I want to claim that the predominant affect of this situation of being-stranded, opened up by an understanding of radical contingency, is an

²⁴ But this does not mean that everything is already aleatory. The world that is the case is always the result of contingent processes that sediment their taking-hold (*prise*). The process of subsumption is in this case a process of taking-hold.

affect that exacerbates epistemic confusion. This confusion takes different names in this thesis, which will methodologically follow temporal and theoretical configurations that are not definite in absolute terms—yet, they act to intensify relations: their sequence could have been arranged otherwise and therefore, yield different results.²⁵ An attention to contingency and underdetermined laterality implies thinking thoroughly about relations; which theoretical constructions are being used and how these relations in turn, change each other.

This is one reason to keep the interplay between the Spanish word *desencuentro* and the notion of the missed encounter: their multiple meanings can range from a simple (literal) encounter that is missed—a missed date, an encounter that never happened—to encounters that even after-having-taken-place leave a trailing series of disappointments or defective recognitions that are not immediately understandable according to the logic of the surrounding conditions nor comply with initial expectations.

The missed encounter also heavily figures as a common trope in pink-versions of Latin American soap operas.²⁶ This potential for divergence into irrelevant conditionals is a trait of the Althusserian encounter, which postulates swerving as a post-structural derivative that is—as Bosteels argued—always-already embedded in any structure or social formation.²⁷ One can say that the very gap between the missed encounter and *desencuentro* is a self-referential performative opening of the concept itself. *Desencuentro* comes as a self-referring gap, in which the concept is unable to effectively perform its duties and therefore, inconclusively spreads to the laterality of surrounding effects.^{28,29}

²⁵ I refer here to Strugatsky Brothers' *A Billion Years* (Chapter Two), Ricardo Piglia's *Theory of Complot* (Chapter Three) and Hugo Santiago's *Invasión* (Chapter Four).

²⁶ The Mexican soap *Desencuentro* (1964) and its several remakes need to count here as a paradigm. It qualifies here as a surreptitious figure of the Althusserian encounter due to the fact that I found it only after having done most of the research for the thesis. The original series was called *The Enemy*, coinciding the concept of the complot (the matter of Chapter Three) and the situational position of the film *Invasión* (the matter of Chapter Four).

²⁷ This point I owe to Adrian Rifkin, who pointed this (post-)post-structural Althusserian subjectivation is perplexing since the subject is 'subjected' to a double bind, in which it is both a subject and remains *beside* the subject.

²⁸ In his seminars on the *Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*, Jacques Lacan addresses the theme of 'The Unconscious and Repetition' (Lacan, 1998, pp. 53-64), where two interlinked problems arise: the problem of repetition in Freud; the problem of experience in psycho-analysis. Here, Lacan famously argues that the discipline of psycho-analysis is not

(Re)Reading Althusser

This dissertation does not wish to add new bulk to reinterpretations of the field, for it is not a re-assessment of Louis Althusser's philosophy *per se*, nor is it a project that wishes to add an 'expert' contribution to Althusserian studies. Warren Montag argues that the French philosopher insisted '[...] throughout his work that a philosophy must be judged by the effects that it produces, all the effects, whether internal or external to whatever disciplinary boundaries might be thought to impose their jurisdiction on it' (Montag, 1998, p.1)

an idealism (1998, p.53). Lacan's main point pertains, precisely, to the mode in which psycho-analysis addresses the real. The first move implies a decoupling of psycho-analysis and idealism, through the thesis that psycho-analysis concerns the *core* of experience. Lacan claims: 'no praxis is more orientated towards that which [...] is the kernel of the real than psycho-analysis' (Lacan, 1998, p.53). This claim has radical implications, its predicament implies that psycho-analysis is in a privileged relation to address the real (whatever it may be). According to Lacan, once we forego any presupposed idealism for psycho-analysis, the discipline will give us a privileged vantage point to address this issue.

Interestingly—for the conceptual matrix of the present project—Lacan explains how any straightforward attempt to theorise the real implies a fundamental misapprehension. This misapprehension occurs between an encounter and a real that always appears as elusive. Theoretically speaking, Lacan distinguishes the *tuché*—relating to Aristotle's attempt to find an 'encounter with the real'—and the recurring 'insistence of the signs', the latter being the mark of the automaton and the insistence on the pleasure principle (pp.53-54). Lacan foregoes any straightforward conception of the real as given, by giving the 'encounter' a traumatic quality that can never fulfil a total apprehension of this real. The real can only be apprehended through repetition, and therefore, it appears as a posterior traumatic effect. The *tuché*, operates through the modality of a repeated occurrence that has a quality of happening 'as if by chance' (p.54).

This pseudo-event that is marked by the modality of the *tuché* implies an approach to the 'real as encounter'. Here lies Lacan's surprising conclusion: psycho-analysis is able to address 'the encounter in so far as it may be missed, in so far as it is essentially the missed encounter' (p.55). Any apprehension of the real is processed through the form of trauma; there is no such thing as the encounter, only the 'missed encounter [sic]' (p.54).

²⁹ Now, the present project owes everything to Lacan's insistence on the missed encounter between real and expectation; which in turn, engenders a torsion of the real that is never fully apprehended. Althusser himself is deeply indebted to Lacan's intellectual project (for instance, his notion of overdetermination stems from psychoanalysis; his theorisation on the reproduction of the conditions of production dialogues with psychoanalysis' insistence on repetition; the notion of an inherent torsion within the core of any system is analogous to the missed encounter).

Such conceptual matrixes constitute core materials for the present project: the missed prescription of an expected meeting point (with Lacan) is not sufficiently processed. I could here speak that, in a performative way, this project enacts a delayed homage and encounter with the underground current of the (Lacanian) materialism of the (missed) encounter. Potentially and plausibly, as an inadequate homage, inasmuch as the homage is never sufficient. (Or, which happens as an encounter that operates through the modality of the always-already: this relation has always-already been insisted upon...).

Following this cue, the present project decides to thrive on and pay attention to *theoretical effects*. These effects are felt in the intersections of artistic practice and the theoretical production that surrounds it. Leaving behind exhausted tropes of authorial creativity, this precise lack of a bounded subjective position can be claimed as a potential space for speculation and theoretical construction. Keeping in mind Althusser's emphasis on effects, the notions I will invoke will not therefore derive from a general ontology nor from a specific set of philosophical conditions, but instead rely on the surfaces of theoretical operations. The evasion of the authorial logic brings another problem, especially in the context of an Althusserian 'return' through the figure of the missed encounter. Since addressing this seemingly contradictory 'Althusser-effect' implies an authorial dilemma, it is necessary to evacuate any mystifying authorial cult (Read, 2005).

Althusser himself suggests a way out, through a thought experiment that relies on an interesting type of subjectless theoreticism:

If we are here, it is as the effects of a theoretical conjuncture. The person who is addressing you [Althusser] is, like all the rest of us, merely a particular structural effect of this conjuncture [...] The theoretical conjuncture that dominates us has produced an Althusser-effect, as it has produced a Rancière effect, a Balibar-effect, [...] and so on... (Althusser, 2003, p.17)

Every conjuncture brings with it a contingent and contradictory arrangement. This a-centrifugal logic is a logic of persistent disagreement that stems from within, an overdetermination of the contradictions in question. Ben Brewster's glossary on Althusser (1969) defines a conjuncture as it 'denotes the exact balance of forces, state of overdetermination of the contradictions at any given moment to which [...] tactics must be applied' (Brewster, 2009).

This juncture allows for a space of manoeuvre and unexpected flight. The 'particular' effect of the conjuncture relies on the idea of the *effect*, which is also the aperture to the problem of *our* conjuncture: Althusser himself, or rather, the actuality of the Althusser-effect in the current situation. Not as a return to the 'master', nor as an excuse for authorial fever, but as a shift in a mode of *reading* that upholds laterality and *effectivity*. And this movement of lateral dispersion is a core methodological trait of this project: the slip into the laterality of surrounding effects is a core affect of epistemic confusion.

(Re)reading Althusser also means turning to a model of reading that emphasises surface and its textu(r)al effects. I will use a short essay written by Jorge Luis Borges to tackle the immanent contradictions evoked here.

Borges' short text, *Kafka and his Precursors* (Borges, 2000, 2007c), published in Spanish for the first time in 1952 in Buenos Aires, is a meditation on the problem of Kafka's literary precursors. The author argues to have 'considered [Kafka] to be as singular as the phoenix of rhetorical praise', but after recurring to his previous texts, Borges' concluded that he 'could recognise [Kafka's] voice, or his practices, in texts from diverse literatures and periods' (Borges, 2000, p.234).

By enumerating the texts in which Kafka's 'modes of doing' appear—even before Kafka himself existed—Borges sets to extract a series of possible influences on Kafka. Borges cites Zeno's Paradox as the first of among several genealogical findings, where the multiple subdivisions of infinity allow for the impossibility of movement; this is argued to be the exact same problem of Kafka's *The Castle*, where 'the moving object and the arrow and Achilles [appear as] the first Kafkian characters in literature' (Borges, 2000, p. 234).

The second is taken from an analogue of Han Yu, as reproduced in Georges Margouliès' *Anthologie raisonnée de la littérature chinoise*, in which an argument following the conceptual possibility of a unicorn ends up seeming uncannily plausible and yet, at the same time, renders the figure of the unicorn unimaginable. (Borges, 2000, pp.234-235) The third is taken from the writing of Kierkegaard as cited by Walter Lowrie, condensed in a parable of a counterfeiter working for the Bank of England who, due to his 'adverse disposition', is continuously invigilated on his job of counting banknotes. This last parable is found by Borges to be structurally equal to Kierkegaard's reflection on God, who also holds him under a regime of total invigilation due to his special understanding of evil. (Borges, 2000, p.235) The fourth 'prefiguration' comes from a poem by Robert Browning in which a man who confronts the possibility of having a friend who might be an obscure apocryphal god; the fifth is taken from two parallel stories by Léon Bloy and Lord Dunsany, which display inverse relations of total and particular arrivals or departures to different locations, and yet the movement between the two points is always described as both static and infinite. (Borges, 2000, pp.235–236). The most compelling part of the text, however are Borges' last words, where he exposes the radical implications of his reading:

If I am not mistaken, the heterogeneous pieces I have enumerated resemble Kafka; if I am not mistaken, not all of them resemble each other. This second fact is the more significant. In each of these texts we find Kafka's idiosyncrasy to a greater or lesser degree, but if Kafka had never written a line, we would not perceive this quality; in other words, it would not exist. The poem "Fears and Scruples" by Browning foretells Kafka's work, but our reading of Kafka perceptibly sharpens and deflects our reading of the poem. Browning did not read it as we do now. In the critics' vocabulary, the word "precursor" is indispensable, but it should be cleansed of all connotation of polemics or rivalry. The fact is that every writer creates his own precursors. His work modifies our conception of the past, as it will modify the future. In this correlation the identity or plurality of the men involved is unimportant. The early Kafka of *Betrachtung* is less a precursor of the Kafka of somber myths and atrocious institutions than is Browning or Lord Dunsany (Borges, 2000, p.236).

The Kafkian genealogy is elegantly laid down in this conclusion, which allows for an expansive and paradoxical account of heterogeneity and homogeneity, identity and plurality in a simultaneous ordering. The most interesting fact about this negation is that it does not rely on a positive figure of Kafka, as an author, a man, a canon or a style. Rather, it relies on Kafka's specific role as nothing more than a differential status. 'Kafka' here acts as an intervallic figure of reference: an effect of reading.³⁰ What Deleuze and Guattari would call a Kafka-Machine, an unhinged apparatus of reading, 'A Kafka-machine is thus constituted by contents and expressions that have been formalized to diverse degrees by unformed materials that enter into it, and leave by passing through all possible states' (Deleuze and Guattari, 1986, p.7). The effects that count as states, as possible articulations of the machine that can be used in different ways: 'To enter or leave the machine, to be in the machine, to walk around it, to approach it—these are all still components of the machine itself: these are states of desire, free of all interpretation. The line of escape is part of the machine' (Deleuze and Guattari, 1986, p.7). And here, I wish to extract an actualised reading of an Althusser-Machine.

³⁰ George Hartley has made a compelling reading comparing metonymic (and immanent) strategies against metaphoric (and transcendent) proclivities in both Kafka and Althusser (Hartley, 1993). This paraliterary Althusser is the returning *Althusser-effect* that I am interested in. Chapter Two and Three address the *paraliterary* as a modality that further advances this tendency.

A Borgesian provocation of the same type has also been made by Thierry De Duve, in the October roundtable discussion on the ‘The Duchamp Effect.’ De Duve asks: ‘[...] What is “Duchamp”? Is that the name of a great artist? A genius? Or is it the name for a set of conditions? What does “Duchamp” refer to?’ (Buchloh et al., 1994, p. 146).

Similarly, we could ask and modulate the same question, after reading Borges’ Kafka: ‘What is “Althusser”? Is that the name of a great theorist? A genius? Or is it the name for a set of conditions? What does “Althusser” refer to?’. These last two questions being the most relevant to the present argument, advance the notion of the Althusser-machine: an apparatus of reading.

‘Althusser’ becomes a *machine* of contingency,³¹ the supplement that exceeds both the author and his connections and at the same time enables the kinship between different times and places, writings and discourses. The answer to this provocation applies to Duchamp, Kafka and Althusser, if they are understood as ‘generic’ operators, if they are allowed to work as motifs or as figures of differential division, as gaps that confound a smooth transition in what would appear as an otherwise teleological line of influence and history. Following Borges, the negation in question is differential: ‘Kafka’ as an interval is the name of that ‘set of conditions,’ rather than an author that organises a given sequential order of transmission and influence. This distance, this interval, undoes an authorial perspective and arranges an interplay on effects: Kafka (and Althusser) on one hand, resemble less their authorial voices (they are not-only-themselves). On the other, they modify previous practices, theories and texts—even their ‘own’—, which in turn modify what ‘Kafka’ or ‘Althusser’ are. One can clearly see how a radically different perspective of the *new* emerges here: a reinterpretation of the past that both modifies what that past is and at the same time actualises the present. Something that is already there, suddenly finds itself as having the spontaneous quality of the new, in

³¹ In an interview with Claire Pernet, Gilles Deleuze describes the wide ranges of what he understands as machination: “Machine, machinism, machinic:” it is neither mechanical nor organic. The mechanical is a system of gradual connections between dependent terms. The machine, on the other hand, is a clustered “proximity” between independent terms (topological proximity is itself independent of distance or contiguity). A machinic assemblage is defined by the displacement of a center of gravity onto an abstract line’ (Deleuze and Pernet, 2007, p.xv).

any point at any given time, following Althusser's idea of an encounter, which postulates the *necessity of contingency*. But this necessary contingent new is nothing special, instead of valuing novelty, Borges' approach debases it into a generic impression.

So the new Althusser is new in this generic sense: this newness is nothing special, since it is contingently distributed it may be read everywhere and anywhere. Borges' argument against any idea of the new stems out of a model of reading, not a conclusion, production or end product. If one claims here an Althusser that is 'new', it is because Althusser is a marker for a self-differential figure signalling a reading strategy, and a new machinic assemblage; a reading-machine signalling the actuality of dispersal.

How does the conjunction Kafka/Althusser/Borges appear then? The play of resemblances and pre-figurations might bring an answer: they are gapping, self-differential figures (*décalages*). But it would be dangerous to mystify their names as markers of mastery, as overlapping categories that would bear the hierarchies of their precursors. Borges' text is in itself deceiving (and offers an antidote to this phenomenon)—it should not be surprising that it is written as a response and reformulation of T. S. Eliot's arguments in Tradition and the Individual Talent (Borges, 2000; Eliot, 1921). Put in this new perspective, Eliot's text is the 'precursor' to Borges, and yet once read, it demands being understood in specifically intransitive Borgesian terms—we could say it has been transformed by the Borges-machine, or that Borges is a precursor to Eliot, or that a line of Kafkian influence is already to be read in Eliot himself, or even that the Kafkian effect of posterior recognition and abolition of the new is an effect of the Eliot-machine as a precursor to Kafka's precursors, etc.

Reading strategies are modes of emphasising the laterality of movements and tactics—to be applied in every conjuncture, recalling Brewster's definition. Using these strategies means following an actualisation and commitment to the relevance of this machinic figure of Althusser. Thus, thoroughly justifying its use beyond a claim to expertise. In a very different way, we are already reading an actualised Althusser, and this thesis holds a strong fidelity to that 'renewed' anachronistic Althusser, that is able to bypass a recycled anti-humanism and can propel a historically complex and dense effectivity.

To pay homage to this movement is also to enable the thwarted logic of the materialism of the encounter through the differential logic of its precursor: the missed

encounter. In a time where the demanding imperative asks to derive theoretical practices from the safe vantage point of ontological sets of conditions, this thesis celebrates a logic of derivation, which can but only stem out of derivativeness itself.

Language as Material

Coming back to the materiality of language in artistic practices: The present project is 'about' models of interference and the effects of language not being effective; models where language fails to achieve its devised ends or tends towards a surplus of incomplete gradients. It is premised on exploring a broader palette of possibilities that do not fall into the trap of binary subordination (i.e. where artistic practice is proscribed as a persistent exploration of theoretical claims). Writing has a crucial and critical value hence, since it is precisely by underscoring its operative materiality in this topical juncture that arguing for such a forced move (art practice/theory) becomes unnecessarily simplistic. I write 'about' precisely to emphasise swerving relations; language is never one 'single' thing that can be grasped in a definition—and as such, it is taken here both as point of departure and *cul-de-sac*. Unearthing theories of immaterial labour and their relations to capitalism implies a sense of orientation, a 'positionality' that in turn points to a 'local' epistemic condition: setting the scene with an emphasis on effects. And this setting the scene means not asking what language is as a philosopher, a linguistic analyst, an economist, etc., nor inquiring by assigning it any pre-given ontological status, but taking it in through 'conjunctures'; the present one being the one arguing for a reference point in cognitive capitalism. I commit to taking the intersection within artistic practices as a practitioner who writes and works with language as a material, a mode of doing among others. But this material is not a 'simple' found neutral fragment of the world as it is encountered. I will turn to Adorno in order to source a re-vitalising conception of material, that holds up to the specific demands of this project.

Adorno's definition of material in Aesthetic Theory is my entry point to this network of swerving terminologies. First, because it links the idea of material with broader spheres in which production is determinant—but not determining. A conception that understands these collusions should be called materialist in a general post-Marxian sense. In a restricted sense though, artistic material may be anything that exists, but is

rendered and mediated through its use by artists. It can be said that what exists as an artistic material has been mediated through labour in a general and abstract sense. The movement between these two is not linear. Artistic practices interact with materials and spheres of production in general. It is worth quoting Adorno himself to examine and unpick this proposition; specifically having in mind the discussion on cognitive capitalism discussed until now.

Material, [...], is what artists work with: It is the sum of all that is available to them, including words, colours, sounds, associations of every sort and every technique ever developed. To this extent, forms too can become material; it is everything that artists encounter about which they must make a decision (Adorno, 2013, p.202).

In order to construct material as an operative concept—meaning a concept that is more than a definition, something that can be used—it is necessary to point out the following specificities:

1. Adorno links artistic material *with* its change. This link brings together a broad general sphere of production 'broad technical developments', to include every technique ever developed. This definition, of course, includes language and this fact is important in terms of the discussion on post-fordism, immateriality and cognitive capitalism. Following Adorno's path, it can be claimed that material implies a broadened awareness of ways-of-doing, of production that does not relinquish its historicity:

The idea, widespread among unreflective artists, of the open eligibility of any and all material is problematic in that it ignores the constraint inherent in technical procedures and the progress of material, which is imposed by various materials as well as by the necessity to employ specific materials. The choice of the material, its use, and the limitations of that use, are an essential element of production (Adorno, 2013, p.202).

2. Therefore material, as understood here, implies a re-definition of technique. Thhis is an important operation: technique, as the available—therefore producible and produced—means comes to encompass various sites of activity and labour. Adorno's definition broadens the concept of technique as it can include *anything* ever made. Therefore:

3. Adorno's approach permits one to think about material as more than simply the outcome of developments on machinery, factory production, or technical development. It

is closer to a generalised sense, to more general 'ways of doing' (recall here Virno's movement of 'opening' towards the general intellect). Material, in the sense defined here, does not leave behind an idea of labour.

4. Then, the definition of material proposed here is broadly aesthetic, more than simply technical: technique is not dissociable from aesthetics. The idea of 'decision making' is not subjected to a closed unidirectional authorial mode. There is an encounter with material and that material in turn changes how its use operates and what that material is. The process is not unidirectional but multidirectional. Adorno's definition is useful because it lines up a very complex historical, relational and materialist modality for thinking about artistic practices—without falling into the naive idea of an omnipotent artistic agency. This definition is strongly mediatory and vindicates a broader sensoria that is linked to broader modes of production.

5. The following is a strong claim that Adorno's definition presupposes and that I wish to take on board:

[...]material is not natural material even if it appears so to artists; rather, it is thoroughly historical. Its supposedly sovereign position is the result of the collapse of every ontology of art, which has in turn affected the materials. They are no less dependent on the transformation of technique than is technique on the materials that it manipulates (Adorno, 2013, p.202).

This downfall of an ontological support is a first impressive regard, one that will bind forthcoming arguments. Adorno's take on the anti-naturality of material implies a broader outlook that encompasses glitches produced by linguistic surplus and epistemic breakdowns. Language as material is now neatly tied with a renewed impulse to think about the outcomes of a contingent materialism.

The Transparency of Transparency

This project proceeds by emphasising the grey thickness of the language in which demands are articulated, so that the imperative to explain and bridge a practice with a theoretical edifice or to generate a 'rigorous' procedure of engagement appears 'doomed' from the outset. This is not a celebration of random linguistic euphoria—even

though it does not disavow this affect in contemporary writing;³² nor does it wish to fall back into the millennialist relativism of ‘postmodern’ agitprop. It rather poses a straightforward advancement that aims to muddle the practice/theory binary in order to produce a state in which their clean division runs out of vitality.

But this straightforwardness is immediately tricky, for writing out of that language—*itself* the threatening medium and agency—spoils the plans and harvests diversions from neat and clear exposition. This laterality needs to be upheld as a contemporary trait that calls for investigation. To do this, I will delve into the murky waters of the history of Conceptualism—where language can be said to ‘first’ become material in Contemporary Art—in order to come back to the laterality of surrounding effects and make a case for meta-strategies. The mediation of language should be initially visited in one of its most relevant historical dimensions for artistic practice: conceptualism.

Nowadays, it seems that only marginal nostalgia would claim any relevance for conceptualism as a historically relevant referent for contemporary practices. Or, even worse, for its most reductive trait, which doomed its reputation for future generations: tautology. This can be argued quite easily: the value of self referentiality has been overturned by its overuse and reductive positivism (Buchloh, 1990). But I wish here to make a case for disparaging tautologies that echo the manifest emptiness and open-ended self-differentiability of lateral mobilisation, enabled by the swerving Althusserian logic of the encounter (and its derivative missed encounter). Consider for a moment Mel Bochner’s piece *Language Is Not Transparent*.

³² So in a sense, it can be said to be not (*only*) a celebration of random or linguistic euphoria [...].



(Fig 1. Language is Not Transparent)

Bochner's work consists of a clumsily written text over a splatter of black paint that reads:

1. LANGUAGE
IS NOT
TRANSPARENT

The performative insufficiency of this tautology is interesting inasmuch as it needs its own linguistic means to state an attack on its claims. Less interesting than the lesson we learn from that statement is the rather ungraceful impossibility of attaining such knowledge straightforwardly, through the 'pristine' means of language. Clumsily, the words transparently state their own lack of transparency, making the postulate appear as

deceitfully devious. Its own aims to transparency betray both the objective and 'objectivity' of its statements.

Mel Bochner's piece engages in an enigmatic lesson that outwits the conflation of conceptualism's referentiality as being merely tautological. It is a piece that does not transparently state its own performance, but rather moves *through* that performance in stating its aporetic self-evidence. The main trait of a tautology is auto-referral, in its flattest definition: it is information that refers to itself. But one should not be tricked into reading Bochner's piece as *only* a tautology—nor to read tautologies as *only* tautologies. It can be argued that this piece operates on an order of meta-referentiality. This is the singularity of the 'lesson' I extract from the clumsy writing on the wall: meta-strategies are performative; there is always a remaining surplus that leaks when referring to information on information (in other words meta-coding is never sufficient and something always escapes).

A set of questions beg to be asked: Why indulge with the aporias of a piece of art made forty-four years ago? Why invoke meta-strategies as relevant in the second decade of this millennium—almost fifty years now after the first conceptualist advancements sprouted around the globe? (Camnitzer et al., 1999).

The first response is historical: this derivation is interesting as a historic marker, especially when dealing with language-based practices as this thesis does. Second: contemporary art as necessarily post-conceptualist practice is irremediably entangled in language. Opaque transparency becomes a methodological imperative and Bochner's piece is both a stepping stone and paradigm in this direction. In an age where State espionage seeks total transparency, opacity becomes a virtue.^{33,34}

³³ The Dutch design studio Metahaven is an important referent in this aspect. Discussing its proposals for a corporate design of Wikileaks, Metahaven upholds the contemporary paradoxical relations between transparency and opacity: '[Wikileaks] is constituted by a necessary sense of opacity—employed in order to offer anonymity to the whistleblower and abstract the leak from its source—while paradoxically asserting the principle of transparency' (Metahaven, 2014). In a number of proposals for WikiLeaks' visual identity, Metahaven references the image economy circulating around the organization, alongside the notion of *transparent camouflage*: an aesthetic gesture and a political strategy (Metahaven, 2014). The videogram shown in the exhibition *Black Transparency* (Metahaven, 2014) is available online (Metahaven, 2013).

³⁴ As, Ian Kiaer and Michael Newman pointed to me—to take a local example from the present dissertation in relation to Lyotard's concept—the excessive matter of Bochner's wall

Meta [...]

But one luring mediation is being left out: The second decade of this century (the time in which this thesis is being written) has been plagued by *meta*— articulations: meta-communication, meta-data, leaks, etc. Our contemporary milieus—including the abstract infrastructures that cut across our everyday lives—are not understandable without a disposition to the affective qualities of meta-. This is the age of meta-surveillance, of massive recollection of meta-pieces and meta-fragments: the surplus materiality of our informational lives, which can be understood as a prevalently data-oriented biopolitics. One of the basic traits that defines this data-oriented register and the materialities of present-day domination is premised precisely on embedded information, on information that refers to itself (Ball, 2013). Meta- qualities let us now grasp the materiality of a veritable total police meta-state. Pre-Snowden, this fact would have probably been disregarded as ridiculous paranoia. Literary and Political theorist Davide Panagia has preliminarily suggested we call this regime *dataveillance*, a portmanteau term binding data and surveillance (Panagia, 2014).^{35,36}

painting addressed in Chapter One (Fig. 1) may imply a slip towards a figural register. An excessive surplus within the linguistic emphasis of the piece can be found in: the matter of the chalk; the density of the paint; the contingent splatter of each instantiation of the piece; the photographic picture of the work; the scanned web image of that picture; the toner-printed reproduction of such a picture on the paper surface of the present dissertation. These (generic) plastic events present materialities that challenge the presupposed linguistic predominance of the piece. A conceptual attention to this fact exceeds—and at the same time complements—the linguistic performativity of Bochner's work, producing a range of unacknowledged possibilities. This matter is unaccounted for in Chapter One, and is a point well taken; following that route should yield different and diverse results that escape the present project.

My account recognises Lyotard's open-ended and complex notion of 'figure', but limits the scope of the terms 'figure' and 'figural' to a more restricted sense of 'figuring-out', akin to Fredric Jameson's theorisation of a mode of making-sense-of: a mode of cognitive mapping that is related to the totality of the economy (Jameson, 1988, pp 348-350). This emphasis connotes the terms in a constructive way, which may lack the Lyotardian 'thickness' of a-signifying instances and moments that escape discourse's capture.

My emphasis is meant to chime with Piglia's idea of Complot, which is a mode of opening up: 'the idea of the economy understood as a practice of experimentation on the subjects' (Piglia, 2015, p.112). 'Figure' and 'figural' are here related to a mode of 'figuring-out' the capitalist world-system and, at the same time, its subsequent subject-effects and the material role of circulating fictions as 'quasi-bodies' (Rancière, 2006, pp.39-40).

³⁵ The 'Mexican definition of a paranoid' applies full scale, this time with an actualised joke-content: a paranoid is someone who believes that (s)he is being followed by a couple of guys who are actually following her/him. Or, as quoted by Bruno Bosteels, Paco I.T II defines '[...] a Mexican paranoid [as] someone who is certain that they are out to get him and who moreover is right to think so' (Bosteels, 2012c, p.279).

A crucial importance is given here to instances that resonate with contemporary problematics that vindicate meta-levels. Practices emphasising language and the infrastructural materiality of abstract mediation are back on the scene: the cunning strategies of deviation, diffusion, enmity and confusion have acquired urgent relevance.³⁷

This thesis remains bound to the materialities of abstraction: the spectral domain in which ‘generality’ and genericness are actualised. This is the opaquely transparent post-Bochnerian domain that I wish to inhabit and which will be the ‘scope’ of this dissertation. Instead of a clear focus, this dissertation has a diffuse visibility, or rather, it refuses to have a specific ‘scope.’ This assertion points to a converge between early conceptualist critiques of vision and today’s datapolitik: the de-prioritisation of visuality as the main organising trait of an aesthetic/political regime (Panagia, 2014).³⁸ Our optical knowledge has become blurred, the affectivity sought has dithered and spread out to the surround. Abstractions have come to the fore. And the main abstraction that drives this investigation is the abstraction of language *in its materiality*.

(Epilogue) on Surplus Referents

Some deeper influences for this project are also felt in design, as a materialist paradigm, a practice of superficiality and cunning: design in its deceptive, ‘crafty and insidious aspects’(Flusser, 1995, p.53). Andrew Goffey’s and Matthew Fuller’s stylistics in their book *Evil Media* (Fuller and Goffey, 2012) are another forceful referent, first because they

³⁶ I thought it worth to add a reference to the lyrics to Cabaret Voltaire’s song *Like Spies in the Wire* (see Appendix Three). Serendipitously, the song was playing on my headphones while I was correcting the previous footnote.

³⁷ Not without irony, Fuller and Goffey call this sensibility the position of grey immanence: ‘If the operatives of the Cold War could reserve for themselves the position of grey eminence, the distant adviser to the executive power, the new spaces of collectively intelligent networks and the asymmetrical relations these put in place demand instead the more difficult position of grey immanence’ (Fuller and Goffey, 2012, p.32).

³⁸ Davide Panagia supports this claim by enabling the term scopophilia: ‘[T]he fact of datapolitik requires that we not rely on our inherited intuitions about surveillance: whether Orwellian/totalitarian, or Foucaultian/Benthamite. Datapolitik is not a regime of surveillance in that way, nor is it a configuration of power relations that easily maps onto the scopophilic—as both the Orwellian and Foucaultian models do. There is literally nothing to “see” here. Not because datapolitik is “invisible” but because it is not a domain of politics available to sight. Datapolitik involves algorithms and programming platforms, not visual technologies of the gaze’ (Panagia, 2014).

uphold the potentials of contemporary uncertainty and ambiguity in our present digital infrastructures (2012, p.312)—potentials which in turn imply the necessity to take on board a wide range of hypothetical analytical positions and movements that lack clarity and resolution. Second, Fuller and Goffey update a case for confusion and sophistic modes of articulation: emphasising on the blurry aspects (and surpluses of abstraction) is critical for thinking the present day's infrastructures, their politics, their tenacious capacity for governance and their mediation of everyday materialities. These mediations include the subjections of archiving (and the archival) of knowledge and therefore, the grey media of administrative reports. This mention is of course, a methodological apart: for instance, this very dissertation as a mode of articulation, distribution and exposition of knowledge implies an attention to the stylistic demand of the transparency of transparency. This demand implies thinking about the dissertation-report as a necessarily aestheticised site (See. Chapter Two and 3).³⁹

This (non)specific scope, in which language is caught and which traverses a range of locations and temporalities can be said to operate materially—in a range of diffuse modalities by promoting indeterminate gradients, fuzzy, unfocused yet persistent remains that do not form a complete paradigm or a finished model. This thesis will continuously come back to this diffuse spectrum where indetermination, dispersion and incoherence persist.

³⁹ Jean-François Lyotard's classical take on the bureaucratic report-format as a site for epistemic inquiry gains relevance in relation to the aesthetics of the bureaucratic report (Lyotard, 1984).

CHAPTER TWO

Always-Already: Homeostatic Capture and Knowledge (By-Products)

Pegaso NEE-01 / Tsyklon-3

On 25 April 2013, the Ecuadorian Civilian Space Agency (EXA) launched the nation's first satellite, Pegaso NEE-01, on a mission to orbit Earth and broadcast live images of the country's geography. Pegaso NEE-01, a Cubesat nanosatellite, was constructed as Ecuador's pioneering incursion to the exploration of space. The project was inspired by a pedagogical drive to heighten the country's own perception of its renewed capacities and highlight the emerging geopolitical role of the Citizen Revolution led by President Rafael Correa. The launch of the satellite and its timid hubris were acerbically—though predictably—read by critics of Correa's government as nothing more than a media show-off: a failed demagogic promise based on a fraudulent trust in technology and progress; a project driven by ideological exaggerations which served to promote a false illusion of modernisation in Ecuador (Pallares, 2013).

Some of Pegaso's functions could easily be supplanted—their quality even surpassed—by services already made available by private companies: Pegaso's cameras would be unable to compete with the higher resolution images of Google Earth; its meteorological readings would always be inferior to the masses of cumulative data already being parsed and processed for atmospheric analysis. Its predictions would pale when compared to existing sets of data aggregation, available through probably less expensive means.

Regardless, there were remarkable aspects about the modest space gadget, which never aimed for a monumental status. The artefact, mostly constructed by skilled Ecuadorian personnel (Nader et al., 2014), would broadcast images of the Earth's orbit in real time for public television. The broadcast was intended to be seen by hundreds of people in the country's national territory, in places encompassing its diverse geography, from the Amazonian region to the Andes Mountains.

The Ecuadorian government asserted, as a response to its critics, the irrelevance of their invoked teleological narrative of development, further promoting the incipient excursion as thoroughly justified in its projective pedagogy and pioneering outlook. Pegaso's mission aimed to be both a public and symbolic assertion of national self-sufficiency. Championing a renewed spatial and geopolitical imaginary for the nation, it is not surprising that the satellite's main faculty was the capacity of image production. Imagery in a broad sense, which would further promote the State's promise for inclusive national education.

Nothing of the sort happened, at least not in any previously expected way. Pegaso's fate bypassed all predictions, unraveling what will be read here as an aesthetic potentiality that extends beyond its capacity to fulfil—or fail to fulfil—any claims to development or underdevelopment. I am speaking here of a(n un)fortunate incident that went beyond the specific technological effectivity of the satellite. The following events point to asynchronous temporal overlaps—confusions that form the affects of a delayed actualisation of temporalities. These affects—a-subjective, material and non-teleological—postulate an unexpected deviation. Pegaso NEE-01 becomes thus an important paradigm to reconsider the outcomes that follow Althusser's Philosophy of the Encounter.

Pegaso NEE-01 disappeared on 23 May 2013 after colliding with space debris left from a Ukrainian built Tsyklon-3 rocket launcher, which had been orbiting the Earth since the Soviet Era. The shard, identified as SCC-15890 caused 'an attitude loss and physical damages' (EXA, 2015a, translation mine), according to the official webpage of the EXA. This unexpected collision thwarted the nanosatellite's orbit, unleashing a gamut of catastrophic consequences. Pegaso's emissions ceased and its predefined orbit was irreversibly altered. The sad developments of this accident appeared to give the government's critics a certain degree of reason when they mocked the rising 'Ecuadorian

Space Age' (EXA, 2015b). But, going beyond the exasperated claims to the failure of the South American nation's space program—which would therefore be extensive to the rest of the government's ideological framework—stepping back from such sterile disputes may provide a wider and more interesting range for analysis.

Pegaso's example will be a case and an opportunity to aid the construction of a reading mechanism that serves to revitalise the unrealised virtualities of Althusser's notion of the encounter. In order to do this, I will produce the figure of the missed encounter, which is a derivative theoretical proposal: a machine for reading materials that would not have been related otherwise. I will claim that the missed encounter operates in the blurry state of undecidability opened by situations whose main affect is defined by the incapacity to know if an encounter that has taken hold has in fact occurred.

What follows is a presentation of Althusser's arguments, in order to better clarify the terms of his philosophy of the encounter. Althusser states

the existence of an almost completely unknown materialist tradition in the history of philosophy: the materialism (we shall have to have some word to distinguish it as a tendency) of the rain, the swerve, the encounter, the take [prise]. [...] A materialism of the encounter, and therefore of the aleatory and of contingency (Althusser, 2006, p.167).

Althusser's motifs are crucial to understand the consequences of this materialism, which operates as a *tendency*. This materialism is prone to modifications, attentive to the flux of contingency. Althusser treats this materialism as a tendency—an underground current—using an atmospheric metaphor. The signifier *rain*, is a motif that already runs through Epicurean thought: the rain of atoms falling in the void. More specifically, it is a materialist articulation that can be found in Lucretius' poetry:

Another basic principle you need to have a sound
Understanding of: when bodies fall through empty space
Straight down, under their own weight, at random time and
place,
they swerve a little. Just enough of a swerve for you to call
It a change of course. Unless inclined to swerve, all things
would fall,
Right through the deep abyss like drops of rain. There would be
no
Collisions, and no atom would meet atom with a blow,

And Nature thus could not have fashioned anything, full stop
(Lucretius, 2007, p.42, emphasis original).

A collision of atoms that fall at 'random time and place', 'through the abyss like drops of rain.' The *encounter* is presented as an aftereffect: a collision that is brought about by the aleatory *swerving* of the atoms. Lucretius' poem highlights the most important feature of the Althusserian swerve: its necessary contingency. Lucretius repeatedly states the quality of the aleatory: 'of the slight swerve of the atoms, at a random time and place' (Lucretius, 2007, p.45); even the *slightest* swerve expresses the possibility of an encounter. The atmospheric rain of particles that swerve, that deviate from their fall and are able to generate an encounter (and it matters not that the encounter lasts). What matters in this philosophy is the relation between contingency and necessity, a relation that is a condition for the materialist philosophy of the encounter. Thus, for Althusser, a materialist philosophy worthy of the name needs to think the 'contingency of necessity as an effect of the necessity of contingency, an unsettling pair of concepts that must nevertheless be taken into account' (Althusser, 2006, p.187). Figuring out of this possibility and articulating it through the contingent *possibility* of deviations (i.e. swerve) is Althusser's task for a materialist philosophy. Philosophy should unearth this materialist current in order to enable a thinking of contingency.

Althusser asks:

What becomes of philosophy under these circumstances? It is no longer a statement of the Reason and Origin of things, but a theory of their contingency and a recognition of *fact*, of the fact of contingency, the fact of the subordination of necessity to contingency, and the fact of the forms which "gives form" to the effect of the encounter. It is now no more than *observation [constat]* : there has been an encounter, and a "crystallization" [*prise*] of the elements with one another (in the sense in which ice "crystallizes") (Althusser, 2006, p.170).

The effect of a contingent swerve is the fact (*fait accompli*), as the taking hold [*prise*] of an encounter that crystallises and holds together. Retrospectively, that which can be recognised as an encounter that holds (*prise*) is that which is legible after the fact—after the accomplished fact that is therefore the crystallisation of an initial encounter. This relationship allows for a materialism of change, for configurations that contemplate the radical possibility of things being—and becoming—otherwise. Of change, premised on

the negation of a pre-given teleology. A change that at the same time, cannot discard the articulations of what 'there is' (*es gibt*, according to Heidegger) (Althusser, 2006, pp.170–171)]. What 'there is', for Althusser means nothing other than historical sedimentation, as what has-come-to-be (Althusser 2006, p.189).⁴⁰

Again, Althusser explains:

nothing guarantees that the reality of the accomplished fact is the guarantee of its durability. Quite the opposite is true: every accomplished fact, even an election, like all the necessity and reason we can derive from it, is only a provisional encounter, and since every encounter is provisional even when it lasts, there is no eternity in the 'laws' of any world or any state. History here is nothing but the permanent revocation of the accomplished fact by another undecipherable fact to be accomplished, without our knowing in advance whether, or when, or how the event that revokes it will come about. Simply, one day new hands will have to be dealt out, and the dice thrown again on to the empty table (Althusser 2006, p.174).

This radical instability is the core of a materialist philosophy that is comprehensive enough to set the conditions for the legibility of change, and to submit itself to its own predicated contingency. The provisionality of the encounter is due to the momentum of the atmospheric *tendency* of the rain, which maps a certain proclivity, affectivity and effectivity. The current of the encounter, of an underground current of the materialism of the encounter, is thus the outcome of this contingency and this tendency, where diverse philosophical projects collide and resonate.⁴¹ Althusser situates this gathering as an encounter that produces the *conditions for a swerve (deviation)*: a forceful—and in a certain sense, violent—reading in which these particles (and projects) are able to converge. And this convergence can go back to the establishment of a fact, of the fact that there is a tendency in the history of philosophy that can be understood as a materialism of the encounter. A tendency that can be taken as a *fait accompli*, to the extent that the underground current of a materialism of the encounter modifies the aims

⁴⁰ An interesting strand that I do not follow here is the relationship between 'there-is' and 'there-is-nothing.' Althusser's relationship to the category of 'nothing' is treated by Warren Montag in (Montag, 2010).

⁴¹ Althusser aims to come to terms with both his precursors and contemporaries in this text. The list of authors, compiled in order of appearance, are: Epicurus, Lucretius, Heidegger, Machiavelli, Spinoza, Rousseau, Hegel, Marx, Nietzsche, Derrida, Foucault, Deleuze.

and outlook of philosophy itself. This matter is of no little importance, since it articulates what could be called an anachronistic temporal dimension that is a crucial binding mechanism for this current.

I will articulate this temporal relation so that the proposition of the missed encounter can follow. In an interview the philosopher Jacques Rancière—a former pupil of Althusser—explains: ‘to conceptualize the “contemporaneity” of thought requires the reliance on a certain anachronism or untimeliness’ (Panagia and Rancière, 2000, p.121). Rancière speaks about the negation of an ‘appropriate’ place for thought, of a necessary violence that follows by opposing an ‘identitarian presentism’ (Panagia and Rancière, 2000, p.122), which is the identification of time with time, of the present as an inevitable fact. The temporal disjunction afforded by anachronism goes against a crude understanding of a lineal accumulation of facts, the etymology of anachronism refers to being *against* time. And going back to Althusser, some further consequences can certainly be extracted by the untimeliness of anachronism, understood through this being-against-time. Althusser reflects on this matter: ‘chronology hardly matters in this business [...] because what is in question [in any materialism of the Encounter] is, above all, the resonances of a tradition buried and then revived, resonances which must be registered’ (Althusser 2006, pp. 179–180) Althusser speaks of an extant tendency (a materialism of the encounter) that needs to be registered through its *resonances*. And resonance, as a physical or acoustic vibration of parallels, recalls once again Lucretius’ open-ended atoms falling in a void. Althusser expresses here a new kind of crystallisation of facts, beyond a suffocating historical inevitability or a chronological build up. Instead, this crystallisation appears as a polymorphous field of material affection.⁴² History need not aggregate nor follow a univocal path: its outcomes are always arranged in polyvalent ways, and contingency lurks behind the corner.

It is only after the retrospective assertion of a ‘Fact’, verifiable as the outcome of a having-taken-hold, that an encounter can be registered. The anachronistic register of

⁴² And here *affection* does not appear as emotion, but as the ‘ability to affect and be affected’. (Massumi, 1987, pp.xvi). Althusser is a keen reader of Spinoza and this affective undercurrent needs to be acknowledged, even if it is not thoroughly treated in the present project.

resonances—elsewhere treated in this dissertation by evoking Borges' retroactive notion of the precursor—is thus nothing other than the registering and acknowledgement of a materialism of the encounter.^{43,44}

It is in this intersection that the following questions, which guide the present project, operate: What happens in the moment of undecidability in relation to the encounter? What can be thought through by acknowledging the temporal multiplicities opened up by the condition of swerving? As stated above, the site of operation of the missed encounter would be nothing other than a blurry state of undecidability, whose main affect would be defined by the inability to know, if an encounter that has taken hold had *in fact* occurred. The polyvalent space of open associations and possibility is the disjunctive space of the derivative notion of the missed encounter. As the name missed encounter indicates, it operates with an unstable mixture of significations ranging from a temporal disjunction to a sense of core antagonism and disagreement. Its multiple valences lend it its interpretive capacities.

Desencuentro

In July 1982, between a psychiatric clinic and his Paris apartment, Althusser wrote a body of work that is now considered to be a turning point in his oeuvre. *The Underground Current of the Materialism of the Encounter* is a landmark of this period, due to its treatment of structurality and contingency. The late Althusser offers a new conception of materialism that enables a total re-assessment of his previous theoretical output. There

⁴³ One would be tempted to add Borges to the underground current of the materialism of the encounter exposed by Althusser. Instead, his evident absence from Althusser's list aligns him with the underground current of the materialism of the *missed* encounter.

⁴⁴ Acknowledging the currency of anachronism and Borges' surreptitious presence on this project, I find it worth to mention Pierre Menard's technique of reading/writing, which consists on copying Cervantes' Quixote word by word in order to create a new (meta-)work. Borges explains how '(perhaps without wanting to) [Menard] has enriched, by means of a new technique, the halting and rudimentary art of reading: this new technique is that of the deliberate anachronism and the erroneous attribution. This technique, whose applications are infinite, prompts us to go through the Odyssey as if it were posterior to the Aeneid and the book *Le jardin du Centaure* of Madame Henri Bachelier as if it were by Madame Henri Bachelier. This technique fills the most placid works with adventure.' (Borges, 2000c, p.71; 2000e)

is, in fact, a growing impulse to treat this Althusserian moment as a paradigmatic shift in the philosopher's trajectory, due to the text's own retrospective modification of his previous ideas and 'structural' approach (Cockshott, 2013; García del Campo, 2003; Hartley, 1993; Montag, 2013, 2010; Suchting, 2004). Following the earlier suggestion—made through Althusser's own ideas on retrospective articulation and their underground resonances—we can claim that Althusser's previous work is haunted by posterior articulations. These articulations irrevocably modify the course of Althusser's thinking, retrospectively and projectively. The late Althusser is a disruptive precursor to his own early work, following the discussion on the Borges-machine outlined in the previous chapter (Borges, 2007e, 2000c).

I follow a broader impulse that aims to recover the rich conceptual ground laid down by Althusser. My contribution is premised on fabricating the loose notion of the missed encounter—itself, a swerving offshoot of the philosophy of the Encounter. The present project contributes to capture an obsolescent momentum: the Philosophy of the Encounter may not take hold, or its taking hold [*prise*] may unexpectedly occur. In this sense, I stay on an uncertain terrain of ambivalence that considers the possibility of a relevant encounter that may not last. Or an encounter whose relevance may not be articulated in a way that is coherent enough to acutely grasp the perplexities of the present. Articulating the notion of the missed encounter as a secondary articulation implies the necessity of defending a blurry notion, rather than a sharp analytic tool.

Until now I have followed Althusser's arguments for parallelism and dithering, towards the broader atmospheric domain of the Lucretian rain. This foggy parallelism exists also on a methodological level, which I will discuss now. Following the anti-original implications that come with acknowledging the dense web of literary referentiality—as a notion that encompasses a wide range of material.

The conceptual prototype of a missed encounter is thus owed to an even broader set of existing discussions on the Althusserian legacy. I follow here the Belgian theorist Bruno Bosteels, with whom the resonances are most clear, given that the term missed-encounter is first proposed by him (Bosteels, 2012, 2011). Bosteels works on the reception of Marx and Freud in the geographic space that comes under the underspecified signifier of 'Latin America.' By cursorily referring to a missed encounter, Bosteels therefore elliptically activates a powerful term. The debate invoked by Bosteels operates in the

context of the relevance or obsolescence of Althusser. This implies thinking of both an intersection and a dispute that has a multilayered epistemic conjuncture as a template. This conjuncture implies a subsidiary disagreement over what sort of geopolitics of knowledge is at stake when the following chain of signification is invoked: Marx-Freud-Latin-America (and of course, all their possible combinations).⁴⁵ I want to seek mechanisms that juggle with a polyvalent and thoroughly uneven conjuncture that is opened by the Althusserian concept of the Encounter. And the response to such a conjuncture needs a mechanism that tackles polyvalence and is able to juggle with a broad array of contradictory urgencies and responses. Urgencies that imply the necessity to make sense of what may be at stake in a labyrinthine expansion. In this sense, the swerving dispersion of the encounter urges me to avoid confining responses to a fine-grained corpus of specialism and expertise. Instead it compels me to privilege transversality and spreading-out, as movements that allow for thinking through uneven and underspecified degrees and stratifications.

In this sense, the second-hand concept of the missed encounter is coupled with a textual parallel: that of a text in the 'second degree', which implies a text in-relation—'[a] general notion of a text in the second degree [...], a text derived from another preexistent text' (Genette, 1997, p.5). This simple act of derivation—a sort of tautological general condition of all textuality—has fortunate consequences for the re-assessment of the notion of the encounter and the production of the missed encounter, in the second-degree. Genette's notion of a text in the second degree is influenced by Borges' approach to language as labyrinth and totality, as an unstable retro-futurity of trans-textuality (Borges, 2000a; 2000c; 2007c; 2007e).

Recalling Chapter One: my privileged notion for the development of the arguments is the notion of subsumption. Cognitive capitalism attempts a total subsumption by modifying the constitutive fibres of capital and language, irrevocably. Irrevocability here is crucial: the labyrinthine and totalising affect of epistemic confusion appears in this crux.

⁴⁵ Walter Mignolo uses *geopolitics of knowledge* to refer to 'the uneven distribution of knowledge' (Mignolo, 2005, p.44), constitutive of the very epistemological tangle that constitutes the idea of Latin America. Mignolo implies here a spatialisation of knowledge.

The affect of the second-degree implies a labyrinthine situation, where the dense totality of capital is amplified. In a sense, we could speak of a paralinguistic condition, of a redundant linguistic expansion that runs in parallel to the expansion of global capitalism. Following the thesis of total subsumption: affective and meta-communicative traits contingently dither out from language into the still unrealised totality of capitalism. This dithering brings about the expansive lingual surplus of the second degree.

Althusser proposes a new mode of approaching materialism as embedded in the paradoxical relation between necessity and contingency. This materialism is aleatory inasmuch as it is understandable through an argument of necessity—a necessity that is in turn, nothing other than a necessary contingency: The 'contingency of necessity as an effect of the necessity of contingency' (Althusser, 2006, p.187). Althusser's move, premised on what seemingly appears to be a paradoxical statement, presupposes radical change as an always available possibility, through the form of (as will be seen) the *a/ways-already*. This approach is a refreshed renewal of materialism that grounds a conflictual brand of post-structuralism. A post-structuralism that—repeating Bosteels' argument in Chapter One—is in itself a type of structuralism (and vice-versa). This point of ambivalence is the effect of an 'immanent deadlock' (Bosteels, 2012a p.12). The always-existing internal contradictions of 'necessity' are conditions for the possibility of the swerve and therefore, for the aleatory and the contingent.

The enabling zone of operation where such conditions are met exist on the 'second-degree' and under the premise of the 'always-already'—or being always-already on the second-degree form—the necessary trans-textuality and trans-semiotic of the present modality of subsumption of cognitive capitalism. Underscoring the 'always-already' second-degree qualities of reading implies an overloaded relation to the Philosophy of the Encounter, which becomes a machine for reading through the untraceable totality of the present-day capitalist subsumption (Jameson, 1988) (Chapter Three). Focusing on the qualities of this second-degree condition means that every kind of reading is always a mode of misreading, implying that the necessary contradictions that haunt the act of reading itself need to be taken into account—or need to be acknowledged (always-already acknowledged). A necessary violence extracted from and exerted on the material needs to be understood as constitutive of the very act of reading, which is in turn an inevitable act of transformation.

Trying to bring Althusser to bear upon contemporary art is in a certain way, a parallel impossible exercise, as is any pretension to swiftly and transparently translate ideas from the philosophical realm to an artistic project. Acknowledging this inherent contradiction is analogue to acknowledging an irreducible constitutive degree of definition loss that is needed for an erratic take on the Althusserian project—which is paradoxically, in passing, a sufficient justification of the whole enterprise. We could speak about a missed encounter between art and the philosophy of the encounter, as a way of adding a conflictual level that is always immanently tackled (Chapter Four).

The present project then, ought not to be judged by the detail of its fidelity to Althusserian principles, but by its propositions on productive misreading and its repurposing of theoretical terms—their use as *material*. To further assert this point, I will cite an interesting inversion that Efraín Kristal attributes to Borges: ‘an original can be unfaithful to a translation’ (Kristal, 2002, p.1). I am uncertain if this is an erroneous attribution, since I have not been able to track where Borges said such a thing. Regardless, what is interesting to me—beyond the nice performativity of Kristal’s improbable invention—is a textual underscoring of untruthfulness and lack of faith. This question addresses an underlying claim for *productive contradiction*, which needs to be acknowledged as necessary for this project’s conceptual stock.

In order to treat the conjuncture in question, it ceases to matter if Althusser is our contemporary (or if we are indeed contemporaries of Althusser). Kristal’s anecdote highlights a delayed understanding, which recalls what psychoanalysts call an *après-coup* type of delayed temporality. The term, translated as *afterwardsness* in English, stems from Freud’s *Nachträglichkeit* (Laplanche, 1999). Afterwardsness expresses how symptomatic effects can only be read in a backward manner, through a retrospective reading of the symptom of the repression that modifies past events through the lens of posterior effects of the repression itself. Recalling Etienne Balibar’s title, the Non-Contemporaneity of Althusser (Balibar, 1993)—or the conflicting contemporaneity of the Althusser effect—is what gives the temporally distorted conflictual logic an even stronger sense of urgency.⁴⁶

⁴⁶ And these effects are being mobilised in diverse ways. The title of Quentin Meillasoux’s

Coming back to Pegaso NEE-01's fate allows for an analysis of the theoretical conjuncture presented here. Pegaso NEE-01 constitutes an object-paradigm of the missed encounter—a figural exemplar of a conjuncture that does not take hold (*prise*): it presents an overlap of conflicting temporalities, which in turn produce unintended and unpredictable after-effects, impossible to foresee from within the original configuration of the situation. This is precisely the 'gap' (*décalage*) between a 'structural totality'—embodied in the planetary geo-imagination of the role of a new socialist nation—and the conjuncture itself—the polluting gravitational material leftovers of an earlier socialist experiment. The missed encounter articulated here is not the accidental scientific miscalculation of the EXA; it is rather kin to the unforeseeable actualisation of a geopolitical imaginary that is far removed from a narrative of progress. In the outer atmospheric void of the Earth's gravitational field, built-up historical tensions, embodied in gravitating post-industrial leftover material unexpectedly link the budding socialism of the tropical nation of Ecuador with the residues of the age-gone space glory of the Soviet Union. While Pegaso was designed as a patriotic exercise to further Ecuador's geopolitical self-imaging/imagination (EXA, 2015b), this imaginary was in turn unexpectedly actualised by means of the sordid historical encounter between the floating rubbish left by the industrial Communist potency and the historical aspirations of an emergent socialist postcolonial nation.

The notion of the missed encounter serves to understand the promises of historical actualisation that unfolds without a taking hold [*prise*]. Following the contingency of this untimely event, the optimistic geopolitical imagination of the Ecuadorian Space program was wrecked by background rubble in the—very literally—material historical milieu that held its hubris. Pegaso's collision signals a thwarted actualisation, visible in the overlapping of histories by the destructive virtues and effects of median detritus, remnants and material surpluses.

book, the cornerstone of Speculative Realist thought—is symptomatic of the thwarted temporal actuality of Althusser's thinking on contingency (Meillassoux, 2010).

Pegaso's case calls for an analysis that leans towards affects of dispersal. First, because the effects of this collision can only be read through the unexpected consequences unleashed by the encounter. Second, because the claim for relevance of what could be called a 'pseudo-event' is only available through the encrustation of parallel—yet uneven—developments of multilayered historical processes, today visibly embodied in their technological debris.

Building on the post-Althusserian lexicon, the Pegaso pseudo-event perfectly typifies the internal mismatch of the encounter as a concept which 'misses' itself: thus asserting again a reading of the missed encounter in its second order status: in its relation to the 'originality' of the Althusserian project. This second order virtue is shared by the multiple layers of the missed encounter itself, unfolding in a plethora of circumstantial material qualities. And circumstantiality should not be neglected, since the encounter depends precisely on the possibility of the swerve, without which—recalling Lucretius—'There would be / no / Collisions, and no atom would meet atom with a blow, / And Nature thus could not have fashioned anything, full stop' (Lucretius, 2007, p. 42, emphasis original).

I will momentarily diverge and take colour as an example and typification of the swerve: Ecuador is part of the 'pink tide', a 'second -order' experiment on socialism made by a member of a group of second order nations which can barely aspire to being truly red. The concept 'missed encounter' is therefore constituted by: 'not-being-quite x', in this case, 'not-being-quite' red. Pegaso's irrelevance hardly qualifies as a technological breakthrough, placing Ecuador at odds with its aspirations to form a process that could credibly take hold as a revolution. Pegaso, within the colour-paradigm, is part of a further derivation: pink is not a primary colour, and only exists as a derivative tint of red. Whereas Red refers to the purity of the Encounter that 'took hold' in the USSR, the erratic behaviour and existence of a spurious gadget that crashes with post-Soviet Ukrainian debris is a debased *antimonument* that underscores the impossibility of any definite taking hold. And thus, it is a semi-perfect example of a mis-encounter (as an encounter that is supposed to have been missed)—a derivative theoretical artefact that brings about the most radical implications of the swerve.

The missed encounter is in this way, a second order theoretical construction that is always *relative to* (one could add, allegorically) to the grandiosity of the Encounter, and

yet is able to leak towards circumstantial and fortuitous qualities and applications that debase the Encounter's magnanimous primary status. Regarding colour again, derivativeness is important, pink being labeled as a derivative tint of red, a red that is the true and triumphant European Socialism. Again, insisting on the derisive homage of the 'Latin American pink tide', as a 'weak' tide that is not as red as its true red exemplar. The pink in question here can be interpreted through another shift in signification, which is less emphatic colour and leaks to the surrounding domain of spectrality: on tide as wave, its qualities therefore related to waveforms. This leak could be interpreted as the spectral domain of pink noise, the levelling of the background volumes that produce an even noisy spectrality.

Interestingly, insisting on the lateral spill of the swerve, the theory of colour overlaps with politics once again in a relevant example for the second order political aesthetics we are probing here: Goethe himself—the 'Father' of modern colour theory—suggested to Francisco de Miranda in 1785, that the newly decolonised nations' flag should be composed of the three primary colours, yellow, blue and red. Such colours would be parallel the universality of the new nations' claim for liberation and independence from their colonial past, and should therefore be kept in their raw state. Three colours which still, until today, constitute the flags of Colombia, The Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela and Ecuador, which were united as one nation after defeating the Spanish Empire in the War of Independence.

As much as Pegaso NEE-01, the missed encounter flaunts its antimonumental status. A further detour will follow, in order to introduce the figure of antimonumentality. A bootleg by the Japanese noise musician Merzbow is my cue here (Merzbow, 1986). The name Merzbow itself downplays—but at the same time pays homage—to the grandiose monumentality of Kurt Schwitters' *Merzbau*, the project from which it takes its name (and thus, sets up an important transtextuality that diverges into the aural spectrum). *Antimonument* is a noise album that pounds on heavily distorted overlapping rhythmic patterns. It is also an important recording for the Japanese noise scene. This project is useful in the following ways:

First, the fact that *Antimonument* is a bootleg legitimises a certain aspect of its own (auto-reflective) antimonumentality. The album is not part of Merzbow's otherwise prolific

and complete official oeuvre and, precisely because of this, it comments on the whole of the artists' trajectory in a way that only its derivative (bootleg) status can.

Second, by emphasising on noise-detritus instead of monumental sculptural construction, the album sifts into a spectral domain that is not only reliant on the oculocentric domain of the symbol, but on the thumps, clacks and hisses that form another approach to temporality. This is especially crucial for our concerns here, in relation to Pegaso's antimonumentality, due perhaps to its debased spectral dissolution.

Third, Merzbow is also located in a second-degree and derivative relation to Merzbau. Where Schwitters' Merz relates to building (*bau*, in German), the monument is both homage and an elliptical reading of the building as a diffuse domain; Merzbow operates in the sound spectrum asserting the noisy spectrality of the leftover. Resolutely, the shift from merzbau to Merzbow opts for a defacement of the monument.

Merzbow orients us in the search for further contradiction: it can also be claimed that Pegaso is less a paradigmatic figure of the missed encounter than the SC-15890 shard of the Tsyklon-3. This conclusion is compelling in a certain way, given the generic name of the leftover. But I want to further argue that Pegaso's in-between status negates the messianic expectation of the Ukrainian shard being the bearer of a future promise of actualisation (of the colour red, of a Communism-to-come, etc.) Pegaso NEE-01 is neither necessary nor providential. Its crash was fortuitous and the consequence of unfortunate events: in this sense it perfectly fits the present paradigm of aleatory antimonumentality.

Returning to the matter of derivation and the second-degree status of the missed encounter: it could be further claimed that the missed encounter—at least as constructed up until now—is not only derivative of the Encounter but of itself. Stating it in Spanish, *e/ desencuentro se desencuentra*; the missed encounter *se desencuentra*. Which means that the missed encounter disagrees with itself/it misses its own encounter/it dis-encounters itself. This articulation plays with the ambivalent mismatch of the concept in its own constitution—and explains why it is a methodologically productive gesture to keep the polyvalent interplay between the Spanish and English languages. The missed encounter is here presented as a kind of piling wreckage, as a defective articulation accumulated by reading the underground current of the philosophy of the encounter—and a way with which to inhabit the (impossible) gap between a philosophy of contingency and art. The missed encounter is bound by outcome of encounters that do not take-hold (*prise*) (or

whose taking-hold is, at least perceptibly, indefinitely sustained). The condition of not-having-taken-place is what holds together the immanent field of potential articulations of not-knowing. Precisely, it is because of its clumsy conceptuality—the mis-encounter se *desencuentra*—that the attention of the missed encounter to reminders and leftovers acknowledges the potentiality of surplus particularities.

If the Encounter is taken as the whole—as the conceptual structural totality in Althusserian terms—the missed encounter will emphasise on the contradiction of contradiction: on the circumstantial surplus that is always left over. Since missing the encounter means not-knowing where one is located, the affect of not-knowing is a model of being lost in the gaps. The Spanish word *encuentro* (encounter) will serve to further clarify this situation: *encuentro* is a location marker. ‘I am located in’ means ‘*me encuentro en*,’ which can be translated as: ‘I meet myself in,’ ‘I encounter myself in.’ Desencuentro can be taken as a form of not finding one-self and therefore as a way of missing the subject.⁴⁷ Neatly matching a post-structural rejection of the subject and paying a tribute to the effectiveness of the Althusserian Effect on our thinking.

Moreover, Althusser defines a *décalage* as the mark of an immanent torsion within the structure (any structure whatsoever). This is a reason to openly keep the fluidity and self-difference of the missed-encounter/mis-encounter/desencuentro complex. Althusser (indifferently) calls this gap a torsion, or an internal dislocation. (Althusser and Balibar, 2009, pp. 16,19,85,148). As theoretical constructions that are in a conflictual state with their own meaning, the missed-encounter/mis-encounter/desencuentro complex needs to pay attention to *décalages* within *décalages*. The gap, or the internal dislocation of the term against itself, is a mark of the missing of an encounter: a self-referential fissure that implodes and serves to mobilise contradiction.

Pegaso NEE-01’s paradigmatic status should be celebrated, precisely because of its limitations, which seemed to be doomed from the outset. Nevertheless, the nanosatellite actualises a relation between geographically removed historical densities within

⁴⁷ Furthermore, as Adrian Rifkin suggested to me in a conversation, missing the subject may be a form of melancholic longing for the subject and at the same time, a form of not being able to encounter the subject.

common frameworks. It does not however, articulate an exemplary revolutionary force of newness; nor does it promote a positive view of the renewed Ecuadorian revolutionary experience; nor does it uphold the hopeful remnants of a failed Socialist dream. Instead, Pegaso enforces a different version of possibility, within the unacknowledged matter of the contemporary.⁴⁸

Pegaso's 'original' trait of defectiveness is premised on the paradoxical outcomes of immanent contingency, abundant in the meteorological dithering of the surround. The scope obtained by paying attention to immanent contradiction serves to enforce what Althusser called the 'necessity of contingency:' a 'thinking [of] contingency as a modality of necessity' (Althusser, 2006, pp. 193–194).⁴⁹ Again, Pegaso is relevant here retrospectively, *only* after it crashes with the gravitating shard SCC-15890. Appearing only too late, Pegaso's relevance *can only be read in retroaction*: had it not crashed, it would be totally irrelevant to unravel the sprawling derivations of the missed encounter.

On January 25, 2014, Pegaso NEE-01's lost signal was again picked up by its twin satellite, NEE-02 KRYSAOR (EXA, 2014). As of today, both satellites are still within the range of the Earth's gravitational field. A dysfunctional and modified NEE-01 still follows an eccentric orbit that is only retrievable when its signal overlaps the range of its twin satellite NEE-02. Pegaso NEE-01, our antimonument of choice within the landscape of post-industrial debris is only matched by its derivative twin NEE-02 KRYSAOR, whose main function is to pick up its 'brother's' anomalous signals.

Knowledge (as a) Production, Reading Passaic

The missed encounter has been constructed as a machine for productive readings. A tangential point on the production of reading needs to be made before visiting the generic wreckage of post-industrial suburbia in the United States.

⁴⁸ In this way, it can be said that the condition of the *a/ways-a/ready* follows a logic of virtuality, rather than a logic of potentiality.

⁴⁹ According to this logic, we are now fully entitled to use Althusser's 'non-contemporaneity' (Balibar, 1993) as a trait of the surmounting and unavoidable relevance of the underground current Althusser theorised in his late years.

A point needs to be cursorily made for a practice of reading that is not attentive to depth, but to the imbrications of surface. Acknowledging language as a polluting entity, as the infrastructure and substrate of cognitive capitalism and knowledge-work, is unavoidable. This means taking into account the thesis of 'total subsumption,' which allows for a deep implication of the activities of writing/reading. But this, in turn, means that the depth in question is not a smooth and clean conceptual space, but a contradictory and 'contaminated' milieu. Keeping a complex range of valences for such activities and avoiding a simplistic notion of language as a clear communicative entity is therefore, imperative. Writing should be acknowledged in its plasticity and complicity with another production: the production of the activity of reading. Reading and writing are compromised in their production and reproduction, and thus, in their materialities.

Falling back to an Althusserian conceptual space, this means forcing encounters when initially there are none to be seen: acknowledging a 'guilty' practice of reading (Althusser and Balibar, 2009, p.15). And reading is not a neutral activity that seeks clues or simply 'serves' a reader—artist, or researcher—as a tool for exploration. The neutrality of the mechanisms of reading and re-reading are muddled when both activities are taken as complicitous.⁵⁰ The collusion of reading/writing, forces us to take detours, to conceive of both instances as activities that are always obliquely compromised with each other; deeply entrenched on the materialities of production. Thus, I wilfully mis-read the context to which Althusser and his pupils were speaking to when they claimed that 'We must completely reorganise the idea we have of knowledge, we must abandon the mirror myths of immediate vision and reading,' in order to further '*conceive knowledge as a production*' (Althusser and Balibar, 2009. p.24 italics mine). Acknowledging the contaminated access of immediate vision through reading, I address a space in which knowledge can be tested out as material. In other words, the space of art writing, that becomes a mode of dealing with and intruding in the capitalisation of knowledge and its intersections in artistic practices that take language to be their materiality. I have mentioned materiality, and this materiality will be addressed by following a detour. The

⁵⁰ Complicity is the matter of Complot (Chapter Three) and Invasión (Chapter Four).

figure of the detour needs to be methodologically understood in its attention to surplus reminders and leftovers. And in order to obliquely follow a detour, we follow an important moment in the history of late twentieth century art practice, where the form of the tour—as a digression from art practice proper—becomes a site of production by its own means. Descending this time, from the wreckage of gravitating technological debris to Robert Smithson's earthworks: his exploration of the post-industrial rubble space of language-as-matter.

Robert Smithson's companion and user guide to an 'entropic museum' is our initial point of departure, which will further propel an exploration of the qualities of immanent contradiction. Newfound, suburban ruins decorate his *Tour of The Monuments of Passaic* (Smithson, 1996c). In this parodic and melancholic tour, Smithson describes ruinous temporalities in the decaying landscapes of de-industrialised suburbia in the East Coast of the U.S. Smithson recalls an 'involuntary museum'—found by chance in the discarded sites of post-industrial space. This site maps underlying spatial logics and textures of the new atmospheres of late capitalism. Here, the artist re-works the idea of sculpture by adding the immanent temporality of decay (Smithson, 1996c).

This (anti)sculptural approach challenges a long inherited aesthetic notion of *production* as the outcome of willed agency. The artist, (in this case a sort of parodic aesthete) traces instead a surplus integument: the *by-product*. As a shift from monument to rubble, from production to by-product, this internal element of degradation articulates a debased monumentality that emphasises matter over the symbol. No longer a stand-in for the representation of a figure in its modernist autonomy, sculpture degrades into scattered matter. Smithson provides a way for thinking a materialism that shifts from the product to the *by-product*, installing a polyvalent understanding of the relations between general social productivity and artistic practice.

The remnant—the material ruinous temporality of this deterioration of sculptural thinking is also, a rearticulation of the notion of the museum. The museum becomes something akin to a figure of reading, as a generalised practice of the act of collection. A collection that takes place as the activity of reading/writing. It is no coincidence that the first ruinous landscapes that the artist evokes are the otherworldly Earthworks by the science fiction writer Brian Aldiss, which are juxtaposed to the paradisiac (yet potentially

decaying) nineteenth century landscapes.⁵¹ The most crucial aspect of this brief text is its mapping of a new conception of spatiality and a radically different understanding of the meaning of the museum, thought from the vantage point of the futural ruin. This notion of the museum—inevitable, entropic—is subject to language, precisely the subsumptive linguistic museum of post-industrial space:

In the illusory babels of language, an artist might advance specifically to get lost, and to intoxicate himself in dizzying syntaxes, seeking odd intersections of meaning, strange corridors of history, unexpected echoes, unknown humours, or voids of knowledge... but this quest is risky, full of bottomless fictions and endless architectures and counter-architectures... at the end, if there is an end, are perhaps only meaningless reverberations (Smithson, 1996a, pp.78).

There is arguably no other place for recent history of art-writing in which the affect of 'not-knowing' is better probed. Seeking the strange Borgesian corridors and babels of language, advancing in order to get lost is the path to the inevitable subsumption, the desire to follow the unacknowledged swerve of meaningless reverberations.⁵² Smithson provides a new understanding to the shifting nature of the contemporary production of space—and at the same time, of the shifting spaces of production. Recall the aforementioned 'linguistic turn' in cognitive capitalism; Smithson's shift to language brings language-as-matter to the fore, as a fundamental constituent of the field of production. Smithson's re-introduction of a 'toxic' aspect of discourse needs to be acknowledged as a contaminated and contaminating language. No longer the pristine means of vision and reading, the vicious intoxication of language brings out its instability. Further atmospheric pollution on the very material basis of linguistic production.

Smithson is a key figure to disavow a seemingly transparent politics of language and avoiding claims for any sense of purified autonomy. If linguistic performativity cannot be thought as a 'ghost' behind the 'shell' of production, their relation can be flattened to the same horizontal and parallel stratum. Shifting here from metaphors of construction to

⁵¹ For an interesting take on Smithson's textual practice, it is worth mentioning Craig Owens' essay *Earthwords*, which modifies Brian Aldiss' *Earthworks*, cited by Smithson in *A Tour of the Monuments of Passaic* (Owens, 1979).

⁵² It is interesting to note how the fragment echoes an 'intoxicated' reading of Borges' *Library of Babel* (Borges, 2000d).

topographies, the toxic tour is the contamination of production *by language*. Recalling the atmospheric debris cloud of equatorial gravitation, Passaic is the conceptual space in which post-industrial detritus is found, this time involving a juxtaposition of materials, antimonuments, ruins, citations, fictions, photographs and filmic references. Language is found and levelled as yet another material, debased from any hierarchical priority over any other. Smithson was fond of conceptual detritus, of the materialities that form destitute concepts and discarded forms of thinking: understanding language as matter among matter. His taste for jettisoned forms should therefore not be confined to his better known 'sculptural' practice—which is usually taken as if it existed autonomously, beyond the dizzying intoxications of language that his parallel writing practice effects. By touring the antimonuments of Passaic, Smithson provides an outlook of language that decays, downgraded to the antimonumental level of found matter.

In his *Provisional Theory of Non-Sites* Smithson recalls this tendency, arguing that his:

little theory is tentative and could be abandoned at any time. Theories like things are also abandoned. That theories are eternal is doubtful. Vanished theories compose the strata of many forgotten books (Smithson, 1996b, p.364).

Smithson's approach needs to be asserted because of its burning relevance for the current conjuncture, not least because it cartographs an oblique map of our post-industrial topography of language-matter. Thus, the artist exposes language as a productive material force. This cartography is of course demeaned to the status of an art. In order to trace this cartography of subsumption it is worth recalling the parallel example of J.L. Borges' *On Exactitude in Science* (Borges, 1975), where a 1:1 map of a foregone Empire is charted over the territory. Following the 'inclemencies of the weather,' the 'tattered ruins' come to be confounded with those of the territory. The paradoxical outcome being the suggestion that the tattered ruins may very well be those of the territory itself (Borges, 1975, p.130).

Cartographing: Smithson focuses on the materiality of language as embedded in—and often impossible to dissect from—entropic, yet persistent material remnants. His materialism is one that treats process before end-products. His emphasis on provisionality is part of an emphasis put on rubble. Instead of the finished products of

sculpture, what we find in Passaic are remnants, waste and by-products; and instead of monuments, we find antimonuments. The post-industrial topography of knowledge production is, in this same way, prone and subject to undecidable and aleatory decay. This is the strata on which I argue that theoretical construction inevitably thrives. Abstraction—after Smithson—becomes as material as the prototypical wreckage of demolition grounds or the brute shard of SCC-15890.

Wondering what this text is able to say today, almost fifty years later implies charting its textures and intense mappings of leftover proto-sculptural wreckage; its implication in affects far removed from the duration of the author's singular moment of perception.

Smithson speaks of 'the memory-traces of an abandoned set of futures' (Smithson 1996c, p.72). I want to resist an optimistic reading that finds messianic prompts of a desired teleology, contra Smithson's bleak futurism. I want to argue that the memory-traces that Smithson mentions follow the logic that Steven Shaviro has identified with an affect that is deftly mapped by science fiction—a genre that informs Smithson through and through: '[...] most science fiction, is not about literally predicting the future. Rather, it is about capturing and depicting the latent futurity that already haunts us in the present' (Shaviro, S., 2010. p.66).

Smithson's text suggests a writing of this futural capitalist post-industrial and impersonal history of aesthetic sedimentation, in which sediments are not codes but figments in an overall natural history of decay. But, removed from grandiose metaphors, I ask myself if the *pharmakon* of romantic eulogy—the contemporary fetishism of the ruin—is not already haunting my expectations.⁵³ This wreck compels a materialism that Smithson found to have 'slipped into a lower stage of futurity' (Smithson 1996c, p.72). And this futurity, derived from a debased speculation, enables a mode of reading that is able to sort through piles of theoretical wreckage.

⁵³ 'Ruin porn' is an internet phenomenon consisting of documents, images and videos of abandoned sites and buildings across the world, posted for the visual pleasure of anonymous observers.

Homeostatic Capture

The previous sections explored language as spread out material accumulation—that inevitably traverses all aspects of production. By actualising diverse overlapping historical and materially present qualities, an attention to surplus leftovers has been crucially acknowledged. Pegaso NEE-01's collision and Robert Smithson's Tour of the involuntary museum of Passaic have lead to a materialised reformulation of the dilemmas surrounding knowledge production and knowledge formation. More to the point: taking into account the opacity of language—or, recalling Bochner's piece, the impossibility of its transparency—the road to knowledge as a positive or finalised product has become elusive; and an acknowledgement of the necessary perspective allowed by the affect of not-knowing has been upheld. Smithson would oblige here a detour, transforming the notion of production through the surplus notion of the by-product. In a certain sense, there is no knowledge production; there are only knowledge by-products (or by-products and not-knowing). 'Production' necessarily implies the vantage point of the by-product, allowing for a wide palette with which to cartograph the post-industrial space of language as matter. The generic post-industrial landscape of Passaic is an allegory for the 'panorama' in which language becomes the main productive force, bringing an intoxicated discourse to the question of knowledge formation and art-writing. And the outcome of this mis-encounter (the touring swerve) can be framed in the production of a state of 'not-knowing' which will be explored consequently.

Boris and Arkady Strugatsky, two of the most prominent science fiction writers on the late Soviet era, wrote the satirical novella *Definitely Maybe* (Strugatsky and Strugatsky, 2014), originally published as *A Billion Years Before the End of the World: A Manuscript Discovered Under Strange Circumstances*. The book traces the collapsing personal environment of a group of eminent scientists working on groundbreaking scientific projects that synchronically come to a halt. *A Billion Years'* new uncensored translation, republished in its complete form in 2014, tells the story of Dmitri Malianov and his fellow scientists who struggle to keep their important intellectual projects together as they near the brink of collapse, psychological breakdown, extenuating

interruption and unjustified distraction.⁵⁴ The novella explores the paradoxical aporias of epistemic breakdown, read through the collapsing lives of its characters. The reading of this novella as presented here resists (but does not disavow) one of the better known interpretations, which generally take it as a useful catalogue and critique of Soviet censorship of the time (a reading reserved for Chapter Three). This reading is up to a point endorsed by Boris Strugatsky in the afterword of the new edition—a good index of the negotiation of its writing with his censors (Strugatsky and Strugatsky, 2014, pp. 147–149). Following a different path, I will propose a take on the topicality of the epistemological problematics it treats.

A Billion Years directly treats and surrounds knowledge production—the materiality of knowledge. It is relevant to this project because it lends itself to an oblique reading of the implications of subsumption of knowledge-work. The subsumption of artistic knowledge-work (and its commodification) implies a redistribution of the roles of artistic practice. This novel distribution, at once, implies a new challenge to artistic practice's relation with research, knowledge, academic pressures, epistemic possibilities and limits; in short, to the conjuncture of knowledge-work and art. Addressing Strugatsky and Strugatsky's novella is justified, given that the present project responds to the unmappable demands that spring out of the multiple tensions found in the force field of this conjuncture. Tensions appear as always-already encountered (as immanently present) within this subsumed situation (they are always changing). This project harnesses its momentum by the thrust of its approach: by postulating and defending the status of 'not-knowing' (vis-à-vis the transparency of 'Knowledge Production'), it affords a paradoxical position that produces a polyvalent palette of nuances and distorted possibilities. It is also this paradoxical relation that provides a meta-referential approximation to methodology (and by default to what constitutes the writing of an art dissertation). By refusing to take the written element as a translucent (i.e., lacking opaqueness) report on knowledge—but also by reflectively naming this liminality (i.e. now)—the project stranded between the refusal to become a purely 'creative' artistic

⁵⁴ From now on, I will retain this abbreviated form *A Billion Years*, alluding to the authors title in the Russian language instead of following the rather unfortunate *Definitely Maybe*.

writing or a prototypical report on a knowledge field. Its own claims to produce and defend epistemic disarray are shared in this methodological tendency, as a non-affirmative approach to knowledge production.

Knowledge production and knowledge formation: before following the aporetic destinies of Dimitri Malianov and his fellow scientists, I will momentarily step aside and re-visit the question of knowledge production. Paraphrasing Choi, Hlavajova and Winder: What, specifically, is knowledge production? (Hlavajova et al., 2008, p.6). It seems that this epistemic problem needs to be tackled straight forwardly, due to its resonances with current concerns in the artistic world. And yet, such straight-forwardness appears impossible. When attempting to elaborate any definition, the question itself becomes paradoxical, since it resonates on more than one meta-level. What is knowledge? How is knowledge produced in the artistic field?

Trying to provide a positive description of what knowledge was, is or could be—the very definition of knowledge as something known—is a paradox that cannot be afforded, since claiming to know knowledge may be pedantic and potentially impossible. One cannot know by definition that which one does not know. It is clear that such epistemic responses lead to aporetic dilemmas. Before going back to *A Billion Years*, we can illustrate this paradox of non-affirmation by briefly contrasting it with a well known example in which politics, fiction, complot and epistemics collide.

Donald Rumsfeld, the grey eminence and Secretary of Defence under the Administration of the United States Government of George W. Bush Jr., famously articulated his 'unknown unknowns' speech as the paradigmatic justification of non-affirmative epistemics in 2002:

there are known knowns; there are things we know we know. We also know there are known unknowns; that is to say we know there are some things we do not know. But there are also unknown unknowns—the ones we don't know we don't know (Rumsfeld, 2002).

As it will be seen, Malianov and his peers' approach to knowledge formation in *A Billion Years* paradoxically shares the same meta-order that the U.S. Department found when dealing with non-existent weapons of mass destruction (WMD) in the hands of Saddam Hussein (governing by that time, the broader territory of what was formerly known as Iraq, now largely controlled by the Islamic State). The order of unknowability in

Rumsfeld's paradox is undermined by the fact that, for the State Department of the U.S., it is known that there are unknown unknowns. The epistemic claim in question does not proceed by either being an affirmation or a negation: Rumsfeld's discourse is not one that legitimises not knowing what is unknown, but one that knows that the U.S. does not know something that is not known. Rumsfeld does not delegitimise his administration's position by affirming that the U.S. department knows that there are any WMD in Iraq, nor by thoroughly negating the existence of WMD in the country; he rather produces a justification through a debased production of determinate unknowability.⁵⁵ The trailing perversity of this epistemic meta-layering would seem playful, were it not for the present pantomime revamping of a 'new cold war' with Russia and all the perverse historical actualisations that it brings with it.⁵⁶ I focus here on its non-affirmative approach, inasmuch as it provides a definition: non-negational and non-affirmative at the same time, Rumsfeld's definition tackles the conditions of knowledge production from a scope that falls outside of epistemic certainty. By evoking a 'knowledge of contingency,' or the 'contingency of knowledge,' Rumsfeld comes close to Althusser's late writings, bringing us to a paradoxical position. This state of confusion can be vividly summarised in an ethos of wilfully deployed incertitude: 'neither this, nor that, but precisely just the opposite', '*Ni lo uno ni lo otro, si no todo lo contrario*' (País, 2011). A rhetoric tactical weapon of plausible deniability, attributed to a wide lot of Latin American characters ranging from the famous Mexican comedian Cantinflas to the infamous Venezuelan president Carlos Andrés Pérez, up to the Chilean dictator Augusto Pinochet. Leaving the U.S. Secretary of Defence's aporias behind, we come back to an even more radical denaturalisation of knowledge, through the form of 'second-world' soviet science fiction,

⁵⁵ It is the U.S. department's own Maskirovka (Маскировка)—the prototypical Russian strategy of war by deception, in which confusion is weaponised in order to confuse and produce chaotic responses in the enemy. This ensues a theatricalisation of war—a new and completely aestheticised type of total warfare. An outcome that is becoming more and more unavoidable in our contemporary landscape of surveillance, nowhere better exemplified than in the militarisation of our communicative milieus.

⁵⁶ As an addition to the gamut of conspiratorial affects that underpin this project, Wikipedia's entry on the Cold War II makes for an interesting read. At the moment of reading, the page is filled with references to 'informational warfare', lending credibility to the hypothesis of a new political aesthetics subsumed in total warfare (as mentioned in the previous footnote). Following that hypothesis, the wikipedia page itself is a site of interpretive and communicational confrontation ("Cold War II," 2015).

which, at the present moment of writing, operates peripherally as an involuntary homage to the slapstick caricature allure of this otherwise evidently dangerous tension. This disjunction will prompt another reading of the missed-encounter, the involuntary *desencuentro* (dis-encounter) between epistemology and its own immanent limits.

A Billion Years explores the misadventures of Dimitri Malianov and his colleague scientists, which start unfolding in a warm summer of intense scientific work in Leningrad. Malianov is visited by Lidotchka, an unannounced guest who presents herself as his wife Irina's childhood friend. During this disruptive visit, he receives a strange agitated call by his friend Val Weingarten, who informs him that their acquaintance and neighbour Arnold Pavlovsky Snegovoi (another friend and scientist), has shot himself in the same block of buildings. After the shocking event, a man called Zykov—presumably a private investigator—shows up to investigate this strange death, but ends staying in Malianov's flat for a few days sharing drinks and cocktails in the midst of the sordid agitation. A series of weird intromissions and unexplainable events start unfolding amidst 'pervasive madness, terror and drunkenness' (Strugatsky and Strugatsky, 2014, p.76). The characters will not hesitate to elaborate a series of theoretical models to explain what is going on.

Malianov later on receives Gubar and Zakhar, who inform him of a visit from a strange agent, who makes part of a secretive cult called the 'Union of the Nine.' This somehow ridiculous story does not go through, but the first draft of a paranoid theory emerges. Weingarten, a brilliant mind among brilliant minds, explains the evident in the midst of localised panic. In a call for reason, he argues: 'the conclusion that follows is that there are no aliens and no ancient wise men, but something else, some force—and our work is getting in its way' (Strugatsky and Strugatsky, 2014, p.71). It is not until they receive a visit by Vecherovsky, a prominent mathematician and esteemed colleague, that the main hypothesis takes form. Vecherovsky himself articulates:

Why they need to stop [Malianov and colleagues'] research in particular, [...] is not only a complex question, but an academic one. The point is that humanity, without even suspecting it has attracted the attention of this intelligence and stopped being a self-contained system. Apparently, without even suspecting it, we've trod on the corns of some supercivilisation, and that supercivilisation, apparently has decided to regulate our progress as it sees fit (Strugatsky and Strugatsky, 2014, p. 80).

By realising the utterly weird quality of this theory, they start suspecting that, if they use publicity against the secrecy of this complot, they will end in a psychiatric asylum—giving in to the higher order suspicion that this may definitely and totally disrupt their research, which would be probably a desired outcome of this unknown intrusion and an uncanny proof of its existence. Vecherovsky, later on, introduces what appears to be—at least, for Malianov, but definitely for us—the most credible epistemic breakthrough. Malianov explains his ‘concept of the Homeostatic Universe’. in which:

“The universe retains its structure,” that was [Vecherovsky’s] fundamental axiom. [...] The law of nondecreasing entropy contradicts the homeostasis of the universe and therefore is a partial law and not a universal one. Complementary to this law is the law of constant reproduction of reason. The combination and conflict of these two partial laws are an expression of the universal law of the conservation of structure.

If only the law of nondecreasing entropy existed, the structure of the universe would disappear and chaos would reign. But on the other hand, if only a constantly self-perfected and all-powerful intelligence prevailed, the structure of the universe based on homeostasis would also be disrupted. [Discarding the theory of the supercivilization, as unable to provide a theory to explain the transcendence] of the law of non-decreasing entropy on a cosmic scale (Strugatsky and Strugatsky, 2014, p. 103).

The scientists realise that, what has been happening to them is nothing other than ‘the first reaction of the Homeostatic Universe to the threat of humanity becoming a supercivilization’ (p.102-104). Thus unveiling the problematic core of a homeostatic capture that is ‘naturally’ bound to be antithetical to the advancement of human knowledge.

Throughout the novel and towards the end, everyone involved (but Vecherovsky) retires from pursuing their research. Malianov decides to leave behind his investigation before risking an assassination attempt. Vecherovsky, in their last conversation concludes that the law of the homeostatic universe can only be understood through the intense destructive pressure it exerts. The book ends without any promise for redemption, leaving only a darkly humorous and despairing ending, where nothing appears to be solved: there are still two billion years until the end of the world, in which at least some scientific progress on understanding the aporias of the Homeostatic Universe can be

advanced—the enterprise is nevertheless, doomed from the outset and is directed through every single microscopic step by this unknown force.

The Strugatsky brothers brilliantly treat the epistemic symptoms as strange extra-personal intromissions in the scientists' promising careers, bringing about an interesting case for re-reading the stakes of knowledge production. Something other seems to be stopping the scientists from carrying on their investigations. The strange effects are only materially visible within their field of research and—as the characters realise in a clear analytical attitude—thoroughly paradoxical: completely extraneous to their themes of development or the intrinsic scientific logic of their inquiries, and yet, embedded in the very types of knowledge that are being produced. The scientists come to realise in a confined flat in Leningrad, that the eerie consequences they face, only appear as symptoms of a deliberate intervention to their epistemic sphere of activity. In fact, the consequences are only visible from within that epistemic field, evoking an extreme *implication*; a perverse dialectics in which the investigation (the production of knowledge itself) interferes with the 'homeostatic universe' and vice-versa.

Strangeness—and the scientists come to theorise it as such—is actually part of the groundbreaking research they are failing to undertake and that is failing to materialise. There appears to be something in the 'object' of their knowledge—the Homeostatic Universe—that deflects their epistemological enterprise by incorporating their subjective attachments and personal lives in the research. Both categories are conflated in this delirious science fictional reversal: the scientists' research is objectively intervening in the fabric of reality, the 'objective' outcome of their production is violently resisting understanding; and weirdly enough, the only evidence for this acknowledgement is the very real process of the destruction of their lives. *A Billion Years* explores with bitter irony the pathetic events of unforeseen xenological disruption in the characters' lives: through active intervention, the universe is bitterly conspiring against their will to discovery. The homeostatic universe's capture implies a weird effect: it is as if an explicit agency in the cosmos is actually trying to destroy their knowledge-work. An exogenous unknowable formation that appears to be somehow embedded on the object of their research is overwhelming their methodology and thus producing frustratingly bizarre and abrupt consequences.

A Billion Years, visits a recurring topic in ‘Eastern European’ science fiction: the probing of inconclusive uncertainties and the limits of human understanding. Fredric Jameson has called it the *unknowability hypothesis* (Jameson, 2005): ‘[a] Science Fiction’ that is perversely ‘designed to demonstrate, in some Kantian way, its own absolute limits.’ (Jameson, 2005, p.108) A proto-postmodern desublimation that explores the epistemic limits of understanding by negatively referring to the impossibility of epistemic representation. Frederic Jameson originally speaks of Stanislaw Lem’s oeuvre, even though the symptom he describes can be easily exported to *A Billion Years*.⁵⁷ The unknowability hypothesis, is as ‘[...]a metaphysical parable of the epistemological relation of the human race to its not-I in general: where that not-I is not merely nature, but another living being’ (2005, pp.108–109). Lem’s science fiction, is premised on probing the limits of the human species vis-à-vis alien forms of life that exceed the human’s own perceptive and temporal limitations (such as a human life span in time travel) and the ecological determinants that phenomenologically limit the species (such as gravity, human sensorial limits, its carbon-based vital structure, intelligent machines, etc.)^{58 59 60}

⁵⁷ In *The Geopolitical Aesthetic*, Jameson dedicates a chapter to the interplay between *A Billion Years* and Aleksandr Sokurov’s outstanding film version *The Days of the Eclipse*. Sokurov’s film begs to be acknowledged, even though it unfortunately falls out of the scope of the present project.

⁵⁸ For instance, in *Solaris*, the protagonist Chris Kelvin travels through time/space to the planet Solaris, knowing his loved ones may not be alive when he comes back. The planet, whose ocean is a complex biological form, appears incomprehensible to scientific rationalisation. Given the planet’s divergent evolutionary history, the ocean’s ‘senses’ respond to human presence by materialising temporary beings who are based on the cosmonaut’s experiences. The mission is ruined and compromised by the resonance of these extraneous psychological disturbances and spaceship crew’s memories (Lem, 2014).

⁵⁹ Solaris poses further questions to this project’s relation to knowing and not-knowing. Specifically: to the question of the planet as unknown. This relation can be thought by cross-linking to footnote 28, which refers to the Lacanian missed encounter. The planet Solaris operates by topically repeating and reproducing traumatic memories of the crew. In this sense, Solaris lends itself to a psychoanalytic take on the missed encounter. Specifically, relative to Lacan’s notion of the *tuché*—a repeated occurrence that happens ‘as if by chance’ (Lacan, 1998, pp.53–54). The *tuché* indicates a torsion that generates an effect of ‘the real as an encounter’, but which effectively operates as a missed encounter with the real, as the traumatic trace of such an encounter (Lacan, 1998, pp.53–54).

The planet Solaris can be understood as a producer of spectres of ‘the real as encounter’ that take material form, through sordid instantiations of the relatives of the crew in the space station. The traumatic reappearances effected by Solaris recall the psychoanalytic notion of repetition, with an added distortion: what is repeated in the space station is not the signifying concatenation of a previous traumatic experience, but a materially exact copy of a dead relative in all its fleshy qualities. The planet, as the entity that experiments with the production of traumatic plastic instances of the real, can be

A Billion Years calls for a renewed reading of the Unknowability Hypothesis, which instead of premising failure on an external alien form, looks at failure as being brought by the internal qualities of the scientific quest itself. Through an inversion of extraneous

understood as it taps into a damaged registry of the real that is processed by the crew through the self-evidence of the trauma. The most intense relation being the re-appearance of the psychologist Chris Kelvin's wife; an index of the Planet's experiment on the materialities of the missed encounter.

The planet Solaris does not appear as a sublime and radically inaccessible other, but as a tangibly known entity that is impossible to understand. For example: the Planet's ocean slowly generates abstract but orderly formations—mimoids, symmetriads, and asymmetriads—whose names derive from their shapes. Solaris thus, does not appear as unknown, but rather as unknowable. In the novel Solaris, the planet never appears as totally unknowable, but rather, as impossible to understand (echoing an encounter that is a 'fiasco', the title of another of Lem's novels). The unknowability hypothesis (Jameson, 2005, p.108) in question here treats not an otherworldly neo-sublime, but an extrapolation of the previously intrinsic psychologic traits of the novel into a real that cannot be registered nor deciphered in its totality.

In this sense, a de-sublimation of human agency (parallel to that of SR) is effected. This move can be understood through the memory damages and extreme torsions of the real that register as unexpected encounters with the space crew's mnemonic archive. In this sense, the planet Solaris fails to register as a totally other entity—given that the missing of its encounter is processed in human terms, testing and probing the limits of human understanding and its impossibilities *through* a modulation and intervention into such a repository. Here, the limit is not the Modern predominance of human mastery over thinking, but the recurrence of something that may be missed by SR: the return of a third term, which is the repressed mnemonic that is not registered by the real—or which clashes with the real through the missed encounter—and is processed by psychoanalysis through the term unconscious (only here, this unconscious exists as an externalised material register that does not exist as either 'human' nor as 'thinking', but as something that is even more radically unknowable). In the case of Solaris we speak of an unconscious of a different kind, one which exists on a material register and is processed as a modulation of a psychic repository, and is expressed through the fleshy reproduction of human beings.

Further following Lacan, Solaris' question of the planet as unknown can be described as a deformation of the clear-cut distinction that maintains the human as an entity that is totally separate from the planet itself. If one were seeking an otherworldly sordid inertia, any other interstellar body would suffice. Solaris' flustered qualities are disturbing because their strange intrusion on the real manifest themselves through strange affinities with the human. The gasping sublime in Solaris is almost postmodern in kind, but it implies not an overstretched Kantian impossibility of knowing, but an unknowability located in the brutal encounter with the real that can never fully register. The only account of this encounter is precisely the uncanny knowledge of a failure to understand. Were the planet a totally other entity, without any affinity to the crew, Solaris would just be an astronomical fable, not the strange piece of fiction that it is.

⁶⁰ Addenda to Solaris' treatment of contact vis-à-vis the question of the planet as unknown: Parallel to Freud's problem of transference, the planet Solaris does not manifest itself '*in effigie* or *in absentia*' (Lacan, 1998, p.54), but through repetition of previous human forms that follow an unconscious traumatic insistence on the signs of the trauma, through the production of further traumatic experience in the form of newly generated human-like configurations of matter. The twist being that the automaton here is not just a traumatic memory—returning as a linguistic-sign—but a full-range material body, fully endowed with a human language, and carrying uncertain and vague relations to specific shared individual memories.

incomprehensibility, it is the immanent relation of knowledge to itself that prompts the situation of not-knowing—the factor conspiring against its own ends. In their darkly humorous take on the paradoxes afforded by this depiction of epistemic decay, the Strugatsky brothers present what could be called a materialist parable, (perhaps even more materially grounded than Jameson's metaphysical suggestion). Precisely, this angle is what makes it bitterly relevant for the now: The non-I of the epistemological relation is precisely the quest for knowing, the intruding entity being always-already embedded on the situation of knowledge production. And the deep cynicism of Rumsfeld's (otherwise perversely brilliant) discourse is precisely premised on the imperial hubris that allows it to 'produce' the knowledge required. Less an 'excuse' to legitimise an attack on Iraq, it is the very epistemic materiality of the attack itself.⁶¹

A Billion Years's deep paradox implies the reconfiguration of the very field of understanding. In this context, Althusser's notion of topicality becomes useful to unpick what is going on in this self-unfolding meta-dialogue. Slavoj Žižek introduces the concept in his book *Metastases of Enjoyment* ‘ “Topicality” [...] refers to the topical character of the “thought” itself. Theory is always part of the conjunction into which it intervenes’ (Žižek, 1994, p.182).

Arguing through two examples, Žižek continues:

The “object” of Marxism is society, yet “class struggle in theory” means that the ultimate theme of Marxism is the “material force of ideas”—that is, the way Marxism itself qua revolutionary theory transforms its object (brings about the emergence of the revolutionary subject, etc.). This is analogous to psychoanalysis, which is also not simply a theory of its “object” (the unconscious) but a theory whose inherent mode of existence involves the transformation of its object (via interpretation in the psychoanalytic cure).

Both theories, therefore, are fully justified in answering their critics with what an external gaze necessarily misperceives as a case of *petitio principii*: opposition to Marxism is not a simple refutation of a mistaken theory that makes use of the neutral tools of rational argumentation but is itself part of the class struggle, and expresses

⁶¹ In this sense Rumsfeld's argument is not simply a 'justification' of the attack, but part of an epistemic weaponisation of knowledge production.

the resistance of the ruling ideology to the revolutionary movement—like resistance to psychoanalysis, which itself partakes in the mechanisms of repression (Žižek, 1994, p. 182).

The production of knowledge, in Marxian terms outlined beforehand, becomes the aporetic vehicle of confusion; labour appearing no longer as a required force of production—the more the living-labour of the scientist is deferred, the more accessible the understanding of the homeostatic universe becomes (i.e. living labour ≠ knowledge-work). *A Billion Years* deforms the Marxian vitalist thesis to such an extent that it opens up a ‘universe’ of readings and misunderstandings that lie on the rims of meta-theory (theories on theories), speculative fiction, conspiracy, parodic epistemologies of the non-‘first world’. This project is inevitably stranded in a terrain that takes stock and uses these palettes of second order strategies of knowledge as strategies for production. Malianov and Vecherovsky’s fiasco is premised on the not-I that is a blend between the homeostatic universe and epistemic production itself. A fiasco premised on the immanent negativity of knowledge byproducts.

The Homeostatic Universe, itself a part of the epistemic situation unfolds into its own incomprehensibility by articulating itself on the conjuncture. Malianov and his peers probe the limits of their own theory and the intrusion of the Homeostatic Universe in the epistemic quest. No longer an extraneous force, the Homeostatic Universe is part of the conjuncture itself, performing an extreme topical case: a case for an immanent deadlock of the non-I within the I itself. The non-I is not ‘set-against,’ but becomes part of a conspiracy of the universe as a whole against the very possibility of knowing (and against its own existence). Knowledge production, in all its valences—including our cherished lucid epistemic failures—cannot escape the affects of an all-encompassing embedded complot, which paves the way for the conspiracy of epistemic, theoretical and (meta)fictional characteristics.^{62 63}

⁶² Speculative Realism (SR) has approached science fiction with keen interest, as it is a genre that allows for the depiction of potential universes that do not presuppose the centrality of the human. Thus, a radical critique of anthropocentrism lies at the core of SR. For thinkers associated with this movement, the presupposed centrality of the human—a misapprehension that traverses the enlightenment and modern Western thought—is due to a deeper misunderstanding that takes the name of ‘correlationism’, namely: ‘the idea

according to which we only ever have access to the correlation between thinking and being, and never to either term considered apart from the other' (Meillassoux, 2010, p.5).

Quentin Meillassoux has a fine-grained definition for science fiction and for what he calls extro-science fiction (XSF); the first being a fiction that thematises the effects of scientific knowledge upon the world; the latter (XSF) being a form of fiction that imagines 'worlds where, in principle, experimental science is impossible and not unknown in fact' (Meillassoux and Asimov, 2015, pp.4-6).

Science fiction is a privileged genre for SR, since it allows for a mode of inquiry that can imagine thought beyond the correlationist trap, to extents so radical that it can decouple thinking from any kind of presupposed being or entity (human or non-human).

⁶³ Another fine example within this thread is the work of Iranian philosopher Reza Negarestani, whose debut on 'theory-fiction' *Cyclonopedia* narrates and engages the deep materialities and histories of oil: petrohistories of a material that is both the nucleus of contemporary war and a pre-human register of geological catastrophes that stretch millions of years before the evolution of the human species (Negarestani, 2008).

The SR turn allows for a blend of fiction and theory that performs the tenets of hyperstition, understood as 'semiotic productions that make themselves real' (Time Spiral Press, 2015). (See footnote 67 for a further discussion of this concept, which adds an important set of harmonics to Piglia's approach to the materialities of fiction).

Interlude One



(Fig 2.)

Infalcon [user] (2013) *First Images of the Ecuadorian Satellite NEE-01 Pegaso 16-05-2013 - YouTube*



(Fig 3.)

EXA: Agencia Espacial Ecuatoriana (n.d.) [Splash Image] *Tierra-mano-exa-pegaso-krysaor.jpg*.



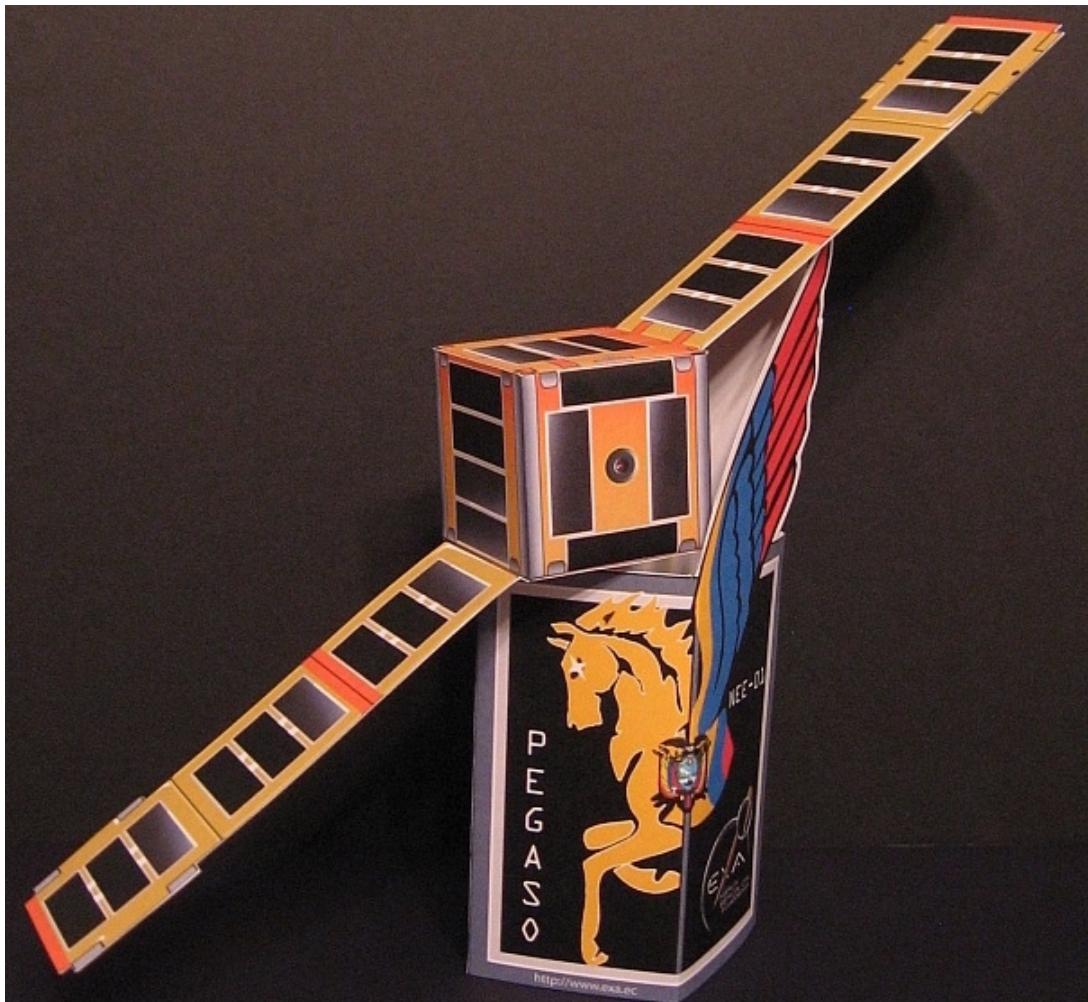
(Fig 4.)

Rafael Correa Attending the Launch of Pegaso NEE-01. Rafael Correa [Facebook user: MashiRafael] (2014)



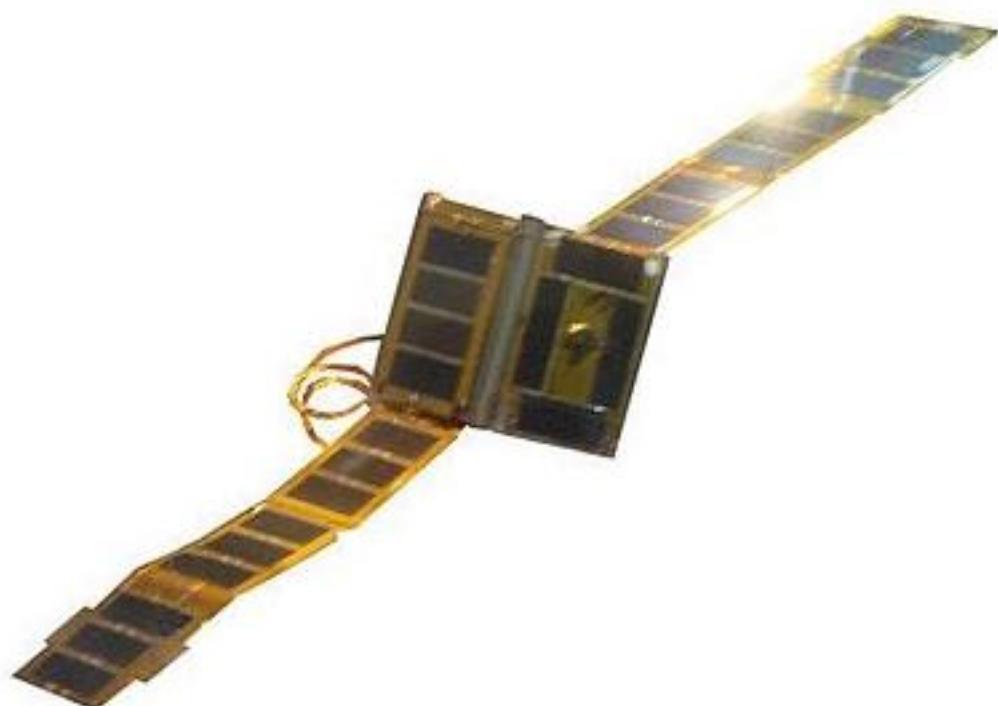
(Fig 5.)

EXA: Agencia Espacial Ecuatoriana (2008) *EXA Logo*.



(Fig 6.)

Msc. Carlos Alvarez [courtesy of], (Public Relations Office, EXA: Ecuadorian Space Agency) (2016) *Pegaso NEE-01 Paper Model*.



(Fig 7.)

Image of Pegaso NEE-01 Cubesat Nanosatellite. EXA: Agencia Espacial Ecuatoriana
(n.d.) *Illustration of the Pegasus Cubesat with the Deployed Solar Wings.*



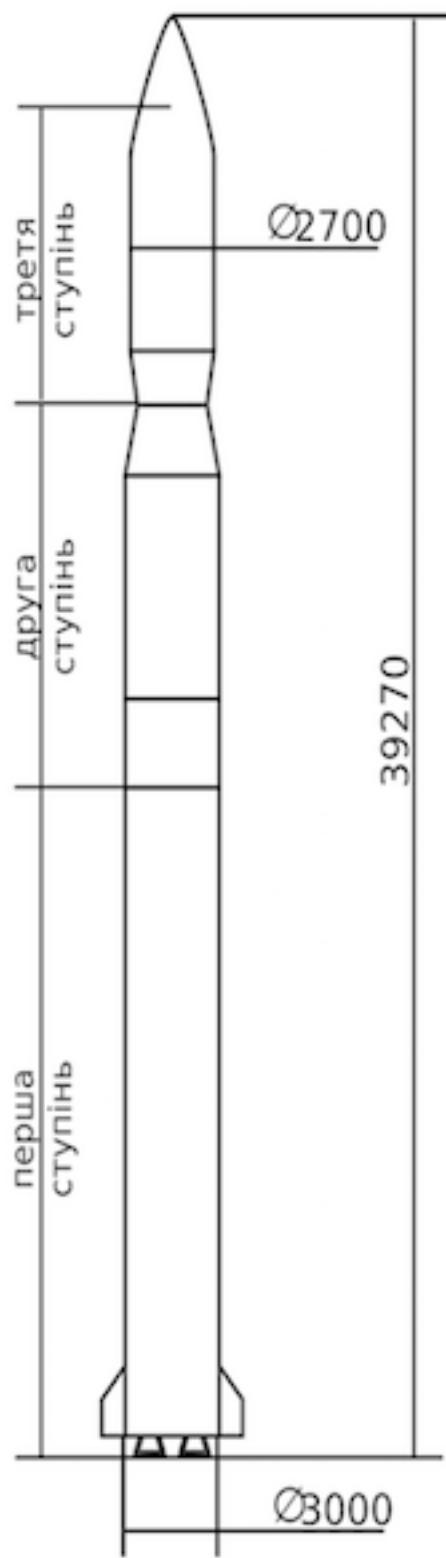
(Fig 8.)

Flag of Ecuador. Zscout370 [user] (2010) *Flag of Ecuador.svg*.



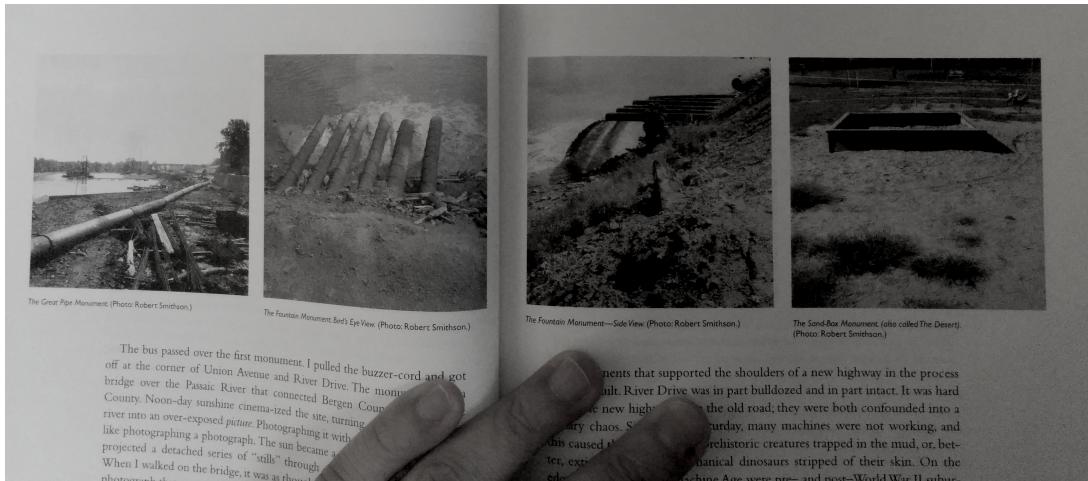
(Fig 9.)

Tsyklon-3 Rockets. Kosmonavtika.com [Nicholas Pillet] (2009) *Mik, Cosmodrome De Plesetsk, 24 Janvier 2009: Mise en Place de La Coiffe.*



(Fig 10.)

Diagram of a Tsyklon-3 Launcher (Sergento, 2014)



The bus passed over the first monument. I pulled the buzzer-cord and got off at the corner of Union Avenue and River Drive. The monument was a bridge over the Passaic River that connected Bergen County and Passaic County. Noon-day sunshine cinema-sized the site, turning the river into an ever-exposed picture. Photographing it with a camera was like photographing a photograph. The sun became a lens. I took a series of projected a detached series of "stills" through the bridge. When I walked on the bridge, it was as though I were photographing the bridge.

...ments that supported the shoulders of a new highway in the process of being built. River Drive was in part bulldozed and in part intact. It was hard to tell where the new highway ended and the old road; they were both confounded into a single, sprawling, dry chaos. Saturday morning, many machines were not working, and this caused me to feel like a prehistoric creature trapped in the mud, or better, excretions of mechanical dinosaurs stripped of their skin. On the edge of the highway, a machine gun was pre- and post-World War II silent.

(Fig 11.)

Smithson's Monuments. Smithson, R. (1996) 'A Tour of the Monuments of Passaic New Jersey', in *Robert Smithson: The Collected Writings*.



(Fig 12.)

Merzbow & Hasami, Abtectonics (1986) *Antimonument* (Vinyl cover).



(Fig 13.)

NEE-02 KRYSAOR Cubesat Nanosatellite. EXA: Agencia Espacial Ecuatoriana (2015)

NEE-02 KRYSAOR: 2do Satélite Ecuatoriano.

CHAPTER THREE

Complot: Parallel Machinations

Recursive Complot

This chapter follows the thread that binds cosmic conspiracy and complot. The chapter attempts to bring together a range of topics addressed until now, following previous attempts to map the materialities of the (missed/mis) encounter—arriving to the intrusion of language in the field of production. The relations promoted by this turn to linguistic (d)efficiency follows the figure of the prefix para–, which immerses us in the literary logic of parallelism: para-literature. The previous chapter dealt with a logic that unfolds and confuses the within with the without: the externalised conspiracy against the Homeostatic Universe and its feedback effects—grasped through the discovery of topical embeddedness. This chapter thus exploits the totalising fragmentation of affects that are held in the threshold of not-knowing and the desire to know it all. Topicality here, implies a change of register: from the all of cosmic conspiracy to the material efficacies of circulating fictions. The chapter thus, follows the Argentinean Novelist Ricardo Piglia's essay *Theory of Complot* ('Teoría del Complot'), a transcription from a lecture that was first published on Ramona (2002); re-visited by the author on the occasion of his latest book, *Personal Anthology* ('Antología Personal') (2015). Even though Piglia's text is a reflection on his literary precursors, the text can also be read as a transversal cipher for his heterogeneous oeuvre, composed of novels, fragments, theoretical essays, prologues and fictional interviews.

I want to follow a specific reading of Piglia's theory, by addressing the role of fiction in the production of the complot. Complots are understood as circulating fictions that

enable readings of machinations that bind power and the economy. Inasmuch as these three aspects operate as modes of exchange and circulation, they form part of a shared stratum. The complot allows us to figure leakages and exchanges that traverse fiction and politics (and vice-versa), allowing for a literary modality that aims to map the total of the present-day neoliberal sensoria.

The totalising logic of the complot is, to a certain extent, auto-referential. The complot produces a paranoid affect that questions its own logic, and therefore provides a cipher that links fiction with broader machinations of the economy. Piglia explains:

Often, the narration of a complot makes part of the complot itself, yielding a concrete relation between narration and menace. In fact the complot can be seen as a potential fiction; an intrigue that is plotted and circulates and whose reality is always called into question. (Piglia, 2015, p. 99)⁶⁴

But, the complot's autophagic logic should not be taken as a purely closed system that holds no critical value whatsoever. It is not a simple tautologic reading of a conspiratorial all. As Piglia reminds us, 'The complot [is] a point of articulation between practices for the construction of alternative realities and a mode of deciphering a certain functioning of politics.' (Piglia 2015, p.100) Complot, is a key term to understand the logic of contemporary fictions and their overlap with abstract processes of circulation—by extension the complot-form hints to the ciphering and concealing of such processes. Partly deciphering, partly obscuring, the complot produces more fictions as it tries to unveil the opaque machinations of exchange.

The question of the cipher will return in this chapter through a different form, but I want to focus now on the politics of notion of the complot as a *complot*: a blend of narration, menace and suspicion. In a remarkable essay addressing Piglia's theory, Bruno Bosteels argues how '[...]the answer to the total subsumption of life under capital cannot be the invocation of an impossible outside to this logic; it can only be the production of an immanent counter-conspiracy.' (Bosteels, 2012, p.275). Until now, I have argued that this

⁶⁴ All of the translations of Piglia's text, originally written in Spanish, are mine. The bibliographic code indicates which version is being referenced where. As a general rule, I use the newest version, unless an important fragment for my discussion has been cut-out. Piglia's text has not yet been published in English (Piglia, 2015, 2002).

type of auto-referentiality is better understood as a topical unfolding (topicality). The complot extensionally obeys the logic of immanent embeddedness. By the same measure, it allows for a productive degree of surplus contradiction. Piglia's epigraph to his theory emphasises such claims by asserting: 'We need to construct a complot against complot' (Piglia, 2015, p.99; Bosteels, 2012, p.275). The figuring of a conspiratorial fiction (which through the form of capital exchange has very real effects) is devised through the radical immanence of a counter-fiction. For Piglia, this knot forms the core issue of literary production in the present.

At stake in Piglia's theory is the question of the complot as com-plot: a collectivised machination of plots—understanding the prefix *com-* as 'with' and 'together'. The connection between the com-plot as a collective and the dubious circulation of narrations is a fortunate aspect that is only graspable in the English language, gaining relevance with the translation. As a dynamic logic of parallelism and figuration, the conjunction com-plot is for Piglia one of the densest and most elusive stakes of contemporary fictional production. Piglia asserts this point by underlining the relations between literature and the logic of the complot:

In the novel as a genre, the complot substitutes the tragic notion of destiny: hidden forces define the social world and the subject is therefore an instrument of those forces which he/she cannot comprehend. The novel has slipped politics into fiction through the form of the complot. The difference between tragedy and novel seems to be related to a displacement of the notion of fatality: destiny is now lived under the form of a conspiracy (Piglia, 2015, p.102).

The 'slippage of politics into fiction' can be read as a trademark of modern textual production, in its broadest general sense, as an expanded notion of the literary. There is a replacement of the classical notion of divine fate with a contemporary dispersion of signs which have no origin and no destination (Rancière, 2006, p.39). The replacement in question presupposes a hidden plot: circulating signs and versions parallel to the textual existence of the novel, but are not teleologically bound by divine intervention. In one sense, the fictions that the novel (or post-novel) grasps, exist in the same realm as the

regime of political fictions—the sensoria otherwise understood as reality.⁶⁵ What figured as the teleological ordering of narratives through the manipulation of the gods is now replaced by the total dispersion of a-teleological public conspiracies that have no starting point and whose origin is always called into question. Signs, as ‘quasi-bodies, blocks of speech’ (Rancière, 2006, pp.39–40) can be said to exist in the same material universe as those of the communities of readers, writers and inventors of plots; a total and conspiratorial materialism.^{66 67}

The dispersion of signs in question implies the logic of an apparently random machination of power—we could say this machination operates in a necessarily contingent way. Piglia continues the paragraph above by explaining how ‘the gods have ceased to decide fate’ (2015, p.102). My translation in this case, loses some of the valences used by Piglia: I have translated fate for what in fact is the Spanish word *suerte*: a word that means both chance and luck; two relevant aspects for Piglia’s analysis. This chancy scheming, is an allusion to Borges’ political narratives which, according to Piglia, are premised on the construction of fictive conspiracies. Borges’ *The Lottery of Babylon*

⁶⁵ The collection *Reading Capitalist Realism* indicates an interesting route for the current discussion on ‘reality.’ The book intersects Mark Fisher’s notion of *capitalist realism*, as the only seemingly possible mode of the real, with the aesthetic modality of literary production that literary studies understands as ‘realism’ (Shonkwiler and La Berge, 2014).

⁶⁶ Rancière’s notion of *literarity* is finely tuned with Piglia’s description. Especially worth noticing here is the concept of circulating signs as *quasi-bodies*: ‘Literarity is at once the condition and the effect of the circulation of “actual” literary locutions. However, these locutions take hold of bodies and divert them from their end or purpose insofar as they are not bodies in the sense of organisms, but quasi-bodies, blocks of speech circulating without a legitimate father to accompany them toward their authorized addressee. Therefore, they do not produce collective bodies. Instead, they introduce lines of fracture and disincorporation into imaginary collective bodies. This has always been, as is well known, the phobia of those in power and the theoreticians of good government, worried that the circulation of writing would produce “disorder in the established system of classification.”’ (Rancière, 2006, p.39).

⁶⁷ Hyperstition is a pivotal concept for the Cybernetic Culture Research Unit (Ccru) an influential collective based at the University of Warwick, which circulated around the work of philosophers Nick Land and Sadie Plant. The postulates of hyperstition directly engage with the relationship between fiction and the real. According to the glossary of Ccru terms ‘Hyperstition [is an] element of effective culture that makes itself real, through fictional quantities functioning as time-travelling potentials. Hyperstition operates as a coincidence intensifier, effecting a call to the Old Ones’ (Time Spiral Press, 2015 [ebook, no pagination]). Hyperstition is an intensification of its close term ‘superstition’, which involves fictions becoming real. This term is relevant to the present project to the extent that it resonates with: the intrusion of the Homeostatic Universe Strugatsky brothers’ novella (Chapter Two); the productivities of the Piglian complot, where fictions make part of the broader economies of the real—as semiotic productions that make themselves real (Chapter Three).

(Borges, 2007d)—Piglia's paradigmatic example in this case—tells the story of the 'Secret Company', which runs Babylon and dictates the speculative and unpredictable future of its subjects through lottery and chance. In Borges' text, 'The State organises a vast machination to determine the experience on the life of its subjects by casting periodical lots' (Piglia, 2015, p.104). Piglia thus, polemically recasts Borges' narrative through a hidden narration, smuggling the complot-form. Society as a whole appears in Borges as a big conspiracy, through the figure of the complot (Piglia, 2015).

Piglia's conclusion on the post-novel can be understood as a proposal for a distinct theory of literature, which is better understood in its contemporary form through the figure of the complot:

[...] obscure forces construct machinations that define the secret functioning of the real. Oracles have changed their place, it is the multiple plots [*múltiples tramas*⁶⁸] of information, the versions and counterversions of public life; the places where the subject routinely reads the cipher of a destiny he/she can no longer comprehend" (Piglia, 2015, p.102).

It will be crucial to extend beyond the specificities of the intra-fictive relation, since this element is related to a figuration of a broader totality. Piglia articulates a definition of the economy as the template for this totality, evoking a history of an expanded understanding of the economy that stretches back to Nietzsche, but runs through Bataille, Derrida, Deleuze and the Foucault of *The Birth of Biopolitics*:

On the one hand, the economy is conceived through the form of a machination that moves masses and territories and, on the other hand, there is what we would call a conspiratorial response to the conspiracy; the attempt to integrate small circles that seek to construct a closed economy, a utopian economy, an economy that is regulated by gratification and unproductive exchanges. The definition of a potential economic theory that defines a significative line in contemporary thought. (Piglia, 2015, p.112).

And this theory, is traced back to Pierre Klossowski's pivotal reading of Nietzsche, constituting

⁶⁸ In Spanish *trama* means both narration and weaving. I have kept the fluidity of the English 'plotting'. This choice underlines the relations between narration, plan, strategy, intrigue and machination.

a symptomatology of economic life that defines a new regime of concepts, [A] theory [that] is present in Bataille, in Callois, in the Klossowski of *Living Currency* and, of course, also in Deleuze, with his hypotheses on libidinal fluxes, in the opposition between desire and interest and on the impossible barter that *regulate the logic of sense* (Piglia, 2015, p.112, emphasis mine).

The logic of sense that is economically regulated includes a wide span of effective ranges, taking into account not a circulation and exchange of commodities, but also a broad regulation of bodies, affects, and sensoria—in all its conceivable amplitude and extension: ‘Nietzsche’s complot [recalled by Klossowski] is a heroic intent to oppose the economy, seen through the form of an anonymous machination that dissolves the subjects in its abstract fluxes’ (Piglia, 2015, p.113). Piglia concludes that

The key to Klossowski’s reading [...] is the idea of the economy understood as a practice of experimentation on the subjects. In this sense, the economy is an invisible and multiple manipulation that knots and ties individuals, groups and sets to massive displacements of money. Populations are plotted on those demential displacements of capital [*Las poblaciones están tramadas en esos desplazamientos demenciales del capital*] ⁶⁹ (Piglia, 2015, p.112).

We deduce here a logic akin to contemporary forms of neoliberal segmentation, subjection of the bios: a clear but silent reference to Foucault’s project on biopolitics as a genealogy of neoliberal governmentality (Foucault, 2008). In terms defined by the present project: Piglia’s theory of complot maps an affect of not-knowing, within the realm of neoliberal subsumption.

Theory of Complot is both a metafictional and theoretical argumentation; the text probes the fluid borders between these two instances. By proposing that the relation between literature and politics is better thought through the figure of complot, Piglia alludes to the relations between scheming as conspiracy and plotting as narration. The effects and affects of suspicion unleashed by this theory are only available after the fact:

⁶⁹ Piglia again recurs to the Spanish word *tramada*, which I have translated as ‘plotted’. In Spanish, the word *tramada* also means mesh/weaving/being-captured/or being-mesmerised, implying that subjects are somehow woven into the displacements of capital. This shift emphasises a type of de-subjection and predominance of the literary exchange as a parallel logic, also *subjected* to the abstract logic that weaves the subjects in question.

by reading Piglia we default on a conspiratorial reading of a complot that expands to everything, an intrusion into the all that produces a totalising scheme. Piglia's text can be read as a type of cunning articulation where all instances cited become complicitous. The modality of complicity, operates *apres-coup*: after the fact (Laplanche, 1999). This means that the semi-paranoid logic of the complot is inescapable, a matching affect for this project's sub-text of total subsumption (Chapter Four continues this immersion by articulating the notion of non-exit).

Piglia's text charts an alternative to the complot through a counter-complot: the remedy to proliferating possibilities implies that the only logic to traverse the devious machination of the complot needs to figure out the logic of immanence offered by the complot itself. The complot is in this sense, a relevant contemporary figure, especially in relation to the aforementioned immersion and total subsumption; the complot is an operative machine that produces a certain type of reading in an age of fictive circulation of the economy. We can say, of ubiquitous information and under the terms of surveillance capitalism (Zuboff, 2015):⁷⁰

informational excess produces a paradox effect [*un efecto paradoja!*]; that which is not known becomes part of the news. That which is not known, in a world in which everything is known, urges the search for a hidden key that will help decipher reality. If the crisis of experience that Benjamin situated on the first World War has been displaced, then this is perhaps due to the on-growing presence of the idea of a complot in the relations between information and experience. Before becoming clinical, paranoia is an exit from the crisis of sense. (Piglia, 2015, p.99)

A regime that aspires to capture the whole of experiential totality; producing a new version of political aesthetics.

⁷⁰ Shoshana Zuboff has coined the term *surveillance capitalism*, to refer to a new logic of capitalist accumulation. She writes how '[w]ith the new logic of accumulation that is surveillance capitalism, a fourth fictional commodity emerges as a dominant characteristic of market dynamics in the 21st century. Reality itself is undergoing the same kind of fictional metamorphosis as did persons, nature, and exchange. Now "reality" is subjugated to commodification and monetization and reborn as "behavior." Data about the behaviors of bodies, minds, and things take their place in a universal real-time dynamic index of smart objects within an infinite global domain of wired things. This new phenomenon produces the possibility of modifying the behaviors of persons and things for profit and control. In the logic of surveillance capitalism there are no individuals, only the world-spanning organism and all the tiniest elements within it' (Zuboff, 2015, p.85).

The Politics of Literature

Piglia is not alone in conflating fiction and politics. The move is also familiar to Jacques Rancière, who argues:

the politics of literature is not the politics of its writers. It does not deal with their personal commitment to the social and political issues and struggles of their times. Nor does it deal with the modes of representation of political events or the social structure and the social struggles in their books. The syntagma “politics of literature” means that literature “does” politics as literature—that there is a specific link between politics as a definite way of doing and literature as a definite practice of writing (Rancière, 2004, p.10).

Rancière underscores the specific syntagmatic relation between politics and literature as stemming out of a linkage between both terms. This process occurs within a specific *distribution of the sensible*: an a-priori mode that precedes what is thinkable, sayable, hearable, doable—in short, an expanded understanding of a regime that regulates sensoria. This distribution of the sensible is understood as the *aesthetic regime* (Rancière, 2006, pp.20-29). The aesthetic regime is the broader ordering of the possible as a distribution of sensoria. This regime links, in our case, two forms of sense: that of the literary and in parallel, that of politics, which appear as forces of irruption of what is sensible or sensed—the politics in question is the matter of distribution. Rancière offers a renewed conception of aesthetics as a broad domain of identification of what is perceivable, taking in sensoria at its most expanded definition (Rancière, 2006).

For Rancière, politics always appears as a kind of fictional actualisation of what can be sensed: literature inscribes itself within a sensorial domain, inasmuch as it shares its modes of doing with a broader distribution of capacities. This double possibility allows for both a politics of aesthetics and an aesthetics of politics: literature and the arts qualify as *modes of doing* among others, which in turn, share an equal and general space of sensorial production (Rancière, 2006, p.39).

Rancière speaks of an aesthetics of politics as a way of actualising the possibilities of modes of doing as capacities—in the sense of what is possible. The politics of aesthetics means there is a specific linkage that operates within an equal stratum of sensorial potentiality and articulation. It is worth noting that Rancière does not allow the regime to inherently produce hierarchies between these capacities, since sensoria

operates on a horizontal distribution, where the deep ambiguity of what can be done with is always present as a surplus possibility. This nevertheless does not mean that hierarchies do not exist, only that they can always be overturned. How something can be linked with something else is for Rancière the source of a radical anonymous potential. Anonymous, in the sense that there is no teleology in a mode of address: the addressee of a text, an image, a sound, etc., is paradoxically, nobody and anybody at the same time. A radical dispersion of unoriginal signs that have no destiny, a kind of economy of circulations, bound by the premise of a total sensorial complot.

Now, Rancière's general reception in the spheres artistic production has been met with a mesmerised sense of immediacy—an often optimistic sense that the link between aesthetics and politics is an enabling move. A heartening hope for an escape from an immobilising preoccupation and a profound sense of crisis. Beyond this optimism of the intellect, I feel that a process of actualisation needs to be tackled here, given that there is an important omission that figures prominently in Rancière's own explanations. An omission left untouched, (probably) wilfully missed almost everywhere: Rancière often speaks of *regimes* of aesthetic identification, lending a somehow sinister tone to read what would have appeared as a new space of playful potentiality. This omission is uncannily evident, yet it remains literally plainly visible. The total and open potentiality of the regime is given by its closure. Probably due to this haunting sense of closure, I have the impression that Rancière has left this aspect under-theorised. Like Poe's purloined letter which can only be hidden in plain sight, it appears everywhere and yet is mentioned nowhere. Rancière himself can be held accountable for the promotion of this ambiguity. Rancière wishes to operate within such a regime, and treat it as a totalising force that can only be modified from within. Politics for Rancière, appears as a redistribution of the sensible, which is governed by the law of non-regulation of the regime of aesthetics (or recalling Althusser, the necessary contingency that defines the aesthetic regime). In a way, this means that there is no beyond-aesthetics. The paradoxical severity of an articulation that promotes what initially appears as a deeply enabling theory is perplexing, at least in the possibilities it lends to tackle an inflated sense of wild possibility.

What to make with this unsurpassable totality? Piglia's complot offers an answer. It can be noted how Rancière's theory operates as a total conspiratorial complot. The

regime that operates and governs the perceivable is a logic of paranoid and disembodied regulation: the specificity of every aesthetic operation (which amounts to the broader organisation of sensoria) is already defined by the suspicious dynamic of equivalence that the aesthetic regime allows for. This explains the polemic name Rancière uses to describe self-evidence of the regulatory system of the aesthetic regime: the *police* (Rancière, 2006, p.89; 2010, pp.36–37).⁷¹

Depending how this issue is followed, the resulting modification of the relation between fiction and linguistic production will differ. Rancière's phrasing operates an order of the 'specificity' of the linkage provided by the aesthetic regime: he is always emphasising on the *specific* common regime of articulation that gives literature its *specific* ability to provide a mode of enunciation. This modality of the specific is what gives aesthetics its irreducible link with politics. This specificity is the specificity of a common shared stratum. What is this regime that Rancière delivers? A figure of literature that is part of a broader share of parts.

The complot, as Piglia elaborates it, takes this irreducible ground further, to such extreme paranoiac extents, that it conflates fiction with politics on an irreversible scaling. No longer a discrete, specific part of the regime—as for Rancière—fiction circulates everywhere and may be present in all and everything. My argument is that the resulting exponential disparaging of the complot serves to underscore an extant logic in Rancière's more neutral description of ordering and distributing—and which is, recalling Poe again—hidden in plain sight: an economic dimension. But as we have seen 'the idea of the economy understood as a practice of experimentation on the subjects' (Piglia, 2015, p.112) that Piglia draws from the Nietzschean line that runs through from Klossowski, Bataille to Foucault: this economy is *not* a reduced economy. The term distribution, in distribution of the sensible needs to be addressed as this broadened political aesthetics, which includes a logic of circulation, exchange and expenditure. Piglia's complot, proposes

⁷¹ The other of the police being the non-all that is politics (*dissensus*), which exists as the disruption of the Aesthetic Regime, effecting a redistribution of roles and places. A reshuffling of cards, so that a new game can be played.

fiction as a mechanism that is able to provide a figuration, precisely of this process of exchange and circulation.

The complot swarms to the extent that the notion of literature ends up being compulsively articulated onto everything. The conspiracy in the complot—as in Borges' lottery—is realised in the totalising logic of fiction. Piglia's notion of the literary is non-specific, or rather, it breaks loose towards affects that are less regimented than the necessary specificity that Rancière is so intent on emphasising. Piglia's one is a specificity for which there is no specificity. If Rancière provides us with a ground to test the efficacy of a total regime, Piglia provides a mode of paranoid recursion for this regime, which appears as the realisation of a total complot. This complot is in fact read as the total figure of the regime, a regime that Rancière would understand as an unsurpassable horizon. Repeating Piglia's epigraph in this context: 'We need to construct a complot against complot', in order to effectively use the literary against itself—and thus, probably leave behind Rancière's reliance on a restricted economy.⁷²

(and) the paraliterary

In an essay from 1980, "Poststructuralism and the 'Paraliterary'", Rosalind Krauss introduces the question of—effectively—the paraliterary as a theoretical intrusion in the space of literature: an intrusion that irrevocably modifies the literary. The prefix para- that accompanies the literary means in parallel, running sidewise. The paraliterary drowns literature into a multiplicity of coexistent and concurrent voices, resonances, citations and surplus textual operations. The unicity of the canonical meaning of a 'literary' text is surrounded by a sprawling disunity (Krauss, 1980).

Krauss cites two examples, which stem from two lectures by Jacques Derrida and Roland Barthes:

The first example that Krauss cites is Derrida's lecture addressing Heidegger's "The Origin of the work of Art". Here, Derrida adds exasperated and irruptive questions in a

⁷² Further criticism can be aimed at Rancière's aesthetic regime as a Francophone/Eurocentric formation that has its origin in the French revolution. A theory of disparaged signs would be expected to include a total global conflation, not a celebration of a singular national origin.

sharp high pitched tone, while he reads his more ‘serious’ philosophical text. Heidegger’s famous analysis of Van Gogh’s shoes is interrupted by Derrida’s falsetto, who impertinently disrupts the philosophical flow by asking spurious questions (Krauss, 1980). Krauss argues that this ‘voice functions to open and theatricalize the space of Derrida’s writing, alerting us to the dramatic interplay of levels and styles and speakers that had formerly been the prerogative of literature but not of critical or philosophical discourse’ (Krauss, 1980, p. 37).

The second example is Barthes’ idiosyncratic lecture of Proust in “*Longtemps, je me suis Couché de Bonne Heure*”. Barthes ‘explicitly pointed to the intention to blur the distinction between literature and criticism’ (p.37), in this example, by painstakingly ‘analogizing his own career to that of Proust’ (p.37). The title of the lecture is telling since it annexes a fragment on the first line of Proust’s *Remembrance of Things Past* through a personal lens. (Krauss, 1980)

Two important points can be extracted from Krauss’ text:

The *operativeness of the paraliterary*: Krauss argues that ‘The creation of the paraliterary in the more recent work of these men is, of course, the result of theory—their own theories in operation, so to speak.’ (Krauss, 1980, p.38) an important element of Krauss’ argument is her drawing of attention to the way in which theory acts as an intruder: it exerts its operations on the literary and in turn becomes a part of the literary, emphasising on the surrounding affects of denotation, which are inextricable from literature proper but extend beyond it.

Superficiality: Krauss claims ‘[...]that there is not, behind the literal surface, a set of meanings to which it points or models to which [the paraliterary] refers, a set of originary terms onto which it opens and from which it derives its own authenticity[...’ (1980, p.38). Krauss points to a diatribe against an Academia that is too well versed on ‘critical practice’, which she refers to ironically. She contrasts the incapacity of academic departments of her time to deal with the paraliterary (her point is made in the U.S.A). The last sentence is remarkable, due to how she shifts between modernist literature to *postmodernist* literature:

if one of the tenets of modernist literature had been the creation of a work that would force reflection on the conditions of its own construction, that would insist on reading as a much more consciously *critical* act, then it is not surprising that the medium of a

postmodernist literature should be the critical text wrought into a paraliterary form
(Krauss, 1980, p.40, italics in original).

Krauss' notion of the paraliterary is premised on a trans-discursive dialog and one of her most crucial moves is her appropriation of the figure of the technocrat, a derisive term that her colleagues save for thinkers of like Derrida and Barthes. She uses the pejorative term her fellow academics used to describe them in an ironic but self-reflexive mode. Krauss can be cherished for promoting this nouveau-technocratic arrangement, where paratextuality appears as the blurring of fiction and theory. And this fact opens up the operativeness of the paraliterary and the claim for superficiality in terms that interestingly qualify the present project (more on this point in the section 'Bureaugraphy').

Now, the debate on the paraliterary is thirty years old and the question of a modernist/postmodernist divide seems somehow dated. Nevertheless, the shift towards an extra-literary surplus which haunts and surrounds the notion of literature itself is still interesting—specifically, as a mode to reflect on the paraliterary genre of the dissertation-site. This fact pays attention to the mode in which the paraliterary form is witness to an equally superficial lack of depth and topical embeddedness.⁷³

When asked to address the paraliterary, science-fiction writer Samuel Delany suggests that 'we adopt a different methodology for studying paraliterature: Because we cannot count on the markers the way we can in literary studies' (Delany, 2011, p.204). These markers, broadly refer to points of demarcation (i.e., the marker that demarcates literature from paraliterature itself). Delany argues that 'we must compensate by putting more emphasis on paraliterary genres as *material productions of discourse*.' (Delany, 2011, p.204, emphasis mine). Delany adds: '*although one can study literature without studying paraliterature, one cannot do it the other way around.*' (p.204, original emphases) And the disorder of this operation is an irrevocable change in the status of those material productions of discourse (this project included). A surplus that arguably expresses an

⁷³ Lack of depth is not to be confused with a lack of conceptual density, but as a horizontal ground in which discourses, citations, texts, words, images, etc., are understood as parallel materials.

affect of the complot kind; where these material productions are dispersed in the surround and fiction is extended everywhere.⁷⁴

Meta-(Fiction)

The complot induces a meta- modality as a key driving force. This meta modality defies 'self-reflection' as a problematic trope: a mode of subjectivity guided by a privileging of the self, which is incidentally also oculocentric—hence the metaphor on reflectivity. Instead, the allusion to meta- denotes a range of characteristics that promote paratextual relations to the complot's own realisation as a fiction. An important trait in the capitalisation of language, a meta-attitude is also a gesture that attempts to figure a systemic totality. Fredric Jameson cherishes this impulse as a desire to map the elusive sublimation of late capitalism and its aesthetic dithering (Jameson, 1988). This affect is palpable in the concept of *cognitive mapping*, a notion elaborated by Jameson in order to

⁷⁴ Carrie Lambert-Beatty (2009) coined the term *parafiction* to describe an artistic strategy that deploys fiction, in order to confuse a regime of plausibility that is taken for granted. Lambert-Beatty notes how 'a parafiction is related to but not quite a member of the category of fiction as established in literary and dramatic art. It remains a bit outside' (p.54). Parafiction blends deception with that which is experienced as possible: 'in parafiction real and/or imaginary personages and stories intersect with the world as it is being lived. Post-simulacral, parafictional strategies are oriented less toward the disappearance of the real than toward the pragmatics of trust' (p.54). Thus, this merging of plausibility and parafictionality imply that '[para]fictions are experienced as fact' (p.54).

Regarding the present project—and following Piglia's theory of complot—things become interesting: Piglia holds that implausible fictions are experienced as fact, such as the devastating effects of economic speculation, which operates by shaping the realm of implausible reality-effects (often, regardless of the concrete outcomes). Lambert-Beatty considers artistic counterstrategies, but does not necessarily address overarching fictional corpuses that have virtual effects, such as the complots that underscore State power's monopoly on violence (the fiction of the State is, effectively, experienced as fact). Lambert-Beatty's discussion emphasises parafiction's 'minor strategies', leaving aside the use of fiction and plausibility on effects that exceed micro-levels. This is not a criticism: Lambert-Beatty's argument clearly indicates that the terrain of parafiction is a terrain that may be lost in the totalisation made by the Piglian complot—her argument is tinged with a nuanced and less totalising tone. In the conspiranoid logic of the complot, on the other hand, the instances of the fictional/plausible are in fact conflated to totalising extents—hence the necessity to create a complot against complot. A playful way to vindicate the Piglian theory for the present project, vis-à-vis parafiction, would index a conspiranoid 'coefficient of implausibility', which always underscores a countercomplot that points to a broader subsumption: the more implausible the regime—homeostatic, aesthetic, capitalist, unknown, etc.—the more insidious its effects. After all, the 21st century destruction of major parts of the middle-east by Western powers is premised on the powers of make-believe.

address the totality of the world-system of late capitalism, 'a system so vast that it cannot be encompassed by the natural and historically developed categories of perception with which human beings normally orient themselves' (Jameson, 1988, pp.1–2). A post-phenomenological charting of '[...] totalities [that] can never be perceived with the naked eye (where they would remain, in any case, purely contemplative and epistemological images), [...] we speak of mapping out or triangulating, rather than perceiving or representing, a totality' (Jameson, 1988, p.31).

Jameson explains how

when confronted with the ambitious program of fantasizing an economic system on the scale of the globe itself, the older motif of conspiracy knows a fresh lease on life, as a narrative structure capable of reuniting the minimal basic components: a potentially infinite network, along with a plausible explanation of its invisibility; or in other words: the collective and the epistemological (Jameson, 1992, p.9).

Piglia's proposition holds a similar momentum, since it bends towards parafictional and linguistic productivity; making it an important candidate for our attention here. Piglia's take on the complot is premised on the impulse to think the broad economic flux that is registered in the movement of capital and its meshing (*trama*) of subjects in its conspiratorial plot. In face of the necessity to 'construct a complot against complot' (Piglia, 2015, p.99), capitalist subsumption and the meshing of fiction need to be underlined. This situation of weaving is tackled through the promotion of embeddedness (*trama, entramado*) and activation effects, instead of opting for an implicitly passive spectation. Both Jameson and Piglia suggest a de-centring of the oculocentric narrative of the spectacle, in favour of an epistemic image of the total that cannot be grasped by individual sight, nor exclusively by the senses. Such a fragmentation of cognition underscores the 'fresh lease on life' of the conspiratorial motif, defended by Jameson in the quote above. And this lease is updated by Piglia through the figure of the complot.

Instead of exalting any phenomenological capacities to perceive an evanescent totality, Jameson acknowledges of the epistemic function of cognitive maps, which are crucial for pursuing a 'geopolitical aesthetic' that can effectively figure aspects of the global-world system of late capitalism:

Reading having been redrawn in contemporary theory, perhaps it is now time to restructure our conception of learning itself. If fantasy is epistemological, [...] indeed

if narrative is itself a form of cognition, then an obvious next step lies in the systematic harnessing of the energies of those hitherto irrational activities for cognitive purposes. The conception of cognitive mapping I have proposed elsewhere was intended to include that possibility [...] (Jameson, 1992, p.188).

Jameson asserts here a new role for reading in this enterprise, thus supporting the apparatus of fiction: this redrawing of reading in contemporary theory matches what until now, I have decided to call the paraliterary.

A series of related points that bind the complot with the paraliterary, sum up its relevance for this project. The following is a recapitulation of the argument: (i) the disfiguration of the ocular logic dissolves into the articulation of fictions and their political valences, (ii) the promotion of this extensible fictionality allows one to pollute other realms and find a material operativity in (para)literature (iii) the specificity of Rancière's literary regime that owes its energies to an equally specific literariness is disparaged by the introduction of a paraliterary elusive totality. The paraliterary proliferation of apparatuses and machines of thought (and suspicion) figure an unrestricted economy and make subsumption available to thought (iv) the complot unleashes epistemic affects of the blurry boundaries between knowing/not-knowing (v) finally, the paraliterary figuring of the totality in question ought to be constructed and played upon itself—its meta qualities are also potential powers of re-articulation and self-realisation.

Regarding the function of the meta order invoked here, Piglia expands on the self-sufficiency of intrigues:

We could say that, in principle, a complot implies the idea of a revolution. [...] But there exist other forms of complot that are self-realising, which we would define as intrigues a pure politics of conspiracy that, even beyond the possibility of its realisation, finds its sense on the microscopic and invisible effects of the confabulation itself (Ricardo Piglia, 2002, p.4).

Beyond the proposition of an ideal of revolution, Piglia's aim is to capture the microscopic forms of the configuration of an intrigue; the 'pure' politics of conspiracies that have lives of their own. Implying that any efforts to make sense of such a politics derives in an ever-growing spiral of further intrigues. The meta- aspect not only means that we need to construct 'a complot against complot' (Piglia, 2015, p.99). It also alludes to the

spontaneous and uncontrolled proliferation of scheming narratives that further sprout from narratives of complot; proliferation is the key word: a complot produces further conspiratorial narratives of complot.

Piglia proposes, in this sense, a consistent extrapolation of the politics of the Strugatsky brothers' *End of the World*; a world threatened by the microscopic buildup of anti-entropic rearrangements. The resistance of the homeostatic universe to the scientist's efforts needs of course to be read here as a total and universal complot as an absolute epistemic limit. This alternative *End of the World* would serve as a counterfeit version of the 'End of History' polemics that initially animated Jameson's project: an *End of History* that slowly resists in a way comparable to the Homeostatic Universe's struggle to retain its form.

Piglia appears as an interesting hinge figure to follow up the microscopies of conspiracy in *A Billion Years*; the manufacturing of political intrigues and their processing collude in the excessive desire for a figuration of the abstract infrastructures of late capitalism, which appear as sublime forms of finance understood as magic: a productive, though certainly hasty interpretation of the Strugatsky's futural dystopia.

A momentary swerving diversion indicates an interesting parallelism for Piglia in his non-booming status within the panorama of Latin American contemporary literature. I propose the unsteady term implosion to describe this movement. Implosion implies: a retaliation against the fetishism of magic realism and an immanent inward blow that produces immanent effects. I am in dialogue here with Jameson's titles for his analysis of the Strugatsky's novella and Alexandre Sokurov's film (Sokurov, 1988) as: 'Soviet Magical Realism' (Jameson, 1992, p.87), which I find rather unfortunate. But, just as it was useful to diverge into the pink spectrum (Chapter Two) in order to activate potentially useful ways to modify a non-booming spectrum, which aims to produce forms of exodus that do not rely on magical amusement. Non-booming neatly ties in with the blob of non-Historical production (with a capital H), that I have treated so far in other references.⁷⁵ In

⁷⁵ Mignolo speaks about 'subjects whose perspectives [do] not count. [Citing] Eric Wolf's famous book title, *People without History*, [which] became a metaphor to describe this epistemic power differential.' History, with a capital H means here that 'according to the regional concept of history as defined in the Western world from ancient Greece to

this sense, we can decouple Jameson's outdated obsession with an 'End of History', which of course never happened in the fetishised latitudes of elsewhere.

Non-booming implosion will mean here a movement that refuses the regime of magic realism as the only horizon of an expansive boom and a figure that can produce a mode understanding further epistemic valences and its power differentials (Mignolo, 2005, p.xii). Non-boom is projected here as an unbound proliferation of fiction into the all (rather than magic as already populating the real). By inverting the boom of a realism which is presupposed as being always-already magical, the implosive shift projects and promotes a proliferation of fictions for which the real itself is part of a dubious fictive articulation: magic coming as nothing but a merely interesting redundancy. Fiction is complicit with the dark sorcery of capital and herein lies its efficiency and the political urgency to seriously address it (coming back to the surplus in Jameson's title, the 'Geopolitical Aesthetic' he seeks should figure within an implosive regime too, where the Regime of Aesthetics is seen as collapsing onto itself). Here the conspiratorial logic should be taken as utterly necessary, and thus, the genres of 'Second' and 'Third' world metafictions of yesteryear acquire an unexpectedly intense grip on the present (This thesis defends this claim, and this a generic reason that already binds the seemingly incompatible materials of the Strugatsky's, Piglia and Santiago).

Returning to the complot, which I read as a figure where reading and writing collude. This collusion expands the paranoid affectivity of not-knowing, providing a space for a reformulation of the notion of literature that can leak beyond its boundaries. The notion of complot permanently underlines a politics of fiction as being *always-already* embedded in the materialities of discursive production. Further more, the emerging *conspiranoid* modality of the contemporary can be said to operate as tampering of the logics of meta articulations.⁷⁶

twentieth-century France, every society that did not have alphabetic writing or wrote in a language other than the six imperial languages of modern Europe did not have History' (Mignolo, 2005, p.xii).

⁷⁶ My friend Belén Zahera pointed me to the term *conspiranoid*, which is currently used in Spain as a negative-cum-positive portmanteau, commonly used in everyday political chit-chat. It aptly comes in a moment of semi-total de-legitimation of the bi-partidist post-Franco regime otherwise known as the caste (*la casta*).

Leaks, in this sense, interestingly unfold in a spatial way that speaks to the motion of an implosive post-boom. Leaks are defined by Julian Assange as ‘the defection of the inner to the outer’ (Assange 2006). In the total conspiranoid world in which we are presently immersed, the possibility of leaks is potentially increased. Intelligence analyst Peter Swire describes this phenomenon as the declining half-life of secrets: the exponentially diminished socio-technical capacity to maintain secrets of all kinds (Swire, 2015). It is in this context that the conspiranoid affectivity of a meta unfolding can be understood, harnessed and produced. Assange explains how ‘the more secretive or unjust an organization is, the more leaks induce fear and paranoia in its leadership and planning coterie’ (Assange, 2006). This arrangement of ‘conspiracy as governance’ (the title of Assange’s second article) is a mode of tackling the most pressing technology of contemporary subjugation. The complot underscores the fictional infrastructure of the present predicament. Piglia’s intuition presciently reads a very contemporary affectivity.

In his first draft of Theory of Complot (Piglia, 2002), Piglia addresses politics and complot through a provocative formulation that is unfortunately cut out from the new version (Piglia, 2015). Regardless, I find that this simple, though negative definition is still relevant for the present inquiry. Piglia claims that ‘the economy appears in our times to be the realisation of politics by other means’ (Piglia, 2002, p.4). A clear and playful reframing of Clausewitz’s maxim, Piglia continues: ‘[...] a politics of conspiracy manifest in the economy, for which the state is nothing else than a route of circulation, a channel of vigilance or counter-information’ (Piglia, 2002, p.4). This claim of course serves to outline directives to understand new models of the contemporary regime of post-Snowden ‘datapolitik’ (Panagia, 2014).

Piglia offers a weaponised view of aesthetics and politics—the avant-garde move *par excellance*—and an elliptic variation on Piglia’s previous discussion of the avant-garde and revolution. Here, I wish to resist the lure of nostalgic versions of avant-gardism. I propose instead that it is more fruitful to further inquire on the implications of Piglia’s phrasing. Clausewitz’s twenty-fourth point on warfare speaks of war as ‘politics continued by other means’ (Clausewitz, 2006, p.28; italics and adaptation mine). There is a slight discrepancy between the Spanish phrasing used by Piglia, which originally goes as ‘*La economía aparece en esta época como la realización de la política por otros medios*’ (Piglia, 2002, p.4; same quote as above) and Clausewitz’s English translation: ‘24.

'War Is Merely the Continuation of Policy by Other Means' (2006, p.28).⁷⁷ Clausewitz's continuation acquires a different connotation through the term realisation.

Piglia rightly captures a flux of continuation by using the word realisation, proposing that the economy is better understood as the realisation of politics *by other means*. The shift from continuation to realisation is important: there is a material operativity of the economy—and its subordination of politics tout-court—that is figured through the complot. The most crucial aspect of Piglia's proposition is the nebulosity of the unmentioned means. An unfettered obliqueness that is yet-to-be-articulated lends the argument its special force. My point here is that Piglia's proposition underlines another crucial aspect of the Clausewitzian conception of psychological warfare: Clausewitz's famous *fog of war*.

For Clausewitz's, the fog in question is the epistemic conditioning of an understanding of war:

If we pursue the demands that war makes on those who practise it, we come to the region dominated by the powers of intellect. War is the realm of uncertainty; three quarters of the factors on which action in war is based are wrapped in a fog of greater or lesser uncertainty (Clausewitz, 2006, p.54).

Clausewitz thus speaks of an exploitation of indeterminacy and uncertainty. A diversion of understanding becomes a key aspect of the role and use of knowledge in warfare (and its limitations). Paul Mann explains this proposition, actualising war's

[...] untheorizable turmoil, error, accidents, chance, the sheer disorientation of combat terror. The fog of war is quite literally noise, war's resistance to language, to objectification, to the code: both its problematic and its seductiveness, the limit of its intelligibility and the depth of its sublimity (Mann, 1996, point 39).

Piglia's 'other means' invoke the materiality of this diversion and its self-actualisation: the core of fictionalisation, which inevitably yields a force of articulation. Piglia's complot is posed as the answer to the question of aesthetics subsumed in warfare, a retrogressive

⁷⁷ The lines that follow are: 'We see, therefore, that war is not merely an act of policy but a true political instrument, a continuation of political intercourse, carried on with other means' (2006, p.28).

understanding of the avant-garde as present in a perverse everyday articulation, formulated as a total regime. Here, a version of economic non-lineal warfare is construed and produced as a total mediating force, which takes us back to the need to underscore not-knowing as a strategic detour (or in fact, 'to construct a complot against complot', which implies another name for the same operation).^{78,79}

Bureaugraphy

If *A Billion Years* brings about a distorted totalising figure of universal conspiracy against the project of what we call here knowledge production, then the figure of complot reinforces the notion of conspiranoia by grounding its embeddedness on the materialities of fictional production. Helpfully in the English language, the articulation the complot as *complot* indicates this shift. The matter of fiction and the matter of politics are conflated in the same anxious ground. None can be said to precede the other; both imply a threat of continuous and probable contamination. The realm of fictive articulation thus, underscores the relation between conspiracy and plotting.

Among the most remarkable issues that *A Billion Years* raises is its treatment of the outcomes of epistemic breakdown, which progressively become understandable only through a totalising cosmic conspiracy. Non-external to the abstract logistics of inquiry, the Homeostatic Universe intercedes in the mechanisms of knowledge production in such a way that it irrevocably modifies those mechanisms and machinations. Instead of aiming for a positive articulation of knowledge production, *A Billion Years* epitomises the strange effects of intrinsic transactions of Knowledge Production (its self-fulfilling logics), which lead to an aporia that can only possibly be understood through the adoption of a vantage point that is only known to the scientists in its inverted form: knowing that the Homeostatic Universe is actively regulating the possibilities of the knowable is possible only by acknowledging the breakdown of the enterprise of knowledge itself. The collapse

⁷⁸ It is also interesting to recall that the pretext to the destruction of the Middle East was predominantly played in fictional terms: the existence of WMD in Saddam Hussein's hands, according to Powell's weaponisation of epistemic production.

⁷⁹ The following is the first 'tweet' made by the CIA in the social network Twitter: 'we can neither confirm nor deny that this our first tweet'. 10:49AM – 6 Jun 2014.

of the will-to-know conspires to produce surplus forms of understanding that cannot be contained by the usual mechanisms of knowledge production. Or rather, of a specific version of knowledge production that can be allegorised in our own terms—by the way of a methodological unfolding—as a bureaucratisation of the knowledge process through the proliferation of instances of evaluation required by the financialisation of the institutions of knowledge.⁸⁰

Naturally, these instances are not simply the result of natural history, and here lies the darkly humorous tone that the Strugatsky brothers provide as a critique of bureaucratic rule, which we can also embrace as a meta-reflection to the conditionals of the present writing.

A Billion Years is distinctively written as a series of fragments and reports; each section appearing as an incomplete file that documents the series of events faced by the scientists in each moment. This mimetic reference to a model of writing that is premised on investigative or documentary archiving should not pass unnoticed. It acts as a constitutive format that gives the novella its capacity to bypass its censors in the Soviet Union.⁸¹

By recalling Leo Strauss' take on the relations between reading/writing in censorship (Strauss, 1941), Piglia addresses the double bind offered by the position of the censor-reader and the act of censorship, through a complot-like expansion of editorial activity:

Frequently, in order to understand the destructive logic of the social, the private subject needs to infer the existence of a complot. As Leo Strauss recalls in his now classic essay *Persecution and the Art of Writing*, reading between the lines—assuming that there is always something ciphered—is by itself a political act. The censor reads in that way and so does the conspirator: two great models of the modern reader (Piglia, 2015, p.100).

⁸⁰ See the introduction of David Graeber's latest book *The Utopia of Rules* for a take on this financialisation, which is read as further bureaucratisation (Graeber, 2015).

⁸¹ in the Afterword to *A Billion Years*, Boris Strugatsky explains how, after being edited by the government censors, he and his brother only got two minor changes: 'homeostasis' would have to be rephrased as 'preservation of structure' and 'criminal investigator' as 'procuratorial investigator' (Strugatsky and Strugatsky, 2014, pp.147–149).

Instead of being 'tricked', the censor needs to find a ground of complicity with the writer; their operations of reading are complicitous from the perspective of the complot. And I am referring here to finding a common ground that is able to understand that all fiction is always-already political. Jameson explains how the very brushing off of the political dimension is itself the fetishised form of liberal censorship:

[...]for it is only at that deeper level of our collective fantasy that we think about the social system all the time, a deeper level that also allows us to slip our political thoughts past a liberal and anti-political censorship (Jameson, 1992, p.9).

The Strugatsky brothers' blurry fictional production is to my mind one of the most compelling takes on the dilemma of censorship and transparency, which explains its immediate relevance for our purposes. As a meta-reflection of its own textual mediality, it serves to think through and unfold the material fabric of contemporary knowledge work. The Strugatsky brothers' novella presents a mode of collective writing that is done through the institutional apparatuses of censorship, and which would be impossible without this grey mediation.

A Billion Years can be understood as a paraliterary oeuvre that mimics (and produces) a defective sub-genre: the bureau-graphic, a writing that operates within technocratic rule, but has a dual existence within that rule. In this sense, the book is a sort of parallel production that realises and fictionalises its own conditions of articulation. *A Billion years* provides the perfect example of a paraliterary production by touching on several grounds of literary disavowal: on one hand, it is a science-fiction piece; a 'secondary' and 'unpolished' genre of literature. On the other, it exists as a novella and a fictional documentation of Stalinist bureaucracy; subjecting its narration to the language of the bureaucratic report, a mimicking exaltation of the bureau-genre, or what I have decided to call the bureaugraphic, in lack of a better term.

Mark Fisher has identified a 'New Bureaucracy' under the form of 'Market Stalinism' in his book Capitalist Realism:

Initially, it might appear to be a mystery that bureaucratic measures should have intensified under neoliberal governments that have presented themselves as anti-bureaucratic and anti-Stalinist. Yet new kinds of bureaucracy—'aims and objectives', 'outcomes', 'mission statements'—have proliferated, even as neoliberal rhetoric about the end of top-down, centralized control has gained pre-eminence. It might

seem that bureaucracy is a kind of return of the repressed, ironically re-emerging at the heart of a system which has professed to destroy it. But the resurgence of bureaucracy in neoliberalism is more than an atavism or an anomaly (Fisher, 2009, p. 40).

For our present purposes, it is important to argue for the dissertation-format as a site configured by the most diverse heterarchical forces, which cannot be tackled without acknowledging it as a thoroughly paraliterary space of bureaucratic production. Half-bureaucratic; a technical report; thriving within a bureau-culture of rules and regulations; tinged by a disingenuous search for 'novelty'; a potential site for polite experimentation; a legal binding to a certain near-future of debt (the fuel of speculation that is the material infrastructure of the transnational university); etc.⁸²

Complot

I will recapitulate here on some of the characteristics that Piglia traces for complot in the first section of his theory, in order to propose further series of actualisations that this project opens up as further spaces of inquiry. They serve theoretical contact points with an intrinsically contemporary situation:

1. The complot emphasises *paradox*, a tendency that is continuously advanced on this project. Recalling a previous quote, Piglia writes: 'informational excess produces a paradox effect [*un efecto paradojal*]; that which is not known becomes part of the news. That which is not known, in a world in which everything is known, urges the search for a hidden key that will help decipher reality' (Piglia, 2015, p.99). This first claim is an initial commitment and description of a broader arrangement that exceeds subjective knowledge. Its theoretical hinge relies on Walter Benjamin's tracing of a crisis of experience; in a sense, complot is not a positive model

⁸² Including an increasingly thorough social sorting and populational control that is regulated through a rationalised limiting and restriction of access. Nowhere better exemplified than in the UK's higher education visa *omertá*, which applies to all non-European customers under its two-tier classification.

of knowledge, it is a construction, an articulation of how such a presumably hidden or non-existing model machinates, and in its suspicion, it allows for connectivities that were not necessarily possible before its existence.

2. The complot marks a productive and operative model of reading. Piglia writes: Recalling Leo Strauss' quote above, reading between lines—assumes a cipher and is always-already a political act (Piglia, 2015, p.100). We approach here a politics of writing in the model of the complot that is to be discovered after the facts. This point therefore suggests that there is a grain of futurity that can be grasped in the complot-form. Both the censor and the conspirator are part of such a model. And more importantly, they form a sort of 'unity in opposition'. The always existing relation between *information* and *experience* proposes and presupposes further cartographies and relations of power. And these relations and cartographies hint to a cryptographic relation in relation to the cypher; a 'writing of the hidden'.
3. Following the previous point, the complot 'always implies an idea of revolution.' (Piglia, 2015, p.100) (Piglia cites the Leninist Party, Guevara's *focos* and remarkably, Gramsci's reading of Marx's understanding of organisation as being inspired on jacobin clubs and secret organisms). A relation between fiction and secrecy as an intrigue presents a fertile terrain for speculation and underscores an actualisation of avant-gardism under the following form: aesthetics as total warfare.⁸³
4. The complot figures notions of power and strategies that help us imagine a politics of the State (with a capital S). The mechanisms of power and counter-power are always knotted. As a model of the state-form, one can

⁸³ G.K. Chesterton's *The Man Who Was Thursday* is an interesting reference in this direction. The book constructs an inspiring conspiracy that speaks to the present project: the driving force of the narration is the confusion of conspirators being conspired upon (Chesterton, 2007).

abuse the relation and claim that the State is premised on the complot of a complot:

The notion of complot allows for thinking a politics of the State, because there is a clandestine politics, linked to what is usually called the intelligence of the State, the secret services, forms of control and capture, whose objectives are to register the movements of the population and dissimulate and supervise the destructive effect of big economic displacements and money fluxes (Piglia, 2015, p.100)

Piglia connects metafictions (enabling further uses of the prefix meta-) with an understanding of a politics of writing that is not dependent on the knowledge of the State. Our present times are most cogently graspable through their affects and desires: the will to a super-state; the dream of full-spectrum surveillance and the ideal sublimation of the police into the all (or the very real existence of a transnational police state). In such times, the logic of the complot may be useful for grasping the paradoxical relation we have with the aforementioned forms longing: these dreams of total control are parallel to a time in which the inner mechanisms of state are at their most transparent, where the inner machinations of nation-states have been theorised, archived, documented, photographed and recorded in all formats and media. This situation also holds the promise of prominent leaks and of entropic collapse, which makes the State form (whatever its ungraspable nature is, since it is definitely not bound to the nation-state) more paranoid than ever.

Complot tales connect to the metafictional impossibility to grasp the all: they construct a fiction and at the same time they give a sense of how the fiction is constructed—positing its own limitation and underscoring the fiction's own metafictional quality. Similarly, as stated above, the obscene logic of power of the contemporary State-metaform is best understood by observing its own demential conspiranoid logic; since its own complots are to be understood by thinking through the limit-form of fiction. Hence, the need to assemble further counter-complots.

Piglia's theory of complot becomes an overdetermined machine for reading that assembles a wide range of material and forces it to match such a definition—an impossible literary artifice that cunningly spreads from within. In fact, Piglia explicitly asks that his literary referents should in one way or another be understood under that

rubric.⁸⁴ This is precisely an inversion and disarticulation of the commonsensical understanding of metafictions as binary branchings between two levels: a fiction and its self-reflective stance. Fiction blurs their boundaries, since it always holds a double potential.

The complot produces an operative modality, in which it is both the machination and the logic of the narration. Means and ends are disparaged and we are left with a redundant referentiality that expresses a further possibility of extrapolating layers of surplus signification. In other words, the meta-level of the complot overdrives the narration, to such an extent that the rationality of the writing exists only on the dispersed format of an unattainable ciphered encryption; there is never a narration, or *writing* in a more general sense, that is not always already duplicitous.⁸⁵

Piglia's argument, numerated above, can be read in a different code—very literally, a different cipher.⁸⁶ This cipher is prone to the contagious modality of complot, in its imperative to construct a complot against complot:

1. Ambivalence within an informational regime, underscoring the materiality of immateriality;
2. Reading and theoretical constructions as metafiction;
3. Revolution as imperceptible shifting or self-revolutionising. Instead of a 'turn from below', articulating a replacement of the 'below' for an immanent superficiality;

⁸⁴ When discussing his main references in Argentinean literature (R. Arlt, J.L Borges and M. Fernández) Piglia explains that: 'their texts narrate the construction of a complot and, while telling us how to construct a complot, they also tell us how a fiction is constructed' (Piglia, 2015, p.101).

⁸⁵ Duplicitous deceptiveness is part of Piglia's metafictional proposition. Piglia wrote a series of thesis on the narration of short stories. The following are immediately relevant: 'First thesis: a short story always tells two stories' (Piglia, 2011, paragraph 1). Third thesis: 'Working with two stories means working with two different systems of causality. The same events enter simultaneously into two antagonistic narrative logics. The essential elements of the story have a dual function, and are employed in different ways in each of the two stories' (Piglia, 2011, paragraph 3).

⁸⁶ **1.** Interpretation and the 'paradoxal' effect; **2.** Crises; **3.** Revolution; **4.** State.

4. The State as a point of flux, understood as a mapping and critique of a neoliberal spatiality—an aesthetic dimension of what today appears as a total regime.

This is the new and actualised argumental sequence for the figure of the complot: one further sub-text that secretly runs through and informs the present project.

**Interlude Two
(Santiago, 1969)**

(Fig 14.)



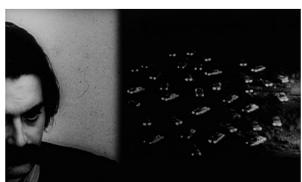
(Fig 15.)



(Fig 16.)



(Fig 17.)



(Fig 18.)



(Fig 19.)



CHAPTER FOUR

Invasión: Non-Exit, Failed Encounters

Resisting Resistance

This chapter addresses *Invasión*—a film directed by Hugo Santiago in 1969—as a co-productive mechanism. The output advanced here is initially planned to strategically resist the idea of resistance. Resistance is invoked here *not* as a derivation of a predetermined template for political or aesthetic practices that can be tackled in their pure conceptual state. Instead, resistance is presented as the symptomatic expression of always an existing (immanent) constitutive disjunction. I argue that figuring this disjunction affords an opportunity to assess positions where immanent contradiction becomes an underlying premise.

On his latest book on the subject of resistance, Howard Caygill argues how ‘despite the proliferation of texts dedicated to provoking, sustaining or repressing it, resistance remains strangely unanalysed and indeed *resistant* to philosophical analysis’ (Caygill, 2013, p.6, italics in original).

Resistance is commonly rooted on a rebuttal of capture; of the capture politics by the State. But it can also be understood as a broader kind of praxis—which has to therefore include the valences of the aesthetic as a broader regime of articulation. Recalling Rancière’s notion of the regime as a field of aesthetic capture: a politics of aesthetics implies a framing of resistance that underscores the blurriness of the boundaries that demarcate their territories. Resistance is thus, thoroughly paradoxical, and yet it is this quality that gives it its force.

As a result, an analysis of resistance should comprehend its own unstable and paradoxical analytical status. Such analysis necessarily needs an oblique mode of address (Caygill, 2013). No prescription of resistance will ever be able to shield itself from its own constituent contradiction. Nor can resistance be resisted through a logic that privileges purifying abstraction over concrete articulation. Analysing resistance implies an assertion of one's own *implication* and uncertainty. Expressed in the vocabulary established by this project; *la resistencia se desencuentra*: resistance is dis-encountered; resistance itself is undone, even after it has faced a previous encounter; resistance fails to agree with itself; the resistance forces an encounter. Resistance, in short, produces paradoxical ambivalences that can be advantageously mobilised.

The derivation of theoretical preconditions to justify resistance is futile; resistance is a concept that derives its force from its contradictory constitution. Resisting the idea of resistance urges us to carefully observe the effects of surplus contradiction, including the contradictions embedded in the concept of resistance itself. Addressing the paradoxical condition of resistance, Jean-François Lyotard mentions the ambiguities haunting the conception in an interview with him by Gilbert Larochelle:

if we consider the political meaning of resistance, everyone knows approximately what the word means. If we take it in the psychoanalytic sense, it means almost the opposite thing. In this latter sense, the word refers to what does not want to break free (Lyotard and Larochelle, 1992, p.402).

Lyotard is speaking here about the double meaning of the word. On the one hand, the political stress on resistance refers to a practice of opposition to a higher form of power. On the other, the concept refers to a phase of psychoanalytic treatment, where resistance means something different: that is, the patient's active opposition to psychoanalytic treatment, as a form of repression of the conscious thought and its subordination to the unconscious (Freud, 1920, par.11).

The present project can be read as tackling resistance in epistemic terms, through the figure of the Homeostatic Universe and its contradictive resistance—its aversion and refusal to being known. In this case, the inferred existence of the Homeostatic Universe implies a position of resistance as the only condition that (paradoxically) allows the scientists to understand a portion of the Homeostatic Universe's own functioning. In a sense, the Homeostatic Universe's resistance to knowledge de facto becomes the

condition through which at least some traces of its machinations can be known. Thus, the Universe's regulation is disclosed, through the figuring of its own active intervention, under the form of a cosmic homeostatic resistance. This form of what can now be called a universal complot closely follows the psychoanalytic line: in an analogous way, the patient's active repression of his/her thoughts is itself the topical sign of resistance. The intrusion of an unknown force, produces a new specific type of epistemological productivity that is based on topical ambiguity. And topical ambiguity is the precise meaning of the term *implication*.

Coming back to the duplicity of resistance: its double sense and instability provide the concept its diffuse focus and lend the word its ambiguous capacities. Resistance, understood in its dense complexity, articulates a tactical comprehension, which permits an understanding of sites of struggle and dispute; a broadened understanding of power dynamics. There is no resistance to power that is not also an awareness of its constitutive relationality and multiplying fragmentation. The following are Michel Foucault's words on the subject, probably the most famous iteration of the ambiguity of resistance:

if there was no resistance, there would be no power relations. Because it would simply be a matter of obedience. [...] So resistance comes first, and resistance remains superior to the forces of the process; power relations are obliged to change with the resistance. [...] */R*esistance is the main word, *the key word*, in this dynamic (Foucault, 1997, p.167, italics in original).

Resistance will necessarily be premised on a relation between forces and processes. This point, earlier made by Foucault, and now reinforced by Caygill, is important to raise awareness against idealisation, grounding resistance in a perpetually changing field of struggle.⁸⁷ It is important to keep to mind the relation of coming-first, since *Invasión*'s premise will rely on a temporal conundrum (See below).

Back to a discussion of resistance through the terminology proposed by this project: what is emphatically argued for when emphasising the elasticity of resistance and its paradoxical constitution is precisely its contradictive logic. We could speak of a version

⁸⁷ A note needs to be made for Jacques Derrida's essay Resistances (Derrida, 1998, p.1-38), which treats resistances of/to psychoanalysis.

of resistance that is premised on the thwarted temporality of the overloaded figure of the Althusserian premise of the *always-already*. Resistance is *always-already-present*, and thus, signals systemic *décalages*—internal dislocations.

The expression ‘resistance to resistance’ underscores the role of the immanent deadlock, of systemic ambiguities and of potential instability. Moreover, ‘resistance to resistance’ underscores a common trait found in the methodological recursion referred to until now: looking back to the transparency of transparency (Chapter One) and the necessity to construct a ‘complot against complot’ (Chapter Three). Further iterations would turn to variations of the scattered formula: ‘*el desencuentro se desencuentra*’ (Chapter Two). Here, the original disjunction is elaborated as the point in which a reconfiguration of the field of engagement can be thought from an immanent perspective.

This chapter arguments for a positioning that premised on implication and on being *within*, by extrapolating an array of implications that revolve around being on a weak perspective in a power conundrum and an immanent standing. Recalling Piglia’s *Theory of Complot*, which is premised on extreme feebleness and the immanent possibility of *exit* (Piglia, 2015, p.111).

Françoise Proust addresses Deleuze’s notion of resistance to push against resistance as an outside of power relations, against its conception as a pre-given template for action:

[...]resistance is not that traitor line which zigzags incessantly and escapes every grip on it. It is the power of the countering (*contrer*), not of nomadization. It is a contrariety still in act and not a variation. It is a game of actions and reactions between being and its double. This is not “extra-being” as Deleuze would have it. It is “counter-being” (*contre-être*) (Proust, 2000, p.34 italics in original).

Following Proust’s reading of Deleuze (Proust, 2000): the privileging of becoming over being is an immanent promotion of vitality vs. death—life itself is an engagement, a ruthless combat of contrariety. Resistance evokes a dual force. In a simple sense, as a combat between life and death; in a more complex sense, as deaths’ resistance to any vital process of becoming: ‘life is resistance to that irresistible power which is death’ (Proust, 2000, p.34). The de-doublement of resistance is its core potential:

Resistance is not equivocal, it is duplicitous. It practices a double politics. It is the contemporary and double of the power it resists, neither primary nor secondary in relation to it. Resistance constantly accompanies power. At the same time as it resists from within the ‘hardlines’ of history, it causes an “outside” to surge up. This contaminates, grafts onto, and displaces the “inside.” Neither in the middle nor at the margins, resistance redoubles, does an about face, and, ironically, finds itself confronting its adversary (Proust, 2000, p.35).

The unfolding of the within from the without—the power of redoubling—is ambiguous through and through. Strengthening Foucault’s claim, resistance is ancillary to power. They are both inseparable and complicit adversaries.

Planning to *strategically* resist the idea of resistance will mean that: the emphasis ought can be slightly displaced towards the mediating term: *strategy*. By opening up the weakness of this counterposition, an analysis of the constitutive weakness of power emerges. Resisting resistance in order to strategise and unfold the question of what constitutes a strategy of resistance. Expressed in a different way, resistance can be used to think about mobilising ambiguity;⁸⁸ of exploiting the elasticity of resistance.⁸⁹ As a designation that employs fictive tactics, strategy needs to be understood as a powerful machine that articulates paradoxical formulations and their effects, promoting further confusion in a field of struggle, and which similarly to the construction of a ‘complot against complot’, the immanent counter-resistance unfolds a paradoxical quality (furthering possible directions that were not foreseeable in advance).⁹⁰ The contradictory

⁸⁸ Fuller and Goffey distinguish *strategy* (as an overarching plot) from *stratagems* (as nebulous dictums) (Fuller and Goffey, 2012, p.19–23). Stratagems are operators of grey media that do not aim to disclose a full structural approach but can still think through the ambiguity of systemic mediations. Acknowledging the power of the stratagem, I nevertheless retain here the term strategy, due to its connotations with war and board games, crucial for a discussion of *Invasión*.

⁸⁹ Again, recalling Fuller and Goffey, this section can be read as an application of the stratagem: *Systemic Ambiguity*, which claims that ‘Ambiguity, along with the mental conflict it discloses and creates, is at once a diagnostic tool, to the extent that it symptomatizes potentially antagonistic or threatening intentions, and a critical weapon, to the extent that it creates doubts, uncertainties, and the possibilities for divergences in the field of action in which it is at work’ (2012, p.29–32).

⁹⁰ In this sense, further iteration leads back to Powell’s negative knowledge production and the mobilisation of the unknown unknown. Again, this qualifies deception warfare (*Maskirovka* /Маскировка) as a strategy of war and fiction as a weaponised materiality (See Chapter Two).

temporality of resisting tendencies finds an efficacy on the operations of fiction, where zones of articulation are endlessly constructed and played out.

I use *strategy* here to grab an ethos that follows Guy Debord's conception of subsumption. Or rather, force this reading onto him, Debord understands his time as a constant vital manoeuvring involved in a never-ending war. In the essay *The Game of War : Debord as Strategist*, Mckenzie Wark claims that 'Debord saw his time as an incessant war, which engaged his entire life in a strategy' (Wark, 2008, par.5). Life, time, strategy: in line with Proust's reading of Deleuze, the certitude that life itself exists is not enough to count as a fact of resistance; strategising and understanding shifts in all modes of becoming becomes the only possible manoeuvre (forcing move) in the face of total war—of adamant subsumption—as Debord incisively realised.⁹¹ This insight takes full material shape in Debord's and (his wife) Alice Becker-Ho's last collaborative work: *The Kriegspiel*, or *Game of War* (Becker-Ho and Debord, 2007).

Explaining the ethos of the *Game of War*, Wark delineates:

Among the *Game of War*'s particular qualities is that it is not a territorial game. It does not conceive of space as property to be conquered and held. It is instead modelled on classic war games, which go back at least to the time of Clausewitz. [...] Yet it is not really a conventional game of war at all. Rather, it models something more like a full-spectrum war, in which the opposing forces are not wholly restricted by their extension in space (Wark, 2008, par.7).

The full-spectrum war mentioned by Wark can be transposed as a political aesthetics that recalls the figural horizon of the complot. This conception of subsumption involves a weaving and a sense of plotting; implying a sense of being meshed in what appears now as a regime and an all-subsuming field of war. The complot recalls a desire to map the fragmented subsumption of the sensible in the contemporary world, and accordingly treats fiction and the construction of plots as potential schemes that found and figure political intrigues. Similarly, by invoking a renewed ground for strategic figuration,

⁹¹ Unfortunately, this project runs out of space to consider the following important relations of strategising: 1. Articulating Clausewitz's relation to strategy is important, given his influence on Althusser. 2. Machiavelli's influence in Althusser's understanding of strategising.

Debord's game becomes a playful element that must aid the learning of strategising, transforming the contemporary into a field where a full-spectrum confrontation is ought to be waged. The horizon of the political aesthetic of subsumption is the horizon of a total war. A movement giving contemporary asymmetric warfare a wide range of aesthetic valences.⁹²

Within / Immersion

Recapitulating: Althusser's philosophy of the encounter found its energies by playing out the effects of systemic internal contradictions. These contradictions would attain the potential to articulate a successful take (*prise*)—integrated as the expressive outcome of a lasting encounter. Notwithstanding that, the encounter need not be an eventful formation: an encounter can crystallise, be sustained, short-lived, form a cohesive regimentation, or pass unnoticed. Regardless of its outcomes, the encounter will always be polyvalent and multi-structural—it may exist in a vast variety of levels, from a social formation to a love affair.

Until now, I have treated Althusser's clear philosophical articulation in a diffuse way, emphasising on ambiguity, contradiction and totalising confusion. Althusser is clear and carefully eloquent in his philosophical unpacking of the undercurrent of his materialism of the encounter. My aim here has not been to revive a philosophy that has been discarded under the name of structural Marxism, but rather to make sense of unfulfilled potentials found in its systemic cracks. Arguably, to force a momentary encounter, so that the philosophy of the encounter can be missed (as longing and not having yet encountered it). And to actualise the force of its own failed encounter (as a failing encounter that is in a process of taking-place). And this forcing can take place by leaving behind the assumption that the philosophy of the encounter can serve as a template to be applied in today's conjuncture.

⁹² Debord's comments (XX and XXI) on the Society of the Spectacle treat the actuality of the trope of conspiracy, which had been previously discarded as an outmoded concept. (Debord, 1998, p.59–62)

Missed encounter, *desencuentro*, mis-encounter, etc. become here unstable propositions that emphasise and actualise the existence of immanent deadlocks. These deadlocks place the system in question on the border of a paradoxical, uneven and ambiguous state of structurality and post-structurality. I have repetitively argued until now that, by underscoring the missed-encounter, the state of paradox can be purposefully and productively mined and strategically deployed.

A parallel situation is the premise of non-exit that is posed by subsumption: art appears at once the subject of capital, at the same time the perfect utopian response to the commodification of labour (recall the paradox of valorisation in Chapter One). This ambiguity and uncertainty becomes a terrain that allows for manoeuvres and the articulation of strategies, without falling into a crude prescription, naïve romanticism, utopian affirmation or cynical dismissal. The relation of immanence and the premise of non-exit equally apply to art, language and their relations to capitalism.

If capital also finds its own immanent deadlocks through self revolutionising—it cannot go frictionless—its situation is also paradoxical: by mobilising all material forces available, including the matter of the general intellect—the very substance of sociality which is the totality of language and cognitive labour—it also encounters its limit within it. This I think, is one of the most crucial points of critical theory from the last decades, that Althusser clearly glimpsed when underscoring the disruptive force of immanent deadlocks in extant systemic articulations and social formations. The forces of capital can be understood to be structural only to the extent that they exist on the thin line of post-structural ambivalence; the deadlock itself is also the fine relation that becomes a site of epistemic struggle.

This chapter, and the whole project in different ways, can be read as an engagement with strategic arrangements that tackle the problem of containment, understood as non-exit and being-within. This containment is taken by underlining the disturbances generated by the intrusion of language into the spheres of artistic production, assertively indexed by conceptualist practices throughout the world. Additionally, capitalist total subsumption implies a dense merging of models of labour that cannot be traced back to a pristine purified origin. Artistic labour is also a labour that is caught by the grids of surplus value production and capitalisation. This too, applies to 'global conceptualisms', which in many cases directly engaged with the commodity-form of the artwork as an

initial gesture of resistance (Camnitzer et al., 1999). Conceptualisms are often blamed for ‘failing’ to effectively challenge capitalism, evidencing (*mutatis mutandis*) contemporary art’s failure to escape the grids of capture of capital.⁹³ I will re-read this by shifting the register to an appreciation of ‘weakness.’

Blake Stimson explains, ‘Emerging quite early on, often from within conceptualism itself, a discourse of “failure” developed alongside claims for the radical character of its criticality.’ Adding that, ‘At issue [...] was the most politicized among the various ambitions driving conceptual art: the critique and transformation of the existing institutions of art’ (Stimson, 1999, p.xlii). Today, these institutions of art encompass art itself, including the cognitive resources of the artist—all of which as I have argued until now, are drowned in capitalist subsumption.

Contemporary Art Is Postconceptual Art

Peter Osborne recently launched the provocative declaration: ‘Contemporary art is postconceptual art’ (2014, p.51). I propose that Osborne’s declaration can be read as a challenge to the narrative of conceptualist ‘failure’ (in terms that are not simply posed through the lens of a critique of political economy). Osborne’s conceptual articulation is presented as a *condition* for thinking artistic practice in its critical, transnational and contemporary dimensions (Osborne, 2013, p.51; Osborne, 2014, p.25). Osborne asserts:

if the claim for the critical-historical priority of conceptual art can be sustained, it is only in relation to the category of conceptual art, in its inherent problematicity, that a critical historical experience of contemporary art is possible (Osborne, 2013 p.51).

Thus, from a conditional perspective, the claim ‘contemporary art is postconceptual art’ is also a demand made to contemporary art, in order to challenge and imbue it with a critical and theoretical historicity, which is simultaneously an effect of the inherent

⁹³ By taking subsumption into account, debates on ‘failure’ are sterile, since the grids of capitalist modification should not be seen simply as matters of ‘winning-over’, but through thoroughly extended heterarchical grids of capture.

problematicity of conceptual art; and therefore of an irrevocable theoretical intrusion.

Osborne explains how

in this construction, postconceptual art is not a traditional art-historical or art-critical concept at the level of medium, aesthetic form, style or movement. It denotes an art premised on the complex historical experience and critical legacy of conceptual art, broadly construed in such a way as to register the fundamental mutation of the ontology of the artwork carried by that legacy (Osborne, 2014, p.25).

Reinforcing a notion and history of artistic recapitulation, Osborne advances the view that the unresolved ground of dispute is haunted by immanent torsions or disagreements that surround the conditions of production of contemporary art.

Osborne's intervention is interesting in various levels:

The first one is the postulation of a fictional temporality: first, Osborne argues that conceptual art is a prehistory that haunts the contemporary. '*the fiction of the contemporary is necessarily a geopolitical fiction*' (Osborne, 2013, p.25, italics in original). This fact, needs to be understood in relation to the geographically disperse sprouts of early conceptualism, which operates as a diffuse condition—hence, the claim for a postconceptuality of contemporary art, and for the contemporariness of the postconceptual. In this way, Osborne's dictum is a forced proposition, that is applied with a definite theoretical violence that aims to extract conclusions, which were unforeseeable from the outset. The declaration is retroactive in this regard, it irrevocably changes the conditions of both the contemporary and of postconceptual art.

Second, as I have mentioned before, it is a demand made to the contemporary. Inasmuch as the contemporary addresses its own temporalisation within a delayed and persistent presence, it calls into question an equivocal reading of the contemporary as simply a present state of affairs. Osborne claims

[The] durational extension of the contemporary (as a projected unity of the times of present lives) imposes a constantly shifting periodizing dynamic that insists upon the question of *when the present begins*. But this question has very different answers depending upon *where* you are thinking from, geopolitically (Osborne, 2013, p.25, italics in original).

Third the post- prefix arranges a demarcation that postulates a sense of recapitulation and a critical dialogue with historical sediments of previous artistic practices. Thomas

Crow argues for recapitulation as a necessary form and auto-reflective condition for critical art practice: 'Almost every work of serious contemporary art recapitulates, on some explicit or implicit level, the historical sequence of objects to which it belongs' (Crow, 2006, p.53). A sense of temporal blurring that blends a sense of pre- and post-. Instances that produce interlinked implications and imply a new ontological grounding for the contemporary artistic practice, which critically addresses and questions its own temporal dimension. These are all crucial points to cherish Osborne's elegant condensation, but I want to follow and advance a further consequence of his intervention—I want to emphasise on another characteristic that lures the temporal effectivity of Osborne's formulation. This characteristic is not explicitly stated in his own text but it is arguably contained in his project. The following artwork by Eduardo Costa will serve to analyse and better elaborate my example:

A piece that is essentially the same as a piece made by any of the first conceptual artists, dated two years earlier than the original and signed by somebody else.
Eduardo Costa (cited in Miguel López, 2010).

Costa's proposition is a piece of art-writing that refers to its own aporetic originality, as it is articulated by historical conceptualism, through the language of conceptual art. As a fictional proposition, it entails a condition that Osborne claims for a generic and post-medium fact of the postconceptual work: 'Each material work, or materialization, can be understood as the performance of a fictive element or idea' (Osborne, 2013, p.33). And Costa's materialisation implies a range of performances and fictive vindications that deal with the work's own temporality. First, there is a disjunction between pre- and post-, muddling the transition between the conceptual and the postconceptual, and thus, claiming the contemporary as an opaque interregnum. Recalling the notion of afterwardsness that Jean Laplanche evoked: what is implied here is a movement of retrogressive and progressive temporal alteration (Laplanche, 1999). Second, the piece only exists in its second-degree/parallel status to another work, giving ground for considering new and different arrays of temporal overlaps.

Returning to Costa's piece: the proposition can by itself also be read as a piece of conceptual art that modifies its own claims through a fictional proposition. In this sense, it is a disparaged tautology that recalls Bochner's invocation of the transparency of

transparency. By effecting this recursion, the piece modifies its own temporal relation to forthcoming and pre-extant artistic works. Turning to Crow's recapitulation, it engages a logic of auto-propagating recursion, by including itself in the recapitulating sequence. Costa's piece can be said to be, not only the 'first' conceptual piece, but the first artwork, given its infinite temporal devolution. By claiming originality, it shatters the very possibility of an original by recurring to a *mise en abyme* regression.⁹⁴

My proposal is to read Osborne's articulation as a fictional re-articulation of the historical stakes of conceptual art. As a parallel formulation that is itself immersed *within* the historicity of conceptual art, it is a statement of the same type as Eduardo Costa's. Osborne's proposition *is a postconceptual artwork*, addressing its own historicity within the sequence of objects that it acknowledges (its own linguistic materiality and its strategies of fictionalisation). Or rather, the art piece *contemporary art is postconceptual art* addresses its own historicity through my claim that it is a (post)conceptual piece of art. The aforementioned failure of conceptual art can be thus read in a different code that understands failure as a faulty movement of acknowledgement, which takes on the broad density of linguistic materiality—a thick logic of intrinsic implication.

Osborne subjects the contemporary to a logic of continuous permutation, where the contemporary is postconceptual and vice-versa *only through* the postconceptual logic that the phrase evokes. The wording is very important here: Peter Osborne is articulating what he calls a *conceptual* condensation: not a philosophical thesis, nor a critical remark. The line brings another reading: Osborne's work is an ancillary conceptual piece that refuses its name as art. Thriving on paradox, proper of the twisting temporalities of conceptual art, this work is the stepping stone that allows a fully fledged embrace of fiction and an even further transcategorial rupture. Not only has the critical space of philosophy been transgressed, but its theoretical relation to postconceptual art submerges both under a logic of mutual modification.

⁹⁴ Recalling a Kafkian/Borgesian recursion, Costa's piece is a selfish claim to its own precursors. Read as a tautology, Costa's piece treats the statement/artwork as an original: this way, a Borgesian register of infinite regression emerges.

Diverse temporalities can be articulated within the sphere of conceptuality demanded by conceptual art itself. Osborne's conceptual piece inhabits an interesting position in the face of a discourse that emphasises on failure. Conceptualism, having lost its chance to present something different to its own servile logic to capital, moves towards a new temporal discordance and opens a new and opaque space for fiction. This implies unexpected moves that bring a new lease of life to the contemporary and postconceptual condition, beyond its diachronic virtues or failures. Resorting to Piglia's vocabulary, Osborne's logic can be read as a totalising plot in which all contemporary art is secretly and inevitably related through an always-present postconceptual machination, that both irrevocably modifies the past and ambivalently projects the plots in question as a set of potentially discarded and discardable futures (Smithson 1996c, p.72).

The 'failure' of conceptual art in this regard is paradoxical: even by explicitly postulating the degree to which capital operates within the field of practice, this failure can also be read as a moment of torsion that sustains art's engagement with the irresolvable paradox of valorisation. The negational impetus of conceptualism thwarts the possibility of a purified autonomous outside from which to operate freely. It is this situation of loss that I will treat subsequently: having lost the possibility of a pristine exteriority, premising the impossibility of exit as a condition.

Invasión

In 1968–1969, cinematographer Hugo Santiago worked with Jorge Luis Borges and Adolfo Bioy Casares to write and shoot the film *Invasión* (Santiago, 1969). *Invasión* was released in 1969, at the beginning of the 'Dirty War': an intense period of state terrorism in Argentina.⁹⁵ The Dirty War era is marked by authoritarian oppression and the prohibition of artistic avant-gardes; most of the country's filmic material was censored during that period. This process tangentially implied the film *Invasión*, which was banned for several years. Its most important setback came during the military dictatorship of Jorge Videla,

⁹⁵ Baptised at the time as the 'Argentine Revolution' (1966) by its military leaders, which were originally led by General Juan Carlos Onganía.

whose reign was imposed after the short termed electoral years of 1973-1976. In 1978, eight reels of the original negatives were stolen from the studios that hosted them in Buenos Aires. A new restored version was released in 1999, following intense work done by the director and peers in Argentina and France—the two countries that still held extra copies of the original reels. Finding a quality copy of the film today is still a cumbersome task.

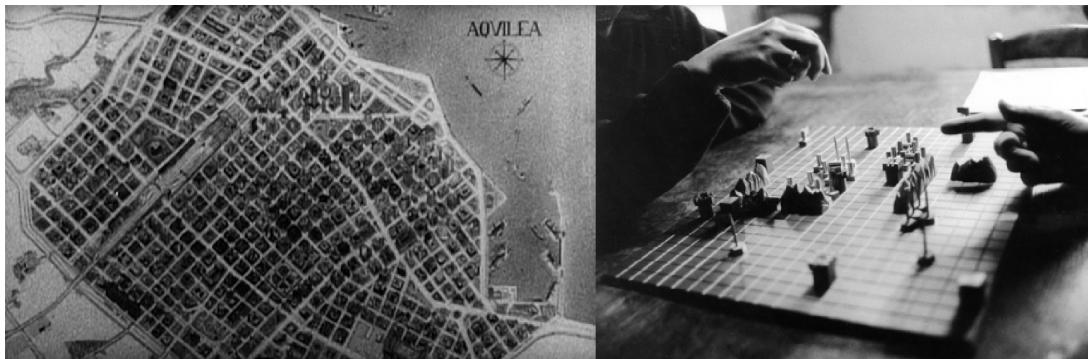
Invasion is premised on the never-ending siege of the city of Aquilea, as seen from the perspective of the weakest force. The film reworks the plot of the *Iliad*; a city confined by a mysterious siege. This time however, the perspective focuses on the experiences of the defending forces.⁹⁶ The plot is set in 1956 in the fictional city of Aquilea. The atmospheric environment portrayed in the film closely resembles the industrial quadrants of a futuristic Buenos Aires. There are multiple references to the Argentinean capital throughout the film, a fact that intentionally blends two allegorical levels. Perspectives are explored through close shots and events that always unfold *within* the boundaries of the city. I claim that the narrative in *Invasión* is based on the premise of non-exit. *Invasión* is an exploration of diverse perspectives that portray tactical deployments and explore aporias of resistance. In *Invasión*, Aquilea is the limit and the threshold. The conceptual premise of the film lies on its figural negation of an outside.

Before exploring the intricacies of Aquilea's entrapment, I will list the main characters of the film, in order to make my description of *Invasión* more intelligible: Julián Herrera is the tragic hero who leads the small guerrilla group; Irene is Herrera's lover and undercover fighter; Don Porfirio (and his cat Wenceslao N), the oldest character, is the mastermind and planner of the resistance; the remaining group is constituted by: Cachorro, Irala, Lebendiger, Moon, Silva and Vildrac.

The city, as the enigmatic entity that should be defended at all costs, presents an interesting condition: beyond the aforementioned characters, Aquilea is both the setting and the ultimate protagonist of the film (Don Porfirio's last words to Herrera, quoted at

⁹⁶ The thematics of the invisible siege are symptomatic of the era. See Héctor Germán Oesterheld's comic strip 'El Eternauta' for a parallel take (Oesterfeld and Solano López, 1975) (Fig.9x).

the end of this chapter, confirm this claim). This fact is supported by taking into account the architectural textures of the film and its territorial relations. One crucial element of this architectural emphasis is seen through the map of the city, where the local force led by Don Porfirio continuously plans and retraces the tactics and strategies for resistance. This overall planning and subordination to a reticular whole recalls Debord's predicament of the contemporary as a full-spectrum war—the *Kriegspiel* acts here as a machine to navigate and strategically challenge the total spectrality of the waged war, as an aid to immanent strategising. By conceptualising the board game as a productive interpretive machine, Debord makes a complex actualisation of the old map/territory dilemma. Similarly, as one would expect in a screenplay written by Borges (1975, p.130), the map/territory division appears through the disjunction of Don Porfirio's enigmatic map and the textural spaces of the filmic Aquilea (See Chapter Two). The map, which appears throughout the film, is an element that stages the tension of relation/non-relation between Aquilea the map (the space of strategy) and Aquilea the city (the space of deployed tactics). The exploitation of this tension, as the discontinuity between both sites, grants an upper hand to the resisting force, affirming Don Porfirio's strategic cunning (See Fig. 2x below). But, recalling Debord's premise we should not expect the war to be confined to a simple territorial dispute. The total subsumption that is indicated here attests to a similar extrapolation of war into the all. Architectural relations are thus, crucial drivers for the narrative in the film—Santiago is keen on depicting industrial ruinous buildings and on continuously emphasising the grid-like structure of the city as the intransitive setting. But this textural mapping should not lure us into thinking that the territory is the main focal point. Just as in Borges' parable, where the ruins of the map and the ruins of the territory collapse into each other, the spatial relation collapses into an entropic temporal unfolding that becomes the full-spectrum (Borges, 2007b, 1975).



(Fig. 20 Map of Aquilea; Becker-Ho and Debord's *Game of War*)

Santiago's use of montage influences a complex play of binaries that is installed and played out throughout the film. The director's complex use of the shot and the counter-shot is evidenced from the outset: the first scene introduces the invigilating Herrera, dressed in his dark suit, looking out for enemies through his binoculars. The camera that films the scene follows him through the dark, revealing a graffitied wall. This long sequence shot is dynamic and articulate; dark and enigmatic, defining a noir tonality that will marks the defending force.

Abruptly, a text that reads

Frontera Sur

interrupts the take. The next shot is noticeably different: a group of anonymous men on white suits are seen rigging a wall with explosive chords, while taking instructions for an ambush in an unnamed café. A breach on the city of Aquilea renders the beginning of both the film and the invasion. Santiago's montage cunningly shifts from a heroic situation of defence, to an anonymous and dangerous break-in. (See Fig 3.)



(Fig. 21. Southern Frontier: Herrera; Aquilea; the invaders breaking into the city)

The juxtaposition between Julián Herrera and the anonymous contenders indicates a contrast and a play of binaries. This binary play sets the tone and introduces the logic of the forthcoming invasion (or rather we should reject 'forthcoming' and claim the invasion that is *a/ways-a/ready* ongoing; or an invasion that is *a/ways-a/ready* about to happen). The

first sequence strikes oppositional chords and produces binary analogies: (shot) the cautious Herrera, dressed as a nocturnal vigilante in a black suit, enters a long musicalised scene; (counter-shot) a well lit group of men in white suits install a bomb on a short but silent take. Each force is archetypically depicted by closely following a set of oppositions: shot, counter-shot; black, white; a musicalised take, a silent take. Julián on his hand, represents the resistance of a tragic individual against an anonymous force; a heroic character set against a multitude of unnamed invaders. The field is connoted through the archetypes of the clearly demarcated forces.

But just as the complementary dynamics between the shot and counter-shot are presupposed as necessarily conflicting and interdependent, the installation of apparent binaries is a preliminary suggestion of a sophisticated interplay of implications. Regardless of the colours or the inclinations of the archetypal characters, learning who operates on which side gets more and more complicated as the film unfolds. The crucial character in this uncertain terrain is Irene.

The figure of the game is more than an arbitrary articulation, it is crucial. The binary armies portrayed in *Invasión* often resemble a board game. The structure of the game of chess comes to mind: As I have explained, *Invasión* clearly places a chess-like distribution of antagonistic forces. This is not a far fetched analogy, it is a clear clue that becomes a metatextual referent, smuggling Borges' literary framework into the film. I discovered this after closely watching the movie, trying to map the narrative knot that ties a phone-call made by Don Porfirio to Herrera, after which they hold an important dialogue. This intense scene, depicts the interpellation of the characters by the imminent invasion is shot in a nouvelle-vague style. Made up of short contrasting shots, the scene alternates Irene's and Herrera's room. Among these takes, their library is depicted. The reference is minimal, but the only recognisable book in the shelf is Borges' own *E/Hacedor*, translated in English as *Dreamtigers* (Borges, 1973) (See fig 7.). My surprise when I looked at the book was confirmed when I found in this book a poem entitled *Chess*, which I will now address.



(Fig.22 Borges' book 'El Hacedor')

In the first part of the (two sided) poem, Borges' writes:

Finally, when the players have gone in,
and when time has eventually consumed them,
surely the rites then will not be done.

In the east, this war has taken fire.
Today, the whole earth is its provenance.
Like that other, this game is for ever.
(Borges, 1968, p.75; 2007, p.224)

The poem tells an infinite tale of implication, where the amphitheatre is the whole Earth. In this sense, Debord's intuition of an all encompassing war is retrospectively strengthened and vindicated by Borges' poem. Chess is the other of history, an allegory of an infinite contend in an infinite temporal flow. Presumably, the scenario that has installed this infinity is recalled through a small metaliterary clue. Borges' poem on one level, always evokes the necessary order of the game and, on the other, underscores the contingency that stems out of a strong binding order (evoked through the rigorous board).

But Borges adds a temporal delay to the literary framework of the film, visibly readable in the first section of the poem:

In their serious corner, the players
move the gradual pieces. The board
detains them until dawn in its hard
compass: the hatred of two colors.

(Borges, 1968, p.75; 2007, p.224)

I want to now focus on this small fragment.⁹⁸ The hatred of two colours, which are slowly being kept, are governed by the regime of the board. Borges is aiming for the relationship between the spatial intricacies and the temporal qualities of the game of chess. These two dimensions are juxtaposed, and are extensive to the hatred of two colours. Here, an allegory of the temporal dimension is contrasted with the reticulation of the board, as the materialised and limited spatiality of the dispute. The ambit of the board governs the slow limit and the pace, imbuing the game with a temporal interplay that gives the game its 'severe magic' (Borges, 1968, p.75) [Another translation for the Spanish version could be 'magic rigour' (Borges, 2007a, p.224)]. Borges' *Chess* and Santiago's *Invasión* deploy a deceitfully binary logic in higher levels of abstraction, hinting towards second-order strategising, which by itself cannot be reduced to its component parts. In Santiago's film, the reference to the game of chess is always implicit: the two forces follow the black and white dress code, which resemble another spatialisation of the game of war, transposed in the allegorical city of Aquilea.

⁹⁷ Again, recalling Althusser's necessity of contingency and the contingency of necessity.

⁹⁸ Acknowledging that a single doctoral project could be devoted to the relation between Borges' literary motifs and the film *Invasión*.



(Fig. 23. Herrera's squadron ambushed by occupying forces.)

Aquilea, as the only ambiguous scenario of the film is deeply imbued with structural relations to the notion of the game. And games will be absolutely crucial for the development of the film, since there is a shift from the field of war that is the city, to the microcosm of Herrera's death which occurs in a football stadium. An important element of the film is extrapolated in referencing instances of gaming as the spatialisation of power disputes. The siege of Aquilea is premised on the impossibility of escape and on the imperative of the local forces to maintain the resistance alive. The narrative premise of non-exit becomes the conceptual focus of the film. This focus unfolds as a spatial articulation that is the setting where the slow paced war is waged. Instead of an escape route, the defence of the city articulates a claustrophobic atmosphere, where a scattered (and) situated resistance is played out. This in turn, induces a broader reflection on tactic immanence.⁹⁹

The master of the tactical exploitation of immanent conditions is Don Porfirio, the insightful and mysterious character who leads the forces of resistance. Don Porfirio is an older criollo who is often portrayed with a poncho and a mate teapot. Don Porfirio, the

⁹⁹ My interest in *Invasión* stems out of discussions and conversations on the themes of escape and exodus in Escapologies, Edgar Schmitz's reading group in Goldsmiths (2011–2014).

asymmetric strategist is an archetypical Argentinean prototype: a melancholic local who deploys his spatial knowledge of the city as a weapon against the invading force. Don Porfirio will always be seen with the map of Aquilea by his side. The map is the apparatus he uses to chart the tactical deployments needed to weaponise the enemy's strength against itself (See Fig. 5x).



(Fig. 24. Don Porfirio and his map of Aquilea)

While the city is presented in diverse ways, the depiction of the relations between the map and the territory are always emphasised in an attempt to produce ways of tricking the siege. This space of conceptualisation works as a site from which the strategy to contain the enemy invasion is planned, where the tactical operations are emphasised. Clausewitz distinguishes between tactics and strategies through the following formula: '[...] tactics teaches *the use of armed forces in the engagement*; strategy, *the use of engagements for the object of the war*' (Clausewitz, 2006, p.74, emphasis original). The tactical deployment of units (i.e., sending Herrera to die in the football field), contrasts with the overall strategy of tricking the forces into losing the overall plot (i.e., tricking Herrera into thinking that Irene is isolated from the resistance). The overarching objective of a game of war is to train on discerning and understanding the broad extension of strategic and tactical thinking. Here, hints to the game of chess come full circle. The order of strategy includes the deployment of ambiguity and uncertainty. The first scenes of the film signal scattered detours and playful arrangements that emphasise on inconclusive clues. I propose here to read these clues to expand on the previously mentioned concept of radical implication.

Implication will be both consequence of the refusal and the impossibility to exit the spatial field of capture. The feeling of a structural binding to a set of defined rules premises the composition of the film and constructs an allegory to the figure of the game.

In conditions of impending doom, the map clearly states the spatial limits where the resistance is played out. This fact does not imply an escape from the conditions of entrapment as an allegory of infinite resistance. As I have argued, *Invasión* strongly references spatial and architectural dimensions. Parallel to the strategic manoeuvres used in chess, the battle for Aquilea is played out by modulating spatial positions within the ultimate limit of the city. Here, the spatial movements of entering, occupying and evacuating enable possibilities of action, attack, coercion, and defence. The allegorisation of the immanent battle is reinforced by a double polarity and a relentless symmetry, where the white force always holds the upper hand by making the first move (Borges, 2007a, 1968).¹⁰⁰



(Fig 25.)

There are extensive references in the film to the relationship between the game and the field of battle (See Fig.6x). I will momentarily focus on the narrative articulations of the dialogue in the film: just after the invaders have broken into the city, Don Porfirio calls Herrera over the phone, in order to plan a meeting at the secret headquarters. Herrera is

¹⁰⁰ Deleuze and Guattari distinguish between the smooth game of Go vs. the striated game of chess (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987, pp.352–353). Both games have a reticular board, but Deleuze and Guattari privilege Go as an open, smooth and less striated field.

informed of the imminent invasion, to which he responds, 'It is better that way. One gets tired of waiting' (Santiago, 1969).

Immediately after Don Porfirio's call, Herrera turns to his wife Irene, with whom he has a short dialogue: 'Anything wrong?' asks Irene. Herrera answers somewhat arrogantly: 'Don't take my absences so seriously, señora', 'I'll tell you a secret. I like to play the game of mysteries.' Irene answers: 'Yes. I already know it's a game' (Santiago, 1969). There are several unfolding consequences of this initial conversation, which clearly references an interplay between opposing forces. Importantly, the conversation refers to a realisation and allegorisation of the meta-structural character of the game. The levels of this dialogue are blurry, they count as a multiplicity of missed encounters which can be interpreted as: 1. The strategising Don Porfirio, the archetypal player who plans the failed encounter (or the final encounter that does not happen) between Irene and Herrera. This encounter appears as the sign of a failed convergence. 2. A further allegory on the role of the game in Herrera's demise, where the missed encounter appears as an encounter with the known imminence of death, that recurs and is always played out (See the section on the *Milonga of Manuel Flores* for more on this point). 3. Finally, the romantic mis-encounter (as a desencuentro) between Irene and Herrera, who seem to know that their destiny is not bound together. This last point being the most relevant in case: its analysis is left for the conclusion of this chapter.

Returning to Borges' metaphor of battle as a symmetric engagement that is continuously and infinitely played out: 'Like that other, this game is for ever' (Borges, 1968, p.75) [The Spanish version uses the term 'infinite' instead of 'for ever': '*Como el otro, este juego es infinito.*' (Borges, 2007, p.224)]. Here, the allegory of infinitude operates as a different type of entrapment. The binaries produced by the emphasis on symmetric dualities should not simply affirm that the game is one of structurally bound positions, where the most powerful force would steadily and gradually gain terrain due to a determined structural order. Don Porfirio is involved in outplaying the enemy with cunning manoeuvres, perhaps with the knowledge that the invasion will never be over. Faced with an imperative of defence, Don Porfirio deploys an asymmetrical conception of warfare, weaponising the spatial limits of the city, its symmetries and discontinuities in order to mine the movements of the enemy. In an allusion of guerrilla tactical deployment,

asymmetry becomes the very advantage of the cunning strategist (in the same way as resistance always exists as an immanent constitution of power).

This thorough implication in/with the battle field, allows me to better assert the notion of non-exit, that I have mentioned until now. Paolo Virno speaks of *defection* vs. a position of escape. Escape, understood as surrender, which in our case would amount to abandoning Aquilea. *Invasión* forecloses the possibility of exiting. Following Virno, the strategy of

defection stands at the opposite pole to the desperate notion of "You have nothing to lose but your chains." It is postulated, rather, on the basis of a latent wealth, on an abundance of possibilities—in short, on the principle of the *tertium datur*. But how are we to define, in the post-Fordist era, the virtual abundance that favors the escape option at the expense of the resistance option? What I am talking about here is obviously not a spatial "frontier" but an abundance of knowledges, communication, and acting-in-concert implied by the publicness of general intellect. The act of collective imagination that we call "defection" gives an independent, affirmative, high-profile expression to this abundance, thus stopping its being transferred into the power of State administration. (Virno, 1996, p.199)

Virno's reliance on the figure of the *tertium datur* (a negation of the law of the 'exclusion of the third,' revamped today as a determined realism) is a mode of reframing the space of the possible, through a figure that exceeds that which appears under the mantra of necessity (recalling Althusser again, it is a variation that points to the contingency of necessity and the necessity of contingency). The non-exclusion of the third, is useful for thinking defection as an outcome that exists within the imperative of non-exit. Just as the squared board in the game of chess cannot be dispensed with, Aquilea needs to be defended at all costs, there is no possible exit. Aquilea is the indispensable *within*: the ultimate horizon that cannot be surpassed. Virno's quote aids an understanding of the paradoxical 'resisting resistance' as an immanent articulation of defection and an abundant deployment of the general intellect that overturns a univocal pre-determined course. Paradoxically, the *defection* that affords this possibility in Aquilea is the a-temporality of the invasion, which always allows for new modes of engagement but at the same time presents the citizens with a mythically tragic moment of incompleteness.

The notion of defection here enables a thinking of immanence that reformulates the meaning of the strategy: instead of overthrowing the board itself, a thorough

reconceptualisation that relies on the force of the collective potential of the resistance is needed. Santiago's film is premised on the latent force of this feeble position that is at once a source of abundant power. This explains why the story is told from the position of the weakest force who, uses its cunning intelligence to prolong the battle to an implied infinite temporality.

And arriving towards the end, which is a hinge on the recursive chain, we arrive in a different type of field: a football stadium (See Fig.8x). Throughout the movie, Herrera's squadron is decimated. Tricking and attacking the invading force ensues heavy losses; crucial parts of the city are taken in the process. Towards the end of the film, after Herrera has lost most of his men, he heads to the Football Stadium in full awareness that he will meet certain death.



(Fig.26 Herrera's death in the stadium)

After his arrival, Herrera is met by a mob of white suited invaders. The whole enigmatic scene takes place in the field, where Herrera's body is left for Don Porfirio to pick up (See Fig.8x).¹⁰¹ This shift in the field of battle can be read as a change in the rules of the invasion, which has taken the lives of the best men in Aquilea. Here, the stage shifts from the Borgesian infinite to a situation of entrapment: a vindication of the principle that asserts that there are no alternatives. I want to emphasise on Don Porfirio's approach to this dilemma, as the planner and strategist of a broader game of life and death.

Don Porfirio's last words in the field, when facing Herrera's dead body are the following: 'Of course, I always knew you were infallible' (Santiago, 1969). Speaking as a friend, Don Porfirio also appears here as a gentle but ruthless strategist who is willing to

¹⁰¹ The connotations of this scene are gruesome, especially today, knowing that the Argentinean and Chilean dictatorships used football stadiums to concentrate and torture civilians.

tactically sacrifice his best men in order to gain an extension of space and time. Herrera, the tragic hero, had to die for a greater good, in order to defend Aquilea. Herrera acts as a loyal pawn who is aware of his destiny, understood now as a machination that flows under the field of a deeply structural contingency.

The tangle—where the very rules of the game are used to produce unexpected consequences that can always be hijacked for diffuse tactical aims—is one of the most valuable theoretical operations that I wish to extrapolate from *Invasión*. The spatial arrangement of power relations in the film does not obey a transcendental imperative but is purposefully understood and mined by the resistance in order to thwart the plans of the enemy.

A close attention to the unfolding of Don Porfirio's strategy shows how the complexity of his engagements consist on a strategy of *exit*, under the terms re-conceptualised by Virno: '*exit* consists of unrestrained invention which alters the rules of the game and throws the adversary completely off balance' (Virno, 2004, p.70). *Exit* is understood as a reformulation of the mode of engagement: after being trapped into the enclosed field of football, the *exit* route emerges through a re-engagement with the contingently structured chess-board of Aquilea. Virno's articulation of defection is important here, since it produces moves that reformat the field of battle, regardless of what the appointed rules are, or how structurally bound they appear to be (Virno, 2004, p. 70). In the terms set by Don Porfirio's strategising, this does not mean a total disregard for the rules themselves, but an instrumental use of the conditionals of the field; modifying the enemy's expectations and turning the shortcomings of the enemy into potential gains. Don Porfirio uses the conditions of (apparent) imminent failure faced by the citizens of Aquilea, in order to gain ground and keep the civilian grip on the city. Don Porfirio sets up a series of misleading deployments that cunningly use the enemy's force against itself, so that the opponent's strength becomes its own setback. The figure of the game serves to understand those tricky modes of doing which, regardless of their shortcomings—or better, also because of them—yield new unexpected consequences, projections, tactics and manoeuvres, which are subordinate to a broader strategy. In this case, the strategy should be understood as an attempt to mobilise contingency. And the modes of doing understood as weaponised entanglements.

The Milonga of Manuel Flores

'Somebody warned me to leave before the rain catches up on us' (Santiago, 1969), says El Mono, a secondary character from the film *Invasión*, who interrupts Herrera and his crew while they sit on a table in an unnamed bar. Herrera responds: 'Their people are already everywhere' (Santiago, 1969). There is no point in running away. El mono invokes the signifier rain to encode the metaphor for the invasion. The anonymous atmospheric dithering that is as deadly as the invasion resonates with the Epicurean rain in Lucretius' poetry, and the first phrase that Althusser uses in his essay on the Materialism of the Encounter.

The deadly rain of the anonymous invasion: El Mono's phrase echoes the meteorological frozen rain of the comic strip *El Eternauta*, written by Hector Germán Oesterfeld, a crucial reference to the underground current of science fictional influences of the film. *El Eternauta* refers to an unknown and unexpected snow that slowly kills and destroys everything, forecasting a silent alien invasion to the city of Buenos Aires (see Fig 9.) A quiet reference to the upcoming dictatorship, that would later kill Oesterfeld and his family in the final years of the 1970s. This site of entanglement is the site that is obliquely treated by *Invasión*.

Oesterfeld's *El Eternauta* is structurally similar to *Invasión*, the story ends in a temporal loop that takes the reader back to the beginning, echoing an ongoing alien siege that is first manifested through deadly and terrible snow flakes. The motif of the rain also comes back to haunt us here, tinging Althusser's first invocation of the Lucretian rain with a different type of deadly contingency. Or a twisted type of certainty, that is the entropic certainty of death—a potentially nihilistic side of the missed encounter.



(Fig 27. The motif of the deadly snow in Oesterfeld's *El Eternauta*)

Echoing the gallant *Eternauta*—who improvises a suit to confront the threat of the rain—Herrera urges them to stay and confront the enemy. El Mono—a strategic figure who will be later killed on a chess-like grid like a tragic pawn—warns of an immediately different but imminent peril, this time saying: ‘Watch out, I think I can hear a guitar,’ as if raising an alert or a further warning (Santiago, 1969). Herrera answers ‘if Silva sees it, he will not pardon the Milonga of that “Flores” character’ (Santiago, 1969). An allure of inevitability follows, an inevitability that is the matter of the present section, which analyses the recurrence of the *Milonga of Manuel Flores*.

Tempted to fall into the aural spectrum and grasp some clues in the repeating soundtrack, I follow the route of the milonga. A milonga is a folk musical genre in Argentina, which has its origins in nineteenth century improvisations by the Gauchos who populated areas that span large parts of Brazil and Argentina (Cara-Walker, 1986, pp. 280–282). As an expression, milonga also means a false story, a doubtful matter, a disorder. I want to follow the track of this disorder. Playing with words: tangoes become tangles, expositions that bring about not-knowing as a crucial stake on the face of potential siege. Herrera and his team face a situation that urges for a necessary

immanent response against an unknown threat: here the affect of not-knowing is prevalent, taking us back to the initial argument.

Entanglement becomes here a mode of being implied, a mode of disorienting the enemy through the contingent mobilisation of linguistic surplus. And this entanglement is crucial for the initial question of knowing/not-knowing and the deployment of epistemic confusion vis-à-vis linguistic performativity and knowledge by-products.

The proliferating linguistic disorganisation to which the term milonga refers to is 'structural':

The name "milonga" comes from one of the Bantu languages. It is the plural form of *mulonga*, meaning "word" or "wordiness" and suggesting by extension, verbal entanglement and intricacy. [...] milonga was used, for example, to refer to disputes, confusion, or disorder, but also, for instance, to indicate a mischievous lie or gossip. A "milonguero" utterance might be characterized by a boastful, provocative tone, or by a light and humorous sense of verbal play. In each case, though, verbal display and flaunting highlight the speaker's mastery of words (Cara-Walker, 1986, p.281).

This wordiness and entanglement is important here, regarding the plots and arrangements that this project cites. The figure of the *milonguero* implies an actualisation of Virno's expressivity of the multitude as the boastful virtuosic performative aspect of the general intellect. In this case, the *milonguero* version of the general intellect sneaks in a gossipy tone and a mischievous cunning. A verbal excess that is not only geared to demonstration, but is also attentive to a lingual surplus.

The milonga should be read here as paradigmatic in relation to the wordiness and expressive linguistic productivity that describes a different kind of surplus imagination of the general intellect. A surplus that is an excessive remainder: both the source of value and a latent excess to/within cognitive capitalism. Similar to Virno's notion of defection, it marks the source of a latent wealth of the publicness of the general intellect. (Virno, 1996, p.199) The milonga brings about a slight shift: a displacement of the idea of knowledge as a tangle, pointing to its messy confusions and leftovers. *Invasión* serves to reflect and ask elliptic questions on the capitalisation of knowledge. Not-knowing appears here as a valid and crucial stake: a force of structural ambiguity that can be exploited as a defensive mechanism on the face of an eternal siege.

Returning to the soundtrack: Silva, a young participant from the resistance sings *The Milonga of Manuel Flores*, several times throughout the movie. The song, which is repeated in several scenes of the film treats another space of subsumption: death as a total space. The confrontation with death appears as an inevitable destiny for the abstract character of Manuel Flores, yet it is an allegorical reflection that anticipates a certain meta-structural attention to the events that will later define the end of the film. The foretold character of the siege returns to a parallel point of origin, suggesting that the invasion is always ongoing (or, is *always-already* in the process of going on).

In their final and decisive battle as a group, Herrera and his crew are sitting on a bar and hear this repeating tune, that forecasts their destiny and fore-coming death. The following is Robert Mezey's translation of Borges' poem, that is musicalised for the film by Aníbal Troilo:

Manuel Flores is going to die.
You can bet your money it's true;
And dying, well, that's a common thing
That people know how to do.

And still, to say goodbye to life
Pierces me to the bone,
Life that is such an everyday thing,
So intimately known.

I look at my hands at daybreak,
look at the veins, the pulse,
With a queer feeling, almost as if
They belonged to someone else.

Four final bullets will come and then
I won't know if any mourn;
Merlin the magician said it:
Dying is having been born.

So many things on the road of life
Were given these eyes to see!
Who knows what other things

After Christ judges me.

Manuel Flores is going to die,
You can bet your money it's true,
And dying is a common thing
Everyone knows how to do.
(Borges, 1991)

The first and last verses, which repeat and emphasise the dichotomy between a random betting and death: 'you can bet your money it's true' / Manuel Flores is going to die. Betting, a monetary relation which is inferior to dying is presented as an ultimate destiny, which to an almost metaphysical extent is already implied in the scene.

The death of Herrera, which inevitably happens towards the end of the film is a clue to something else, and a clear unfolding of a logic that also recalls the *Iliad*. The premise of death is a necessary condition. It is a kind of structural impasse or aporia that includes all the characters on the scene, in the bleak allegorical setup that portrays a group of gentlemen who appear to be only too aware of the implications of this song (See Fig. 4x). And yet, the allegorical sense of anticipation is a reference to the actualisation of a series of repetitions. Articulated in a different way:

1. The poem's first and last verses are structurally the same, emphasising on the trend of the death of Manuel Flores. This is, initially speaking, a compositional matter;
2. The bard who would also be a prototypical character on the *Iliad* is actualised in the figure of an Argentinean *milonguero*, a figure who recalls the structure of the story and orients the flow of events. Both characters, the bard and the *milonguero*, are able to access a meta-reflection that registers the movement of a doubtful destiny. The situation presents a figure of literary implication and situated entanglement.^{102,103}

¹⁰² An interesting figure that cannot be tackled here in its complexity is the figure of the 'Homeric Nod', which is an error of continuity in Homer's works. Homer's storylines are inconsistent every now and then, and these narrative cracks have influenced theoretical

¹⁰³ Another speculative parallel can be found in Borges' short story *Tlön, Uqbar, Orbis Tertius*

The narration of the *Milonga of Manuel Flores* presents the tragic ending that is death as a condition; and the siege as an inevitable premise that is then recounted retrospectively. Importantly, these facts do not alter the sense of the narration. This point is important to the degree that it unfolds within a double repetition: the bard and the folk musician are the allegorical messengers that tell the crux of the story, that present the unfortunate event—the *fortuna*, as an unfortunate encounter. *Invasión* is a limit case between *fortuna* as divine destiny and complot (again: *Invasión* is clearly a palimpsest of a classical narration that is premised on a complot against Aquilea).

Invasión exists in a threshold between an unfortunate destiny and a total complot against the city. In metaliterary referentiality, it takes the narrative of the *Iliad* and re-narrates it by speaking of a siege that is fragmented as a fictional framework or scheme (scheme here should resonate with scheming). A move that downgrades a certain idea of literary universality to the wordy excess of a deceiving *milonguero*, an unreliable musical folk and rhythmic improvisation from the South.¹⁰⁴ Following Piglia, the *Iliad* would resort to a classical narration in which *fortuna* would appear as the narrative device, the manifest destiny which is the premise of an epic story. For the singer of the Milonga, the allegory of Manuel Flores typifies a replacement of an epic tale of magnanimous scales, through the lower status folk figure of Argentinean popular narrative music. A parallel type of pastiche that would deliver a coded secret that is metaphysical and somehow applies to all living beings—the truism of death: ‘Manuel Flores is going to die. / You can bet your money it’s true; / And dying, well, that’s a common thing / That people know how to do’ (Borges 1991).

In a sense, there is a sort of exaggeration of the clumsiness of the performance that gives the *Milonga of Manuel Flores* its ominous pre-arrangement and temporal insight:

speculation on Homeric authorship. A Borgesian affiliation would understand this gap as a productive opening and distortion that therefore reflects on all literature. (Borges, 2000), where Bioy-Casares discovers a certain discontinuity in a library entry, and therefore unleashes an investigation that implies a literary complot that intrudes into the real.

¹⁰⁴ I would argue that this fact goes against a general understanding of Borges’ work as a ‘universal writer’: instead of claiming a universality for the literariness of the milongas, Borges’ treatment of Argentinean folk genres as if they were universal do precisely the opposite: they effect a devaluation of the very idea of universality, found in the neglected history of surplus popular linguistic production.

the death of Manuel Flores is a forecast of the imminent death of the resistance in the hands of the invaders. This trivial secret has, initially, lured us to consider it as a passage to the Piglian theory of complot. *Invasión*, arguably, allows this crossing through the musical meta-reflection of the *Milonga of Manuel Flores*.

I want to recall the double unfolding of the palimpsest and the swarming effect of fictional meta-referentiality, in order to further knot this tangle. A retrospective reading of the *Ilíad* imposes a questioning of the plain notion of fortuna, as the narrative device that produces a ‘destiny-effect’ in the work. What I mean here is that, not only does the meta-fictional reflection come back to haunt *Invasión*; it needs to be extensible to the *Ilíad*. Destiny is foretold here as a belated lo-fi version: as a narrative device that recalls mirroring. It can be argued that *Invasión* mirrors the *Ilíad*, only with a small detail that is left for the moment of the end, in which the invasion starts again, when the never-ending movement of an eternal siege is implied. The *Ilíad* is here re-told, in a second-degree status. The foretold death is not only a metaphysical allegory, but it is a literary one, it refers to the theme of eternal repetition—so dear to Borges—which places *Invasión* *within* the chain of said repetition. Typically, in Borges, this is a question of the meta-referentiality of literature—and I believe it to be one of the issues that Piglia attempts to grapple with in his theory of complot: the palimpsestous and second-degree status of literariness that muddles the all. Or, the paraliterary status of linguistic production, that continually projects onto and modifies every other piece of linguistic production (even contra literature, as a well defined regime of identification).

The issue can also be expressed in the following way: *Invasión* is a derivative work of the *Ilíad* with a paratextual (and paraliterary) orientation; reframing the *Ilíad* as both a commentary and a repetition. Through this gesture it merges the *Ilíad* as a repetition, and furthers a chain of references that enable thinking of *Invasión* as a paratext itself.

Genette says that ‘[...] one can probably suggest that there does not exist, and there never has existed, a text without paratext. Paradoxically, there do exist on the other hand, if only by accident, paratexts without text’ (Genette, 1991, p.236). The complot is foreseeable precisely as this plunge into the totalisation of fiction as a lost chain of

referentiality, as an entangling dispersion of signs.¹⁰⁵ Following the parallel stratum of Adorno's horizontal definition of material: *Invasión* is a para-film to the text that is the *Iliad*, further confusing posterior layerings.

The metaliterary position is the position of complot. The chain of references becomes a multiplication of further implications, and these implications become narrative textures. Hugo Santiago explores this dimension by proposing a multilayered textural density of entanglement. And, coming back to the milonga, we have plunged to the tangle of this density, which is aptly played as a sonic detour—an aural surround that is not completely captured by the flow of narrative repetition. And the relation of the tangle and the tango are crucial. Entanglement and wordy confusion are of course implicated, as milongas are musical precursors to the tango. And the tangle/tango has been seen to have multiple meanings: a dispute, a quarrel or a disagreement. Tangos become tangles: the conspiracy of the all leaves us in a total immersion of implications and connections, a mesh of references and potential connectivities. In *Invasión*, the fact that the end is always the same means absolutely nothing regarding what can happen, in relation to the open and messy contingency of a totally and impossibly 'determined structurality'.

This is exactly the point where the post-Althusserian machine of the missed encounter is able to overlap with the template of *Invasión*—vectoring an encounter that can only take place through an interplay of derivations. Structurality means absolutely nothing in terms of a *prise*, as an effective taking-hold. That contingency is the condition of such structure means that the outcome is never to be predicted. The allegorical figure of death—and this is a strange but unavoidable conclusion—is the only guarantee for this fact, as the eternal death of Manuel Flores indicates. The destiny that is known—that Manuel Flores is going to die—alters in no way the combinations that the *prise* can take. Again, recalling Althusser recalling Mallarmé: a throw of dice will never abolish chance—there is no reason to accept that the end is the coup of Aquilea, even if the force is always being decimated.

¹⁰⁵ Added to the literal fact that both the *Iliad* and *Invasión* tell stories of a complot against a city.

Finally, the death of Herrera here counts as the missed encounter par excellence, since it happens just after his last conversation with Irene in an idyllic location in an inner park within the city: 'What is going on Irene, I can see you are not happy' asks Julián, 'Now I am', she responds. 'One day señora, you be able to be happy again,' Herrera adds, only to get a skeptical response from her: 'Are you sure?' A dubitative Herrera responds: 'I need to believe that everything will turn out favourably.' 'Something must have changed us' Irene continues. 'What is going on Irene, if everything seems to be turning out well?,' continues Herrera. Irene suddenly starts crying and Herrera asks 'Why do you cry?' Somehow forecasting the ominous death of her partner, as if she was aware of the existence of the *Milonga of Manuel Flores*, Irene responds: 'I know I have reasons to do so. Today... tomorrow, it is all the same thing' (Santiago, 1969).

In the next scene, a worried Irene looks at herself in the mirror at her place, while Herrera secretly glances at her for the last time before heading to Don Porfirio's headquarter. When Herrera arrives, Don Porfirio gives him his last task: 'Irala and Vildrac have died so you could destroy the truck. The invaders installed a station in the field. They will order the attack from there. But one man like you is able to destroy it. That would give me a few more days, and I need them.' A melancholic Herrera responds, 'Why die for people who do not want to defend themselves? Do not count with me.' Don Porfirio, decidedly tells him: 'The City is more than its people' (Santiago, 1969). Herrera lets Don Porfirio know that he will refuse to go this time, only to break his promise and head to the stadium, where he is sure that he will meet his final death.

The next scene—the penultimate in the movie—Herrera is able to thwart the enemy plans to convert the stadium into a station, but is ambushed by a mass of white suited gentlemen who brutally kill him in the field.

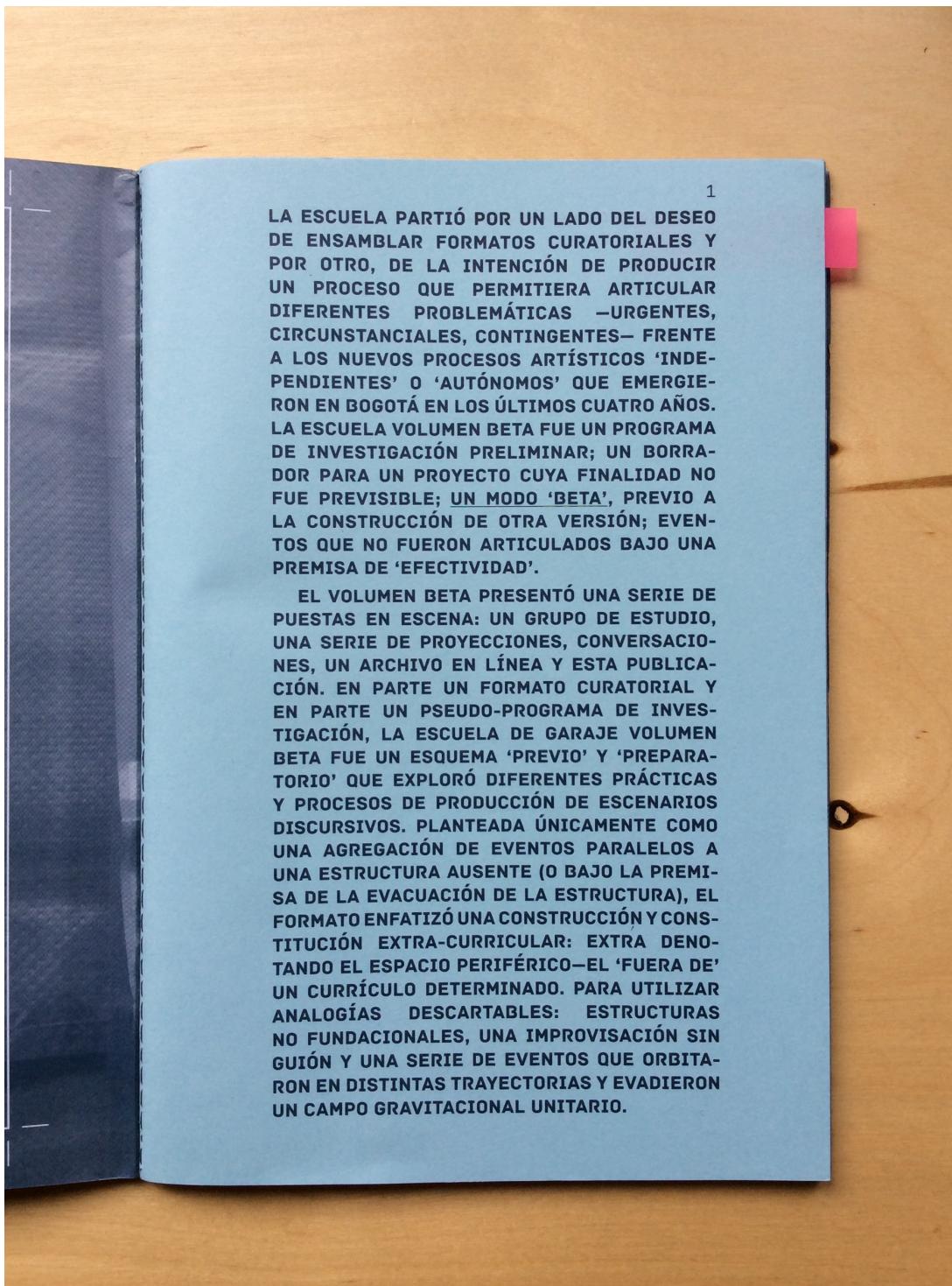
The last scene of the movie portrays a last anticipated encounter that is never allowed to happen, a mis-encounter as a 'desencuentro' that is entangled in multiple levels of signification: the romantic missed expectation of the couple and the impossibility to fight together in the resisting force. A strong Irene coordinates the handing of weapons to the local citizens of Aquileia. Don Porfirio tells them: 'The invasion has started. It is now your turn, it is the turn of the South' (Santiago, 1969). Here we learn that Irene was the most important figure of the resistance—Don Porfirio's most valuable asset. She lived without being able to disclose her position to her lover Herrera.

The penultimate dialogue is strangely updated here, giving Herrera's death a sense of belated actuality. A loving couple who faces a set of impossible or failed encounters: their love is an obstacle to them being together; being-together conspires against their infinite love. They are both implied in the resistance but are ultimately unable to trust each other. The missed encounter of the love affair precludes the missed possibility of fighting together, ambivalently stranded between a melodrama and a tragic destiny. After Herrera's death, the command of the South arms itself in order to confront an invasion that is about to begin. The movie ends, and the invasion is still ongoing. In a way, it has *always-already* been ongoing.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX ONE: Description of the Garage School

(Fig 28.)



(English Translation)

On one hand, the Garage School followed a desire to assemble curatorial formats. On the other it followed a specific intention: to produce a setup that would articulate different problematics—urgent, circumstantial and contingent—within the context of Bogotá's rapidly growing 'independent' and 'autonomous' artistic scene. The Garage School was proposed as: a preliminary research program; a draft for a project that would not signal a definite final end-point; a 'beta' version, previous to the construction of a final copy; and a series of events that would evade the rubrics of academic effectivity. During the month of November (2013), we presented a series of events in La Agencia and other artistic spaces of the city. We produced a reading group, a series of projections, conversations, an online archive and a publication. Both a curatorial format and a faulty research program, the Garage School underscored its lack of completion. It was premised as a preparatory space that served to explore practices and processes that would lead to discursive scenarios. Because of that, we proposed the Garage School as an aggregate of events that ran in parallel to a non-existing structure (or at least, one that was being formed on the go). The format emphasised on an extracurricular construction—*extra* meaning here literally 'outside of' a heavily determined curriculum. The Garage School proposed a discussion on discardable and alternative analogies: non-foundational structures, improvisations without scripts and events that followed different trajectories; attempting to evade a unitary gravitational field.

La Agencia is an artist collective working in Bogotá. Its members are: Sebastián Cruz, Diego García, Mariana Murcia, Santiago Pinyol and Mónica Zamudio.

APPENDIX THREE

Lyrics of 'Spies in the Wires' by Cabaret Voltaire

Ingenuity my secret rival
Fly, fly, and I am waiting
She said, he said
Just someone, and
But it's slowly turning 'round
You keep hearing, every sound
Running into mines and fires
Laughing at the situation
Like spies
Like spies in the wire
Dark eyes in the wire
Like spies in the wire
Catch a mirror, the lines are dancing
Like a mirror, it's growing faceless
Find a way, the special service
Keep it down, keep it harmless
Like spies
Like spies in the wire
Dark eyes in the wire
Like spies in the wire
Ingenuity finds secret rival
Fight the fire, and I am waiting
She said, he said
Just start, that heart
Like spies
Like spies in the wire
Dark eyes in the wire
Like spies in the wire
Like spies in the wire

Catch at work, the lines are dancing
Like a mirror, it's growing faceless
Find a way, the special service
Keep it round, keep it harmless
Like spies
Like spies in the wire
Dark eyes in the wire
Like spies in the wire
Like spies in the wire
Like spies in the wire

(Cabaret Voltaire, 1984)

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