Compilation 21

The Toxicity of Continuity

Patricia Reed
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Walter Benjamin defined 'catastrophe' as a missed opportunity.[1] Unlike conventional associations of the term referring to an unsuspecting event puncturing the everyday, for Benjamin catastrophe concerns continuity. Specifically, historical continuity, where a "critical moment" has been lost, having become engulfed by the "spirit of routine."[2] Opportunity, in this historical dimension, pertains to the deprivatized realm of social transformation, and although it interfaces with, and affects the personal, it is irreducible to individual chance-taking. While unanticipated and tragic incidents will always, sporadically, thwart even the most sophisticated of probability calculations, those occurrences alone do not constitute the catastrophic. Tragedy and catastrophe are not interchangeable. What distinguishes them, is that tragedy divulges symptoms of underlying causal forces and/or co-existential logics that ought to compel conscious reappraisal, whereas catastrophe marks a rejection of that reappraisal, whether through hubristic stubbornness or indifferent ignorance. The catastrophic lies in remaining fundamentally unchanged, unlearned, and unmoved by disruptions, be they epistemic, environmental, economic and/or socio-normative —often in combination. As a continuous attachment to the way familiar worlds are configured (no matter their condition), catastrophe marks a shunning of possibility in favor of staying the course (no matter the consequence). To put it bluntly, to remain calm and carry on *is* the catastrophe.

Catastrophe arises when a world as it currently is, is inflated to the status of the only possible world. What is meant by 'a world' in this instance, is simply a space of inhabitation. It is an historically informed site, underwritten by certain frames of reference that function to justify[3] and condition particular forms of life within its

contours. Frames of reference serve as rudimentary conceptual schemas for systems of activity and thought, setting a vantage point from which modes of reasoning, sense-making, material and relational practices accordingly derive. As an epistemic example outlined by Reza Negarestani, the question of how long it takes for the earth to revolve around the sun, is a legitimate question within Copernican frames of reference; whereas the question of how long it takes the sun the circle the earth, is a relevant question from the perspective of Ptolemaic frames of reference.[4] Each referential framework enables certain questions while it disables others, where vectors of inquiry are opened or closed depending on the initial perspectival constraint (i.e. in this case, where the earth is schematically situated). For spaces of inhabitation, namely social configurations which is the primary concern here, frames of reference are often fictional, which is to say they are conceptual idealizations. This 'fictional' status does not diminish their significance or power to orient a system in a certain way, on the contrary. Of lingering consequence, is Adam Smith's fictional frame of reference of the 'egoist human,' deployed in order to validate his system of political economy. As Hans Vaihinger wrote, Smith required a causal interpretation of human behavior in order to bring the "whole of political economy into an ordered system."[5] Since human actions are exceptionally complicated, they raise serious conundrums when trying to condense them to causal factors alone,[6] and yet despite the actuality of cooperation, generosity or sheer behavioral habits, Smith fashioned his model with the 'as if' assumption that the driving force of *all* human activity is always, and solely, egoism. Such an abstractive and fictional reduction of human activity, may be useful in some cases of modeling, as all complex situational models require a degree of simplification. Yet as Vaihinger noted, it is when this oversimplified fiction becomes axiomatic, and 'reliable' conclusions are derived from it, that the value of the model becomes "positively ruinous as hypothesis or dogma."[7] While the example was intended to illustrate the hazards of conflating a selectively reductive, abstractive fiction with the "complete range of causes and facts" of reality (what we could call a

toxic reduction, compared to a rigorous reduction),[8] it nonetheless also demonstrates the consequential weight and responsibility of inventing frames of reference as a schematic of departure. More than a century after Vaihinger's book, to describe the obstinate adherence to this egoist-human frame of reference as 'dogmatic,' would be an understatement, however the broad point to be made, and pertinent to both examples, is that conceptual frames of reference (be they fictional or otherwise) serve as a perspectival constraint for world-building, orienting a world and its contents in logical compliance with that perspective. As such, the creation of otherworlds (as a non-catastrophic opportunity), is inseparably tethered to the task of devising frames of reference for that very otherworld.

Frames Of Reference And Reproducibility

As a prerequisite for all worlds, frames of reference are unique and distinct to each, yet they are functionally universal, since they are what makes any world operational (even when dysfunctional, pragmatically speaking). Such a claim resonates with Sylvia Wynter's elaboration of the 'sociogenic principle'—a *general* description of how *particular* human worlds become reproducible.[9] For Wynter the foundational perspective set by any and all regionally specific worlds, is bound to conceptions of 'being human' that belong to those worlds —both geographically and historically. Those worlds subsequently evolve social and knowledge structures, as well as incentives and behavior in accordance with the idealization established by said human self-conception. It's here we can note the force of the toxically reductive 'egoist human' as the primary referent driving the self-storytelling logic of our existing world, a regionally and historically specific picture of the human consequently inflated to global proportions that has manifest as a liberal 'monohumanism' or 'homo oeconomicus', in the parlance of Wynter.[10] The inflation of this frame of reference to a global scale, not only leads to the erasure of worlds (in the plural) in favor of a constricted unilateral world, it

also works to corrode the possibility space for the interminable project of human self-conception, from which otherworlds would logically evolve—both schematically and heuristically.

Frames of reference are vehicles for the reproduction of forms of life that self-referentially confirm the conditions of a particular, historical world, setting up a boundary of logical and normative inclusion/exclusion. The contours of a world are geographical and temporal, allowing for the bracketing of discrete historical eras that are regionally specific—like how it is possible to distinguish between Classical and Modern periods.[11] Similar to the Foucauldian 'episteme,'[12] these world-historical contours delimit a space of what is possible/relevant or impossible/irrelevant to say, do, question, or be, while implicitly determining what is good, true, adequate, or necessary. Diagrammatically thought, catastrophe can be seen as the reinforcement of the contour of a particular, concrete world. This reinforcement involves an endorsement of the frames of reference that legitimize and govern its limit condition, and this endorsement is performed whether it's explicitly affirmed or unconsciously practiced (usually the latter). Catastrophe, as missed historical opportunity, is thus a doubling down on an existing world-historical contour as if it is impermeable, total, or complete. Otherwise said, catastrophe is the residue of 'ahistorical' being and thought insofar as it entails an ethical and cognitive refusal to contend with the actual contingency of history belonging to any world—including the artifact of the human picture endemic to it. In such a refusal the particular frames of reference belonging to a world are sustained and rehearsed as an invariant fact or law, enforcing processes of naturalization. Considering that what "it means to have a history," is to labor against the self-referential semblance of historical completeness in order to repurpose it for pathways "unseen by the past," catastrophe indexes a disavowal of this 'meaningful' labor.[13] When futurity is unglued from the frivolity of twinkling novelty, and understood, rather, as a struggle for other histories, catastrophe, as a vector of continuity, can be seen as an aversion to create demands on the future. The compounded effects of such an aversion, are that the transformative

demands futurity reciprocally makes upon us, are also evaded or ignored.[14] Catastrophe is thus equal to the active prevention or indifferent arrestation of transformation in this twinned sense, manifest in the unreasoned perpetuation of given frames of reference undergirding the logic, and reproducibility (i.e. continuity) of a particular world configuration.

In Benjamin's dialect, a 'critical moment' is where the "status quo threatens to be preserved."[15] Following this thought, we can then infer that operations of preservation can only be deemed 'threatening' when a reasoned analysis of a present world (in its current arrangement) is mentally extended into the future, and is considered as harmful, unjust or undesirable.[16] We can only come to diagnose the perpetuation of the status quo *as* a threat, because of cognitive and ethical investments in the future, demanding of us, at a minimum, to *care* about existing and conceivable risks and harms.[17] Stated differently, the perceptibility of threat in the continuation of the present, is only possible because of our capacity to care for: a) that which is immediately damaging and for which discontinuity is desired in the future, and b) that which is conceivable as a probable risk, yet is not fully, concretely existent in the here and now. This threat of continuity is entirely distinct from many popular doomsday tales, where threats are often treated as purely external, or alien to current world configurations. The 'threat of continuity' stands apart, since it addresses the *immanent menace of uncaring* for futural risks and the reciprocal demands for transformation those prognosticated risks ought to catalyze. Catastrophe, as missed opportunity, is the historical receipt of this uncaring, whether enacted deliberately or through pure negligence. While it has been a centuries-long achievement of human thought to even be able to conceive of our own species extinction,[18] the 21st Century is rather particular, since it is one where the *epistemic abstraction* of human extinction is waning, not because the premise is invalid, but because its *actualization* has become more proximate, beyond sheer intellectual deliberation. When the continuity of our unilateral world as it

currently is, comes to be foreseeable as an existential threat at planetary dimensions, the persistent frames of reference coaxing us along a continuous path, can be understood as nothing other than toxic. In this way, the toxicity of continuity can be seen as the destructive residue of unrealized opportunity.

Debordered Conceptual Exposure

To describe something as 'toxic', in both biological and sociological senses, is to evoke something that produces harm. Although toxicity is more routinely understood as the injurious contamination of an organism by some entity *external* to it, thereby upsetting its 'healthy' or consistent functioning, in the context of concepts, toxicity can occur in the opposite direction: by preserving what is *internal* to its self-referential modes of thought. That is, by continuing to confirm what is (thought to be) known, true, sufficient, necessary, or good. Avoiding conceptual contamination is the shirking of possibility to think or know otherwise, and the name for this is unreason. It is to remain fixedly entrenched in ones existing situational perspective, a plight Achille Mbembe described as "mental self-amputation."[19] The unyielding preservation of conceptual frames of reference plays out in the rehearsal of the 'proper' contents, and undeliberated conventions of thought belonging to a particular world, and, in so doing, affirms the discursive and practical configuration of that world. It's how concepts not only calcify into dogmatism, but how the capacity to reason otherworlds not of the concrete here and now, is progressively eroded. At work in this conceptual self-amputation is an adamant attachment to the familiarity of a world as it is currently known, where the comfort of what is customarily thought, seen and heard operates as a compulsive venom. What may initially be dismissed as 'innocuous', habits of thought can mutate into mental quiescence under the influence of analgesic, familiar frames of reference; ones that manufacture harm because they sow conceptual paralysis. Rejection or non-engagement with the unfamiliar, in

either passive or active forms, amounts to the fixity of a world as it is, where Mbembe calls upon us to "cure our souls from such human-inflicted ills."[20] As a thinker of debordering, Mbembe's oeuvre primarily reflects the geopolitical domain, yet the principle of debordering must also extend to the conceptual domain as well, foregrounding a pedagogic necessity for exposure, vital contamination, and permeability.[21] Without said conceptual contamination—that is, infecting the "bodymind"[22] by something unknown to it, no learning or cognitive adjustability is possible. While today the call to 'unlearn' proliferates, let's be clear, there is simply no such option, for 'unlearning' speciously presupposes a surplus of knowledge one can afford to selectively dispense of. There is only learning; learning put to the service of conceptual dehabituation as a labor of thought enabled by debordered exposure.

Critique As (Negative) Affirmation Of What Is

Although 'critical thought' is often upheld as a vehicle for the transformation of worlds, since it teaches of contradictions, injustices or structural incompatibilities, it's diagnostic method requires the maintenance of a given world, in so far as that world is preserved as a negative object. Critical thinking cannot be performed without its referential object—and that object is an existing world. Certainly, critical thinking is an indispensable method in demonstrating the toxic conditions of a familiar world and its frames of reference (opening a space of reasons for the need to transform it), but without the propositional dynamics of an inexistent world, critique nonetheless remains negatively attached to a world as it is. Critical thought is necessary but not sufficient, since the minimum precondition in the making of otherworlds, is to make existing frames of reference belonging to a current world, irrelevant. In our moment, critique can (and often does) speak to the threat of preserving the hegemonic Modern-human concept. This concept, premised on an initial separation between figure and ground as a

legitimizing frame of reference is one that has enabled a world where the earth is schematized as an exploitable resource for nourishing the expanding aspirations of (myopic) human comforts. As this long-standing frame of reference has spawned consequences that now tangibly expose a threat of continuity (a 'critical moment'), what criticality alone fails to articulate are pathways for diversion from this toxic continuity. This is so because criticality, methodologically speaking, advances few cognitive tools to hypothesize frames of reference that could enable such an urgent deviation, and can only address a referential condition as it is, even when this is negatively predicated. It is necessary, yet not enough to point to the hypocrisies or contradictions of a given world, it is rather a question of how to make a world's given configuration, schematically and paradigmatically, redundant.

This is by no means an advocation for a-critical thought, merely the acknowledgement of its methodological limitations. If the problem of critique is that it is forever bound to a world as it is, the inverse problem of unbridled, delirious fantasy (in the context of world-making), manifests as the rash speculation of infinite otherworlds—a recklessness that is trivial at best, and perilous at worst. The call for a debordered contamination of the conceptual domain cannot be carelessly made with an anything-goes disposition, as if the proliferation of any and all worlds is, *per se*, desirable. Just as *all possible* diversions from the status quo are not to be championed, not all contaminations or exposures are vital; many are just as injurious as the toxicity of existing frames of reference. Otherwise said, conceptual contamination without the faculty of judgment is but a flattening of the consequences of thought, as if all concepts are worthy 'infectors.' It is on this point, where the reasoning of conceptual infection is entangled with care, a genre of depersonalized or non-intimate care that is indivisible from the agency to adjudicate concepts substantially—that is the agency to care about their potential, ramified risks. What types of conceptual contamination ought to intoxicate perspectival frames of reference, and towards what collective purpose? As the mediator between knowing and

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doing,[23] reason (understood across a wide spectrum of activity), is how commitments to otherworlds can be made explicit, and how responsibility for the realization of said commitments can be accountably arbitrated.[24] Rather than envisioning the entanglement of reason with care as bound solely to individual reflection, as Jules Gleeson reminds us: "[r]easons both arise *from* communities and are appeals *to* them"—meaning that the practice of reasoning is always social, and always a "reciprocal matter."[25] Because any form of reasoning as to the qualities of certain conceptual 'infections' always takes place in a world that is not of one's personal making, care for how conceptual infections serve to re-schematize worlds is both ethically and pragmatically necessary. The configuration of an otherworld, undergirded by frames of reference adequate to it, is not just a question of carefully refereeing new conceptual frameworks, but is also a labor of care for those concepts in nurturing their maturation, especially in view of how they reciprocally transform the very agents of their thought—namely, us.

Constructing Departure

To put an affirmative valence on Benjamin's sense of catastrophe, we can say that escaping it demands the *construction* of opportunity. First, opportunity needs to be considered as a mutually transformative ramification of critical diagnoses, both inwardly and outwardly directed (and not the stand-alone diagnosis as such). And second, by 'construction' what is conveyed, is that opportunity is not something that can simply be revealed, it is not subject to unveiling, nor is it a ready-at-hand prefigured condition. Opportunities are not self-evident pathways suddenly appearing from nowhere to be passively or patiently hoped for, they require enabling conditions. The space of possibility implied by 'opportunity' requires fabrication, and this task is both conceptual (possibilities need to be made intelligible, or available to thought), as well as material (possibilities need to be realizable at the level of practice). As an immanent procedure,

opportunity is crafted in the here and now of a given, situated world, yet it is done so to enable departure from those given configurations (a resituated perspective including the frames of reference required to achieve such perspectival shifts). In this way, opportunity as enablement is not the delineation of a fully determinate telos or path, but is rather an intervention into the what-is-ness of a given world, mediated by the mental schematic of what could be of an otherworld (an inexistent world). Because the construction of opportunity cannot take place without meticulously nourishing capacities to make inexistent worlds intelligible, there are transformations upon the activity of thought required to realize transitions from world-diagnosing to world-making. Since the agency to think inexistent worlds cannot occur exclusively through critical thought alone, the genre of thinking needed to access worlds that do not yet exist, as Nick Houde has written, "requires modelling our understanding of reality as a space of what it could be" rather than remaining bound to what it is.[26] Important in Houde's formulation, is that reality is cognized *not only* as something to understand in ever-more profundity, like a model of reality bound exclusively to discovering its invariant laws, but is simultaneously conceived as a possibility-space for variation, for its tinkering otherwise. The consequence of this approach to reality is that it is both variant and invariant at once, meaning the threshold between 'what is' and 'what could be', is not a question of degree-zero, absolute novelty, nor is reality merely a result of social construction, but it is rather a space of synthesis between description (the analysis of the contents of an existing world —including judgments for demanding its reconfiguration) and possibility (the opportunity or immanent affordance of an otherworld).[27] The agency to construct opportunity as an otherworldly project, is bound to this synthetic dynamic of thought— that is, in the capacity not only to understand and evaluate the conditions of a world, but to purposefully reconstruct it from the inside out. The synonym for this synthetic operation of thought is imagination. This is so because imagination is the faculty to perceive (in the mind), that which is not available to immediate sensation (an otherworld).[28] Imagination is a representational force, since it entails

the making of mental pictures of something that is absent or non-present, and it is in this faculty that a corresponding sense of freedom can be found.[29] A form of freedom located in the agency to extrapolate from the purely diagnostic understanding of the 'what-is-ness' constitutive of an existing world, towards the variant possibility-space of world-building. Diverting the toxic continuity of this world is dependent on the synthetic faculty of imagining better worlds, since a 'better world', no matter the seeming naivety behind the expression, is a world not fully realized in the here and now of this world. While the determination of 'betterment' is always historically specific (it is *the* political object of contestation), formally speaking, a better world, always and generically, pertains to a there and then of a concretely, inexistent world. Any struggle for betterment is also a struggle over learning to witness a world that does not yet concretely exist.

Opportunity, as the affirmation of an exit from catastrophe, is bound to the collective enactment of detachment from the what-is-ness of a given world. This requires unbinding from given frames of reference that self-referentially entrench a familiar world and determine its particular configuration. Such unbinding entails the coordination of collective sense as to the permeability of the boundary conditions enclosing a particular world; a difficult task since the enclosures of worlds perpetuate appearances of impermeable completeness upheld by perspectives that reinforce such appearances. It is nothing less than a collective labor in learning how to become witness to the incompleteness of a world, and to testify to the irrelevant toxicity of frames of reference that make a given world concretely inhabitable (especially when a given world proffers inhospitable conditions). Averting the toxicity of continuity requires of us to care about existing and prognosticated harms and learn how to synthesize the transformative demands such harms reciprocate upon us as variable, transformable agents. As the day-to-day continuity of our world is put on abrupt hold (in the best case scenario) and death counts march tragically upwards under the force of a tiny, non-human intrusion, it is neither callous, nor uncaring to begin reasoning 'opportunity' in

Benjamin's sense. While many may acknowledge a 'planetary turn' on an epistemic level, primarily as a result of an earth-systems perspective that deals a blow to frames of reference buttressing operations of unilateral globalization, what this 'critical moment' makes apparent, for the first time, on the ground, and at such a scale, is the situated, non-abstract condition of planetary co-existence. Today, this is practiced and experienced with respect to commonly shared vulnerabilities where it is no longer relevant to envision freedom as containable within individual selfhood (the primary location for liberalist freedom), but is rather shifted to the *vectors between* agents, namely to the location of interrelations. This shifted location of freedom, perhaps masked by the temporary and immediate unfreedoms of mobility, is spontaneously performed in the choreographic practice of physically isolated, yet conceptually entangled solidarity, where a conscious awareness of those vectors is foregrounded, rather than the nodal points of individualization. The catastrophic prospect of returning to the status quo world as it is/was, once the acuteness of choreographic perturbations wanes, would do nothing but index the ignorant circumventing of a critical moment in favor of a familiar world which only benefits the few, and for a highly finite amount of time—and that would be catastrophic. How this current experience can serve as conditions of enablement for historical opportunity based on the collective reasoning of experience of this crisis that literally proves planetary entanglement, is a narrative that urgently awaits seizing and realizing for better worlds.

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(Sternberg Press); *Cold War Cold World* (Urbanomic); and *Distributed* (Open Editions). Reed is also part of the Laboria Cuboniks (trans-feminist, techno-material) working group whose Xenofeminist Manifesto (2015) was republished by Verso Books in 2018 with additional book-length translations in Korean, French and Greek (all in 2019).

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Walter Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*, trans. Howard Eiland and Kevin McLaughlin, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1999), 474.

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Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*, 477.

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Even when unjust, in an ethical sense.

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Reza Negarestani, *Intelligence and Spirit*, (New York/Falmouth: Sequence Press, 2018) 427.

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Hans Vaihinger, *The Philosophy of 'As If': A System of Theoretical, Practical and Religious Fictions of Mankind*, trans. C.K. Ogden (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Truber & Co., Ltd, 1935), 20.

6

Ibid.

7

Ibid.

8

Ibid.

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Originally coined by Frantz Fanon in *Black Skins, White Masks* (1967), Wynter carries the intellectual relay further, wherein she describes how human self-conception operates as template for an idealized human form and set of activities, an idealization (a storytelling) whose modes of reproduction are reinforced by socio-organizational structures that incentivize adaptation to this idealized concept. For a lengthy interview wherein the concept of sociogeny is thoroughly discussed, please see: Sylvia Wynter and Katherine McKittrick, "Unparalled Catastrophe for our Species," in *Sylvia Wynter: Being*

Human as Praxis, ed. K. McKittrick, (Durham: Duke University Press, 2015), 9-89.

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Sylvia Wynter and Katherine McKittrick, "Unparalled Catastrophe for our Species," in *Sylvia Wynter: Being Human as Praxis*, ed. K. McKittrick, (Durham: Duke University Press, 2015), 10.

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Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of Human Sciences*, (London: Routledge, 2005), xxiii.

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David Scott, Preface to "The Re-Enchantment of Humanism," (Interview with Sylvia Wynter), in *Small Axe 8*, 2000, 119–207, https://libcom.org/library/re-enchantment-humanism-interview-sylvia-wynter.

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Negarestani, *Intelligence and Spirit*, 491.

14

Thomas Moynihan, "Existential Risk and Human Extinction: An Intellectual History," in Futures, 116 (2020), https://doi.org/10.1016/j.futures.2019.102495.

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Benjamin, The Arcades Project, 474.

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To be clear, there is no equation between 'reasoning' and 'being reasonable' as an expression used to describe status quo complacency. One requires the agency of reason (in whatever form) to know when 'being reasonable' is entirely unreasonable, and how to demonstrate it.

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Moynihan, "Existential Risk and Human Extinction: An Intellectual History."

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Ibid.

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Achille Mbembe, "Thoughts on the Planetary," interview by Torbjørn Tumyr Nilsen, in *New Frame*, 5 Sept. 2019, https://www.newframe.com/thoughts-on-the-planetary-an-interview-with-achille-mbembe.

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Ibid.

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Mbembe gestures towards this idea of conceptual debordering, albeit alternately through a pedagogical lens, with his notion of a 'Planetary Curriculum.'

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I borrow this expression from Alexandra Pirici, from 23 March, 2020. See: https://www.facebook.com/alexandra.pirici/posts/10157854868068617

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Hannah Arendt, Lectures on Kant's Political Philosophy, ed. Ronald Beiner, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), 36.

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Negarestani, *Intelligence and Spirit*, 62.

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Jules Gleeson, "Robert Brandom, a Philosopher's Philosopher," in *Jstor Daily*, January 8, 2020, https://daily.jstor.org/robert-brandom-a-philosophers-philosopher.

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Nick Houde, "For any, for all, for each," in Glass Bead: Research Platform, 2019. *https://www.glass-bead.org/research-platform/for-any-for-all-for-each/?lang=enview*

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I am grateful to Inigo Wilkins for raising this formulation of 'invariance and variance' in the context transitioning from one world to an otherword, during a discussion held at the "Glass Bead: Views from the Anti-World" workshop, in Okayama, Japan, 27-29 September, 2019.

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Arendt, *Lectures on Kant's Political Philosophy*, 79.

29

Ronald Beiner, "Hannah Arendt on Judging," in *Lectures on Kant's Political Philosophy*, ed. Ronald Beiner, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), 132.

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Pulverization and Auto-Genesis in Monsters I – Chimeras and Composite Production

Mohammad-Ali Rahebi

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> *The aggregate as such is not a well-formed object; it seems irrational to us. … we're all Pythagorians. We think only in monadologies.*

> (Serres, 1995)

Behold the Löwenmensch[1], the Lion-Human, this most ancient of monsters! The oldest form of the New, the earliest attempt at producing something theretofore unseen, something unprecedented: divine and awe-inspiring. Wonder of wonders, the head of a lion and the body of a human: Lion-Human. And with this hyphen, with this analysis, it comes so easily apart. The earliest moment of monstrosity, the first incarnation of the monster: the chimera, the hybrid, the composite. The New as a mere collage of the old. To name it is to see its substance dissolve into borrowed parts. The formula of the monster-as-chimera is a pseudo-linguistic formation in terms of a syntactic juxtaposition: the head of a goat with the body of a man, the body of a lion with three pairs of eagle wings and the feet of a bull, etc.

The composite nature of the monster-as-chimera entails two main consequences: in the first place it makes the monster a dependent fabrication, who cannot be defined or described without invoking the proper name of its creditors, e.g. Lion-Human. The second: heterogeneous multiplicity. Being composed of different species, the monster is, in its entirety, not entire. The chimera is not a whole, homogeneous entity, a creature of *genesis*. It is fractured, sewn

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together from different bodies, different times and spaces. We are faced with an imagination which is, in the first place essentially a montage.

The creature thus created, the chimera, multiple without essence, without substance, yearns for unity: to become a thing since (at least until the end of the Leibnizian paradigm) that which is not *a* being is not a *being*.[2] The chimera is inherently unstable as it constantly stands under the threat of dissolution, of being deciphered into its components, the parts it has borrowed from "real" beings, from the lion, the goat, the snake.

Perhaps the most obvious solution, and the one usually taken, is "pulverization": instead of creating a new being from combining parts from two or three "natural" beings (or species), why not from five, or ten? The eyes of a snake, the skin of the toad, the legs of the panther, the skull of an eel, etc. The vague descriptions of Cthulhu and its ilk are a rather good example as they have become more and more complex over the decades. Other ready examples can be found in Hollywood "creature features" and monster movies: the conception of the Xenomorph in the Alien franchise is especially illuminating here.[3] The strategy is to make the atomic elements smaller and smaller, so that the monster will appear as less and less of a patchwork than made of whole, seamless cloth.

In this stage, the monster's powers in invoking fear lies in its becoming an unreadable cipher, unanalyzable; it must hide its parts, its stitches, its debts, lest it be recognized for the borrowed, patchwork mess that it still is. Compare:

> *I cannot even hint what it was like, for it was a compound of all that is unclean, uncanny, unwelcome, abnormal, and detestable. It was the ghoulish shade of decay, antiquity, and desolation; the putrid, dripping eidolon of unwholesome revelation; the awful baring of that which the merciful earth should always hide.*

(Lovecraft, 1984)

and,

I will not conceal his [Leviathan's] parts.

(Job 41:12)

and the difference between a hybrid-stage monster and a real individual-species with a proper name becomes apparent.

The monster as the fragmented, composed/composite body is in its uncategorizable form and without a proper name, without a "proper body", without a (legitimate) discourse and in a way still contingent, temporal, and also impotent as in isolated and unable to reproduce. It is a sum of heterogeneous parts, atomic units that are taken from different entities which are in themselves possessing of a unity and homogeneity by virtue of the proper names of their species. And yet it is also a site of immense potential, a possibility of the emergence of something radically new.

The monster, the composite body that has as its mode of being only the accidental, must try to change its own history, its genealogy as a contingent being and fashion for itself a new self-production, a new beginning that is necessary, transcendental, and most of all natural. It is in this creation of the second origin that the notion of genesis comes to fore as the process that produces a new body and as such necessitates a production process, which is the same as a reproduction process (the origin is effaced in species).

This new *genesis* will allow the heterogeneous fractured monster tries to become an independent (from the animals, etc. of whose parts it is composed), homogeneous, and "real live" being. It requires an act of "wonder," divine or magical intervention of re-production (or re-inscription). It needs to become a species, to erase its material history and re-create, re-write itself as whole, natural, true, and

essential.[4]

The rough stitches that bind together the mismatched body-parts stolen from corpses into Frankenstein's "creature," the nails that serve as joints for little Pinocchio, omphalos, the mamalian navel that shatters the human dream of godhood: reminders of being created, of being made and as such, contingent, not self-sufficient. That is the problem of the monster, of the newly created trying to become *something*, an entity, an individual. As Hans Jonas said, "only those entities are individuals whose being is their own doing, and thus, in a sense, their task" (Jonas, 1968).

Every new thing, every invention, in a word every monster, will try to become something more than just a passing, contingent, unnamed being. It will try to become a whole bigger and other than the sum of its parts, to become a full body that is *unengendered*. As we will see in more details in the subsequent parts of this series, there are many approaches to achieving this unity and this essence and mythology, literature, and pop culture provide us with many examples of such efforts, whether they end in failure (Frankenstein's creature) or success (the rebellious sons in Freud's myth of the Primal Father).

There are many forms of the New, of creativity and production. The monstrous is simply the most emblematic (and perhaps most problematizing) example of the New. The first moment of the monster is the Chimera as composite where the New is formed as a more or less obvious collage of the old, the similar, the already-existing "natural." In this stage, the monster's development occurs as an occluding of its dependent, created reality through dissembling its composition and multiplicity while dreaming of a new body, of its next moment.

References:

Jonas, Hans. "Biological Foundations of Individuality" in *International Philosophical Quarterly* 8: 231-151. 1968.

Serres, Michel. *Genesis,* University of Michigan Press, 1995.

Lovecraft, Howard Philips, "The Outsider" in S. T. Joshi ed *The Dunwich Horror and Others,* Arkham House Publisher, 1984.

1

The Löwenmensch of Hohlenstein-Stadel, a roughly 40,000-year old statue and considered the earliest example of a chimera or hybrid being.

2

The famous maxim of Leibniz, establishing his monadological philosophy.

3

The reader is refered to the interviews and behind-the-scenes documentaries from both the original Ridley Scott *Alien* and *Alien: Resurrectio n* where the "natural inspirations" behind the monster's appearance are discussed.

4

Compare this with tribal origin myths and their function in creating the "primitive" society's identity as a whole. We will come back to this when re-reading Freud's Ur-myth of the Primal Father and his sons.

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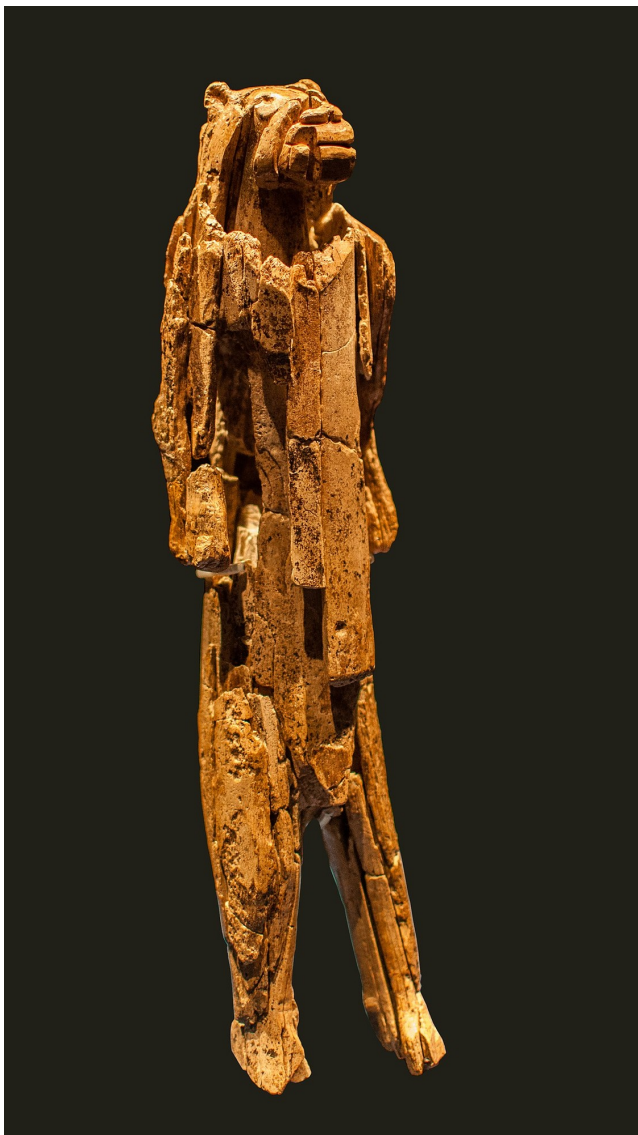
Lion-man of the Hohlenstein-Stadel, Baden-Württemberg, Germany, 40,000 years old, Ulmer Museum.