"*Cogito*, Madness and Religion:
Derrida, Foucault and then Lacan"
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The 'antagonism' of the Kantian notion of freedom (as the most concise expression of the antagonism of freedom in the bourgeois life itself) does not reside where Adorno locates it (the autonomously self-imposed law means that freedom coincides with self-enslavement and self-domination, that the Kantian "spontaneity" is in actu its opposite, utter self-control, thwarting of all spontaneous impetuses), but "much more on the surface":[1] for Kant as for Rousseau, the greatest moral good is to lead a fully autonomous life as a free rational agent, and the worst evil subjection to the will of another; however, Kant has to concede that man does not emerge as a free mature rational agent spontaneously, through his/her natural development, but only through the arduous process of maturation sustained by harsh discipline and education which cannot but be experienced by the subject as imposed on his/her freedom, as an external coercion.

Social institutions both to nourish and to develop such independence are necessary and are consistent with, do not thwart, its realization, but with freedom understood as an individual's causal agency this will always look like an external necessity that we have good reasons to try to avoid. This creates the problem of a form of dependence that can be considered constitutive of independence and that cannot be understood as a mere compromise with the particular will of another or as a separate, marginal topic of Kant's dotage. This is, in effect, the antinomy contained within the bourgeois notions of individuality, individual responsibility ... (Pippin—118-119)

One can effectively imagine here Kant as an unexpected precursor on Foucault's thesis, from his *Discipline and Punish,* of the formation of the free individual through a complex set of disciplinary micro-practices—and, as Pippin doesn't wait to point out, this antinomy explodes even larger in Kant's socio-historical reflections, focused on the notion of "unsocial sociability": what is Kant's notion of the historical relation between democracy and monarchy if not this same thesis on the link between freedom and submission to educative dependence applied to historical process itself? In the long term (or in its notion), democracy is the only appropriate form of government; however, because of the immaturity of people, conditions for a functioning democracy can only be established through a non-democratic monarchy which, through the exertion of its benevolent power, educates people to political maturity. And, as expected, Kant does not fail to mention the Mandevillean rationality of the market in which each individual's pursuit of his/her egotistic interests is what works best (much better than direct altruistic work) for the common good. At its most extreme, this brings Kant to the notion that human history itself is a deployment of an inscrutable (?) divine plan, within which we, mortals, are destined to play a role unbeknownst to us—here, the paradox grows even stronger: not only is our freedom linked to its opposite "from below", but also "from above", i.e., not only can our freedom arise only through our submission and dependence, but our freedom as such is a moment of a larger divine plan—our freedom is not truly an aim-in-itself, it serves a higher purpose.

A way to clarify—if not resolve—this dilemma would have been to introduce some further crucial distinctions into the notion of "noumenal" freedom itself. That is to

say, upon a closer look, it becomes evident that, for Kant, discipline and education do not directly work on our animal nature, forging it into human individuality: as Kant points out, animals cannot be properly educated since their behavior is already predestined by their instincts. What this means is that, paradoxically, in order to be educated into freedom (qua moral autonomy and self-responsibility), I already have to be free in a much more radical, "noumenal", monstrous even, sense.

Daniel Dennett draws a convincing and insightful parallel between an animal's physical environs and human environs; not only human artefacts (clothes, houses, tools), but also the "virtual" environs of the discursive cobweb: "Stripped of /the 'web of discourses'/, an individual human being is as incomplete as a bird without feathers, a turtle without its shell."[2] A naked man is the same nonsense as a shaved ape: without language (and tools and ...), man is a crippled animal—it is this lack which is supplemented by symbolic institutions and tools, so that the point made obvious today, in popular culture figures like Robocop (man is simultaneously super-animal and crippled), holds from the very beginning. How do we pass from "natural" to "symbolic" environs? This passage is not direct, one cannot account for it within a continuous evolutionary narrative: something has to intervene between the two, a kind of "vanishing mediator," which is neither Nature nor Culture—this In-between is not the spark of logos magically conferred on homo sapiens, enabling him to form his supplementary virtual symbolic environs, but precisely something which, although it is also no longer nature, is not yet logos, and has to be "repressed" by logos—the Freudian name for this monstrous freedom, of course, is death drive. It is interesting to note how philosophical narratives of the "birth of man" are always compelled to presuppose a moment in human (pre)history when (what will become) man, is no longer a mere animal and simultaneously not yet a "being of language," bound by symbolic Law; a moment of thoroughly "perverted," "denaturalized", "derailed" nature which is not yet culture. In his anthropological writings, Kant emphasized that the human animal needs disciplinary pressure in order to tame an uncanny "unruliness" which seems to be inherent to human nature—a wild, unconstrained propensity to insist stubbornly on one's own will, cost what it may. It is on account of this "unruliness" that the human animal needs a Master to discipline him: discipline targets this "unruliness," not the animal nature in man.

In Hegel's *Lectures on Philosophy of History*, a similar role is played by the reference to "negroes": significantly, Hegel deals with "negroes" before history proper (which starts with ancient China), in the section entitled "The Natural Context or the Geographical Basis of World History": "negroes" stand there for the human spirit in its "state of nature," they are described as a kind of perverted, monstrous child, simultaneously naive and extremely corrupted, i.e. living in the pre-lapsarian state of innocence, and, precisely as such, the most cruel barbarians; part of nature and yet thoroughly denaturalized; ruthlessly manipulating nature through primitive sorcery, yet simultaneously terrified by the raging natural forces; mindlessly brave cowards ... [3] This In-between is the "repressed" of the narrative form (in this case, of Hegel's "large narrative" of world-historical succession of spiritual forms): not nature as such, but the very break with nature which is (later) supplemented by the virtual universe of narratives. According to Schelling, prior to its assertion as the medium of the rational Word, the subject is the "infinite lack of being /*unendliche Mangel an Sein*/," the violent gesture of contraction that negates every being outside itself. This insight also forms the core of Hegel's notion of madness: when Hegel determines madness to be a withdrawal from the actual world, the closing of the soul into itself,

its "contraction," the cutting-off of its links with external reality, he all too quickly conceives of this withdrawal as a "regression" to the level of the "animal soul" still embedded in its natural environs and determined by the rhythm of nature (night and day, etc.). Does this withdrawal, on the contrary, not designate the severing of the links with the *Umwelt*, the end of the subject's immersion into its immediate natural environs, and is it, as such, not the founding gesture of "humanization"? Was this withdrawal-into-self not accomplished by Descartes in his universal doubt and reduction to *Cogito*, which, as Derrida pointed out in his "*Cogito* and the history of madness",[4] also involves a passage through the moment of radical madness?

This brings us to the necessity of Fall: what the Kantian link between dependence and autonomy amounts to is that Fall is unavoidable, a necessary step in the moral progress of man. That is to say, in precise Kantian terms: "Fall" is the very renunciation of my radical ethical autonomy; it occurs when I take refuge in a heteronomous Law, in a Law which is experience as imposed on me from the outside, i.e., the finitude in which I search for a support to avoid the dizziness of freedom is the finitude of the external-heteronomous Law itself. Therein resides the difficulty of being a Kantian. Every parent knows that the child's provocations, wild and "transgressive" as they may appear, ultimately conceal and express a demand, addressed at the figure of authority, to set a firm limit, to draw a line which means "This far and no further!", thus enabling the child to achieve a clear mapping of what is possible and what is not possible. (And does the same not go also for hysteric's provocations?) This, precisely, is what the analyst refuses to do, and this is what makes him so traumatic—paradoxically, it is the setting of a firm limit which is liberating, and it is the very absence of a firm limit which is experienced as suffocating. THIS is why the Kantian autonomy of the subject is so difficult—its implication is precisely that there is nobody outside, no external agent of "natural authority", who can do the job for me and set me my limit, that I myself have to pose a limit to my natural "unruliness." Although Kant famously wrote that man is an animal which needs a master, this should not deceive us: what Kant aims at is not the philosophical commonplace according to which, in contrast to animals whose behavioral patterns are grounded in their inherited instincts, man lacks such firm coordinates which, therefore, have to be imposed on him from the outside, through a cultural authority; Kant's true aim is rather to point out how the very need of an external master is a deceptive lure: man needs a master in order to conceal from himself the deadlock of his own difficult freedom and self-responsibility. In this precise sense, a truly enlightened "mature" human being is a subject who no longer needs a master, who can fully assume the heavy burden of defining his own limitations. This basic Kantian (and also Hegelian) lesson was put very clearly by Chesterton: "Every act of will is an act of self-limitation. To desire action is to desire limitation. In that sense every act is an act of self-sacrifice."[5]

The lesson here is thus Hegelian in a very precise sense: the external opposition between freedom (transcendental spontaneity, moral autonomy and self-responsibility) and slavery (submission, either to my own nature, its 'pathological' instincts, or to external power) has to be transposed into freedom itself, as the "highest" antagonism between the monstrous freedom qua "unruliness" and the true moral freedom.—However, a possible counter-argument here would have been that this noumenal excess of freedom (the Kantian "unruliness", the Hegelian "Night of the World") is a retroactive result of the disciplinary mechanisms themselves (along the lines of the Paulinian motif of "Law creates transgression", or of the Foucauldian

topic of how the very disciplinary measures that try to regulate sexuality generate "sex" as the elusive excess)—the obstacle creates that which it endeavors to control. Are we then dealing with a closed circle of a process positing one's own presuppositions?

Madness and (in) the History of *Cogito*

This paraphrase of the title of Derrida's essay on Foucault's *Histoire de la folie* has a precise stake: madness is inscribed into the history of *Cogito* at two levels. First, throughout entire philosophy of subjectivity from Descartes through Kant, Schelling and Hegel, to Nietzsche and Husserl, *Cogito* is related to its shadowy double, pharmakon, which is madness. Second, madness is inscribed into the very (pre)history of *Cogito* itself, it is part of its transcendental genesis.

In "*Cogito* and the History of Madness," (*Writing and Difference*) Derrida states that

> the *Cogito* escapes madness only because at its own moment, under its own authority, it is valid even if I am mad, even if my thoughts are completely mad. /…/ Descartes never interns madness, neither at the stage of natural doubt nor at the stage of metaphysical doubt. (55)

> Whether I am mad or not, *Cogito*, sum. /…/ even if the totality of the world does not exist, even if nonmeaning has invaded the totality of the world, up to and including the very contents of my thought, I still think, I am while I think. (56)

Derrida leaves no doubt that, "/a/s soon as Descartes has reached this extremity, he seeks to reassure himself, to certify the *Cogito* through God, to identify the act of the *Cogito* with a reasonable reason." (58) This withdrawal sets in "from the moment when he pulls himself out of madness by determining natural light through a series of principles and axioms" (59). The term "light" is here crucial to measure the distance of Descartes from German Idealism, in which, precisely, the core of the subject is no longer light, but the abyss of darkness, the "Night of the World."

This, then, is Derrida's fundamental interpretive gesture: the one of "separating, within the *Cogito*, on the one hand, hyperbole (which I maintain cannot be enclosed in a factual and determined historical structure, for it is the project of exceeding every finite and determined totality), and, on the other hand, that in Descartes's philosophy (or in the philosophy supporting the Augustinian *Cogito* or the Husserlian *Cogito* as well) which belongs to a factual historical structure" (60).

Here, when Derrida asserts that "/t/he historicity proper to philosophy is located and constituted in the transition, the dialogue between hyperbole and the finite structure, /…/ in the difference between history and historicity" (60), he is perhaps too short. This tension may appear very "Lacanian": is it not a version of the tension between the Real—the hyperbolic excess—and its (ultimately always failed) symbolization? The matrix we thus arrive at is the one of the eternal oscillation between the two extremes, the radical expenditure, hyperbole, excess, and its later domestification (like Kristeva, between Semiotic and Symbolic...). Illusionary are both extremes: pure excess as well as pure finite order would disintegrate, cancel themselves... This misses the true point of "madness," which is not the pure excess of the Night of the World, but the madness of the passage to the Symbolic itself, of

imposing a symbolic order onto the chaos of the Real. (Like Freud, who, in his Schreber analysis, points out how the paranoiac "system" is not madness, but a desperate attempt to ESCAPE madness—the disintegration of the symbolic universe—through an ersatz, as if, universe of meaning.) If madness is constitutive, then EVERY system of meaning is minimally paranoiac, "mad."

Recall Brecht's 'what is the robbing of a bank compared to the founding of a new bank?'—therein resides the lesson of David Lynch's *Straight Story*: what is the ridiculously-pathetic perversity of figures like Bobby Perou in *Wild at Heart* or Frank in *Blue Velvet* compared to deciding to traverse the US central plane in a tractor to visit a dying relative? Measured with this act, Frank's and Bobby's outbreaks of rage are the impotent theatrics of old and sedate conservatives...

This step is the properly "Hegelian" one—which is why Hegel, the philosopher who made the most radical attempt to THINK TOGETHER the abyss of madness at the core of subjectivity AND the totality of the System of meaning. This is why, for very good reasons, "Hegel" stands for the common sense for the moment at which philosophy gets "mad," explodes into a "crazy" pretense at "absolute knowledge"...

So: not simply "madness" and symbolization—there is, in the very history of philosophy (of philosophical "systems"), a PRIVILEGED point at which the hyperbole, philosophy's ex-timate core, directly inscribes itself into it, and this is the moment of *Cogito*, of transcendental philosophy. "Madness" is here "tamed" in a different way, through "transcendental" horizon, which does not cancel it in an all-encompassing world-view, but maintains it.

In the serene world of mental illness, modern man no longer communicates with the madman: /…/ the man of reason delegates the physician to madness, thereby authorizing a relation only through the abstract universality of disease." [6] However, what about psychoanalysis? Is psychoanalysis not precisely the point at which the "man of reason" reestablishes his dialogue with madness, rediscovering the dimension of TRUTH in it? And not the same ("hermeneutic"-mantic) truth as before, in the pre-modern universe? Foucault deals with this in History of Sexuality, where psychoanalysis as the culmination of "sex as the ultimate truth" confessionary logic...

In spite of the finesse of Foucault's reply, he ultimately falls prey to the trap of historicism which cannot account for its own position of enunciation; this impossibility is redoubled in Foucault's characterization of his "object," madness, which oscillates between two extremes. On the one hand, his strategic aim is to make madness itself talk, as it is in itself, outside the (scientific, etc.) discourse on it: "it is definitely not a question of a history of ideas, but of the rudimentary movements of an experience. A history not of psychiatry, but of madness itself, in its vivacity, before knowledge has even begun to close in on it."[7] On the other hand, the (later) model deployed in his *Discipline and Punish* and *History of Sexuality* compels him to posit the absolute immanence of the (excessive, transgressive, resisting…) object to its manipulation by the dispositif of power-knowledge: in the same way that "/t/he carceral network does not cast the unassimilable into a confused hell; there is no outside";[8] in the same way that the "liberated" man is itself generated by the dispositif that controls and regulates him; in the same way that "sex" as the unassimilable excess is itself generated by the discourses and practices that try to control and regulate it; madness is also generated by the very discourse that excludes,

objectivizes and studies it, there is no "pure" madness outside it—Foucault here "effectively acknowledges the correctness of Derrida's formulation",[9] namely of *il n'y a pas de hors-texte*, providing his own version of it.

When Foucault writes "Perhaps one day /transgression/ will seem as decisive for our culture, as much part of its soil, as the experience of contradiction was at an earlier time for dialectical thought."[10] So, does he not thereby miss the point, which is that this day has already arrived, that permanent transgression already IS the feature of late capitalism? His final reproach to Derrida's *il n'y a pas de hors-texte*: [11] textual analysis, philosophical hermeneutics, no exteriority ...

reduction of discursive practices to textual traces; elision of the events which are produced in these practices, so that all that remains of them are marks for a reading; inventions of voices behind the texts, so that we do not have to analyze the modes of the implication of the subject in the discourses; the assignation of the originary as /what is/ said and not-said in the text, so that we do not have to locate discursive practices in the field of transformations in which they effectuate themselves.[12]

Some Marxists even, as if Foucault/Derrida = materialism/idealism. Textual endless self-reflexive games versus materialist analysis. BUT: Foucault: remains HISTORICIST. He reproaches Derrida his inability to think the exteriority of philosophy—this is how he designates the stakes of their debate:

could there be something prior or external to the philosophical discourse? Can the condition of this discourse be an exclusion, a refusal, an avoided risk, and, why not, a fear? A suspicion rejected passionately by Derrida. *Pudenda origo,* said Nietzsche with regard to religious people and their religion.[13]

However, Derrida is much closer to thinking this externality than Foucault, for whom exteriority involves simple historicist reduction which cannot account for itself (to what F used to reply with a cheap rhetorical trick that this is a "police" question, "who are you to say that"—AGAIN, combining it with the opposite, that genealogical history is "ontology of the present"). It is easy to do THIS to philosophy, it is much more difficult to think its INHERENT excess, its ex-timacy (and philosophers can easily dismiss such external reduction as confusing genesis and value). This, then, are the true stakes of the debate: ex-timacy or direct externality?

Foucault versus Derrida, or Foucault on Descartes

Cogito, madness and religion are interlinked in Descartes (*génie malin*), in Kant (distance from Swedenborg, who stands for madness, etc.)
Simultaneously, *Cogito* emerges through differentiation from (reference to) madness, AND *Cogito* itself (the idea of *Cogito* as the point of absolute certainty, "subjective idealism") is perceived (not only) by common sense as the very epitome of the madness of philosophy, crazy paranoiac system-building (philosopher as madman—(not only) late Wittgenstein). And, also simultaneously, religion (direct faith) is evoked as madness (Swedenborg for Kant, or radical Enlightenment rationalists, up to Dawkins), AND religion (God) enters as the solution from (solypsistic) madness (Descartes).

Foucault and Derrida: polemic, in which they share the key underlying premise: that *Cogito* is inherently related to madness. The difference: for Foucault, *Cogito* is grounded in the exclusion of madness, while, for Derrida, *Cogito* itself can only

emerge through a "mad" hyperbole (universalized doubt), and remains marked by this excess. Before it stabilizes itself as *res cogitans*, the self-transparent thinking substance, *Cogito* as a crazy punctual excess.

In Foucault there is a fundamental change in the status of madness took place in the passage from Renaissance to the classical Age of Reason (the beginning of 17th century). In Renaissance (Cervantes, Shakespeare, Erasmus, etc.), madness was a specific phenomenon of human spirit which belonged to the series of prophets, possessed visionaries, those obsessed by demons, saints, comedians, etc. It was a meaningful phenomenon with a truth of its own. Even if madmen were vilified, they were treated with awe, like messengers of sacred horror.—With Descartes, however, madness is excluded: madness, in all its varieties, comes to occupy a position that was the former location of leprosy. It is no longer a phenomenon to be interpreted, searched for its meaning, but a simple illness to be treated under the well-regulated laws of a medicine or a science that is already sure of itself, sure that it cannot be mad. This change does not concern only theory, but social practice itself: from the Classical Age, madmen were interned, imprisoned in psychiatric hospitals, deprived of the full dignity of a human being, studied and controlled like a natural phenomenon.

In his *Histoire de la folie*, Foucault dedicated 3-4 pages to the passage in MEDITATIONS in which Descartes arrives at *Cogito*, ERGO SUM. Searching for the absolutely certain foundation of knowledge, Descartes analyses main forms of delusions: delusions of senses and sensible perception, illusions of madness, dreams. He ends with the most radical delusion imaginable, the hypothesis that all that we see is not true, but a universal dream, and illusion staged by an evil God (*Malin Génie*). From here, he arrives at the certainty of *Cogito* (I think): even if I can doubt everything, even if all I see is an illusion, I cannot doubt that I think all this, so *Cogito* is the absolutely certain starting point of philosophy.—Foucault's reproach is that Descartes does not really confront madness, but avoids to think it. He EXCLUDES madness from the domain of reason: "Dreams or illusions are surmounted within the structure of truth; but madness is inadmissible for the doubting subject" In the Classical Age, Reason is thus based on the exclusion of madness: the very existence of the category 'madness' is historically determined, along with its opposite 'reason'; that is, it is determined, through power relations. Madness in the modern sense is not directly a phenomenon that we can observe, but a discursive construct which emerges at a certain historical moment, together with its double, Reason in the modern sense.

In his reading of *Histoire de la folie*, Derrida focused on these 4 pages about Descartes which, for him, provide the key to the entire book. Through a detailed analysis, he tries to demonstrate that Descartes does not EXCLUDE madness, but brings it to EXTREME: the universal doubt, where I suspect that the entire world is an illusion, is the strongest madness imaginable. Out of this universal doubt, *Cogito* emerges: even if everything is an illusion, I can still be sure that I think. Madness is thus not excluded by *Cogito*: it is not that the *Cogito* is not mad, but *Cogito* is true even if I am totally mad. The extreme doubt, the hypothesis of universal madness, is not external to philosophy, but strictly internal to it. It is the hyperbolic moment, the moment of madness, which GROUNDS philosophy. Of course, Descartes later "domesticates" this radical excess: he presents the image of man as thinking substance, dominated by reason; he constructs a philosophy which is clearly historically conditioned. But the

excess, the hyperbole of universal madness, is not historical. It is the excessive moment which grounds philosophy, in all its historical forms. Madness is thus not excluded by philosophy: it is internal to it. Of course, every philosophy tries to control this excess, to repress it—but in repressing it, it represses its own innermost foundation: "Philosophy is perhaps the reassurance given against the anguish of being mad at the point of greatest proximity to madness" (59).

In his reply, Foucault first tries to prove, through a detailed reading of Descartes, that the madness evoked by Descartes does not have the same status of illusion as sensory illusions and dreams. When I suffer sensory illusions of perception or when I dream, I still REMAIN NORMAL AND RATIONAL, I only deceive myself with regard to what I see. In madness, on the contrary, I myself am no longer normal, I lose my reason. So madness has to be excluded if I am to be a rational subject. Derrida's refusal to exclude madness from philosophy bears witness to the fact that he remains a philosopher who is unable to think the Outside of philosophy, who is unable to think how philosophy itself is determined by something that escapes it. Apropos the hypothesis of universal doubt and the Evil Genius, we are not dealing with true madness here, but with the rational subject who feigns to be mad, who makes a rational experiment, never losing his control over it.

Finally, in the very last page of his reply, Foucault tries to determine the true difference between himself and Derrida. He attacks here (without naming it) the practice of deconstruction and textual analysis, for which "there is nothing outside the text" and we are caught in the endless process of interpretation. Foucault, on the contrary, does not practice textual analysis, but analyses of DISCOURSES. He analyses "dispositifs", formations in which texts and statements are interlinked with extra-textual mechanisms of power and control. What we have to look for are not deeper textual analyses, but the way discursive practices are combined with practices of power and domination.

... and then Lacan

The philosopher who stands for one of the extremes of "madness" is Nicholas Malebranche, his "occasionalism". Malebranche, a disciple of Descartes, drops Descartes's ridiculous reference to the pineal gland in order to explain the coordination between the material and the spiritual substance, i.e. body and soul; how, then, are we to explain their coordination, if there is no contact between the two, no point at which a soul can act causally on a body or vice versa? Since the two causal networks (that of ideas in my mind and that of bodily interconnections) are totally independent, the only solution is that a third, true Substance (God) continuously coordinates and mediates between the two, sustaining the semblance of continuity: when I think about raising my hand and my hand effectively raises, my thought causes the raising of my hand not directly but only "occasionally"—upon noticing my thought directed at raising my hand, God sets in motion the other, material, causal chain which leads to my hand effectively being raised. If we replace "God" with the big Other, the symbolic order, we can see the closeness of occasionalism to Lacan's position: as Lacan put it in his polemics against Aristoteles in *Television*,[14] the relationship between soul and body is never direct, since the big Other always interposes itself between the two. Occasionalism is thus essentially a name for the "arbitrary of the signifier", for the gap that separates the network of ideas from the network of bodily (real) causality, for the fact that it is the big Other

which accounts for the coordination of the two networks, so that, when my body bites an apple, my soul experiences a pleasurable sensation. This same gap is targeted by the ancient Aztec priest who organizes human sacrifices to ensure that the sun will rise again: the human sacrifice is here an appeal to God to sustain the coordination between the two series, the bodily necessity and the concatenation of symbolic events. "Irrational" as the Aztec priest's sacrificing may appear, its underlying premise is far more insightful than our commonplace intuition according to which the coordination between body and soul is direct, i.e. it is "natural" for me to have a pleasurable sensation when I bite an apple since this sensation is caused directly by the apple: what gets lost is the intermediary role of the big Other in guaranteeing the coordination between reality and our mental experience of it. And is it not the same with our immersion into Virtual Reality? When I raise my hand in order to push an object in the virtual space, this object effectively moves—my illusion, of course, is that it was the movement of my hand which directly caused the dislocation of the object, i.e. in my immersion, I overlook the intricate mechanism of computerized coordination, homologous to the role of God guaranteeing the coordination between the two series in occasionalism.[15]

It is a well-known fact that the "Close the door" button in most elevators is a totally dysfunctional placebo, which is placed there just to give the individuals the impression that they are somehow participating, contributing to the speed of the elevator journey—when we push this button, the door closes in exactly the same time as when we just pressed the floor button without "speeding up" the process by pressing also the "Close the door" button. This extreme and clear case of fake participation is an appropriate metaphor of the participation of individuals in our "postmodern" political process. And this is occasionalism at its purest: according to Malebranche, we are all the time pressing such buttons, and it is God's incessant activity that coordinates between them and the event that follows (the door closing), while we think the event results from our pushing the button ...

For that reason, it is crucial to maintain open the radical ambiguity of how cyberspace will affect our lives: this does not depend on technology as such but on the mode of its social inscription. Immersion into cyberspace can intensify our bodily experience (new sensuality, new body with more organs, new sexes...), but it also opens up the possibility for the one who manipulates the machinery which runs the cyberspace literally to steal our own (virtual) body, depriving us of the control over it, so that one no longer relates to one's body as to "one's own". What one encounters here is the constitutive ambiguity of the notion of mediatization:[16] originally this notion designated the gesture by means of which a a subject was stripped of its direct, immediate right to make decisions; the great master of political mediatization was Napoleon who left to the conquered monarchs the appearance of power, while they were effectively no longer in a position to exercise it. At a more general level, one could say that such a "mediatization" of the monarch defines the constitutional monarchy: in it, the monarch is reduced to the point of a purely formal symbolic gesture of "dotting the i's", of signing and thus conferring the performative force on the edicts whose content is determined by the elected governing body. And does not, mutatis mutandis, the same not hold also for today's progressive computerization of our everyday lives in the course of which the subject is also more and more "mediatised", imperceptibly stripped of his power, under the false guise of its increase? When our body is mediatized (caught in the network of electronic media), it is simultaneously exposed to the threat of a radical

"proletarization": the subject is potentially reduced to the pure $ (the divided subject), since even my own personal experience can be stolen, manipulated, regulated by the mechanical Other.

One can see, again, how the prospect of radical virtualization bestows on the computer the position which is strictly homologous to that of God in the Malebrancheian occasionalism: since the computer coordinates the relationship between my mind and (what I experience as) the movement of my limbs (in the virtual reality), one can easily imagine a computer which runs amok and starts to act liker an Evil God, disturbing the coordination between my mind and my bodily self-experience—when the signal of my mind to raise my hand is suspended or even counteracted in (the virtual) reality, the most fundamental experience of the body as "mine" is undermined... It seems thus that cyberspace effectively realizes the paranoiac fantasy elaborated by Schreber, the German judge whose memoirs were analyzed by Freud: the "wired universe" is psychotic insofar as it seems to materialize Schreber's hallucination of the divine rays through which God directly controls the human mind. In other words, does the externalization of the big Other in the computer not account for the inherent paranoiac dimension of the wired universe? Or, to put it in a yet another way: the commonplace is that, in cyberspace, the ability to download consciousness into a computer finally frees people from their bodies—but it also frees the machines from "their" people ... This brings us Wachowski brothers' *Matrix* trilogy: much more than Berkeley's God who sustains the world in his mind, the ULTIMATE Matrix is Malebranche's occasionalist God.

What, then, is the Matrix? Simply the Lacanian "big Other," the virtual symbolic order, the network that structures reality for us. This dimension of the "big Other" is that of the constitutive alienation of the subject in the symbolic order: the big Other pulls the strings, the subject doesn't speak, he "is spoken" by the symbolic structure. In short, this "big Other" is the name for the social Substance, for all that on account of which the subject never fully dominates the effects of his acts, i.e. on account of which the final outcome of his activity is always something else with regard to what he aimed at or anticipated. However, it is here crucial to note that, in the key chapters of *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psycho-Analysis*, Lacan struggles to delineate the operation that follows alienation and is in a sense its counterpoint, that of separation: alienation IN the big Other is followed by the separation FROM the big Other. Separation takes place when the subject takes note of how the big Other is in itself inconsistent, purely virtual, "barred," deprived of the Thing—and fantasy is an attempt to fill out this lack of the Other, not of the subject, i.e. to (re)constitute the consistency of the big Other. For that reason, fantasy and paranoia are inherently linked: paranoia is at its most elementary a belief into an "Other of the Other", into another Other who, hidden behind the Other of the explicit social texture, programs (what appears to us as) the unforeseen effects of social life and thus guarantees its consistency: beneath the chaos of market, the degradation of morals, etc., there is the purposeful strategy of the Jewish plot ... This paranoiac stance acquired a further boost with today's digitalization of our daily lives: when our entire (social) existence is progressively externalized-materialized in the big Other of the computer network, it is easy to imagine an evil programmer erasing our digital identity and thus depriving us of our social existence, turning us into non-persons.

Following the same paranoiac twist, the thesis of *The Matrix* is that this big Other is externalized in the really existing Mega-Computer. There is—there HAS to be—a

Matrix because "things are not right, opportunities are missed, something goes wrong all the time," i.e. the film's idea is that it is so because there is the Matrix that obfuscates the "true" reality that is behind it all. Consequently, the problem with the film is that it is NOT "crazy" enough, because it supposes another "real" reality behind our everyday reality sustained by the Matrix. One is tempted to claim, in the Kantian mode, that the mistake of the conspiracy theory is somehow homologous to the "paralogism of the pure reason," to the confusion between the two levels: the suspicion (of the received scientific, social, etc. common sense) as the formal methodological stance, and the positivation of this suspicion in another all-explaining global para-theory.

Notes:

[1] Robert Pippin, *The Persistence of Subjectivity: On the Kantian Aftermath*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005.

[2] Daniel C. Dennett, *Consciousness Explained*, New York: Little, Brown and Company 1991, p. 416.

[3] G.W.F. Hegel, *Lectures on the Philosophy of World History, Introduction: Reason in History*, Cambridge: Cambridge UP 1975, pp. 176-190.

[4] Jacques Derrida, "*Cogito* and the history of madness," in *Writing and Difference*, Chicago: The University of Chicago Press 1978.

[5] G.K. Chesterton, *Orthodoxy*, FQ Publishing, 2004.

[6] Michel Foucault, *Madness and Civilization*, London: Tavistock 1967.

[7] Michel Foucault, *Folie et deraison: Histoire de la folie à l'age classique*, Paris: Plon 1961.

[8] Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, Harmondsworth: Penguin Books 1977.

[9] Robert Boyne, *Foucault and Derrida: the Other Side of Reason*, London: Unwin Hyman, 1990.

[10] Michel Foucault, *Language, Counter-Memory, Practice*, Oxford: Blackwell 1977.

[11] "Reading /.../ cannot legitimately transgress the text toward something other than it. /.../ There is nothing outside the text." (Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press 1976.

[12] Michel Foucault, "Mon corps, ce papier, ce feu." *Histoire de la folie à l'age classique*, Paris: Gallimard 1972.

[13] Foucault, *op.cit.*

[14] Jacques Lacan, "Television," in *October* 40 (1987).

[15] The main work of Nicolas Malebranche is *Recherches de la vérité* (1674-75; the most available edition Paris: Vrin 1975).

[16] As to this ambiguity, see Paul Virilio, *The Art of the Motor*, Minneapolis: Minnesota University Press 1995.

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