Compilation 23

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

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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Patricia Reed is an artist, writer and designer based in Berlin. Recent writings have been published in *Glass Bead Journal*; *The New Normal* (MIT & Strelka Press, forthcoming); *Construction Site for Possible Worlds* (with Anil Bawa-Cavia, Urbanomic, forthcoming); *e-flux Journal*; *Making & Breaking*; *Angelaki*; *Para-Platforms* (Sternberg); *Post-Meme* (Punctum Books); *e-flux Architecture*; *Xeno-Architecture*

(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).

1

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

2

Benjamin, *The Arcades Project* , 477.

3

Even when unjust, in an ethical sense.

4

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

5

Hans Vaihinger, *The Philosophy of 'As If': A S ystem of Theoretical, Pr actical and Rel igious Fictions of Mankind* , trans. C.K. Ogden (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Truber & Co., Ltd, 1935), 20.

6

Ibid.

7

Ibid.

8

Ibid.

9

Originally coined by Frantz Fanon in *Black Skin s, 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 Wy nter: Being*

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

10

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.

11

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

12

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.

13

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.

15

Benjamin, The Arcades Project, 474.

16

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.

17

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

18

Ibid.

19

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.

20

Ibid.

21

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

22

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

23

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

24

Negarestani, *Intelligence and Spirit*, 62.

25

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

26

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*

27

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.

28

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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Smoke, Drug, Poison: A Philosophy of the Faramoosh-Khaneh (Opium Den)

Jason Bahbak Mohaghegh

October 4th, 2020

We must enter the 'faramoosh-khaneh' (Persian 'house of forgetting,' meaning opium den). We must rest horizontally across its smooth planks and breathe deeply of its dust in order to contemplate a philosophy of willed oblivion. For opium is not a simple business of annihilation, but rather of processes of temporary transmutation; it conducts a paradox of physical ethereality wherein one learns to become at once smoke, drug, and poison. There is an elegant ritual in play: the reclined body, the slanted head, the lit pipe and charcoal grills, the careful assortment of objects and implements, the choreography of postures and the channeling of consumptive fumes. All of these make possible the delicate exercise of inhalation and exhalation that allows us to begin devising an 'atmospheric methodology' (or perhaps a 'phenomenology of mood').

Fumomania (Obsession With Smoke)

Principle 1. Vanishing (Becoming-Subtle)

I was sitting beside my opium brazier. All my dark thoughts had dissolved and vanished in the subtle heavenly smoke.

Sadeq Hedayat[1]

To enter the opium realm, we should become servants of this small corner of experience that synchronizes mouth, throat, and lungs in a

near-lethal rhythm of fumomania (captivation by smoke traces). Nevertheless, the smoky half-sleep that rises here must be radically differentiated from that of the unconscious: indeed, the opium daze is more an art of gradual disappearance (outward, skyward) than a plunge into psychological depth (inward, downward). And the key behind such aptitudes of flight and evanescence? The elevation of a single object (the brazier) over any centrality of the knowing subject (I). The apparatus of resins and charred seeds, the micro-oven of shaved poppies, its juxtaposition of burners, apertures and bowls, its seamless conversion between sticky waxes and crushed powders: all this is rendered viable by the subordination of consciousness (in a non-sacred ceremonial offering) to the all-encompassing brazier. It assumes the function of magnetic pole or reed instrument through which "dark thoughts" undergo a becoming-subtle ("dissolution", "vanishing"). He blows himself through the wooded mouthpiece, and thereby approximates the narrowness within: never transcendence, just dispersal (via the article). "Heavenly" means something altogether different here, amid the vial's dominion: a plane of existential thinning, evaporation and fineness.

[Opium and the brazier; dark thoughts; dissolution; vanishing; subtlety; heaven]

Principle 2. Immolation (Becoming-Merciless)

Writers, a call to cigarettes! Literature considered as opium smoke! [...] Literature as a physical test of intellectual suffocation! Literature and smoke, literature up in smoke.

The city is giving birth to my cerebral death, I feel my head airing out its atoms of the great state, I feel my head airing out its atoms of literary opium, and I expose my bare skull to the healing rain...

Reda Bensmaia[2]

The opium smoker must not simply lose himself in the complex staging of accessories: the dangling of glowing oil lamps, the positioning of ceramic trays and metallic paraphernalia, the scraping or wafting motions of the once-called 'dream sticks.' There is also a severe "test" at stake in the first excerpt above (manifesto of disintegration), an insurgent imperative of the rebel, dissident, or saboteur that turns the opium den into a headquarters and stronghold of miasmic plots. It is in this sense that opium's reactivity fulfills both a perfect philosophy of distraction and a perfect philosophy of focus: the gray-white mist forms an exclusive perimeter around the execution of an urgent gesture; its haze barricades awareness of any outer reality (revolutionary indifference) while concentrating the gaze instead on the circulation of an emergent, all-important design (revolutionary passion). Sensation thereby becomes a call-to-arms, the thick air emulating that of the tear gas inhaled during street riots, or even that of the crazed fog of war, and with it all aesthetic actions in this domain are equally consigned to a literal trial-by-fire (martyrological "suffocation").

What outer threshold of creative fanaticism requires the burning of one's work? What outer threshold of creative conviction requires the burning of oneself? We have certainly seen avant-garde movements take flame to their own artistic products, setting alight their canvases and sculptures according to suicidal-masochistic creeds or proclamations of euphoric purging, and even avant-garde performers inflict perceptible damage to themselves in a sort of subject-object exchange whereby they become yet another dispensable stage property, but in the 'faramoosh-khaneh' we find ourselves speaking of another register of violation. No mere symbolic theaters of operation anymore; all representational orders are since overtaken by the borderline materiality-immateriality of ash and ember.

What exactly is being choked (to death) here in this time-space contraction around a single smoke-ring, and what are the exact terms

of this immolation reflex whereby all language or thought goes "up in smoke"? On whose undressed bodies are this era's writers suddenly commanded to put out their still-crackling cigarettes (whose pleasure bought by pain)? Why must they seek the exposure of "bare skulls" beneath the oppressive city's rain, all the while enduring conflagration with the ferocious look of armed devotees? Headless authors, marching in succession, their cerebra enkindled in service of the "atoms of the great state." Is it like the calculated act of brush-clearing in forest lands, or more the naturally spontaneous effect of the wildfire? Either way, it is intended to evacuate an otherwise saturated horizon of the event, to restore the zero-degree and thereby prepare infinite conceivable room for whatever inflections of chance, destiny, potentiality. The pipe is more an epochal knife (sharpened against history); the pipe infuses unstoppable momentum; the pipe teaches its smoker to proceed mercilessly. Rage, storm and the veritable transubstantiation of the exhausted subject into pure exhaust: such is the militancy of the opium den's inscription.

[Opium and writing; testing; suffocation; cerebral death; atoms; exposure; bareness; healing]

Narcomania (Obsession With Drugs)

Principle 3. Solitude (Becoming-Innocent)

In caves of loneliness

futility was born,

blood smelled of bhang and opium,

pregnant women

gave birth to headless infants,

and cradles out of shame

took refuge in graves.

Forugh Farrokhzad[3]

Opium's storytellers have fashioned several narrative genres to attempt capturing the elusive touch of the drug, though none coming closer than the fairy tale (and by extension the poetic imagination of the child). For despite the fairy tale's chaotic shapes and intimations, all of which gain it autonomy from psychological sub-structures and mythic archetypes, there are certain recognizable conceptual paths to enable trespass into unrecognizable places. The first aspects, scrawled in large letters like signposts before the open mouth of the jungle, island, labyrinth, or rabbit-hole: "Loneliness"; "Futility". Radical solitude and absurd perception are thus the initial points of departure for this procedural wresting of reality into unreality: And could we think of a better agent than opium to confer this very wisdom of the loneliness and futility of things?

Still, these thematic strands forge only a nihilistic springboard, not a nihilistic destination, which effectively isolates the child's wonder ("in caves") and resurrects their ever-threatened innocence ("was born") so as to unleash experiences of wildness, curiosity, adventure, and formless temptation. Uncorrupted narcomania (as encountered exception) is thus diametrically opposed to addiction (as neurotic repetition-compulsion), for it never aspires to an identical trip but rather always to an untold dimension (by traversing the hollow spot). Opium: Surrealism five thousand years before Surrealism; Pataphysics five thousand years before Pataphysics (the study of imaginary phenomena and imaginary solutions).

So why such drastic distance from the human species (fatigued by one's race), and why this kinship with trivial perspectives on Being?

Because it then allows a conspiracy of boredom, derangement, and desire to fill the void with innumerable prototypes—animality, monstrosity, machines, ghosts, celestial or vegetal visitants, abnormally animated or talking things. Notice that she is not alone in her aloneness: she quickly speaks of "pregnant women" and "headless infants" who clamor and flood the otherwise empty forum of the cave (itself a lesson in the relation between wish and will). For if Hell is brought by static otherness, then paradise is not the retreat into absent seclusion but rather the invention, projection, and accompaniment of a phantom-carnival whose participants blur all lines between the beautiful and the grotesque, the lyrical and the vulgar, the moral and immoral creature. The drug's latex residue thereby serves both as enclosure (it banishes the ideal body) and portal (it invokes physiological strangeness). The 'faramoosh-khaneh' (in its highest orchestration) follows this same logic of the festival, masquerade, or playground where mad indulgence reigns above limitation, expectation, or need. First she locates the cavern; then she summons those of diluted-smelling blood to dance across its stone walls: an invitation to those who might smoke freely in her "refuge", unearthing new entourage (of the unspeakable gathering), those who master the minor techniques of pretending and shadow-puppetry behind all visions of remoteness.

[Opium and the cave; loneliness; futility; pregnancy; infancy; headlessness; the cradle; the grave; refuge; shame]

Principle 4. Secrecy (Becoming-Entranced)

He sprinkled a secret drug onto the water. The suspect particles flashed in the light as they fell and then scattered over the water's surface. He watched them quickly spread—zealously, like entranced mystics—to contaminate the entire pool.

Ibrahim al-Koni[4]

We should perhaps overlook the 'faramoosh-khaneh's' centuries-long intersection with actual mystical circles for the more insidiously fascinating relation between narcomaniacal zones and mysticism. Temporally, they are connected by their shared preferences for nocturnality, untimeliness, stillness and eternity. Spatially, they are connected by their congregation in outskirts, undergrounds and confined quarters. Epistemologically, they are connected by their predilections for obscurity, perplexity, circularity and imaginative excess. Sensorially, they are connected by the throes of ecstasy, serenity and vertigo. Metaphysically, they are connected by their varying quests to devour godliness (through immanent contamination, never purity), by the compartmentalization of the universal by the particular (a single swallow, puff, or drag) and by the conceptualization of otherworldliness as a nearby surface (though stretched endlessly across a lone layer).

Principally, though, it is a profane adoration of Lightness that binds the territories of opium and mystical worship. Notice the terminology of the above passage—"sprinkled", "particles", "flashed", "quickly spread"—for clear evidence of how the mystic or opium dealer aligns their followers toward the insubstantial. Priests, sorcerers and shamans of both pagan civilizations and nomadic tribes understood this collusion (against gravity) in their earliest trances, their populations forever oscillating between famine and opulence, strung across the desert's infernal dawns and freezing cold nights, its blinding suns and luminous stars, all testaments to the frailty of creation's spiral. Opium: Revocation of any unifying theory of the ground (dwelling, habitation); rather, there is only manipulation of the drift (abandonment, hovering, pneumatic trajectography). This is the philosophy of Secrecy and Trance flowing across the watery pool and through the inner chambers of the drug den: "they fell and then scattered" (epithet of existence, condemned to lightness).

[Opium and sprinkling; secret; water; suspicion; the particle; light; scattering; surface; spreading; zeal; the mystic; the trance; contamination]

Principle 5. Horror (Becoming-Caged)

Here they recommend the leeching of healthy hearts

so that somewhat high and delirious like an intoxicated canary

you give yourself over to the tune of the sweetest melody

of your existence up until death's threshold

for you know that

tranquility

is roasted corn in the stomach's reed-tripe

which fulfills its destiny in a cage,

as the security officer places the paper slip of relief in your palm

and the pill-bottle of codeine in the pocket of your gown

— one in the morning, one at night, with love!

Ahmad Shamlu[5]

What rare typologies of fear arise when the otherwise illicit tonics and ingredients of the 'faramoosh-khaneh' are thieved by regimes of bio-political power? What fresh paranoia now accompanies those once-savored narcotic clouds when displaced from their badlands and assimilated into pale, regimented institutions? When its beautiful malevolence filters through mechanisms of sadistic control? We call this stolenness the Hospital, where opium is deprived of its wayward qualities and made to "fulfill its destiny in a cage," its

tropospheric veils now condensed into the foreign compositions of the pill and the syringe.

A new definition of Horror accompanies the Hospital, though funneled through a false high or perverse delirium that facilitates "the leeching of healthy hearts." It is the pseudo-intoxication of the stupor as opposed to the drug slumber of older periods, one that imports the awful logic of nightmare, suspicion, and anonymous threats behind the mask of alleviation. The poppy's carelessness morphs into a totalitarian prescription of care, its prior capacities for hypnosis and pacification now imitated by analgesic regulation. For opium is misanthropically transformative (one sheds their human scales); the opioid is anthropocentrically binding (seeking a cruel utopian sameness). Opium bestows a certain arche-intelligence; the opioid leaves patients strolling courtyards with half-comatose stares. Opium endows hyper-sensitivity (through ventilation); the opioid breeds numbness (through domination). The broker of the unbound somehow becomes the broker of containment, its former sub-cultural hiddenness wrenched into mass epidemic waves: a sedative to promise countless slaves.

Thus we return to the poetic passage above and its careful sketch of a Horror based not in pain but in the painkiller. In the opium den, we found attendants graced with indistinct presence and refined passivity, quietly entering and exiting each corner with almost spectral aspect; in the opioid hospital, we hear the loud interventionist footsteps and feel the authoritarian looming of the staff (systemic minions). No, the gentle narcomaniacal overseer, caretaker, or curator is not the same as the warden, superintendent, or administrator of synthetic compounds. In the opium den, we set an elaborate backdrop for sentiments of micro-exaltation, micro-apotheosis, and insignificant invincibility; in the opioid hospital, we sustain states of impoverishment, disadvantage and subsistence-level perception (kept barely alive). In the opium den, we prolong the true aim of the eternal return (recurrence of the most perfect hour, or "the drunken happiness of dying at midnight"[6]); in the opioid

hospital, we are obligated to play out the most wretched conditions of weakness (inexorability of the worst possible moment). This is how Horror becomes routinized into Dread—official, codified, trading short-lived desertions for long-term dependencies—as "death's threshold" finds itself resewn each day into the "pocket of your gown" (gift of the watchkeeper).

[Opium and leeching; delirium; intoxication; sweetness; threshold; tranquility; destiny; the stomach; the cage; the bottle; the pocket; relief]

Iomania (Obsession With Poison)

Principle 6. Distillation (Becoming-Sunken)

I sink into your hell and I scream out:

I distill a poisonous elixir for you

and I give you life

Adonis[7]

Opium, in the hands of the incompetent or malevolent supplier, transitions the milky liquid almost unnoticeably from tranquilizing agent to venomizing agent. "I distill a poisonous elixir for you, and I give you life," he rasps like someone with elite knowledge of the balancing-point between vitality and terminality, transience and permanence, momentary calm and irrecoverable sunkenness. For just as Sleep and Death were deities often personified as brothers, lovers, or close allies in mythological descriptions of the first civilizations, so does the opium den's trade tiptoe across this fine iomaniacal line between two untrustworthy gods.

Modern thought should study those ancient and medieval orders (of physicians, astronomers, alchemists) who diagrammed toxicological classifications of salves and ointments extracted from dangerous plant species: deadly nightshade ('Atropa belladonna'), black henbane ('Hyoscyamusniger'), and mandrake ('Mandragora officinarum'), each with their unique alkaloid mixtures of atropine, scopolamine and hyoscyamine. Moreover, they were among the earliest to employ the opium fields for medicinal purposes of anesthesia (soaking sponges during surgical operations) and even euthanasia (mixing it with hemlock), again walking the nameless tightrope between salvation and demise. So it is that the grand libraries and palace laboratories of Baghdad, North Africa and Persia became accomplices to the forbidden lounges of the 'faramoosh-khaneh' and its customs of sublime impairment.

Such early scientific visionaries initiate us in a great philosophy of Concoction. They developed intricate methodologies of delivery (ingestion, inhalation, skin absorption) and of brewing (fermentation, acidification, frothing) in order to experiment with the internalization of semi-fatal substances. An expert practice of measuring proper degrees, weights and dosages of the inconsumable that would bring their willing disciples to the fragile limits of poison time and again. The heart stops beating, a slight excision or antidote administered to wrench them back among the living, and an acute notation scribbled in the tables of some esoteric pharmacopoeia (to warn future generations what goes too far).

[Opium and sinking; hell; scream; distillation; elixir; gift; life]

Principle 7. Beastliness (Becoming-Massacred)

While I wait for the poison to work

The blood of a demon bile spit out

Spit out by beasts all massacred.

Joyce Mansour[8]

Is there a modicum of evil borne by the opium experience, and does the opium den situate itself amid base materialist dregs? For she speaks of an iomaniacal demon, of the diabolical patience required to "wait" for poison's symptomatology to take hold, and of the viscous pouring of blood, bile and spit in a single line.

Let us picture the actual tactile setting of the 'faramoosh-khaneh'—its partly-ruined edifices and paint-chipped walls, its poor velvet couches and linen beds lain ever-close to the floor, its dim-lit lanterns and candles—as a site coalescing both luxury and dilapidation, something that restores us to the paradoxical aesthetics of decadence (in the best artistic sense of the term). Like all concepts of Waste, it bears both lavish and crude temperaments; it is built for an inverted aristocracy (that of superior outcasts) for which one must be simultaneously cultivated, discriminating and tasteful while also negligent, contemptible and self-destructive. Supreme stylization of the dishonorable.

[Side-Note: Nearly 100 years ago, in the salt desert provinces of central Iran, an elder family member was known to withdraw each evening into a private room and smoke opium. However, it was also common knowledge that a long white snake lived between the walls of the house, and would emerge each night from a hole in the upper right-hand corner of the ceiling to partake alongside the elder man. It had become equally accustomed to the nocturnal ritual and the drug's alluring potency, and would slither slowly upon detecting the first scent to join its familiar human counterpart for several lost hours, resting at the foot of the opium brazier and flicking its tongue in satisfaction. We might speculate whether serpents too hallucinate.]

Animality is a natural inheritance, whereas Beastliness signals another (lower) primordialism: defective, anomalous, cryptogenic. A

poison derived from "beasts all massacred," she tells us above, such that this entire discourse brings us to the doorstep of the 'faramoosh-khaneh' as a kind of bestiary geared toward the encapsulation of fantastical traits. Indeed, the den's own funhouse architectural arrangement reminds one of the illuminated manuscripts of bestiaries and 'aja'ib' literature (compendia of 'strangeness') from the Middle Ages—Zakariya al-Qazvini's *Aja'ib al-Makhluqat wa Ghara'ib al-Mawjudat* (Marvels of Things Created and Miraculous Aspects of Things Existing) or Abd al-Hasan Al-Isfahani's *Kitab al-Bulhan* (Book of Wonders)—which combined calligraphic text with illustrations of exotic, rumored, or supernatural entities. No mere coincidence that opium finds itself fastened to the expression 'chasing the dragon' across decades: for beasts (like opium) are extravagant, ornate forces beheld with both seduction and repulsion; they also share remarkable capacities for adaptation and murkiness. But above all else, they sweeten the prospect of non-being (for both predator and prey): namely, beastliness alleviates the negative concern with death's finitude by charging it with the attractive purpose of dying-on-the-run. It seals the original philosophical task of learning to die well ('ars moriendi') with the ultra-violent timing of massacre (i.e., at the nebulous climax of ability, energy, hunger).

[Opium and waiting; blood; bile; spit; the demon; the beast; massacre]

Principle 8. Ephemerality (Becoming-Dream)

He knew that we all, like human rags, imagine and say to ourselves day and night things that are degenerate, even alarming. The important thing is that the hallucination should continue, that the viper of time should bite the ephemeral people who visit the field, that in all our life we should write one story or poem: This market is my world, my grave and my wings. I am the house of worms that is troubled by a number in a dream.

Hassan Blasim[9]

Opium's epilogue should be composed precisely by sloping or leaning silhouettes, those "troubled by a number in a dream" (i.e. under its fleeting spell awhile). For this 'faramoosh-khaneh', house of forgetting, house of oblivion, shelter of transient degeneration and degenerate transience, is somewhere we must leave in the end. Thought becomes an emulsion to identity, a banned flower in the garden, contrasting past selves with rising chimeras. But it does not last forever (all are but visitors). In this respect, opium embodies reversibility at its finest juncture: that split second when the idle ones rule the world, and then become undone again. We should beware events that are irreversible; we should also beware events that are reversible: for those who master ephemerality are likewise masters of the return ("that the hallucination should continue"). They will find their way back to the faintness; they will reawaken the "viper of time", wear their best silken rags, and draw strong influenced breath once more. Everything that is elsewhere and suspended in air belongs to them.

[Opium and rags; degeneracy; alarm; hallucination; continuation; the time viper; ephemerality; visitation; trouble; the dream number]

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Jason Bahbak Mohaghegh is an Associate Professor of Comparative Literature at Babson College. He focuses on tracking currents of experimental thought in the Middle East and the West, with attention to concepts of chaos, violence, illusion, silence, extremism, mania, disappearance and apocalyptic writing. He has published nine books to date, including the recent *Omnicide: Mania, Fatality, and the Future-In-Delirium* (Urbanomic/ Sequence/MIT, 2019) and *Night: A Philosophy of the After-Dark* (Zero Books, 2019). He is also Director of Transdisciplinary Studies for the New Centre for Research & Practice and Founder of the 5th Disappearance Lab.

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Hedayat: The Opium of Translation and Creating the Impossible Memory

Saleh Najafi
October 7th, 2020

> *I smoked my whole stock of opium[1], in the hope that the wonder-working drug would resolve the problems that vexed me, draw aside the curtain that hung before the eye of my mind and dispel my accumulation of distant, ashy memories. I attained the spiritual state for which I was waiting and that to a higher degree than I had anticipated. My thoughts acquired the subtlety and grandeur which only opium can confer and I sank into a condition between sleep and coma.*

Sadeq Hedayat[2]

Recollection Goes Behind The Curtain

When the female narrator of Chris Marker's *Sans Soleil* (1983) reads the letters of his male friend to the viewer, she quotes her friend: "only one film had been capable of portraying impossible memory—insane memory: Alfred Hitchcock's *Vertigo*." "Impossible memory"? "Insane memory"? In the rest of the letter she reads, these expressions (or concepts?) are not elaborated directly. Marker's other writings and works, even his remarkable essay on Hitchcock's masterpiece, also do not shed further light on this ambiguity. What does impossible memory mean? We have to search for clues to uncover its meaning. Is it a clue that Hitchcock decides to name the heroine of his movie Madeleine? At any rate, the word 'Madeleine' reminds us

of the decisive moment in Proust's *In Search of Lost Time*: the madeleine cake triggers narrator's process of recollection. Can it be claimed that the main theme of Proust's novel is "impossible memory"? Marcel, the novel's narrator, speaks of the redemptive character of "involuntary memory. Is "involuntary memory" an oxymoron? Unintentional recollecting? Can these two expressions be considered equivalent? Perhaps in order to begin thinking about these questions, we should better explore the verbal aspect of memory. The verbs used for memory can be divided into two categories: remembering and recollecting.

The first attempt in the history of philosophy to conceptualize the distinction between these two aspects of memory was probably Plato's *Philebus*. In *Philebus*, Socrates accurately distinguishes memory from recollection for his interlocutor, Protarchus. Plato's Socrates states that in his view, "retention of perception" would be a good definition of memory, but this concept differs from 'recollection.' He states that, "when the mind (psyche) of itself, without sensory stimulation, recovers [or recaptures] as far as possible what it once underwent in conjunction with the body, we say it recollects." Socrates then says, when "the mind (psyche) regains memory of some sense-experience or piece of knowledge which it had lost," this process is called "recollection."[3]

This distinction becomes the basis for one of Søren Kierkegaard's nineteenth century books. In the preface to *Stages on Life's Way* (1845), Kierkegaard discusses the splendid difficulties of secrecy and extensively develops the distinction between 'remembrance' and 'recollection.' He uses the words 'erindre' (to remind or recollect) and 'huske' (to remember), but writes that these two terms are by no means the same. According to Kierkegaard, it cannot be said that a secret belongs to its bearer and therefore it cannot easily be claimed that a secret is transferrable; however, this is not the only difficulty of secrecy. This difficulty is not that the bearer of the secret must not betray it, but rather that the person who holds a secret has another responsibility: he must be careful not to forget it. Despite this

challenge, Kierkegaard posits that there is a worse situation, which he calls "incomplete recollection," or "to turn one's soul into a transit warehouse for damaged goods."[4] In expanding on this, Kierkegaard makes use of an intriguing simile: if forgetting or unlearning (perhaps another distinction between forgetting and unlearning is necessary here) is a silk curtain drawn in front of a memory, recollection is the vestal virgin who goes behind the curtain. He states that, "behind the curtain is the forgetting again—if it is not a true recollection, for in that case the forgetting is excluded."[5]

Here we may talk about the dialectics of (true) recollection and forgetting. Every act of remembering is conditioned by forgetting some past elements. Thus, in many cases recollecting depends on unlearning some remembrances. It can even be suggested that sometimes recollecting is equivalent to creating memories that we fail to recall. Such is the reason that one of the main forms of human beings committing something to memory is writing (taking notes). As if fearing we will forget what we see, hear, or read, we employ a material instrument in order to register what we have seen, heard, or read and thus confer a material/verbal form to our fragile memories. However, writing produces something *new*. Accordingly, it may be claimed that writing is always accompanied by producing the past, a past which cannot be recalled, or as Proust put it, has no place in one's memory due to the general laws of habit always governing one's voluntary memory. In the deprived present moment, this is the source of the unhappiness of memory and obsessive attachment to the illusive happiness of a fake past. Recollection is the sole way of the realization of genuine contentment and in this sense, forgetting is a negative potentiality inserted in every attempt at true recollection.

Kierkegaard believes that recollection must be not only accurate, but also happy. Before bottling and sealing the memory, recollection must preserve the fragrance of the remembered experience. To explain the distinction between remembering and recollecting, Kierkegaard gives an example: one can remember every single detail

of an incident very well without recollecting it. He states that, "remembering is only a vanishing condition."[6] In his view, experience presents itself through memory in order to be sanctified by recollection. He claims that this distinction is evident in the difference between generations, and that,

> *The old person loses memory, which as a rule is the first faculty to be lost. Yet the old person has something poetic about him; in the popular mind he is prophetic, inspired. But recollection is indeed his best power, his consolation, which consoles him with its poetic farsightedness. Childhood, on the other hand, has memory and quickness of apprehension to a high degree but does not have recollection at all.[7]*

Kierkegaard writes that, "what the child remembers the old person recollects,"[8] but are there any ways to transpose or intermingle remembering and recollecting? Is "impossible memory" not in a sense the synthesis of these two experiences? Is writing not always an attempt to transform remembrances through past recollections? In this respect, writing is strangely linked to taking drugs. The dividing line that Kierkegaard fails to consider between childhood and old age, or only mentions through its absence, is youth. In this sense, youth is always defined by the experience of loss: the loss of childhood/innocence, the expectation of an unsettling future, the loss of youth. Writing and narcotics use are two sides of the same endeavor to (re)gain a linkage with time. The temporal coordinates of writing, regardless of the writer's age, always constitute the experience of youth. If writing yearns to relive childhood, the use of narcotics reflects the possibility to experience old age via feeling its power and consolation. Therefore, it can be posited that writing and drugs always summon one another: writing is the ideal form of drug consumption and taking drugs is the material form of writing. Still, what does it mean to experience old age in one's youth? It might be claimed that through experiences such as falling in love and gaining faith, which are linked in essence to the idea of youth, we face childish acts that age us prematurely.

Translation: The Intoxication Of Registering Impossible Memories

In his "Surrealism" essay (1929), Walter Benjamin introduces hashish eating, opium smoking and consumption of other narcotics as a way to access a sphere that he calls "profane illumination." Through this proposition, he thus enters the tradition of literary narcotic experts such as Baudelaire and Hermann Hesse. Benjamin's reflections on narcotics are in the framework of his lifelong attempt to elaborate the concept of experience and overcome 'the poverty of experience,' i.e. the main form of poverty in the modern world, particularly after the First World War. In his view, narcotics are able to make time and space inseparable. In this way, experiences become multi-layered and resonant; i.e. they allow us to live in more than one temporal sphere. Benjamin differentiates between "the most passionate investigation of the hashish trance" and "the profane illumination of thinking about the hashish trance."[9] He describes "the reader, the thinker, the loiterer, the *flâneur*" as types of the illuminati akin to the "opium eater, the dreamer, the ecstatic," although he feels that the first group is more profane.[10] In this sense, the use of narcotics is an attempt to unfold a space for experiencing profane illumination and writing is the most important instrument to register this experience. In this modern linkage between writing and opium in societies that experience modernity through its absence, modernization processes are inevitably achieved through translation. In this regard, translation always occurs in the dividing line, or intersection between, religious and profane illuminations. A translated text inevitably becomes like a sacred text for the translator, although the process of translation desecrates the source text in various ways and on different levels. The translator, whose status is constituted by the conjunction of all four figures of Benjamin's profane illumination, simultaneously engages in the experience of opium-induced dreaming and trance states. In the history of Persian literature, Sadeq Hedayat is the sum of all the aforementioned figures: he is both the

reader and the translator, the thinker and the dreamer, the ecstatic who constantly loiters, the 'flâneur' of Western texts akin to the 'flâneur' of streets…

In "The Image of Proust", Benjamin emphasizes the connection between 'involuntary memory' and the act of writing. In his view, the linear time inherent in the experience of reading a text imposes a structure of linear interpretation of sorts on the reader; the traces of this structure can be seen in both the linearity of the sentence and the conventional perception of human experience as linear. This is precisely what Proust strives to challenge. Ironically, Benjamin describes Proust's writing as "the Penelope work of recollection" that is in fact "a Penelope work of forgetting."[11] In this respect, we many approach a general rule in modern writing which makes writing 'the machine of impossible memory' or 'insane memory.' Perhaps Hedayat's *The Blind Owl* can be read in this way, as it is a text that is not only written at the beginning of Iran's historical modernization project, but is also the *foundational* modern Farsi text.

Hedayat's *The Blind Owl* is an attempt to register "impossible memories," memories that no one either remembers or recalls, but are rather *produced* in the act of writing, induced by the opiate of a haunted writing possessed by the act of translation. In a sense, *The Blind Owl's* writing style is the impossible synthesis of the childhood and old age of Persian prose: it is an aging prose that has forgotten its own historical rhythms and childishly tries to create a new rhythm for itself. As it is old, it must inevitably recollect something that it does not remember. It is perhaps for this reason that the 'ethereal woman' and the 'bitch' overlap into one persona in *The Blind Owl*. This aged prose is supposed to animate a lost infancy, infancy in its strongest sense, in which 'infantilism' means 'the inability to speak.' Infancy is the essential element of any creative writing which comes into existence, insofar as it is writing and not a substitute for, or replica of, spoken words.

Opium: Enchantment Of The Distorted Time Of Writing

Near the end of *The Blind Owl*, the narrator talks about his attempt to recollect his childhood. Hedayat delicately makes use of 'recollecting' and 'remembering.' What relation exists between these two acts? Sometimes we remember something: is this voluntary memory? Sometimes we unintentionally recollect something: is this involuntary memory? Is it possible to remember something even though we cannot recollect it? The narrator says, "I used to wish to recall the time of my childhood but when it would *come* and I would experience it again it was as grim and painful as those days" (my emphasis).[12] What is notable is the use of the verb "come." We can say that Hedayat did not structure his sentence according to the verbal phrase ellipsis: "I used to wish to recall the time of my childhood but when my childhood would come to my mind... it was as grim and painful as those days." The tension here is between craving and memory: the narrator wishes to recall his childhood. This means that he wants to refresh sweet and perhaps soothing memories, but what comes to his mind is grim and painful. There is a paradox in this tension. The narrator knows that his childhood was painful, so why does he wish to recall those days? Furthermore, if he remembers those days, why does he wish to recall them? One tries to recall what one does not remember. Thus, memory finds three dimensions in Farsi: remembering, recollecting and memorizing. Understanding the temporal coordinates of *The Blind Owl* rests on detecting the relation between these three aspects of memory in the narrator's world and their relation to his peculiar narrative—a narrative that might be interpreted as "impossible memory."

Immediately after this recollection, the narrator expresses a strange tension between his memory and his craving: "my coughing, which sounded like that of the gaunt, black horses in front of the butcher's shop." Is this what the narrator recalls from his childhood? And "my spitting, and the fear lest the phlegm should someday reveal a streak of blood." There is then a sentence describing this blood: "the tepid, salty liquid which rises from the depths of the body, the juice of life,

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which we must vomit up in the end." Next he says that, "and the continuous menace of death, which smashes forever the fabric of his mind and passes on was not without dread and fright."[13] The peculiarity of these images is completed with the peculiarity of the syntax: the continuous menace of death, which smashes 'his' mind and moves on. His? The narrator says this menace was not without dread and fright. Is it possible for a menace to not contain dread and fright? Is there a difference between dread and fright? Maybe. The English translator used the words "anxiety and fear." I mention the 'peculiarity of syntax'[14] because the narrator's second sentence, which starts with "coughing," finds its verb very late, at the end of the original Farsi text. "Coughing which sounded like that of the black horses" is the first subject, "spitting" is the second subject and "fear" is the third subject. These three subjects are left without a verb at the end. The next sentence starts with "the continuous menace of death" and ends with "was not without dread and fright." The reader can consider "was not" as the verb for all four subjects, but it is noteworthy that the English translator resolved this syntactic difficulty in Farsi at the beginning of the sentence: "Other things which brought their contribution of anxiety and fear were my coughing […]; and the continuous menace of death […]."[15]

This syntactic peculiarity of Hedayat's sentences is linked to the narrator's impossible memory. The coughing, spitting, blood and continuous menace of death are all subjects of the same sentence, whose conjunctions are loose. Hedayat's odd and disorderly punctuation generates the sentence's peculiarity.

The novel's next paragraph breaks the narrative sequence. The narrator begins reflecting on the subject of 'masks.' The importance of this paragraph, this quasi-philosophical digression, lies in its unclear connection to the previous and next paragraphs. Hedayat writes:

> *Life as it proceeds reveals, coolly and dispassionately, what lies behind the mask that each man wears. It would seem that*

everyone possesses several faces. Some people use only one all the time, and it then, naturally, becomes soiled and wrinkled. These are the thrifty sort. Others look after their masks in the hope of passing them on to their descendants. Others again are constantly changing their faces. But all of them, when they reach old age, realize one day that the mask they are wearing is their last and that it will soon be worn out, and then, from behind the last mask, the real face appears.[16]

Where does this reflection come from? What does this paragraph do near the end of Hedayat's novel? In fact, what is the theme of this reflection? Everyone wears a 'mask' that life has revealed to him or her. The second sentence further complicates Hedayat's/the narrator's point: "It would seem that everyone possesses several faces [not masks]" and then "some people use only one [mask] all the time." It seems that Hedayat uses the word "face" and "mask" interchangeably.[17] Is he interested in the correlation between "face" and "mask"? There is a temporary answer to these questions: in a way, these sentences were Hedayat's/the narrator's 'memory.' As he tries to 'recall' the past differently from how he has 'memorized' it, he suddenly 'remembers' something else. From where? From other texts he has previously read and translated? Perhaps. Similar sentences to those in this paragraph can be found in the only novel by one of the greatest German poets, Rainer Maria Rilke. Rilke wrote the 1910 *The Notebooks of Malte Laurids Brigge* while living in Paris. The book's form is similar to an interior monologue, related through its narrator, a twenty-eight year old young Danish man: "Did I say it before? I'm learning to see—yes, I'm making a start. I'm still not good at it. But I want to make the most of my time."[18]

Rilke's narrator wants to learn "to see" and one of the things he has learned is that there are more 'faces' than he previously thought: "For example, I've never actually wondered how many faces there are. There are a great many people, but there are even more faces because each person has several. There are those who wear one face for years on end."[19] The last sentence in the original German is: "Da sind

Leute, die tragen ein Gesicht jahrelang," which literally means "there are people who wear a face for years." It is obvious that Rilke's narrator uses a quite strange phrase. Expressions such as 'wear a smile, frown, grin, etc.' are common in English, for example: 'his face wore a welcoming smile.' If we follow this analogy, we can, for example, say: 'She wore a very serious face.' This phrase means that the woman in question had a very solemn countenance or visage, but this evident expression on her face does not show any sign of her interior state. In this sense, the meaning of 'face' is close to that of 'mask.' And here lies the affinity between "face" and "mask" in the above passage by Hedayat.

Rilke's narrator continues:

> *Naturally, it starts to wear, it gets dirty, it breaks at the folds, it becomes stretched like gloves that are kept for travelling. These are thrifty, simple people; they don't change their faces, and never for once would they have them cleaned. It's good enough, they maintain, and who can convince them otherwise? Admittedly, since they have several faces, the question now arises: what do they do with the others? They save them. They'll do for the children. There have even been instances when dogs have gone out with them on. And why not? A face is a face.*[20]

It is clear that Hedayat had these sentences in mind when he wrote the aforementioned paragraph, but he did not translate them literally. Why? Because he paraphrased them? Because he used memories? Because he found the expression 'wear a face' strange? We do not know for sure, but I think one thing is certain: Hedayat was aware that the literal translation of Rilke's sentence would implicitly signify the word 'face' ('Gesicht'), meaning that, whatever face we wear is like a mask. Furthermore, is it possible for someone to not wear a face? This possibility is highly improbable in real life (except for Buster Keaton and Bresson's models).

Rilke's narrator describes the second group by stating that, "other

people change their faces one after the other with uncanny [unheimlich] speed and wear them out [aufsetze = put on]."[21] A face is compared to a glove and uses the verb for putting on clothes; Rilke describes the face as wearable:

> *At first it seems to them that they've enough to last them forever, but before they're even forty they're down to the last of them. Of course, there's a tragic side to it. They're not used to looking after faces; their last one wore through in a week and has holes in it and in many places it's as thin as paper; bit by bit the bottom layer, the non-face [Nichtgesicht], shows through and they go about wearing that.[22]*

Following Rilke, Hedayat divides people into two groups. He calls the first group "thrifty" and describes the second group as those who are "constantly changing their faces." However, Hedayat's narrator draws a significantly different conclusion from that of Rilke's: "But all of them, when they reach old age, realize one day that the mask they are wearing is their last and that it will soon be worn out, and then, from behind the last mask, the real face appears."[23] For Hedayat's narrator it is finally the real face that appears, whereas for Rilke's narrator it is the bottom layer, "the non-face," the face that is not a face, that finally shows through.[24]

Now we can return to the question about this paragraph's relation to those that proceed and succeed it, and more importantly to the novel as a whole. We might say that this paragraph is the "impossible memory" of Hedayat's prose/syntax/narrative. In the same way the narrator of *The Blind Owl* attempts to reanimate parts of his 'opiated' memory, which come to life only with the aid of opium and are in turn distorted by its consumption, Hedayat's prose also attempts to actualize a potential in the history of Persian prose that cannot be fulfilled without the enchantment of translation. As it passes through this filter (of enchanted translation), it becomes—in comparison to the so-called 'neat prose' of the thousand-year history of Persian writing—a distorted prose contaminated by syntactical perversion

and awkwardness. Similarly, the narrative of this first modern Persian novel takes place in a distorted temporal coordinates: its past is shaped by impossible memories, its present by opium fits and its future by already-realized nightmares.

Vegetable Becoming: A Getaway For Failed Aspirations

"I leaned over her in order to see her more plainly. Her eyes were closed. However much I might gaze at her face, she still seemed infinitely remote from me. All at once I felt that I *had* no knowledge of the secrets of her heart and that no bond *existed* between us" (my emphasis).[25]

The (Farsi) reader of *The Blind Owl* comes across some errors, or rather some syntactic perplexities. However, the above case has a unique feature that might help us understand the tension that somehow 'distorts' the novel's temporal coordinates. There is a small yet important error in Hedayat's/the narrator's sentence, the corrected Farsi version of which translates as: "All at once I felt that I have no knowledge of the secrets of her heart and that no bond exists between us." The problem here is that Hedayat followed a double standard (in adopting both Farsi and German and/or English syntax) in the construction of this sentence. It can be guessed that this double standard is caused by the unconscious tension inherent in a writer who has dealt with European texts for years. The comparison between the two translations sheds light on this point. If we follow English syntax rules for the translation of the above Farsi quotation, it would result in a strange and odd sentence. Hedayat's syntactic slippage, if we are justified in using such an expression, confronts the reader with the (im)possible conjunction of two temporal coordinates: past (had) and present (have). Should we take this slippage and the consequent conjunction seriously? Consider the narrator's following sentences: "I felt that I had become a child again. At this very moment as I write I experience those sensations. They

belong, all of them, to the present. They are not an element of the past."[26]

The narrator of *The Blind Owl* utilizes the opium of writing to distort the temporal coordinates of the subject/agent of the narrative; while writing, he feels that he is experiencing the sensations that he is narrating, sensations which either supposedly, or as a general rule, belong to the past, but which the writer/narrator experiences as belonging "to the present." The narrator delivers a hypothesis/theory for this too: "A story is only an escape for frustrated aspirations, for aspirations which the story-teller conceives in accordance with a limited stock of spiritual resources inherited from previous generations."[27] This hypothesis/theory, which reminds us of Freud's theory about the relation between dreams and repressed desires, somewhat explains the conjunction between present and past verbs in the afore-mentioned sentence. If we look more closely, the sentence "a story is only an escape for frustrated aspirations" is also ambiguous: does it mean "an escape for frustrated aspirations"? It seems that this sentence is also a translation from a European sentence. Are frustrated aspirations confined and in need of escape? Hedayat probably thought about the *satisfaction* of repressed desires (or frustrated aspirations), not an *escape*.

Another clue to help us to understand this point is the kinship between words and pictures in the narrative. (Perhaps it might be claimed that through imagery, pictures always have an opiate effect on words—i.e. on the main constitutive elements of the text). It is remarkable that the narrator of *The Blind Owl* is a painter: "Had I seen the subject of this picture at some time in the past or had it been revealed to me in a dream? I do not know. What I do know is that whenever I sat down to paint I reproduced the same design, the same subject. My hand independently of my will always depicted the same scene."[28] The narrator describes a hand that automatically paints the same scene over and over again; it is obvious that there is a kind of 'repetition compulsion' at work here, a 'scene' which the narrator is not certain if he has seen it in reality (wakefulness) or if it was

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revealed to him in a dream. Putting these two points together, we can assert that Hedayat is talking about traumatic shock. It is evident that trauma has a shared feature with the Kantian 'Thing-in-itself', i.e. an inaccessible reality that always eludes the subject's grasp and remains *outside* the narrative. On the other hand, trauma functions as a 'something here in me', which, as Slavoj Žižek explains in *Less Than Nothing* (2012), "distorts and disturbs my perspective on reality, twisting it in a particular way." The classic example of this shock is of a brutally raped and humiliated person; not only can this person not directly recall the rape scene, but the repressed memory of the rape also distorts their approach to reality, i.e. it makes them oversensitive to some aspects, but not others, of that unbearable reality.[29] The contrast proposed by Žižek between trauma and the 'Thing-in-itself' appears here: trauma both functions *inside* the narrative and simultaneously distorts and constitutes it.

Understanding this point depends on another conception concisely suggested by Freud in his description of the relationship between trauma and repetition: "what one is not able to remember, one is condemned to repeat."[30] According to Freud's definition, trauma is something one cannot remember, i.e. one cannot make it part of one's symbolic narrative. In other words, trauma is the part of the narrative that is *not* narrated. Trauma repeats itself and haunts the person who tries to recollect it. In *On Belief* (2001), Žižek connects this notion to Nietzsche's 'Eternal Recurrence of the Same' and writes "what repeats itself is the very failure, impossibility even, to repeat/recollect the trauma properly."[31]

In order to fully grasp the relation between trauma and repetition, we should perhaps turn to the most radical reading of the concept of repetition in the history of philosophy. In *Repetition*, Søren Kierkegaard, under the pseudonym Constantine Constantius, states that, "repetition and recollection are the same movement, only in opposite directions."[32] He defines recollection as what is repeated backwards and repetition as what is recollected forwards; repetition

means recollecting an event forward. In this sense, repetition is generally a tragic attempt at recollecting something that by definition we are unable to recall, which perhaps results in a comic ending. Repetition and recollection both strive to establish a link between the past and the present. Trauma is a past that is repeated like a present wound and thereby what is not remembered is paradoxically recollected, i.e. repeated forwards. Trauma is, therefore, the impossible synthesis of recollection and repetition: the repetition of negative recollection. It is noteworthy that from Kierkegaard to Fernando Pessoa, one of the most complete manifestations of modern writing under a pseudonym constantly tries to recall a past that comes to recollection through the act of not-remembering. In this regard, writing is an opiate machine that operates by unintentionally remembering an incident from the past in order to, using Freud's memorable expression, 'work through' the trauma. This 'working-through' neither forgets nor treats the wound, but is rather a kind of tarrying with it in order to create a new thing/rhythm.

The Blind Owl is the 'working-through' process of historical trauma through words. The reader, alongside the narrator of this first Persian novel, 'recollects forwards'; the reader lives the rhythms that he or she would have never experienced without The Blind Owl. The Blind Owl is the translation of a wound that is not possible to narrate/recollect through traditional rhythms; thus Hedayat was compelled to repeat the impossibility of its recollection. What is the source of this wound? The confrontation with the fulfilled desire of modernization before material conditions were primed for the emergence and comprehension of that desire. Hedayat experiences this confrontation by trying to read/translate/comprehend European texts; each text intensifies the wound and thus Hedayat's prose becomes haunted, opiated and distorted from the inside out. Syntactic ambiguities and semantic perplexities are the result of this repetition and working-through of a collective-personal/political-literary trauma. The narrator of The Blind Owl embodies this wound and prepares the ground for an unprecedented event in Iranian

thinking. Ironically, this preparation occurs (within the narrative) "beside the opium brazier":

> *I was sitting beside my opium brazier. All my dark thoughts had dissolved and vanished in the subtle heavenly smoke. My body was meditating, my body was dreaming and gliding through space. It seemed to have been released from the burden and contamination of the lower air and to be soaring in an unknown world of strange colors and shapes. The opium had breathed its vegetable soul, its sluggish, vegetable soul, into my frame, and I lived and moved in a world of vegetable existence; I had become vegetable...[33]*

This 'becoming vegetable' is both the climax of profane illumination par excellence and the extension of an experience that has never transcended the boundary of animal/human perceptions; moreover, it both indicates the phenomenological relationship between writing and vegetable existence and the relation of writing to opium. He or she who writes minimalizes and then subtracts their animal movements. He or she undergoes the experience of vegetable becoming. In this process, the body confronts not with its own omission, but the parts of it that have been excluded from the age-old dichotomy of animal existence and human life. In the narrative of *The Blind Owl*, the body becomes a machine with a vegetable soul into which opium is blown. The narrator talks about the body's meditating/dreaming, which is the origin of the real and autonomous existence of the body in the history of a culture that has never placed any value on the body's intellectual-spiritual status. Yet this is the beginning of a process which modern Persian prose continues—or denies in various ways—through the repetition of the moment in which the wound was inflicted upon the body of Iranian thinking. Hedayat talks about a kind of 'vegetable becoming' that is rendered possible only in literature and through opium consumption in narrative space. This is the escape that Hedayat's prose portrays, in his *peculiar* words, "an escape for frustrated aspirations," for desires whose moment of fulfillment has not yet arrived and may never

come; or more accurately, desires that are prematurely realized via consuming the opium of translation before the body is capable of bearing them. A body whose organs are not fully developed, but is nevertheless capable of meditating and dreaming. It is in these very circumstances of struggle that the narrator, for some reason unknown to him, recalls "the old odds-and-ends man," the night hag of denial who dissipates and squanders the potentials of the invention hidden in the practice of repetition:

I […] looked down at myself. My clothes were torn and soiled from top to bottom with congealed blood. Two blister-flies were circling about me, and tiny white maggots were wriggling on my coat. And on my chest I felt the weight of a woman's dead body …[34]

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Saleh Najafi is a writer, researcher, educator, translator and editor in the field of philosophy. His translations of contemporary thinkers such as Alan Badiou, Slavoj Zizek, Giorgio Agamben and Soren Kierkegaard have been widely published in Iran. Najafi also writes articles for theoretical and artistic journals. Among his recent publications are two book series, *Film as Philosophy* (2018) and *Love in Cinema* (2019). He lives in Tehran.

1

"*Teryak* which is now used in Farsi instead of *afyūn* [opium] is a Greek word meaning antidote… *Teryagh* or *deryagh* is the Arabic form of *teryak* meaning again antidote… In Greek, *theriakos*, which came to all the European languages, is the combination of several drugs used for the treatment of animal bites, especially snake-bite" (Ebrahim Pourdavoud, *Hormazd Nameh* , 1952, 107-108). The French word 'mélasse' is a thick dark juice obtained by boiling sugar cane or the sugar from sugar beet in sugar refinery factories. It is called 'treacle' in English. In the mid-fourteenth century, treacle was a medicinal compound and antidote. The root of this word was 'triacle' in Old French, which originated from the Latin 'theriaca' and Greek 'theriake' (antidotos) used as an antidote for poisonous wild animals. 'Theriakos' was an adjective in Greek for beasts or wild animals (therion). Treacle in the sense of molasses was first recorded in English at

the end of the seventeenth century, probably because molasses was used as a laxative or for disguising the bad taste of medicines. From 1771 onwards, it has also been used in the sense of anything too sweet or sentimental.

2

Sadeq Hedayat, *The Blind Owl*, trans. by D.P. Costello (New York: Grove Press, 1957), 34. Hedayat's novel *The Blind Owl* was first published in Farsi in 1937. All quotations in this article are taken from the 1957 English translation by Desmond Patrick Costello, except those translated by the editors.

3

Plato, *Philebus*, trans. by J.C.B. Gosling (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1975), 4a–c.

4

Søren Kierkegaard, *Stages on Life's Way*, trans. and ed. Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1988), 23.

5

Ibid.

6

Kierkegaard, *Stages on Life's Way*, 9.

7

Ibid.

8

Ibid.

9

Walter Benjamin, "Surrealism: the Last Snapshot of the European Intelligentsia," in *Reflections: Essays, Aphorisms, Autobiographical Writings*, trans. by Edmund Jephcott, ed. Peter Demetz, (New York: Schocken Books, 1978), 190.

10

Ibid

11

Walter Benjamin, "The Image of Proust," in *Illuminations*, trans. by Harry Zohn, ed. Hannah Arendt, (New York: Schocken Books, 1968), 202.

12

Literal translation by the editors from: Sadeq Hedayat, *Būf-e kūr* [*The Blind Owl*], (Esfahan: Sadeq Hedayat Publishing, 2004), 93.

13

Hedayat, *The Blind Owl*, 78.

14

The peculiarity of the syntax is much more evident in the original Farsi text of *The Blind Owl* (translator's note).

15

Hedayat, *The Blind Owl*, 78.

16

Ibid.

17

"We have to play a hundred tricks all day long and wear a couple of masks on our faces. While we are not happy, we have to laugh." (Houshang Golshiri, *Ra'i's Lost Lamb*, 1977: 141). In this sentence, the word mask is used figuratively as a facial expression that does not show someone's true inward state; in short: 'a deceptive look.'

18

Rainer Maria Rilke, *The Notebooks of Malte Laurids Brigge*, trans. by William Needham, (Wolf Pup Books, 2013), 2.

19

Ibid.

20

Ibid.

21

Ibid.

22

Ibid.

23

Hedayat, *The Blind Owl*, 78.

24

After this reflection, Rilke's narrator recounts a painful memory about a woman at the corner of rue Notre-Dame-des-Champs, who was bent forward with her head in her hands and wholly immersed in herself. The street was empty and the narrator feared that the sound of his footsteps might disturb the woman. Despite his caution, the woman was startled out of this condition "too quickly, too violently, so that her face was left in her two hands." In this memory, Rilke takes the analogy between face and mask

to an extreme: "I could see it lying there, the hollowness of its shape. It cost me an indescribable effort to keep looking at those hands and not at what they'd torn away from. I dreaded seeing the inside of a face, but I was much more afraid of the exposed rawness of the head without a face" (Rilke, *Notebooks*, 2). It is noteworthy that the English translator of *The Blind Owl* accurately translated Hedayat's words as mask and face: "Life as it proceeds reveals, coolly and dispassionately, what lies behind the mask that each man wears." The English translator made a small change/correction in Hedayat's text: in Farsi the narrator says "life reveals each man's mask to himself", but the English translator wrote that life "reveals […] what lies behind the mask that each man wears." Ironically, if we consider this paragraph as the free translation or paraphrasing of Rilke's novel, Hedayat added the first sentence. Moreover, when we compare the two texts more closely, we realize that in *The Blind Owl* the narrator divides people into three groups: 1) the thrifty ones who use only one of their masks; 2) the ones who pass their masks on to their descendants; and 3) the ones who constantly change their faces and realize they have used their last mask when they reach old age. Of course we can mention a small error in Hedayat's translation: Rilke says that the thrifty people who only use one of their faces save the rest of them for their children.

25
Hedayat, *The Blind Owl*, 18.

26
Hedayat, *The Blind Owl*, 53.

27
Hedayat, *Būf-e kūr*, 65 (trans. editors).

28
Hedayat, *The Blind Owl*, 9.

29
Slavoj Žižek, *Less Than Nothing: Hegel and t he Shadow of Dialectical Material ism* (London: Verso, 2012), 535-536.

30
Slavoj Žižek, *On Belief*, (London: Routledge, 2001), 37.

31
Ibid.

32
Søren Kierkegaard, *Repetition: An Essay in Experimental Ps ychology*, trans. Walter Lowrie (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1941) 33.
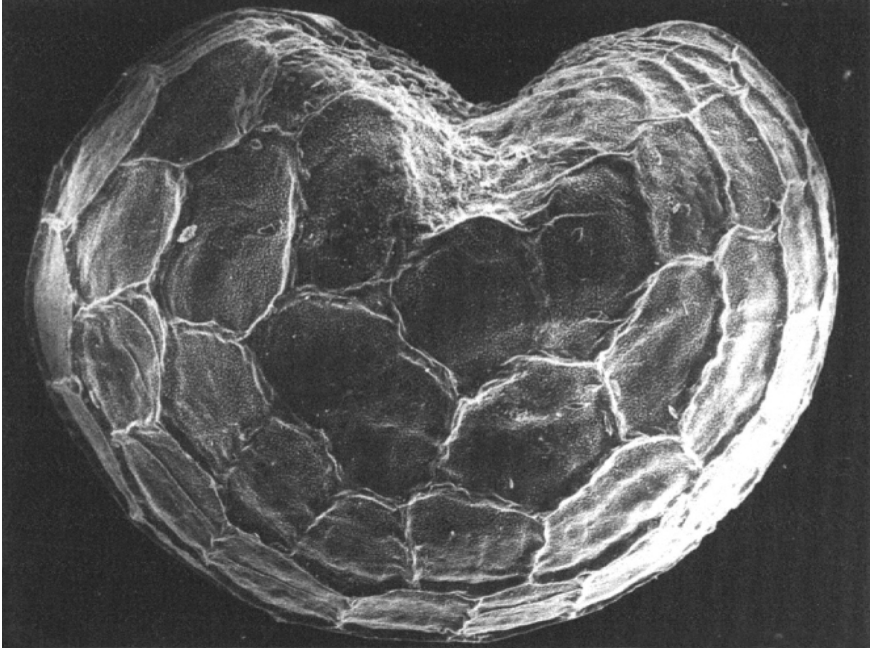
33

Hedayat, *The Blind Owl*, 80.

34
Hedayat, *The Blind Owl*, 98.

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Seed of papaver somniferum, from Poppy: The Genus
Papaver, ed. Jeno Bernath, CRC Press, 1999, page 71.