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### **Philosophical Phantasms: ‘The Platonic Differential’ and ‘Zarathustra’s Laughter’**

Mischa Twitchin

What changes in our understanding of ‘theatre’ if it is qualified as ‘philosophical’? That is, when theatre is addressed not in terms of its own historical practices – as, for example, literary or visual; dramatic or ‘post-’; actors’ theatre or directors’ theatre; immersive or even invisible – but as something conceptual? Besides the recycling of metaphors, when Foucault reviews Gilles Deleuze’s two major works of 1969 – *The Logic of Sense* and *Difference and Repetition* – under the title of ‘Theatrum Philosophicum’,<sup>1</sup> how does either term distinguish the other; not least, with respect to the history of practices and personae which it names for itself? Following the Latin idiom of Foucault’s title, perhaps the most obvious distinction here would not be between the terms (theatre and philosophy) themselves, but rather with the metaphors of the *Theatrum mundi*, that ‘world’ (or, in its changing meanings, ‘globe’) with which we think ourselves familiar.

The Platonic relation of philosophy to the world – one of abstinence, asceticism, abstraction (even in Socrates’ or Seneca’s exemplary deaths) – was famously overthrown by Friedrich Nietzsche, just as perhaps he himself was overthrown in Turin, 3 January 1889. In Maurice Blanchot’s wonderful evocation: ‘We see Nietzsche collapse at the point where Dionysus, the pagan revelation of the divine, collides in him against the affirmation of the Crucified’.<sup>2</sup> Here the traditional sense of philosophy as a preparation for death, the thoughtful consolation for mortality, implies that the world is its double, where death is a proof of immanence, not a realisation of transcendence. The *Theatrum mundi* is thus displaced by the

sense of theatre as an exemplary trope (albeit disavowed) of philosophy's relation to itself as a *Theatrum philosophicum*. This sets the scene, when thinking with Foucault, of a phantasmaphysics displacing metaphysics.

Especially in the work of mourning, the testimony of friendship is a significant aspect of the history of philosophy. Addressing the concerns of this article, for example, Deleuze's little book on Foucault<sup>3</sup> offers a condensed reflection on a yearlong seminar (1985-86) devoted to what Foucault has still to say to us after his death.<sup>4</sup> Although the focus here is, indeed, on Foucault and Deleuze, with their shared discussion of Nietzsche, it is also important to remember that this is a Nietzsche presented in the work of Pierre Klossowski. Arguably, the exemplary 'philosophical theatre' in Foucault's reading is that of Klossowski's novel *Diana at her Bath* and we may note again the tragic scene of Nietzsche's collapse in Foucault's short essay on the 'prose of Acteon' (1964), evoking 'the Nietzschean interplay of Dionysus and Christ (since they are each, as Nietzsche saw, a simulacrum of the other)'.<sup>5</sup> Similarly, Acteon's dream of possession of Diana becomes his own death, distinct from that familiarity – or identification even – with thought that is the legacy of Descartes. Here philosophical theatre becomes a play of phantasms emanating from the death mask of thought.<sup>6</sup>

When Plato cites an analogy that was already ancient when he used it in the *Philebus* (47D-50E) – discussing (or, rather, disdaining) the everyday mixture of pleasure and pain in the soul – it is clear that neither the comic nor the tragic mask becomes philosophy. For Plato, philosophy should be the purification of such affects as anger, envy, and jealousy, which provide the principal motives of both life and drama. Transposing the former into the latter – the apparent arbitrariness of emotion into the ideal type of 'character' – Aristotle identifies plot as a technique for the purifying of such affects through catharsis. In the name of a

*poetics*, he sought thereby to save theatre for philosophy. Paradoxically, as discussion remains caught in continued reference to the ancients, it often seems that translations of Plato appear more contemporary than those of writers historically closer to us. While the implications of Nietzsche's drawing parody out of tragedy,<sup>7</sup> for instance, marks a modern resetting of the theatrical question for philosophy, it remains common place – especially in obituaries – to ascribe an 'exemplary' genre (whether tragic *or* comic) not only to the events of a person's life, but to that life itself. Here the question remains as to how the difference between the *Theatrum mundi* and the *Theatrum philosophicum* is conceived of by either, not least in defining the other.

Symptomatic of new fault lines in the historical stratification of society, Renaissance humanists, when addressing the ambiguities of the passions, would admit a hybrid genre as more appropriate to the human condition: dramatizing the tragi-comedy of life. Here, for example, Montaigne proposes: 'For while it is true that most of our actions are but mask and cosmetic, and that it is sometimes true that *Hæredis fletus sub persona risus est* [*Behind the mask, the tears of an heir are laughter*], nevertheless we ought to consider when judging such events how our souls are often shaken by conflicting emotions'.<sup>8</sup> It is in this sense of a 'conflicting' genre (as, precisely, one of the so-called 'problem' plays) that Shakespeare offers us the example, in *Measure for Measure*, of such judgement in the characters of Angelo and Isabella (in contrast, for instance, to Tarquin and Lucretia). With Shakespeare we enter, as spectators, the very Globe, passing beneath the motto of its theatre: *Totus mundus agit histrionem* – 'All the world's a stage/ And all the men and women merely players', as it is so famously glossed in *As You Like It*. If such a theatre is not philosophical (at least, in Platonic terms), does Foucault's twentieth century evocation suggest, then, something necessarily anti-Platonic? And what might be the consequences for thinking through the difference – literally more Greek than Latin – between the theatrical and the philosophical?

Here we are engaged with a paradox. For the humanist world of theatrical analogy, with its metaphysically grounded ethical concerns with relations between face and mask, nature and artifice, itself conforms to a Platonic dramaturgy. This mundane theatre adheres to an interpretative metaphysics that distinguishes between reality and appearance, as if between truth (the honest character) and lie (the dissembling character). It even relegates to a derivative interest its own reproduction of appearances in terms of masks and actors, as if adopting for itself the traditional philosophical denigration of such role play as simulacra or phantasms. Indeed, the dramatic canon is full of plays that make this their very subject, whether in the name of ‘dreams’ or the ‘absurd’. For all that modernists tried to revalue this scenario in terms of professional training (as if an art or technique would save acting from ‘mere’ artifice), from the point of view of the philosophical guardians the theatre-going *hoi polloi* remain as happy to mistake reality for fiction as fiction for reality.

Resisting the lures of resemblance that would have us refer understanding back to originary models or meanings, Foucault indeed calls theatre ‘philosophical’ in an anti-Platonic sense. What we might think is meant by ‘theatrical’ in the everyday is displaced conceptually as, precisely, a matter – or, rather, an event – of thinking; indeed, by its avowed dis-simulation as philosophy. ‘If the role of thought’, Foucault writes, ‘is to produce the phantasm theatrically and to repeat the universal event in its extreme point of singularity, then what is thought itself if not the event that befalls the phantasm and the phantasmatic repetition of the absent event?’<sup>9</sup> In Foucault’s echo of Descartes’s *larvatus prodeo*, the philosopher here goes out into the world wearing a mask.

Understood in the specifically modern sense of what, after Nietzsche (following Heidegger’s reading), is called the ‘reversal of Platonism’,<sup>10</sup> the mask is now conceived of as ‘freed from the constraints of similitude’.<sup>11</sup> As both Foucault and Deleuze note, this ‘reversal’ is, however, already Platonic in its very inception; at least, when considering the example of

Plato's own difficulty in saving Socrates from the sophists. 'What philosophy has not tried to overturn Platonism? If we defined philosophy at the limit as any attempt, regardless of its source, to reverse Platonism then philosophy [...] begins with Plato himself, with the conclusion of the *Sophist* where it is impossible to distinguish Socrates from the crafty imitators'.<sup>12</sup> It is this paradoxical recognition that provides what Foucault calls a 'Platonic differential',<sup>13</sup> as an index of the return of Platonism within what is opposed to it. Contemporaneously, Deleuze even offers an example of this 'reversal' as 'dramatization',<sup>14</sup> when making a parallel with the sense of differentiation (distinct from dialectics) – where the question of philosophy is understood, in its Nietzschean transformation, as a question for philosophy. 'Given any concept', Deleuze proposes, 'we can always discover its drama' as soon as the question is no longer 'what is the true?' but 'who wants the true?'<sup>15</sup>

Before returning to the 'theatre' (or 'drama') of this philosophy, we might also recall its relation to art history. Perhaps the most familiar example of the mask of difference (as an appearance of indifference) comes from Pop art, with which Foucault's 'philosophical theatre' was historically contemporary. Andy Warhol (for all his Catholic piety) famously provides us with a silk-screened veronica of this emancipated mask, not least in the guise of a self-portrait: 'If you want to know all about Andy Warhol, just look at the surfaces of my paintings and films and me, and there I am. There is nothing behind it'.<sup>16</sup> Needless to say, for each Warhol candle there are many more fifteen-minute artist-moths. Here one might also reflect on the co-creation of sculpture and spectator entailed by Robert Morris's *Untitled (Mirrored Cubes)*, first presented in 1965 (of which Tate Modern has a sanctioned 'remake', 1976).<sup>17</sup> The edifying 'presence' of art shows its apparent subject quartered into a mirrored *abyme* that is, precisely, all surface and no depth. Famously, art and theatre here become the simulacrum of performance; not least, in the latter's phantasy of 'presence'.

But if the reverse-Platonic performance art of the 1960s concerns the ‘mask of these masks’,<sup>18</sup> what kind of mask or persona might become the ‘worldly’ philosopher – traditionally distinct from both artist and actor (Nietzsche notwithstanding) – as a figure of and for their ‘voice’? Is it possible to ‘translate’ the philosopher, as with the great Ass’s Head of worldly theatre, without the measure of a Platonic differential? As no longer an Angel to a Faery Queen or a Bottom to mere mortals, for example? What relation might now hold between a gay science and a philosophical theatre; or a symposium and an asses’ festival (with Zarathustra’s laughter at men who would be gods)?<sup>19</sup> Foucault’s own answer was to advocate the mask of anonymity, taking the question ‘who?’ (rather than ‘what?’) and replying – with Beckett – by proposing this as ‘one of the fundamental ethical principles of contemporary writing’.<sup>20</sup>

In Foucault’s phantom theatre, the many deaths of Plato are ritually enacted by the philosophers in a pantomime of repetition, like a parody of *Julius Caesar*, beginning (as already noted) with Plato himself in the attempt to decide between the mask of Socrates and the Sophist. The cast also includes Duns Scotus – who appears ‘sporting an impressive moustache [...] belong[ing] to Nietzsche, disguised as Klossowski’.<sup>21</sup> Indeed, amongst Foucault’s philosophical personae, it is this particular disguise that provides a synopsis of all that came before in the understanding of what follows. The epilogue, meanwhile, is provided by Deleuze’s staging of Nietzsche’s ‘reversal of Plato’ (in the translation by Klossowski). This is not simply ‘untimely’ in its question of modernity, but becomes a question of which century we, the spectators of this ‘world’, might imagine ourselves to be living in, whether as this concerns nihilism or ‘progress’.

For all the continuing academic industry of Deleuze studies, certain aspects of his century have, perhaps, proved rather short lived, especially when mistaken for something that used to be called ‘post-modern’ – distinct from the enduring anachronism of its past futures.

Nonetheless, what Foucault – in his thinking ‘theatrically’ – suggests ‘most urgently needs thought in this century’<sup>22</sup> is not just in and of its own time. In ‘this’ century (the Deleuzian one), Foucault writes: ‘The philosophy of representation – of the original, the first time, resemblance, imitation, faithfulness – is dissolving; and the arrow of the simulacrum [or phantasm] released by the Epicureans is headed in our direction. It gives birth – rebirth – to a “phantasmaphysics”’.<sup>23</sup> In terms of a concern that is recurrent in Deleuze, this involves a philosophical search for a ‘new image of the act of thought, its functioning, its genesis in thought itself’.<sup>24</sup>

Does ‘phantasmaphysics’ – as a generator of images of and for the act of thinking (as its ‘theatre’) – undo the Platonic differential of metaphysics? Does it, thereby, transform the sense of a philosophical ‘theatre’ after Nietzsche? Is ‘phantasmaphysics’ an atavism of the ‘pre-philosophical’, like the ‘primitivism’ that is amongst the proudest inventions of modernism? Is it an echo of that return of tragedy, of Dionysus contra Socrates, explored by different participants in the College of Sociology? Is there, perhaps, an echo of philosophical laughter in this old-new knowledge (or ‘science’) of phantasms, at least in its difference from phenomenology?

The repressed of metaphysics has taken many names, so that now ‘phantasmaphysics’ itself seems to have as little recognition as its near homonym, ‘pataphysics’. The knowledge of phantasms (in both senses of the genitive) becomes here a question of appearances no longer defined by an opposition to truth. Amongst the emblematic statements of this, we might recall Nietzsche’s artful appeal to lived (rather than transcendental) experience: ‘We no longer believe that truth remains truth when the veils are withdrawn; we have lived too much to believe this’.<sup>25</sup> And it is, precisely, the *Gay Science* (with the posthumously published notes, following Colli and Montinari’s text) that, in 1967, Deleuze and Foucault together



presented – again in Klossowski’s translation – as the first volume of the new Gallimard edition of Nietzsche.<sup>26</sup>

Whether the distinction between phenomenology and phantasmaphysics is itself more (or less) than apparent is another question, however; one that could well be explored through Deleuze’s philosophical parody, adducing Heidegger’s relation to Jarry.<sup>27</sup> But, beyond the metaphysical guignol of the history of philosophy, the theatre of ‘phantasmaphysics’ is not simply a problem of and for understanding (or thinking) itself. It offers an orientation to help problematise much else that ‘needs thought in *this* century’ – in broaching, for instance, the decolonisation of such thinking. How might this philosophical theatre contribute to what Latour has called an ‘anthropology of the moderns’,<sup>28</sup> for example, through an enquiry not only about – but with – the phantasms that possess modernity in its very denial of them? In this ‘theatre’, the ‘primitivism’ that was once thought to distinguish modernity from its Other has long been recognised as a distinction within modernity itself, as the effect of cracks in the mirror of its claimed ‘universality’. The theatre of phantasmaphysics offers manifold senses of ‘possession’ – and dispossession – that would be key to exploring worlds which modernity has sought to define in its own image (conceived through its Platonic differential rather than Zarathustra’s laughter).

Between the philosophical and the theatrical (in the miming of the one by the other), we might then wonder how phantasms become *personae*; not least, when something in the voice invites a change in hearing. Whether in Turin or in Rodez, the potential of laughter – that scream of the enlightened – is not reducible to the genre masks of sacred tragedy *or* profane comedy. In the echo of laughter, if the metaphor of ‘unmasking’ is itself unmasked by phantasmaphysics, what might it mean to ‘face the truth’? What becomes of an all-too-human face, with no divine model, in the claims of – and for – a modernity that is as murderous as it is emancipatory?

In Zarathustra's account, the pagan gods died laughing at the pretension of one amongst them who jealously proclaimed himself to be the *only* one;<sup>29</sup> one who would later have to be killed by his worshippers, who would then look amongst themselves for the victims of a new holocaust. It is hard now to hear the echo of the gods' laughter in the vertigo of masks, where those who have killed their (one) god no longer have any sense of sacrifice in common. In modernity, the sense of each as the other's potential victim – in the image of a god – no longer bears any meaning of 'purification'. Despite 'this century's' appeal to a 'rebirth' of phantasms, perhaps we remain afraid of not being able to distinguish the former gods from future madmen? This question is a red thread in the post-Nietzschean dramas of Stanislaw Witkiewicz, for instance; while the suspicion is now widespread as to whether the personae of a 'post-Platonic' theatre can offer any resistance to cynicism.

In Deleuze's attempt to save the eternal recurrence from the principle of the (Platonic) Same (to which difference is otherwise subordinated), what are the consequences (or, at least, the implications) of turning the question of theatre from that of imitation (or representation) to that of simulation (or masquerade) – as if metaphysics were, indeed, 'overcome'? What is the temporality of this 'reversal', which offers an unmasking not of the face but of the mask itself? The figure of 'reversal', after all, no more means that modernity is 'post-Platonic' than that it is defined by anti-Platonism. Here one might substitute any number of actors in this 'theatre', wearing the very masks of these same prefixes. Such instances of dramatization (and their recurrence) engage with the historically relative claims for what needs thinking: the post-colonial, for instance, as the desired consequence of anti-colonialism. If, then, the Platonic differential provides a diagnosis (which, in another philosophical register, could be called a 'pharmacology'), perhaps the symptom of an impossible cure for metaphysics remains Zarathustra's laughter?

Amongst the exemplary simulacra of and for Eurocentric, metaphysical reason is the ‘fetish’ and its corollary theatre of possession by forces that rationality calls ‘primitive’. While we might think here of Artaud’s celebration of the Marx brothers,<sup>30</sup> Peter Brook preferred, for his planned ‘theatre of cruelty’ season, to share with his company a film by Jean Rouch entitled *Les Maîtres Fous* (or *The Master Madmen*).<sup>32</sup> This film has had a complex (and controversial) reception and one might wonder whether a phantasmaphysical theatre might allow us to think through this example without simply repeating its historical reception, as if it ‘unmasked’ the interest of the film. Of what then might the entangled reception of Rouch’s film be symptomatic, at least amongst its ‘Western’ audiences, including those in Niger where it was filmed? Whatever Rouch’s film may or may not tell us about the Hauka, whose cult of spirit possession it presents (commissioned, indeed, by two of its priests), what does its reception tell us about its European viewers – within a phantasmaphysical ethnography of ‘the moderns’? How do colonial phantasms appear in the neo-colonial metropolis, screened (literally) by the image of others; when, unlike the 1960s (the decade of Independence), the post – as in the post-colonial (or even the post-modern) – is no longer a promise of the future? Here we return to the question as to which century we might imagine ourselves to be living in ‘philosophically’ – surrounded by the phantasmata of our consumerist fetishism.

In contrast to Foucault’s own example of LSD-induced ‘trance’ (like Pop Art, emblematic of its time),<sup>33</sup> Rouch’s film focuses (as it were) on a theatre of transformation that profoundly interrupts modernist expectations of perception; especially where the face becomes its own mask, with bulging eyes and contorted mouth. Crucially, the West African Hauka cult adopted various European colonial officials into the spirit pantheon of traditional Songhay rituals of possession. Phantasmaphysics invites us to consider that such possession is not explained (still less purified or exorcised) simply in Platonic terms as a question of

model and imitation – as between the colonial figure (or image) and the colonised imagination (or body) – but invents new images of and for a historical understanding of modernity’s necropolitics.<sup>34</sup>

While the temptation to speak of ceremonial mask and naked violence seems almost inevitable with respect to the colonisers themselves, does this not simply reproduce the metaphysical theatre that, in the colonial phantasy, would distinguish itself from a ‘pre-modern’ atavism or ‘primitivism’ of possession? The difference between the metaphysical and phantasmaphysical might, indeed, appear to be that between acting and possession; as if the one projected a ‘model’ that the other introjected. But given that most theories of acting contradict this, it is perhaps the very structure of the opposition here that fails to account for the difference. This is precisely the conceptual scenario that Foucault’s philosophical theatre invites us ‘urgently’ to consider; even as the Platonic schema is perhaps implied in Rouch’s own commentary on the Hauka, which provides a pharmakon or theoretical ‘cure’ of the otherwise delirial impression of their practices.<sup>35</sup>

Crucially, the point is not so much a cure of the dissociation manifested in the possession states but, precisely, a cure of dissociation by the possession states – as manifesting an integration of psychic disturbance with a social practice. Here the question of mimesis returns for a European philosophical theatre of ‘difference and repetition’, a review of which precisely provided the occasion for Foucault’s *theatrum philosophicum*. The possession by phantasms is a mode of mimesis that is not simply an identification, but a technique of acting with identification for which theatre offers an occidental metaphor.

In Hausa the word *hauka* means crazy or mad,<sup>36</sup> but here the question of translation is not simply of a word but the contexts through which its meaning – for whom? – is in question. It is a moot point, after all, whether this (anti-) Platonic ‘cure’ of and by phantasmatic possession serves for the Hauka themselves, who are seen in everyday life

outside the confines of the colonial psychiatric hospital (not to mention the cinema, as in the contrasting example of Jean-Pierre Bekolo's film, *Aristotle's Plot*); or for the European viewers, who see no mastery only madness in the inverted image of their own identification with the phantasms of the screen, possessed by an atavism that they claim to know only in others.<sup>37</sup>

Perhaps in terms of phantasmaphysics we could reflect other-wise on the consternation, if not the racist anxiety, with which *Les Maîtres Fous* has been typically viewed, with its 'modern' audience – who might also be spectators at the Globe, going to see actors embody that dreamwork of colonialism, *The Tempest* – unwilling, or unable, to relate to the Haukas' colonial mimicry (at least as film), especially when it foams at the mouth. For the unsuspecting, this expression of the spirit possession appears as a kind of *informel* transgression of the 'civilised' demarcation of the cultural from the natural – a scenario (like the eating of dog meat) that refers itself to the conventions that constitute a taboo. But this excessive saliva is also an example of technique, just as with all aspects of possession and its 'visibility'.<sup>38</sup> These masters of colonial madness, in their parody of Prince Philip as much as their exorcism of Mr Kurtz, mix both horror and humour, presenting a simulacrum of European colonial violence as coeval with its primitivist (capitalist) 'reason'.<sup>39</sup>

The Hauka demonstrate the contemporaneity of 'tradition', the continually developing meaning of the past in the present (through the chiasmic relation of the present in the past), where the phantasm is also a phantom, not reducible to an 'anti-theatrical' opposition between world and representation. In Paul Stoller's research with the Hauka since the 1970s (in the decades after Independence), we seem to return to the question of 'mixed genre' in worldly theatre, when he calls their rituals of possession – as a mode of cultural resistance to European power in Niger – an 'horrific comedy'.<sup>40</sup> Again, what if this 'horrific comedy' were to be thought of in terms of a philosophical theatre? Rather than recalibrating a traditional

philosophical differential – between simulacrum and truth – what if our understanding did not try to curtail or contain the laughter (or the fear) which it mimetically incites? What if the question of a ‘mixed genre’ here concerned the senses rather than the poetics of plot? A haptic vision, a hearing eye, an unsettling of the separation between active and passive? How different this would be from the recuperation offered, for instance, by the wish to see in spirit possession something ‘authentic’ in relation to ‘alienated’ modernity, something ‘really real’ (as Mattijs van de Port describes it),<sup>41</sup> which carries over into the curiously Platonic ‘intensities’ of so much discussion of performance art? These paradoxes are particularly manifest when de Port discusses ‘the theatre metaphor’ in the example of Candomblé – reflecting on the incorporation of the tourist gaze into the circuit of authentication of what is ‘inexplicable’ in the ceremonies.<sup>42</sup>

Of course, the Hauka masquerade is not one that European museums choose to show when ‘animating’ their formalist displays of African masks – whether these are understood as ethnographic artefacts or as examples of ‘world art’. The Hauka are not recognised as part of the standard contextualisation in terms of performance for these museum encounters (or ‘contact’) with what has been imagined in the ‘West’ as ‘pre-modern’. One might say that this reticence concerning phantasms is due to obvious reasons concerning the violence of their appearance. But how and why something is deemed to be ‘obvious’ – especially with respect to violence – may not itself be so obvious. The appearance of masks and the symbolisation of violence in critical examples of African cinema – for instance, the very different poetics of Sembène’s *Moolaadé* or Bekolo’s *Aristotle’s Plot* – is not part of this museum encounter either. African futures, as transforming European pasts, are again appropriated by these institutions’ new investment in contemporary art, as if the global art market offered answers to questions of museum anthropology that have ceased even to be asked.

With respect to the supposed evidence of film, modernity is so enthralled by the phantasms of the screen that image industries are now devoted to promoting ‘immersive experiences’ of commoditised vision, including within the so-called ‘interactive museum’. Is this not another global colonisation of imagination through the technology of ‘spirits’ and their exploitation of affect – now ‘purified’ simply in terms of reducing resistance to consumption? In the ‘war of dreams’,<sup>43</sup> the sense that thinking about phantasmata involves a return of thinking with or through such phantasms – that, indeed, reflection on film or cinema might be oriented by what has still to be learnt from cultures of spirit possession, rather than simply by projection upon them – is, as Foucault said, ‘urgent’.

Perhaps the vaunted digital emancipation of simulacra or phantasms – especially in terms of a commodified reality that wants to be called ‘augmented’, ‘immersive’, and (*ad absurdum*) ‘3-D’ – has not made the ancient theatrical metaphor of ‘the world’ philosophically redundant, after all. The digital economy, afraid of a reality that may yet limit its powers of exploitation, remains chained to what it still advertises as an experience of the ‘real thing’. Here the possibility for thinking through relations between the colonial museum and global imaging technologies in phantasmaphysics broaches an anthropology of mediated consciousness beyond the old disciplinary walls. Exploring the manifold senses in which ‘we have never been modern’,<sup>44</sup> Deleuze’s evocation (‘after’ Foucault) of ‘control societies’ reflects on an image of thought that could indeed be called a ‘philosophical theatre’. The subject of research would follow the shift (advanced by Deleuze and Foucault, after Nietzsche) from determining the ‘what’ of exhibitionary or curatorial power to questions of the ‘dramatization’ (or agency) differentiating that power. Such a research opens itself up to the possibilities of the phantasmatic, rather than simply the perceptual; to the dynamic, rather than simply the descriptive.

Paradoxically perhaps, in less histrionic (or perhaps more stoical) terms, Foucault's turn to a hermeneutics of the self, to an aesthetics or technique of the mask, suggests a more than superficial reading of philosophical survivals, including laughter. The authentic is not a return to origins but an ongoing invention, as the very artifice that is traditionally condemned as inauthentic and unoriginal. Whether in Eleusis or in Kreuzlingen, the question of truth is not what it appears; and here, perhaps, reference to Foucault's 'theatre' of thought is not only historical but necessary. Between difference and repetition (or between mimesis and alterity), this philosophical theatre offers an interpretation of life and death quite distinct from the networked Fitbits that translate desires and anxieties into marketable data. This latest digital short-circuiting of reflection, with its inverted claims of 'self-control', contrasts with the corporeal interruption of reflection – or, indeed, its 'possession' – by the 'eternal return' of laughter. At stake in both is an understanding of mortality, which (as Foucault reminds us) the Stoics conceived of, in an *art* of philosophical performance, as a practice of individuation in correspondence with others.

From the circle of Klossowski's Nietzsche again, Blanchot too offers an example of this, in a reading of the phantasmophysical play of the subject becoming its own differentiation: '[E]verything has still not been said definitely; for if the gods die laughing, it is no doubt because laughter is the movement of the divine, but also because it is the very space of dying – dying and laughing, laughing divinely and laughing mortally, laughter as Bacchic movement of the true and laughter as mockery of the infinite error passing incessantly into one another'.<sup>45</sup> What may be said here is not said "once and for all" but, rather, "yet again".<sup>46</sup> And is it not such an art of spacing – that of dying and laughing, as that of writing and reading – that returns in Foucault's own practice of critical research? That is, when it invites us to think with – as much as about – what has already been said concerning philosophical phantasms?



## Notes

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<sup>1</sup> Michel Foucault, 'Theatrum Philosophicum' (1970), in Michel Foucault, *Language, Counter-memory, Practice*, ed. Donald Bouchard, trans. Donald Bouchard and Sherry Simon (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1986), pp. 165-96.

<sup>2</sup> Maurice Blanchot, 'Cruel Poetic Reason', in *The Infinite Conversation*, trans. Susan Hanson (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993 [1969]), pp. 293-7 (p. 296).

<sup>3</sup> Gilles Deleuze, *Foucault*, trans. Sean Hand (London: Bloomsbury, 2013 [1986]).

<sup>4</sup> Gilles Deleuze, *Seminar on Foucault*, 1985-86, [http://www2.univ-paris8.fr/deleuze/rubrique.php3?id\\_rubrique=21](http://www2.univ-paris8.fr/deleuze/rubrique.php3?id_rubrique=21), date accessed 14 January 2018.

<sup>5</sup> Michel Foucault, 'The Prose of Acteon' (1964), in Pierre Klossowski, *The Baphomet*, trans. Sophie Hawks and Stephen Sartarelli (Colorado: Eridanos Press, 1988 [1965]), p. xxviii.

<sup>6</sup> This constellation of claims about and for authorship amongst a close coterie of writers in the late 1960s is explored by Eleanor Kaufman in her book *The Delirium of Praise* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2001).

<sup>7</sup> Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Vintage Books, 1974), p. 38.

<sup>8</sup> Michel de Montaigne, *How We Weep and Laugh at the Same Thing*, trans. M. A. Screech (London: Penguin, 2015), p. 2.

<sup>9</sup> Foucault, 'Theatrum Philosophicum', p. 178.

<sup>10</sup> 'Reversing Platonism' (1967) was the title of the first version of what was later published as 'Plato and Simulacrum' in Gilles Deleuze, *The Logic of Sense*, trans. Mark Lester with Charles Stivale (London: Athlone Press, 1990 [1969]).

<sup>11</sup> Foucault, 'Theatrum Philosophicum', p. 177.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 166.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*

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<sup>14</sup> Gilles Deleuze, 'The Method of Dramatization' (1967), in Gilles Deleuze, *Desert Islands*, ed. David Lapoujade, trans. Michael Taormina (Los Angeles: Semiotext(e), 2004 [2002]), pp. 94-116 (p. 94).

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., p. 98. As Deleuze summarises this (in reply to a question about 'dramatization'): '[W]hen Nietzsche asks *who*, or *from what perspective*, instead of *what*, he is not trying to complete the question *What is this?*, he is criticising the form of this question and all its possible responses. When I ask *what is this?*, I assume there is an essence behind appearances, or at least something ultimate behind the masks. The other kind of question, however, always discovers other masks behind the mask, displacements behind every place, other 'cases' stacked up in a case'. Ibid., p. 114, original emphasis.

<sup>16</sup> Quoted in Hal Foster, *The First Pop Age* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2012), p. 7.

<sup>17</sup> 'Robert Morris', *Tate Liverpool*, <http://www.tate.org.uk/whats-on/tate-liverpool/display/dla-piper-series-constellations/phase-one-1960-now/robert-morris>, date accessed 14 January 2018.

<sup>18</sup> Foucault, 'Theatrum Philosophicum', p. 196.

<sup>19</sup> Friedrich Nietzsche, 'Thus Spoke Zarathustra', trans. Walter Kaufmann, in *The Portable Nietzsche* (London: Penguin, 1978), pp. 425-9.

<sup>20</sup> Michel Foucault, 'What is an Author?' (1969), in Michel Foucault, *Language, Counter-memory, Practice*, ed. Donald Bouchard, trans. Donald Bouchard and Sherry Simon (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1986), pp. 113-38 (p. 115).

<sup>21</sup> Foucault, 'Theatrum Philosophicum', p. 196.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid., p. 180.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., p. 172.

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<sup>24</sup> Gilles Deleuze, 'On Nietzsche and the Image of Thought' (1968), in Gilles Deleuze, *Desert Islands*, ed. David Lapoujade, trans. Michael Taormina (Los Angeles: Semiotext(e), 2004 [2002]), pp. 135-42 (p. 140).

<sup>25</sup> Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, p. 38.

<sup>26</sup> Michel Foucault and Gilles Deleuze, 'Michel Foucault et Gilles Deleuze veulent rendre à Nietzsche son vrai visage' (1966), in Michel Foucault, *Dits et écrits*, Vol. 1 (Paris: Gallimard, 1994). The gist of their co-written, brief introduction (reprinted as Michel Foucault and Gilles Deleuze, 'Introduction générale' (1967), in Michel Foucault, *Dits et écrits*, Vol. 1 (Paris: Gallimard, 1994)) is given in the translation of an interview with Gilles Deleuze, 'Nietzsche's Burst of Laughter' (1967), in Gilles Deleuze, *Desert Islands*, ed. David Lapoujade, trans. Michael Taormina (Los Angeles: Semiotext(e), 2004 [2002]), pp. 128-30.

<sup>27</sup> Gilles Deleuze, 'How Jarry's Pataphysics Opened the Way for Phenomenology', in *Desert Islands*, ed. David Lapoujade, trans. Michael Taormina (Los Angeles: Semiotext(e), 2004 [2002]), pp. 74-6; Gilles Deleuze, 'An Unrecognised Precursor to Heidegger: Alfred Jarry', in *Essays Critical and Clinical*, trans. Daniel Smith and Michael Greco (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997), pp. 91-8.

<sup>28</sup> Bruno Latour, *An Enquiry into Modes of Existence: An Anthropology of the Moderns*, trans. Catherine Porter (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2013).

<sup>29</sup> Nietzsche, 'Thus Spoke Zarathustra', p. 294.

<sup>30</sup> Antonin Artaud, *Theatre and its Double*, trans. Mary Caroline Richards (New York: Grove Press, 1958), pp. 142-4.

<sup>32</sup> The film *Les Maîtres Fous* is accessible on Youtube (with Portuguese subtitles), <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Z8uHE2oIARk&list=PLqMCEvP8dVMU1FlpfCVaS0nbshilFyv5&index=2>, date accessed 2 December 2018.

<sup>33</sup> Foucault, 'Theatrum Philosophicum', pp. 190-1.

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<sup>34</sup> We could compare this with Fanon's Hegelian dialectics of freedom and alienation, especially in its idealisation of combatant masculinity in the anti-colonial struggle in North Africa. See Françoise Vergès, 'Chains of Madness, Chains of Colonialism: Fanon and Freedom', in Alan Read (ed.), *The Fact of Blackness* (London: Institute of Contemporary Art, 1996), pp. 46-75.

<sup>35</sup> The image of power adopted by post-independence dictators, supported by the neo-colonial powers (who also participated in local politics through the murders of Lumumba, Sankara, Cabral, and others), is another aspect of this scenario – the most egregious example of which is perhaps the self-proclaimed 'Emperor' Bokassa.

<sup>36</sup> Paul Stoller, *The Cinematic Griot: the Ethnography of Jean Rouch* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), p. 145.

<sup>37</sup> It would be interesting here to engage also with Manthia Diawara's 1995 film *Rouch in Reverse*.

<sup>38</sup> Jean Claude Muller, 'Review of *Les Maîtres Fous* by Jean Rouch', in *American Anthropologist*, New Series, 73.6 (December 1971), 1471-3 (p. 1472).

<sup>39</sup> Indeed, it is curious how avant-gardist Marxism also appeals to this scenario from which (in the name of change, or revolution) it otherwise wishes – often ruthlessly – to distinguish itself. In an interview, Thomas Sankara observed that: 'You cannot carry out fundamental change without a certain amount of madness. In this case, it comes from nonconformity, the courage to turn your back on the old formulas, the courage to invent the future. Besides, it took the madmen of yesterday for us to be able to act with extreme clarity today. I want to be one of those madmen... We must dare to invent the future'. Interview in Ouagadougou, January-June 1985, quoted in Jean-Pierre Bekolo, 'Haunted by the Future', in Lien Heidenreich-Seleme and Sean O'Toole (eds.), *African Futures* (Bielefeld: Kerber Verlag, 2015), p. 125.

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<sup>40</sup> Stoller, *The Cinematic Griot*, p. 160.

<sup>41</sup> Mattijs van de Port, 'Circling Around the *Really Real*: Spirit Possession Ceremonies and the Search for Authenticity in Bahian Candomblé', *Ethos*, 33.2 (2008), 149-79 (p. 153).

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 174.

<sup>43</sup> Marc Augé, *The War of Dreams*, trans. Liz Heron (London: Pluto Press, 1999 [1997]).

<sup>44</sup> Bruno Latour, *We Have Never Been Modern*, trans. Catherine Porter (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993).

<sup>45</sup> Maurice Blanchot, 'The Laughter of the Gods', in *Friendship*, trans. Elizabeth Rottenberg (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1997 [1971]), pp. 169-82 (p. 182).

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 181.