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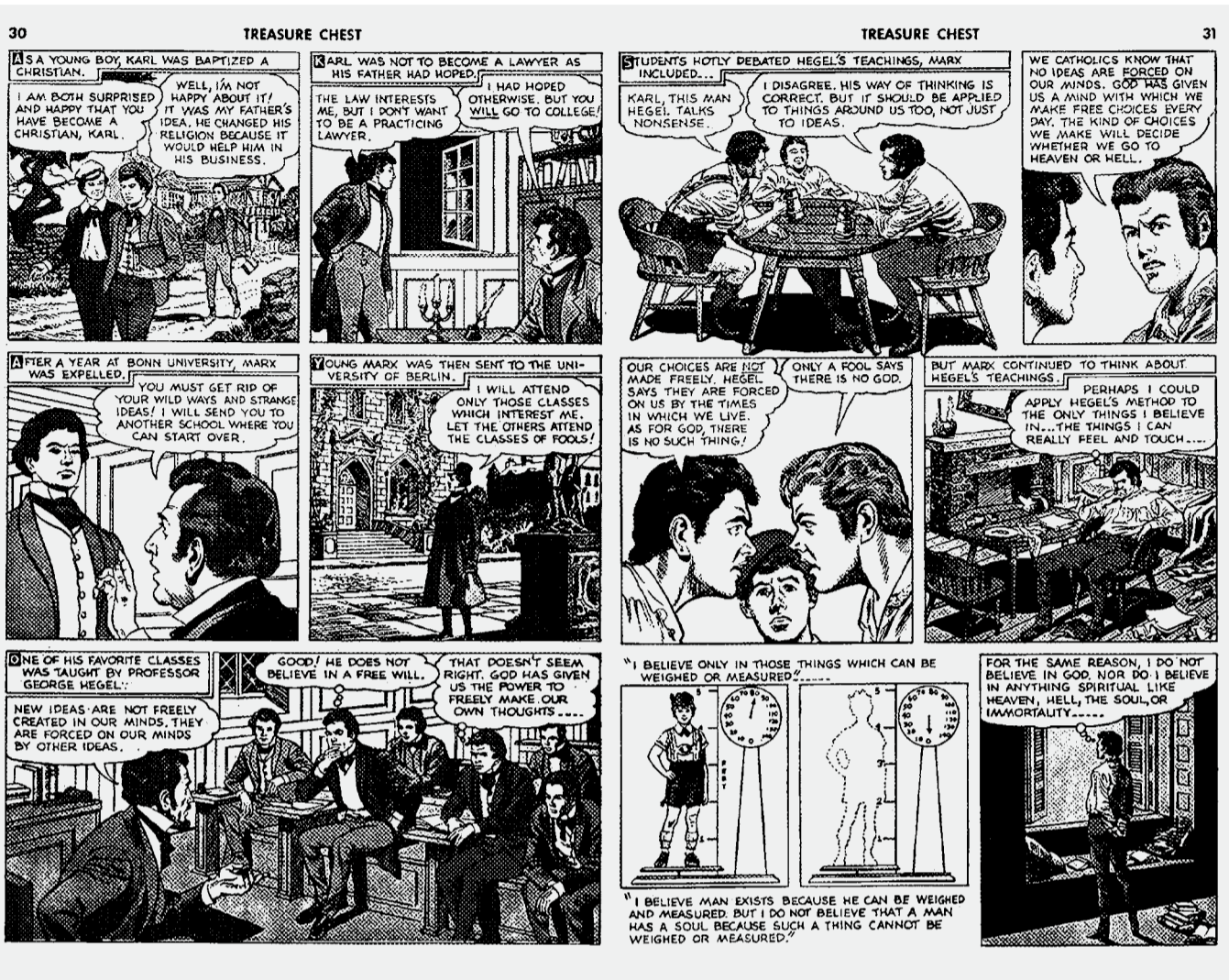
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# THE S

Pages 30-31 of *Treasure Chest*  
Vol. 17, No. 4, 1961.  
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## Authentic Histories

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The young Marx follows Hegel's lectures in Berlin, and learns to apply his ideas to the concrete surrounding world: there is no more free will, since man's consciousness is determined by his social existence. In 1961, the comic book *Treasure Chest*, published by the Catholic Guild, starts publishing a series of issues on "Godless Communism", the first providing us with an illuminating cartoon that depicts the struggle of the young Marx. This was particularly illuminating to J. Edgar Hoover, who did not hesitate to write a letter thanking the editors, and stressing the need to learn from the authentic sources, in order to save us from such a mortal threat.

This issue gives us many such authentic histories. Brian Manning Delaney provides a reading of the artist Lene Berg, who uses the CIA as a subject matter for art, and looks into the complexities of the Cold War use of culture as a tool and a weapon. In a review of Brian O'Doherty's recent book, *Studio and Cube*, Dan Karlholm discusses how the project of institutional critique, which once gave rise to the expression "The White Cube," stands up today.

History is indeed oblivion too, or perhaps an "active forgetting", as Nietzsche said. Sinziana Ravini's essay on the artist Stefan Constantinescu probes the way in which memories of a totalitarian era are handled, and the dialectic between "proof politics" and sensationalism in an exhibition that wants to unearth Romania's recent past.

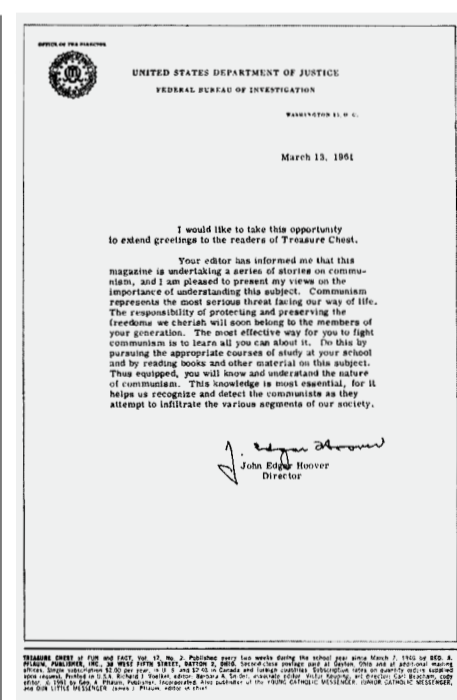
Art history once began as a discourse on style, perceived as a supra-individual entity. Today this category seems to have fallen into oblivion,

but in her new book, *On the Style Site*, Ina Blom attempts to revive this concept. Jeff Kinkle discusses how well she succeeds.

The two art projects by Björn Kowalski Hansen, *Yesterday is Crowding up my World* and *This is the Sign You Have Been Waiting For*, are about a melancholy state of mind, but also about the necessity of change. This state of mind pertinently enough divides this issue into two parts.

Kant did not care much for history; it was accorded only a small section at the end of *Critique of Pure Reason*. Staffan Lundgren takes a look at Deleuze's reading of the old "Chinaman of Königsberg", and how his Copernican Revolution overthrows not only the subject, but also the history of philosophy. Hegel on the other hand was fascinated with history to the point of transforming the Absolute Subject into the historical process itself. Celebrating the 200th birthday of Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit*, Sven-Olov Wallenstein attempts to brush away some of the cobwebs surrounding the great spider.

In a review of Beatriz Colomina's *Domesticity at War*, which looks at the psychological impact of the Cold War on American architecture, Helena Mattsson brings us back to the beginning. And finally, Kim West's obituary on Isidore Isou takes us back to the Letterist movement, a seemingly repressed avant-garde that was to merge into Situationism, which profoundly affected the way we read Hegel and Marx, although in a way that would probably not be appreciated by either *Treasure Chest* or their enthusiastic admirer at the FBI. •



The letter from John Edgar Hoover appears in *Treasure Chest* Vol. 17, No. 2, 1961. The Director extends his greetings to the readers of the magazine and notes that "Communism represents the most serious threat facing our way of life." Source as above.

# Limited Freedom, Unlimited Masks: Lene Berg's "Gentlemen & Arseholes"

Brian Manning Delaney

Imagine that a Scandinavian artist wanted to create a panegyric to the CIA, a celebration of the world-historical wisdom and beneficence of this maligned and misunderstood agent of freedom, a work that would move the viewer to reflect on the true role of the CIA in securing freedom for the West, to entertain the possibility that the CIA's role in the Cultural Cold War, in particular, might have been overwhelmingly positive, that the CIA may well have saved Western Europe, and therewith, a few decades later, the whole of Europe, and perhaps, ultimately, the whole world—for who knows how far west the lusterless, grim wheels of the Soviet Union might have rolled had Greece, or Turkey, or perhaps Italy or France, fallen for the blandishments of Soviet propaganda.

How would an artist with such an idea proceed? Would it be possible to receive funding from, say, the Swedish government, or any Swedish foundation, for such a project? From a Norwegian foundation? For that matter, from any Western European funding source? Wouldn't the artist have to lie, if nobly, about the true nature of the work in order to get funding? And, if the artist ever wanted to receive funding again—we're of course leaving aside the vanishingly few artists whose works are "collected" right as they are produced—and if she wanted to show her work anywhere in Europe (for that matter, anywhere in the West, aside from a gallery or two in perhaps northern Virginia or Canberra), wouldn't the work have to disguise its message so thoroughly that a lifetime would have to pass before it was decoded? Might the artist simply have no choice but to appear to fall in line, to present the work as yet another morality play from Western Europe (or the coastal U.S.) about the blood on the hands of Americans? Might she have to resort to the stratagems and feints normally associated with pre-Enlightenment philosophy and art, or with 20th century Soviet journalism, making use of acrostics, diversions, masks and esotericism of all kinds? The fact that a Scandinavian artist is very unlikely to be burned at the stake (unless she produces a work critical of Islam's treatment of women) doesn't mean that making certain political statements wouldn't amount to professional suicide.

Lene Berg's work, *Gentlemen & Arseholes* may well not be a paean to the CIA, and the above scenario may well prove to be an absurd counterfactual once the work is examined closely, but the questions such a scenario suggests might be more illuminating than the more obvious ones elicited by the work. The piece is complex, its message, or

messages, far less clear than one might imagine, and careful reflection is needed before we can begin to understand what the piece means. A description of the subject of the work reveals how complicated interpreting it will be.

*Gentlemen & Arseholes* is, to begin with, at least in some way about the CIA's Cultural Cold War activities during the 1950s and 1960s. Specifically, the work deals with the Congress for Cultural Freedom and its flagship journal, *Encounter*, and touches on a number of ethical questions surrounding the Congress and its activities. Berg's project consists of a reprint of the first issue of *Encounter*, altered in various ways, such as by the addition of "inserts"—newspaper articles, photographs with captions, along with Berg's own short texts (themselves entitled "On the Trail of a Liberal Conspiracy")—placed inside the pages of the journal; along with a video, *The Man in the Background*, which repeats the same sequence of scenes, mostly taken from an old home movie of some of the central players on vacation in Southern Europe while attending a conference, but with a different voice-over each time, recounting different stories, all of which seem equally fitting for the scenes being shown. I had the pleasure of seeing the work at Midway Contemporary Art in Minneapolis, where it was shown from March 17 to May 5. In a darkened room, copies of the journal were placed on a table illuminated by an overhead hanging lamp, producing the cloak & dagger ambience one might associate with a CIA or SIS back office, or a secret "gentlemen's" club (or, as the name of the work suggests, a "CIA & SIS club"). At the other end of the large exhibition space we have the sunny scenes of the home movie from Greece, with Berg recounting different narratives in Norwegian (with subtitles) about Michael Josselson, the Administrative Secretary and one of the architects of the Congress for Cultural Freedom, his wife Diana, and some of their colleagues. There is also an interview with Diana Josselson, conducted by the artist not long before Diana Josselson's death in 2005.

Berg's work, multifaceted though it is, deals with only one small part of the sprawling Congress for Cultural Freedom. The Congress for Cultural Freedom (CCF) is described in an article published on the CIA's Web site as one of the CIA's "more daring and effective" efforts.<sup>1</sup> The CCF was created in order to counter the Soviet Union's Kulturkampf for the hearts and minds of vacillating leftists throughout the West, though the primary battlefield was Western Europe. The Soviets had begun exploiting long-standing European anti-Americanism, which, paradoxically, was

reignited shortly after the end of World War II, perhaps as a proxy for European anti-Semitism, which of course had largely ceased being politically correct. The low-brow, superficial culture of the U.S. would poison Europe's centuries-old Teutonic depth, British wit, Italian taste, and French *je ne sais quoi*. "Brothers in culture: unite!" went the battle cry. "Look east to Dostoevsky and Tchaikovsky, instead of west towards the money-grubbing 'International American', towards Disney and Hollywood, which are run by crass capitalists and protected at the point of a gun by all those coarse, bubblegum-chewing negroes you see standing around on the street corners of your once noble cities of Berlin and Rome." The Soviets were of course slightly more subtle than that, but the CIA's response was far more subtle indeed. Instead of meeting this attack with a blunt "Go U.S.A.!" counterpunch, the wise men of the CIA, grasping what Hegel called the "awesome power of the negative", simply sought out anti-communists and anti-Stalinists, whatever other views they might have held, and showered them with funding, allowing them to write and produce whatever they wished, under the assumption that the result would in some way be pro-democratic, if not pro-U.S. For over a decade and a half, writers and artists of all stripes, including pacifists and socialists, many of them markedly anti-American, received what for most intellectuals was a small fortune from the CIA. The project was truly gargantuan. The Congress for Cultural Freedom had offices in dozens of countries, funded twenty magazines, and sponsored hundreds of art exhibits, performances and conferences throughout the world.

The twist is that the funding was more or less covert, at least until 1967, when an article containing accusations of secret CIA funding appeared in *Ramparts*, accusations which were shortly thereafter proudly confirmed by Thomas Braden, former head of the CIA's International Organizations Division, in *The Saturday Evening Post*, in an article entitled "I'm Glad the CIA is 'Immoral'". This is where the obvious ethical questions begin: Was the CIA immoral or not? Did the beneficiaries of the money, which came via front organizations and foundations, really not know the money was provided by the CIA? Does it even matter, given that these men and women of culture were able to produce the works they would have produced anyway? And did these men and women, in point of fact, really produce the works they would have produced anyway?

Unfortunately, it is all-too tempting, when in-

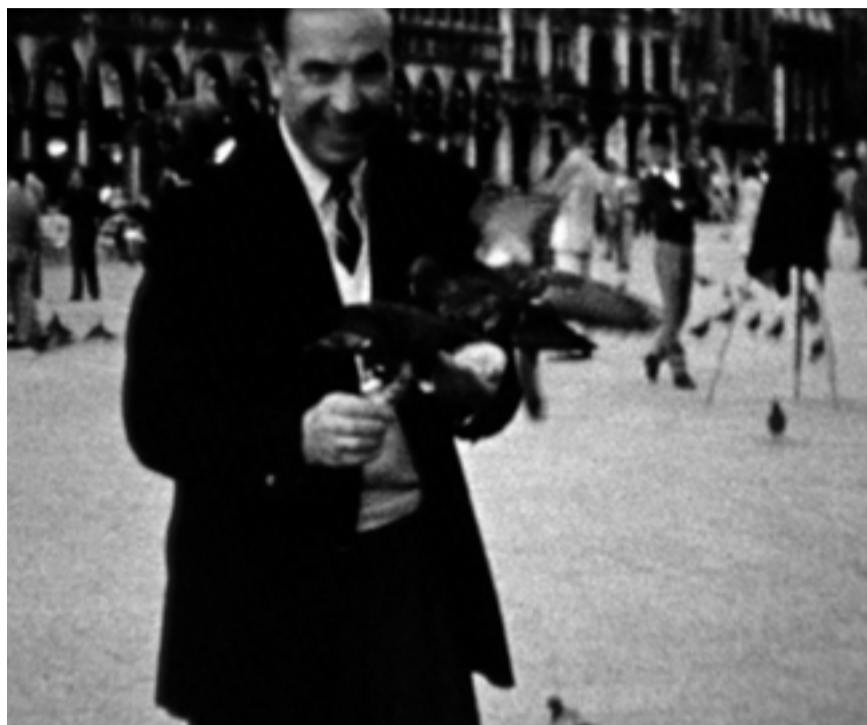
terpreting *Gentlemen & Arseholes*, to do little more than begin with these questions, instead of pursuing them as far as one should. Given that the whole matter of the CIA funding of the CCF has for the most part been forgotten, people today are initially stunned by the very facts themselves, and immediately start reading *Gentlemen & Arseholes* as little more than an artistic version of a straightforward, if gripping, historical text, one such as Frances Stonor Saunders' book, *Who Paid the Piper?: CIA and the Cultural Cold War* (1999), which recounts, with the peculiar moral indignation of the British left,<sup>2</sup> the shocking details of the CIA's Cultural Cold War undertakings. Given that Berg is Scandinavian, and that the vast majority of art from Northern Europe (or from the U.S., for that matter) that touches in any way on U.S. culture or foreign policy takes a distinctly critical stance against the U.S., we simply assume, once the fascination with the historical details begins to wear off, that the piece is but more calumny heaped upon the U.S., and we answer the obvious ethical questions surrounding the work almost as fast as they are raised, that the meaning of the work is simply: the CIA's skulduggery was at best bumbling interference in the world's greatest centers of culture, at worst a needless, freedom-perverting atrocity, and that every one of the pipers knew full well who paid them, and that they should have refused the money, or admitted receiving it from the start. Thus everyone is guilty: Michael Josselson, the people who worked for the Congress for Cultural Freedom, and above all the CIA.

It is clear, however, that any reasonable interpretation of *Gentlemen & Arseholes* must move beyond knee-jerk assumptions about Berg's political agenda. First of all, the work is clearly, at one level, a kind of tragedy about some of the most disreputable-seeming CIA employees. The story of Josselson and his wife is particularly moving. Josselson nobly agreed to take the fall when *The Saturday Evening Post* article appeared, and many of Europe's intellectual elite promptly abandoned him, leaving him to twist in the wind. Berg displays an unmistakable tenderness for Josselson, an Estonian Jew who became an American citizen during World War II, and who believed passionately in the cause of the CCF.

Secondly, the bite of some of the strongest suggestions of an anti-U.S. or anti-CIA stance vanish upon sufficiently close examination. This, by the way, is where we have the strongest concrete evidence of esotericism in the work, though we can't be certain whether Berg's masks are masks of political necessity, or whether the masks are



▲ Diana and Michael Josselson 1958, video stills from *The Man in the Background*, Lene Berg, 2006. Part of the project *Gentlemen & Arseholes*.



▲ Michael Josselson 1958, video stills from *The Man in the Background*, Lene Berg, 2006. Part of the project *Gentlemen & Arseholes*.

instructive or playful—and there is a significant difference. On the one hand, there is the esotericism of someone like Shostakovich, who was threatened with death or exile to a gulag. On the other hand, there is the esotericism of Nietzsche, which was more playful, and was even a means to force the reader to think independently, as Leo Strauss has pointed out—indeed, instead of hiding the esoteric nature of his works, Nietzsche frequently exhorted his readers to look for hidden meaning everywhere. The nature of Berg's freedom, and thus the nature of her esotericism, is perhaps somewhere between that of Shostakovich and that of Nietzsche. Nietzsche could safely scream at the reader: "those who have ears, hear!", "all deep things love a mask", and could use his ever-present suggestive dashes and ellipses. For Shostakovich, on the other hand, such interpretative instructions would have been suicidal. He had to hide the esoteric meaning carefully within the exoteric. Any interpretative instructions were feints directing the listener to the exoteric level, as in the editorial note accompanying his Fifth Symphony, "A Soviet artist's reply to justified criticism"; elsewhere, he even wrote that the symphony's conclusion was "joyful and optimistic". It took years for music theorists to understand the possible significance of the violent hammering of the first and fifth tones of the final D major chord, and the relatively weak third tone (the tone that determines that the chord is major instead of minor) in the conclusion to the final movement, a movement which otherwise seemed to be a triumphant glorification of Stalin. Shostakovich's musical esotericism was complicated enough that even today there is no consensus on the meaning of the work.

The anti-Americanism of the West has its own triumphalism, and, on the left (which itself has essentially no internal resistance, because it still fashions itself *the* resistance) the major third is generally loud and clear, be it a riff on Americans' obesity, ignorance, superficiality, hypocrisy, or aggressive, self-serving foreign policy. Dinner table conversations can riff on any of those themes, but art tends to focus on some aspect of foreign policy. Cognizant of the need to include at least a hint of anti-American triumphalism, but less threatened than Shostakovich was, and thus free enough to make the esoteric level transparent to a relatively careful viewer, Berg includes her own short text about Conor Cruise O'Brien publicly questioning the integrity of the people behind *Encounter*. The text, dealing with how the CCF began to unravel,

begins with a description of O'Brien posing the question, in 1966, of why *Encounter* hadn't once mentioned the Vietnam War. Berg then notes O'Brien made this claim "right in the middle of Operation Rolling Thunder and the U.S. was in the process of dropping more bombs on Vietnam than the world had ever seen before..." On the surface, this might seem like a line from Harold Pinter's Nobel Prize acceptance speech, the sort

**"The CIA may well have saved Western Europe, and thereafter, a few decades later, the whole of Europe, and perhaps, ultimately, the whole world"**

of thing that pleases people who would rather be pleased than think. But Berg surely knows that a discriminating reader will note that the Gulf of Tonkin incident had occurred less than two years before the articles for *Encounter* up till that time had been written. A careful reader will also notice the awkward structure of the sentence—not: "right in the middle of Operation Rolling Thunder, during which the U.S..." but the more forced "... and the U.S. was in the process ...". How can the writers and editors of *Encounter* be accused of being stooges for American foreign policy when the overwhelming majority of the articles were written during a time when the Vietnam conflict was generally seen in the West as another Korea, and long before most of the massive bombing had taken place?

There is of a course a risk of over-interpretation with *Gentlemen & Arseholes*, as there is with Shostakovich. But when we're dealing with a sufficiently meticulous artist like Berg, analyzing even the slightest oddity is always repaid, and plenty of curious features of the work stand out as worthy of analysis. For example, she leaves out—we have to assume intentionally—the scare-quotes around "immoral" in the title of *The Saturday Evening Post* article mentioned above, which makes Braden seem like a recalcitrant apologist for government turpitude, instead of a critic of historically benighted moralism. And then there is the odd note about the

translations of her texts having been done by "an American who wishes to remain anonymous". Who is this American? Why does he or she want to remain anonymous? Was the translator even American? Was there a translator at all? Is an artist under any obligation to be honest? Were the writers for *Encounter*, who were not journalists, under any obligation to be honest? (For that matter, what sort of honesty can we demand even of journalists? Isn't the livelihood of journalists everywhere threatened? Isn't there a party line, the same one, in the overwhelming majority of newspapers and even art magazines from Stockholm to Perth? Imagine a journalist wanted to pen a paean to the CIA... Would any art magazine in the West dependent on state funding publish it without preceding it with a prominent "major third", such as one of Joe McCarthy's or J. Edgar Hoover's most banal, paranoid letters?)

This brings us to the somewhat odd, lengthy editorial that Berg wrote. It would seem that Berg is reminding the interpreter that all deep things do indeed love a mask, even if they may not actually need the mask. In this sense, the editorial at first makes Berg seem more like Nietzsche than Shostakovich, even if she may well not be as free as Nietzsche was. This, finally, is the primary reason why the work cannot be interpreted as a leftist morality play about the CIA's perversion of freedom. Berg's editorial first spells out the many levels on which the work can be read: it is a tragedy, a comedy, an investigation into the conditions of freedom, and more.

But then we have a puzzling sequence of statements. First:

There is no evidence that the CIA ever censored *Encounter*, or in any way told the editors or writers what they should write, think, or say. Judging by all available facts, the whole thing was based on a tacit agreement between what the people associated with *Encounter* wanted to do, and what the CIA wanted to fund. Something similar is the case with *Gentlemen & Arseholes*, which has been realized under conditions that can be described as complete freedom.

She then lists the numerous foundations (all but one funded "by the state") who gave her money, and then writes:

But one thing that is certain is that, either way, neither I, nor those who worked for *Encounter*, can simply do what we want to do: there are many ideas, but it is the

financial and social conditions that make it possible for things to materialize and be distributed.

The people associated with *Encounter* did what they "wanted to do", as did Berg; yet, we are told a few lines later, they and Berg *cannot* simply "do what [they] want to do". What do we make of this direct contradiction? If Berg were a Hegelian we would be tempted to "think the contradiction", to interpret the editorial, and the work itself, as "speculative"—that the conditionality of freedom doesn't negate freedom. But I think it's more sensible to interpret this contradiction, which can be construed as the primary tension in the work as a whole, as the kind of Nietzschean tension that Strauss, Wittgenstein, and many others emphasized was needed to goad us to think—in the case of *Gentlemen & Arseholes*, to think about the nature of freedom, and to think about what that means for the work at hand, and for art in general.

But to the extent that Berg's life conditions are somewhere between those of Shostakovich and Nietzsche, we have a tension in the very degree to which the Nietzschean tension itself can be displayed: the very existence of masks is neither unambiguously unmasked, nor fully hidden. To the extent that the possibility of Berg's continuing to work as an artist is more constrained than was Nietzsche's possibility of writing with utter freedom (he, like few others, was "free as a bird"), her permitting the existence of this second tension, by partially lifting up the Shostakovichian mask covering the Nietzschean use of masks, is not only one of the most interesting aspects of the work, it is also a sign of great courage. We should hope that the board members of various art foundations in Oslo and Stockholm, who might have hoped they were funding a work whose message would be more like Tim Weiner's in *Legacy of Ashes: The History of the CIA*, will have missed this partial lifting up of the outer mask. Failing that, we should hope they will at least esteem Berg's fearlessness. Otherwise they would prove themselves to be yet more gentlemen and arseholes. •

**Notes**

- 1 <https://www.cia.gov/library/center-for-the-study-of-intelligence/kent-csi/docs/v38i5a10p.htm>
- 2 Stauners' book is reviewed by Thomas M. Troy, Jr., who can't resist ribbing her for her moral outrage: "Frances Saunders evidently was dismayed and shocked! shocked! to learn there was gambling in the back room of Rick's café." (<https://www.cia.gov/library/center-for-the-study-of-intelligence/csi-publications/csi-studies/studies/vol46no1/article8.html>)

# Studio Space and Gallery Time: The Cube Reconsidered

Dan Karlholm



**This book**, the elegant materialization of an illustrated lecture, revolves around a pair of spaces for art, namely “where art is made and where art is displayed,” according to its descriptive subtitle. The dichotomy, or pseudo-dichotomy, is abbreviated for the main title: *Studio and Cube*. The latter is, of course, another abbreviation for *the white cube*, the successful metaphor coined by the author in 1976, which refers to the ideological content and capacity of the purified modernist exhibition space for art.<sup>‡</sup> The expression has long since lost its quotation marks, and has been de-authorized in the late modern or postmodern discourse of art. What Brian O’Doherty seeks to do with these places is to study their relationship, which turns out to be trickier than it may seem.

The text begins by presenting the “studio-bedroom” of Lucas Samaras, which he reconstituted as art in his New York gallery in 1964. He took the material contents of this room, bed, clothes, wall decorations, art, junk, etc. and installed them in a structurally identical way in the space reserved for the exhibition of art. From this suggestive vantage point, seemingly collapsing the subtitle’s distinction, we are led through well-known sections of modern art history and the history of studio paintings in particular, i.e. paintings depicting their own place of origin with or without the artist present. But among the many excellent illustrations of artworks—more numerous than the pages of this volume—are also many documents of artist studios kept by Rothko, Picasso, Ernst, Rauschenberg, Mondrian, et al. The book ends with a kind of reversal of Samaras’ gesture: when Brancusi’s famous studio, arranged like a gallery, “entered the museum intact.” But entered as what? Surely, it entered as a studio, if also a displacement for the mythic artist, whereas Samaras’ studio, intended as a “picture of me,” entered as art.

While the author recapitulates some famous historical paintings of the studio, by Van Eyck,

Vermeer and Velasquez, it is only in the 19th century, he argues, that the studio becomes a subject of its own. Courbet’s famous *The Painter’s Studio* (1855) “provides one of the first modern texts for the relation of studio to exhibition space.” The relation is an interrelation, a commingling of the two. But what interests O’Doherty is the extent to which the studio becomes mythologized as the “mysterious locus of the (potentially subversive) creative act.” The studio is “a thinking space” which comes to stand for the art and the artist, and is important in the “development of the self-referential work of art and the closed aesthetic systems of late modernism.” The author argues that there is a connection between the self-referential creative process that takes place in the studio and the fashioning of the autonomous artwork, which “in turn transfers to the gallery.” Now, is this to say that art is made autonomous already in the studio, due to the mystic creative process of the artist in whom the power to make art is invested, before this is confirmed, so to speak, in the gallery? Or is the object in the cube a displaced object, which has lost its origin or home (which is in the studio)? The author remains vague on the nature of what is altered or effectuated by this transfer.

And what is actually meant by the gallery? The term was only loosely defined in *Inside the White Cube*, but at least once referred to as a commercial locale. Here, however, the gallery is not theoretically distinguished from the museum, presumably since both of these spaces display art. But if we fail to distinguish the temporal display of a commercial gallery from the more or less permanent display of an art museum, the analysis of the functions of these spaces will not go far. Interestingly, however, along with distinguishing between different spaces and places for art, O’Doherty discusses different temporal conditions for art as well. Studio time, for example, is open (art is unfinished and the process

of making art is not yet definitely interrupted), whereas museum time is “frozen” (meaning, I guess, that art is installed as a historical trace of a past existence). But what about gallery time, unmentioned in this account? Gallery time surely is a temporality of its own, in which the works are terminated but in waiting for a transfer to some other time-space. They may head straight for the public museum, without passing through some private collector or safety deposit box, or be stuck in this transit hall forever. They may also, of course, have to return home the same as they came but certainly different.

For all its thought-provoking reasoning, good points and entertaining anecdotes, the overall argument of this text raises another set of questions as well. Is not the gallery as much, if in a different sense, a place of production as the studio, even before relational art projects took command of it as a site for experiments and literal production? Duchamp is invoked, as well as the idea of the “creative act,” but with no repercussions on this issue: “In the 1950’s ‘the creative act’ became a popular fetish that exonerated the spectator from the travail of engaging the work itself. The mystery of the work was displaced to the mystery of its creation,” by which O’Doherty seems to mean the artist’s original creation in the studio. Daniel Buren is invoked too, who argued that the proper place of art, its home, was the studio. Such a view, along with the idea that art is “made” in the studio, ignores the extent to which art is “made,” according to this post-Duchampian commonplace, with every serious encounter with it, typically outside of the studio.

The author’s concluding point is that the studio has “influenced” the white cube (“gallery and museum”). The increasingly white and sparse studio environments of Mondrian and Brancusi may account for the establishment of the white exhibition space for art (exactly where is unclear, and the lack of references, despite direct

quotations, is as irritating here as in that more well-known essay). The suggestion raises many historical questions that need to be dealt with. What is the relation, for example, of Alfred Barr’s whitish MoMA walls to these artist studios? And what about historical precedent? The first white gallery walls were possibly those of the Berlin Nationalgalerie in 1906. The big historical question, which also *Inside the White Cube* left unresolved, is how the white cube phenomenon came about, when, where, and why; what exactly brought it about, and how has the content of this content-less form changed over time? O’Doherty’s by now classic account is still an excellent piece of criticism with its drastic characterizations and many illuminating historical connections. The present book is a good lecture that manages to revive interest in the former text, advance its arguments somewhat, and, not the least, stimulate further critical work on the contextual constraints of art today. •

#### Notes

‡ Brian O’Doherty, *Inside the White Cube: The Ideology of the Gallery Space*, with an introduction by Thomas McEvilley (Santa Monica, San Francisco: The Lapis Press, 1986). Originally published in *Artforum* in 1976.

Brian O’Doherty, *Studio and Cube: On the Relationship Between where Art is Made and Where Art is Displayed* (New York: A Buell Center/ FORuM Project Publication, 2007)

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# An Archive of Pain in the Palace of Oblivion

Sinziana Ravini



4  
Ceausescu's Palace  
Photo: Sinziana Ravini

I have always admired those that master the art of looking back, those who return to their homelands, if only momentarily, to then raise their feelings and their considerations to the desirable heights of aesthetics. Stefan Constantinescu is exactly such an artist who has managed to create a portal between two cultures—the Swedish and the Romanian. This portal is not only spatial but also temporal. It leads back to Romania's darkest history—the period between 1948 and 1989 where thousands of intellectuals and all sorts of individuals who opposed the party were imprisoned and tortured to death. *Archive of Pain* (2000), a work consisting of twelve filmed confessions of communist dissidents, was shown last summer at The Museum for Contemporary Art in Bucharest (MNAC), which organized a whole exhibition around Stefan Constantinescu that had the somewhat ironic title, “Thanks for a Wonderful, Ordinary Day.”

It is no small feat for the Romanian state, which still steers the arts, to let these heartbreaking stories of mental and physical torture come to the surface, especially considering that the Museum for Contemporary Art and the parliament share the same building: Ceausescu's old palace. If there is one thing that Romania did not have time for in the years after the fall of communism, it is to deal with the communist party's horrendous acts of terror. And certainly it is difficult to clean up the mess when it is still being created—if not by the same ideologies of yesterday, then at least by the same people. Even if this is not the case, people still live under this conviction: the same evil sits in power even if it has a newer face.

The importance of Constantinescu's *Archive of Pain* to the anonymous suffering cannot be over-appreciated as it provides to the communion of collective guilt both flesh and blood. It is painful to see these people who risked their lives for a better future, who spent up to fifteen years in prison without knowing the time of the

day or the location where they were being held. At the same time, I remember myself how as a little child in school I sang hymns in Ceausescu's honor in the belief that I lived in the best of possible worlds. It is painful to listen to an old officer who gave out anti-communist pamphlets in his youth, forced to hide in the mountains for several years with his comrades, who later turned him in. In jail he chose to play epileptic and pretended he didn't feel pain when the soles of his feet were sliced because he didn't want to give up his friends.

How easy would it be to dismiss this documentary, multi-ethnic tradition that cuddles with the Other, that wants to give the victims a voice, while at the same time aestheticizing them and thereby sacrificing them all over again? The burden of proof politics has always gone hand and hand with an appetite for sensationalism. Had it not been for all the other works in the exhibition space that invites everyday micropolitics into the context, the works would have fallen heavily to the ground. Now they are instead lifted up by all these other people's stories, those who were never imprisoned, but constantly feared possible imprisonment, who constantly suspected neighbors and family members as belonging to the secret police—Securitate—but that still succeeded to find small pleasures from cigarettes, chewing gum and candy from the west. In these stories the Romanian mentality is revealed in all of its complexity. For if there was something the Romanians excelled at, it was being communist and capitalist at the same time. This Janus-faced ideology affected even me who proudly wore my Pioneer's tie during the day and played happily with Barbie dolls and Kinder Eggs in the evening. Naturally I had heard the rumors that people in the West were unhappy, that they committed suicide or ate themselves to death, if they didn't shoot each other down like in Westerns or gangster films. Love films were absolutely forbid-

den and while there did exist some kisses in classics from the forties and fifties, it was likely only because someone had fallen asleep at the censor bureau. Love was taboo, but love for the West, for the freedom to be able to move and think freely, pulsed strongly in every soul, not in the least in Ceausescu's, who built his entire palace after Western models. Communism led paradoxically straight to capitalism.

The only period in Romanian history in which communism appeared to work well in practice was during the 1970s. Constantinescu's *The Passage* (2005) shows just that by giving voice to a pair of Chileans who fled Pinochet's regime for Ceausescu's, trading one dictator for another. One of the Chileans, Pedro Ramires, remembers how it was to live in Romania during the 1970s and shows a certain regret over having left Romania for Sweden. In his world it was definitely better before. As a communist refugee, he was well taken care of by the Romanian state. Here the ideals could be woven together and the dream could be built. That he never was able to see the land that he idealized collapse, much less glance behind its curtains, contributes undeniably to his romanitization of a past Romania.

One other work in the exhibition that definitely does not try to romanticize the past Romania, but that focuses upon the country's visionary dreams, is *Dacia 1300 My Generation* (2003). The Dacia factory started in 1968, the same year the Soviets invaded Czechoslovakia, and manufactured the equivalent of the DDR's Trabant: a car anyone could own. This symbol for the progressive working-class transformed over the years to become a symbol of the lost promise of a better future—in other words a piece of junk that people were able to keep maintaining year after year, even though reserve parts disappeared from the market and queues for gas grew longer and longer. Only those with a certificate showing a near relative had died got to go in front of the

queue, which led suddenly to huge amounts of people having dead relatives to brag about.

If the exhibition's skeleton is *Archive of Pain*, and its meat is the more tragic-comic works—*The Passage* and *Dacia 1300 My Generation*—then the skin or the outer membrane is the image series *Northern Light* (2006), which is about the artist's life in the Stockholm suburb Vällingby. Images immortalize moments of waiting, dark cold days, packages with books and films from Romanian friends, empty rooms and objects that have ceased to call for a use. They are like visual scores to Satie's *Gnossiennes No. 1*. Here the intercultural space seems to have morphed into an infinite waiting room.

Ceausescu's architectonic monster of a palace is also one single large waiting room for better times. Many lives have been claimed to build these huge salons with specially ordered rugs, a lobby that would have room for the Arc de triomphe, and an avenue that makes the Champs Elysée look like an old back lot—all in order to defeat the French in the art of building. Dictatorship and low self-esteem go hand in hand, as is well known. That art and politics live under the same roof does not mean that they are doomed to failure. Ceausescu's communist temple has every possibility of being transformed into a form that works against the dualist antagonism to the benefit of a dialectical antagonism, to borrow the language of Chantal Mouffe. For the time being the communist mentality seems to still be alive in these walls. •

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# Old Dogs, New Lights

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Jeff Kinkle

Ina Blom's *On the Style Site*, as the book's subtitle suggests, is largely concerned with mapping the nexus where art, sociality and media culture meet. An art critic, curator, historian and theorist, Blom performs a re-reading of the artworks of many of the usual suspects of the past twenty years such as Olafur Eliasson, Philippe Parreno, Rirkrit Tiravanija, Liam Gillick, and Tobias Rehberger, armed with a theoretically dense conceptual schema that draws heavily on contemporary philosophy and media theory in general and theories of immaterial labor, cognitive capitalism, and biopower in particular. Looking at artists rarely considered under the rubric of institutional critique, and who are often seen to flirt with the aesthetics of design, fashion, and the mass media, Blom discovers a latent "criticality" that is usually underplayed in discussions of their work or omitted altogether—a criticality she attempts to expose by thinking them in relation to what she calls "the style site".

Blom's starting point is the idea that over the past several decades, as notions of intervention in the politics of social space, institutions, and the realm of the sociality itself have come to the fore, the term "style" has by and large disappeared from critical and historical discourses on art. Simultaneously, however, style has become increasingly central to our culture and economy as a whole. The term style has been displaced from the art world into mainstream culture where it plays a key role in the development of subjectivity. The worlds we inhabit—not least galleries and exhibition spaces—are increasingly stylized worlds. Everyday life is now coated with style—subjectivity is constantly reproduced in and through style. The aim of Blom's book "is to operate in extension of this displacement, all the while testing the ground for a different way of relating to the style issues within art historical and art critical writing." (13) This is not done by merely returning to a vocabulary of style and form, as Blom states, "style, here, is not primarily evoked or referred to as an attribute of artworks but as a *social site*, and, furthermore, that the works to be discussed in this context should be seen as interventions in—or operations on—what we may now call *the style site*". (14)

The style site is conceived as a key "place" in which (post)modern subjectivity is created and continually reproduced by the environment in all of its cultural, economic, and technological complexity.<sup>1</sup> A consideration of the ways in which style—as a catchall term meant to include aesthetics, design, and fashion—structures our everyday lives is combined with the focus on the site-specificity of contemporary art. As Blom writes late in the book in a formulation influenced by Deleuze and Guattari, style site artists and artworks "invent artistic methodologies that make it possible to focus on the machinic production of sociality." (172) Referencing Craig Saper's concept of sociopoetics, Blom emphasizes that these works are more experiments on the style site than works that proclaim their existence within the style site. They not only reflect on the ways in which style produces subjectivity; they actively reconfigure this production. For example, Eliasson's work, to oversimplify Blom's argument, is seen to both reflexively consider how our perceptual reality is created through

lighting, lit spaces, and media machines while it re-orders our perception by making visible the techniques behind this creation.

Things get complicated as Blom then inscribes the style site within the media (once again, broadly defined). Following McLuhan and others, the ubiquity of the media produces a certain kind of mediatic subjectivity, not only on the level of content as an ideological state apparatus but in its form, in the way television for example structures the subject's perception of time and space. Blom's stance is influenced by the work and theory of Nam June Paik and she draws heavily on theories of biopower and immaterial labor, primarily those of Foucault and Maurizio Lazzarato, but also to a lesser extent Negri and Hardt on affective labor and Jonathan Beller on "the cinematic mode of production", and the idea that in post-Fordist societies life itself is put to work for the valorization of capital. Production is no longer limited to the workplace but seeps into all aspects of our everyday lives. Watching television can be seen as being productive for capital and this is demonstrated by the sophisticated ways in which advertisers, corporations, and networks vie for our attention. The value that attention produces may be difficult to quantify but the emphasis placed on television ratings and the high sums paid for advertising demonstrates its existence. The media's influence on the subjectification process is thus seen as immense and so is the media's reliance on style. "The style site is, perhaps above all, treated as a mediatic site and is associated with the global information networks of contemporary capitalism, with all the difficulties this entails for concepts such as 'place' or 'context'". (14) Her claim as to the centrality of media to current style is not problematic in itself but one begins to become concerned that the concept of the style site has become a bit of a behemoth. As the term style by and large falls out of the middle sections of the book as the focus is placed on the media in general and television in particular, the extent to which the style site is even a useful concept for addressing the influence of the television on subjectivity becomes questionable.

The middle two chapters are centered on Blom's discussion of what she calls "lamp works". Used as a methodological convenience to ground her discussion of the style site and its relation to the media, contemporary works of art using lamps are specifically chosen because they direct us to a field of artistic articulation in which art, technologies, media, economic production, and personal lifestyles are treated as a continuum. (59–60) Lamps are a creator of atmosphere and ambiance, themselves heavily stylized and plugged into an immense networked electrical grid; they also, Blom proposes, prompt discussion on the televisual. Blom's argument as to why lamps prompt this discussion is difficult to summarize as it builds on McLuhan, David Toop, Gernot Böhme, Walter Benjamin, and Heidegger, but the basic idea is that by building atmospheres around the emanation of electronic light, they mirror or reflect upon our mediatic environments and how media structures our perception of space and time. "By framing atmospheric and environmental styles rather than distinct media contents, [the lamp works] explore the produc-

tion of subjectivity *through the relation between moving image media and the 'perceptual' creation of space*". (81) Many works are discussed in which television is treated essentially as a lamp: as a device for furnishing artificial light. For example, Rehberger's *81 Years* (2002) is seen to present television at its "most raw or reduced state: as a dispenser of light and time". (105) In the end, however, the use of lamps as an entry point seems a bit too random and forced. Blom continually makes claims like, "Living in the aura of lamps essentially means having one's entire perceptual apparatus connected to the global electronic and informational networks", (73) which is probably true, but the same could be said of say eating an avocado in Sweden (which also arguably engages more of the senses than lamps).

In *On the Style Site* "media" is almost synonymous with "television". Writing in 2007, one also wonders why the focus is on television? Do people still watch television? Socializing with primarily London and Stockholm's cultural classes may not make one representative of society at a whole, but I barely know anyone that owns a TV. There are also quite different senses of time and community generated or engaged by video games and the Internet. We could perhaps even speculate that these medias are reconfiguring attention and sociability. I often find myself fast-forwarding through thirty-second viral videos to get to the so-called money shot: skip the build up and only see the funny fall. And when surfing online it seems to be inattention, the inability to focus on a Web page for more than three seconds, that generates value and not really attention. We can perhaps think of the rise of things like Attention Deficit Disorder as an inability of the state to keep up with the changes being instituted by our engagement with these new media technologies.<sup>2</sup>

Overall, there is a sense that the tumidity of Blom's core concepts makes the history and contemporary examples she chooses seem arbitrary. This is true of the book's second chapter that deals with the Constructivists and the historical development of the style site. In many respects this history is similar to the one sketched by Hal Foster, only with design standing in for style, which begins with Art Nouveau and goes through Bauhaus then continues into the present in which everything from "jeans to genes" is subject to design imperatives.<sup>3</sup> It is understandable why Blom would choose the Constructivists as a key moment in the style site's growth, but it is also true that she could have chosen pretty much any of the groups of the historical avant garde. This is doubly true of the discussion of the lamp works, where Blom even acknowledges that the discussion of the style site in relation to artists who work with lamps is somewhat haphazard, but then even the artists chosen seem random. An artist working with lamps such as Rafael Lozano-Hemmer seems to be more relevant to a discussion of aesthetics, biopower, and biopolitics than many of those discussed, yet is omitted.

This is the biggest problem with the final chapter as well, which seems to come out of nowhere. Blom used to work as a rock journalist and the final chapter of the book looks at the intersection of rock and art, building on many of the concepts in previous chapters. It is coherent

and thought-provoking in itself and does relate to material elsewhere in the book but again feels a bit random. "Rock" too is defined as broadly as possible and appears to include all varieties of popular music, mainstream and underground. The immense variety of rock sites—from sitting at an arena rock concert, laying in bed watching a music video, dancing in a club with bass so heavy one feels nauseous to killing time with muzak in an elevator or listening to an iPod anywhere—makes the concept difficult to work with.

Unfortunately there is no proper conclusion to the book that brings everything together and as a result the book feels more like a collection of essays than a proper treatise. This is not a problem per se, but the chapters are linked to an extent that it would be unsatisfying to read each on its own. At the same time, they do not build on each other enough to make a coherent whole. The argument of the book meanders and it feels like many important discussions are never flushed out—politics being the most conspicuous by its absence. Key concepts are referenced but the debates surrounding them are not. Without entering into the discussions around concepts the attention theory of value, immaterial labor (and by and large only citing a single book by Lazzarato), the theoretical background feels less than rigorous despite the fact that Blom has obviously read both widely and carefully. At times the book feels a bit like a cocktail party where each guest doesn't want to upset the host by bickering amongst themselves, smiling and pretending to get along while the tension simmers beneath the surface. Lazzarato, Laclau and Mouffe, Latour, McLuhan, Foucault, Tarde, Benjamin, Bergson, Heidegger, etc., are all repeatedly referenced yet without any real conflicts erupting. This can work for a Nicolas Bourriaud, but not in a comparably dry academic text like this. The artist or curator as DJ fine, but not the theorist as DJ going from punk to polka to hard house without a cross-fader.

*On the Style Site* is just under two-hundred pages and one suspects that it might have worked better as a provocative, elongated essay or as a larger survey covering the development of the style site and its present importance more thoroughly: as it stands it feels both too long and too short. Still, Blom's text is very rich in both its theoretical and philosophical discussions and in its analyses of specific artists and works. It is a formidable attempt at revitalizing the discussion around a group of artists who one suspected not much new could be said about and should certainly be of interest to those concerned with the intricacies of art practice and aesthetics under the reign of so-called cognitive capitalism. •

Ina Blom, *On the Style Site: Art, Sociality, and Media Culture* (Sternberg Press, 2007).

#### Notes

- 1 In this respect Blom's concerns are similar to those of theorists such as Brian Holmes and Suelly Rolnik, although her interests are more philosophical and art historical, less economic and geopolitical and informed by Guattari than Holmes and Rolnik respectively.
- 2 I owe this point to discussions with Mark Fischer, Alberto Toscano, John Hutnyk, and Tom Bunyard on the "attention theory of value".
- 3 Hal Foster, *Design and Crime* (UK: Verso, 2002), 16.

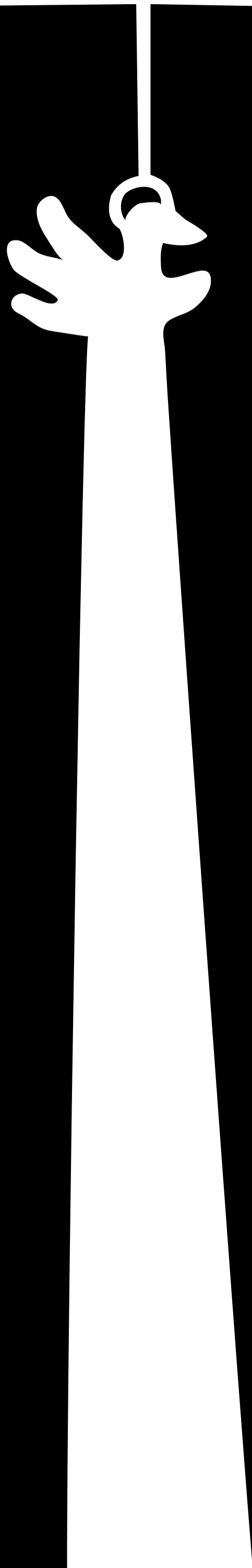
THIS IS THE  
SIGN YOU  
HAVE BEEN  
WAITING FOR











▼  
Cordelia and King Lear. From Charles and Mary Lamb, *Tales from Shakespeare* (Philadelphia: Henry Altemus Company, 1901)



# Note on Deleuze and De Quincey

Staffan Lundgren

“As soon he speaks against Hegel, Levinas can only confirm him, has already confirmed him.”

Jacques Derrida

“What I most detested was Hegelianism and dialectics,” Gilles Deleuze writes in a “Letter to Harsh Critic”.<sup>1</sup> “My book on Kant’s different,” he famously continues, “I like it, I did it as a book about an enemy.”

In what must be said to be a central passage in this 1963 “Kantbuch” (*Kant’s Critical Philosophy*), Deleuze will point to what must be the most radical implication of the Copernican Revolution. The relation between subject and object, that previously had been that of a relation between something internal and something external, becomes internalized, it becomes, as he writes, “a relation between subjective faculties which differ in nature”.<sup>2</sup> In the same moment as the difference between external and internal, object and subject, thing and representation, are internalized, the difference transforms into a struggle of legislative power, a conflict of the faculties of a self that is no longer—can no longer be—itsself. A fundamental chasm is opened in the subject that, many will contend, is the genesis of our schizophrenic modernity. Deleuze will later summarize this turn by a sententious phrase borrowed from Rimbaud, “I is an other”, a phrase that in his preface to the English translation of his book on Kant appears as one of four poetic formulas with which he aims to summarize the Kantian philosophy.<sup>3</sup>

The consequences of this internalization are of course far-reaching, not only in terms of the overthrowing of an ancient hierarchical structure, an overturning that emerges from the newly found powers of the rational being—that it is now “we who are giving the orders”, that “we are the legislators of nature”. (KCP 14) God is already dead, at least in Deleuze’s Nietzschean reading of Kant. If the Law once was a representative of the missing God(s) or Good, now—since we are the legislators—we have another effect of the revolution, which Deleuze points to with the words of Kafka: “The Good is what the Law says”.

Rimbaud and Kafka are accompanied by Shakespeare—with Hamlet, “time is out of joint”. As the Copernican Revolution implies a chasm in the subject it will also turn and split our

understanding of time, and as a consequence, of history. We can see this in *Nietzsche and Philosophy* where Deleuze will bring to the fore a pre-Kantian “philosophy of being” and a “philosophy of will” (that, paradoxically, will first come into being with Nietzsche). As an example of what this turn of history will amount to, Deleuze, in the lecture series “Synthesis and Time”,<sup>4</sup> will designate Kant as the founder of phenomenology:

With Kant it’s like a bolt of lightning, afterwards we can always play clever, and even must play clever, with Kant a radically new understanding of the notion of phenomenon emerges. Namely that the phenomenon will no longer at all be appearance. The difference is fundamental, this idea alone was enough for philosophy to enter into a new element, which is to say I think that if there is a founder of phenomenology it is Kant. There is phenomenology from the moment that the phenomenon is no longer defined as appearance but as apparition.

In this sense Kant’s critical philosophy turns into the differentiating condition, the critical border, or perhaps even the *genesis* of a certain relation to both past, present and future philosophy. Or as Deleuze has it in “Letter to a Harsh Critic”, describing his work on the “Kantbuch”: “I suppose the main way I coped with it at the time was to see the history of philosophy as a sort of buggery or (it comes to the same thing) immaculate conception.” (Letter 6)

For Deleuze the synthesis of the faculties will not be effected by a bridging of the gap in a dialectical scheme, making understanding and sensibility the foundation of reason, but will instead be attributed to the *force* of imagination. A correspondence or accord between the faculties can only come into being by a fundamental discord, one that Deleuze will find in his reading of the third Critique. Once again he will invoke Rimbaud. “A disorder of all the senses” points to the free play of imagination that pushes itself and the other faculties to the limits and beyond in a fearful struggle. The *force* of imagination that here creates disorder rather than the solid entities of understanding, sensibility, the inner

sense and reason in accordance is the genesis of reason—a discord, not an accord, is at the heart of modernity.

The final paragraph of the “Poetic Formulas” begins with a confession that the four wordings clearly are “arbitrary in relation to Kant”, but, as Deleuze continues, “not at all arbitrary in relation to what Kant has left us for the present and the future”. Deleuze then makes an enigmatic reference to Thomas de Quincey’s essay *The Last Days of Immanuel Kant* which, as he writes, “summed it all up, but only the reverse side of things which find their development in the four poetic formulas of Kantianism.” What is it that has found its development in the formulas presented? What are we to expect from de Quincey? His essay begins with the assumption

**“To suppose a reader thoroughly indifferent to Kant, is to suppose him thoroughly unintellectual; and, therefore, though in reality he should happen not to regard Kant with interest, it would still be amongst the fictions of courtesy to presume he did.”**

that “all people of education”, even if they are not familiar with Kant’s philosophy, will have some interest in the personal history of the great “Chinaman of Königsberg”. For this reason de Quincey concludes that “to suppose a reader thoroughly indifferent to Kant, is to suppose him thoroughly unintellectual; and, therefore, though in reality he should happen not to regard Kant with interest, it would still be amongst the fictions of courtesy to presume he did.” (*Last Days* 99) But de Quincey is not only trying not to

offend us due to our lack of interest in Kant. He will also proffer three reasons for the negligence of Kantian philosophy in his homeland, reasons that to a large degree still speak to us today: the language in which it is written, “the supposed obscurity of the philosophy which they deliver”, and “the unpopularity of all speculative philosophy whatsoever, no matter how treated, in a country where the structure and tendency of society impress upon the whole activities of the nation a direction almost exclusively practical”.<sup>5</sup> Writing out in the country at the northern borders of Hamlet’s kingdom, one can only concur with de Quincey’s last reflection, which not only addresses the oblivion of Kant, but indeed summarizes the downside of modernity.

At the end of the “Poetic Formulas” Deleuze leaves us with a question: “Could this be a Shakespearean side of Kant, a kind of *King Lear*?” How are we to answer this question? By proclaiming that Kant has abdicated? Rather we are to pose it to ourselves in such a way that it will force us to read Deleuze reading Kant in a way that does not turn Deleuze into a Kantian, nor Kant into a Deleuzian. If so, let us first of all follow Deleuze, who opens his 1978 lecture on “Synthesis and Time” by saying:

We are returning to Kant. May this be an occasion for you to skim, read or re-read *The Critique of Pure Reason*. ●

#### Notes

- Gilles Deleuze, “Letter to a Harsh Critic” in *Negotiations* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1995), 6. Henceforth cited as *Letter*.
- Gilles Deleuze, *Kant’s Critical Philosophy*, (University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis: 2003), 14. Henceforth cited as *KCP*.
- “On Four Poetic Formulas that Might Summarize the Kantian Philosophy” in *Kant’s Critical Philosophy* as above. The text would later appear in a prolonged version in *Essays Critical and Clinical*.
- Gilles Deleuze, “Synthesis and Time, 14/03/1978”, 5. The page refers to the English pdf version available at [www.webdeleuze.com](http://www.webdeleuze.com). The lectures were held spring 1978 at Vincennes.
- Thomas de Quincey, “The Last Days of Immanuel Kant” in *The Works of Thomas de Quincey: The Spanish Military Nun; The Last Days of Immanuel Kant, Vol. III* (Kessinger Publishing, 2006), 99–100. Henceforth cited as *Last Days*.

◀ Pages 7 and 10  
Bjørn-Kowalski Hansen,  
*This is the Sign You Have Been Waiting For*, 2007.

Pages 8 and 9  
Bjørn-Kowalski Hansen,  
*Yesterday is Crowding Up My World*, 2007.

Berlin-based Norwegian artist Bjørn-Kowalski Hansen’s most renowned project is the multifaceted, ongoing work *Håkki TM* ([www.haakki.com](http://www.haakki.com)),

which he has been working on for many years. It is difficult to describe the work, since it takes on so many different forms, and has many of the trademarks of a typical relational sculpture where the various threads of the work have many different aspects. It all evolved around the small Swedish town of Ljungaværk where the local factory closed down, which turned the city into one of those vanishing small towns. *Håkki* is not only the Norwegian word for Mullet (long on the sides, short on

the head)—but also the nickname of one of its inhabitants, who is now the poster boy for all of the different projects.

It started out with the T-shirts that came out under the *Håkki* brand, with witty slogans that became very popular, not only in Ljungaværk but in Stockholm, Berlin and elsewhere. A new slogan was produced every week. The trademark expanded and now there are even shops named *Håkki*. A book has also come out, and there have

been gallery displays. The profits support the town in various ways, such as by paying for the girls’ soccer team, a new oven for the local sauna, or the “Free Hair Cut Day”, when a hip hairdresser was flown in for a whole day to do the hair of anyone who wanted a free trendy hair cut. Even though some aspects of the project can be seen as relational, this is not about relational aesthetics. Every little branch, logo, print, gallery design, display, etc. has its very own aesthetic, borrowed

from recognizable Nordic design elements common in the ‘70s and ‘80s. More importantly, it is a visionary corporate project built on a hope for sustainability and maximizing empathy and real value instead of economic profit. *Håkki TM* shows that it is not a utopian project, it actually does something—and one can even have fun while doing it.

The two works, *Yesterday is Crowding Up My World*, and *This is the Sign You Have Been Waiting For*, both made in 2007,

were created specially for SITE by Bjørn-Kowalski Hansen. Both posters are about a state of mind, a melancholy about yesterday, but they also proclaim that something has to happen right now in order to make a change for a sustainable tomorrow.

Power Ekroth

# Hegel and the Spirit of Phenomenology

Sven-Olov Wallenstein

## I. The great spider of history

Two hundred years ago one of the most ambitious, dense, and enigmatic works in the history of philosophy was published: Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit*. Neither a commercial nor an academic success in its own time, the book has remained with us to this day, more often cited and alluded to than actually read. It is one of those works, like Dante's *Divine Comedy* or Hölderlin's late poetry, that always lies ahead of us, that always awaits its adequate deciphering. Hegel's works may lie behind us like gigantic and enigmatic pyramids, as Nietzsche notes, but this then also points to a future task: to unravel them as the origin of a certain philosophical modernity that fuses Concept and History into the movement of thought itself. Many subsequent attempts to understand the historicity of thinking, from Heidegger and Adorno to Foucault and Derrida, indeed remain indebted to Hegel, precisely because they want to free us from a certain Hegelian shadow, from the theodicy or *parousia* of history that he created, and because they all aspire to end with the Hegelian ending of metaphysics, as it were. At the end of his inaugural lecture at the Collège de France in 1970, *L'ordre du discours*, Foucault famously notes that all the anti-Hegelianisms of our time may be nothing but another ruse of history, a kind of detour at the end of which he is still waiting for us, immobile, as the great Spider of history that will eventually lure us into his all-encompassing web.

But all of these rejections assume that we already know what Hegel means, what his arguments in fact amount to, which is by no means certain. The great Hegel scholar Otto Pöggeler remarks, in his *Hegels Idee einer Phänomenologie des Geistes*, that he wrote the book (it was first published in 1973) to save Hegel's book from a certain intentionally malevolent use to which it was put by German philosophy departments. If there was an aspiring Ph.D. candidate that they were reluctant to accept, they would say to him: yes, you will be admitted to the program, we just want to you to write a brief essay where you summarize the basic arguments of the *Phenomenology*. After this, the student would sink into the deepest despair and disappear out of sight forever. For those of us who have tried to make our way through this text, let alone translate it (as the present writer has), this makes perfect sense: the labyrinthine quality of the prose, the architectonic complexities of the Hegelian phrase that not only relate to the syntactic structures but also to the very movement and content of his thought, appear to render any attempt at simple summaries futile.

## II. Towards the system

But how then should we approach this monstrous book? Like all great works it is marked by its origin, while not being reducible to it: philosophy is not just of its time, Hegel famously notes in the Introduction to his *Philosophy of Right*, but is "its own time comprehended in thought" (*ihrer Zeit in Gedanken gefasst*). The *Phenomenology* was written during a period of dramatic and momentous shifts, leading from

the French Revolution and the Terror, to which Hegel devotes a famous analysis of the dialectic of "absolute freedom", to the Napoleonic wars, all of which had a profound impact on German intellectual and political life. But on a more general level we could also speak of the emergence of the modern state apparatus after 1789, with its new bureaucracies and institutions, techniques of power and mechanisms of individualization and subjectification, together with the discourse of political economy as the mode of a new "governmentality", all of which have been analyzed by Foucault, among others. From his first texts and onwards, Hegel reacts to these transformations, and a reflection on the nature of political modernity, as a quest for the unity of individual subjects and collective orders, traverses all of his works: the individual must be recognized and respected, while still being understood in terms of an overarching order that makes this individuality possible. Fifteen years after the *Phenomenology*, the *Philosophy of Right* would attempt to solve these problems, but we can see them germinating already in the texts from the Jena period, where Hegel develops a reflection on labor, language, and interaction that can be understood both as a way to conceptualize or "comprehend" an emerging social reality as well as a response to the political philosophies of Plato and Aristotle.

On the one hand, this emphasis on subjectivity situates Hegel within the development of the universal mathematical science that was proposed by Descartes as the way for the subject to achieve mastery over the world: it is by carrying out the operations of the *mathesis universalis* that we can at least approach the infinite knowledge of God, and mathematics and geometry are the foremost tools. When we reach Descartes, Hegel says in his *Lectures on the History of Philosophy*, we are like sailors who have spent a long time adrift on the open sea, and suddenly can cry out "Land, ho!" This new beginning must be given its rightful due, and there is no way back to the cosmic order from out of which the *ego cogito* emerged. On the other hand, Hegel stresses that this subject must also be understood as *substance*, i.e., as the way in which the intersubjective order embedded in institutions, customs, and practices comes to know itself, and the individual becomes conscious of itself as the bearer of rationality that transcends it. Hegel is indeed a post-Cartesian, but by no means simply the culmination of a philosophy of subjectivity, as for instance Heidegger often seems to suggest, but above all a thinker of *intersubjective practices*, which is the basic tenet of the contemporary "non-metaphysical" reading favored both in the analytical as well as the hermeneutic tradition, where the notion of "spirit" is reinterpreted in a decidedly non-religious and almost sociological sense, as those practices that underwrite and support a certain culture's understanding of itself, and which are absolute in the sense that they have no simple "outside". For others this may be not so much a way to put Hegel back on his feet, as Marx once attempted, as to cut off his head; the future will decide to what extent such

readings once and for all manage to separate the "rational core" from the "mystical shell" (as Marx said), or just simply provide a disfigured portrait devoid of both history and future.

This equation that links subject to substance, and that will produce the idea of the *system* as the mode of existence of truth, has a decisive historical background in Kant's critical philosophy. Kant too creates a kind of system or "architectonic" that reintegrates the splits and divisions that had been produced by Enlightenment culture: freedom and necessity, soul and body, reason and nature, etc. For Kant, all of the earlier theories could be taken as partial truths that however lose their legitimacy when they are extended to experience as a totality. The unity of reason that was determined by Descartes on the basis of the *mathesis*, consists for Kant in an articulation of levels that must be distinguished as well as united. The unity of Reason does not imply that one particular theory should be applied to everything, but resides in a "transcendental reflection" on the difference between spheres of rationality, on the principles that provide each of them with a particular legislative autonomy while also connecting them on a higher level within a system of *ends*. The Kantian subject is thus necessarily fractured: it has several positions and functions depending on the *telos* of its activity, but at the same time it always strives for a unity that in Kant's vocabulary could be called a "regulative idea", or a *focus imaginarius* as he says toward the end of the first *Critique*. In this way Kant's critical re-structuring of Reason prefigures the analysis of modernity as a process of rationalization that Max Weber more than a century later would describe in terms of "disenchantment" and bureaucracy, and as the emergence of science and politics as "professions" with their respective competences and procedures. Kant is indeed the first bureaucrat of pure reason, and his invention of a new type of legally and juridically inflected vocabulary ("the court of reason") testifies to this.

After Kant many efforts will be made to rethink this architectural synthesis and indicate a place where that kind of unity that Criticism projects could be realized, and not just in terms of an imaginary focus: reconciliation (*Versöhnung*) must be real, and not just a representation, as Hegel says. This is perhaps the fundamental way in which history enters philosophy, and for his successors Kant appeared as naive since he simply accepted and systematized in an a priori fashion those divisions that in fact had been brought about by the historical process. The responses of Schiller and Hölderlin, and then of Schelling and Hegel, will be to introduce the density of the historical process as an essential moment in thought, and the question of philosophical validity will henceforth be related to the question of historical becoming—we pass from a "structural analysis of truth" to an "ontology of actuality", in Foucault's felicitous phrase, which he applies to Kant's political writings, but in fact more accurately describes Kant's immediate aftermath. The historical task will present itself as the overcoming of the distinctions that Kant

had rendered absolute, and the recreation of a unity of reason and society on a higher level, not just as a correlation of ends that we may "reflect" upon, but as a truly substantial and *living* unity. The historical present appears as a moment of *Entzweiung* and *Zerrissenheit*, a splitting and laceration that results from the Enlightenment and its "philosophy of reflection". This is how the young Hegel paints the present age in his thesis, the so-called *Differenzschrift* of 1801, where the "need for/of philosophy" (*das Bedürfnis der Philosophie*) is at once a subjective and an objective genitive: the present needs philosophy to overcome itself just as much as philosophy needs to take a new step to truly become itself. The philosophy of the future, Hegel suggests, must transcend mere reflection in a movement of *speculation*, i.e. the recognition that all the inherited dualisms have in fact been produced by us: speculation means to return from reflection to a new identity that acknowledges difference and splitting as part of itself, to the "identity of identity and non-identity". This move however requires a "speculative leap" or "proposition", an event in thought and language (Hegel here plays upon the German word *Satz*, which means both "leap" and "proposition"), but it also demands that we remain rational and not succumb to the Romantic temptation to project reconciliation into the sphere of the irrational (for instance into art, as was proposed by Schelling, since this means that the leap will become a deadly one, a *salto mortale* plunging us into the abyss of non-knowledge).

This is one of the reasons why Hegel always remained critical of all attempts to return to some pre-modern unity, for instance the various versions of ancient Greece that had been proposed in the wake of Winckelmann (although these ideas are in fact based on a misreading of Winckelmann: for him, too, Greece was irretrievably lost, and the invention of art history is a work of *mourning*). This return is however just as often proposed as a way into the future, as in the case of the anonymous fragment that since its discovery by Franz Rosenzweig has been called "The Oldest System Program of German Idealism", dating from 1796/97 (the handwriting is undoubtedly Hegel's, and he is now generally accepted as its author), which proposes an idea of a future synthesis of art and philosophy that will echo in many subsequent visions of a social-political *Gesamtkunstwerk*, from Wagner and Nietzsche and onwards, on both sides of the political spectrum. This new world on the one hand constitutes the fulfillment of the Enlightenment, since it needs to have passed through the moment of sundering and reflection, but it is also a step beyond it. Hegel shares something of this Romantic desire to take "the step beyond the Kantian borderline" (as Hölderlin calls it in his famous and programmatic letter to Neuffer in 1794), and the System fragment is an obvious case of this, but as we have already remarked this step or leap must preserve reason and the superior status of philosophy. Absolute knowledge will consist in a full conceptual explication of the rational structure of the world, not in any



4 Robert Morris,  
*Il pensiero di Hegel*, 2002.

intuitively created work of art or “intellectual intuition” that lays claim to immediacy. The absolute, Hegel stresses in the Preface to the *Phenomenology*, can neither appear as “shot from out of a pistol”, like Fichte’s subject, nor can it descend into a “night where all cows are black”, like Schelling’s indifferent Absolute, but rather can only come at the end, as the result of the totality of conceptual mediations. The *Phenomenology*, then, will be the project of attaining the absolute beyond the confines of finitude and limits, while still respecting the critical and epistemological demands of Kantianism.

### III. From consciousness to the absolute: Phenomenology and Logic

The *Phenomenology* is one sustained and grandiose attempt to lead “natural consciousness” to the completion of absolute knowledge, and to do this by following the movement of consciousness itself. We start off with the most meager of all conceptions of knowledge, “sense-certainty”, which lays claim to have the full richness of the world at its disposal by using words such as “here”, “this”, and “now”, and by trying to hold on to the sensuous particular, either in the form of the object or the subject, in the form of *immediacy*. This will however not work, for as soon as sense-certainty attempts to say what it means, it is forced into the element of universality, which here for Hegel significantly appears as language, the more “truthful” element in its movement of negating and preserving the particular according to the double logic of *Aufhebung*. This is the starting point of the dialectic, and it is crucial for Hegel that the movement of negation and preservation is not forced upon consciousness from the outside, by “us”, i.e. the readers and/or narrator of the *Phenomenology* already supposed to know the goal of the entire journey, but that it exists because of the way consciousness tests itself by always supposing a standard to which it subsequently proves unable to live up to. In this way, natural consciousness is driven from station to station, which for it is a painful journey (akin to the “stations of the cross”), an experience of loss and despair that forces it to face up to the power of the negative, although for us this journey means that consciousness attains higher and higher levels of understanding of the necessary intertwining of the world and consciousness, until finally, at the moment of absolute knowing, both come together into a final unity which still preserves all the former articulations as an “interiorized” and “remembered” content.

The difficulty with this conception, whose implications extend beyond Hegel exegesis, is the question of whether these two perspectives, the immanence of finite consciousness that undergoes the experiences and the transcendence of the narrator who addresses us in the “we” that “knows” can truly be brought together (to which we could add the rarely noticed third position of the reader, who knows more than finite consciousness but less than the infinite narrator, and can only be included in the superior narrator called “we” in an insecure and tenuous fashion, and I think most readers of the text can recognize

this). This is further aggravated by the fact that *Phenomenology* was intended as a “propedeutic” to the true science, i.e. the system of categories and absolute determinations of being of which Hegel would propose a first version in his *Science of Logic* (1812–1816), and that no longer needs or perhaps even tolerates a genesis from the point of view of a consciousness that undergoes finite and one-sided experiences. This question whether there can be an “introduction to the *Science of Logic*” was stated already in Hegel’s own time, and has then been brought up several times, most recently in the debate sparked by Hans Peter Fulda’s *Das Problem einer Einleitung in Hegels Wissenschaft der Logik* (1965), with subsequent responses from Otto Pöggeler, Dieter Henrich, Werner Marx, and many others. The question at stake can be formulated in different ways. For instance as follows: Does Hegel’s *Phenomenology* already presuppose the structures of the *Logic* for the movement of dialectics to get started? If this is the case, then the *Phenomenology* surely cannot be claimed to be a “science” on its own. But what should we then make of the two titles that Hegel puts before the text of the *Phenomenology*, “Science of the experience of consciousness” and “System of Science, Part One: The Phenomenology of Spirit”?

Questions of philology apart (and they do exist, since there is considerable confusion concerning titles and subtitles, most of which however are due to printing errors), the true problem is to what extent the perspective, which can no longer be a perspective, of absolute knowledge can be harmonized with a situated experience, i.e. how infinity can be reconciled with the finitude of experience. In the preface to the *Phenomenology* Hegel speaks of how contemporary consciousness no longer tolerates dogmas and imposed solutions, and that it demands that a “ladder” should be given to it so that it may ascend to the heaven of the concept, which probably is how he saw the function of the *Phenomenology*. But if the ladder is itself part of a science that on the other hand neither needs nor even tolerates it, do we not then see an unbridgeable gulf opening up in the midst of Hegel’s system? There would be no way from finitude to infinity, and no way back, once we have passed over. Modern phenomenological philosophies of finitude, from Husserl to Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty on onwards, would in this perspective amount to a return to an *immanent* perspective: a method that stays within finite consciousness, and substitutes the analysis of intentionality, noetic-noematic correlation, and constitution for the false and impossible passage towards infinity promised by Hegel, and rejects his split vision as a contradictory and dogmatic metaphysics.

Something similar would also apply to the concept of *spirit*: for Hegel, at least as he is read traditionally, this would be a going beyond of all finite perspectives toward an absolute subject that finds itself in its otherness and returns to itself in the circularity of the *ab-solute* as that which is *ab-solved* from external reality. In rejecting the onto-theological structure of the specula-

tive method, modern philosophies of finitude would then be led to view a concept like “Geist” with the utmost suspicion, as the remnant of a theological discourse that can have little or no credibility today. *Geist* is in this view not so much a Cartesian ghost in the machine, as the name for an impossible and untenable *third-person objectivity of the subject-object correlation*, which has to be abandoned if we are to adhere to a strict analytic of finitude, whether this be in the Husserlian or Heideggerian version.

(Against this “official” version of phenomenology, it has been claimed that the discourse on *Geist* is by no means absent from Husserl and Heidegger, but in fact often surfaces in decisive places, as Derrida proposes in *De l’esprit* (1987). This is particularly connected to the way in which both Husserl and Heidegger conceptualize Occidental history and philosophy—fusing them into a unity, where history of philosophy and philosophy of history become one—as the gradual unfolding of a singular structure, regardless of whether this is understood as a teleology of reason that has to be saved from the danger of an irresponsible technicism and a forgetfulness of the constitutive role of transcendental subjectivity, as in Husserl’s *Krisis*, or as a progressive oblivion of being, where Husserl’s recourse to a constituting subjectivity is part of the problem rather than of the solution, as in Heidegger.)

These structural complexities however belong to the *systematic horizon* against which the *Phenomenology* as a whole in the last instance is to be measured. The text as it stands is still an almost infinite resource of philosophical ideas, no matter how we judge its ultimate position inside some—in fact *non-existing*—Hegelian system: it must be stressed that the *Science of Logic* already in its first version testifies to a different view of the system than the one announced in the Preface to the *Phenomenology*, which shows that the question of the first book’s compatibility with the rest of the system must remain conjectural. We still need to traverse the text of the *Phenomenology* itself, on a path that will take us through a series of “shapes of consciousness” (*Gestalten des Bewusstseins*), and on this long and laborious journey we encounter many figures that after Hegel have become detached from the movement of the *Phenomenology* as such, and have entered into a general philosophical vocabulary. We move through the dialectic of master and slave which links together death, desire, and work (perhaps the most famous figure, which through the highly original reading proposed by Alexandre Kojève in the 1930s became the matrix for a long tradition of philosophies of desire, from Sartre and Bataille to Lacan and Deleuze); unhappy consciousness, which was first emphasized and read as an autonomous problem in an important book by Jean Wahl in the 1920s; Antigone and Creon, who in Hegel’s reading both believe they are doing the right thing and in this will tear asunder the harmonious fabric of Greek ethical life; the “lacerated language” of Rameau’s Nephew who completes the movement of *Bildung* in a vertiginous re-evaluation of all values, and already

at the end of *l’ancien regime* proposes something that comes close to Nietzsche’s analysis of nihilism; the French revolution and the subsequent terror that in its affirmation of absolute freedom unleashes the “fury of destruction”; the beautiful soul who retreats into himself and his moral certitude, and wants to find peace by always forgiving the crimes of the other. Without here attempting to produce an exhaustive list, we can see the extent to which Hegel’s text brings together analyses of philosophical theories and political events, artworks and religious experiences, virtually all the facets of existence in a narrative that pretends to be both historical and logical, or perhaps none of them.

Is this multiplicity of perspectives and topics the result of a confusion? What type of narrative is unfolding here? The debate has raged since the publication of the book as to whether all, or some, or perhaps none of its chapters can be read as a reflection on empirical history, and if so, how this squares with the attempt to provide an epistemological and not simply historical explanation of succession figures; if the text in fact is a “palimpsest” (Otto Pöggeler) resulting from the fact that Hegel changed his outlook in the process of writing, and which should lead us to distinguish between a true and a merely apparent phenomenology; if the structural confusion (especially in the latter half, of which Hegel himself speaks in a letter to Schelling) simply results from a failed because insufficiently thought-through attempt to combine perspectives that in fact are irreconcilable. Here it may be sufficient to note that the book contains virtually all of the themes and problems that would later be brought out and developed on their own. But many readers in fact perceive Hegel’s later and perhaps more coherent versions of the system, as they develop from the first edition of *Encyclopaedia* (1817) and onwards, as much more sterile and artificially constructed than the living and organic writing of the *Phenomenology*, precisely because of its violent tensions, enigmatic transitions, and often insane complexity. The contorted architectonic of Hegel’s phrases somehow testifies to the need for a language of laceration that could only be turned into a system at the expense of its violence and beauty. Perhaps this is what Hegel himself discovered toward the end of life, when he planned to revise the text for a new edition; almost immediately after having begun he broke off and noted: “Curious early work, not to be rewritten” (*Eigenthümliche frühere Arbeit, nicht Umarbeiten*). •

The first Swedish translation of the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, by Brian Manning Delaney and Sven-Olov Wallenstein, will be published at Thales in the spring 2008, together with an introduction, *Hegel och Andens Fenomenologi*, at Axl Books. An international Hegel symposium will also be held at the Goethe Institute in Stockholm, September 5-7, 2008. For more information, see the website of the Swedish Hegel Society: [www.hegel.se](http://www.hegel.se).

# Transparency, Paranoia, and the Idea of Concealing in the Production of the Postwar American Home

Helena Mattsson

**Architecture and war** produce new subjects. Like war, architecture organizes individual desires and internalizes orders and roles. Both phenomena may be viewed as biopolitical “machines” whose functions, technologies, and forms are constantly shifting. During the Second World War, European modernism was affected not only by physical warfare, but also by an ideological one: “The house with a flat roof was Oriental and Oriental was Jewish.” Modern architecture has however not only been exposed to war, but has itself acted as a “war machine” directed against various invisible threats, from tuberculosis to the contemporary idea of a hidden terrorism.

Beatriz Colomina’s *Domesticity at War* can be read as an analysis of American architecture as a biopolitical machine in the postwar period. After 1945 the war, whose visibility on the American continent had been primarily located in the media, now becomes a domestic affair with the return of millions of soldiers. The distant suddenly becomes close. The physical and mental traumas of the war veterans, together with other traumas, came to affect society as a whole. America was still at war, although the threat now came from within. A new paranoia would soon emerge in the guise of the Cold War and anxieties could once more be projected onto the outside world, this time on Communism and the bomb. The nation under reconstruction had to relate to a new set of invisible threats and Colomina’s book shows how postwar architecture can be understood as a direct response to this.

Just as the war had been a phenomenon encountered through images and stories, this new everyday life was also constructed through representations. Colomina writes: “buildings had become images, and images had become a kind of building, occupied like any other architectural space.” The anxieties produced by the Cold War and the global threat were covered over by an infinite proliferation of images depicting a thoroughly controlled domestic environment, with meticulously described details and perpetually smiling faces. Domestic life was staged and exhibited, not in a white cube but in a transparent house. Colomina provides an interesting reading of the role of this transparency in the produc-

tion of dreams of an ideal home. The spectator is drawn to the large windows, but doesn’t want to remain too long in front of them, since something unseemly might appear. What decides the amount of time spent looking is not courtesy, rather it has something to do with the spectator’s own identity. Colomina stresses that the transparent house is also a machine for looking at the outside: “there is a kind of reverse exposure, an x-ray of the people outside the building.” The history of how we are looked upon by our buildings remains to be written, she suggests.

This new transparent home, which appeared to showcase its interior, was the object of the attention of a whole world, and for the first time American architecture was at the center. “This sense of obsessive, embattled domesticity is the trademark of the immediate postwar years and the focus of this archeological study,” Colomina writes in the introduction. The idealization of home had its backside, and transparency can indeed be used as a means to hide—in fact, she claims, this “concealing” was the underlying structure of the Cold War. Through a series of case studies she constructs an elegant narrative that weaves together the psychology, sociology, and architecture of American postwar society. The story is richly illustrated and full of captivating details, occasionally almost like a *wunderkammer* of peculiar things—text fragments, objects, films, photographs, buildings, models—where each shelf produces its own narrative, its own chapter, all of them autonomous and yet part of the same world. The composition of the book is often reminiscent of the way in which Charles and Ray Eames used to arrange all their gathered information, and they are indeed also one of the book’s main references.

Colomina has developed a technique for creating stories that has its obvious advantages, but also its limitations. History is sometimes portrayed in a thoroughly staged and edited way, with an intricate plot and a colorful opening scene. In this case, it begins with two photographs, the first showing Le Corbusier, Alma Gropius, and Walter Gropius at the *Café des Deux Magots* in Paris 1923; the second showing Gropius’ private home in Massachusetts in

1950, this time with the architect and Ise Gropius. These two images are made into “primal scenes”: the first one displays the master architects in a public space that excludes women; the second a couple in a domestic environment about to create a common space. The task then becomes to understand these two situations and to link them within a more encompassing narrative: “This book is a study of the space between these photographs,” Colomina writes, “the space within which American architecture would rapidly arise and flourish for a time.”

Such a highly conscious way of framing and constructing history often yields impressive results, and it draws the reader into the story, but sometime it seems a bit too constructed. There are few contradictions and the profusion of archive material is seldom allowed to complicate the story. The story is so elegant and seamless that one sometimes wishes for something to go wrong and for the whole edifice to collapse, or at least open up to a more polymorphous interpretation. For those of us who have followed Colomina’s work, much of the material is already familiar, and for me personally, the chapters on “X-Ray Architecture” and “The Underground House” are the ones that really open up new avenues of thought.

Another truly fascinating section, “The Lawn at War,” shows how the lawn was turned into a concrete as well as symbolic place for the operation of “concealing” during the postwar years, and how it can be seen as the expression of a split country: smiling faces, equipment and gadgets on the lawn, all meant to cover over depressions, tranquilizers, and mental disorder. During the war the government recommended people to stay at home and care for their lawns—“the lawn was war therapy,” as Colomina puts it. But the lawn too contained its enemies within—weeds and vermin. Insects turned into symbolic creatures, surrogate soldiers that could be used for testing chemical weapons. The “Jap beetle” was a reflection of a racist perception of Japanese people. This was expressed in the pages of *Life* thus: “Both are small but very numerous and prolific, as well as voracious, greedy and devouring.”

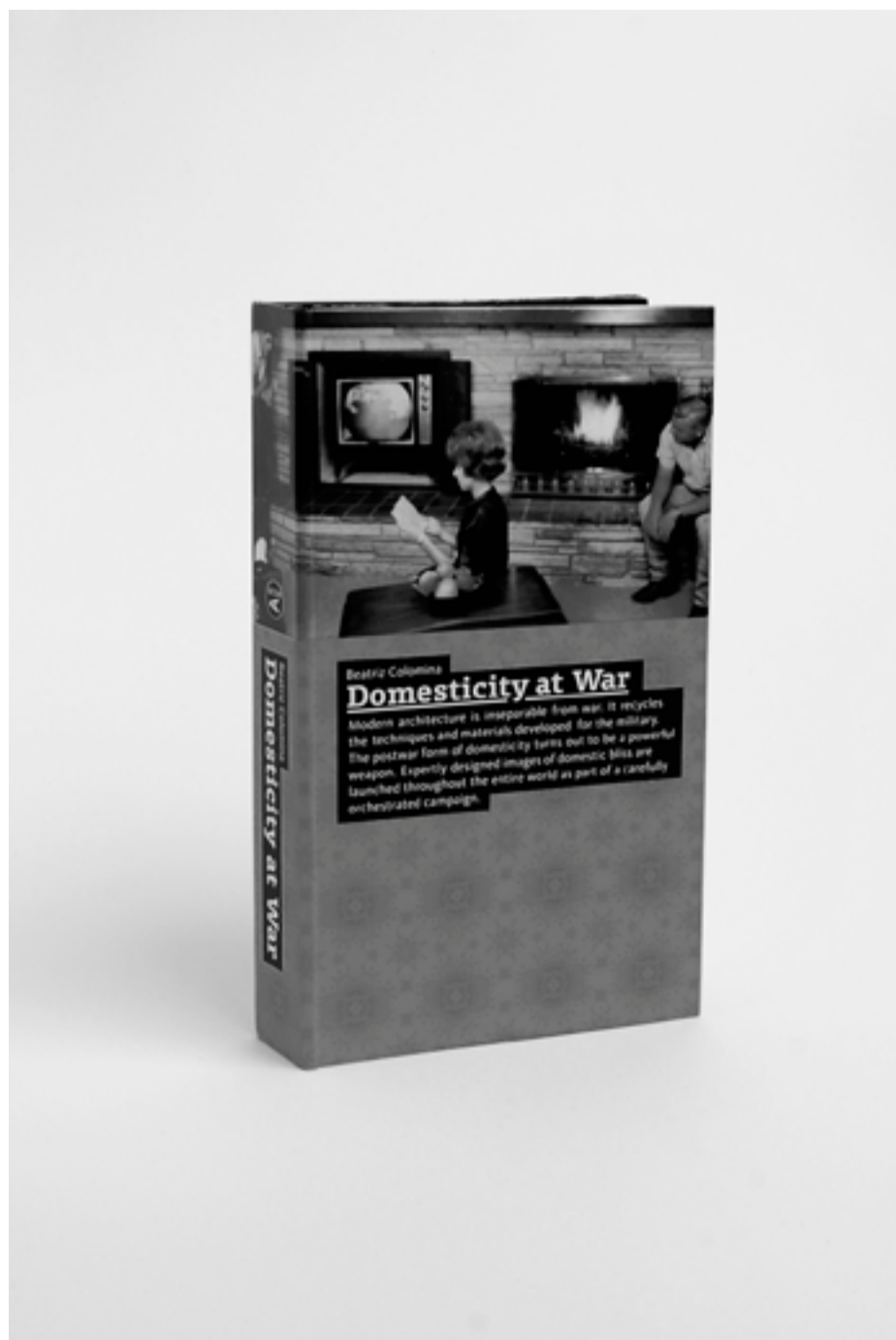
Beneath the lawn shelters were built, and inside food and tranquilizers were stored—100 pills was the recommended amount for a family of four. In 1961 John F. Kennedy gave an important speech where the safety of American citizens during a situation of war was proclaimed to be his own responsibility: “In the coming months I hope to let every citizen know what steps he can take to protect his family in case of attack.” The Department of Defense issued a pamphlet, *The Family Fallout Shelter*, which became a bestseller with almost five million copies sold. The suburban family started to construct systems of defense to keep intruders away from their bunkers: the idyllic suburbs with their transparent homes and trimmed lawns were preparing for war. This was indeed a new landscape. In Colomina’s words: “a network of buried surrogate houses, bunkers beneath the lawn acting as the counterpart to the fragile pavilions above, row upon row of hidden concrete fortifications topped by transparent boxes”.

That American domesticity was at war comes across vividly in the images in *Life* showing a newly married couple that spent their two-week honeymoon in the shelter, or in the images of another couple who cheerfully and proudly pose inside their shelters surrounded by canned food and supplies. And in a case like *The Underground House*, on display in what many architectural reviews described as the rather commercial and kitschy New York World’s Fair in 1966, the bunker is wholly domesticated into a traditional suburban ranch-style house. Here not only the interior, but also exterior aspects like weather and view were fabricated. The bunker was a machine that produced its own environment, weather and lighting conditions. “Peace is achieved in this war by environmental control,” Colomina notes.

Another system for environmental control analyzed by Colomina is *House of the Future*, an exhibition house designed by Alison (and Peter, Colomina claims) Smithson and shown at the Jubilee Ideal Home Exhibition in 1956. This is the European version with an overground bunker (that can be compared to other forms of Brutalist architecture). The house was conceived as a body



▲ Illustration by Mike Ludlow from the July 1960 issue of *The Saturday Evening Post*. Found at [todaysinspiration.blogspot.com](http://todaysinspiration.blogspot.com)



without windows to the outside world. At the exhibition H.O.F was presented as a box, in its turn enclosed within a larger box, and with only a small window opening for the viewer to peep through. During the exhibition actors staged scenes from everyday life, showing us images of a happy and glamorous life led by a young couple with no kids. But, Colomina proposes, there was another side to the house as well, that “the absurdly happy, shiny world of American advertising for the perfect domestic life was in fact a landscape of fear, a deceptive symptom of cultural paranoia.” H.O.F only opened up toward the interior, a paradise-like inner yard, and upward, toward the “unbreathed air.” Colomina reads both *The Underground House* and *The House of the Future* as “escape vehicles,” which makes them paradigmatic for the visions of future homes during the Cold War. Everything was there inside the house, and its inhabitants could escape without leaving it: “The house had finally become the whole world.”

Buckminster Fuller’s postwar “environmental controls” created similar closed worlds. They are not referred by Colomina however, who instead chooses to highlight Fuller’s *Dymaxion Deployment Units*. These grain bins, or “ready-mades” as Colomina calls them, were exhibited at MoMA in 1941 under the name *Defense Unit*. This was the first time that an entire home was shown in a museum, and here too the home is portrayed as an escape vehicle and a dream machine. The impact of war on art and culture was a common topic for discussion during the period, and as MoMA’s Alfred Barr asked: “What good is art in a time of war? Why maintain our cultural interests and activities when the air hums with bombers and the news of the battle?” Fuller’s *Defense Unit* would be one solution to the problem, since the grain bins he finds in Missouri can be used both as bomb shelters and summerhouses. Fuller writes: “You can put one in your backyard, for instance, dive into it if any dive bombers come over and maybe next year (provided there is no direct hit) turn it into a guest house or cart it to the beach for a summer cottage.” The *Defense Unit* received extensive media coverage—for instance in *Vogue*, where it was used as the backdrop for a

fashion spread. The home becomes a transitional site, it promises both change and continuity, and domestic life can itself be turned into a work of art, as in the case of the *Defense Unit* with its high degree of flexibility.

A recurring theme in *Domesticity at War* is the relation between the respective architectural modernisms of Europe and the U.S.. Does it make

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sense to speak of an American postwar avant-garde that would continue the work of the historical avant-garde? Colomina points to 1949 as the year when the world, and particularly Europe, turned its gaze to American architecture. This is the year of Charles and Ray Eames’ house in

Santa Monica, of Philip Johnson’s *The Glass House* in New Canaan, and of Mies van der Rohe’s *Farnsworth house*—to which one could add the first presentation of Pollock at the Venice Biennial, which made an impact described by the architect Peter Smithson as an indelible “image” that would overturn the French tradition. It is well known that American art was part of an ideological program aiming to project U.S. power, politically, economically, and culturally, and this process has been described in detail by, for example, Serge Guilbaut in his *How New York Stole the Idea of Modern Art*. Colomina too discusses the role of architecture and images of domesticity as propaganda tools, for instance the role played by the kitchen and the suburban home as a “weapon” at the American National Exhibition in Moscow in 1959. Here one could have wished for a more developed discussion of how (the image of) architecture and domesticity were used by both the American state and the corporate world in their strategic work to influence the world to take “the proper political course.” Not all political propaganda was as explicit as in the case of the private suburban builder William Levitt: “No man who owns his own house and lot can be a communist. He has too much to do.”

Ever since Robert Koch discovered the tuberculosis germ in 1882, there is a story to be told of the relation between modern architecture and medicine, and the kind of self-control that is implied in a hygienic consciousness. Evil and sickness had finally acquired a concrete form, albeit one that was not visible to the naked eye. This was a source of anxiety, and each individual could create his own techniques for avoiding it. In this way the hygienic project was not just something implemented from above by medical science and discourse, but was also a “practice of the self” that permeated everyday life. Modern architecture and modern homes show the extent to which such anxieties and fears are externalized in physical forms, as well as internalized in the distribution of domestic utensils and the very organization of domestic life. After the war, mental hygiene displaces physical hygiene, and Colomina suggests that “it is as if the horizontality of the TB patient had been replaced by the

horizontality of the psychoanalytic patient, on the couch.” This would be something like a shift in the strategies of practices of the self, leading from the “invisible” medical threats to psychic diseases, and Colomina proposes that the emerging control of tuberculosis in the 1950s meant that mental illnesses came to be a national obsession.

*Domesticity at War* probes deeply into what at first sight may seem like peripheral topics, and Colomina has unearthed rich material that shows us how what appears as marginal details may in fact be the main story. The story she tells of the American postwar home forms an important part in the mapping of how architecture constructs new subjectivities, how the individual internalizes new forms and control which at the same time opens up new freedoms.

Even though the book is a historical study, it is definite bearings on the present. America is still at war—1.6 million American troops have been sent to Iraq and Afghanistan, and in the age of terrorism the idea of a hidden threat is indeed more alive than ever. In a discussion with Homi Bhabha, published in *Artforum* this summer, Colomina suggests that today it is no longer the family home that provides a symbolic shelter, but rather individualized light-weight clothes and personal gadgets. This privatization becomes visible when we pass the airport security checks, and Bhabha describes his own reaction when he is politely asked “could you please...”, as almost a desire to cry out “Yes, yes, absolutely. Search me, and search the other men even more!” For him this indicates a new form of individuation that calls for a rethinking of the idea of biopolitics. This is also the strength of the story narrated by Colomina: it links past and present together in a way that constantly calls for new reflection. ●

Beatriz Colomina, *Domesticity at War* (Barcelona: Actar, 2006).

# Isidore Isou, 1925–2007

Kim West



On July 28, 2007, Isidore Isou died in his home in Paris. While the simultaneous passings of Ingmar Bergman and Michelangelo Antonioni two days later have received enormous attention, the demise of the Romanian-born, French poet, artist, filmmaker and philosopher has been met with almost complete silence. This may appear remarkable concerning a man who founded Letterism, created the “hypergraphical” text and the “discrepant”, “chiseled” and “super-temporal” film, designed theories in philosophy, politics, economics, architecture, psychology, etc., and who between his “literary” (Letterist) debut in 1947 (*Introduction à une nouvelle poésie et une nouvelle musique*) and his last publication in 2004 (the 1,400-page “lifetime achievement” *La Créatique ou à la Novatique*) brought out hundreds of books, made over twenty films, as well as producing innumerable paintings, sound works, sculptures, objects. Isou’s fundamental philosophic, aesthetic and political idea was based upon a notion of total creativity, of endless production. It would not be inappropriate to claim that he seems to have devoted the significant part of the 82 years of his life to putting this idea into practice. At the same time, the media silence regarding his death is hardly surprising. Letterism remains one of the most neglected avant-gardes of the 20th century, often dismissed as but a moment in the prehistory of Situationism, yet whose influence over a number of other artistic, literary and cinematographic movements remains to be mapped out and whose radical aesthetic models have yet to be drained of potential.

The Letterist cinema is a clear example. In 1951 Isou directed the groundbreaking *Traité de bave et d'éternité*, which among other things launched the “discrepant” and the “chiseled” cinema. In the first part of the film, we are invited to follow the figure Daniel, “played” by Isou himself, as he wanders about the streets in St-Germain-des-Prés. Parallel to the images of “Daniel” we hear a voice (Isou’s own) that, sometimes with a vague connection but most often completely without relation to the events in the image-track, reads, declaims, shouts a treatise about how “the two wings of cinema”—image and sound—should be separated and finally given their freedom. In the second and third parts of the film, which are also

“discrepant” but which consist of a more varied image material, Isou is engaged in directly manipulating and destroying (“chiseling”) the film frames by scratching them, drawing and writing upon them, turning them upside down, playing them backwards, etc. Both newly made and “found” shots are subjected to this treatment. The newly made ones most often show “Daniel” in different situations together with Paris artists and writers such as Blaise Cendrars and Jean Cocteau (Isou wanted to raise the market value of the film by casting celebrities), and the found ones consist of discarded shots from newsreels and so on. It would not be difficult to point out how different artists/filmmakers have borrowed and developed ideas and techniques introduced in *Traité de bave et d'éternité*: how the examination into the possibilities of “discrepant” cinema becomes a central feature in the cinematography of the following decades, in the works of filmmakers such as Resnais, Debord, Godard, and Duras, to name only the most obvious ones; and how the manipulation, destruction and scratching of the film frames point forward to, among others, artists/filmmakers such as Paul Sharits and Caroline Schneeman, but also to Stan Brakhage, who, in a letter from 1994, mentions Isou’s film as a central source of inspiration: “If the Lumière brothers and Méliès represent the ‘wings’ of cinema [...] I estimate that Isou is the organic backbone, which comprises a nervous system, with its synapses, chiseled, electrified, all these rhythms creating an emotional investment of the mind. Since I first saw *Traité de bave et d'éternité* it has obviously served as a fundamental inspiration for all of my films, just as it has for other independent filmmakers in the United States.”<sup>‡</sup>

One of the many figures that appear in *Traité de bave et d'éternité* is the young poet and soon-to-be filmmaker Maurice Lemaître, who already later the same year, inspired by the energetic former Romanian, made the equally groundbreaking *Le film est déjà commencé?*, with which he launched his idea of a “Syncinema”, that is, a film that engages the whole space of projection and uses it as an artistic resource. The image track in *Le film est déjà commencé?* consists to the largest degree of found or, to use an anachronism, “detourned” material: long shots from Griffith’s *Intolerance*,

what resembles left-over shots from Isou’s *Traité*, cuts from Hollywood films and newsreels, etc. Here too the film frames are scratched and manipulated, sometimes to the degree that they become almost completely “abstract”. But the essential part of *Le film est déjà commencé?* takes place “outside of” the image-track. At the premiere screening in Paris on December 7, 1951, the audience was forced to stand outside the entrance to the movie theater for one hour, waiting for “the film to start”. In the lobby, shots from Griffith’s *Intolerance* were projected onto a pink screen, at the same time as Letterists in civilian clothes shook dusty carpets and poured buckets with ice-cold water from the balcony above. Just as the atmosphere was about to get out of hand, the audience was allowed to enter the movie theater, where Lemaître’s trashed collage film was projected onto a covered screen in front of which Letterist spectators/actors performed and conversed with the image track. After one hour the projection was ended by the theater’s director because the last film reel had mysteriously disappeared. This caused a great outrage and the screening had to be shut down by the police.

It has of course been easy to dismiss a spectacle like this as a “Neo-avant-garde” repetition of the provocative cabarets of the Futurists and Dadaists. But the question is whether that is the story one has to tell. It is possible to see connections between a film such as *Le film est déjà commencé?* and early cinema’s “cinema of attractions”, where the projection was integrated into a larger context which often comprised acting, voices and performances. Perhaps one could say that the cinematographic experiments of Isou, Lemaître and the other early Letterists (Gil J Wolman, François Dufrène, Guy Debord) belong to a sidetrack to the history of the fiction film and the traditional projection apparatus, in which they develop a legacy from the early cinema in a way that precedes e.g. Anthony McCall’s and Stan VanDerBeek’s “expanded cinema” and the “structural film” of Michael Snow or Paul Sharits, and that points forward to cinematography’s new projection apparatuses in the spaces of contemporary art, as well as, more generally, the new spatialities of film screening in our technological present. In this sense, Isou’s and Lemaître’s films

would not only aim to cause scandals, but also to direct attention towards “traditional” cinema’s implicit preconditions, that is, to unveil the material qualities of the film frame and demonstrate how the space is an essential element of the “medium” of cinema to the same degree as the moving image.

To enumerate everyone who has been influenced by Isou’s Letterism would probably be a superhuman task. The threads spread to a number of post-wwii experimental artistic movements: Nouvelle Vague, Nouveau Réalisme, Neo-Dada, conceptual art, etc. Just trying to establish a list of artists and poets who have been directly associated with the movement generates an almost non-surveyable catalogue. And the collected productions of Isou and the still active Lemaître would fill their own library/cinemathèque/museum, to the extent that the amount may have a discouraging effect—it would take strong motivation to really examine the tens of thousands of pages of text, to see the hundreds and hundreds of hours of film. In short, a number of histories remain to be written (not least about Letterism in Swedish poetry and art). But the productions of Letterism are not only a subject for the historians, despite the recent death of the movement’s founder. Several of the aesthetic models developed by Isou and his followers from the ‘40s and onwards could perhaps gain a new relevance in today’s “post-medium” technological situation: hypergraphy, which constitutes a method for writing with all possible systems of notation in all possible media; infinitesimal poetry, an art for virtual signs within all art forms; meca-aesthetics, which invents a series of mechanic assemblage forms to serve as supports for the endless aesthetic creation... Even though Isou’s extremely tense tone of voice in his manifestos and declarations may have a tiring impact, there may still be things to learn from his attack on the word, his defense of the letter, and his promotion of a “radical artifice” in all domains and all media. To create is, as a thinker who happened to be born the same year as Isou said, to resist. •

#### Notes

‡ “Lettre de Stan Brakhage” in Frédérique Devaux, *Traité de bave et d'éternité d'Isidore Isou*, (Paris: Yellow Now, 1994), 149.