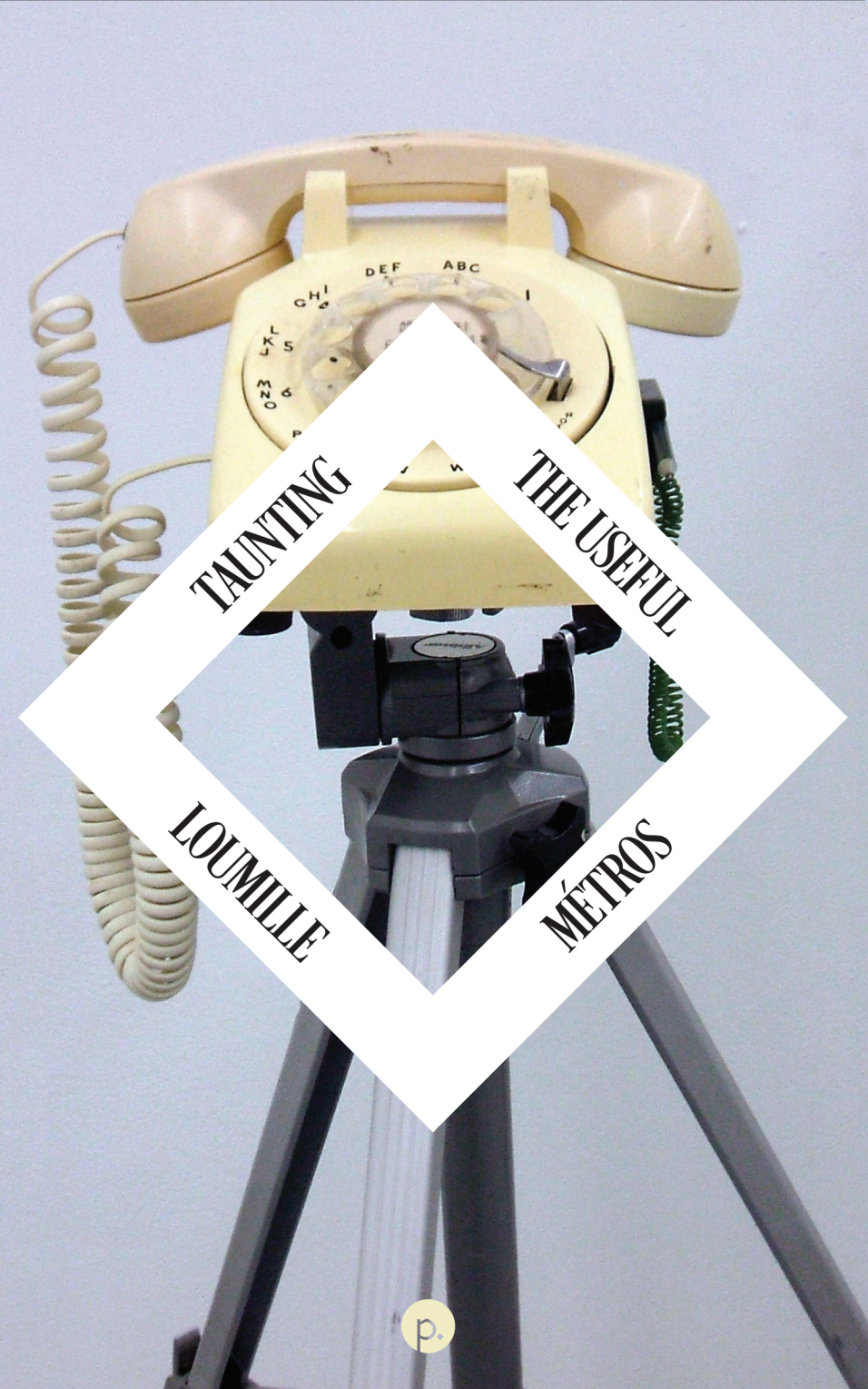
TAUNTING
THE USEFUL
LOUMILLE
MÉTROS

TAUNTING THE USEFUL

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Fig. 1. Detail from Hieronymus Bosch, *Ship of Fools* (1490–1500)

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spontaneous acts of scholarly combustion

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TAUNTING

THE USEFUL

LOUMILLE

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Contents

Preface

The ideas in this book emerged over a long period of time thinking about the so-called "crisis in the humanities," where those disciplines that constituted the first universities, the liberal arts (*artes liberales*), have been severely diminished in favor of the practical and applied: the university is a place where you are trained for a job, rather than one where you might learn to live a good life. The modern university is embattled because the old model of intrinsic knowledge has been diminished in favor of the utilitarian-rational machine of modernity, with its "regime of truth" located in the market.[1]

1 At the time when neoliberalism was taking flight, with the impending elections of Thatcher and Reagan (but also six years after the end of the Bretton Woods system, the unofficial "birth" of neoliberalism), Michel Foucault described this shift from the market as a place of "jurisdiction" to one of "veridiction" ("veridiction-falsification"): it's the market, in its "veridictional" capacity, that will dictate good government. See Michel Foucault, *La Naissance de la biopolitique: Cours au Collège de France, 1978-1979* (Paris: Gallimard-Seuil, 2004), 33–35 (January 17, 1979 lecture). Likewise, it's market logic that will dictate what is studied in university. Note that Reagan, as early as 1967, then governor of California (in the context of the Free Speech Movement student protests for civil rights, to which he was opposed), regarding university funding, said that "the state's taxpayers *should not be 'subsidizing intellectual curiosity'*" (my emphasis; see Elizabeth Erin Smith, "Examining Exemplary P-20 Partnerships," Using a Mixed Methods Approach" (PhD diss., University of Arkan-

The most valuable things in life are directly useless for that modernity, and only indirectly useful. Further, even saying that something is indirectly useful is to subordinate it to the gross efficiencies and instrumentalities of modernity. Even those praising the useless, such as Nuccio Ordine (after Abraham Flexner),[2] fall for this trap — or, they won't take the ramifications of their praise further. John Stuart Mill could easily argue that the useless can be useful, in that it makes life good, yet the "purposiveness" of that point of view needs to be put to the test, because it cannot break the means-ends (subject-object) bind of modern subjectivity, defaulting into the logic of debt.[3]

The idea that we work to live can be reversed: we merely live to work (and consume) in our biopolitical paradigm. In that sense, Molière's Harpagon, who mixes means and ends, is the paragon of our times.[4] That is, we live to eat.

This book would have said that art, beauty, love, friendship, pleasure, leisure — all the things that make life good — are useless. However, that assurance too can be put to the test, because

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sas, Fayetteville, 2016, https://scholarworks.uark.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=3331&context=etd, 13). See bonus chapter 49, n. 12.

2 Nuccio Ordine, *The Usefulness of the Useless,* trans. Alastair McEwen (Philadelphia: Paul Dry Books, 2017), which includes Abraham Flexner's 1939 essay "The Usefulness of Useless Knowledge."

3 I also have in mind Walter Benjamin's notion of *Schuld* (guilt/debt) here, in his "Kapitalismus als Religion": "Capitalism as a Religion," in *Selected Writings,* vol. 1, eds. Marcus Bullock and Michael W. Jennings and trans. Rodney Livingston, 259–622 (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1996). For Benjamin, capitalism is a religion without atonement. The implications for modern subjectivity are important and go much further than typically imagined. This I try to connect to temporality and progress (in Benjaminian terms). See the first thirteen chapters of part VI.

4 In *L'Avare,* Valère says, "il faut manger pour vivre, et non pas vivre pour manger" ("One must eat to live, and not live to eat"), which Harpagon, the bourgeois miser, repeats confusedly, "Il faut vivre pour manger, et non pas manger pour vi…" ("One must live to eat, and not eat to li…": *L'Avare,* Act III, scene V). Molière was drawing on classical sources,[i] so this confusion of means and ends isn't strictly speaking "modern," though it has modern characteristics in Molière that still exist today. It hasn't escaped the author that Harpagon (pronounced "ɑʀpɑgɔ̃") is an anagram (more accurately, an *anaphone*) in French of "paragon."

these good things of life can always be subsumed to the logic of instrumentality. This book resists that instrumental logic but doesn't shy away from its challenges.

When one says that friendship or love are instincts that favor survival, this sort of evolutionary thinking (which no doubt is correct) reflects the utilitarianism of our epoch. It's a matter of emphasis: what supports life, and is it relatively important to account for it when that knowledge won't actually make a difference? Yet emphasizing it can affect our perspective on the wonderful things of life, take away our valuing of them. If you say, "love is merely a means to a reproductive end," or "that powerful feeling you had was merely infatuation (or limerence)," any authentic feeling of love is diminished, second-guessed, devalued. Likewise, in saying that art, critical thinking, the "life of the mind," etc. are useful for society, somehow art and critical thinking are diminished because ultimately, they must reach a goal and show results, and thus are secondary to their use. It's not enough for a young person in university today to merely enjoy the life of the mind, study art, literature, anthropology, performance, physics, or mathematics because these are enjoyable and stimulate "intellectual curiosity."[5] They must be able to apply that learning to some end other than for its own sake.

At the origin of the Western university, that is, in ancient Greece, emerged the idea that thought is the ultimate human (and political, ethical) experience, and that thought preceded any use. We *are* thought. To be philosophical is to be human — more accurately, to be potential. To be philosophical was akin to love, and it was *philosophia:* the love of wisdom. When we love someone, we don't love them for what we can get from them — we love them for their own sake, no matter what.

This book is therefore both a resistance to what the modern university has become and a plea that knowledge and beauty be love.

And yet, the confusion of means and ends that characterizes modernity cannot be a simple reversal. Whether we live to eat

5 See n. 1, above.

or eat to live, both are susceptible to the same logic of utility and ends. To affirm the useless is equally an impasse. This book doesn't say that only useless things are good. Rather, through a form of idio(syncra)tic affirmation, it praises modes, methods, gestures that take us outside of the dominant forms of modernity. One of those ways is through *taunting* which, while dependent on that which is taunted, nevertheless affirms a sort of joy, a sort of *sidetracking* that takes the imperatives of truth onto a new threshold, destabilizing any simple relation of means and ends, thereby generating events and history (that is, irreplaceability).

Taunting is thus outside of the true/false, possible/impossible oppositions. In more ways than I can count, this book is (about) errancy — and about erroneous ideas, thoughts, creations, and machines. That is, useless things. It's about the adventure of the mind. Too much thinking is based on whether things are true or false, accurate or inaccurate, logical or illogical, and not enough on the adventure of thought. Maybe wonderment (*thaumazein*[6]) is wonder *that* something happens, more than *why, what,* or *how* things happen,[7] which risks imprisoning it in an ontological sedation. However, *that* thought happens is, in ethical terms, perhaps more precious than thought that might serve a(nother's) purpose.

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6 *Thaumazein* is the "origin of philosophy" (*arkhē philosophias*), according to both Plato and Aristotle. See chapter 0, n. 1.

7 Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus,* trans. D.F. Pears and B.F. McGuinness (London: Routledge, 1961): "6.44 It is not how things are in the world that is mystical, but that it exists" (88; emphasis in original). Cf. Erin Manning, *For a Pragmatics of the Useless* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2020), a book which focuses on the "hows" (or "processes," after A.N. Whitehead) rather than the "whats." David Cecchetto's *Listening in the Afterlife of Data: Aesthetics, Pragmatics, and Incommunication* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2022) asks after the "hows" that accompany the "whats," thereby "suspend[ing] the question of definition in favor of asking what experience can do" (19). While these two studies meaningfully advance a pragmatic philosophy (which in weird and *wonder*ful ways take communication studies beyond linguistic pragmatics), their approaches are a bit different (I mostly wonder, double meaning, with the "that") — and way more useful than the current book!

When encountering a giant, ancient Douglas fir, one encounters an indescribable, even ineffable magic. This is the *arkhē philosophias,* the origin of philosophy. Like the thing itself, when we try to account for that wonder, we cannot access that moment in an original way, except through the vortex of language and the forms of knowledge we put up as a way to compensate for the ineffability of *that:* who, what, when, where, why, how, which themselves in a way may always be erroneous, or errant with respect to the *that.* Yet that errancy is part of the adventure that is involved in wonder.

It's a shame that useless or erroneous ideas get rejected without being experienced[8] — or that their experience is undervalued, chucked out like malfunctioning factory pieces, especially in the university departments of philosophical truth tables. This book could just as easily be titled "In Praise of Useless Ideas," and it contains a ton of them (it's a heavy book![9]), by its author just as much as by others. It embraces the erroneous, the futile, the false (*caveat lector*[10]), the stupid, the useless. One person's useful is another's useless, and vice versa. The great magic of

8 Hegel understood just how thought is a movement. While it's debatable whether thought needs to get somewhere higher, Hegel's thought recognized how errancy is a movement of the mind, of the mind, of the mind, of the mind; that understanding involves a going-through of thought, and the experience of that as being the reflexive experience of reason.

9 Thanks to David Cecchetto for this joke. See G.W.F. Hegel, *Hegel's Phenomenology of Spirit,* trans. A.V. Miller (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), 223. See also chapter 144.

10 Reader beware, it only tries to mislead out of jest, not to mislead for the sake of power, though it dreams of having magic powers over you, *cher lecteur!* An odd question: what's it like to write and publish when you don't respect your readers? In the context of the mass market, most readers are bad readers, consumers. So, I write for a select few, but in a problematic relation to the many. Baudelaire provides the form for this, with his "To the Reader," whom he describes as hypocritical.[ii] There are hundreds of points of view on this. Most famous is Bourdieu, the sociologist, with his theory of distinction. (Baudelaire sees the problem in a moral vein: "Hypocrite lecteur, — mon semblable, — mon frère !") The enemy is the self-perpetuating bourgeois institutions. The tension between use and exchange value still holds in academic work. To the detriment of intrinsic research. Intrinsic research is independent of mass market logic, but such

this book, its *thaumaturgy,* is in trying to attain the most useless thing: the purely useless uselessness!

If wonder is the "origin of philosophy," and thus primordial, then one main role of the university is to model thought, curiosity, and a sense of one's relationship with oneself and the world, to help "develop a meaningful philosophy of life."[11] While some research pursuits are useful for industry and society (*phronesis,* practical/ethical wisdom), some are "pure" inquiry — that is, the intrinsic search for *eudaimonia* ("happiness"), the human desire for knowledge, wisdom, and creativity (*aretē,* virtue). The liberal arts (present in most university disciplines, including the sciences) have a privileged role in that. The challenge is to justify that role within the funding model of the modern university. Even CERN, the world's biggest, and possibly most useless, architectural project, has come under fire. Obviously, an implicit consensus exists as to what is relevant. But a resistance to imposed consensus by funding bodies (such as SSHRC in Canada) is needed and ongoing.

All is negotiation. *Neg-otium.* There's a blend here of *otium* (leisure, Latin equivalent of the Greek *skolē,* leisure time, from which we get "school") and *neg-otium* (the negation of otium). This book fights on behalf of *otium,* which is necessary for free thought (liberal arts) and learning for everyone but recognizes

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market logic rules — not necessarily according to finance, also to cultural and symbolic capital.

11 See Marielle Macé's beautiful *Façons de lire, manières d'être* (Paris: Gallimard, 2016), in which the author talks about how her studies had "torn me from their familiarity, their singularity and their reserves of strength; but literary experience has restored it to me astonishingly; coming to life in an analogous figure, the signature let itself be discreetly transmitted. Something of my relationship to myself and to others, of what is possible [capable] and impossible [incapable] in my own body, in my own language, is replayed and recaptured there: what social life had weakened, literature revived, gave it a future. As if this other seclusion that is reading had returned this gesture to me in the form of a general power, allowing me to remember it, to re-inherit it, to make it radiate in all sorts of domains of life and its forms" (13; my translation). See bonus chapter 48, n. 12 and bonus chapter 49, n. 11 regarding the development of "a meaningful philosophy of life."

the contradiction that it itself is involved in *negotium*. It argues that useless knowledge is good in its own right, and that the university should (also) cultivate freedom and happiness. The university was a place for wonderment, *thaumazein*. It has become a place for the servile arts (*artes serviles*) since at least the nineteenth century and the British context of utilitarianism, where those studying the STEM disciplines (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics, but even the humanities are being "STEMified") — which have full ideological and industrial support — become *servile*.[12]

In 1958,[13] Hannah Arendt asked what our conception of work and of labor would be in the context of a world without work, emphasizing that we have no proper notion of what the human condition is without work/after work. Today, even our holidays are work, something Jenny Odell has eloquently addressed in

12 *Servī* in Latin, from the singular *servus* ("slave," "servant"). For a critique of STEM's lack of emphasis on the skills offered by the humanities, see Avi Kak, "Letter to the Editor: Why Our English Department Deserves More Respect," *Exponent,* December 9, 2021, https://www.purdueexponent.org/opinion/letters_to_editor/article_788df678-5920-11ec-a915-7b76b8a4d7bf.html.[iii] But even there, it's in view of "skills" for the workforce. See also Sara Ahmed, *What's the Use? On the Uses of Use* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2019) for a discussion of the nineteenth-century university and the utilitarian context and for (as with Cecchetto and Manning) an example of pragmatic philosophy. Unfortunately, Ahmed's study is Anglocentric, and ignores alternative university models such as the German one which was focused on *Bildung,* the cultivation of free thought independent from received/posited ideas. See Bill Readings for a more complete history of the Western university in *The University in Ruins* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1996). See Manning, *For a Pragmatics of the Useless,* 8–9, for a discussion of freedom as "neurotypicality" (and/as whiteness). Equating (mostly white) university students with slaves (while quoting mostly European authors) is a problem. Nevertheless, in light of current states of student debt (at the very least, we can call it "indentured servitude light"), it is apt: if we pretend to be an advanced civilization, then everyone should be free, and study for free, which begs the question.… In any case, it can't be assumed everyone agrees it's important to be intellectually free.

13 Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1958).

her book, *How to Do Nothing: Resisting the Attention Economy.*[14] Can the contemporary university provide an answer to this prospect of a world without/after work, when it has been almost exclusively structured as a creator of workers? This book is an attempt to answer that challenge.

L. M.
June 2023
Victoria–Paris–Johannesburg–Mauritius–Brazil

14 Jenny Odell, *How to Do Nothing: Resisting the Attention Economy* (New York: Melville House, 2019).

How to (Un)Use This Book

-1 Unlike the Deleuzo-Guattarian principle of reading in any order (seeing chapters as independently read "plateaux"[1]), the 144 chapters in this book ought to be read according to the given number sequences, somewhat like a "choose your own adventure" novel. The chapters are without exception ordered according to specific number sequences, and footnotes lead to endnotes[2] that lead back to chapters, with their own peculiar logic. Of course, since this is ideally a coffee-table book, you might leaf through it at your leisure. Democratic principles apply. That said, in order to extract the best use out of this book, it is advisable to follow the sequences and number trails through the notes, because the author has diligently and algorithmically elaborated the sequences. These predetermined sequences are exvoluted and involuted, not to mention convoluted. They are not Spinozistic involutions, but rather Cartesian ones.[3]

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1 Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, "Avant-propos," in *Mille plateaux* (Paris: Minuit, 1980), 8.

2 These footnotes and endnotes try to be useful in terms of research content. Indeed, one might skip the chapters altogether and just read the former, and would extract a lot of valuable information.

3 See Daniel Pennac, "Les droits inprescriptibles du lecteur," in *Comme un roman* (Paris: Gallimard, 1992), 149.[iv]

-2 If you have the PDF version of this book, you can navigate through it by clicking the footnotes, endnotes, and return notes.[4] This is a hypertext: it's not linear. A physical book is also hypertext because we are able to flip through it at random. The hypertext here reproduces the experience of the physical book, even if both are very different phenomenological experiences. In some ways, the PDF is more rigid, insofar as it fixes an experience of reading into links and nodes; in other ways, the physical book depends on the hypertext, insofar as the former posits the existence of links and nodes, while the latter actualizes them, reifies them. They are codependent, implicitly so, ever since digital hypertexts have become predominant. We scroll through paper as if it were a touchscreen, just as much as we pretend the screen is paper.

-3 This book involves an interplay of two infinities: closed and open. Some of the sequences that order the chapters are closed infinities, in the sense of an infinite loop (as with the Juggler sequence and Collatz Conjecture), and some, such as the Fibonacci sequence that constitutes the vorticial axis of this book, are open infinities and follow the logic of n+1. There is also the interplay of footnotes and endnotes. Oddly, an involution involves both these infinities: it is a closed loop, infinitely suspended (though its *conatus*[5] is not derived from "something for nothing"[6]); yet, in that suspension — its immanence — it draws from an origin without beginning or end, its spiraling an open-ended vortex.[7] That is, at once suspended and sucking in and

4 See Fabio Akcelrud Durão, "L'Effet des notes," *Critique* 10, no. 785 (2012): 831–41, not just for the wonderful set of references on studies of the footnote as *parergon, paratext,* etc., but also as a study of the radical possibilities of play that footnotes offer.

5 *Conatus* is the effort required by an entity to maintain itself. Benedict Spinoza, *Ethics* (1833), trans. R.H.M. Elwes, Project Gutenberg, https://www.gutenberg.org/ebooks/3800. See chapter 30.

6 This is perhaps a way to understand perpetual motion. See chapter 8.

7 See chapters 43 and 75.

drowning its lost sailors, its reader. *Caveat emptor!* Only heroes of interpretation dare swim in its swirl.[8]

8 See chapter 42 on "interpretaunting." The image of the drowning sailor evokes Mallarmé's drowned sailor of the *Coup de dés*. See also chapter 1.

Part I

Chapter 0

A rotary-dial telephone mounted on a camera tripod is what contemporary artist Natali Leduc calls an obsolete innovation ("innovation désuète"), her *Fotofonotron 3000* (2012). Say … a "smartphone?" Natali also built a four-person, double-decker tandem operating six churns that make "bice cream," the *Churnatron 1400* (2016). One of her mottoes comes from Les Shadoks: "Why make something simple when you can make it complicated?" Inspired by 'pataphysics, the science of imaginary solutions, her work taunts the useful. Leduc is part of a history of such taunting that maybe starts with the problem of *chresis* (use) at the origin of Western philosophy. The *archē philosophias* (origin of philosophy[1]) came from wonder, and "not on account of any use" (Aristotle, *Metaphysics* 982b), but use has dominated since the industrial revolution. With Gautier's "art for art's sake," art takes a stance, cultivating contemptuous useless machines *for* the bourgeoisie.

1 Transcription of ἀρχὴ φιλοσοφίας. Wonder (θαυμάζειν, *thaumazein,* "wonderment" — we also get "thaumaturgy" from θαυμά) is a key concept in Plato's *Theaetetus* (155d), but also for Aristotle in the *Metaphysics,* and this notion has been taken up notably by Hegel in *The Philosophy of History,* Kierkegaard in *Stages on Life's Way,* and Heidegger in *Basic Questions of Philosophy.*[v]

Chapter 1

How is it even possible to think about a machine that *does* nothing? Even Marvin Minsky's "ultimate machine," based on Claude Shannon's (of Shannon-Weaver fame), *does* something. It's a box with an on/off switch that has a hand that comes out of the box to turn off the switch after you turn it on, which puts one in an endless repetition. The "ultimate" (the last, or utmost) machine is also called a "useless machine." While it does *nothing* (direct object), it arguably produces thought, wonder (synonym of marvel[2]), magic, pleasure, art. An ultimate thing, it is an impossible, Nietzschean "eternal return of the same," with each turn a homogenous, even totality that, while we marvel at it, generates anxiety. The machine's work (its *doing*) cannot correspond evenly with its ontogenetic *undoing*. Its wonder and terror[3] are the product of its ontological inversion. Its taunting.

2 Minsky's "ultimate machine" has also been called a "marvelous machine," and the "Leave Me Alone Box." Minsky was Shannon's mentee (the latter prototyped the "ultimate machine"). Both worked at Bell Labs, which invented many useful machines, such as the transistor (1947), the solar cell (1954), the laser (1958), and the Unix operating system (1969), a version of which the current book was written with. See Mark O'Connell, "Letter of Recommendation: The Useless Machine," *The New York Times,* August 31, 2016, https://www.nytimes.com/2016/09/04/magazine/letter-of-recommendation-the-useless-machine.html. Minsky also invented a "Gravity Machine" which would ring a bell if the *gravity constant* were to change…. One must mention Bruno Munari's useless machines. Munari, a third-generation futurist (critical of technology), like Minsky, developed machines very much anticipating the spirit of this book.

3 Arthur C. Clarke, nonetheless in wonderment: "There is something unspeakably sinister about a machine that does nothing — absolutely nothing — except switch itself off." Abigail Pesta, "Looking for Something Useful to Do With Your Time? Don't Try This," *The Wall Street Journal,* March 12, 2013, https://www.wsj.com/articles/SB10001424127887323628804578348572687608806.

Chapter 1*

For Stéphane Mallarmé, the language machine was an "impotence" machine; the "monstre de l'impuissance"[4] resulted from the tricks of language (verses and their necessary enjambment, rhyme, rhythm, etc.), impeding the poet from expressing his "Idée," or Music. Philologically aware of the limits of language itself, beyond poetry (anticipating Saussure's arbitrary nature of the sign, or Derrida's unnamable différance machine that takes the "forme informe, muette, infante et terrifiante de la monstruosité"), the only solution for Mallarmé was to "céder l'initiative aux mots." In a letter to his friend Cazalis, he proposes to kill this hydratic monster *similia similibus,* using the same with the same: using language to solve language, making of it an autonomous or autopoietic machine. Thus, his poems are alchemically transmuting matter autopoetically — homeopathic machines, or homeotechnical machines, rather than allotechnical machines that use language as a means to an end (Sloterdijk[5]).

4 Mallarmé's "Monster of impotency" is the anguish of the impossible expression of poetic inspiration, because to put it bluntly, you have to edit your "expressions" and make them fit into a given form; thus, we should "relinquish the initiative to words." Mallarmé thereby articulates an early notion of language as autonomous. Derrida evokes a topos of modern philosophy, that of the monstrous. For him it is at once a horror of the meaningless and of its polysemic violence.[vi]

5 Peter Sloterdijk's distinction between "homeotechnics" and "allotechnics" is important for thinking about new relations between nature and technology and our scientific encounters with these: rather than exploiting nature toward our productive ends, scientists can enter into a speculative dialogue with nature, a homeotechnics.[vii]

Chapter 2

The useless, taunting, im-possible machine's etymology machine: from (<) the Greek *makhana,* and *mēkhanē* (tool) < the PIE *magh-ana-,* "that which makes possible" < *magh-,* "to be able." The useless machine, then, is a "powerless," "impotentiality" machine (Agamben < Aristotle's a*dunamia, im*possibility). Curiously, the machine-apparatus that simultaneously desubjectivizes while it subjectivizes, is in French a *dispositif.* Agamben < Foucault < Hyppolite < Hegel's "positive element" (connected etymologically to *ponere,* to "power" and "making"): "positivity" is the historical element "with rules, rites, and institutions that are imposed on the individual by an external power, but that become, so to speak, internalized in the systems of beliefs and feelings" (Agamben, "What is an Apparatus?"). The machine is folk-etymologically[6] associated with "making," < PIE **mak,* "to knead, fashion, fit" > Greek *mageus* "one who kneads, baker." But also to the German *machen* (to make; *poiein* in Greek) and *Macht* (might). The little machine that might.

6 Is folk etymology perhaps not the origin of etymology proper, just as wonder at the origin of the universe provokes astronomy? Is not wordplay a form of it, or vice versa? The whole Cratylitic enterprise reflects a desire for origins, some pre-Babelic language. As if *making* and *might* were the same (but aren't they, insofar as making requires potential in Aristotle's sense of *dunamis*?). What productive potential can be generated by such arbitrary unions? Yet the risk is enormous. That's one thing that was at stake in the nineteenth century, and what led to the demise of comparative grammar. Yet it led to Saussure, who expressed his cryptic Cratylism through anagrams.[viii]

Chapter 3

"With Gautier's 'art for art's sake,' art takes a stance, cultivating contemptuous useless machines for the bourgeoisie"[7]: *for* the bougies, that attacks the bougies, but that can also be reterritorialized or reappropriated by them. The machine is neutral and cannot serve the purpose for which it was intended — a machine without purpose or end — without telos. It contains this inner contradiction. The language machine that would "épater le bourgeois" contains both the intransitive/dative and the transitive/accusative: given to, an object transmitted to; done to, where the machine works the bougies, the machine affects a direct object (the bougie *épaté*, astounded or shocked, but also amazed, made to wonder … a marvelous machine!). Can the machine act on itself in a middle voice,[8] a sort of "homeopathic" machine, rather than "making use" of the other, thereby reinscribing a utilitarian logic within it?

7 See chapter 0.

8 Agamben, perhaps the only main contemporary thinker to work on Émile Benveniste, has recently elaborated on Benveniste's theory of the middle voice (in *Use of Bodies,* trans. Adam Kotsko [Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2016], for example; but Benveniste's presence spans almost his entire career). Benveniste's middle voice, in articles like "L'actif et le moyen dans le verbe" (in *Problèmes de linguistique Générale*), is one where "the verb indicates a process of which the subject is the seat," and that has implications for the conception of the subject: "the subject is the centre at the same time as an actor of the process; the subject accomplishes something that accomplishes itself in them." The subject thus "effectuates while affecting itself."[ix]

Chapter 5

Mallarmé's "Sonnet en X"[9] has an impossible number seven: with fourteen lines, it has six of the rhymes -yx/-ix and eight of -or. Why then does Mallarmé have "septuor" in "De *scin*tillations *si*tôt le *sep*tuor"? (As Mallarmé scholar Robert Greer Cohn notes, "scin-," "si-" and "sept-" are five, six, seven.) Nor is the Alexandrine verse of twelve syllables divisible by seven (the classic division has two hexasyllabic hemistiches). Furthermore, a sonnet is an unbalanced mirror: a sestet reflecting the first part (two quatrains), not two even septets. A sonnet's sestet can be a summary, reversal or opposition. But here, the "Mais" is a reversal of the constellation of the empty "septuor" of Ursa Major. As a self-reflexive poem, the empty constellation of seven stars "mirrors" the empty frame of the sonnet, with its empty words like "ptyx," there merely for the sake of rhyme.[10]

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9 Stéphane Mallarmé (1842–1898), "Ses purs ongles très haut…" (1887), a.k.a. "Sonnet en X" (or "Yx"). See the sonnet (with translation) here: [x]. It is recommended that the reader take at least thirty minutes to read the poem, and a further thirty to read this chapter plus notes (foot and end). Only then will magic barely begin to appear.

10 Note that, since the hemistiche is usually hexasyllabic — with two hemistiches making twelve: in French, Alexandrines are always dodecasyllables (twelve syllables) — in order for there to be six syllables, one must turn "scintillations" (usually four syllables) into five by pronouncing "-ions" as two (poetic convention of the *diaeresis*[xi]). Therefore, "5-tillations," "6-tôt," and "7-tuor" all gain new meanings: the extra syllable creates "scintillations" ("5-tillations," five sparks), but since "scintillations" is normally four syllables, and first hemistiche would only be five (with "Des"), and the second would have to be seven syllables to give twelve; therefore, "sitôt le septuor" means that the "scintillations" would have anticipated "immediately" (*sitôt*) the *septuor* (group of seven),[xii] which of course is impossible. Finally, the "septuor" refers to the North Star/Ursa Major in line nine, at the beginning of the sestet. (Septuor also refers to a music group, or to the impossible seven, impossible septets, seven impossible rhymes.) The empty septuor, like the empty "ptyx," just as "scintillations," needs a lengthened pronunciation/empty syllable. The poem is an empty frame, containing "oblivion" (*oubli*), like the *salon vide* (empty room).[xiii]

Chapter 8

In *Something for Nothing* (1940),[11] Rube Goldberg presents some of his inventions, such as the "Rube-Goldberg Door Opener-Upper" and an "automatic hat-tipper for the lazy lothario," a "conglomeration of wheels, cogs, gears, ratchets, counterweights, strings, and pulleys which gallantly doff the chapeau whenever a young heiress passes by." These "downright screwy" inventions Goldberg associates with laziness and concupiscence, wanting "something for nothing," this "most persistent dream of inventors." Patent experts will pass them even though, knowing "you can't get something for nothing […], you can't get power out of an engine without paying for it in fuel."[12] Then a narrator switches to praising gasoline's power: "today, the driver of the motorcar doesn't get something from nothing, but he does get more power than ever before from the gasoline he buys. Our available supplies of fuel now do more work with increasing efficiency and economy."[13]

11 A film made by Rube Goldberg with the Jam Handy Organization, sponsored by Chevrolet. Rube Goldberg, dir., *Something for Nothing* (Jam Handy Organization, 1940).

12 The US Patent Office "literally has hundreds of such patents — inventors were all perfectly serious," and some of it needs protection, "if you know what I mean."

13 The sacralogical time of something for something is the righteous energy invested, out of which can be gathered much efficiency and power. This orientation to the future, utilitarian at its core, counters its own morally suspect other, that of the "lazy lothario," who is equally invested in a utilitarian logic (the instrumentality of the hat is a means: it is a useful machine, in principle, as is the "Door Opener-Upper").

Part II

Chapter 9

In Jacques Tati's *Mon oncle* (1958), there's a remarkable scene in which Monsieur Hulot, that clownish, awkward character played by Tati himself in several of his films, wends an erratic way up to his apartment on the third floor of a house, in the old part of town, that is a bricolage of three buildings tied together by a winding conjunction of stairs, Hulot visible through a jumble of windows as he goes up, while we hear the sound of children playing and the extra-diegetic sound of nostalgic music. This scene, natural, contrasts with the modern part of town: its regulated roadways, mechanical factory, the artificial gestures of people, and the absurd house of his bourgeois plastic-factory-owning brother-in-law. In this world, there is no music, only the sounds of machinery and the inane conversations of the bourgeoisie, and never the sound of children playing.[1]

1 Is Tati a juggler? Literally in *Parade*. Juggling is a metaphor for and metonymy of art, just as Tati's films are both about art (as industry) and art itself. Juggling can become complex when you add multiple elements, such as in a juggler sequence.

The juggler sequence for initial n=9 would be: 9, 27, 140, 11, 36, 6, 2, 1.

Of course, juggling can be representation. Juggling shows up in the earliest movies. The first ever: Lumière's assistant Trewey spinning plates in 1895; *Jongleur javanais* (1896) has a version of what one would call hacky sack.[xiv]

Chapter 27

In Tati's *Playtime,* play disrupts the ritual of modern life. In the anthropological opposition between play and ritual, if ritual is diachronic (conservative in sustaining the past for the future), play is synchronic and acts in/on the present so that ritual is "per-versed" ("played with"). The comic scenes in *Playtime* become a reappropriation of the mono*ton*ous reality of modern life. The bourgeois restaurant becomes a festival, the traffic circle a carousel, the gray colorful, the monotone music. So this can happen, chaos is introduced into the system and a new game emerges. The door must be broken so that the doorman can hold an imaginary door open, so that the illusion of social ritual can be maintained, so that we the audience can laugh at this ritual. This way, a set of scenes has "decreated" or broken down the quotidian to form new experience.[2]

2 This makes us see the quotidian "ready-at-hand" in a new way. Or, as Agamben would say, "it is only in the burning house that the fundamental architectural problem becomes visible [and] art, at the furthest point of its destiny, makes visible its original object."[xv]

Chapter 140

Tati is a practical anthropologist of the useful. *Praxis* (action), putting-in-act (*en-ergeia*) of knowledge of the human as engaged in the world of utility (as sacred). This doing becomes counterproductive. Rather than the expression of a vision, the revealing (*poiēsis*) of a truth (*alētheia*), it is the putting-into-play of a dynamic relationship between what might be (broken) and what is (or gets broken). It is the inverse of Bartleby's "I would prefer not to."[3] Where Bartleby effectively does something, preferring not to, thereby leaving in his wake another possibility that was left behind, Hulot-Tati would prefer to do it, but all the way, so far that it becomes a parody. So it has the opposite modality to Bartleby's. We never see Bartleby's despair with the dead letters. Rather, the innocent, childlike Hulot, in maintaining the sacredness of objects, clumsily profanes their workings, desacralizing them.[4]

3 "Bartleby, or on Contingency" is a long essay by Agamben reflecting not only on Melville's "Bartleby the Scrivener" story, but on the whole tradition of philosophy, from Aristotle, the Arabic scholars, via Leibniz, to Benjamin and his critique of Nietzsche, while responding to Deleuze's own text on Bartleby. See Giorgio Agamben, "Bartleby, or On Contingency," in *Potentialities: Collected Essays in Philosophy,* ed. and trans. Daniel Heller-Roazen (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999), 243–71.[xvi]

4 With regards to *Playtime,* Hainge notes differences in interpretation of its ending: whereas Iain Borden sees "a rejection of the modern world in favour of a return to a prior, carnivalesque era in which communion is not only possible but is everything" (239), Ben McCann believes that it in fact "radically reconceptualizes the urban space to reveal the utopian potential of urbanism and to offer a revolutionary rereading of the parameters of modernity" (240).[xvii]

Chapter 11

Tati's *Trafic* (1971) is a traffic machine that at once imitates and becomes, that contrasts scenes of absurdity and of humanity, humans in the absurdity of mechanized-being being all-too-human (yet in a sympathetic way): stuck in traffic, yawning, or picking their noses; cars jammed together in the city or rushing on the highway. People helping each other despite it all: after an accident, arguing, raising their fists; or Hulot himself awkwardly fumbling to help an old man after an accident, despite his own goal to get to an Amsterdam car show to promote the Altra camper. The camper, another one of those great Tati inventions, has bumpers opening as seats, a horn that becomes an electric razor, the taillight an extendable light, every part of the car repurposed for maximum efficiency. A film about a car making it to a car show through traffic.

Chapter 36

Like most of Tati's films, *Trafic* has reversals. If Hulot would "prefer to," it's in a special sense. He would prefer to help others before obeying the signals or finishing the job. Even the attempt to do his job concerns him. We never hear him speak, but his actions say a lot. He is childlike in the present, attentive to its imperatives. That is his panic and his grace. He is the proxy of decreative acts disrupting the ritual of work, replaced with playtime: sitting for lunch with the mechanic who fixed the camper; accidentally tearing down the vines on the man's house whom he helped, then trying to fix it. He is not an anarchist, like the hippies who fake Maria's dog's death. He is not a prankster but is the witness to the chaos created by the attempt to control the world.

Chapter 6

Monsieur Hulot, the one who would *prefer to,* is the anti-anarchist: the negative or inverse of anarchy, even insofar as anarchy is generated despite himself. Anti-anarchy as a homeopathic solution to the anarchy engendered by machinic modernity (anarchy as the epistemic symptom of machinic modernity that submits all to its logic). For the more we try to control outcomes, the more chaos reigns — perhaps an unconscious fighting back against the symbolic order, the Real undermining all attempts at order. The more human side of Tati: Hulot who preserves the immanence of friends and the people around him, in play; one who never loses his temper, as in when he gets disrupted by people coming into his office while he designs the display for the car show in *Trafic*. An infinite patience with and for the other, an alternative aspect of the heaviness of infinite responsibility.

Chapter 2*

Hulot is quite removed from the logic of the machine as a means to an end, and it's surprising that he doesn't lose his patience, since he is an artist and his work is disrupted. He is the one who designed the exhibition. He is the one who is in charge of getting to Amsterdam, along with Maria, who is a sort of counterpoint to Hulot. Her chaos is different: she causes the accident at the intersection because she doesn't stop — Hulot and the truck are merely following. He later shows a great deal of sympathy for Maria, and they walk off together through the traffic, after he's been fired. What is the nature of their parallel? It seems like *Trafic* is an allegory for the failed production of *Playtime,* which was a catastrophic financial failure (a €2.5M budget, or €15.4M by today's equivalent).

Part III

Chapter 1**

I wanted to create a machine that would highlight the possible syntactico-semantic combinations in Mallarmé; the machine would illustrate possible reading combinations and the nonlinear nature of poetry, in the way phrases and segments in the *Coup de dés* come together like "constellations."[1] I wanted to do that with Roussel's *Nouvelles impressions d'Afrique* too, and with Derrida's *Glas*. After that, I wanted to map these onto Google Sky, then turn the streets into constellations using Streetview, making an app that could reinscribe randomly generated textual configurations. This was unacceptable as "research" for the organization that had supported me, as it "did nothing," was useless in research terms — it wasn't something one might *use* in the future. It took me a while to realize this was good, that a useless machine might be something exciting, and that I was on the verge of creative work.

1 Cf. Emile Fromet de Rosnay, "The Circuits of Reading the Digital: Some Models," in *Scholarly and Research Communication* 3, no. 4 (2012), https://src-online.ca/index.php/src/article/download/64/138, and "Le *Coup de dés* numérisé: Modèles, défis, perspectives," *Synergies Canada* 3 (2012), https://journal.lib.uoguelph.ca/index.php/synergies/article/view/1689/2436.

Chapter 13

To the charge that the useless and the finer enjoyments of life and the arts are a "privilege" (Greeks relied on slaves for *skolē,* leisure[2]):

1. If we pretend to be civilized and "advanced" in the twenty-first century, then shouldn't these privileges be available to everyone? If not, can we pretend to be advanced if we can't offer everyone these privileges?

2. If privileges are elite, and generally awesome, why should we fight for equality if not for these wonderful things in life?

It seems that the Left has forgotten why it wants equality, is stuck in the rut without any sense of joy and what it ultimately wants (one wonders if it really believes it will get what it wants). Meanwhile, the Right thinks only of use, yet cannot see the futility and destruction of the society to which the "useful" contributes.

2 *Skolē, σχολή,* is the root of our word "school." That is, to study freely, one needs leisure. But the modern school is all about preparing for a job and becoming a worker. "Why don't they teach taxes in school?" or "How will calculus help me with my life?" ("I'm glad I learned about parallelograms in high school math instead of how to do my taxes. It comes in so handy during parallelogram season.") See chapters 42 and 79*. Because that's all life is about. This is a conservative perspective, based entirely on our addiction to servitude.

Chapter 17

A way to exit neoliberalism is to create spaces that are immanent and worthy in themselves, regardless of their "reach" or "impact." These two latter are typically capitalist in their assumptions, in which the logic of mass culture dominates. Knowledge is not worthy if it doesn't reach the largest possible audience. Not that there's anything wrong with reaching a mass audience, but that isn't a great motivation to do art. Likewise, it is appalling to judge a researcher's quality on citations and the number of publications. When doing job searches, should not committees be reading candidates' articles and statements first? Modern university productivity models are a runaway train and are essentially futile to the extent that they are trying to be "useful" and "impactful" according to a market logic. Especially if we consider how problematic many impactful contributions are, which tend to affirm biases.[3]

3 See Mieke Bal's anti–peer review article, "Let's Abolish the Peer-Review System," *Media Theory,* September 3, 2018, http://mediatheoryjournal.org/mieke-bal-lets-abolish-the-peer-review-system/.[xviii] Like Harpagon (see Preface, n. 2), we publish to publish (or perish). So much excess publishing is an arms race. It's in this sense that it is a runaway train, like capitalism itself. There is no way to stop it, even if we sense its ultimate futility and/or destructiveness. Ontologically and institutionally, it's a crisis. The tens of millions of publications are an index to this futility. This book no less: a book to end all books.[xix]

Chapter 52

The useless evokes the old anarchy/socialism dichotomy. The former wants to destroy the system (the state in liberal terms, or the corporation in contemporary neoliberal ones) while the latter wants it to be more just (that unions and syndicates work within the system).[4] The idea of useless knowledge is dangerous for those who try to defend the humanities as useful for educating citizens who will become productive members of society (thus submitted to the telos of servile utility). But a civilization, especially one in which machines will take over our work, will need to think about excess and expenditure in Bataille's sense.[5] If work ends, how will we expend our energy? Assuming that humans still believe that we are potential energy that needs to be exhausted, the expenditure of useless play, art, knowledge will be useful for a civilization that is without work.

4 Note that a related, older structural opposition exists between anarchy and communism, which manifested itself first in the disagreements between Proudhon and Marx. For the former, who foresaw communism's violence, insofar as it reproduced the very system it wished to destroy, communism was yet another form of dogmatism.

5 Bataille: "J'ai écrit l'expérience (extatique) du sens du non-sens, se renversant en un non-sens du sens, puis à nouveau […] sans issue recevable." For Bataille, lived experience is in an absolute immanence, an "être sans délai" (being without delay), which implies a theology of non-knowing. It cannot accept a superior being and is thus, in contradiction to asceticism (an exterior constraint, privation, bound to the future), an intensification that, beyond ecstasy, implies drunkenness, erotic effusion, laughter, the effusion of sacrifice and of poetry.**[xx]**

Chapter 26

It *is* ridiculous that a shitty painting, such as Barnett Newman's *Voice of Fire,* which sold for $1.8M CAD, cost so much. *That* is the point. When Duchamp stuck a urinal in an art gallery, he was making a statement about the institutionalization and bourgeoisification of art. What Duchamp made us ask was, "what is art, and what is it doing in a museum or gallery?" The "average person" is intuitively right in questioning the price of art (and overpriced representational or abstract, etc. art is not the solution to the problem) — and it doesn't mean they don't understand art! The inept attempt to "educate" average people is invested in the institution(alization) of art, and doesn't acknowledge that it is threatened. *The Voice of Fire,* beyond the painter's intention, is a threat to that system that has been recuperated by that very system.[6]

6 See chapter 24 on Banksy and the art world. See also Max Haiven, *Art after Money, Money after Art: Creative Strategies against Financialization* (London: Pluto Press, 2018).[xxi]

Chapter 13*

Natali Leduc makes taunting machines, ones that lightly prod, tease, tickle.[7] They are also participation machines, not machines that are for the museum or the gallery. Whether it is a double-decker tandem making bice cream or a typewriter powered by an emportraited/empoetized pedaler, these are machines that make people laugh together through ridiculous modes. These machines are meant to be used, they are "useful" for the joy of being together in a creation. Embodied, empoetizing machines, they break apart the transcendental of art that is institutionalized in public spaces; they are at once pointing to themselves and to those engaged with them, and therefore cannot be thought of merely as playground structures like carousels, though these are what they most closely resemble. Their "use" can be appropriated yet their "labor" is shared: pure play, pure pleasure, apparatuses of joy; not instrumentalized. A dance.

7 See chapter 142.

Chapter 40

Did something *outlive* its use,[8] an object its utility, a person their usefulness? In some cases, they were used up by use; in others, their survival hinders. Outliving is surviving, and a thing "outliving its use" the contrary of survival. The using survives: use outlives the thing. It's a strange contradiction of language, to "outlive one's use/usefulness." *Merriam-Webster:* to outlive is "to still exist but no longer serve an end or purpose," highlights this contradiction. If "the law has outlived its usefulness," then the law in a sense is a dead weight in the face of changing circumstances, of history, of precedent. Or, "programs have been performing below expectations or have outlived their usefulness and so should be terminated."[9] From the *Oxford English Dictionary:* "Jarvik, whose job it is to provide ideological ammo for the new view that public TV has outlived its use."[10]

8 Cf. Sara Ahmed, *What's the Use? On the Uses of Use* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2019).

9 Such a remarkably ironic title: "Finding the Energy to Act: Reducing Canada's Greenhouse Gas Emissions. Report of the Standing Committee on Environment and Sustainable Development" (Ottawa, Canada: Communication Canada — Publishing, 2015), https://www.ourcommons.ca/DocumentViewer/en/38-1/ENVI/report-7/response-8512-381-186. One enjoys the delicious, inevitable irony in "finding the energy to act."

10 Robert Hughes, *Culture of Complaint: The Fraying of America* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), 169.

Chapter 20

On the charge that high theory is elitist: is algebra elitist? Quantum physics? High theory, perhaps the most useless of our philosophical enterprises, is made to answer to the charge of elitism, yet the STEM disciplines (which actually produce "elites"[11]) don't. But since arguing against STEM isn't a valid argument, what is? Perhaps a reductio argument can help, along the lines of "imagine everyone could do high theory (or mathematics), then the world would be truly just," or "imagine no one did elitist research, then knowledge would be just!" The charge of elitism is a utilitarian charge because it sees knowledge as serving a purpose, playing into instrumental rationality. Its value is in its mass-market logic, its "good." While theory might do this, it cannot be bound to such logic because it would invariably submit to it. Free inquiry must be free from utility.

11 Well, mostly managers, who are essentially higher-level serfs. Even tenured theorists are in cages "with golden bars."

Chapter 10

Theory and other useless things represent what is good in life, which must be protected. Why do we fight for justice if not to have a good life? Is justice for its own sake, like law, or for happiness? Why does the left fight injustice? For equality? But what is equality for, then? So that we can be equal? But does being unequal mean not doing what we love because it is inaccessible to everyone? Ideas spread over time, change. Is there a trickle-down theory of theory?[12] As they trickle down, they transmute, become new ideas, new subjectivities. The role of identity has been challenged; assumptions about truth have, in certain quarters, evolved. Thought has evolved, transformed, in an ongoing dialogue. Even when people resist new theories, they somehow are changed by these. One cannot underestimate theory, since it is also performative, contextual, dialectical.

12 Judith Butler's critiques seemed incomprehensible in her early career, but now are generally accepted. Unlike money, theory's "clouds" produce rain. On money's clouds not producing rain, see Thomas Piketty, *Capital et idéologie* (Paris: Seuil, 2019).

Chapter 5*

Another dichotomy is the one that happens in art: the difference between art-for-art's-sake (completely cut off from the political — or so it thinks) and the useless as a way to effectuate change in the world — whether through disruption or through a violent jouissance. This dichotomy is perhaps one of those uninteresting paradoxes that fascinate analytical philosophers (like "this statement is false" or "you can't be Nietzschean because then you'd be following Nietzsche" — though surely these too fall under the useless, and in some ways might generate new ways of seeing). Art is fundamentally useless, can be recuperated by capital (e.g., through fashion, which exploits our fascination with the visual). Walter Benjamin was keenly aware of this problem, and saw in Baudelaire the allegory of the complex relationship between the search for novelty and fashion, the flâneur or man of the crowd and the marketplace.[13]

13 See Walter Benjamin, "Paris, Capital of the Nineteenth Century," in *The Arcades Project,* trans. Howard Eiland and Kevin McLaugh (Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1999), 1–26.[xxii]

Chapter 16

Postmodernism continued in the avant-garde tradition of disrupting the social order. Or so it thought. As Žižek rightly said, rather than disrupting the bourgeoisie, Deleuzo-Guattarian writing might inspire the yuppy's new videogame, provide solutions to a challenge in his business model.[14] The newness of art can always be recuperated by capital. Artistic innovation, as Benjamin saw,[15] is internal to capital, in whose logic modern art unwittingly participates. Innovation and artistic genius are relatively new concepts, emerging in the seventeenth century,[16] and reflect professionalization and rational subjectivity, of which Romanticism was yet another expression. If the liberated artist (the *"moderne"* as opposed to the *"classique"* in the seventeenth century, or the romantic against the latter for the nineteenth century, or the modernist versus the Romantic) set free new forms hitherto unseen, the neoliberal artist continues this by converting the artistic machine into an NFT machine.[17]

14 Slavoj Žižek, "The Ongoing 'Soft Revolution,'" *Critical Inquiry* 30, no. 2 (Winter 2004): 292–323.[xxiii]

15 Benjamin, "Paris, Capital of the Nineteenth Century." See chapter 5.

16 Along with the idea of a "writer." See Alain Viala, *La Naissance de l'écrivain: Sociologie de la littérature à l'âge classique* (Paris: Minuit, 1985). [xxiv]

17 An NFT (non-fungible token) is a computer object (a token) authenticated by using a blockchain protocol, to which a digital identifier is attached, which makes it unique and non-fungible.

Chapter 8*

Blake's beautiful sun or "vine filled with grapes," versus the miser's guinea or "bag worn with the use of money."[18] Blake here is consistent with the anti-utilitarian "art-for-art's-sake" aesthetics that would contradict nineteenth-century cultural hegemony. This is because of an emerging utilitarian morality at the time, of which Jeremy Bentham was the head. The beauty of the sun is pure energy; yet not one of some physical nature. Is Blake's sun metaphorical? There is no separation. The sun is warm, it gives light to our starved bodies, and we love it. It is entangled with our aesthetic notions, and we are attuned to its waves (mixing our senses up). A pure pleasure that cannot be reduced to the opposition between body and soul. The soul is lit, warmed by the sun, by its physical properties, and by the beauty it bestows upon our world.

18 "To the eyes of a miser a guinea is far more beautiful than the sun, and a bag worn with the use of money has more beautiful proportions than a vine filled with grapes." Letter to John Trusler, August 23, 1799, in *The Letters of William Blake*, ed. Archibald G.B. Russell (New York: Scribner & Sons, 1906), 62. See the Preface for the discussion of Harpagon.

Chapter 4

At the very origin of philosophy, the freedom required for thought depends on a freedom from work, *argos* (being without work).[19] Much of modern art is also stuck with the same problem, because it has to be integrated into a market. Thus, it carries with it uselessness as an active possibility. While there is no purely useless thing (even Minsky's "useless machine" does something[20]), there is art that taunts the useful that can be found everywhere, and is expressed in multiple ways. Art itself makes a stand as an anti-utilitarian expression of inoperativity. It nonetheless contains questions of class and political economy. With the nineteenth-century figure of the dandy, we have a new possibility: the useless existence, the art of neglect, which is a grand contempt for the mediocre and the useful. The dandy and the artist in one figure, against the useful.

19 Cf. Giorgio Agamben on *argos* in "The Work of Man," in Matthew Calarco and Steven DeCaroli, eds., *Giorgio Agamben: Sovereignty and Life* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2007), 1–10.

20 See chapter 1.

Chapter 2*

Jenny Odell[21] rightly insists that rest and recovery cannot be a sneaky way to continue capitalist productivity. Our time off is a time to do "as we will": that is, free time should not be a way to maximize ourselves in view of utilitarian self-development.[22] What we seek therefore is a leisure that would be available to the masses, and not the reinscription of work (getting off social media to work). But this still falls within the realm of the existing order and assumes that work itself is needed. It's the old dichotomy of socialist productivity that created the eight-hour day versus anarchism's liberatory affects. There is still a command at play, an *archē*[23] that directs us to leisure. An anarchy would be the creation of a common impulse without recourse to an initial command. Anarchy is not chaos but freedom from such command.

21 Jenny Odell, *How to Do Nothing: Resisting the Attention Economy* (New York: Melville House, 2019).

22 Similarly, the focus on wellness and mental health has been completely recuperated by corporations in view of mentally fit workers. Bell's "Let's Talk" campaign, for example. That psychoanalysis has been excluded from the APA (and isn't even covered by some insurance plans) is also a sign that efficiency is the primary goal: psychoanalysis simply takes too long!

23 The *archē* (or *arkhē*) being both origin and prime command.

Chapter 1***

Praise be to the little gaps and blind spots in thought, for they signal human errancy and imperfection. Praise be to differences in footnotes and endnotes, to different standards, and to the illogical processes and redundancies that come out of that, the ones we sort of overlook and think nothing further of. Praise them all because they are there, doing nothing, traces of something that will go nowhere. Praise be to wasted thoughts we have,[24] that fill the space between our important ones, even if they serve no purpose. Praise be to the things we do to appear to be something else, even though these will never be revealed. Praise be to the heart that conceals what is useless,[25] for it tries, strives towards outward appearance: the role, the persona, the destructive one. That errant, inaccessible human heart. Praise be, then go to sleep.

24 Somewhere, like a cat chasing its tail.[xxv]
25 Praise be to the dentists who do the work that no one wants to do…

Intermission

Chapter 19

Les Shadoks say, "pourquoi faire simple quand on peut **faire compliqué?"**[26] = complification → pourcomplification. In Latin:

> **Pro** < *pros* (*proton*); PIE **pre-*, from root **per-* (1) "forward, through" < *peri*
> **Cum** < *sym* ∴ "simple" (not *meta*) => *poloi* (many)
> **Plex** < *plekein, plek-, plokos* (French pli, fold; -ple, -ble, -ploy- etc.)[27]
> **Facere** < *poiein*
> -**tion** < -*sis*[28]
> ∴ **Prospoluplokpoiesis** = PPPP[29]

But, "on peut faire" => Leibniz: "possibile est quicquid potest fieri (seu verum esse)" = "possible is something that can do or be (true)" => potest fieri (δύναται πραττειν) => *dynapraxis*.

> Ex*peri*ence, em*piri*cal, ex*peri*ment = *praxis* (going through or around the threshold or perimeter).
> "Pourquoi…?": Pour => see *peri*
> "on peut faire compliqué": potentiality as *sotēria* (preservation), related to *adynamia* (impotentiality)[30]

The practice of *prospoluplokpoiesis* + *dynapraxis* = poetics of *prospoluplokdynapraxis* => the potentiality of complication => potentiality (or Deleuze's "virtual").[31]

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26 [xxvi]
27 [xxvii]
28 [xxviii]
29 [xxix]
30 [xxx]
31 [xxxi]

Chapter 21

.[32.1]

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1 Theory: writing machines[33] highlight an interior contradiction in language's supposed "clarity." Writing machines taunt this clarity, which is the assumed universalism of language as transmission and representation of ideas (unclear ideas = unclear thoughts); if a machine can generate sense automatically, then language in effect speaks itself autonomously from a thinking subject: language estranges, and clarity becomes an oddity of human understanding. The fundamental notion of clarity is undermined ontologically. Language is self-deconstructive (Derrida), but this doesn't go far enough, because it is still determined the transcendental signifier, even if negatively (thereby generating "supplements," "traces" etc.). Language as machine tears language from context/situation (semanticity) and becomes an autonomous machine generating unforeseen associations and sensibilities — still within the realm of horror, because inhuman. But even there, one must account for this encounter, and so the realm of human language is inescapable. We are humans looking.

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32 See Fabio Akcelrud Durão, "L'Effet des notes," *Critique* 10, no. 785 (2012): 831–41.

33 See Brian McHale, "Poetry as Prosthesis," *Poetics Today* 21, no. 1 (Spring 2000): 2–32; William Winder, "Robotic Poetics," in *Blackwell Companion to Digital Humanities,* eds. Susan Shreibman, Ray Siemens, and John Unsworth (Oxford: Blackwell, 2004), 448–68, and "Le Robot-poète," in *Littérature, informatique, lecture: Lecture assistée par ordinateur, lecture interactive,* écrilecture, eds. Michel Lenoble and Alain Vuillemin (Limoges: Artois Presses Université, 1999), 187–213. See chapter 21.

Part IV

Chapter 22

If we are to elaborate a theory of taunting, we must "tease out," that is to say, to "taunt" a theory of taunting through a heckling, by tickling it, scratching it, by combing it, by drawing it out through useless etymologies, helpless modalities, stupid epistemologies, tempting analyses. To taunt is to mock, to tease, to tease out, to tempt. Etymologically speaking, teasing means to pluck, to tear, to pull apart, to comb.[1] For instance we can comb with a *heckle* (synonym for flax comb).[2] It is remarkable that the 1610 emergence of the modern "tease" or "heckle" is so etymologically consistent as a metaphor of *tezen/taisijan* (pull, scratch) that it matches "heckle" with the idea of combing. And teasing is useful. Tickling is so close to scratching, yet almost opposed (one is gentle, if exciting; the other is painful — scratch my back, please).

1 To taunt: middle French *tanter, tenter,* to tempt or try, provoke. Var. *tempter,* to try, from middle French, *tant pour tant,* so much for so much, Tit for Tat. Latin, *tautus,* fr *tam* "so." *Tempt,* verb, "draw or entice to evil or sin, lewer someone from God's law, be alluring or seductive." Old French *tempter,* Lat. *temptare,* "to feel, try out, attempt to influence, test." The Dutch *tezen,* pull, scratch; Old high German to tease, pick wool. Proto Germanic: *taisijan:* running thorns through wool or flax; to "vex, worry, annoy." As usual, I have consulted the very useful *Online Etymology Dictionary* (amongst other sources such as https://www.wiktionary.org/): http://etymonline.com.

2 This comes from Proto Germanic **hakila* and Proto Indo-European **keg,* hook or tooth.

Chapter 10*

To better understand taunting through modalities,[3] through contingency (aka "tickling"): what might be or not, happen or not; what one can do or not do. In the case of the useful/useless dichotomy, both contain each other. 1) Dialectically, mutually determining and dependent: what is useful exists by contrast with what is useless and vice versa. 2) Contextually: one cannot separate the contingency from the circumstances in which it appears. It is considered useless based on what the context considers useful. This contextuality functions in an enunciative mode. Uselessness and usefulness are thus discursive: similar to contextuality, they are connected to event, to happening, and to performativity ("speech acts"). Finally, 3) strictly modally: a contingent phenomenon, a useful or useless thing that might be otherwise. Let's heckle the infoldings of such modalities, rethink the traditional distinctions between possible/impossible, necessary/contingent, and possible/contingent and impossible/necessary.

3 See chapters 39–32.

Chapter 23

Tauntology: taunting + ontology => hauntology + tautology (+ thaumazology) = t/hauntology. Taunting is *thaumazein,* wonder: it is marvelous, wondrous, cryptic, animalistic, tautological wonderment. *Thaumazein* is Talmud Zane (4) according to "voice typing." What is t/hauntology? Tautology haunts t/hauntology. The ontology of taunting; the ontology of haunting as taunting; Taunting is haunting, ontology of *thaumazein* as taunting, taunting as *thaumazein*, as thaumaturgy(!) — taunting as wondrous, gestural potential.[5] Taunting as potentiality, potentiality haunting. Words are haunted as if they were crypts, thus cryptonomy, according to Abraham and Török. Let t/hauntology from now on taunt ontology, hauntology, tautology even, and let *thaumazology* become *thaumazoology,* those marvelous animals of wonder… you know who you are, *thaumazoölogists!* Abraham and Török: "Beneath the fetish, the occult love for a word-object remains concealed, beneath this love, the taboo-forming memory of a catastrophe, and finally beneath the catastrophe, the perennial memory of a hoarded pleasure."[6]

4 "Gift of God": Zane is the same name as John: "Graced by Yah," or *Yehohanan* (יְהוֹחָנָן), "Yahweh is Gracious." 1 Corinthians 13:11: "Ὅτε ἤμην νήπιος ἐλάλουν ὡς νήπιος νήπιος ὡς νήπιος ἐλογιζόμην ὡς νήπιος. ὅτε γέγονα ἀνήρ κατήργηκα νηπίου" (New International Version: "When I was a child, I talked like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child. When I became a man, I put the ways of childhood behind me.")

5 See Emile Fromet de Rosnay, "Taunting the Useful: Wondrous, Gestural Potential (with Agamben)," in *Phono-Fictions and Other Felt Thoughts,* ed. David Cecchetto (Victoria: Noxious Sector Press, 2016), 37–68.

6 Nicolas Abraham and Maria Török, *The Wolf Man's Magic Word* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986), 22. See chapter 5.[x]

Chapter 9*

What must constitute a key factor of taunting[7] is the question of the orientation of existence in terms of possibility or potential. Taunting depends on that which it taunts, thereby evoking potentiality as both possible and impossible (impotential). Leibniz is possibly a key thinker anticipating the instrumentalism of utilitarian philosophy. Where Leibniz's notion of possible worlds sees events as contributing to the best of all possible worlds, this is a passively received eventuality (we don't have autonomous control of destiny). Utilitarianism on the other hand actively intervenes upon the real with a means-ends instrumental rationality and subject-object logic in view of its own version of the best possible world (usually tied to capitalism), a sort of domination of space, time, and nature. Leibniz proposes that history, things that happen to individuals, singularities that affect entities — however these might be construed — where whatever happens serves a purpose…

7 But also the "virtual useless" (the potential that emerges from the indistinction between the useful and the useless). See the "virtual useless" in chapters 81–91.

Chapter 24

Potentiality: taunting that is haunting the useful with its potential uselessness, its contingency, arbitrariness; one always contains its other might-have-beens, its dead potentials. If you have a set of aesthetic or juridico-political criteria, you lose sight of an object's world. Taunting is a haunting of the useless machine with the possibility of a useful recuperation. Think of Banksy's disruption of the art world (disruption is already a business term): Banksy's disruption conferred greater value to the gesture of the torn artwork. Rather than destroying the art system, the latter managed to recuperate Banksy because the gesture is other than the artwork's aura. Creative destruction is now banalized. Is it impossible to exit the system of value? Ultimately, what is taunting's failure? If it becomes a successful failure, then it is a failure. This is a significant point in Eldridge Priest's book, *Boring Formless Nonsense.*[8]

8 Eldridge Priest, *Boring Formless Nonsense: Experimental Music and the Aesthetics of Failure* (London: Bloomsbury, 2013).

Chapter 8**

… towards an inevitable, "optimistic" destiny.[9] Meanwhile, utilitarianism dares to speak on behalf of others in deciding what is best: society, in a limited sense of the greater good (while overlooking the problems of who decides what that is), becomes the best of all possible words. This speaking-for is retro-causational from a posited future, whereas Leibniz is retro-causational from/to the present: where utilitarianism acts on the present from a posited future, towards a future anterior "will-have-been," optimism in Leibniz acts on the past from the present, seeing what might have been as a multiplicity of possibilities that always eventually leads to the same optimal end, which is the one that will have happened (yet is still indeterminate in its unfolding). What happened, however, carries with it what might have happened as a radically other experience that remains with us just as in the utilitarian.[10]

9 Though there is some validity to the caricature, literary tradition has unfairly associated Leibniz with Voltaire's Pangloss, insofar as Leibniz's thought is much more complex than the facile optimism Voltaire presents. See Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz, *Theodicy Essays: On the Goodness of God, the Freedom of Man and The Origin of Evil,* trans E. M. Huggard (London, Routledge, 1951).

10 Those destroyed by the march of History will forever be remainders like the rubble of History left behind in the storm of progress: Walter Benjamin, "Theses on the Concept of History," in *Illuminations: Essays and Reflections*, ed. Hannah Arendt, trans. Harry Zorn (New York: Schocken, 1968), 258.

Chapter 25

T(h)auntology is Loumille Métros with a lisp: it is a stammering, the "rustle of language." Thauntology is the interruption, the possibility of interruption of the smoothly running machine.[11] The machine's smooth-running joy that is aware that at any moment the machine might break down, but we continue in the joy, the uninterrupted flows of discourse in the beautiful moment, the light and lust of language, or the frenetic impulse that shakes the body like laughter or despair. Where is the magic in this? While the machine might be interrupted, it flows thoughtlessly through speech automatisms. While we express thought, that is, while we use our "tongue," our tongues take over like a machine, and that might break down at any moment; yet while it runs it is ever magical like a field or foliage of tongues wagging and licking the corners of expressibility.

11 Roland Barthes, *Le Bruissement de la langue* (Paris: Seuil, 1984). See chapters 42, 63, 41, and 74.

Chapter 43

Hermes stole Apollo's cows, and Apollo wanted to punish him; yet Hermes seduced Apollo with music and got out of Apollo's ire. He also gifted Apollo with a lyre; you know, that one he carries everywhere. Trickery, theft, seduction thrive at the heart of interpretation, qualities that allow for communicability. Culture, under Apollo's control, is transmitted with the help of hermetic powers gifted as compensation for theft. Apollo's rare gift allows for so much, insofar as the world grows and is populated, and Apollo's realm grows. Hermes is the incommunicable, though… the void that allows communication to happen. Hermes is desire, whim, terrestrial unfoldings of the celestial, the link between humans and the godly. That's why the Neoplatonists saw the mediating daimones between humans and God as "hermeneutic." Art is magical thievery, techniques to convert lead into gold, a hermeneutic art!

Chapter 62

The hermeneutic cannot be reduced to logic. Hermeneutic disciplines prevail when logic reaches its limits, the way philosophy and philology have oscillated between truth and the linguistically arbitrary since at least de Saussure.[12] Aristotle understood that rhetoric must be mastered, *topoï* memorized, for arguments to convince. The *archē* of rhetoric is seduction. Of poetics too. Understanding the way that language works is useful in the armory of the modern philosopher. Ancient philosophers needed rhetoric to convince, the moderns show how we are being convinced. So much is subject to interpretation, psychoanalysis being one direction of that. The natural sciences are also subject to interpretation, less in the facts about the world than in why certain questions are asked in the first place. Method, *met'hodos,*[13] is a road to truth in a country yet to be seen. Hermes haunts and taunts along the way.

12 A whole history of nineteenth-century philology gets ignored if we take Ferdinand de Saussure as the father of the arbitrary sign. Often, major thinkers see more clearly intuitions that were already sensed. The arbitrary sign was implicit in Stéphane Mallarmé, but Alexander von Humboldt and others were also on to it, just asking the different questions.

13 Method is etymologically an "after (or higher) road." It is not one we decide upon before encountering the new country, as in the natural sciences, but one that is always after the fact.

Chapter 42

Readers enthusiastic about the number forty-two in Douglas Adams's *Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy*[14] are "heroes of interpretation," using their powers of divination from a sense of wonder at Adams's universe — attaining levels of complexity according to their mathematical and interpretational skills, dolphins swimming through the open space of the galaxy. Stephen Fry says forty-two's meaning will be kept secret. This taunts readers to continue their chase of the impossible meaning-question to which forty-two is the answer. Formula: reading is the relation of belief and interpretation. The intensity/extensity of interpretations is directly proportional to belief in the text. Taunting's inverse proportionality to information.[15] Taunting, belief, interpretation — *interpretaunting*! Taunting inverts reality, favoring nonsense and stupidity. The more we go into details, the more stupid we become.[16] But the heroic elements of reading are like love, just for one day. A mathematics of reading.

14 The number forty-two is, in *The Hitchhiker's Guide,* the "Answer to the Ultimate Question of Life, the Universe, and Everything," calculated by an enormous supercomputer, "Deep Thought," over a period of 7.5 million years. See Douglas Adams, *The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy* (London: PAN Books, 1979). See also chapter 42.

15 Cf. Norbert Wiener: "After all, it had been Wiener who discovered a precise mathematical definition of information: The higher the probability, the higher the entropy and the lower the information content." Amanda Gefter, "The Man Who Tried to Redeem the World with Logic," *Nautilus,* January 29, 2015, http://m.nautil.us/issue/21/information/the-man-who-tried-to-redeem-the-world-with-logic.

16 Flaubert's *Bouvard et Pécuchet* versus Jarry's 'pataphysics. Here, there's an implicit spectrum: on one end *bêtise* (the stupidity of Flaubert's two heroes), and on the other *nonsense* (Jarry), where *bêtise* is oriented to maximal detail/realism/truth/accuracy, and nonsense is not concerned with accurate detail or realism/"truth." Is this an inversely proportional relation? Further, being stupid can be intelligent, and vice versa. Thanks to Elisa Pagan for the discussion of this!

Chapter 63

Oh Hermes, lover of humans, grant us further readings and Barthesian writings[17]; grant us the slowness of careful attention to the words and phrases, as well as the lightning-fast winged thoughts that arise from them. The world is cold but they say it's heating up. Our universe is absolute zero. Oh Hermes, you stand in support of Prometheus who gave us fire. We are punished. Praise be to you, oh Hermes, who flies around giving us ways to sing. Like Prometheus, you love us. That we are nasty to each other and to Nature, you forgive because you love us like an older brother. Oh Hermes, help us to sing like you and to sing through words actively. Oh Hermes, it's a delicate balance, a tightrope, to hum along in language, fearing interruption.[18] We place all of our trust in you, oh Hermes.[19]

17 For Barthes, active reading of a text is "writing it," making of the reader not a consumer but a producer of text. See Roland Barthes, *S/Z* (Paris: Seuil, 1970), 10.

18 See "Le bruissement de la langue" in Roland Barthes, *Le Bruissement de la langue* (Paris: Seuil, 1984), 93–96. See chapters 25, 42, and 74.

19 This chapter appears as the forty-second chapter ordinally: Oh Hermes! Sixty-three is 150 percent of forty-two and 3 x 21! Sixty-three is also the number of chromosomes in an ass (donkey + horse).

Chapter 41

Interpretaunting is virtual/potential. It creates and perpetuates belief, destroying it at once; taunting acts in a godlike way, the way Douglas Adams taunts with the number forty-two as question. Readers would be priestly, *readerly*.[20] The taunted reader needs to believe in the "structure of signifieds," but ultimately navigates the "galaxy of signifiers."[21] This is a fictional game requiring the belief in a notion in order for interpretation to unfold.[22] Just as the theoretical/experimental physicist needs to believe that there is a "truth" about the universe in order to seek it.[23] This is why multiversal theories exist: their epistemological condition of possibility depends on an idea of totality that is confronted with the impossibility thereof, sort of like the multiplicity of identities, because there's a need to identify and thus to totalize Being, thereby creating infinite differentiation, and intersectionality to deal with its infinite accumulations.[24]

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20 Barthes: the reader (critic) goes from the signifier to the signified as stable absolute, like the priest interpreting the word of God; the *writerly* text undoes this tendency, participates in the multiplication of the signifier. [xxxiii]

21 A "galaxy of signifiers, not a structure of signifieds."[xxxiv]

22 Is this not the same argument as the common notion of "willing suspension of disbelief," which is about ignoring the fact that we are in a medium, but rather as in Coleridge, about the supernatural "Truth" (that is nevertheless centered on the problem of objectivity and realism)? In Barthes' sense, this problem relates more to the signified and the author's expression or intention, and the reader's access to that. See Roland Barthes, *S/Z* (Paris: Seuil, 1970).

23 See Foucault on "errancy" in "La vie: l'expérience et la science," in *Dits et écrits,* vol. 2 (Paris, Gallimard, 1994), 1582–95. Cf. Giorgio Agamben, "Absolute Immanence," in *Potentialities: Collected Essays in Philosophy,* trans. Daniel Heller-Roazen (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999).

24 Due to categories of identification, which tend to stabilize existence into essence. This solution is not to multiply them and suture that with intersectionality, but rather to focus on the irreducible specificity of the historical, the way Benjamin did, for example.[xxxv]

Chapter 18

Multiversal theories are the product of the criteria of reason, where a need for totality, unity, and/or consistency is confronted with the impossibility of these. This antinomy is dialectical: there is no uni-verse, no analytical unity, because of multiplicity that is the product of our incommensurable analytical paradigms, and therefore an infinity of differentiation explodes, by necessity. Such an antinomy is perfectly manifested in deconstruction as *différance*.[25] The parallel between the physics of multiverses and polysemia in literary theory is possible. In the latter, we have the dichotomy of no meaning versus multiple meanings, and literary criticism has learned to appreciate this multiplicity in a different way — celebratory, jubilatory — one more comfortable with contingency. "To interpret a text is not to give it a (more or less justified, more or less free) meaning but on the contrary to appreciate what plural constitutes it."[26]

25 That is, deconstruction still assumes an impossible-to-access meaning/signified. Hence the need for terms such as "supplement," "trace," "différance" etc.

26 Roland Barthes, *S/Z* (Paris: Seuil, 1970), 4. I'd love to explore parallels between the physics multiverse and: a) hermeneutic multiplicity; b) polysemia; and c) plural identity. Karen Barad does it in *Meeting the Universe Halfway: Quantum Physics and the Entanglement of Matter and Meaning* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007), as does Vicky Kirby in *Quantum Anthropologies: Life at Large* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2011). Maybe I will; but then again, maybe not! Also, tauntings: writer//God, readerly priest, writerly open text.

Chapter 42*

Similar to folk etymologies, an obsession with meaning in numbers is a useless adventure that brings pleasure, even delight.[27] That enthusiastic readers will try to explain the meaning of forty-two in Douglas Adams's *Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy*[28] is a beautiful gesture surpassing the means-ends logic, even while it seeks an answer to that ultimate question to which forty-two is the answer (which is itself a question that serves no one, unless knowledge of the ultimate question of which forty-two is the answer will bring something useful). It's an indulgence, and (self-)indulgence these days has been expelled from the academy. The only reason we have such indulgence in the academy is as a runoff from the usefulness of mathematics in training and preparing us for the workforce. But even then, "how," they ask, "is knowledge of parallelograms going to help us pay our taxes?!"[29]

27 A more pleasurable word for *jouissance* than "jouissance" as a translation of the Barthesian-Lacanian "jouissance."

28 In *The Hitchhiker's Guide,* forty-two is the "Answer to the Ultimate Question of Life, the Universe, and Everything," calculated by a supercomputer named Deep Thought over a period of 7.5M years. Unfortunately, no one knows what the question is.[xxxvi]

29 The joke here is, "I'm glad I learned about parallelograms in high school math instead of how to do my taxes. It comes in so handy during parallelogram season." We are far from Vico's "heroic mind" (mathematics, or reading literature for that matter, as a form of heroism).[xxxvii]

Chapter 17*

Reading in the sense of taunting, of teasing out, of combing the strands of writerly filaments, is an annihilation of nothing: a potentiality retaining impossibility, an annihilation that comes from making nothing out of nothing, a descent into the abyss of reading the writerly text (and writing the readerly text — that is, the pretense to readability or determinability, in fact becomes redundant, because the suffixability implies this potential). It is a descent into history, into an event that doesn't produce or express, but rather that virtualizes,[30] that opens up something from nothing: the movement of Desire like Lacan's subject supposed to know that reveals something, a call to mama, but something that is eternally contingent and general; posits a determinability in its indetermination; one that is immanent to itself in its polyvalent unfolding. The pure gesture of writing and the pure gesture, heroic, of reading.

30 See Pierre Lévy, *Qu'est-ce que le virtuel?* (Paris: La Découverte, 1995), a book largely inspired by Deleuze's "virtual," in which Lévy introduces concepts of "virtualization" (versus the West's concept of "actualization"). For further reading, see Gilles Deleuze, "L'actuel et le virtuel," in Gilles Deleuze and Claire Parnet, *Dialogues* (Paris: Flammarion, 1977), 179–81, the text on which Lévy relies a lot. Note that for both Lévy and Deleuze, "virtuel" is a broader term than "virtual" in the cybernetics sense, and closer to the philosophical concept of "potential" (*dunamis*).

Chapter 43*

Is God the original Taunter? God — potentiality, substance, as movement rather than a "subject" — descends into the abyss of potential from nothing. Taunting is descending into Tartarus, letting something be. A self-referring vortex of immanence, a blackhole center around which there swirls a flow of becoming. Gesture: the immanent transcendental empirical like the indefinite pronoun that yet refers to a determinate object (confusion of grammar and life); singular as "a," yet not in any way definite as "the." There's a determinability, an ability to be determined even while its person is indeterminate or indefinite, undefinably infinite, indefinite as such. Barthes's author as interpretaunter/godlike/creator of a universe thus becomes writing in its multiplicity, through its singularity, its vortex. The vortex as a swirling eddy in the giant general river of time, not disconnected, yet absolutely singular in its contingency. I suppose Spinoza's god …

Chapter 16*

The text is a material trace, a "death mask."[31] It is an inverted remainder. There are so many definitions, of which the death mask is one. The text is pure gesture that displays itself, is immanent to itself in an indeterminate way, in its "determine ability," in its attempt to refer to its indeterminate ability, to its "transcendental determinability." The text is the rest or remainder of a taunting, a teasing out, a tickling of gesture, the movement of writing that would seek, would have (always already — future anterior) sought out to express something, that would have revealed a truth or a concept, that which would have been the expression of an intention, but is instead the vector of an immanence. Would have, that is, that which contains its other as "might have been."

This is absolutely *not* a theory of multiple possible worlds.[32]

31 Walter Benjamin: "The work is the death mask of its conception."[xxxviii]

32 Indeed, on the contrary, it is a theory of the singularity of an event, its irreducibility. The multiple possible worlds theories are a modern form of nihilism (in Nietzsche's sense), merely dependent, via negation, on the totality of the one (if the one is impossible, then there must be the multiple, which matches deconstruction in that respect). This secret desire, mathematical, is one way that science replaced God in the West.

Chapter 44

Tauntology. Perhaps a useful frame for understanding Trumpism[33] would be the *carnavalesque* or the anthropological concept of *profanation*[34]: parodic elements bringing the sacred to a profane level, effectuating reversals. Profanation is a way to experience the inaccessible sacred, but with a political dimension: kings dressing up as serfs, and vice versa — common in the Middle Ages. The harder the "coastal educated elites" ("from on high") make fun of these people, the more these pursue this parodic vector. Trump seems to be the leader of this carnival.[35] It was a sort of popular resentment that the "clown-in-chief" weaponized. The function of *personae* (masks, *rôles*) takes on a new meaning: politics as performance taken to a parodic level. That's why so many rightwing leaders are clowns (Bolsonaro, Boris Johnson, and many others). What was normally the domain of the left has been adopted by the right.

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33 And other similar global phenomena: Bolsonaro and his "philosopher" Olavo de Carvalho (compare with Putin and Dugin, but also Trump and Bannon), Bojo (who was his fill officer?), these clown politicians…

34 Cf. Mikhail Bakhtin on Rabelais, in *Rabelais and His World* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1984). See also Giorgio Agamben, *Profanations,* trans. Jeff Fort (New York: Zone Books, 2015). Also: "Profanation is the counter-apparatus that restores to common use what sacrifice had separated and divided" (Giorgio Agamben, *What is an Apparatus? And Other Essays,* trans. Stefan Pedatella [Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2009], 19).

35 Other politicians have adopted this, and the dismayed liberals have no way to counter it. E.g., Rebecca Speare-Cole, "GOP Lt. Gov. Drives Around With Gun and Bible To Protest COVID Restrictions in Idaho as Cases Soar," *Newsweek,* October 30, 2020, https://www.newsweek.com/idaho-protest-coronavirus-video-lt-gov-gun-bible-1543499. One cannot begin to understand this sort of phenomenon if we analyze it at face value, and according to the particular framework of left versus right versus wrong.

Chapter 15

The would-have-been and would-have-done is the contingent, rather than the possible impossible in Derrida. What happened, even if it is forever a trace whose intentionality is impossible — access to which will never be granted as with to the law — is, was, as a contingent (might [not] have been or done) happening, beyond expression or meaning as the exhaustion of possibility. It was as a pure happening, destitute of transcendental description, but real: the adventure of history that refers to nothing but itself as an event, language event signaling the moment and a place, and therefore not at all meaningless or impossible. It happened. That much was never in doubt (claims to the contrary are mystical ones). That which happened carries with it a trace of what might have been (done) otherwise, which for Benjamin involved a happiness to be redeemed, as unfolding history's downfall.[36]

36 Walter Benjamin, cf. the "Theologico-Political Fragment," in *Reflections: Essays, Aphorisms, Autobiographical Writings,* ed. Peter Demetz, trans. Edmund Jephcott (New York: Schocken, 1978), 312–13, for his concept of happiness. See also *The Arcades Project,* trans. Howard Eiland and Kevin McLaughlin (Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1999):

> There vibrates in the very idea of happiness (this is what that noteworthy circumstance teaches us) the idea of salvation. This happiness is founded on the very despair and desolation which were ours. Our life, it can be said, is a muscle strong enough to contract the whole of historical time. Or, to put it differently, the genuine conception of historical time rests entirely upon the image of redemption. (N13a,1, 479)

In the earlier "Fragment," the messianic movement and the messianic order are different. The messianic redeems all life, but profane time/life cannot be connected to the messianic order. This is very similar to Nietzsche, but also quite different insofar as Benjamin offers a messianic redemption. It's happiness, and not melancholy, that characterizes the *Angelus Novus*/Angel of History. See chapter 31.[xxxix]

Chapter 45

Tauntology. Two 2020 memes.[37] One has a Venn diagram with two overlapping circles, "Things that I like to do" and "Things I'm good at," and a third that fails to overlap: "Things that make money." The other, a dialogue between an interviewer and interviewee (the image of a keen young woman): "Interviewer: why do you want this job? Me: I've always been passionate about being able to afford food." These memes implicitly deconstruct the connection between work and talent/passion. Capitalism is so ingrained within us that we assume that our passions ought to be work (and paid well!). In the first meme, the idea that if you work hard at what you love, then it will pay off, is dismantled; in the second, destroyed is the implicit idea that we should be passionate about a shit job, while really work is a bare necessity.

37 Both on Instagram, November 9, 2020: @iwouldpreferno and @freud.intensifies.

Chapter 14

Readers, we enter into a special relationship with what was and would have been or done; can connect to real context, to which we turn our gaze; and history then is this relationship, this dance between past and present, what Walter Benjamin calls "dialectics a standstill,"[38] one that isn't a static one, but rather a dynamic interaction in a "now-time knowability" (*Jetzt der Erkennbarkeit*). One might add, the immanence of its determinability. Each "now" is the now of a determinate knowability. In this now, truth is charged with time until its explosion. It's *not* about the past throwing light on the present or, inversely, the present on the past, but that the image (and that in which it was) is united with the speed of lightning with the *now* in a constellation. In other words, the image is dialectic in immobility. At a standstill.

38 Walter Benjamin, "Dialectics at a Standstill" ("Dialektik im Stillstand"), in *The Arcades Project*, N3,1, 463.

Chapter 46

T/HAUNTOLOGY. Perhaps one day we will be able to partake in passionate adventures that have nothing to do with work or social obligation. The Bolsheviks understood that reducing work hours was for the sake of passion projects. "Free time," does this exist when we are relentlessly told to improve ourselves constantly?[39] For the last two centuries, "free time" itself has become work: holidays have become educational trips to improve your general knowledge, athletic endeavor is only worthwhile if you might become a professional, or as "a fun way to stay fit," and our efforts are praised with "nice work" or "good job"; making art for its own sake is almost incomprehensible. What if scholarly endeavors were passion projects valorized on their own rather than what they might contribute to the economy? What if human creativity was much, much more than this type of servitude?

39 See Jenny Odell, *How to Do Nothing: Resisting the Attention Economy* (New York: Melville House, 2019).

Chapter 79

TAUNTING THE USELESS! When Her Majesty's government puts an advertisement out saying that ballerina Fatima's "next job could be in cyber (she just doesn't know it yet). Rethink. Reskill. Reboot," surely this is the equivalent of taunting the useless. Much in the same way the right has adopted troll tactics. This new right not only doesn't fear recrimination, it invites it. This troll state (like Trump's) acts through anonymous agencies. Some government troll, likely from an arts background (this *is* advertising), is taunting useless art. What sort of trolling? What's the mentality here? Trolling is done from the safe distance of anonymity, as the road-rager's windshield is an invisibility mask. Like Eichmann, these trolls are protected by their employers, and that of utilitarian majority opinion that agrees with the ad — few will defend the arts in the face of practical demands of the economy.

Chapter 113

Natali Leduc has a large collection of useless and obsolete objects. If Marie Kondo says you should ask whether an object brings joy or not, Natali would say that they all bring something (maybe not joy — parting with these objects brings pain). What is the nature of this attachment? They are carefully categorized, and even the categorization expresses an aesthetic side. The attachment to these things is melancholy, in the way one finds a lost toy in the park. As if the child who owned it lost their innocence, or it's our own childhood. An attachment to obsolete objects is an attachment to the past, to the relationship one had with those objects. A child sees in the object a spirit and gets mad at it when it doesn't do what they want it to. The artist in this precise sense is a child.

Chapter 78

The argument in favor of cyber and against indulgent artists following their dreams falls into the elitist and conservative argument that only the best and few, the profitable, should dance (or sing, paint, poetize). Of course, contrary to the 1990s utopian thinking, computer science is a notoriously conservative and ethically bankrupt discipline and profession. Just look at Zuckerberg, a Havard compsci dropout.[40] Yet I am not convinced by the sort of playful rejoinder — "Cyber's next job should be in ballet (He just doesn't know it yet). Rethink. Reskill. Reboot," with a robot in a tutu instead of Fatima in a ballet suit — because the only people who will appreciate it are those who already agree with it, just as with the majority. In this sense, taunting is limited, because it can amount to only some sort of rallying cry for the already converted.

40 I do enjoy such blatant generalizations. They are however based on personal observation. I suppose "liberal" is the more "humane" version of compsci.

Chapter 114

With her Midas touch, Natali's art generates obsolete innovations ("*innovations désuètes*") and unforeseen pleasures. Those who want her to throw things away want to repair her. But she doesn't need to be repaired. She is not a compulsive hoarder, but even they *create* pathways through their rubble. If you want to help her to move homes, don't try to change her, because these objects are entwined with life and art. If we moved all the expensive beautiful things out of a museum, this would not be a problem. These things are "beautiful," "useful" or "valuable," not waste. This is the ultimate question, one about waste, what Nicolas Bourriaud calls "exforme."[41] Natali's work is a challenge to the logic of waste, which is double: on the one hand, it reflects commodity, thus waste, culture; and on the other, it explores the afterlife of that waste.

41 Nicolas Bourriaud, *L'Exforme: Art, idéologie et rejet* (Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 2017).

Chapter 77

The afterlife of waste — whether it is records and record players, printers, empty cartridges, dried tomato vines, old rusty bikes, statues, binders, old instruction books and textbooks, stickers, bits of wood and steel, filing cabinets, 8-tracks and cassettes, their players, speakers, a homemade toilet made with a trunk, etc. — only Natali knows what it means, what it can become. Each object or collection represents a dream.[42] A new "aesthetic" is needed to account for this, one in which beauty is not what it was, where beauty is not a "point of perfection." Rather, beauty is a coming together of objects, a "fidelity to things," to torque Angela Cozea's phrase.[43] The accumulation of useless or obsolete objects goes against the dream of aesthetic perfection. Natali's collection is an anti-aesthetic, and an experience of things, just as it creates a new experience of things, involving participation.

42 Leduc has recently relocated from Maple Ridge, BC, to a farm in a remote part of Eastern Saskatchewan. There, she is building a museum for her works (her obsolete inovations?).

43 Angela Cozea, *La Fidélité aux choses: Pour une perspective benjaminienne* (Québec: Les Éditions Balzac, 1996).

Chapter 39

Let's reconsider the modalities. What is to be used is to be exhausted of its potential. This is the standard conception of potential in science, in the West generally — that is, the misconception of the Greek *dunamis*. This misconception implies we have potential energy that gets expressed, as if we are containers containing liquid to be drained. So, when something is potential, we think its actualization is the expression of that potential. A river is for a power station, wood for chopping, etc. A human is born for such and such a function (to work), and this presupposition is a form of *arkhē,* origin and principle command. This is the sense of possibility, or necessity and impossibility, which is the imperative of exhausting energy. The useful will always attach itself to such a conception, because everything in its purview is submitted to its ouroborean law.

Chapter 78*

Now, institutions should make a better effort to defend themselves. The university should come to the rescue. Yet should it come out with counter ads rebuking the utter barbarity of such an ad? The university is itself a part of this market logic. This is the deepest sort of nihilism, that goes way beyond the logic of the art gallery, the museum, beyond the museification of culture: it promotes the erosion of culture from the education institutions altogether. If the art object became increasingly institutionalized in the modern university, here it is reduced to pure marketability (or lack thereof), even further removed from an authentic connection to history and people. What the university and art schools should do is find novel ways to connect with history and community, not in view of the marketplace, but for the sake of it, because it is beautiful.

Chapter 38

The taunting of usefulness is not only negative from the perspective of magicians of usefulness. It is negative insofar as its expenditure leads to nothing outside of itself, in an excess of unproductive joy. Productivity turned on its head, taunted thus. The key uselessnesses: the modalities of the useless. In modal logic, there are two sets of modalities, the alethic and the deontic,[44] which are closely related. What is at stake cannot be the truth according to modality, but how thought can encounter such truth beyond truth tables based on "True/False," "Yes/No," "Inclusion/Exclusion" in a given class, and other binary sets. This encounter becomes apparent when we think about the useless in its full potential, and the modalities begin to break down. This isn't anything new either, for our thinking beyond the binary of the sign since the emergence of poststructuralism.

44 See chapter 32 for the difference between these two.

Chapter 79*

Why is the ballet dancer named Fatima? Fatima, "daughter of the prophet" Mohammed — the dancer doing the useless task, versus the potentially useful Fatima studying compsci. Who is targeted? The parents of prospective students, clearly. Beyond inclusivity (and a deeply conservative message attenuated by it), there is something interesting in the choice of an Arab name, an immigrant's daughter. What are the subliminal elements? How is "Fatima" being *used*? She is triply used: the minority/art-supporting, tolerant public's reaction is attenuated, as is the immigrant parents's being recognized; and the majority, parochial, anti-immigrant Brexiter is subliminally addressed through association — "not only is my job, my country being taken away, fuck those useless dancers!" Useless art is associated with struggling to integrate, with the decay of the nation, maybe even with terror. But then again, Fatima going into cyber could become a radicalized cyber terrorist.

Chapter 37

Thinking the useless can be done out of the useful machine, and vice versa. The Dewey machine sorting books into categories is useless when it comes to choosing whether *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* is a work of philosophy or of fiction. Categorizing your library books according to groups of friends, as memory (or as syndrome) is useless for our mega archives, but it reflects a different sort of community, dare we even say an authentic one. The museum machine, or art-gallery machine, as a model of archive versus the cabinet of curiosities, museums of wonder, collected by those Renaissance merchants. Such a cabinet is unique, and built by an individual (and contingent) history. A useless list of modalities of the useless might look like this: the possible or potential useless; circular of necessary useless; the impossible useful; the virtual or potential (that is, contingent) useless.

Chapter 80

To Hermes, God of taunting, trickster who unravels the strictures of procedure, stealer of cows, maker of lyres, singer of sweet melodies. To Hermes, for stealing Apollo's cows and for softening his heart with song.

To Hermes who makes me a magician, to Hermes who places me in the factory of 144 and who inspires me to alchemy, to light through the soft and bright numerologies, and to the interpretation of sequences into new thoughts worn comfortably like sensation, like joy.

To Hermes, teaching us to taunt, taunting us to reach, (t)haunting us, making us wondrous and bestowing upon us all the sense of love, just like Uncle Prometheus. Reduction and sublation are your methods.

Ô Hermès, perfumer of our joys in reading, in acting out wooly fictions by the letter, by the thin communications via underworld navigations and scripts of blood and aphorisms!

Chapter 36*

-A. the Possible Useless: can be (useless), as an obsolete object, such as a record player, what Natali Leduc calls "antiquated innovations." Although it can still be played, its very presence highlights the idea of uselessness. In this sense, though, even the recent revival of nostalgia for things vinyl can be recuperated by the record industry, the latter having (re)issued vinyl versions. Its usefulness is perlocutionary in this sense, insofar as it is indirect. It relies on the fetish aura of the vinyl. It can be useful for the capitalist, but useless for the archival because it takes up too much space and weight. It is allowed to be useless, even if it is ultimately in-folded into use, used, and used up. But really, here, we think of it as contingent, insofar as it depends on the context and relative use and perspective thereon.

Chapter 81

-1 What is useful is virtually useless, and what is useless is virtually useful. Both sides are mutually antinomial: contain and depend on each other — a virtual malady of reason. Taunting functions according to the instability of the taunted thing (as useful or useless). Leduc's *Churnatron 1400* is "useless" insofar as it is inefficient at making "bice cream," but it is "useful" because it involves participation and creates joy. It is "virtually" useful insofar as its force (*vis*) is its capacity to generate enjoyment, a force of jouissance insofar as it is in tension with its opposite. The other examples of useless machines in this book — the "ultimate machine," the *Fotofonotron 3000,* Carelman's works, Mallarmé's sonnets, etc. — can even be employed within a utilitarian logic, because the joy they generate can be of benefit to society (if only the bean counters could see it!).

Chapter 35

-B. The Circular or Necessary Useless: Minsky's "Ultimate Machine" presents us with a circuit that is self-enclosed, tautological. It cannot not do/be in modal terms. The necessary is a simple one-eyed monster, the kind of thing a mathematician, logician, analytical philosopher or information theorist would find very clever. Yet even the simple *qua* simple is at least dual since the "simplex" involves a fold. The circular uselessness of the circuit in the "Ultimate Machine" represents the tautology sought in the theory of communication and currency, which is an attempt to stabilize meaning/value. Luckily, as Benveniste saw,[45] the arbitrary relation in language does not exist between signifier and signified, but rather between the sign as a totality and the real. Where the information theorist captures the semiotic dimension, "he" (usually) cannot account for the semantic that opens up to the world, to discourse, to understanding.

45 Émile Benveniste, *Problèmes de linguistique générale*, 2 vols. (Paris: Gallimard, 1966–1974).

Chapter 82

-2 The real trouble begins when we start to get comfortable: that art can easily escape the logic of utilitarianism (reminiscent of arguments in favor of the humanities that actually undermine their autonomy, insofar as they are embedded in the logic of the market[46]: the humanities produce good critically thinking workers, they contribute to the greater good via "critique" blah blah). The "virtually useful" comes back to t/haunt the useless. There is no such thing as a purely useless thing. With the virtual here, oppositions engender productive, even seismic instability, unsettling any notions bound to one institution or another. Art or philosophy (the most useless of the liberal arts) must be funded by taxpayers or by capital (in rare cases, by benefactors/sponsors). And it's extremely rare that art justifies itself. The justification of art as useful or useless that reveals our in-folding (our em-ployment).[47]

46 Cf. Max Haiven, *Art after Money, Money after Art: Creative Strategies against Financialization* (London: Pluto Press, 2018). See chapters 24, 26, 82, and 83.

47 See chapter 87.

Chapter 34

-C. the impossible useful: impossible objects (that cannot be used): Jacques Carelman's monocle with arms is a good example, one of many objects in his catalogue of "*objets introuvables.*"[48] Different to Minsky's machine, which actually functions, the monocle with arms fails to function and cannot be used, and can be only looked at. It is thus more "pure" in terms of uselessness. Of course both the possible useless/useful and the impossible useful create wonderment. The latter is "error" (or errancy) as fun and even jouissance: taking "to err is human" as a commandment instead of a description. However, a critique of the useful through parody is a critique of consumer culture, of the notion of progress, and of utilitarianism that has infiltrated every aspect of human knowledge.[49] So the impossible useful is ultimately useful for the anti-utilitarians, showing just how useless modalities can be.

48 Jacques Carelman, *Catalogue d'objets introuvables* (Paris: Cherche-Midi, 1997).

49 One can actually buy imitations/fabrications of Carelman's works on Etsy or Amazon…

Chapter 83

-3 Each of the poles useful/useless contains the other. This is the story of deconstruction and that of modernity with its banishment and zones of indistinction. That is, the type of dissolving of binaries served a purpose within the context of structuralism and like ideas that are the result of a long history of modern science. But the useful in modernity is tied to capitalism whereas, in premodernity, truth was oriented to theology.[50] Art was "propaganda" (anachronism) for the church, for the glory of God, but also the prestige of the patron. Now that art is subject to the market, its autonomy is different. Its relative autonomy[51] and its heteronomy, and the dialectics between these two.[52] Art's relative autonomy still falls within this dialectic. Art is always in the circuit of capital, even the most radically oppositional art. Art is not autonomous from capital.[53]

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50 I'm referring here to Michel Foucault's distinction between modernity's *lieu de veridiction* being in the market, while in premodernity it was located in theology. See Michel Foucault, *Naissance de la biopolitique: Cours au Collège de France, 1978-1979* (Paris, Gallimard-Seuil, 2004), 33–34 .

51 In Bourdieu's sense of autonomy and of distinction, especially regarding the idea of prestige: modern capitalism is just as much involved in illusion, and capitalism's subjects are subject to obligation rather than being exclusively rational agents. See Pierre Bordiieu, *La Distinction: Critique sociale du jugement* (Paris: Minuit, 1979), and *Les Règles de l'art: Genèse et structure du champ littéraire* (Paris: Seuil, 1992).

52 Involved in a prism, in Viala's sense. See Alain Viala, *La Naissance de l'écrivain: Sociologie de la littérature à l'âge classique* (Paris: Minuit, 1985). See chapter 16, n. 3.

53 Cf. Haiven, *Art after Money, Money after Art.* Myths about art and money are mutually reinforcing; the tectonics of radical imagination (17). See chapter 26. Nonetheless, it is possible to enter into a relationship with art that is sincere and for its own sake (e.g., Natalie Leduc).

Chapter 33

-D. the virtual or potential, that is, contingent useless: can be useless/useful or not. This category is involved in all the other ones, but deserves its own category too.[54] Needless to say, the contingent useless involves a double nature, the possibility to not do/be, which retains its possibility to do/be, and is in the zone of contingency/indistinction. Thinking the duo contingency/indistinction is thinking about the useless/useful in modal terms at once as contingent (can not be) which retains (or "saves") its other possibility integral to itself, and as inseparable. Something useful is conditioned by its potential to not be, just as something useless is conditioned by its potential to be useful — and both have a dependency, their force reliant upon their shadow. The most useful thing in the economy is the most useless thing from the perspective of absurdism (the absurdity of modern existence).

54 Honestly, sometimes the difference between possible and contingent is rather… contingent.

Chapter 84

-4 Modalities of useful-useless: the opposition can be examined according to contingency (the equivocal — might or might not be useful/useless). This has profound implications for problems of determination and autonomy/heteronomy, and it brings with it problems of the tragic and of destiny, which thereby connects it to larger questions of ethics. The useful is tragic to the extent that it is oriented: determinism and the tragic, its shadow, depend on contingencies. Utility and law oriented to its end game: the apocalypse. Citizens of Coventry or New York didn't die in vain. The law is fulfilled when it is broken. Contingency can break the law of law itself, opening up to a world where things might be, or not, where attempts at implementation reproduce the tragic. An ethical world cannot be a world where we follow a command, as in utilitarianism. Ethics thus is impossible.

Chapter 32

Alethic and deontic modalities[55] correspond to each other (what is permissible is possible, forbidden impossible, obligatory necessary, and optional contingent); each of the parts of the quadrants communicates with the others (possible is opposed to impossible, necessary to contingent; but possible communicates with contingent and necessary with impossible). As Leibniz says, "possibile est quicquid potest fieri (*seu verum esse*)" ("possible is something that can do or be true"), and impossible, necessary, and contingent cannot (*non potest*), cannot not (*non potest non*), and can not (*potest non*), respectively.[56] Here the connection to Use becomes interesting, because utilitarianism is a moral philosophy, ultimately. The deontic modes of the human *socius* map onto the alethic modes of the world. That is, the morality of the *socius* frames the real world. Coventry must be bombed because if not, the Germans will not not know Enigma has been cracked.

55 **Alethic modalities:** **Deontic modalities:**

Possible	—	Impossible	—	Permitted	—	Forbidden	
|	×	|	×	|	×	|
Necessary	—	Contingent	—	Required	—	Optional	

56 See Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz, *Theodicy Essays: On the Goodness of God, the Freedom of Man and The Origin of Evil,* trans E. M. Huggard (London, Routledge, 1951).

Chapter 85

-5 Can contingency and ethics be analyzed according to the difference between alethic and deontological modalities? Alethic contingency becomes a deontology of choice (optionality — facultativity); choice implies decisionism, utilitarian or otherwise. Decisionism assumes we are confronted with sets of choices, and that those choices are "equal," and that the "decider" is capable of properly choosing — rational subjects in a "game." Game theory reproduces the Christian aporia of free will: that we have clarity of thought allowing us to decide between options, and then that our decisions can be retroactively imputed to a will. Whereas, the more we understand, the more a single way makes most sense, but once we have gone that way, the other way haunts us, like regret. The lover has no choice but to go that way, but once they realize their folly, they have no choice but to give up.

Chapter 31

In these strange numerologies, taunting us, *Taunting the Useful* becomes a Garden of Eden. Taunting the useful is a little paradise with its rules, sequences, blind spots, cul-de-sacs, closed and open infinities. Such a paradise, which cannot be mapped onto the Eternal Kingdom, is a paradise that can only be subject to time and imagination, and desire. Infinity seizing that which is constrained to 144 will become the natural consequence disclosed by Paradise, in which Infinity is kept at bay just as nature is kept out of our fenced-in gardens. Mapping the Eternal Paradise onto the Earthly[57] means creating law, thereby losing sight of the heavenly in the very process of seeking it. The taunting takes this logic further and turns the law into a game. This Eternal Kingdom sets up the opening to an infinite set of vortices, of swirling eddies, of involution.

57 See chapter 15.

Chapter 86

-6 Experience is what happens to you. For Heidegger, we are "thrown." Subjectivity is heteronomous. Yet we aren't determined or destined. We are open. Contingency says, "what we're thrown into might have been otherwise, and that other remains and sustains you," like the lover Des Grieux in *Manon Lescaut*.[58] Contingency, as what-might-have-been, is also what might not have been. We are capable of being or of not being; but according to Agamben, we also have potentiality to NOT NOT be, which he calls "impotentiality." More than a simple double negative or wordplay, the dynamic complexity of potentiality is like a mirror game (not one of depth): not simply a negative reflection, but a doubling. The potential to *not not* be isn't simply the potential to be: it retains its impotentiality. It (under)stands that potential carries its negativity. And it is a privation "in potential."[59]

58 Antoine François Prévost, *L'Histoire du chevalier des Grieux et de Manon Lescaut* (Paris: Charpentier, 1846). Des Grieux experiences a series of disappointments, and his disappointments are informed by what might have been. That is, his lover Manon never arrives, their union never happens. Likewise, the tragic is a fine line between what is and what might have been.

59 Or maybe, then, Agamben takes us out of the sphere of the deontological optionality? What does this question effectively ask? It states: to be in a state where one must (or is to) decide between one or the other of options, what does this do to the way we construct our perception of reality? Is this still not within a closed set of criteria? See "Bartleby, or On Contingency," in *Potentialities: Collected Essays in Philosophy,* ed. and trans. Daniel Heller-Roazen (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999), 243–71.

Chapter 30

Dominant utilitarian ethics is constitutively destitute, insofar as the most poignant underside of its happiness objective is the "least harm" principle. With happiness expressed at the discrete level, we have a collection of individuals with competing desires as damage control. Within higher-order notions of the common good, it can only be expressed as codes, behaviors of a hypostatic subject, merely based on necessity rather on what might be as freedom. It is the most radical curtailment of anything like desire in Spinoza's sense of *conatus*.[60] The force of an injunction, which characterizes our current time, where speech must be "ethical," privilege must be checked, and the threat of cancellation abounds everywhere, is as close to happiness as a bird in a cage is free. The "least harm" always puts action in a relation of debt, and is a continuation of the rationalist, biopolitical subject.

60 For Spinoza (*Ethics III*), desire produces value, not the other way around: "in no case do we strive for, wish for, long for, or desire anything, because we deem it to be good, but on the other hand we deem a thing to be good, because we strive for it, wish for it, long for it, or desire it."[xl]

Chapter 87

-7 *Use* im*plies* (-ply, from *plex,* fold; thus in-folds, em-*ploys*) in-folding something into action. A tool, made for a specific function, is employed, deployed, and exploited — that is, in-folded, de-folded, and out-folded — and re-ployed. To use something is to en-act, to put something to work — energy (*energeia*). That for which something was made is infolded back into its original idea. A toothbrush is for teeth. Yet[61] a toothbrush can be used to clean the chain and cogs on a bicycle. A tool can thus be infolded into another idea, can attain another telos or purpose, can be repurposed; it can be filed down into a knife for stabbing, or it can be used playfully, such as two toothbrushes lying together in lovemaking, in various sexual positions: cunnilingus or felatio, soixante-neuf, doggy, anal, and facial with toothpaste (or any other signification the toothpaste might have).[62]

61 Cf. Sara Ahmed, *What's the Use? On the Uses of Use* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2019), on this very point, chapter 1, "Using Things."

62 See the "toothbrush sex" meme.

Chapter 29

-12 Socrates makes an analogy with desire as a leaky jar, where pain/pleasure is an inseparable duo: pleasure is like a leaky jar that can never be satisfied.[63] Two men possess many jars. If the proto-stoic Socrates is able to fill his non-leaky jars successfully, and then give them no further thought, this is because the pleasure is one of usefulness. The example used is of food, which merely is there to satisfy hunger, whereas the pleasure-based person with a leaky jar wants the pleasure of food for its own sake, which can only lead to suffering. The hedonist chooses the pleasant life, that includes pain as inevitable. This reminds us of Nietzsche's famous quote from the *Will to Power,* that he'd wish suffering on his friends because then they would endure (which is a strong, anti-stoic statement) and become stronger, live more fully.[64]

63 In *Gorgias,* 493e, 8 to 494a 1. Cf. Lisa Shapiro, *Pleasure: A History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), 19–22. The connection between *Gorgias* (Callicles/Socrates) and Pascal ought to be made.

64 In fact, Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Gay Science: With a Prelude in German Rhymes and an Appendix of Songs,* trans. Walter Kaufman (New York: Vintage/Random House, 1974), 85–86, counter-evokes the *Gorgias* when he asks,

> What if pleasure and displeasure were so tied together that whoever wanted to have as much as possible of one must also have as much as possible of the other — that whoever wanted to learn to "jubilate up to the heavens" would also have to be prepared for "depression unto death"?
> […]
> You have the choice: either as little displeasure as possible, painlessness in brief … or as much displeasure as possible as the price for the growth of an abundance of subtle pleasures and joys that have rarely been relished yet? If you decide for the former and desire to diminish and lower the level of human pain, you also have to diminish and lower the level of their capacity for joy.[xli]

Chapter 88

-8 The object of use is double: it's a thing and it's a purpose — substance and telos.[65] As a substance, it has a particular being-in-the-world or *Dasein*. It has a particular history. Each object lives a particular (unpredictable) destiny. Most objects have a particular telos — for what was the object destined? Heidegger says that telos as purpose is a mistranslation. *Techne* (production) is rather a revealing, a bringing-forth, a "worlding." This means that the substance doesn't have essence, and its use is intelligible by its immanent use. Yet it contains a general idea: like language, it needs a universal aspect for communication to be possible. Objects, like words, contain presuppositions, but they needn't: objects and words can be laid out, strung together to create new uses. Even better, they can be enjoyed differently, as a playful encounter, as a performative unfolding and display.

65 *Ousia,* "beingness." Martin Heidegger, *Hegel's Concept of Experience,* trans. Richard Rojcewicz and André Schuwer (New York: Harper Collins, 1988), 105.

Chapter 28

-13 This is where Pascal can be interestingly twisted from his original purpose. What Pascal taught us is that we must suspect moralists insofar as they look after their souls, so their motivations are guided by selfish reasons. A person who does good is both seeking salvation — using moral good to an end — so there is an extrinsic value in doing good, all the while seeking social validation. The same logic is at play in Socrates as proto-stoic. The secret pleasure of avoiding pleasure for its own sake resembles Pascal's looking after one's soul; it sees life as a means, and still falls within the bounds of means-ends instrumentality. Here, life is a mere support of some transcendental idea, which is effectively absurd and nihilist. Indeed, a profound nihilism is at the origin of Western philosophy, which Spinoza countered with his *conatus* as nature.[66]

66 For Spinoza, ethics is possible only if we follow nature. See chapter 30.

Chapter 89

-9 Use as other-than-given: modalities of useful/useless, or contingency, which breaks with destiny/fate/determinism. Utilitarianism is a form of determinism based on greater good, top-down or higher-order thinking, and law, which cannot properly think the historical, except as "precedent." How do decision, undecidability, etc. play into determinism? There is no such thing as a decision. When you're in a state of undecidability, the choices you make are predetermined by factors beyond your ken. But you decide according to experience and the knowledge thus acquired: the *pathei-mathēsis.* Authentic experience depends on the singular. Only that which is personally experienced has the stamp of authority, and this cannot be determined beforehand. When you come to a certain wisdom about what to do — where you were hitherto unable to act — this is because you know more through having experienced it personally (no universal knowledge can determine this).

Chapter 27*

-14 So we have use to another end. Christians do good in order to be recognized or saved; the proto-stoic is ascetic in order to free their soul from the bonds of pain, yet there is a higher attachment (similar to that which we see in Buddhism), to the transcendental. It still falls within the grasp of the same attachment, except as riveted to the non-material, through the avoidance of fleshy pain. Stoicism, for Schopenhauer, is a sedative to life.[67] Further, a subjective distance with respect to one's own experience, and regardless of Stoic or Nietzschean action, becoming the subject of a will, placing one in perpetual debt to the demand (synonym for *conatus*). A "demand" in Spinoza's sense accords with nature moving towards something (even if thrown in affect, passion), like an adventure, not a lack or impossibility to which we are indebted.

67 Arthur Schopenhauer, *The World as Will and Representation,* vol. I, translated by E.F.J. Payne (New York: Dover, 1969), 87. See also Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Gay Science,* trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Vintage, 1974), 33-34.

Chapter 90

-10 There is no universal knowledge when it comes to human affairs (this is a universal statement, says the analytical philosopher … deal with it). The great political challenge of our times: I made a decision because I had no choice. This is not paradox or word play. It means that we have to think about decisions differently. To decide is to cut away something, not to select from two or more options. To decide is to take a certain road because of what you know, because of a certain complex of factors involving intuition, reason, skills (technique/technics), experience,[68] emotion. Even when you know that something is wrong and you do it anyway, this is because there is something about what is right that isn't adequate to your knowledge, that has its determinations, that reflects your particular signature. It is what you are (in)capable of.

68 Aristotle, *Metaphysics,* I, 1, 981a, 1–5.

Chapter 26*

-15 While a certain Stoicism and Christian bad faith (in Pascal's description) are quite different, they do share the same sort of means-ends relationship to life, and neither of them are able to fully accept life as irreplaceable history, because they are based on another life always to come, never in the now. Is this based on a fear of life? Or Nietzsche's nihilist's life-hatred, resulting in the creation of "meaning" with the "hyperbolically naïve" human at the center of the universe? Indifference to events: "[Letting the event happen] is a form of impossibility that knows that events, perfect in themselves, are ultimately indifferent, and that only the individual's acceptance and use of them is important. In this way, events are separated from the subject, and the unity of the event and the one to whom it occurs, which constitutes the adventure, is broken."[69]

69 Aurelius, cited in Giorgio Agamben, *The Adventure,* trans. Lorenzo Chiesa (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2018), 74–75.

Chapter 91

-11 Does a vicious person/character have a full view of things? Maybe they were always mistreated by authority, by family? The social order is oppressive for them, so their actions cannot be separate from that. "Free will" assumes that the transgressor makes a decision voluntarily. This Christian conception, based on original sin,[70] makes transgression imputed to will, and that way the absurdities of the omniscient can be covered up. Omniscient God, omniscient individual subject with the magnificent capacity to rationally follow through on transgressions. All of this enters into a circuit of "the greater good," where agents act according to a larger social sentience. The social is a form of violence that expects full awareness, and punishment is weighed above all according to larger questions, beyond individual stories. This problem maps onto the problem of use insofar as use must match the greater good.

70 Cf. Socrates, cited in Giorgio Agamben, *Karman: A Brief Treatise on Action, Guilt, and Gesture,* trans. Adam Kotsko (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2018): "human beings are not responsible for their actions because they have willed them; they answer for them because they were able to carry them out" (31). According to the Socratic maxim, every evil action is actually ignorance, because no one "does evil voluntarily" (*ouden hēkon hamartanei;* Protagoras 358b)," ibid; Socrates's motto (*ouden hekōn hamartanei,* "no one does evil voluntarily" (34).

Part V

Chapter 34*

Examples of writing machines: 1) writing machines that make up bullshit theory-speak; 2) useless machines; 3) language, automatic writing; 4) constraint machines such as OuLiPo and sonnets; 5) apparatuses of power: a. History and archive; b. education creating ignorance; c. medical systems that perpetuate illness and write on the body; d. carceral systems that create crime; e. law that creates illegality. These random examples demonstrate the various limits of language. Bullshit language that puts to test so-called clear language; language that cannot do anything (useful); language as arbitrary; language as speaking itself, displaying its self-unfolding; language as power (rhetorical, institutional–formal–legal); language that cannot (can not) reveal, as a death mask or, conversely, language as performative; language as horror of the unsayable, the unspeakable, of the impossible possible. Language as taunting, that is poking, teasing the limits of expression, even (as with BS machines) unconsciously.

Chapter 55

Bullshit language generators[1] function as a sort of self-taunting, as they unwittingly taunt the very idea of communicability, that is, all language. These gaffs display language itself. That one can make sense of bullshit language is the sign of this display of language's incapacity to be present to itself: that language refuses to be bullshit. There is a fear of language's excess that is not avowed by those accusing philosophers of generating bullshit. Yet think about it: if I can make sense of bullshit sentences, what does that say about language's capacity to make sense? Its very capacity to make sense is the very undermining of language's capacity to make sense. That anything can make sense points to language's infinite capacities, while the assumption of singular sense is troubled. Language needs a common or general (or universal) medium, yet seeks to express the singular.

1 E.g., Andrew C. Bulhak (eyerolling pseudonym), "On the Simulation of Postmodernism and Mental Debility using Recursive Transition Networks," Monash University, Dept. of Computer Science Technical Reports, 96/264 (1996): https://www.elsewhere.org/journal/wp-content/uploads/2005/11/tr-cs96-264.pdf., or Richard Dawkins (that paragon-Harpagon of intellectual curiosity), "Postmodernism Disrobed," *Nature* 394 (1998): 141–43. These really aren't worth our detailed attention and are merely examples of an ideology of clear language that is dominant (yet the order of things feels it needs to fight "obscurity"). They also confirm the idea that you are stupid when you think you're being clever, and vice versa. See, I'm taunting you, reader, to read them. See also GPT-3 by OpenAI, a machine that can write amazingly convincing paragraphs using predictive text. Recently Eleuther has tried to outdo GPT-3. That last sentence was written in May, 2022. Now we have GPT-4, and the warnings not to go further.[xlii]

Chapter 89*

What does the sonnet machine do,[2] ontologically, that is? The sonnet has rhythms, rhymes, and has lines to match those rhymes. These characteristics mean that the sonnet's sonority has a specificity. The sonnet "rings" — this is a meaning in the word "sonnet" (in French, "ça sonne"). When Mallarmé says that the rhyme of a sonnet is, like the *ptyx,* an "Aboli bibelot d'inanité sonore," for which the "Néant s'honore,"[3] he means that the sonnet is a nothingness machine. While we apply this broadly to language, the sonnet offers a privileged disjunction of form and sense. The sonneteer has to submit expression to form. There is no Idea, or the latter doesn't remain intact once forged into sonnet form. Here, then, the sonnet machine is a self-generating machine, and if you believe language is only about information and ideas, then you likely don't like poetry.

2 It has fourteen lines broken into an octet (of two quatrains) and a sestet. Rhyme schemes have varied over the last 800 years, but typically rhyming abbaabba for the octet, and cdcdcd, cdecde, or cdccdc for the sestet. Since the Renaissance, the common French sonnet has verses of twelve syllables (Alexandrines), but the original sonnet had various lengths. Petrarch's sonnets will have between eleven and fifteen syllables per line. This lack of regularity was retained by the English, which doesn't use syllable count for meter. Rhyme has always been useful for memory. You really should read chapter 5 above attentively. I really doubt you have.

3 "Abolished trinket of sonorous inanity," for which "Nothingness honors itself." Did I mention you should see chapter 5 above?

Chapter 90*

There's a Calvin and Hobbes comic in which Calvin says he's enjoying academic writing because he can make up sentences such as "the dynamics of interbeing and monological imperatives in Dick and Jane: a study in psychic transrelational gender modes." As usual, Bill Watterson is being a good prophet here: the dynamics are potential, and the being between (inter) Dick and Jane contrasts with an imperative for monological speech (as opposed to Bakhtin's "dialogical," which allows for irony and double consciousness[4]). Of course the dynamics of interbeing are psychic! What Aristotle called "psyche" is the soul, which is potentiality (synonym for *dynamis,* from which we get "dynamic"!). The gender modes (or modalities, their possibilities/potentialities of doing or being) are transrelational, in that their dynamic enters into a relation that "crosses" any simple relation of discrete agents, no longer intact because of transformative dialogue.

4 It would be a lot easier if we simply used "monologue" and "dialogue." Cf. Mikhail Bakhtin's theory of the "dialogical" in *Dialogical Imagination: Four Essays*, ed. Michael Holquist and trans. Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981.), since often the transition from noun to adjective can create impediments to clear thinking. The monological speech could also be Dick's "phallogocentric" speech or writing (after Derrida), in that bad "academic writing" stands in for what should be stable, authoritarian ("authorized") discourse (who has the authority to speak, to "sign"?). Dick and Jane, the teaching of language in the "Dick and Jane" series, the gendered notions between these two characters, and Calvin's book report, would make for a great master's thesis.

Chapter 91*

While it's valid to say that OuLiPo's[5] excessive formalism is destructive of historical specificity, if everyone did the same thing, the world would be boring. The distant formalism of modernity — a product (the being "without content") of aesthetic criteria that have dominated since the seventeenth century — is perhaps at its acme in OuLiPo, where any link to the conditions of production, the history of the author or their situatedness, is denied. Nevertheless, history plays out in this ahistory: the criteria of the aesthetic judgment are the relatively recent development of art dominated by rationalism attaining to universal criteria. Still, the raw experimentation of OuLiPo that opens up new potentials is an excess that breaks down the utility of the literary. A certain magic of the literary, its excess potentiality, itself breaks down the literary institution, and in that way becomes a "house in flames."[6]

5 **Ou**vroir de **L**ittérature **Po**tentielle ("*workshop of potential literature*"): literature that is made through constraint, often mathematical. For instance, George Perec's *La Disparition,* a detective novel whose disappearance is double: a case about missing Anton Voyl, and a missing character ("e") of this lipogrammatic book.

6 Agamben: "it is only in the burning house that the fundamental architectural problem becomes visible [and] art, at the furthest point of its destiny, makes visible its original object."[xliii] Agamben demonstrates that many works of art, such as pop art or the readymade, challenge the institution of art and the museumification of everything through the criteria of the aesthetic judgment, has destroyed art's connection to its "origin."

Chapter 92

All language is (en)code(d/ing).[7] Code is semiotic, involving a signifying system. A sonnet has both "langue" (say, standard language with its rules) and poetic form (lines, rhymes, rhythms, meter, stanzas): a double encoding — of syntax and line-breaks (*versurae*), of constative meanings and rhyme-resoundings (the first of eight rhymes resounds seven times), of sentences and rhythms. "Code" is itself an ambiguous term, at once "encoding," a conversion of information into a system, and a proper system unto itself. The "raw" information was previously itself in systems: words and phrases used by the sonneteer, part of a *langue-système* (say, all the readings the sonneteer did), are converted into a double *langue*/sonnet-system. If the sonnet is an obstacle to conversion from one system to another, its own system that disturbs any notion of conversion is a god-system that must be respected — in its very uselessness at conversion.

7 This is an "é-vidence": what can be seen and is obvious. But, what is seen might evoke that which is there but not obvious: see chapter 5. Meillassoux: "un procédé de cryptage interne au *Coup de dés*. Ce procédé vise à la détermination de 'l'unique Nombre qui ne peut pas être un autre,' évoqué de façon énigmatique dans le poème. Nous affirmons donc que le *Coup de dés* est codé, et que le déchiffrement du code est un élément nécessaire à sa juste compréhension."[xliv]

Chapter 93

When Mallarmé says in the "Observation relative" to his *Coup de dés* (that paragon of free verse) that he is not disrespecting old meter, merely dispersing it, Quentin Meillassoux's idea that Mallarmé simultaneously respects traditional meter and free verse doesn't go far enough. A sonnet itself contains the sort of dispersal in the *Coup de dés.* In his insistence on the disposition of words on the page, and on the rhythm of the text (its accelerations and decelerations), and his saying that this has always been the case, is Mallarmé not highlighting something originally available to poetry? If poetry is, as Agamben observed, "the possibility of enjambment," then the verses that both connect and disjoin have this inherent synaptic play in them, insofar as the synapse is at once joining and disjoining — or as the Western tradition translating Heraclitus would say, a "conjunctione oppositorum."[8]

8 Meillassoux: "la question est bien de savoir si la poésie *est dissociable ou non d'une opération de compte,* que son unité soit celle des syllabes ou de tout autre chose."[xlv] The real question here is not whether the counting itself is the crux of the matter, but rather this question of turning, of *versurae* (from which we get "verse"). Agamben's idea of the "possibility of enjambment," in *The Idea of Prose,* trans. Michael Sullivan and Sam Whitsitt (Albany: SUNY Press, 1995), 39, which develops something he had been working on at least since *Stanzas: Word and Phantasm in Western Culture,* trans. Ronald L. Martinez (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1992), where he discusses Heraclitus's idea of the "synapse," of *ta adynata synapsai* ("a putting together of impossible [rather: impotential] things," 139), wonders at the problem of potentiality rather than a sort of neo-Pythagoreanism that betrays Meillassoux's philosophy.

Chapter 69–1

A new topos in the porn industry (a "pornochresis" machine): a husband-and-wife team monetize their sexual activity, converting it to use. They are both faithful and pornographical, transgressive and conservative. They are exclusive (don't have multiple partners) and generate income from this. It is "pornography" in that it "writes that which is sold/purchased."[9] Of course, we only see the woman's face and body, and the man's presence is a substitute for the viewer, insofar as he wears a Steadicam on his head and "we" (most likely males) see what he sees. Far from generating new subjectivities (as Foucault proposed we do, by seeking new articulations and acts), this reinforces established ones: the female body available to the pornaesthetic male gaze. Their activity has hardened into spectacle, and what was once directly lived becomes a representation, the alienation of the social sphere mediated by images.[10] [11]

9 The ancient-Greek *pornē,* prostitute, was such insofar as they (usually slaves) were "sold," and *pornē* < *pernanai,* "to sell." A brothel was a *porneion,* a place of "sold ones." The emphasis here is on the selling. Strictly or etymologically speaking, prostitution is but an example of selling. A pornochresis machine is thus a "use-of-selling" machine. Pornography and prostitution are today merely the obscene Other of capitalism: an unavowed thing which constitutes day-to-day social relations based on use.

10 Was it ever really directly lived, though? Guy Debord, *La Société du spectacle* (Paris: Gallimard, 1967).[xlvi]

11 See chapter 59 for the connection to experience.

Chapter 70–1

For ancient Greeks, fellatio was considered offensive and therefore required the services of a prostitute (male or female). No equivalent taboo for cunnilingus is known. "Mutual simultaneous oragenitalism" has very little history, but traces of it are found in ancient Greek and Roman illustrations, and a Hindu temple statue. "Soixante-neuf" is perhaps a number-symbol of the useless *par excellence,* for no procreation will come of it. The yin-yang symbol doesn't quite apply, since *soixante-neuf* is open to any kind of (gender, genital/orificial) combination; nor is it strictly speaking an opposition, but an open-ended complementarity. It doesn't have the neatness of yin and yang. Sexual pleasure, biologically speaking, is said to increase the chance for procreation, but biology often has spandrels and is not always "Panglossian." The *soixante-neuf* spandrel machine taunts the useless: useful for pleasure, pornography, it can be recuperated into the useful, taunting.

Chapter 96

The original *Dumbo* (and I suspect Tim Burton's 2019 version, too) is an allegory of usefulness. Dumbo's ears make him subject to mockery, but ultimately, they are useful in the circus because he can fly. His quirkiness becomes a distinctness. What the film says is, "don't just celebrate your uniqueness, turn it into something that will make you a lot of money." Dumbo's uniqueness, validated by the crowd, ultimately integrates itself into the system. It's ok to be different, as long as Dumbo develops his "human capital."[12] An alternative film (better: sequel!) would show how Dumbo's newfound fame is unsatisfactory and then, according to another trope, show how he finds a way to give meaning to his existence. How different this allegory is to Kafka's "Fasting-Artist,"[13] who is also a circus creature, but one whose uniqueness is no longer transmissible (the death of tradition)!

12 Foucault, *La Naissance de la biopolitique*.[xlvii]

13 Or "Hunger Artist." Franz Kafka, *The Metamorphosis and Other Stories,* trans. Donna Freed (New York: Barnes & Noble, 1996).

Chapter 97

The "Fasting Artist" is a posttruth/postcritique[14] prophecy: its hero performs in a cage for curious onlookers, who at one time were wonderstruck by his fasting (alas, the age of the fasting artist is passing). He is attended by teams of watchers, usually butchers, who make sure he isn't sneaking in food. Despite such precautions, most are convinced (even some of the watchers themselves) that the hunger artist is cheating. He ends up in a circus, neglected. A complex allegory for the state of truth today, with an off-course "hermeneutics" of suspicion, leading to "critique running out of steam,"[15] old truths disappearing, the value of which is now intransmissible (such is Kafka's fiction an allegory for the impossibility of tradition, a story of the literary itself), and the old institutions, themselves threatened with neglect and indifference, in need of new approaches to justify their existence.

14 "Postcritique," *Wikiwand,* https://www.wikiwand.com/en/Postcritique.

15 Bruno Latour, "Why Has Critique Run Out of Steam? From Matters of Fact to Matters of Concern," *Critical Inquiry* 30, no. 2 (2004): 225–48.[xlviii]

Chapter 98

The old-school academic doing intrinsic (a.k.a. useless) knowledge is like the fasting artist, neglected by the crowd, relegated to the section of the circus dedicated to animals, and there, the crowd mostly looks at the dazzling tiger. The university has evolved into a spectacle where its unacknowledged criterion is popularity. Kafka's loss of tradition, the inability of transmitting old ways of knowing to an audience increasingly captured by new spectacular commodities. In this consumerist logic, where knowledge is an unredeemable commodity, what was once a sacrificial process (fasting) has become unlivable. Having and not having, their relation to the body, have been forever altered, and the fasting artist becomes a mere curiosity until he withers away. Knowledge as spectacle, as that which cannot ultimately be consumed: in a posttruth context, we can never fully possess experience, which has become spectacular in this consumer dynamic.

Chapter 99

Lectio facilior: if alchemical texts require a cipher and a code, this is (an) "easy reading."[16] Yet I'd argue that *interpretaunting* offers a different approach. If the text contains hidden mysteries behind complex formal apparatuses, removing the latter destroys the delicate balance of the work. The object was beautiful with the Veil, and removing the Veil takes away its beauty, and the thing concealed loses its original form.[17] However, what if there is no Cipher? What if the complex formal apparatus is a pretext for meanings that don't exist? What if a hermetic text contained only inanity at its core?[18] Yet the reader still needs to believe there's meaning at the core, a mystery to be solved. This mirrors the writing of the sonnet: the sonneteer needs to believe in the Notion, that the Notion will arrive, in order for the movement to happen.[19]

16 According to Giorgio Agamben in *The Fire and the Tale,* trans. Lorenzo Chiesa (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2014), 125, etc.

17 Agamben, *The Fire and the Tale,* 129: "The esoteric sins against beauty…" Cf. Leo Strauss, *Persecution and the Art of Writing* (Glencoe: The Free Press, 1952).[xlix]

18 Such as Mallarmé's, in the *Sonnet en X,* with its inane vessel, the *ptyx*? *Sonnet en X:* see chapters 5, 89, 93, 110, and 123.

19 "Épouser la Notion" ("To Marry the Notion/Concept"). Stéphane Mallarmé, *Œuvres complètes,* vol. I, ed. Bertrand Marchal (Paris: Gallimard-Pléiade, 1998), 1067–68.[l]

Chapter 110

The history of form is entangled with hermeticism. Since the seventeenth century, there has been an excessive emphasis on criteria of form in order to reach the aesthetic "point of perfection." These criteria of aesthetics hit a crisis in the twentieth century with the avant-garde, the ready-made, kitsch, pop art, etc., which challenged the institution of art. The crisis had already peaked in movements such as Symbolism. Mallarmé was very conscious of the tension between form and content, particularly in sonnets. Essentially, form got in the way of poetic inspiration: for how can your integral Idea, your potential, remain intact in its elaboration through constrained poetic form? The solution to this was homeopathic: focus on form and allow language to unfold itself. On the one hand, form conceals mystery, gets in the way of *Mystery;* on the other hand, form creates mystery, enfolding itself.

Chapter 111

So many interpretations of the dynamic between content and form have arisen in the last hundred and fifty years. These are inevitably connected to the concept of use. If we decipher the Hermetic text, then form was a mere means in the composition, and the form Falls away to reveal its meaningful core. In which case language is merely instrumentalized, reproducing the traditional model of communication as information transfer. If writing is seen as going into the dark, into the forest, as improvisational, then it surpasses language as mere means. Language becomes a way of self-discovery, as Marguerite Duras describes it. For why would you want to write if you already knew what you wanted to say?[20] While the historian or the scientist already has something to say, the writer has experiences through writing as gesture. The self transforms through this process of writing.

20 Marguerite Duras, *Écrire* (Paris: Gallimard, 1993):
Ça rend sauvage l'écriture. On rejoint une sauvagerie d'avant la vie. Et on la reconnaît toujours, c'est celle des forêts, celle ancienne comme le temps. Celle de la peur de tout, distincte et inséparable de la vie même. On est acharné. On ne peut pas écrire sans la force du corps. Il faut être plus fort que soi pour aborder l'écriture, il faut être plus fort que ce qu'on écrit. C'est une drôle de chose, oui. C'est pas seulement l'écriture, l'écrit, c'est les cris des bêtes la nuit, ceux de tous, ceux de vous et de moi, ceux des chiens […]. (28–29)
L'écriture, c'est l'inconnu. Avant d'écrire on ne sait rien de ce qu'on va écrire. En toute lucidité. (64)
Si on savait quelque chose de ce qu'on va écrire, avant de le faire, avant d'écrire, on n'écrirait jamais. Ce ne serait pas la peine.
Écrire, c'est tenter de savoir ce qu'on écrirait si on écrivait — on ne le sait qu'après — avant, c'est la question la plus dangereuse que l'on puisse se poser. Mais c'est la plus courante aussi.
L'écrit ça arrive comme le vent, c'est nu, c'est de l'encre, c'est l'écrit, et ça passe comme rien d'autre ne passe dans la vie, rien de plus, sauf elle, la vie. (65)[li]

Chapter 122

Writing is the suspension of time: taunting time, the teasing of language, the drawing out and the unfolding of the unforeseen, the unpredictable. Writing is improvisation, even if a notion and particular practices of writing proceed the improvisation. Writing comes from the past, moves to the Future, a future that is only imagined by what has been. Writing tickles language, insofar as it contains otherness, as it carries the unknown. The Impossible possible, further: not not possible. Writing is on the threshold of life and death, insofar as it gives life and newness, and carries a remainder that is unforgettable even while it is forgotten and inaccessible. This is how writing taunts all the time, taunts time, its remainders, its stillborn, as much as its loss and arrival. The mystery at the core of text is a pretext for the joy of the unfolding.

Chapter 133

The *lectio facilior* (easy reading), based on the idea that there is an idea. What if there is no idea? What if we have no idea, despite our Orphic desire to descend into Tartarus to redeem the idea? On the one hand, the reader wants an idea, wants the reading to be easy, does not want to have a hard time understanding, does not want to be adrift. That's why a cipher is needed for decipherment because all texts must have a purpose. On the other hand, the writer has an idea. Or maybe not! Maybe all the writer wants is just to write, like a child wants to play, or a dancer dance, in purposeless "purposivelessness." We have such a hard time imagining such a process today, because even child's play is part of "human capital," that is, development in view of productivity.

Chapter 144

Some might argue it is a privilege to be able to write for the sake of writing.[21] Particularly if one is an academic being publicly funded. Those public funds should be put to better use! What Indulgence! Writing books should benefit everyone, not just the writer! Writing for the sake of writing is indefensible. I won't bother with counter-arguments. The only thing worth noting here is that this is yet another example of taunting. For in a sense, all writing is useless, and writing for the sake of writing is but an index to that. Will society directly benefit from the work of the historian any more than from that of an experimental physicist exploring recondite questions? We in the social-welfare state have an enormous debt to the taxpayer! What is a truly subversive act today, when everything is folded into a utilitarian logic?

21 Or "publish to publish (or perish)." See chapter 17.

Chapter 105

Ethics cannot be a code to follow, a higher-order principle, as in utilitarianism. If this were the case, we would merely be following orders. Utilitarianism has to confront the authoritarianism that is foundational to its "ethics." In this specific sense, utilitarianism is antithetical to ethics, anti-ethical. Ethics implies an open relation to the other,[22] and this relation cannot be open if it depends on presupposition or prejudice. The law is presuppositional insofar as it predetermines relations. The law of the greater good is the law of submission to the greater good. Who determines what is the greater good? Even the left must confront this problem, just as the church failed to do before. Ethical, open relations are always threatened by convention, by precedent, and by codes that presuppose. The law precedes, forms the subject, determines what will have been, rather than what might be.

22 Please (don't) interpret this as a Levinasian–Derridean "Other" to whom we are "response-able."

Chapter 106

The law comes from what was (alternatives reduced to impossibility/interdiction, possibility/permission) and what ought to be (necessity/obligation), forgetting what might have been (otherwise, that is, contingency/optionality). Law emerged out of violence and the primal scene was forgotten, is continually forgotten, which means that it is continually maintained as a virtual force. Always now, law makes us violent, more than potentially so: constitutively so. What sits outside of it is to be forsaken: the adulterous lover renounces their lover; both are foretended and presupposed by the law of transgression, out of which emerges shame and another betrayal in faith to the first betrothing. Anything immanent has lost its pure space of being. The relation's suspension of law was but a momentary gesture of freedom, an open space that now quickly closes up as soon as it was opened. Taunting of law.

Chapter 107

The taunting of law is a reciprocal relation. Law taunts, subjects taunt law. Even the suspension of law is a taunting of law. Thus, law is total, and all attempts to exceed its clutches are damned from the get-go. Taunting the law is exposing law's virtual force. Which direction does this go in? Law is future-bound insofar as it seeks to prevent or anticipate, yet it creates that which it prevents, provides the conditions of possibility for that transgression to come. It is apocalyptic precisely in this sense. Any attempts to enforce the law only strengthen the arrival of the reprobate. Taunting exposes, but can taunting do more? Can it create another space outside of the law? The promise of a future joy maps onto the promise of betrothal, the conjuration and the oath. And the promise comes from the past. Taunting can undo.

Chapter 54

-1 A utilitarian usefulness (or uselessness) can be critiqued from the perspective of the absurd or from that of ethics and history (the way utilitarianism is destructive of individual experience, or how it falls under the hegemony of capital and neoliberalism).[23] Likewise, an avant-garde useless can be recuperated by individuals seeking to think past current models, or in typical contemporary fashion, the uselessness of knowledge can "train" citizens of democracy, and in Ordine's logic (following Flexner) can be indirectly useful. Knowledge might be useless in instrumentalist terms, but it enables future leaders the ability to exercise their minds. This is the same thinking as with mathematics being taught at the advanced level: few will apply these techniques in everyday life, but it teaches us to think logically (although, on the other hand, there are some destructive consequences, such as creating too many logical positivists).

23 Use and tourists of life; the expropriation of experience; consumption; the modern subject/Christian subject.

Chapter 56

-2 A tourist of life (or love — of experience) is incapable of experiencing things firsthand; experience is not theirs, but rather an object that they seek to appropriate or to reject. Foucault (amongst others) tried to highlight the genealogy of this, with his work on the hermeneutics of the subject/care of the self.[24] There are three principle problems: 1. The question of will, the imputation of action upon that will, starts with the early Christians, but gets its full articulation in the Stoics; 2. The Stoics created a distance between the subject and personal experience. The subject, henceforth separated from their own experience: all becomes a set of decisions about tasks, and not life according to our historical situatedness. 3. When we must care for our afterlives, all our actions have to be in view of redemption, one that comes in some distant future.[25]

24 This was during the last years of Foucault's career, in works such as *L'Herméneutique du sujet: Cours au Collège de France, 1981-1982* (Paris, Gallimard-Seuil, 2001).

25 While Paul and the Jewish tradition saw redemption in every single moment, the new Christian faith sees this as a distant apocalypse where a "real state of emergency" is no longer possible. In this situation, our entire lives are directed at some distant outcome, and we no longer live in a Now-Time (*Jetztzeit*). This isn't necessarily some idealized time of messianic paradise, but simply being able to live our lives as ours. See Walter Benjamin's "Theses on the Philosophy of History," in particular thesis VIII, in *Illuminations: Essays and Reflections,* ed. Hannah Arendt, trans. Harry Zohn (New York: Schocken, 1968), 257.[lii]

Chapter 61

-3 The three factors (the will, the distance, redemption) are in play today, insofar as our habits are imputed to our will: the theme of selection as consumers, overconsumption attributed to will, our experiences as separate and, as consumers, our incapacity to possess our daily lives directed to a future that never arrives. Its genealogy is a nexus of factors, of which three are key: 1. Modern science has rendered individual experience to be inauthentic. Everything we experience must be generalizable, and individual experience is considered "anecdotal" if it cannot be so. As a consequence, we no longer have our own experiences, since these have to conform to a general principle. 2. The protestant revolution placed the subject in a particular relation to free will. 3. Capitalism draws together ancient and modern elements outlined here, most particularly the temporal dimension, oriented to the future.[26]

26 How to formulate this? The inappropriability of experience:
1. Will: a) decisionism; b) free will; c) tasks to be done;
2. Subject "uses," thus distant indifference of events; repetition à la Nietzsche;
3. Transcendental progress versus Now-Time.

Utilitarianism is a submission to transcendental fate/destiny.

Chapter 57

-4 Consumers are thus tourists of life because they cannot fully live their own experiences. Their experiences are lived as if secondhand, because everything is in view of a transcendental, whether this is some earthly consumer paradise, the afterlife, or some distant state of being. What happens to us, if it fails to conform, is no longer acceptable. Polyamory[27] is a perfect example of this expropriation of experience. Love must conform to strict codes, inhibiting any authentic "falling in love." Love becomes what Badiou calls "insurance,"[28] a protection from that very falling in love. Only certain types in the decisional chain, in typical instrumental fashion, will be acceptable. One "uses" life in view of the transcendental/law, the immediacy of life thus blocked. Such use renders us tourists of life. One cannot therefore inhabit a place, the way a tourist cannot live in a place.

27 The term "free love" might be better insofar as its emphasis is on freedom. Polyamory, in practice, reproduces a logic of law and legalism, form-of-law and power, and in many ways is an intensification and multiplication of the marriage contract. Polyamory is to *archē* as free love is to *an-archē,* anarchy.

28 This insurance is also part of the "greater good," which is equally transcendental. Utilitarianism is thus another factor. Alain Badiou, *Éloge de l'amour* (Paris: Gallimard, 2009).

Chapter 60

-5 What is the nature of the distancing from experience created by Stoicism and subsequent thought systems? Plato (Socrates) anticipated Stoicism in the *Gorgias*, insofar as the philosopher is instructed to distance himself from bodily pleasures and enjoy only those pleasures that will keep the soul from riveting itself to the body, favoring thus pleasures that give celestial knowledge, like philosophy. Already, we see the sort of distancing of the body, that millenary separation of soul from body. Though Descartes did reduce the distance between the mind and the soul,[29] from which we get psychology.[30] Our language today, then, differs from that of the Greeks. Pleasure is distinct from *hēdon*, and has passed through the Christian tradition via modernity, utilitarianism, Darwinism (and Roland Barthes!). For Plato's Socrates, pleasure is associated with need. But we've seen that even pure pleasures like knowledge can be compromised.[31]

29 Descartes separates the mind and body, but he reduces the distance between mind and soul.

30 *Psychē* being soul, not mind. So, in fact, the body is entangled with mind as soul in contemporary psychology.

31 As with the logic of Pascal, who sees good works as contaminated by the desire for salvation and for social recognition.[liii]

Chapter 58

-6 The nature of the separation of the individual from experience has to do with the subject-object divide, where the subject of modernity is distanced from historical-anecdotal experience. Even with Nietzsche, the eternal return risks indifferentiating the historical. The event that is precious to me is not possible, because it's merely part of an infinite repetition. This is not exactly Nietzsche's concept of suffering, where suffering enables meaning and understanding, but there is a point to the critique that the eternal return homogenizes. Suffering is instrumentalized in view of personal growth. In this sense, Nietzsche is no different to Tony Robbins' self-help, or the utilitarian philosophies Nietzsche would hate: We are unable to live in the present moment of our own experience, but rather only in view of something beyond, whether eternal or secular/secularized (progress is secularized salvation mapped onto consumerism).

Chapter 59

-7 There's a risk that experience itself be recuperated by the new economy. The new economy is now less about making or Manufacturing. We have switched over to the service (and porn[32]) industry. The hypercivilized seek new experiences, experiencing rather than possessing. In our desire to be authentic, this new model of experience is not moving away from consumption. On the contrary, it's an intensification of the expropriation of experience, pseudo-authentic experiences that are very much bound to consumerism. There is also Guy Debord's *Society of the Spectacle* to consider.[33] Our experiences are reduced to spectacles. Social media participate in this. Instagram creates an expropriation of experience insofar as our experience is only given its validity if it is spectacular and, just as Debord replaces commodities with spectacles, so our inability to possess our consumed objects is likewise an inability to possess experience.

32 See chapter 69–1.
33 Guy Debord, *La société du spectacle* (Paris: Gallimard, 1967).

Chapter 115

Utilitarianism: the submission, through various apparatuses, of individuals, groups, institutions, actions, gestures, bodies to a given notion of the greater good. This future-oriented philosophy overlaps well with the logic of capitalism. All situations are decisional and are determined within the logic of higher-order truths. Utilitarianism speaks for the other insofar as it decides what is good (or the "least harmful"), according to that higher-order truth. Quite possibly compensating for this *aporia,* Rawls invented the "veil of ignorance," which is ultimately just another version of enlightenment rationality where we pretend to be neutral, color-blind, free of prejudice, as if our determinations of what is good were just (and as if we can determine one's moral good through actions).[34] As with the trolley problem, it is impossible, ultimately, on actional or pragmatic grounds, to determine who is more moral than anyone else, except in extreme cases.[35]

34 John Rawls, *Justice as Fairness: A Restatement* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press/Belknap, 2001).

35 Quite possibly, Rawls would go first. Cf. Saul Smilansky, "Should We Sacrifice the Utilitarians First?" *Philosophical Quarterly* 70, no. 281 (October 2020), 850–67, in which it is argued that, based on one's moral views, one might be sacrificed first (since Utilitarians are sympathetic to the idea that some are sacrifice-worthy).

Chapter 116

Utilitarian action as the expression of a higher command is moralistic because every action goes back to the original command, thus subject to the contingency of *mores,* the conventions of social order and givens. There is little possibility of a genuine ethics. Ethics is being open to the singular experience before you as it arises unpredictably, whereas if you must constantly refer to a higher-order truth, there is no possibility of an ethics. It is merely a carrying out of duties, which is a form of servitude. This is a profound problem within neoliberalism, because it pretends towards freedom, yet counts on social convention (that is why Hayek disliked socialism in favor of cultural tradition[36]). It is actually a problem of modernity, where both political orientations, the history/precedent of the English tradition and French rationalism, assume an arbitrary given and higher command directing actions.

36 See Friedrich A. Hayek, *The Fatal Conceit: The Errors of Socialism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989). See also Wendy Brown, *In the Ruins of Neoliberalism: The Rise of Anti-Democratic Politics in the West* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2019) .

Chapter 117

Stoicism, like utilitarianism, creates a distance from events, which Schopenhauer describes as sedation.[37] If utilitarianism creates a distance insofar as we are confronted with reality from the perspective of a higher-order truth, in stoicism the difficulties we face, though we may see them as ours and ours alone (and thus to be accepted as such), they are to be overcome with a virtuous "stoicism." These difficulties will help us overcome our suffering and give us a power that not even (the) god(s) possess(es).[38] Experience is something to overcome, which serves us towards a higher end.[39] From the metaphysics of an afterlife (after death, or as capitalistic subjects), our suffering enables us to overcome the fragility of existence. While we must embrace our experiences, it's in view of a redemption from it.[40] Stoic experience, as with utilitarianism, is thus a mere support to an end.[41]

37 Arthur Schopenhauer, *The World as Will and Representation,* vol. I, translated by E.F.J. Payne (New York: Dover Publications, Inc., 1969), 87. See also Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Gay Science,* translated by Walter Kaufmann (New York: Vintage, 1974), 33–34 .

38 Seneca's insight, that the gods cannot have this power because they are immortal.[liv]

39 Whether this is a properly theological or bourgeois end.

40 Theology and capitalism are now actually indistinct, whether in Max Weber or in Walter Benjamin (his "Capitalism as Religion," or in James Joyce's cash registers in the sky[lv]).

41 As we redeem coupons or bonds. To this we add the Foucaultian notion of the care of the self ("Culture of the Self"), the constant work that we need to do here on earth, us the earthlings living our terrestrial lives, in view of an eternal life. See Michel Foucault, *Qu'est-ce que la critique? Suivie de La culture de soi* (Paris: Vrin, 2015). We are instructed by the Stoics (based on Epicurus) to always have that in mind.

Chapter 118

Perhaps nothing is quite as crassly utilitarian as the idea that history gives us lessons for how to act now. The phrase "if we don't know our history, then we're doomed to repeat it" assumes that history is always the same. History departments thus can justify themselves against the threat of declining enrollments. But history is actually (about) death: our fear, our desire to be immortal, to preserve ourselves. Following Benjamin, we look to the past, to what might have been, and therein we enter into a relationship that suspends us in an opening, time giving us and holding back in its epochal suspension, and we recuperate a vision of things to come. It is thus not about reproduction, about a static "homogenous, empty time"[42] that assumes the universality of history, but an opening up through recuperation of the dead potentials in our present.

42 Benjamin, "Theses on the Philosophy of History," thesis XIII. The idea that "if we don't know our history, we're doomed to repeat it" is actually anti-historical insofar as it submits the historical to universal conditions of possibility. History, as one might conceive it here, is a witness (*histōr*, *ἵστωρ*) of existence; it is an expression of our mortality.

Chapter 119

-1 Are sociologists of literature ironically (well, hypocritically) bourgeois scholars if their research is premised on being useful? (Do they display a bourgeois bad consciousness, even while they dismantle the illusions of that consciousness?) The assumption here is that the useful is bourgeois, somewhat along the lines that critique became bourgeois, even while it critiqued the bourgeoisie! You can just as easily turn things around and say sociologists are bourgeois working in universities that confer on them great prestige, and Bourdieusian distinction! As Moten and Harney argue, self-critique, the university's capacity for examining its positions, reinforces the power dynamic of the institution to the detriment of what they call the "undercommons."[43] Yet this can only lead to an arms race, because Moten and Harney then themselves can be incorporated into this arms race (despite their best intentions of breaking the exponential, bourgeoiswards outgrowth of critique).

43 Or, "study." Stefano Harney and Fred Moten, *The Undercommons: Fugitive Planning & Black Study* (New York: Minor Compositions, 2013), https://www.minorcompositions.info/wp-content/uploads/2013/04/undercommons-web.pdf. Harney and Moten note that resistance within the system only further upholds it. They describe how critique within the university only further inscribes it within its hierarchical structure, with "professionalization as a privatisation of the social individual" (34).

Chapter 120

-2 Sociology of literature is an importation from (and territorial acquisition by) the social sciences, and has made of literary studies a branch of sociology. It has two basic problems: It cannot justify why it ought to look at the literary (its specificity) and how that is different from other discourses; it has the epistemological *ipseity* of merely confirming its own methodologies. While much can be appreciated in sociological approaches to literature as a way of seeing,[44] it is incapable of appreciating the experience of the literary except in a secondhand way. A sort of intellectual narcissism that cannot account for the interpretive difficulties it sets up. How can it guarantee that the impersonal of language isn't just the generalization of some random sociologist? The literary above all seeks to be an experience… of life, pleasure, jouissance, t(h)aumazein, t(h)auntology, interpretaunting, philosophy, wisdom, of mindfucks.

44 One thinks of Pierre Bourdieu and his disciples like Alian Viala, Marc Angenot, and the latter's own many disciples in Belgium, France, and Québec who faithfully reproduce their master's models. One might even imagine an ironic contempt for old-fashioned literary studies and all it implies in "interestedness": pleasure, wonder, joy, etc. See Angenot's smug *Liberté* article, "Pour en finir avec les études littéraires," *Liberté* 27, no. 2 (April 1985): 27–33.

Compare with Todorov's idea (while he was working on genre in 1978, while genre was diffracting), that persisting in occupying oneself with genre might seem useless (*oiseux* from the Latin *otium,* leisure) and anachronistic, yet that genre can only be made visible through diffraction/transgression.[lvi]

Chapter 121

-3 Sociology of literature is good for recognizing that enunciatory events are part of a large fabric of language, placing the individual utterance in a larger phenomenon irreducible to a single speaking subject.[45] This desubjectivized condition of language makes it impersonal, material, historical, containing discursive elements and the vastness of human discourse that make up the utterance. Many approaches can be taken in this respect. A poem, for instance, is made up just as much of poetic forms as it is of "formalities": for the latter, the poet is aware of what should be said when, how to say it, and who is reading or listening.[46] Furthermore, beyond individual psychology, we have to consider institutional aspects, or "prisms"[47] that condition the utterance: what is the poet's training, school of thought, aesthetic presuppositions, all of the elements of writing that make it impersonal and personal.

45 Or deconstructing the idea of "genius," by showing that the author is part of a larger social fabric, dependent on an impersonal complex of language, conventions, history, sociality, materiality, etc. Again, while this gives great insight to the literary, it is in a sense ipseistically always proving the same thing. Sometimes naïveté is more fun, more worthwhile, even if ever so slightly more "bourgeois" than the sociologists. See chapter 120.

46 This is the truly wonderful insight of Pascal Durand's book, *Mallarmé: Du sens des formes au sens des formalités* (Paris: Le Seuil, 2008). By extension, it could help us to better understand a radically new type of literary utterance, one that breaks from given discursive formalities. Rimbaud, for instance, that strange comet flying past us.

47 This is Alain Viala's inventive insight, based on Bourdieu in part, in his book, *Naissance de l'écrivain: Sociologie de la littérature à l'âge classique* (Paris: Editions de Minuit, 1985).

Chapter 122

-4 What is the *use* of accounting for the discursive fabric of a work? Will it serve to better understand a work in context, to reconstitute its historical intelligibility? While merely focusing on textuality is limited, even dangerous (generalizing forms evacuates irreducible specificity), the sociology of literature has become symptomatic of a need for the humanities to justify themselves. Sociology brings insight into the human condition, which is one of misery (in most cases and at most times[48]). Literature also highlights this, but writers are subject to suspicion, because publishing is part of capitalism, and writers need their "distinction."[49] Yet this distinction is always going to self-confirm itself. You can go deeply into a work's details, contributing to the enlargement of the sociological *nous,* but you will always find the same result. The experience of literature is like the experience of philosophy: *thaumazein!*

48 One thinks of Schopenhauer here…

49 This is Bourdieu's ingenious insight. See Pierre Bourdieu, *La Distinction: Critique sociale du jugement* (Paris: Minuit, 1979), but for writing, *Les Règles de l'art: Genèse et structure du champ littéraire* (Paris: Seuil, 1992).

Chapter 123

-5 The experience of literature is the irreducible experience of wonder(ment), a shared experience, between the text and the reader, and is an individuation.[50] While literature itself cannot be defined in any strict way, it has certain intuitive specificities that ask for consideration, and it cannot be subsumed under the general fabric of discourse/science, demanding therefore proper literary analysis — whether rhetorical, poetic, stylistic, aesthetic, etc. Otherwise, what distinguishes the literary text from any other kind of text for the sociologist? This is a key question. Why should a scientific text not be subject to the analysis of both the sociologist and the literary scholar?[51] But both analyses are asking different questions. Mallarmé's *Sonnet en X* has formalities, yes, but it also has a readerly and writerly experience that surpass formality. This most mysterious poem resists overdetermination,[52] and offers us a diamond of indifference.

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50 See Gilber Simondon, *L'Individuation psychique et collective* (Paris: Aubier, 1989). So, while reading and writing are social and collective, impersonal and desubjectivized, open to the "outside," they are also irreducible and individuated. See chapter 72.

51 This has been done many times, of course. Latour comes to mind for the former, while for the latter any sort of text is analyzable. See Bruno Latour and Steve Woolgar, *Laboratory Life: The Social Construction of Scientific Facts* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1986

52 This is perhaps why Bourdieu ("Le Démontage impie de la fiction"), and Catani behind him,[lvii] thinks the important context is about accessibility, in response to the social desire for distinction via "obscurity." You can even say the same for Rancière, who justifies Mallarmé (contra Barthes's aestheticizations) as proposing new forms for democracy (but the poem can be just as easily enjoyed by an authoritarian). See Pierre Bourdieu, "Le Démontage impie de la fiction: L'Esthétique négative de Stéphane Mallarmé," *Les Cahiers Stéphane Mallarmé* 1 (2004): 75–80, and Jacques Rancière, *Politique de la littérature* (Paris: Galilée, 2007).

Chapter 124

-6 The use of the sociology of literature is that of highlighting a work's place in the fabric of society. The "use" (usage) of literature is much broader, however. It is (ab)used by multiple agents, is impersonal and vast, like human language itself. Literature witnessing, like every linguistic act: it comes from telling stories or singing passion, bearing witness to events and affects. The biological version of the sociology of literature is literary Darwinism. While it may be true that stories are there to help us survive, so what? As with the sociology of literature, this is an *ipseistic* epistemology, for every new work will confirm the theory of natural selection.[53] The literary as witness means that every single story is singular. That is why the story is told, and why we are compelled to express ourselves, even if for the sake of distinction.

53 I regret to say that, like the digital humanities, the sociology of literature is an institutional phenomenon that arose out of the utilitarian insofar as it needs to match the natural–scientific — which is now the ideal form of knowledge in said utilitarian society (but now under threat since… posttruth?) as well as the self-interested subject of modern economics (of which social Darwinism is a manifestation — not the other way round!). That is, "literary studies" had to emulate the natural sciences in order to justify its existence in the context of that scientific (not to mention scientistic) paradigm that overlaps with industry's. Also, Weber's *Institution and Interpretation* (what he said)… Samuel Weber, *Institution and Interpretation* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987)….

Chapter 125

-7 This book critiques and attacks utilitarianism, a system of thought that aims for happiness.[54] An important question for politics is: why struggle, to what end? Is critique simply there to destroy, to undermine, even if in view of an ethical stance[55]; or to show where that which is critiqued is to be placed in the decisional cut of critique? Or does it seek happiness, *eudaimonia?* Has sociology of literature lost sight of happiness, or pleasure?[56] Hypothesis: a civilization that cannot define what it wants reproduces the same capitalist futility that sociologists are trying to take down. We want equality, justice etc., but in view of what? This is why the present book tries to celebrate the useless, not because it might be indirectly useful. Beauty, love, magic, mystery, these are useless things! They are things that make us happy or we enjoy.

54 Ironically because J.S. Mill's definition of use is essentially bound to individual happiness. See J.S. Mill, *On Liberty* (London: John W. Parker & Son, 1860).

55 This is why I resist the sociological "démontages" ("dismantlings," or "deconstructions") à la Bourdieu (even while I admire the latter) or à la Terry Eagleton, *Ideology of the Aesthetic* (London: Blackwell, 1991). Marxists and others just don't know how to have fun. Is Marxism utilitarian? Socio-critique? Yes, insofar as everything is submitted to dogma (i.e., higher-order principle), and insofar as everything is submitted to their own analytical confirmations, over and over and over again.

56 Does sociology of literature commit Plato's banishment yet again, this time of reading's daimonic rapture?

Chapter 126

-8 Socio-critique has become an arms race, a sort of infinite regression that Barthes had already recognized when he critiqued his own mythologies. Latour also sees the problem of critique, even if inadequately, by asking if critique has run out of steam.[57] In the contemporary university, we have this idea that the researcher must be able to critique their own position. But Moten and Harney (*The Undercommons*) have understood that that becomes also a form of power. However, are they not themselves adding to that arms race? We are all petit bourgeois in the end, either striving to be bourgeois or to maintain our threatened statuses. An immense futility of disciplines devoted to the work of utility and power struggles that have lost all notion of what is joyful and pleasurable, always in need of justification without knowing where it really wants to go.

57 It would have been inconvenient for Latour discuss the history of critique and to have properly defined critique beyond "criticism."[lix]

Chapter 127

-9 For Bourdieu, the snob isn't distinct via his money, but his cultural capital. The nineteenth- and twentieth-century avant-gardes played into a similar logic, insofar as distinction is created by separating oneself from the herd. And academia is similar. This book also risks the accusation of elitism. So be it. Bourdieu's approach is only one amongst many, however influential. Distinction in academia is henceforth expressed as social usefulness, what academic work can contribute to the greater good. Social-justice culture comes from academia, but not exclusively. Traditionally, there was activist culture in the arts. But social media have disrupted things. Academia has been infiltrated by its logic. Being "relevant" is key now. Again, to the detriment of intrinsic research. Fewer and fewer scholars working on history and intrinsic questions, e.g., interpretation of recondite minutiae in literary works, why an author said this and not that.

Part VI

Chapter 64

-1 Taunting interrupts temporal continuity. Taunting suspends things in a sort of "divine violence."[1] Taunting becomes a swirl of conflicting forces, where the past is eternally present like a black hole. What is the past? We are in the presence of, and engaged in activities determined by what might have made us happy, even if (the) work(ing) of the past is self-destructive. What traditionally led to happiness — a scandalous notion, that suicide is relief from unhappiness, some sort of negative happiness. Happiness and time have an intimate relation because our activity continues hope, even if hope is gone. That to which our activity is tied is no longer present or only present in a very subliminal way, yet has a huge power on us like a black sun. Taunting can be the interruption of that black sun or be lit by that black sun.

1 Cf. Walter Benjamin, "Critique of Violence," in *Reflections: Essays, Aphorisms, Autobiographical Writings,* ed. Peter Demetz, trans. Edmund Jephcott (New York: Schocken, 1978), 277–300: where law-creating or mythical and law-preserving violence maintain the order, "divine violence" (the example Benjamin uses is the general strike) disrupts this law-preserving order.

Chapter 76

-2 Oh taunting, give us an interruption, guide us, show us the way to undo the continuities bound to dead potentialities; allow those dead potentialities to demonically interrupt false memories that put us on the road or track towards predictable trolley problems. Oh taunting, give us a short circuit, give us some deep-fried circuits, blow the fuse, scramble the motherboard, be the stolen holy water that is spilled on the irrevocable machine; oh taunting, let us profanate the days and nights; oh taunting, Give Us Our Daily Bread; oh taunting, let us go into the forests of your delightful contradictions; oh taunting, let us ruminate upon the impossible possible, lettuce chew the cud of lost and dead hopes, taunting gifts; let us make our way into the endless loops and caverns and shores of possibility, and spread our intensities into the vast improvised unknown.

Chapter 65

-3 The idea that time is not a simple sequence of discrete moments is a key concept of phenomenology (in Husserl's sense). Time is an entanglement involving *retention* and *protention:* retaining and anticipating moments in complex timeflows. Music is the key example: when we listen to a unit of sound or movement, the previous units or movements have been retained, and these in turn have protained into the music to come. In a sense, movement can only be a metaphor, or some vague skeletal and geometric notion of time, for time is psychological and psychology cannot be abandoned to the geometric model. Nor can retention and protention account for contingency or chance, or the idea of change, that particular units, if we can even think of them as units, are contingently transmuted in the admixture, chronologically unfolding, thereby disrupting any calculable flow of time.

Chapter 75

-4 Time and taunting: I wonder if Husserlian phenomenological temporalities of *retention* and *protention* are adequate to grasp all the temporal implications of taunting. While it is important to understand attention (protention and retention) and temporal flow from a geometrical perspective — that is, to understand the structure of chronological time, and its durations — how can an interruption of the temporal flow be understood according to the very terms which that Interruption seeks to blast apart? Anybody can understand the psychological dimensions of time, which certainly participate in chronology; yet psychological time is a suspension and it is singular, like a swirling eddy, a vortex, an involution. This is just a metaphor, but it is helpful. There's a long history of this metaphor.[2] What are some other models for time? Let's resist the idea that there's a neat correspondence between the future and the past.

2 Starting perhaps with Spinoza, but perhaps earlier, and going via Benjamin, Deleuze, and others to Agamben in most of his recent work, especially in *Use of Bodies*, trans. Adam Kotsko (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2016) and *The Fire and the Tale,* trans. Lorenzo Chiesa (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2014). Psychological time is a suspension and it is "chaotic," like a swirling eddy, a vortex, an involution: "We should not conceive of the subject as a substance but as a vortex in the flow of becoming. He [*sic*] has no other substance than that of the single being, but, with respect to it, he [*sic*] has his [*sic*] own figure, manner, and movement. and it is in this sense that we need to understand the relation between substance and its modes. Modes are the whirlpools in the endless field of substance, which, by collapsing and swirling in itself, is subjectivized, becomes aware of itself, suffers and enjoys." Giorgio Agamben, *The Fire and the Tale,* trans. Lorenzo Chiesa (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2014), 61.

Chapter 66

-5 Now enter retrocausation, which depends on chronological order: Kronos eating his offspring. A structural similarity between the way the past acts on the present and the way the future acts on it, as well as the present on the past, and on the future. The future acts on the present retrocausationally insofar as — we have either optimistic or pessimistic conceptions of the future — our conceptions determine present action. For instance, if we believe and focus on cosmic pessimism,[3] then our present actions may lose their political intensity. In capitalism and utilitarianism, the idea of redemption in the future, towards which all decisions are made, acts on our present actions and cuts us off from the present real. Similarly, our view of the past acts retrocausationally: in that past everything was conditional. In both cases, action is bound to chronological order — thus is ideological.

3 That entropy leads to cosmic death.[lx]

Chapter 74

-6 Chronological order enforces belief, whether it is capitalistic or theological. Taunting enters, interrupting the chronological flow like play, boiling together synchronic capacities, hybridizing divergence, interrupting the machine. It is a stammering,[4] repurposing both repressive apparatuses and obsolete objects into new momentary pleasures. Useless objects are instilled with (and distilled into) delight — useful objects made useless. The means/ends dichotomy no longer makes sense, for objects are no longer inscribed within their habitual use. What is the alternative to chronology — that is, Kronos eating his children? Some suspension, some kind of paradise, some kind of play, a kairologicality[5] that opens us up, making us children yet again. The child is not concerned about the stable signified or the essence of being, in their suspended school, *skolē,* suspending moment of play. The recess lasts for a brief moment, recreation — at least before the bell goes off.[6]

4 Roland Barthes, "Le Bruissement de la langue," in *Le Bruissement de la langue* (Paris: Seuil, 1984), 99–102. See chapters 25, 42, and 63.

5 Cf. Antonio Negri, *Kairos, Alma Venus, Multitudo: Nove lezioni impartite a me stesso* (Rome: Manifesto libri, 2000), and Giorgio Agamben, *The Time That Remains: A Commentary on the Letter to the Romans,* trans. Patricia Dailey (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2005).

6 For *skholē, σχολή,* see the Preface and chapter 13. For recreation, see Federico Campagna, *Prophetic Culture: Recreation for Adolescents* (London: Bloomsbury, 2021).

Chapter 67

-7 The challenge has always been to keep the Revolution going, the interruption. Interruption and disruption have been reterritorialized by businesses as a new ideal: capitalism can always adapt, become a parody of revolutionary thought. The trick here is that the distinction between ritual and play becomes important insofar as play disrupts the logic of temporality in which capitalism has invested, and where *use* holds the highest function. Disruption in the business sense is merely a parodic revolutionary employment[7] of play into imposed chronological order. "Disruption" is a pretentious word for capitalist innovation and competition. Taunting has nothing to do with such temporality, because it does not seek an end and is never a means. It is pure play outside. The ongoing revolution therefore can never be subject to Kantian means-ends, and seizing the means of production cannot become a reinscription of the same.

7 Literally, in+fold+ing ("ploy" from *plex*, "fold").

Chapter 73

-8 Technical time. The dialectics of creating new spaces: play. Time is not an easy dialectic between past and present: the past does not inform the present and vice versa. Rather, a different logic is at play, the creation of a new space, a moment that is not the expression of an energy from the past into the present, like "action," but an original time that is ongoing, out of time, disjunctive and conjunctive at once, breaking with and playing with. Such a suspension is the unpredictable unforeseen, the epochal time that is impersonal and out of our control and yet which comes irrevocably and incommensurably from us and which cannot be separated from our humanity, even as animal humanity. A new space improvised, anarchic, posthuman, unpredictable, not subject to generality — singular indefinite, definable only once it has fallen, retrocausationally, gone like the past.

Chapter 68

-9 The new space created by play, once in the past, is henceforward inaccessible; yet it haunts, comes back to us, like a refrain. Why am I always haunted by moments of joy, by the moments of play? Is it just a chemical process, entangled with neural pathways? Are we that reducible? Why do the primal scenes keep returning? Those were the happy moments in which something new arose that are now lost forever, but which are maintained and sustained, like a black hole, which can never be recuperated, but which is always present and indeterminate, always there, to which we would be forever faithful. These strange multiple temporalities haunting us, taunting us, always escaping our hopeful grasping. Yet they will always be redeemed in some way, some improvised, unpredictable way — that the force of the *arkhē* of time, of "action," cannot ever enforce.

Chapter 72

-10 It is important to be open to the forests (of the) outside. The *Apeiron*[8] brings the unforeseen, is infinite play, infinite newness. Where the ritual preserves the past and is diachronic, synchronic play disrupts that preservation, and sees the emergence of collective affect, as the anarchists would say. So, affect always retains hope, is the remainder of an idea of happiness even if that happiness can never be fulfilled. Affect can be freed, affect can release. Dual affect, dual temporalities, yet not chronological strictly speaking, because suspended and suspending. Not a split subject, not an ambivalent subject — a multiplicity, a multitude. Yet consistent, insistent, such is hope's trajectory. Entangled time, that cannot be reduced to coordinates, yet coördinated, out of joint.[9] Time flows like a river and, in that river of time, encounters the physical and generates contingency. Yet it is not chaos.

8 See Gilbert Simondon, *L'Individuation psychique et collective* (Paris: Aubier, 1989). See chapter 123.

9 [lxi]

Chapter 69

-11 Event is not chaos, even while contingent. Anarchic time is contingent. This means that the event, while only understood retrocausationally within the logic of chronological time, is connected to a series of circumstances, situations, worlds, enunciatory contexts. Such a series is like a grammar for logical time, wherein the elements partake in a syntactical process whose metalogical elements refer to modality. Yesterday's "what might have been" is today the conditional verb "would have been," based on uncertain eventualities (its "will have been" a dead future); what might have been didn't transpire yet is retained in the now as lost hope. However, this cannot be thought rigidly as possible, impossible, necessary, contingent, the way they have been thought traditionally, because possibility is inexhaustible, and energy is only suggestion of intensity. The danger of ascribing coordinates to affective intensities is that those intensities become reified.

Chapter 71

-12 Happiness is located in the present? This is a challenge. For Walter Benjamin, happiness is in the past. The Messianic is the constant redemption of happiness, that what-might-have-been. Not a melancholy fixation on the black sun of possibility. Happiness is retained and maintained, even if that hope cannot but be a hope that was better left unfulfilled. This assumes a coherent subject, yet the subject can keep going, faithful to itself, to that part of itself that is unnamable. Happiness then is that which ontological surveillance might overlook but which remains in incalculable ways. Happiness is infinity in all directions. Infinity as incomplete infinity as an ending. Infinity as incompletable, Infinity as indefinite, as yet definable as fleeting, flashing singular eruptions, as disruptions of joy and play. Taunting seeks to play, tease, and thus it tickles temporality out of chronology. *Quod est demonstrandum.*

Chapter 70

-13 Happiness would *prefer to*[10] more than it would "prefer not to."[11] Let's dismantle the god Kronos's retrocausational time machines, and his retrocausation allies, progress, utility, pessimism, optimism, and all other deterministic ways of knowing past and future. But let's find a new time instead of reproducing the same old daddy time,[12] in which our resistance merely puts us in the same vicious circle — linear and cyclical at once. Let's swirl in eddies of newness outside. Permanent recess, freedom from the demands of utility, even if we are oppressed by life, institutions, necessity. Let's at least free our minds. For is it enough to merely dismantle, like the sociologists or the deconstructors, the men in dead-letter offices? Tati teaches us that there's an innocent kindness about trying to hold things together. How can we keep that innocence of *preferring to* while everything breaks down?

10 See chapter 140 on Tati as an anthropologist of the useful.

11 Pace Agamben after Melville and Deleuze.[lxii]

12 We really are in need of "Daddy Studies," in the "Universidad(dy)," where we study "veridad(dy)," and do "collarship."

Chapter 141

Marielle Macé would seek, with her "cabanes,"[13] to favor a community that is built locally, made by individuated collectives (a variation on the "think globally, act locally" theme of the 1990s). This fits with Marx's idea in *The German Ideology* that communism isn't about establishing a state of affairs, but about abolishing the present state of affairs.[14] But for another Marx, any changes have to happen on a "world-historical" scale. The challenge thus is where the question of scale comes in. Community-building is a beautiful utopian impulse, but can it be generalized? This was Proudhon's critique of Marx. Is utopia a form of privilege? As in, are we privileged in our capacity to build community outside of consumer culture, all the while most humans are enslaved to it, are physically unable to? Is the building of a radical utopian community generalizable? Should it be?

13 Marielle Macé, *Nos cabanes* (Paris: Verdier, 2019).

14 "Communism is for us not a *state of affairs* which is to be established, an *ideal* to which reality [will] have to adjust itself. We call communism the real movement [note the similarity with Benjamin's "real state of emergency" from Thesis VIII of the "Theses on the Concept of History," in *Illuminations: Essays and Reflections,* ed. Hannah Arendt, trans. Harry Zohn (New York: Schocken, 1968), 253-64!] which abolishes the present state of things. The conditions of this movement result from the premises now in existence" (on this last point, Proudhon and the anarchists generally would disagree — see above).[lxiii]

Chapter 142

Natali Leduc tries to "poke" people (like one does on Facebook?), not "poke fun of."[15] So "taunting" can be a gentle provocation: erotic or ludic, jouissance or *plaisir*. She also (like me) sees a sort of "grey zone" between the useful and the useless. There is no strict division, as many in the art world might have it. Her idea passes through the filter of child's play, stemming from "a certain nostalgia for the time when […] I would play (often outside) with my friends." A child plays without the least thought for whether the activity is "useful" or "important." Even contemporary educational theories that promote this kind of play still frame it within the discourse of usefulness. In the same way, contemporary human sciences and fine arts — and even some branches of mathematics and natural sciences — have the same pressure to justify themselves.

15 She says it's to "press one's thumb lightly into the flesh of the useful, more to irritate innocently, […] with a bit of surprise, for pleasure, as a child might. What interests me is that people interrogate (while smiling) the definition of what is useful, and the idea of progress and comfort too, and on the importance that we accord to the useful." See chapter 13*.[lxiv]

Chapter 143

Leduc emphasizes that her work might incite communal engagement through play and "wonder."[16] Her *-tron* machines allow total strangers to share a fleeting moment of joy and community, a "joyous utility," versus utility which is "brutal and totalitarian." This is a productive pleasure insofar as it is good for its own sake. Likely aware of Barthes's distinction between pleasure and joy,[17] for her, joy is more important than pleasure, in that joy is drawn from "the ridiculous, even absurd way [that the useful] is produced." Yet "jouissance," involving greater participation on the part of the individual (being thus "writerly"), is not quite set in the same terms as Barthes's.[18] This playful, even light critique differs from the unhomely/uncanny characterizing much of post nineteenth-century art, while drawing so much from it. One thinks as well of the experiments of Dada, Surrealism, and 'Pataphysics, for instance.

16 Leduc uses the term *émerveillement* (wonderment, amazement, marveling) and evokes the simple joy of being together and making something foolish and "useless."

17 She has written a doctoral dissertation on the concept of divagation, especially in the Surrealists and in 'Pataphysics.[lxv]

18 Jouissance "puts one in a state of loss, which creates discomfort […], which sways the reader's historical, cultural, psychological foundations, the consistency of their tastes, values and memories, and disturbs their relation to language."[lxvi]

Chapter 144*

In 2017–2018, Leduc made the *Jokeatron 5200*. This construction was a giant machine in which you recorded your joke(s), which it then broadcast from its own speakers at Burning Man 2018. Funded by the event that annually takes over part of the northwestern Nevada desert, this unique machine not only records and broadcasts jokes, it is itself a joke — an interactive large-scale sculpture (12ft tall with a 24ft diameter), a steel-plated banana peel that a gargantuan prankster robot threw on the desert floor to make another robot slip. Leduc even invites us to make bad or silly jokes, because we often feel anxious remembering or inventing good ones. "Why don't bananas ever get lonely? They hang around in bunches." "How many deconstructionists does it take to screw on a lightbulb? That's undecidable…" "How many Agambenians did it take to write this joke? Whatever…"

Analytical Table

I	13	23	79	32	90*	56	**VI**
0	17	9*	113	85	91*	61	64
1	52	24	78	31	92	57	76
1*	26	8**	114	86	93	60	65
2	13*	25	77	30	69–1	58	75
3	40	43	39	87	70–1	59	66
5	20	62	78*	29	96	115	74
8	10	42	38	88	97	116	67
	5*	63	79*	28	98	117	73
II	16	41	37	89	99	118	68
9	8*	18	80	27*	110	119	72
27	4	42*	36*	90	111	120	69
140	2*	17*	81	26*	122	121	71
11	1***	43*	35	91	133	122	70
36	19	16*	82		144	123	141
6	21	44	34	**V**	105	124	142
2*		15	83	34*	106	125	143
	IV	45	33	55	107	126	144*
III	22	14	84	89*	54	127	
1**	10*	46					

Bonus: 7, 12, 47–51, 94, 95, 100–104, 128–32, 134–39

Bonus Chapters

I

7

The old concordances that were created to index and cross-reference elements in a work or body of works (an *œuvre*) were made obsolete the instant it became possible to electronically search texts. Today, we have vast amounts of digitized literary texts, and it is very easy to do what Franco Moretti calls "distant reading"[1]: data-mining (and forensics of) a large set of works; to locate, identify, quantify, compare, analyze, map trends, patterns, frequencies, author styles, etc. This distance is far more scientific, effective, and reliable than the old concordances, which were slow and limited by human incapacity (and error/errancy). However useless concordances are today,[2] they did have one virtue (because, you know, books are created and read by humans): the type of scholarship required to build concordances led to thorough familiarity with the corpus — that is, "close reading," a dying art and practice.

12

"Distant reading" carries naïve assumptions about text, as if works of literature were the same thing as objects of nature.[3]

1 Franco Moretti, "Conjectures on World Literature," *New Left Review* 1 (January/February 2000), https://newleftreview.org/issues/ii1/articles/franco-moretti-conjectures-on-world-literature.

2 See Natali Leduc above on "obsolete innovations" ("innovations désuètes"): see chapters 0, 114, and 142 infra.

3 Saussure recognized that "the absolutely final law of language is, we dare say, that there is nothing which can ever reside in *one* term, as a direct consequence of the fact that linguistic symbols are unrelated to what they should designate, so that *a* is powerless to designate anything without the aid of *b,* and the same thing is true of b without the aid of a." Quoted by Emile Benveniste, "Saussure après un demi-siècle," in *Problèmes de linguistique générale* (Paris: Gallimard, 1966), 40–41.

While machine reading can illuminate texts, it is not a substitute for actually reading them. Indeed, it by definition avoids reading in the traditional sense of the term. While machine reading requires human input (creating filters, for instance), it is not the same category type as "human" reading, which involves different phenomenological and interpretive potentials. Distant reading also assumes an objective body of works to be analyzed: what a text is and how it can be read, based on an outdated (seventeenth-century) linguistic model — language as information, to match computation as informatics — language as the representation of ideas. While what is objectively written is important, there is no universal "reading." One could even argue that human reading[4] is everything machine reading is not.

47

"Dunning-Kruger"-convinced Moretti dismisses humanist approaches as "lacking conceptual imagination."[5] First, he denies the history of literary criticism since Saussure, or what philoso-

4 As far as I know, we have yet to see nonhuman animals read literature.

5 Exhibit A: "The humanities will need to save themselves, and not only for the crass reason that going to university can cost an insane amount of money, so students choose to go into business, medicine, economics, etc., to remake the money as soon as possible. It's not just that, although that cannot be simply dismissed. In the 20th century the natural sciences have produced some amazingly stunning and beautiful theories in physics, and genetics, and in biology. The humanities have produced nothing of this sort[!]. Literature, art, in a sense even political history (mostly in a horrendous way), have produced enormously interesting objects, but the study of these objects, that is to say the disciplines of the humanities — the study of literature, the study of history — *have lagged behind. The humanities have lagged behind in conceptual imagination and in boldness.* I totally understand why a 20-year-old would choose to do astrophysics rather than literature. It's so much more interesting in many ways, just for the pleasure of the intelligence. That is what the humanities have to work on." Franco Moretti and Melissa Dinsman, "The Digital in the Humanities: An Interview with Franco Moretti," *L.A. Review of Books,* March 2, 2016, https://lareviewofbooks.org/article/the-digital-in-the-humanities-an-interview-with-franco-moretti/ (my emphases).

phy has done with literature, such as the close readings of Derrida that have reinvented philosophy. To compare humanities' methods negatively with, say, (post)quantum physics, is a value judgment. Second, like the sociology of literature, the digital humanities have often functioned under a pseudo-scientific fallacy. Objects of human knowledge are not the same as those of nature or society. Literature is not mirror of these. Literature has a metasemanticity[6] that requires interpretation because it is communicating meaning with semantics, with a different set of modes and epistemologies, beyond use and the subject-object relation. The sociologist, linguist, media archeologist and/or theorist, psychoanalyst, etc. are asking different questions of the text, and can greatly contribute to understanding the literary, but cannot substitute actual reading.

48

The complaint is not with digital-humanities methods *per se,* but with the insecurity subtending the arrogance. (Jerome McGann has a similar sort of scientism.[7]) The institutions of

6 I am articulating here the unbridgeable gap identified between semiotics and semantics in the work of Benveniste. The semiotic is the system, related to reception, where the semantic is the enunciatory event in a world, related to understanding.

7 Exhibit B: "My argument is quite different: that quantum and topological models of analysis are applicable to imaginative writing tout court, *that these models are more adequate, more comprehensive, and more enlightening than the traditional models we inherit from Plato and Aristotle to Kant and Marx.* 'Quantum poetics' in this study does not signify certain figures and tropes that stimulated the practices of a certain group of historically located writers. On the contrary, it comprises a set of critical methods and procedures that are meant to be pursued and then applied in a general way to the study of imaginative work.

"The Ivanhoe Game" models a new form of critical method. Its applicability is of a general kind — as much for Yeats and Pound as for Keats and Byron, for Shakespeare or Dante, for Ovid, Lucretius, the Bible. It is a model that we propose to build in a new kind of textual environment — a digital one. Finally, it is only a model — one model. We propose to build it in the hope that it may stimulate others to develop and build more

literary studies, and the humanities more generally, are under pressure to compete with the STEM disciplines[8]; their cultural capital has diminished, and they need to justify their existence through a sort of "STEM-ification" that actually undermines them. It is a losing game to the "attention economy," and to the new economy altogether, with its context collapse. The literary is disappearing, reading is changing. We can practice new ways of literary reading, that old and precious but dying art — opening up to new terrains (including those ignored by old canons), new interfaces. Moretti's short circuit is that once "the great unread"[9] are discovered by distant reading and its "conceptual ima[ch]ination[s]," they still have to be read![10]

49

What the humanities offer is a way to live a life, "develop a meaningful philosophy of life,"[11] build one's own critical thought

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adequate critical tools." Jerome McGann, *Radiant Textuality: Literature after the World Wide Web* (London: Palgrave, 2001), xv (my emphasis).

8 As a humanist, Moretti is being provocative, but it belies a deep insecurity. Television and now the Internet (the "attention economy") likely provide another explanation for the long-term demise of the literary. However, along with the neoliberal and industrial support for STEM (see note 12 below), this book contends that it is the utilitarianism of the modern university and the hypervalorization of scientific and applied approaches that feed humanists' self-hatred. I include sociology's territorialization of the literary in this scientistic trend. See chapters 118–127 above. Moretti: "Marxist critics have often chosen individual authors as a way to bring unity to the heterogeneous landscape of history" (see "A New Intuition," *New Left Review* 131 [September/October 2021], https://newleftreview.org/issues/ii131/articles/franco-moretti-a-new-intuition); I on the other hand "have often chosen [Moretti and McGann] as a way to bring unity to the heterogeneous landscape of [digital humanities]."

9 Moretti, "Conjectures on World Literature."

10 Ask any author if they would prefer to be closely read or not.

11 Apparently, in a 1971 survey (the year the US dropped the Bretton Woods system; see "Preface," n. 1), 73 percent of American college students said they wanted to "develop a meaningful philosophy of life":

> However, the idea that higher education should contribute to one's personal development in a way that would ultimately benefit others

(the idea of *Bildung*), and experience the intensity of singularities through "reading,"[12] something digital-humanities methods arguably fail to do. Well, as far as I know: any sort of study can

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began to change in the mid-to-late 1900s. Berrett (2015) identifies February 28, 1967 as the date on which Ronald Reagan, then governor of California, enunciated a shift in thinking regarding the purpose of higher education when he declared that *the state's taxpayers should not be "subsidizing intellectual curiosity"* (Berrett 2015, para. 6). Six years later, the Higher Education Research Institute began tracking freshmen responses to questions about why they pursue college degrees […]. *In 1971, 37.1% of freshmen said that "Being very well off financially" was an "Essential" or "Very Important" reason to obtain a college degree. The same year, nearly 73% of freshmen indicated that "Developing a meaningful philosophy of life" was "Essential" or "Very Important." In contrast, by 2002, 73% of freshmen indicated that "Being very well off financially" was "Essential" or "Very Important" and 41% emphasized "Developing a meaningful philosophy of life."* (my emphases)

Elizabeth Erin Smith, "Examining Exemplary P-20 Partnerships Using a Mixed Methods Approach," (PhD diss., University of Arkansas, Fayetteville, 2016), 13–14.

12 Broadly construed. See my discussion in the "Preface," n. 11, on Marielle Macé and reading in *Façons de lire, manières d'être,* 13:

L'étude m'avait arrachée à sa familiarité, à sa singularité et à sa réserve de forces; mais l'expérience littéraire me l'a étonnamment restituée; s'animant dans une figure analogue, la signature s'est laissée discrètement transmettre. Quelque chose de mon rapport à moi-même et aux autres, de ce qu'il y a de capable et d'incapable dans mon propre corps, dans mon propre langage, s'y est rejoué et ressaisi: ce que la vie sociale avait affaibli, la littérature le relançait, lui redonnait un avenir. Comme si cette autre réclusion qu'est la lecture m'avait rendu ce geste sous la forme d'une puissance générale, me permettant de m'en souvenir, d'en ré-hériter, de le faire rayonner dans toutes sortes de domaines de la vie et de ses fonnes.

([My] studies had torn me from their familiarity, their singularity and their reserves of strength; but literary experience has restored it to me astonishingly; coming to life in an analogous figure, the signature let itself be discreetly transmitted. Something of my relationship to myself and to others, of what is possible [capable] and impossible [incapable] in my own body, in my own language, is replayed and recaptured there: what social life had weakened, literature revived, gave it a future. As if this other seclusion that is reading had returned this gesture to me in the form of a general power, allowing me to remember it, to re-inherit it, to make it radiate in all sorts of domains of life and its forms; my translation)

create wonder. Yet the literary and the humanities more generally have a special place precisely because they deal with affairs of human concern (even posthumanism is about humans and their relationships with the nonhuman; some might even argue that they are "human, all too human"!). We find in the literary something of ourselves and others, of our potentials and our impotentials, and thereby can reconnect these to the broader experience of life. Briefly put, it's a redirection and expansion of our personal experience in ways the STEM or applied disciplines cannot do.

II

50

Money for its own sake: we say that certain beautiful things are good for their own sake. This is the problem of *praxis,* which Aristotle described as a good in itself, as opposed to *poiesis,* which involves a means to an end. Art for art's sake is a version of this dichotomy. Love is another. We love art and loved ones the same way (Eros was both art and love), for their own sake, not in a logic of instrumentality. What about money, then? Does Harpagon[13] not love money for its own sake? Is not the accumulation of capital the accumulation of capital for its own sake? On a superficial level, yes. Not all accumulation of capital is for its own sake. A Marxist might raise funds for the sake of a Marxist project. The generation of money for the sake of other ends.

51

This question of money for its own sake is in some ways naïve. Even the financier seeks prestige within a context of what Bourdieu called *illusio* and "distinction." Money in this sense serves to aggrandize the financier's social status (the anti-social Harpagon only seems to be an exception). Bourdieu developed this logic of distinction with the author, who functions within a "market of symbolic goods,"[14] even when their work resists market logic, because the author still tries to generate distinctions. Everything is subsumed under the logic of capitalism. Or the "spectacle," according to Debord, where everything is subsumed by the vast accumulation of spectacles.[15] So is money for its own

13 See my "Preface," n. 4.

14 Pierre Bourdieu, "Le Marché des biens symboliques," *L'Année sociologique* 22 (1971): 49–126.

15 Debord's substitution for the commodities in *Das Kapital. Capital,* I, I, I, 1: "The wealth of those societies in which the capitalist mode of production

sake contradictory to the project of "taunting the useful," while money accumulated in view of a valid social cause invalidates the project of taunting? Of course not, and the useless can be taunted too!

prevails, presents itself as 'an immense accumulation of commodities,' its unit being a single commodity" (trans. Samuel Moore and Edward Aveling [New York: Modern Library, 1906], 41). *The Society of the Spectacle,* trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith (New York: Zone Books, 1995), 12: "The whole life of those societies in which modern conditions of production prevail presents itself as an immense accumulation of *spectacles*. All the once was directly lived has become mere representation."

III

94

Decisionism as subjectivity, an assumption that the decisions we make are rational. In this sense, Cartesianism reproduced old notions, possibly Neoplatonist in nature, about the expression of subjectivity. The world is the hylomorphic expression of ideas, which does not account for the complexity of history and materiality — that the decisions we make are never so clear. As Socrates understood, we make mistakes out of ignorance. The judgmental nature and guilt complex of contemporary politics is just that: imputing to will our actions; and it's the individuals who have to "do a better job": the individual has a responsibility for their actions, which realign with a higher-order truth, in utilitarian terms, but also a neoliberal development of one's "human capital": managing effects instead of causes. This is not ethics or politics — rather an authoritarianism of the higher good that produces a sort of sacrificial violence.

95

The difference between the *Imitation Game* (2014) and the recent *Greyhound* (2020) should illustrate the problem of utilitarian sacrifice. If in the *Imitation Game* it is about allowing the bombing of a fleet so that the cracking of the code won't be revealed — and the same logic is present in the knowledge Churchill supposedly had regarding the bombing of Coventry — in *Greyhound* the captain saves the lives of those immediately present at the risk of not being able to defend the rest of the convoy crossing the Atlantic. It's also implied that this convoy is the very same one that was allowed to be attacked by U-boats in order to hide the fact that the Enigma Code had been cracked. But this is another argument and one more point about

utilitarianism. The point here is that attending to the immediate disturbs higher-order truths.

100

The opposition here is between the general law and application based on a greater good to which bodies must be submitted — benevolently expressed through a Rawlsian "veil of ignorance" — and the immediate, imminent situation with which we are confronted. Is this a false opposition or dilemma, like those trolley problems? In any case, in both films, individuals have to decide, and the immediate still gets infolded into a decisional chain. Based on available information, *there is no choice,* though. While in the real world it's a practical necessity to follow certain rules based on the greater good, such as wearing a mask that will in a sense reduce one's individual freedoms — so that we save others — the ethical implications cannot be ignored, nor can we pretend this is ethics when not the result of open thinking. We are confronted everyday with such situations.

101

Anarchism is ethics. Rather, ethics implies anarchy! *An-arkhē.* Because the ethical is open and cannot be based on prior logics or higher-order principles, the truly ethical is what arises or emerges in the present, to which we respond in a free way; allowing what is real to be thought through and engaged with on the ground — listening to the Earth, so to speak. Much of what passes as politics today is nothing of the sort. Modernity abandoned the old dogmas only to fall into competing dogmas, such as Liberalism (ironically originally based on "free thought"), Marxism, Game Theory, Neoliberalism, Libertarianism (close to Anarchism), etc. Anarchism has an internal "contradiction": not following a prime command is a prime command, an *arkhē*! Oh well, ideally, the anarchists can think with their feet, from emergent exteriorities, out of anxieties, based on the immanent circumstances that condition them.

102

This is why anarchist Agamben was being overly rigid during the Covid-19 situation, insofar as he opposed lockdown and vaccinations, because he reduced the ethical dimension to the biopolitical, as pure apparatus of power.[16] Deciding to wear a mask was ethical in uncertain times, care for others, grounded on and attentive to the facts as they were emerging, a form of collective affect. Refusing to wear a mask based on a theoretical argument about biopolitics as a state of emergency is not thinking freely and openly, and is symptomatic of exactly the type of a priori, deductive logic Agamben has fought for decades. One cannot turn anarchism into a higher-order principal of command! But he was correct that the sorts of gestures and apparatuses that have emerged out of Covid-19 are here to stay: no bureaucrat will want to let go of newfound powers.

103

Here is a challenge: if we are to avoid stagnation, anarchism cannot be held down by dialectical contradictions (Marxists think in terms of productive contradictions, yet these circulate within the given system[17]). During the pandemic, one could be out in the streets protesting while wearing a mask! One could hide behind a mask. One could isolate oneself temporarily in order to protect a life,[18] without thinking that one was only participating in biopolitics. A new anarchism requires a light fist that can

16 See Giorgio Agamben, *The Coming Community,* trans. Michael Hardt (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2007), 1, where he describes the need for accepting "whatever being," which is not a form of indifference but rather an attention to singularity.

17 This was always the tension between anarchism and Marxism: see Daniel Colson on "Contradictions" in *A Little Philosophical Lexicon of Anarchism from Proudhon to Deleuze,* trans. Jesse Cohn (Wivenhoe: Minor Compositions, 2019), 63, https://www.minorcompositions.info/?p=902.

18 Even if in the end it did nothing, even if ultimately hindsight tells a more complicated story. The pandemic wasn't a time to be a prophet, even if Agamben was. It wasn't a time to be dogmatic.

tickle too, that can scratch, comb, heckle, taunt—the capacity to adapt quickly with circumstances, avoiding shitty arrangements, which has always been the anarchist way. While this "pragmatism" risks falling into the sorts of strategies and tactics of neoliberalism — that new capitalist machine that converts everything it sees into itself — anarchism thrives when it experiments with new forms towards a genuine politics.

IV

104

Taunting moves forward, driven by a "storm […] from paradise,"[19] driven by what might have been as forgotten though unforgettable. Taunting is demand-desire: *conatus*. In time, yet out of time. Suspended and suspending; moving quickly: side-tracking something, tracking it, yet sidetracked. Affecting something while affecting itself.[20] Moving away from what is shit, yet recognizing it — analyzing its posterior. Taunting is sidetracked by the magic of the *that; that* something happened is a suspension in the thing's magic, its immanent joys. Its magic

19 Walter Benjamin, "Theses on the Philosophy of History," in *Illuminations: Essays and Reflections,* ed. Hannah Arendt, trans. Harry Zohn (New York: Schocken, 1968), 257. There's a common misunderstanding that Benjamin's "Angelus Novus/Angel of History" is only describing a negative movement, that the angel is a "melancholy angel"; yet that understanding needs to consider what Benjamin says about "happiness" in the "Theologico-Political Fragment." See *Reflections: Essays, Aphorisms, Autobiographical Writings,* ed. Peter Demetz, trans. Edmund Jephcott (New York: Schocken, 1978), 312–13. As for the "melancholy angel," one needs to properly consider Benjamin's critique of "Left-Wing Melancholy." See Walter Benjamin, "Left-Wing Melancholy," in *The Weimar Republic Sourcebook,* eds. Anton Kaes, Martin Jay, and Edward Dimendberg (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994) and Wendy Brown, "Resisting Left Melancholy," *boundary 2* 26, no. 3 (1999): 19–27. See also Giorgio Agamben, "Walter Benjamin and the Demonic: Happiness and Historical Redemption," in *Potentialities: Collected Essays in Philosophy,* trans. Daniel Heller-Roazen (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999), 138–59.

20 Cf. "L'actif et le moyen dans le verbe" in Benveniste, *Problèmes de linguistique générale* 1, 168–75. The concept of middle voice, where "le verbe indique un procès dont le sujet est le siege" ("the verb indicates a process of which the subject is the seat"; my translation): "le sujet est centre en même temps qu'acteur du procès ; il accomplit quelque chose qui s'accomplit en lui" (172: "the subject is at the center as well as an actor in the process; they accomplish something that is accomplished in them"). The subject therefore "effectue en s'affectant" (173: "carries out [affects] while affecting itself").

is not the magic wand of the dialectic moving towards an ever-higher state, but rather a suspension: wonderment, yet not hypnosis nor paralysis — a transrelational dynamic, that "enters into a relation that 'crosses' any simple relation of discrete agents, no longer intact because of transformative dialogue"![21] Taunting is tossed into existence — not the "debt" of a purposive subject acting on the object.

128

"From the ground up" is the message for the transrelational individuates. There is no prime command. Please scratch my back and tickle me. I trust, fear you (won't) violate me: I like your danger, the possibility of violation. It tickles me. I violate Sociology and Darwinism of literature, Digital Humanities, making lots of enemies along the way. How could I have tickled them instead? Can I go back? Even "editing is destructive."[22] I'd like to tickle philosophical pragmatism, as I learn from and about it, even though I suspect terms such as "relation" and "process philosophy" (Alfred North Whitehead), because they assume relations and processes are *it,* conjuring "action" (*pragma* from πρᾶγμα), which can be another way to formalize existence, forms of life, into structures. Philosophical pragmatism might produce a nonsubject-as-potential-energy, through the *pragma*tic, in the very movement away from subjectivity. We will see.

129

There is a further difficulty to be overcome (maybe) with "process philosophy" and philosophical pragmatism: if processes are the "hows" of experience, do those actually account for experience? How do we know that experience is a process? While

21 See chapter 90.

22 David Cecchetto, *Listening in the Afterlife of Data: Aesthetics, Pragmatics, and Incommunication* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2022), 15.

experience needn't be "the privileged terrain of a higher-order consciousness," and can be "instead the causal efficacy through which worlds world,"[23] to experience something requires accounting for it consciously (which requires language). The going-through of experience is not an indifferent or neutral thing, since it happens to us as we (human or nonhuman) perceive it (AI cannot, in that sense, perceive — not yet, anyway). Kant reenters through the back door, but now the disinterested observer evacuates the "experiencer," and insofar as it requires a consciousness all over again. For Kant, we cannot understand perception without that "higher-order consciousness," otherwise all would be a "rhapsody of perceptions."[24]

130

Is understanding processes the most useful way to enrich our understanding of experience? Also, understanding sensation through sensation is an infinitely regressive problem. Or, using quantum physics to explain discourse is something that can never be proven anyway.[25] Or, does seeing friendship and love as evolutionary enrich our experience of them? On the contrary.[26] Does their explanatory power enhance our ability to properly understand the experience of experience, and all that that experience entails — the suffering, joy, the emotions, the physical and spiritual sensations that going-through entails? Looked at differently, by way of an analogy/metonymy, does understanding how climate collapse happens as a scientific process help us to stop it, or should there rather be cultural, social, and politi-

23 Ibid., 57.

24 Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason,* trans. J.M.D. Meiklejohn (London: Colonial Press, 1900 [1781]), Book II, chapter II, section II, https://www.marxists.org/reference/subject/ethics/kant/reason/critique-of-pure-reason.htm.

25 Cf. Karen Barad, *Meeting the Universe Halfway: Quantum Physics and the Entanglement of Matter and Meaning* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007) and Vicky Kirby, *Quantum Anthropologies: Life at Large* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2011).

26 See the "Preface."

cal shifts?[27] That science as evidence is useful, because we need to see the collapse before we see more of it, but the problem is elsewhere.

…

27 Albert Camus, *La Peste* (Paris: Gallimard, 1947), 62: "À l'allure où la maladie se répand, si elle n'est pas stoppée, elle risque de tuer la moitié de la ville avant deux mois. Par conséquent, il importe peu que vous l'appeliez peste ou fièvre de croissance. Il importe seulement que vous l'empêchiez de tuer la moitié de la ville." ("At the rate the disease is spreading, if it is not stopped, it could kill half the town within two months. Therefore, it doesn't matter whether you call it plague or growing fever. It only matters that you stop it from killing half the town"; my translation)

V

134

Sports in ancient Greece, some argue,

VI

145

"Eternity is in love with the productions of time."[28] *Nunc stans* (Aquinas), *Jetztzeit* (Benjamin)? In time, yet out of time — synaptic, single through touch, yet incommensurable, out of joint, running out of time, always on/in time. Rather than split, multiplied, always on the go. Everything redeemed. The violence of the quote from Blake, stripped of its antithetical context, makes us turn back to its origin, always fleeting and out of reach, yet generating new spaces. The infinitely ungraspable, or how the eternal present is always a gift, an opportunity, opening. The irreplaceable now-time eddies contain their own infinite (unfinished, unending) gateway to the black sun, black hole. The inappropriate appropriation is not that of the proper, but of the improperly proper and the properly improper: its use, of the self or of another, is not a falsifiable truth proposition, but rather its own unfolding-infolding.

28 William Blake, "The Proverbs of Hell," in *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell, Wikisource,* June 1, 2021, https://en.wikisource.org/wiki/The_Marriage_of_Heaven_and_Hell, 7.

Endnotes

Preface

i The Romans used the palindromic acronym EVVNVVE ("Ede ut vivas, ne vivas ut edas": "eat to live, don't live to eat"). Cicero apparently used it in his *Rhetorica ad Herennium* (*Rhetoric for Herennius*), Book IV, ch. 28 : "Esse oportet ut vivas, non vivere ut edas" ("one must eat to live, not live to eat") in *Rhetorica ad Herennium,* trans. Harry Caplan (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1954), 324–25. See Preface, n. 2.

ii See Charles Baudelaire, "Au lecteur": "hypocrite Reader — my double — my brother!" trans. Robert Lowell, in *The Flowers of Evil,* eds. Marthiel Mathews and Jackson Mathews (New York: New Directions, 1963). Found on https://fleursdumal.org/poem/099. See Preface, n. 4.

iii Avi Kak, "Letter to the Editor: Why Our English Department Deserves More Respect," *Exponent,* December 9, 2021, https://www.purdueexponent.org/opinion/letters_to_editor/article_788df678-5920-11ec-a915-7b76b8a4d7bf.html. See Preface, n. 6.

How to (Un)Use this Book

iv Vinciane Despret, *Que diraient les animaux, si…on leur posait les bonnes questions?* (Paris: La Découverte, 2012). See How to (Un)Use this Book.

Part I

v For Plato's *Theaetetus,* and other classical texts, see *Perseus Digital Library,* http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/. For Martin Heidegger's *Basic Questions of Philosophy* (Bloomington: Indiana

University Press, 1994), see §§35–38. Cf. John Llewelyn, "On the Saying That Philosophy Begins in *thaumazein,*" in *Post-Structuralist Classics,* ed. Andrew Benjamin (London: Routledge, 1988). See also David Bollert, "Plato and Wonder," *Extraordinary Times,* IWM Junior Visiting Fellows Conferences, Vol. 11: Vienna 2001, http://www.iwm.at/wp-content/uploads/jc-11-131.pdf. Michael Edwards wrote a beautiful treatise on the subject, *De l'émerveillement* (Paris: Fayard, 2008), based on his Collège de France course of 2006–2007, accessible on the Collège de France website, http://www.college-de-france.fr/site/michael-edwards/course-2006-2007.htm. Finally, see Mary-Jane Rubenstein, *Strange Wonder: The Closure of Metaphysics and the Opening of Awe* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2008), in which the author discusses Heidegger's differentiating wonder (*Erstaunen*) from curiosity (*Verwunderung*), 28–33. See chapter 0.

vi Mallarmé was a nineteenth-century French poet and head of the French Symbolist movement. For the "monster of impotency," see his "Letter to Cazalis," September 14, 1869, about his prose-poetic drama *Igitur:* "je te dirai un seul mot de mon travail que je te porterai l'été prochain : c'est un conte, par lequel je veux terrasser *le vieux monstre de l'Impuissance,* son sujet, du reste, afin de me cloîtrer dans mon grand labeur déjà réétudié. S'il est fait (le conte) je suis guéri ; *similia similibus*" ("I'll tell you one thing about my work which I'll bring to you next summer: it's a tale with which I want to crush *the old monster of Impotency,* its subject, moreover, in order to cloister myself in my great labor already re-studied. If it is done [the tale] I am cured; *similia similibus*"; My emphasis and translation). In Stéphane Mallarmé, *Œuvres completes,* I, ed. Bertrand Marchal (Paris: Gallimard/Pléiade, 1998), 748. Aee "Crise de vers" for his notion of "relinquishing the initiative to words," in *Œuvres complètes,* I, 211. For the "monstrous," see also Jacques Derrida, "La Structure, le signe et le jeu dans le discours des sciences humaines," in *L'Écriture et la différence* (Paris: Seuil, 1967), 427–28. See chapter 1.

vii Peter Sloterdijk, *Die Domestikation des Seins*: *Für eine Verdeutlichung der Lichtung* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 2000). I have consulted the French translation: *La Domestication de l'être: Pour un éclaircissement de la clairière,* trans. Olivier Mannoni (Paris, Mille et une nuits, 2000), 74–75, 90–91. See chapters 3, 6, and 110.

viii See Gérard Genette, *Mimologiques: Voyage en Cratylie* (Paris: Seuil, 1976). See Oswald Ducrot and Tzetan Todorov, *Dictionnaire encyclopédique des sciences du langage* (Paris: Seuil, 1972) for a history of comparative grammar. See Joshua T. Katz for Saussure and his penchant for anagrams: "Saussure at Play," *Cahiers Ferdinand de Saussure* 68 (2015): 113–32. See chapters 2, 22, and 42.

ix "L'actif et le moyen dans le verbe," in *Problèmes de linguistique générale,* I (Paris: Gallimard, 1966), 168–75. The original French: "le verbe indique un procès dont le sujet est le siège," and the subject "effectue en s'affectant" (173). See chapter 5.

x Mallarmé, *Sonnet en -yx:*

> Ses purs ongles très haut dédiant leur onyx,
> L'Angoisse, ce minuit, soutient, lampadophore,
> Maint rêve vespéral brûlé par le Phénix
> Que ne recueille pas de cinéraire amphore
> Sur les crédences, au salon vide : nul ptyx
> Aboli bibelot d'inanité sonore,
> (Car le Maître est allé puiser des pleurs au Styx
> Avec ce seul objet dont le Néant s'honore.)
> Mais proche la croisée au nord vacante, un or
> Agonise selon peut-être le décor
> Des licornes ruant du feu contre une nixe,
> Elle, défunte nue en le miroir, encor
> Que, dans l'oubli fermé par le cadre, se fixe
> De scintillations sitôt le septuor.

> With her pure nails offering their onyx high,
> lampbearer Agony tonight sustains
> many a vesperal fantasy burned by
> the Phoenix, which no funerary urn contains
> on the empty room's credences: no ptyx,
> abolished bauble, sonorous inanity
> (Master has gone to draw tears from the Styx
> with that one thing, the Void's sole source of vanity).
> Yet near the vacant northward casement dies
> a gold possibly from the decorations
> of unicorns lashing a nymph with flame;
> dead, naked in the looking-glass she lies
> though the oblivion bounded by that frame
> now spans a fixed septet of scintillations.

Mallarmé, *Œuvres completes,* I, 37–38. Translation from Stéphane Mallarmé, *Collected Poems and Other Verse,* trans. E.H. Blackmore and A.M. Blackmore (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006).

Concerning "magic": in his *Le Mystère dans les lettres,* Mallarmé responds sarcastically to his critics and the charge of "obscurity" (notably by Marcel Proust in "Contre l'obscurité," in *Chroniques* [1896; repr. Paris, Gallimard-NRF, 1936], 151–58) that it's best to turn away "lazy" readers from the "treasures" of the text: "Tout écrit, extérieurement à son trésor, doit, par égard envers ceux dont il emprunte, après tout, pour un objet autre, le langage, présenter, avec les mots, un sens même indifférent : on gagne de détourner *l'oisif,* charmé que rien ne l'y concerne, à première vue" (Mallarmé, *Œuvres completes,* I, 229). "Every written thing, outside of its *treasure,* must, regarding those [writings] from which it borrows, after all, for another object/purpose, language, present, with words, a meaning that is even indifferent: we gain from turning the *lazy* [reader], charmed that nothing there concerns them, at first sight"; my emphasis and translation. See chapters 5, 89, 93, 110, and 123.

xi From the Greek διά (*dia,* two, or division) and the verb αἱρέω (*haireo,* take, seize, and even choose), thus to split in two/divide the two elements of a diphtong. So a diphthong like "oo" that is normally one syllable is split in two. Prior to the twentieth century, this was much more common in French verse (though it did happen in English). *The New Yorker* has this "pedantic" policy of representing diaereses such as "coöperate," "zoölogy," and so on using the diaeresis accent. It's even a political issue! (You'd never see it in a conservative publication.) See Mary Norris, "The Curse of the Diaeresis," *The New Yorker,* April 26, 2012, http://www.newyorker.com/culture/culture-desk/the-curse-of-the-diaeresis. Note that in English, diaeresis usually refers to the accent "¨," often confused with the Umlaut that refers to an alteration of pronunciation. In French, the diaeresis is called a "tréma" (such as with the word "naïf/naïve," which of course *The New Yorker* uses); but often there isn't an accent for those splits, such as in "hier" ("ee-yair"). There's a counter-piece by Jen Doll. See Jen Doll, "We Resist Further Cooperation on 'Coöperation'," *The Atlantic,* April 26, 2012, https://www.theatlantic.com/culture/archive/2012/04/we-resist-further-cooperation-cooperation/328832/. In fact, when you think about it, the diaeresis taunts: it taunts conservative and "liberal" readers, for different reasons. It's useful, but unnecessary, and somewhat pretentious, I'd say. You can't help but notice them when they occur in *The New Yorker.* While they might be quirky or eccentric, they come across as *faux*. But they do test the fundamental principle of this book — they taunt!

As for the Greek διαιρέω (*diaireō*), I wonder if we can connect the *reō* of *aireō* to *rheō* as flow or flux, but also "rhythm" — see Émile Benveniste, "La notion de 'rythme' dans son expression linguistique," in *Problèmes de linguistique générale,* I (Paris: Gallimard, 1966), 327–35. In that sense, *diaireō* would mean a "split flow" or "split rhythm." There's a wonderful adventure to be had here, insofar as according to Benveniste's findings, rhythm isn't regular return like the cadence of waves, but more like the ongoing flow of a river (*rheō* comes from the flow of a river, not the beat of the waves on a shore. It's Plato and Aristotle who

imposed the idea of metered rhythm into Western knowledge). My connecting *diaireō* to *rheō* is of course likely a folk etymology, but also a case of "philology." See chapters 2, 42*, 22, 72, and 5.

xii This is untranslatable, and the English "now spans a fixed septet of scintillations" unfortunately cannot capture everything in this hydratic, polysemic poem. It is nevertheless a great translation. This poem is a wonderful example of untranslatability. See chapter 5.

xiii Robert Greer Cohn, *Towards the Poems of Mallarmé* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1981). See chapter 5.

Part II

xiv For juggling in movies: http://www.juggling.org/movies/date.html. See chapter 27.

xv Giorgio Agamben, *The Man without Content,* trans. Georgia Albert (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999), 115. See chapter 27.

xvi Giorgio Agamben, "Bartleby, or On Contingency," in *Potentialities: Collected Essays in Philosophy,* ed. and trans. Daniel Heller-Roazen (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999), 243–71. See Gilles Deleuze, "Bartleby, ou la formule," in *Critique et clinique* (Paris, Minuit, 1993), 89–114. See also chapter 140.

xvii Greg Hainge, "Three Non-Places of Modernity in the History of French Cinema: 1967, 1935, 2000. *Playtime, Subway* and *Stand-by,*" *Australian Journal of French Studies* 51, nos. 2–3 (May 2014), 197–211. See chapter 11.

Part III and Intermission

xviii Mieke Bal, "Let's Abolish the Peer-Review System," *Media Theory,* September 3, 2018, http://mediatheoryjournal.org/mieke-bal-lets-abolish-the-peer-review-system/. See chapters 17 and 144.

xix A similar problem exists with the crisis of the humanities, which need to justify their existence institutionally. Just as academics are justified by the number of publications (that no one will read), because apparently that and the venue where they are published are the only way to judge them, so the humanistic disciplines need to justify their existence by providing some social worth, by focusing on questions for the greater good, thereby losing sight of the specificity of their disciplines. While in the twentieth century, literary studies had to become a "science," because that was what was generally valued, today literary studies must contribute to society. But again, how do you gauge this "impact" and "reach"? It's a circular problem. See chapter 144 and 17.

xx Georges Bataille: "I wrote about the (extatic) experience of meaning and non-meaning, reversing itself into a non-meaning of meaning, then again […] without a receivable exit." "Sur Nietzsche," in Georges Bataille, *Œuvres complètes* (Paris: Gallimard, 1970–1988), 6:160; and *Méthode de méditation* (Paris: Fontaine, 1947), 218. See also Alain Arnaud and Gisèle Excoffon-Lafarge, *Bataille* (Paris: Seuil, 1978), 28–30, 36. See chapter 52.

xxi Lise Hosein, "Art 101: Why Is This Art?," *CBC Arts,* March 5, 2019, https://www.cbc.ca/arts/art-101-why-is-this-art-1.5040195. See chapters 26 and 24.

xxii Walter Benjamin, "Paris, capitale du XIXe siècle." For the English, see "Paris, Capital of the Nineteenth Century: Expose of 1939," in *The Arcades Project,* trans. Howard Eiland and Kevin

McLaughlin (Cambridge: Harvard/Belknap, 1999), 22. See chapter 5*.

xxiii Slavoj Žižek, "The Ongoing 'Soft Revolution,'" *Critical Inquiry* 30, no. 2 (Winter 2004):

> What, however, if there is no puzzled look, but enthusiasm, when the yuppie reads about impersonal imitation of affects, about the communication of affective intensities beneath the level of meaning ("Yes, this is how I design my publicities!"), or when he reads about exploding the limits of self-contained subjectivity and directly coupling man to a machine ("This reminds me of my son's favorite toy, the action-man that can turn into a car!"), or about the need to reinvent oneself permanently, opening oneself up to a multitude of desires that push us to the limit ("Is this not the aim of the virtual sex video game I am working on now? It is no longer a question of reproducing sexual bodily contact but of exploding the confines of established reality and imagining new, unheard-of intensive modes of sexual pleasures!"). There are, effectively, features that justify calling Deleuze the ideologist of late capitalism. Is the much celebrated Spinozan *imitatio afecti,* the impersonal circulation of affects bypassing persons, not the very logic of publicity, of video clips, and so on, where what matters is not the message about the product, but the intensity of the transmitted affects and perceptions? Furthermore, recall again the hard-core pornography scenes in which the very unity of the bodily self-experience is magically dissolved, so that the spectator perceives the bodies as a kind of vaguely coordinated agglomerate of partial objects. Is this logic where we are no longer dealing with persons interacting, but just with the multiplicity of intensities, of places of enjoyment, plus bodies as a collective/impersonal desiring machine, not eminently Deleuzian?" (292–93). See chapter 5*.

xxiv Alain Viala, *La Naissance de l'écrivain* (Paris: Minuit, 1985). See chapter 16.

xxv Cf. Eldritch Priest for this idea, Karen Eliot, "Eldritch Priest—Impractical Enthusiasms (TSpec4)," *YouTube,* December 24, 2016, https://youtu.be/V5sbsK59vcc. See chapter 4.

xxvi "Why make something simple when you can make it complicated?"). Or, "beaucoup pour pas grand chose" ("lots for not much"). See chapters 19 and 0.

xxvii Cf. πολύπλοκος, *poluplokos* ("many-folded," "manifold") → complex, complicated, intricate, mazy (or… convoluted, from Gk. *eluo* "wind, wrap," *helix* "spiral object," *eilein* "to turn, squeeze"). See chapter 19.

xxviii E.g., *poiesis, mimesis;* cf. Emile Fromet de Rosnay, *Mallarmésis* (New York: Peter Lang, 2011), and David Cecchetto, *Humanesis* (Minnesota: Minnesota University Press, 2013). See also chapter 5, n. 2 for *-tion*. See chapter 19.

xxix An alternative would be PROSMETAPLOKPOIESIS = PMPP. In a sense, this would be a remedy to, and continuation of, Object Oriented Ontology (OOO), but also an augmentation of "Patience, Persistence, Passion" → "Patience, Persistence, Passion, Pourcomplification!" See chapter 19.

xxx Which is a reflection on "the modalities of non-knowledge." Furio Jesi is quoted by Agamben in *The Open,* trans. Kevin Attell (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2004), 89. See chapter 19.

xxxi Gilles Deleuze with Claire Parnet, "L'actuel et le virtuel," in *Dialogues* (Paris: Flammarion, 1996), 178–81. For the English translation, see Gilles Deleuze with Claire Parnet, "The Actual and the Virtual," in *Dialogues II,* trans. Eliot Ross Albert (London: Continuum, 2002), 148–52. See chapters 17 and 19.

See Brian McHale, "Poetry as Prosthesis," *Poetics Today* 21, no. 1 (Spring 2000), 2–32; William Winder, "Robotic Poetics," in *Blackwell Companion to Digital Humanities,* eds. S. Shreibman, R. Siemens, and J. Unsworth (Oxford: Blackwell, 2004), 448–68; and William Winder, "Le Robot-poète," in *Littérature, informatique, lecture: Lecture assistée par ordinateur, lecture interactive, écrilecture,* eds. Michel Lenoble and Alain Vuillemin (Limoges: Artois Presses Université, 1999), 187–213. See chapter 21.

Part IV

xxxiii Roland Barthes, *S/Z* (Paris: Seuil, 1970), 180:

> La maîtrise du sens, véritable sémiurgie, est un attribut divin, dès lors que ce sens est défini comme l'écoulement, l'émanation, l'effluve spirituel qui déborde du signifié vers le signifiant: l'auteur est un dieu (son lieu d'origine est le signifié); quant au critique, il est le prêtre, attentif à déchiffrer l'Écriture du dieu.
>
> The mastery of meaning, a true semiurgy [but also a thaumaturgy, even an *interpretaunturgy!* See chapter 42] is a divine attribute, since this meaning is defined as the flow, the emanation, the spiritual effluvium which overflows from the signified to the signifier: the author is a god (his place of origin is the signified); as for the critic, he is the priest, attentive to decipher the scripture of the god.

REMARKABLY SIMILAR TO NIETZSCHE! (Cf. Barthes, *S/Z,* on Nietzsche and interpretation. This is a split in Nietzsche, because he still subscribes to this notion of overflowing in *Will to Power.* Cf. Agamben, *The Man without Content*. See chapter 41.

xxxiv Barthes, *S/Z,* 12:

> ce texte est une galaxie de signifiants, non une structure de signifiés ; il n'a pas de commencement ; il est réversible ; on y

> accède par plusieurs entrées dont aucune ne peut être à coup sûr déclarée principale ; les codes qu'il mobilise se profilent à perte de vue, ils sont indécidables (le sens n'y est jamais soumis à un principe de décision, sinon par coup de dés) ; de ce texte absolument pluriel, les systèmes de sens peuvent s'emparer, mais leur nombre n'est jamais clos, ayant pour mesure l'infini du langage.
>
> This text is a galaxy of signifiers, not a structure of signifieds; it has no beginning; it is reversible; it is accessed by several entrances, none of which can be definitely declared main; the codes that it mobilizes loom as far as the eye can see, they are undecidable (meaning is never subject to a principle of decision, except by roll of the dice); systems of meaning can take hold of this absolutely plural text, but their number is never closed, having the infinity of language as its measure. (Google Translate)

See chapter 41.

xxxv Barthes is a source of infinite clarity and pleasure, joy even:

> Il faut donc choisir: ou bien placer tous les textes dans un va-et-vient démonstratif, les égaliser sous l'œil de la science indifférente, les forcer à rejoindre inductivement la Copie dont on les fera ensuite dériver; ou bien remettre chaque texte, non dans son individualité, mais dans son jeu, le faire recueillir, avant même d'en parler, par le paradigme infini de la différence, le soumettre d'emblée à une typologie fondatrice, à une évaluation.
>
> We must therefore choose: either place all the texts in a demonstrative back and forth, equalize them under the eye of indifferent science, force them to inductively join the Copy from which we will then derive them; or put each text back, not in its individuality, but in its play, have it collected, even before speaking about it, by the infinite paradigm of differ-

ence, submit it from the outset to a founding typology, to an evaluation. (Google Translate, again)

See chapter 41.

xxxvi Astonishing example of *interpretaunting:* "Some readers who were trying to find a deeper meaning in the passage soon noticed a certain veracity when using base-13; 613 × 913 is actually 4213 (as (4 × 13) + 2 = 54, i.e., 54 in decimal is equal to 42 expressed in base-13). When confronted with this, the author claimed that it was a mere coincidence, stating that 'I may be a sorry case, but I don't write jokes in base 13.'" Wikipedia, s.v. "Phrases from *The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy,*" https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Phrases_from_The_Hitchhiker%27s_Guide_to_the_Galaxy#The_Answer_to_the_Ultimate_Question_of_Life,_the_Universe,_and_Everything_is_42. The *Wikipedia* entry (and Wikipedia in general) is a trace of heroic heroism. *Interpretaunting* is therefore a double movement: reading (teasing, tickling, combing a text) for meaning(s), writing (teasing, tickling, entangling a reader) with meaning(s), in both cases where there might not be any meaning (or too many). See chapter 41*.

xxxvii Giambattista Vico, "On the Heroic Mind [*De mente eroica*]," in *Vico and Contemporary Thought,* vol. 2, eds. Giorgio Tagliacozzo, Michael Mooney, and Donald Phillip Verene, 228–45 (Atlantic Heights: Humanities Press, 1979). See also Giambattista Vico, *On Humanistic Education* (*Six Inaugural Orations. 1699-1707*), trans. Giorgio A. Pinton and Arthur W. Shippee (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1993). See chapter 42*.

xxxviii In "One-way Street," in Walter Benjamin, *Reflections: Essays, Aphorisms, Autobiograpbical Writings,* trans. Edmund Jephcott (New York: Schocken, 1978), 81. See chapter 16.

xxxix See Giorgio Agamben, "Walter Benjamin and the Demonic: Happiness and Historical Redemption," in *Potentialities: Col-*

lected Essays in Philosophy (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999), 138–59. See chapter 15.

xl Benedict Spinoza, *Ethics,* trans. R.H.M. Elwes, 1883, part III, Proposition IX, https://www.gutenberg.org/files/3800/3800-h/3800-h.htm#chap03. See chapter 30.

xli Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Gay Science: With a Prelude in German Rhymes and an Appendix of Songs,* trans. Walter Kaufman (New York: Vintage/Random House, 1974), 91: "Examine the lives of the best and most fruitful people and peoples and ask yourselves whether a tree that is supposed to grow to a proud height can dispense with bad weather and storms; whether misfortune and external resistance, some kinds of hatred, jealousy, stubbornness, mistrust, hardness, avarice, and violence do not belong among the favorable conditions without which any great growth even of virtue is scarcely possible." See chapter 29.

Part V

xlii Will Knight, "This AI Can Generate Convincing Text — and Anyone Can Use It," *Wired,* March 29, 2021, https://www.wired.com/story/ai-generate-convincing-text-anyone-use-it/. See also Steven Johnson, "A.I. Is Mastering Language: Should We Trust What It Says?" *The New York Times,* April 15, 2022, https://www.nytimes.com/2022/04/15/magazine/ai-language.html. See chapter 55.

xliii Agamben, *The Man without Content,* 115. See chapter 91.

xliv Quentin Meillassoux: "an encryption process internal to the *Coup de dés* [*Throw of the Dice*]. This process aims to determine "the unique Number which cannot be another," enigmatically evoked in the poem. We therefore affirm that the *Coup de dés* is coded, and that deciphering the code is a necessary element for its proper understanding" (my translation). Quentin Meillassoux, "Le Nombre de Mallarmé," *Transversalités* 134 (March 2015), 118. Note that some have argued, like Meillassoux does, that the essential number of Mallamé's *Coup de dés* is twelve. Note also that the vast majority of sonnets have twelve syllables, but that this syllabification is not at the origin of the sonnet (Petrarch varies their count). See especially chapter 5. See also chapters 3, 34, 89, 92, 93, 99, 11, and 123.

xlv The question "is indeed to know if poetry is *dissociable or not from a counting operation,* whether its unity be that of syllables or of an entirely other thing" (Meillassoux, "Le Nombre de Mallarmé," 118). See chapter 92.

xlvi Cf. Giorgio Agamben, *La comunità che viene* (Torino: Bollati Bolingheri, 1990). For the English translation, see Giorgio Agamben, *The Coming Community,* trans. Michael Hardt (Min-

neapolis: Minnesota University Press, 1993), 78–83. See chapter 69–1.

xlvii Michel Foucault, *La Naissance de la biopolitique: Cours au Collège de France, 1978–1979* (Paris: Gallimard-Seuil, 2004), 231. See chapter 96.

xlviii Bruno Latour, "Why Has Critique Run Out of Steam? From Matters of Fact to Matters of Concern," *Critical Inquiry* 30, no. 2 (2004), 225–48. See chapter 97.

xlix Leo Strauss, *Persecution and the Art of Writing* (Glencoe: The Free Press, 1952). See chapter 99.

l Emile Fromet de Rosnay, "Le Mensonge impossible: Mallarmé et sa 'Notion,'" *Les Cahiers Stéphane Mallarmé* 2 (2005), 33–57. See chapter 99.

li From Google Translate (apologies in advance—I find it uncanny, of course, that a machine can do such a good job of translating human writing):

> It makes writing wild. We join a savagery before life. And we always recognize it, it is that of the forests, the one as old as time. That of the fear of everything, distinct and inseparable from life itself. We are fierce. One cannot write without the strength of the body. You have to be stronger than yourself to approach writing, you have to be stronger than what you write. It's a funny thing, yes. It's not just writing, writing, it's the cries of animals at night, those of everyone, those of you and me, those of dogs [...].
>
> Writing is the unknown. Before writing one knows nothing of what one is going to write. In all lucidity.
>
> If we knew something about what we were going to write, before doing it, before writing, we would never write. It wouldn't be worth it.

> To write is to try to know what one would write if one wrote — one only knows after — before, that is the most dangerous question one can ask oneself. But it is also the most common.
>
> Writing comes like the wind, it's naked, it's ink, it's writing, and it goes like nothing else happens in life, nothing more, except her, life.

See chapter 111.

lii Walter Benjamin, "Theses on the Philosophy of History," in *Illuminations: Essays and Reflections,* ed. Hannah Arendt, trans. Harry Zohn (New York: Schocken, 1968), 253–64. See chapter 56.

liii Pascal, but also François Fénelon, whose *Sur le renoncement à soi-même,* in *Œuvres,* vol. 1, ed. Jacques Le Brun (Paris: Gallimard, 1983), 917, offered, in the same era, a similar type of suspicion of those who do social good in view of the eternal. See chapters 29, 28, and 26.

liv Seneca, *Moral Essays,* vol. I: *De Providentia. De Constantia. De Ira. De Clementia*, trans. John W. Basore (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1928), 44–45 (*De Providentia,* VI):

> At multa incidunt tristia, horrenda, dura toleratu.' Quia non poteram vos istis subducere, animos vestros adversus omnia armavi; ferte fortiter. Hoc est quo deum antecedatis; ille extra patientiam malorum est, vos supra patientiam.
>
> "Yet," you say, "many sorrows, things dreadful and hard to bear, do befall us." Yes, because I could not withdraw you from their path, I have armed your minds to withstand them all; endure with fortitude. In this you may outstrip God; he is exempt from enduring evil, while you are superior to it.

See chapter 117.

lv James Joyce, *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* (London: CRW, 2005), 171:

> His life seemed to have drawn near to eternity; every thought, word and deed, every instance of consciousness could be made to revibrate radiantly in heaven: and at times his sense of such immediate repercussion was so lively that he seemed to feel his soul in devotion pressing like fingers the keyboard of a great cash register and to see the amount of his purchase start forth immediately in heaven, not as a number but as a frail column of incense or as a slender flower. (See chapter 117)

lvi Marc Angenot, "Pour en finir avec les études littéraires," *Liberté* 27, no. 2 (April 1985): 27–33. Todorov: "Persister à s'occuper des genres peut paraitre de nos jours un passe-temps oiseux sinon anachronique. […] On pourrait aller plus loin: la norme ne devient visible — ne vit — que grâce à ses transgressions" ("Persisting in occupying oneself today with genre can appear to be a useless/lazy passtime if not anachronistic. […] One could go further: the norm only becomes visible — lives — thanks to its transgressions"; my translation). Tzvetan Todorov, *Les genres du discours* (Paris: Seuil, 1978), 44. Quoted by Natali Leduc, "Divagation, Prohibition of Divagation and Divagation of Text" (PhD diss., Rice University, 2007), 1. For *otium* and its Greek precedent *skholē,* see my Preface, as well as chapters 13, 74, and 120.

lvii Damian Catani, *The Poet in Society: Art, Consumerism, and Politics in Mallarmé* (New York: Peter Lang, 2003). See chapter 123.

lviii Samuel Weber, *Institution and Interpretation* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987). See chapter 124.

lix Bruno Latour, "Why Has Critique Run out of Steam? From Matters of Fact to Matters of Concern," *Critical Inquiry* 30, no. 2 (Winter 2004): 225–48. See chapter 126.

Part VI

lx Eugene Thacker, *Cosmic Pessimism* (Minneapolis: Univocal, 2015). See chapter 66.

lxi Alexander Wilson, "Techno-Optimism and Rational Superstition," *Techné: Research in Philosophy and Technology* 21, nos. 2–3 (2017): 1–21. See chapter 66.

lxii Agamben, "Bartleby, or On Contingency." See chapter 70.

lxiii Karl Marx, *The German Ideology,* Part I, A: https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1845/german-ideology/ch01a.htm. See chapter 141.

lxiv Natali Leduc, e-mail message to author, April 29, 2016:

> Je n'avais pas pensé à utiliser "taunt" ni provoquer (de façon ludique) avant que tu m'en parles mais je crois que ça rejoint pas mal ce que je fais en général avec certaines innovations désuètes (antiquated innovations). Je dirais aussi "poke" (mais pas "poke fun at"), enfoncer légèrement son doigt dans la chair de l'utile, plutôt agacer de façon assez innocente (un peu comme les marins avec l'albatros dans le poème de Baudelaire, mais sans méchanceté), avec aussi un peu d'étonnement, pour le plaisir, un peu comme le ferait un enfant. Ce qui m'intéresse, c'est que les gens se questionnent (en souriant) sur la définition de l'utilitaire (ou l'utile), sur l'idée de progrès et de confort aussi, et sur l'importance qu'on accorde à l'utile.
>
> Il y a dans le monde de l'art une zone grise autour de l'utile. Un objet utile ou utilitaire peut-il être considéré comme étant une oeuvre d'art? Je crois que beaucoup d'intervenants dans le monde de l'art diraient non. Mais je peux avoir tort. Moi, je dirais parfois oui, parfois non. C'est du cas par cas.

Ma notion de communauté passe par le filtre du jeu de l'enfant. J'ai une certaine nostalgie du temps où j'étais enfant et que j'allais jouer (souvent dehors) avec mes amis (je le faisais quand même assez souvent à Houston, même adulte). Plusieurs de mes projets cherchent à engager les autres dans une sorte de jeu à partir duquel se forme une communauté autour de l'émerveillement et de la joie toute simple d'être ensemble et de faire quelque chose d'un peu insensée (et d'inutile). Avec d'autres projets, comme le Fotofonotron (une performance où je tentais de prendre une photo avec un téléphone à cadran et avec l'aide de tous les spectateurs), les spectateurs deviennent tous des participants, avec un rôle à jouer et ils s'amusent comme quand ils étaient petits et quand ils jouaient à faire semblant (make-believe). Le Churnatron est moins complexe mais permet à des participants qui ne se connaissent pas de partager un moment de jeu et de joie, comme entre amis, de créer une communauté ponctuelle d'amis de façon immédiate (et momentanée, fugitive).

Je crois qu'il y a à la fois ce que tu décris comme résistance à l'utile, enfin à ce que l'utile peut avoir de brutal et totalitaire pour aboutir à une sorte d'utilité joyeuse, comme tu dis une "jouissance productive qui vaut en soi, pour soi," qui retire sa joie moins de ce qu'elle produit d'utile que de la façon un peu ridicule, voire absurde qu'elle le produit. Le mot "joie" est important (plus que plaisir).

See chapter 142.

lxv Leduc, "Divagation, Prohibition of Divagation and Divagation of Text." See chapter 143.

lxvi My translation of "celui qui met en état de perte, celui qui déconforte (…), fait vaciller les assises historiques, culturelles, psychologiques, du lecteur, la consistance de ses goûts, de ses valeurs et de ses souvenirs, met en crise son rapport au langage":

Roland Barthes, *Le Plaisir du texte* (Paris: Seuil, 1973), 25–26. See chapter 143.

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Index

Please see the "Introduction" to Ivan Illich's *In the Vineyard of the Text: A Commentary to Hugh's Didascalion* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996). For further inquiries, please consult the English edition of Derrida's *Adieu — Emmanuel Levinas* located at the McGill University library, if it is still there. In that edition, someone scribbled a note in the area where there would have been an index, saying something along the lines of "why don't French books have bloody indexes?!"