

THE PLOT: COMPLICIT WITH AMBIVALENT OBJECTS

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PROLOGUE

This paper is a plot, which is cut out from but also integrally linked to its landscape. It burrows in its topography and creates areas of density. Much like the crime thriller, this plot is fragmented and driven by a series of flawed and systemic inquirers who encounter an array of evidence and witnesses. In contrast to the genre, this plot does not climax in a ‘big reveal’, as it does not assume a privileged handshake with the truth.

‘The Plot: complicit with ambivalent objects’ (shortened hereafter to ‘The Plot’) does not construct a map of its terrain for the audience. It is unconcerned with the term plot in its context as a verb. If the plot, as a strategy, were to be taken as a verb then it would be at risk of scheming in advance and foreclosing the evidence. The materials would no longer be ambivalent but complicit. On the other hand this inquirer is complicit and will encounter ambivalent materials (theories) that cause the text to spiral, deepen and thicken.

In this sense ‘The Plot’ is to be referred to in its noun status, as an allotment that is cut from within a continuous landscape but is also distinct or autonomous from it. Its author is constructed by a series of fictional and actual protagonists, which encounter a multitude of theoretical objects from within the material cosmos. At the ‘War Against the Sun’ conference Robin Mackay delivered a paper, which attested to the importance of the term ‘plot’, as opposed to that of the ‘site’.¹ Mackay stated that a plot explores the thread between local and global from within its weave; unlike the site, which locates a

¹‘War Against the Sun’ conference, as a part of *The Matter of Contradiction* project organised by Sam Basu, Fabien Giraud, Ida Soulard and Tom Trevatt at Limehouse Town Hall [attended 2 March 2013]

specific place that is then mapped onto the global.

This text distances itself from the garden plot when it is interpreted as a site of ownership. Instead, 'The Plot' identifies its methodology with the act of tunnelling, in which the process can only be deepened. 'The Plot' forms itself from within the matrix and does not assume that it is able to map, frame, correlate or resolve the textual and theoretical objects with which it engages. Its protagonists are complicit in enveloping and weaving a fabric or tunnel with these ambivalent materials.

'The Plot' not only defines the methodology deployed by this paper but it also refers to the image. Images are simultaneously cut from the material environment and maintain their autonomy in that landscape. Images are referred to in their noun status and are encountered as 'objects', rather than as 'doers', as the latter is the verb function. It is the debates surrounding the ontology and force of the image, as well as the real in art, which drive the plot of this paper. Literary objects, which explore the image through both fictional and non-fictional texts, cluster together to create a dense constellation that composes the form and structure of this plot.

To summarise this prologue, 'The Plot' is an autonomous object formed in its literary landscape. As an object it is a contingent prismatic thread: the obtuse and acute angles of the textual objects that it confronts bend, lengthen, shorten, thicken, sharpen and direct its course. These textual materials conceptualise differing assertions of the ontological status of the image. The characters that construct this plot are formed by their systemic conditions and decisively bend with and against the objects encountered.

THE WIFE OF BATH'S TALE: WHAT IMAGES WANT²

Long, long ago in the
Roman's day,
There was a Latin term
for the image that
people still say:
An image is a 'likeness'
or a 'reflection', an
'imago'.³
Producing an endless
tale and one fraught
with woe,
Not unlike Oscar
Wilde's 'Dorian Gray',⁴
An image invested with
spirit can stray;
Turning ugly and evil
with its subject's play
Whilst keeping his
image of flesh ever gay.
Thus, an image can
carry its master's
malicious intent,
As well as being able to
independently and
falsely represent.
A theorist once located
this binary bind
And sent out his
apprentice so that he
may find

²First half of the title, protagonist and style of prose (in Modern English) appropriated from: Geoffrey Chaucer, *The Canterbury Tales: A Selection*, London: Penguin Books Ltd., 1996
Second half of the title is a play on w. j. t. mitchell's book *what do pictures want?: The Lives and Loves of Images*.

In the chapter of the same name mitchell states that too much power has been bestowed on images, as they may actually be weaker than we think. He likens women's lack of and, simultaneously, their want for social power with that of the image, by an analogy of Chaucer's 'The Wife of Bath's Tale':

'The question of what pictures want, then, is inseparable from the question of what women want... The official moral of Chaucer's tale is that consensual, freely given mastery is best, but Chaucer's narrator, the cynical and worldly Wife of Bath, knows that women want (that is, lack) power, and they will take whatever kind they can get.'

w. j. t. mitchell, *what do pictures want: The Lives and Loves of Images*, Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2005, p. 35.

³Terms from the Latin *imagine*m (nominative *imago*) and stem from *imitari*: 'Image', *Online Etymology Dictionary*
<<http://etymonline.com/?term=image>>
[accessed: 13.12.12]

⁴Oscar Wilde, *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, London: Penguin Books Ltd., 1994

Whether an
image can be
faithful to
humankind and
its future.
Exiled until he
could return to
his tutor
With the
answer to the
question that
caused so much
ire -
What do images
most desire?
Firstly, this
novice set out
on his trial and
only did find
That the
'morbid
ubiquity' of
images had
overwhelmed
mankind.⁵
More worrying
still...

⁵ In his essay on Giorgio Agamben and film, Benjamin Noys asserts that the fear created by the copy's ability to displace the original was prevalent in Plato's time. This is evidenced by Plato's account of the cave and his concern that semblance prevents pure reason. Noys states that the capacity to reproduce images has only heightened this already existent metaphysical concern: 'From Plato's anxieties concerning the simulacra's disruption of the distinction between original and copy, to Lacan's implicit critique of the imaginary as the site of doubling and deadly violence, Western metaphysics attests to the irreducible potency of the image... With the technological proliferation of the ubiquity of the image, through photography, cinema and digital media, we are all, or at least those of us who live in Europe, the United States, and similar states, living in the crisis of the metaphysics of the image.'

Benjamin Noys, 'Film-of-Life: Agamben's Profanation of the Image' in *Cinema and Agamben: Ethics, Biopolitical and the Moving Image*, ed. by Asbjorn Gronstad and Henrik Gustafsson, London and New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2015, 89–99 (p. 89).

Was the death mask's ability to harm the spirit's will.⁶
Rather than carrying it to its place in the afterlife
The menacing image can hijack the sitter, causing
much strife.
An image is a false reflection
Produced by advertising but too cunning for
detection.
It weaves a narrative and causes us to consume,

⁶ Paul O'Kane refers to the death masks that were meant to honour the deceased and were deployed in funeral practices in Egypt, Incaic, Mesoamerican and Mexican societies. These masks were not meant to be an independent artwork but a clone of their sentient subject. Death portraits were created to transport the spirit of the deceased from earth to the realm of spirits. Funeral images were meant to act, as conduits for human spirits and this role was central to the mask's existential powers. In this scenario the image's agency has an alternative face that radiates a menacing quality, as it could deploy the death mask's existential powers to displace the subject. This attests to a belief that the image could do more than represent the subject, as the copy could actually hi-jack the spirit of the original sitter and he/she might never make their destination.

Paul O'Kane, 'Life and Death', *Art Monthly*, 365 (2013), London: Britannia Art Publications Ltd., pp. 5-8.

Bombarding us with images so that the subject is dancing to someone else's tune.⁷

'But what if we ourselves are images?'

The apprentice swung his head to see who delivered such messages,

⁷ Siegfried Kracauer was concerned that the proliferation of capitalist images created an abstraction, which was accepted by the public as natural. He theorized that this abstraction was the result of a capitalist methodology, which equated everything to the abstract form of money. Kracauer saw the naturalization of capitalism, the belief that it is an innate system, as subjugating humans to nature. This hindered the progress towards rising above and ruling nature, which Kracauer believed was the objective of true reason. Kracauer argued that contrary to common opinion capitalism was far from natural and did not actually reason enough:

'In the hands of the ruling society, the invention of illustrated magazines is one of the most powerful means of organizing a strike against understanding... The contiguity of these images systematically excludes their contextual framework available to consciousness.'

In this account, capitalism's flow of images bombards the public to the point that they cannot reason with the system's (lack of) logic. It is capitalism's lack of reason that Kracauer believed photography had to reveal by exposing the metaphysical void at the centre of mass consumer culture. Kracauer believed that photography could capture the abstraction at the heart of 'The Mass Ornament', which was exemplified by the Tiller Girls and the abstract formations created by their bodies, by traveling into the centre of these mass images. These images were then revealed to have no aura or reason. Kracauer believed that this methodology exposed the need for an alternative metaphysical order to be instated.

Siegfried Kracauer, *The Mass Ornament: Weimar Essays*, trans. by Thomas Y. Levin, London and Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1995, p. 58.

And an old hunchback holding an Anglican Bible
confronted him⁸
Professing that, ‘God made human beings in his
likeness so images are our origin.’⁹
‘We were born from a cosmic order,
psychoanalysis suggests an ‘ideal image’ cultivates
how we mature and grow older.’¹⁰

⁸Genesis 1:27. Revised English Bible Translation of 1989 by Oxford and Cambridge Universities. The Oxford Study Bible 1992. Very few manuscripts survived the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 C.E., and soon after the disaster the Jewish religious leaders set about defining the canon and finally standardizing the text. This was the Massoretic or traditional text. Most translations into English were based on Rudolf Kittel’s three editions of *Biblia Hebraica* (1906, 1913 & 1937). The Revised English Bible was the first translation to use the *Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia* which appeared in instalments between 1968 and 1976 and reaching a final form in 1997. This is the Massoretic Text of the Hebrew Bible preserved in the Leningrad Codex.

Genesis 1:27 comes from the P Source of the sources that contribute to the first five books of the Bible. It is distinguished from the J, E and D Sources because of its high degree of interest in the priesthood, worship, liturgy, sacrifice, ordination etc. P was composed sometime not long after the destruction of Jerusalem and the first temple in 587 B.C.E. It draws upon ancient traditions and attempts to give a theological response to the tragedy of the end of the Kingdom and the exile of the people in Babylon. P pointed the way toward the emergence of a Jewish identity apart from a nation-state and it was a foundation of diaspora Judaism.

⁹‘Then God said, “Let us make human beings in our image, after our likeness, to have dominion over the fish in the sea, the birds of the air, the cattle, all wild animals on land and everything that creeps on the earth.” God created human beings in his own image; in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them.’

J.R. Mueller, K.D. Sakenfeld, M.J. Suggs, (eds), *The Oxford Study Bible: Revised English Bible* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992) Genesis Chapter 1: Verses 26-27

¹⁰ ‘Curiously, the Latin word “imago” has meant many things in the West throughout the centuries. Christian theology refers to the *imago Dei*, God’s image, according to which humans were created and to which they should endeavour to conform. The expression *imago mundi* leads us to the religious idea of cosmic order. In the 20th century, psychoanalysis introduced the concept of “imago” to refer to the idealised image of someone (usually a relative) formed in childhood and that is unconsciously kept in adulthood – a kind of ideal.’

Imago/Mask, Jose Antonio Fernandes Dias <<http://www.art-coa.pt>> [accessed: 26 April 2013]

Spluttering with consternation the man eagerly continued,
'God did not invest in us his biological likeness but the image is imbued
With his abstract nature and so his human face needs to be constantly renewed
In us, his privileged subjects, and must not be abused.'

On pondering these spectacular words the apprentice replied,
'God's image is plural and unites human with flower,
His image endowed with an abstract and fluid power
But this means that Christians need to differentiate themselves regularly
From their milieu through ritual and iconography.'
Walking swiftly on from this encounter
The apprentice began to realise that he was a doubter
Of sacred relationships between man and God, he hesitates
And begins to wonder of man's image without God's grace,
He asks, 'with what will this original image be replaced?'

It is then that he stumbled upon a well-dressed fellow and now faced,
The proposition that, the 'Manifest Image' will allow man to escape
Divine patronage, as it was man who found himself distinct from the rest of his landscape
And rose above it with thoughts of tools, categories and estates.
But the story did not end there, for the philosopher then further relates:

'There is also a 'Scientific Image', which challenges mankind's¹¹

View of 'man-in-the-world' because you will find¹² That it will not correlate With any perceptible image of man up until this date.' 'Our world is constructed out of atoms that make up all of creation And man's body is built out of this same molecular configuration.

The challenge is to salve the manifest and scientific into a synchronous whole So that we can all extol What it is to have a complete view of man-in-the-world.'

This left the apprentice concerned with what it is to be an 'image-in-the-world',¹³

If a representation differed molecularly from man then his exploration had just been hurled

Onto another trajectory altogether.

About to reach the end of his tether,

The apprentice came across an artist that listened to the objects in her still life,

¹¹ a) Terms 'Manifest' and 'Scientific Image' come from:

Wilfrid Sellars, 'Philosophy and the Scientific Image of Man', in *Frontiers of Science and Philosophy*, ed. by Robert Garland Colodny, Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1962, pp. 35-78.

b) See book 'Glossarium: a collection of glosses' under the title 'xxxvii Matter: Scientific image of man', pp. 32-3, for a definition of how the two images in Sellars' account interact

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Kracauer, in his chapter on photography, states that to be an image in the world is to become a spatial representation, as opposed to a subject with a communicative persona: 'When the grandmother stood in front of the lens, she was present for one second in the spatial continuum that presented itself to the lens. But it was this aspect and not the grandmother that was eternalized. A shudder runs through the viewer of old photographs. For they make visible not the knowledge of the original but the spatial configuration of a moment; what appears in the photograph is not the person but the sum of what can be subtracted from him or her.'

Kracauer, *The Mass Ornament*, pp. 56-57

and mumbled, 'think of all those
plants and animals, oh such
strife!

Through the construction of
their image they have always
been absented

so 'imagine an uprising of the
represented'.¹⁴

'Snow, hay, desert sand and
horse are all imprisoned

In the cages of their brush-
stroked images that are
summoned

To play the fool for the subject
whom so wishes

To view the bounteous nature
served up for their pallets on
shiny dishes.'

He asked her why so much
concern for the pheasant she
now painted

and this the creator then
lamented,

'We need to permeate and be
infused by that which we choose
to depict

And responsibly convey their
inner construction, or else be a
hypocrite

By claiming that no one should
rob thy image but then do the
very same

To objects whose true nature you
then do maim.'

On over-hearing this a critic
professes,

¹⁴To prevent an
uprising of the
represented, Berger
describes a dream he had,
which highlighted a
method that would enable
a less fallacious
representation and more
truthful likeness of
the subject:

'The secret was to get
inside whatever I was
looking at – a bucket of
water, a cow, a city
(like Toledo) seen from
above, an oak tree, and,
once inside to arrange the
appearances for the
better... it simply meant
making it more itself so
that the cow or the city or
the bucket of water
became evidently
more unique.'

This statement
produces the following
question: *is the resultant
image actually a truer
representation of the
object's appearance
for humans, rather than
the actual thing in-itself?*

John Berger, *The Shape of a Pocket*,
Berlin, London and New York:
Bloomsbury, 2002, p. 13.

‘Representations can be likened to
the captors of princesses,
In fact they go further and are the
judges of our future dictums.
They construct our syntax and
intend to entrap the viewer as their
victims,
Conspiring toward a sublime image
that will render us passive
‘spectators’.’¹⁵

Overwhelmed, the student did not
know what to make of his educators,
Unaffected by his listener’s
hesitation the critic asks with a
calculative glance,
‘Why are you inquiring about the
image, is it per chance...’
‘That you want to know its deep
rooted nature?’
‘I had no idea that they were such
dictators’

The apprentice innocently replied,
‘I just mean to inquire what it is that
images want?’

‘Oh, I can fulfil that quest but first of
all to make sure you are quite
constant

In your intellectual leanings, I will
need you to sign this contract
That I may call in for your services
whenever I may require.’

Earnestly the apprentice signed the
dotted line in anticipation of
receiving his desire.

On returning to his tutor, the
apprentice was asked,

¹⁵The continued
contemporary concern
with Guy Debord’s
description of a society
constructed out of
passive spectators (and
his pursuit for a formula
to this issue in his film
practice) is exemplified
by the 50th Venice
Biennale titled ‘Dreams
and Conflict. The
Dictatorship of the
Viewer’ (2003) curated
by Francesco Bonami

‘Well did you fulfil your
 perilous task?’
 All hush and silence fell,
 As the apprentice put
 forward his confident
 tell,
 ‘An image wants the self-
 same sovereignty
 Over its artist, curator
 and critic ‘as over its
 viewer’,¹⁶
 And owner he/she; for
 they must not be above
 it.
 That is the image’s
 greatest wish, whether
 you kill
 Or spare me; please
 yourself. I wait your
 will.’¹⁷

¹⁶ It becomes evident that mitchell’s question, ‘what do pictures want?’ is a misnomer because he is actually asking, ‘how do we show seeing?’ mitchell states that images mediate the social in conjunction with cultural influences that inform image formation, so they are not purely social constructions but have a semi-autonomous power. This does not mean that images want, or have power, over subjects. mitchell actually describes them as the subaltern entities, which exist in-between the subject and object. He defines images as emulating a combination of extramission and intromission theories if they are taken as a psychosocial reality, as opposed to a truthful account of vision. In mitchell’s scenario the image is an interface: ‘... an invisible screen or latticework of apparently unmediated figures that makes the effects of the mediated image possible’. He claims that it is because images construct the social that we need to ask them what they want but if they are the very mode of seeing, or communication, then we should be asking: *what does communication or the psychosocial want?*

w. j. t. mitchell, *what do pictures want*, p. 351.
 See book ‘Glossarium’ for a definition of ‘extramission’ and ‘intromission’ theories under the title ‘xxi Goggle Affect’, pp. 15–6.

¹⁷ Terms for women, husband, lover etc. are replaced with the term image, viewer, artist, curator, critic, owner, they, its, etc. but otherwise the text came directly from: Chaucer, ‘The Wife of Bath’s Tale’, p. 304.

WORDS BETWEEN TWO STUDENTS

Observing their teacher's tale, two students began to ask each other,

What if this is a totally different type of bother?

A male student hypothesises an image that does not need a psyche to assume power

But the other is not so sure whether this is just romantic ardour.

A realist, the female student suggests that perhaps to represent is not the only operation

of which an image is capable, and the male bites at this temptation,

'Is the image's autonomy that sadistic toward the material it depicts,

or is it just violent towards a human, as it does not predict

what the viewer desires but actually castrates

a concern for a viewer from its landscape?' and then he hesitates.

'It is because of the image's historical legacy and spiritual inheritance

that it is still called to speak the truth as a representation, witness, document or evidence.

Its truth is constantly monitored and doubted due to the possibility

of mediation: worried that artistic plotting and frivolity

will tarnish the image. It is because of the image's assumed power that its ontological

existence, as true/false, real/fictional, or actual/spiritual

is still very much debated in the contemporary landscape and the political.'

'Jose Arcadio Buendia' leaves the two students in
deep debate,¹⁸
Not wishing the argument to escalate,
But he did have some questions himself to explore
As a philosopher to leave lacunae he would deplore.
He asked himself, what if the image is not simply a
representation
And the above axis not the prerequisite of its
destination?
What if the image is considered a material in itself,
As opposed to a human conduit for the reflection of
him/herself?

¹⁸ Jose Arcadio Buendia is a lead protagonist in the magical realist novel:
Gabriel Garcia Marquez, *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, London: Pan Books Ltd. |
Picador Edition, 1978

PART 1. BUENDIA'S INQUIRY

Provoked by the 'Wife of Bath's Tale: What Images Want', Jose Arcadio Buendia decided to embark on his own investigation and commenced by deploying a scientific method to see if he could expose the true nature of the image and its relationship to reality:

... Jose Arcadio Buendia, who had resolved to use it to obtain scientific proof of the existence of God. Through a complicated process of superimposed exposure taken in different parts of the house, he was sure that sooner or later he would get a daguerreotype of God, if He existed, or put an end once and for all to the supposition of His existence.¹⁹

By the above hypothesis Buendia assumes that his daguerreotype will have the ability to either capture the essence or absence of God. To do this Buendia has to identify the photographic process with a pure scientific and empirical enterprise. This also supposes that there is an integral relationship between the image and the real, which is supported by Buendia's presumption that his apparatus is neutral so that the camera can perform a truth procedure. Buendia is testifying to a belief that the photographic process and its resultant image, the photograph, is an indexical account of the real: asserting that the camera's operations are transparent so the photographic document can be claimed to capture a truthful account of its subject. Buendia's experiment, which sets out to define the existence or inexistence of a God, relies on the empirical validity he perceives in the image. It is by assuming the neutrality of the photographic process that the presence of his subject can show itself and the hidden dimension of nature will come to the fore.

¹⁹ Ibid, pp. 50–51.

In this sense Buendia's experiment is a 'Call to the Old Ones'.²⁰ In his talk 'Hyperstition: Figuring the Apocalypse', at TEDx Table Mountain, Delphi Carstens states that the constant 'Call to the Old Ones' creates an ideology, which attests to the existence of a hidden dimension to nature. Carstens' term the 'Old Ones' refers to the belief that aliens exist on the other side of the technological subject-centred dark mirror and on the alternate face of this technological surface there is a world of objects we cannot know. In this belief, technology is a mirror that can only reflect the human subject's own representations while the scientific images attest to a real outside this technological apparatus. Micro and macro images bring humans closer to a scientific understanding of the universe(s), at the same time they invoke a world beyond the lens that humans can't directly contact. It is the increasing technological mediation of human interactions in the practice of science, which has made the real world of matter appear as more distant and less directly related to subjective reality. Physical distancing produced by technology, counter-intuitively, cultivates the belief in a real that exists behind a veiled reality and maintains the disciplines of theology and philosophy. Buendia's scientific experiment, therefore, is a theological-philosophical 'Call to the Old Ones' but he has neither considered the appropriateness of his equipment for defining his object's relation to the real, nor the abstract nature of the God whose existence or inexistence he is trying to prove.

Graham Harman critiques Martin Heidegger for a similar faux pas, as Heidegger also assumed that his philosophical approach to forming an ontological theory of object-hood was neutral.

²⁰ Delphi Carstens, 'Hyperstition: Figuring the Apocalypse', *TEDx Table Mountain* (2012) <<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Wdj9ChlRoqU>> [accessed 23 November 2012]

Given this priority of human care for the referential system of equipment, all arguments for the supremacy of tool-being would appear to be destroyed. The human entity now turns out to be the ground of possibility for all significance, and thus for the action or function of tool-beings as a whole.²¹

Harman's philosophy credits Heidegger with the revelatory assertion that object ontology can exist without being human-centred and he terms this theory 'tool-being'. In tool-being there are tools that go unnoticed because they work seamlessly for their subject. In contrast, a broken-tool comes into being by refusing to work for the subject and, therefore, announces its own existence for itself. This process is counteracted, as Harman states above, when Heidegger ties the broken tool's existence back to the ethics of the subject and by this negates the theory of an 'object-oriented-ontology'.²² It is his philosophical-ethical equipment that prevents Heidegger from severing the object from the subject and so the existence of tool-being is undermined.

The neutrality of Buendia's equipment comes under similar scrutiny due to his theological-philosophical leanings. Buendia immediately sets up an either/or scenario by his daguerreotype: God either exists or he does not. Religion contradicts this assumption because it requests blind faith so Buendia's scepticism combined with his scientific approach opposes any possible outcome which could prove the existence of God. A spiritual entity cannot be revealed to him by the rational and empirical method he has set up in his experiment, as God cannot be exposed by empiricism. In this

²¹ Graham Harman, *Tool-Being: Heidegger and the Metaphysics of Objects*, Chicago and La Salle: Open Court, 2002, p. 29.

²² Object-orientated-ontology' is the term that Harman gives to his practice to highlight that objects are at the centre of his philosophy. See pp. 60–6 of this book for further information on Harman under the heading 'The Quadruple Image'.

sense Buendia's critical endeavour is similar to the way that Harman frames Heidegger's methodology: his philosophical lens simultaneously introduces and undermines the search for the real nature of things.

Alain Badiou's theory of the 'Event' attests to the above nature of blind faith, which undermines Buendia's experiment.²³ Badiou invests in the role of faith, through fidelity, as he sees its potential ability to destabilise rational thought so that a new subjectivity (one that is previously inexistent) can come into being. This is exemplified by his assertion that Saint-Preux's fidelity to Julie, in Jean-Jacques Rousseau's novel *Julie, or The New Heloise*, is an amorous Event.

It is only in the name of such a change that Saint-Preux declares his eternal fidelity to the sorrowful love that unites him to Julie. Of course as he says, 'I have lost everything', but he immediately adds: 'I have only my faith left: it will be with me until the grave'.²⁴

Badiou theorises fidelity in terms of his philosophy of the Event. Fidelity is important in creating a truth-procedure that remains faithful to the site, or encounter, so that a new subjectivity can come into being. The site is where a maximal singularity is produced, and one that coalesces from within the void and therefore displaces what was previously in existence. In *Julie, or The New Heloise* this site is the encounter between Saint-Pereux and Julie, which has vanished due to the physical distance that has come between them, and the new existence is their love for each other. Vanishing as the Event comes into being, the site exists as a virtual vector rather than as an empirical place. Due to a lack

²³ Alain Badiou, *Being and Event*, London: Continuum, 2007

²⁴ _____ *Logics of Worlds: Being and Event II*, London: Continuum, 2009, p. 380.

of fixity, subjectivities must maintain their fidelity to the site or singularity if the Event, which consists of all these aspects, is to have longevity and agency. It is Badiou's investment in the incomprehensible aspect of fidelity which highlights the problem in Buendia's rational and empirical attempt to expose a virtual existence (in his case, God). It is exactly because God does not exist empirically that faith is required. It is this faith that Badiou wishes to extract from belief, as belief correlates with the conservative operations of religion. In contrast, faith can destabilize the current state of affairs because faith cannot be measured by the contemporary order of things. It is the very nature of the measurement that prevents anything new coming into existence and this is why an unreasonable or exorbitant faith is necessary for Badiou's Event to occur and maintain its definitive break with the past.

Buendia, simultaneously, faces the issue of scientifically evaluating the 'realness' of his artefact (daguerreotype), as he has pre-emptively assumed that there is a truth procedure in either the photographic process or the daguerreotype. He believes that the daguerreotype is either a factual or magical document, which captures a pure account of the world.

Doubt of the real facts, as I must reveal them, is inevitable; yet, if I suppressed what will seem extravagant and incredible, there would be nothing left. The hitherto withheld photographs, both ordinary and aerial, will count in my favour, for they are damnably vivid and graphic. Still, they will be doubted because of the great lengths to which clever fakery can be carried. The ink drawings, of course, will be jeered at as obvious impostures, notwithstanding a strangeness of technique, which art experts ought to remark and puzzle over.²⁵

²⁵H.P. Lovecraft, *At the Mountains of Madness*, Toronto: Prohyptikon Publishing Inc., 2010, p. 1.

Buendia assumes that the daguerreotype can only ever be received as an accurate account of the real. Contrary to Buendia, Lovecraft's protagonist, Dyer, speculates on the issue that the photographic document can be faked and his images doubted. This highlights another bone of contention for Buendia's experiment. Dyer's account creates a sceptical reader, who may distrust Buendia's assumption that people will believe in his photographic process. If photographs can be faked then Buendia might be forging rather than extracting his truth from the outside world. His daguerreotype might not stand up as a truthful account and could be accused of constructing the evidence. Buendia's problem can be compared to the economic principle provided in 'Gresham's Law'.²⁶ A law that was introduced by the 16th century financier Sir Thomas Gresham and can be summarised as follows: 'Good' money is money that shows little difference between its nominal value (the face value of the coin) and its commodity value (the actual value of the metal). Counter to Good money is 'Bad' money, which is a currency whose material value has been debased. The debasement of a coin could mean that it is either counterfeit, or the precious metal has been alloyed with a base metal. It reduces the value of the economy by flooding the market. Debased money infiltrates the market by masquerading as a legitimate coin at face value but reduces the commodity's material value. In Gresham's Law the material value of the coin could be exposed empirically and this resulted in adjustments in the market. Buendia is concerned that his theory would not be able to make an adjustment in terms of the daguerreotype's value because he wants the photographic plate to capture the real. Even if he could validate the document at face value by reproducing an image of God, he still hits a problem at the document's material value. Buendia has not yet revealed how

²⁶ 'Gresham's Law', Encyclopaedia Britannica: <<http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/245850/Greshams-law>> [accessed 10 March 2013]

he can expose that an essence, of God or God's lack, exists in the photograph's actual materiality so the question of the daguerreotype's value has not yet been answered. He fails to distinguish between his medium's ability to create a Good (real) and Bad (fake) image.

Buendia's belief that the image is an extension of the real and can capture the landscape accurately correlates with the belief at the turn of the 20th century in the indexical truth of the photograph. In contrast, Tom Gunning states that there can be no unmediated access to the real:

The claim that the digital media alone transforms its data into an intermediary form fosters the myth that photography involves a transparent process, a direct transfer from the object to the photograph. The mediation of lens, film stock, exposure rate, type of shutter, processes of developing and of printing become magically whisked away if one considers the photograph as a direct imprint of reality.²⁷

Gunning clearly critiques the neutral 'indexicality' assumed in Buendia's deployment of the daguerreotype, as he claims that the subject who composes the photographic frame always mediates a photograph.²⁸ It is the subject rather than the image that fouls the photograph's ability to be neutral. It is the creator's intent that deems the apparatus untrustworthy, as the composer is already predetermining the constraints of their investigation. Buendia limits the daguerreotype's validity by assigning it the task of capturing the true nature of reality. In light of Gunning's account, in which the photographic indexing of the real is not a neutral process, Buendia starts to

²⁷ Tom Gunning, 'What's the point of the Index? Or, Faking Photographs' in *Still/Moving: Between Cinema and Photography*, ed. by Karen Beckman and Jean Ma, Durham: Duke University Press, 2008, pp39-49 (p. 40).

²⁸ A term coined by Charles Peirce, as referenced in: *ibid.*, pp. 39-49.

question whether his hypothesis and apparatus for the experiment are faulty. The predetermined frame photographers utilise to abstract materiality from the landscape limits the truthful criticality of their apparatus, which is created and deployed by subjects. Buendia assumed that the index could be a philosophical position but now perceives it as a chemical one. This renders the index problematic because it cannot capture the essence of the world in the photograph, as the chemical process documents light and space, so it cannot register God's aura or lack.

Walter Benjamin actually locates potential in the photograph's ability to abstract and maintain autonomy from the subject it depicts. He describes photographic documentation of originals as being more than replicas, by theorising how reproductions can split with the artwork.

The reason is twofold. In the first place, a technological reproduction is more autonomous, relative to the original, than one made by hand. Through photography, for instance, it is able to bring out aspects of the original that can be accessed only by the lens (adjustable and selecting its viewpoint arbitrarily) and not by the human eye, or it is able to employ such techniques as enlargement or slow motion to capture images that are quite simply beyond natural optics. That is the first reason. Secondly, it can also place the copy of the original in situations beyond the possibility of the original itself. Above all, it makes it possible for the original to come closer to the person taking it, whether in the form of a photograph or that of a gramophone record. A cathedral quits its site to find a welcome in the studio of the art lover; a choral work performed in a hall or in the open air can be heard in a room.²⁹

²⁹ Walter Benjamin, *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction*, London: Penguin Books Ltd., 2008, p. 6.

Benjamin claims that technical reproductions, more so than copies or even forgeries produced by hand that merely imitate an existing piece, can reveal themselves to be autonomous from their originals. This is due to their technological ability to create new images that extract alternative views and different information from the original. As opposed to replicating the form in its previous medium and situation, which would just copy its previous restrictions. Benjamin states that photographic reproductions can also create new platforms for the art object, which no longer needs to be visited in situ but can be observed against the backdrop of domestic wallpaper, in the pages of a book or on an urban street. It is also due to this situational versatility that the reproduction is not restricted by what Benjamin describes as the hierarchical individual viewing of many privileged artefacts. Easy access to clear views of the original iconography of a cathedral, or images in a collection, were traditionally only privy to those at the top of the religious or wealthy pyramid. This curatorial conceit reduced their availability to the masses but Benjamin claims that reproductions change this by catering for, and thus producing, a mass audience.

Benjamin promoted technological advances as being capable of breaking with the cultic history imbued in the original's 'aura' and invested in the reproduction an ability to forge a new democratic society.³⁰ An artwork's aura relies on the presence of it in the here and now because its genuineness, or history, can only be experienced in the flesh. It is by the aura of the artwork that the weight of its material duration can be understood. Benjamin claims that reproductions remove the artwork's ability to be a historical witness because they do not privilege material duration, so they undermine the original's authority and provenance: 'The age where art became reproducible by technological means, in setting it

³⁰ Ibid, p. 7.

free from its cultic roots, extinguished the light of its autonomy forever.³¹ The clash between photography and art is seen by Benjamin as the process by which 19th century society was uprooted: the autonomy of the photograph led to the questioning of the autonomy of painting, which actually undid each medium's claim to cultic value and art began to function differently.

The reduction of the aura, Benjamin states, is most significant in film due to the effects that the medium has on the actor or actress being filmed, as well as the audience. Benjamin asserts that the aura of the screen actor or actress is displaced because there is no longer a here and now to facilitate its production. Instead, a camera mediates a series of abstracted shots and the audience no longer identify with the protagonist's situation or their aura but with the position of the camera operator. An editor then assembles the material fragments and constructs a collaged narrative. Benjamin suggests that films are a universal educational apparatus by which an active audience can analyse the world around them: 'The audience empathizes with the performer only by empathizing with the camera. It thus assumes the camera's stance: it tests.'³² It is by the camera that the audience can learn more about perception and the social unconscious. This is exemplified in his essay, 'A Short History of Photography' in which he compares photography with psychoanalysis, 'Photography makes us aware of the optical unconscious just as psychoanalysis discloses the instinctual unconscious.'³³ Film, as an open-access tool, not only enables the public to question the effects of mass media on the unconscious but also gives everyone the chance to become an expert, whereby artistic authority can become 'common property'.³⁴

³¹ Ibid, p. 15.

³² Ibid, p. 18.

³³ Walter Benjamin, 'A Short History of Photography', *Screen*, 13.1 (1972), 5-26 (p. 7).

³⁴ _____ *The Work of Art*, p. 23.

If the photographic and filmic process belongs to everyone then there is a possibility that the social unconscious, which controls our habitual actions, could change.

Benjamin's theory promoted practices that could distil or freeze unconscious moments so that they were discernible to consciousness. In the Benjaminian scenario, past images could explode the present by revealing the operations of the hidden or overlooked (unconscious) areas in social history. Kracauer describes Benjamin's redemptive resurrection of the past:

For him, living constructs and phenomena seem jumbled like a dream, whereas once they are in a state of disintegration they become clearer. Benjamin gathers his harvest from works and states of affairs that have died off, that are removed from the contemporary context. Since the most pressing life has left them, they become transparent, allowing the order of essentialities to shine through them.³⁵

Kracauer asserts that Benjamin was able to locate photographic and filmic practices, which stripped the present of its aura and exposed the optical unconscious. Benjamin's methodology is theorised as disrupting the dream-like flow of the present day by delivering a stable account of capitalism's essence that exists in, but is obscured by, its abstractions.³⁶ As a result, instead of moving away from abstractions, Benjamin decided to reveal the unconscious in capitalist modes of distraction. Fredric Jameson, in his chapter on video in *Postmodernism: or, the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (2009) states how this Benjaminian premise of distraction has been deployed and distorted by Postmodernist practices:

³⁵ Kracauer, *The Mass Ornament*, p. 262.

³⁶ See earlier in this book footnotes: '7', p. 8, and '13', p. 11, for an account of Kracauer's own theory of photography.

There is something like Benjaminian 'distraction' raised to a new historically original power: indeed, I am tempted to suggest that the formulation gives us at least one apt characterization of some properly postmodernist temporality, whose consequences now remain to be drawn.³⁷

Benjamin believed that rather than turning away from distraction and framing it as an issue, it could actually reveal the social unconscious to the masses. Jameson exposes how this stage of mass culture has been hijacked by the Postmodernist practice of video, which regurgitates streams of past images without giving any single image precedence over the previous or subsequent images. As a result there is no logic or hierarchical order present in Postmodernist videos. Jameson's Postmodernism sweeps away any stable view of the past by deploying a seamless flow of existing images that 'cannibalise' any redemptive ground.³⁸ A dialectical view of history has been destroyed by the Postmodernist culture of perpetual disintegration. These practices have erased any ability to salvage images from an earlier period, as well as the concurrent claim that they can breakthrough to the present, because Postmodernism's present ceaselessly deploys a horizontal, as opposed to teleological, history in the making of its own era. Jameson's Postmodernism is a surface without depth and treats all past images as having the same value. The ramification of this practice is that it is unable to indicate any historical meta-narrative or unconscious, precisely because Postmodernism aims to distinguish itself from the fictional grand narratives and monuments of Modernism. Ironically, Jameson's account of the crisis in Postmodernism turns into a grand narrative of Postmodernism, as it presents capitalism as speeding towards its inevitable collapse.

³⁷ Fredric Jameson, *Postmodernism: or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*, London and New York: Verso, 2009, p. 87.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 96.

Jameson states that Postmodernism is the cultural manifestation of late capitalist logic but does not pose an alternative to capitalism's endless flow of images. He resists the temptation to reinvent a stable past, as these images have been released from the anchor of history, but this produces an affirmation of the Postmodernist discourse and signals a belief that the system's lack of internal logic will lead to its own crisis. This is not that dissimilar to Benjamin Noys' account of 'acceleration' in which he states that accelerationists harbour the view that increasing the velocity of existing modes of production will end in a collapse of the system.³⁹ Noys also highlights that this view is tied up with a particular version of history and subject formation. He claims that an accelerationist attitude, in which subjects have to endure the path of history or progress until the infrastructure of the social is able to support a crisis or revolution, is comparable to the conditions required for the birth of 'War Communism' in 1918.⁴⁰ The retrospective name, War Communism, was given to the period that realised the civil war in Russia had resulted in a crash in production. In order to fast track its way out of the dire situation, the communist state promoted the view that a new productive society could be born out of 'zero'.⁴¹ This resulted in combining capitalism's machine labour with human labour so that the latter was not subordinated to the former. They believed that deploying capitalism's machine efficiency without displacing human labour would re-imagine work as the site of freedom.

It tried to find a new and superior mode of production – one that could take the 'best' of capitalism, but reorganise it to go beyond the limits of a system driven by profit... precisely to

³⁹ Benjamin Noys, *Malign Velocities: Accelerationism and Capitalism*, London: Zero Books, 2014, p. 27.

⁴⁰ Ibid, p. 25.

⁴¹ Ibid, p. 26.

breakthrough to the future and, in doing so, to put human labor in charge.⁴²

In the War Communism model, human labour would be in charge of the machine and not the other way round. War Communism invested in the belief that the proletariat's hybridisation with the machine and their subordination to labour would enable them to finish the work more quickly to indulge in their own creative time. In contrast, Noys describes this android system as resulting in the acceleration of the capitalist model, while still deploying a theory of the latter's lack so that it appeared Utopian. War Communism actually dehumanized capitalist techniques and inserted an authority that dictated the importance of extending the hours of lived labour. This even accelerated to the model of gulags, under Stalin, which capitalised on free and spatialised labour.⁴³ By his analogy with War Communism, Noys highlights the risk involved in theories that intend to accelerate existing forms of labour. In order to cut to a future beyond current labour conditions, these theories may not end the mechanisms of subordination but are actually more likely to result in their amplification. This critique of accelerating labour is analogous with a critique of theories that claim an acceleration of Postmodernist images can result in the collapse of capitalism. If, according to Jameson, Postmodernism is the cultural logic of late capitalism, then a proliferation of the movement's prevalent techniques of appropriation and regurgitation could amplify rather than dismantle capitalism.

Beundia is deeply concerned about a theory of accelerationism because such a process would take an incredibly long time to reach its climax in his solitary town. His whole community relies on the occasional visit from a

⁴²Ibid, p. 24.

⁴³Ibid, p. 33.

group of travellers, in order to learn about any developments in the world. This has often resulted in Buendia believing that he has conceived of an original fact, when it had already been discovered years ago in another distant part of the globe. His situation appears to refute the very conditions that would be able to harness accelerationism and cut to the future. He is also suspicious of the accelerationist dialectic, which harnesses the belief that by pursuing the negative course of history, a nation or movement could bring about a radical and positive future. An issue he has identified through his own attempts at producing homeopathic remedies, which more often than not actually exacerbate the biological condition that it aimed to heal.

Buendia feels trapped because he is also uncertain whether it is plausible to exercise Benjamin's model of capturing a stable image of the past. Buendia's daguerreotype, which he hoped would prove the existence or inexistence of God, relies on a stable backdrop or procedure that Jameson's account of Postmodernism sweeps away. If humans can't identify the difference between dawn and dusk in an image, then perhaps all images are interchangeable and any photographic account of a God could be exchanged with any other image of reality. Buendia's experiment, which invested in the neutrality of the photographic document in order to reveal a truth or provide a reason, has been thrown off course. His exposition has struck on two distinct elements in photographic opinion and, therefore, he draws up two definitions for these positions:

1. *Semi-autonomous*

Photographs are dialectical: they can act as a limited representation and witness to the materiality they encounter but they are also mediated by the camera operator and are an indexical extension of their unconscious. This position affirms that subjective

encounters with the world can be transferred onto the photographic document; so human subjects can expose or be exposed to reason.

2. *Exchangeable:*

Photographs are completely mediated and can only replicate perceptions of the real. Every perception is of equal value and one image could quite easily take the place of another. The image has no outside referent, as it is produced by subjects for subjects, as a form of information and communication. Any dialectical axis (true/false, reason/unreason, good/bad) is blown away because an image does not refer to anything beyond its surface.

In the first of Buendia's poles, the photographic image undergoes mediation but still maintains a metaphysical authority. An image as metaphysical substance implies that either the photograph's materiality will always withdraw from the viewer or that it can bring the absent into presence. As a result the image adorns a further two faces: its essence (God or spirit) will always evade capture or it has an innate spirit, which exposes itself to the subject. On one side of this dialectical coin, the image, and by extension the cosmos of images, has a secret inner life that can never be known by the subject; so the image is credited with an autonomous power that is not for human consumption.

If it is possible for the same line, the same distinction, to separate and to communicate or connect (communicating also separation itself...), that is because traits and lines of the image (its outline, its form) are themselves (something from) its intimate force: for this intimate force is not 'represented' by the image, but the image is it, the image activates it, draws and withdraws it, extracts it by withholding it,

and it is with this force that the image touches us.⁴⁴

Jean-Luc Nancy's description of the image highlights that an artwork maintains its autonomy by receding from the subject. Nancy's theory states that the image's force separates itself from the viewer, in order to communicate its reality. Artworks are not constructed to truthfully represent the subject that they depict but radiate a force that exists in their own form and materiality. Nancy's image could be diametrically opposed to both the empirical realm, to which their representations refer, and the viewing subject, from whom they withdraw. In contrast, Nancy's theory simulates the image's independence from the subject by depicting its material force but does not circumvent the viewer from the image's agenda. For in Nancy's scenario the image does communicate with the subject, even if it addresses the viewer in the negative by withdrawing. As a result, Nancy's image correlates with Buendia's initial conviction that the photograph will willingly relate itself to the viewer. It also complements w. j. t. mitchell's question, 'what do pictures want?' as it assumes that the image wants to directly communicate with the viewer. But this question obfuscates what mitchell is actually asking, which is, 'what does communication want?'⁴⁵ In mitchell's scenario the image takes up its own position between the subject and object and acts as a form of correspondence. mitchell's image is the product of communication so it is already assumed that it will want to reveal itself to the subject. His theory treats the image's medium as the message and has nothing to say about the actual material existence of the object from which the image is partially constructed. The object itself fades into the background when the image is forged between itself and the

⁴⁴ Jean-Luc Nancy, *The Ground of the Image*, New York: Fordham University Press, 2005, p. 5.

⁴⁵ See earlier in this book footnotes: '2', p. 5, and '16', p. 14, for an account of mitchell's position on the image.

viewing subject. When the object is entangled with the subject in an act of creating the image, its actual materiality is negated in favour of the supposedly co-constructed virtual projection. Nancy's artwork may have been released from its obligation to act as a strict representation of its subject but the image it projects, its force and communication, still needs the support of the viewer. It relies on a viewer to receive the image's force or message, in order to validate the necessity and power of this communication. In Mitchell's scenario the image is dependent on the subject and object to even exist, as it is constructed out of two concrete poles and subsists as a mediatory form of communication. Buendia procrastinates over this line of enquiry and ends up asking: *to whom does the image, as force or projection, belong? How much of the image is emitted from the object in comparison to the perceptions of the subject?* He assumes that the most likely answer will be: *the image is produced by the subject and is the medium of perception!* Buendia becomes anxiously aware that the material existence of the image itself has again disappeared into the ether.

On the second side of this semi-autonomous coin, the image is able to bring the absent into presence and witness a mediated real. Buendia claims that there has been a renewed interest in the spirituality of the image, due to a post-secular backlash against the secular theory that the image is purely coded with signifiers. A post-secular treatment of the image tries to release it from merely functioning as a linguistic device. He suggests that this rebirth of spirituality tries to combine itself with humanist concerns, the latter coming out of the Renaissance and secular knowledge. Buendia confidently states that this theory of the image's spiritual inner life coalesces with the knowledge that a subject mediates it. An image can act as a mediated witness to the real, which enables it to provide a form of cathartic or therapeutic relief. Buendia's revised view of the image is supported by Frances Guerrin and Roger Hallas in their introduction to the edited

collection of essays *Still/Moving: between Cinema and Photography* (2007):

Thus, the image's role in the process of bearing witness can be seen to rely not upon a faith in the image's technological ability to furnish empirical evidence of the event, but upon a faith in the image's phenomenological capacity to bring the event into iconic presence and to mediate the intersubjective relations that ground the act of bearing witness.⁴⁶

Buendia's experiment appears to have been turned on its head, as Guerin and Hallas' image is no longer relied upon to be an accurate account of the real. Resituated, the image is now a mediator for witnessing a traumatic account. Guerin and Hallas' image is now relied upon to provoke moments of presence, which draw out the phenomenological effects of the traumatic event. This enables the viewers, as both witnesses and addressees, to acknowledge and work through trauma. The image in this account is no longer a site of the real, as it cannot provide a purely indexical account of the event. Images are not ontologically democratic because the persecutor and not the persecuted, more often than not, control the lens and frame of the photograph. In its role as a witness, the image cannot help but be semi-erroneous, so Guerin and Hallas restrict it from being endowed with a moral responsibility towards its subject. This suggests that the image does not implicitly inherit humanist values so it needs to be approached differently.⁴⁷

Guerin and Hallas attest to the image's ability to act as semi-witness, whose account maybe orchestrated but does bear a

⁴⁶ Francis Guerin and Roger Hallas, (eds), *the image and the witness: Trauma, Memory and Visual Culture*, London and New York: Wallflower Press, 2007, p. 12.

⁴⁷ See pp. 46–7, of this book for Quentin Meillassoux's argument that the image does not care for-us.

similarity to the event it depicts. They claim that the image does this by transforming the traumatic site of the event, which is now absent, into a presence that can now be confronted. In order to perform this act, they emphasise the 'iconic' nature of the image and invest in the notion that there is a presence in the image's likeness.⁴⁸

At the same time, however, we must recognise that the image is only a likeness of God, that it is a spiritual similarity, but ultimately, the material image itself is not authentic. The truth exists in its likeness.⁴⁹

Guerin and Hallas assert that the image's likeness can act as a discursive prompt or mediator because it brings the site of trauma into the presence of the addressee. Images do not provide either neutral or authoritative accounts but their likeness can act as a stimulus to facilitate an encounter between trauma and addressee(s). In this scenario, the image is a conduit for state violence and exposes the site of the actual trauma, which has already disappeared. It is deployed in the hopes that by confronting the event the subjects can be healed. Guerin and Hallas' image operates as a form of catharsis in the absence of the real object or situation, which is now absent and in the past.

In his essay 'The Permanence of the Theological-Political', Claude Lefort highlights how this belief in a likeness reasserts itself at the time of trauma. Lefort refers to the French Revolution and the political limbo that exists during the end of one regime and the potential of the next. It is in this political void or absence of the state that religion rears its head and announces that it has always been tied in with politics, despite the attempts to sever the two institutions.

⁴⁸ See footnote '14', p. 12, of this book for Berger's account of a truthful likeness.

⁴⁹ Guerin and Hallas, *the image and the witness*, p. 9.

Can we not admit that, despite all the changes that have occurred, the religious survives in the guise of new beliefs and new representations and that it can therefore return to the surface, in either traditional or novel forms, when conflicts become so acute as to produce cracks in the edifice of the state?⁵⁰

Lefort asserts that religious belief appears when the state is fractured and weak because it is felt that the government can no longer provide for or protect its constituents. It is in this violent void that religion functions to try to construct a stable image of the real for its subjects. Guerin and Hallas' belief in an iconic image acts in a similar way, as it provides a ground for its fractured subject to picture and then confront their trauma. A theory which relies on the image's ability to bring absence into presence suggests that we have returned to or perhaps never superseded the Christian abstract image.⁵¹ Buendia recognises that the belief Guerin and Hallas have in the image is not that dissimilar to his initial stance, albeit resituated. Perhaps he was looking to the photograph for a phenomenological likeness all along?

If only it was that simple but Buendia's position is divided due to the second, secular, definition. David Joselit states that the secular definition causes an ontological shift to occur in the conception of the image:

No longer were they [images] cherished primarily for their capacity to make the absent present, through, for example, their embodiment of ancestors and gods, or their staging of sacred visions. Rather art began to be

⁵⁰ Claude Lefort, "The Permanence of the Theologico-Political?" in *Political Theologies: Public Religions in a Post-secular World*, ed. by Lawrence E. Sullivan and Hent de Vries, New York: Fordham University Press, 2006, pp. 148–87 (p. 150).

⁵¹ See footnote '9', p. 9, of this book, for a definition of the Christian abstract image.

valued for its capacity to carry secular knowledge as aesthetic form.⁵²

Joselit highlights that the secular image is equated with knowledge, rather than spirituality, essence or consciousness. An image no longer references a real that exists outside itself so its true/false axis appears to no longer be a problem. Post-secular images are ciphers or codes and with the right tools they can be deciphered, in order to transfer knowledge. A series of linguistic images can be constructed like an essay and utilised for the transference of meaning from one subject to another. Reference to an outside has been dismantled in favour of the distribution of subjective knowledge. Images, as an economy of knowledge, require the subject to commit to his or her own self-development. Viewers must be invested in education if they wish to learn how to read these post-secular images and join the creative community.

Impetus for this proactive self-educator is produced by the united initiative of governments and the art world, as both want to produce knowledgeable and by extension moral constituents. The more invested individuals are in their own self-education the more money both institutions procure. Governments capitalise on the well-educated person's taxes, as well as a lesser drain on providing community initiatives, and art institutions secure regular funding and sponsorship due to their philanthropic educational agenda. This also produces a society invested in self-education and entices paying customers through museum and gallery doors: perpetuating the art world's increasing investment in providing community and social projects. Mutually beneficial to both governments and museums, this softens the effects of state cuts to the community and secures art world funding, as

⁵² David Joselit, *After Art*, Oxford and Princeton: Princeton University Press | POINT, 2013, p. 86.

long as galleries can quantify the value of their work to the community and society at large.

Latent 'bourgeois' notions come into play here,⁵³ as the art world immerses the subject in a context where accumulative knowledge is presented as a form of 'cultural cache'.⁵⁴ As a result, the subject is encouraged to become the ideal producer-consumer; they produce further educational values and ideals, as they consume their education. A drive, therefore, is produced in individuals who then invest time and care in their cultural presentation. Individuals are encouraged to identify with this educational system so that they can consume and perpetually produce an ideal social image: a walking portfolio of cultural knowledge. In this secular scenario the value of the spiritual image in itself is successfully displaced, as the significance of the image is located in the meaning it produces and the education it facilitates.

A new responsibility for the provision of meaning and knowledge brings the sign and signifier into play. If the image is a language then it relies on the undiluted transference of the image's meaning to the viewer, the viewer then digests this meaning to gain knowledge. This places emphasis on the

⁵³ Michel Foucault highlights that during their rise to power the Bourgeoisie had to differentiate themselves from the masses but their bloodline had no authority so they had to turn to a regime of self-care. Their emphasis on self-care distinguished them as intellectually, sexually and culturally superior to other social classes.

Michel Foucault, *The Will to Knowledge: The History of Sexuality*, 1, London: Penguin Books, 1998.

⁵⁴ The proliferation of textual material and educational events is endemic in most art institutions and museums, which highlights the anxiety to educate the public in order to secure private and state funding.

clarity of the image's sign(s), which has to send a pure signal to be received by the viewer. In order for this teleological process to be successful, the key signifiers have to be contained in the image's syntax. Contrary to this operation, the signifier is dependent not only on the lucidity of its sign but also its reception in the viewer. This is where the sign's infallibility comes into question, as each viewer is different and the sign's message (signifier) is open to subjective interpretation. In its relation to the viewer the sign can be distorted or registered in a spectrum of alternative comprehensions.

Buendia again ponders his position, as a humanist in a small isolated village, and poses some urgent questions: *what if I don't have the skills to decipher the image's syntax? Does the image lose its significance? Is it only those involved in the production of art (artists, curators, art historians and critics etc.) that can decipher the image's code? Is that why so much textual material is proliferated around the object, as it aids the non-professional in deciphering it? Is it the need to decipher that drives our visit to these art temples? If so, what is the aim of this systemic drive and to whom does this impetus, and the anxiety it produces, belong? Do I, Buendia, 'have' to understand the image?*

Buendia decides that he needs to provide a theory that could perhaps support the image in its fallibility. If the secular meaning invested in the image can be diluted or distorted on its passage to the subject or viewer, then, perhaps the image is ultimately democratic. If the image's signs are interchangeable then it exists in a state of flux. The image can operate as a stimulus, which is open to multiple interpretations. Furthermore, this open image would no longer need a curator 'to care' for the artwork, as it is just a floating piece of information that does not reference anything

specific.⁵⁵ If this open image is a form of floating knowledge then the artist, curator and audience can be playful in their interpretation, display and reception of images.

Joselit enables Buendia to develop this theory of openness, as he suggests that an 'Epistemology of Search' can positively unite the secular notions of the image.⁵⁶ Joselit asserts that the image can maintain its status as a cultural object while not having a fixed or closed meaning. This is because in Joselit's account, the image functions as a form of currency. In this scenario the image's value is not seen as being institutionally controlled, so it cannot be utilised to manipulate naïve consumers. Instead, the image's power is located in its ability to produce a bottom-up system or apparatus, in which the consumer produces the image's value. As a result, Joselit's image only has power under conditions of circulation. Joselit states that the Internet can act as a useful metaphor for the ways in which the art system operates. Internet consumers create a 'buzz' around certain sites that are then connected to more and more sites.⁵⁷ These specific sites then become hubs of cultural and economic capital, which brings more connectivity and currency.

⁵⁵ The term curator originates from Latin and translates to mean, 'to take care of' from cura, which translates to, 'care, heed, attention, anxiety and grief'.

⁵⁶ Joselit, *After Art*, p. 89.

⁵⁷ Buzz is a term that references Joselit's account of the networked image and its power:

'I believe image power—the capacity to format complex and multivalent links through visual means—is derived from networks rather than objects. This means that works of art must develop ways to build networks into their form by for example, *reframing*, *capturing*, *reiterating* and *documenting* existing content—all aesthetic procedures that explicitly presume a network as their 'ground'.'

Ibid, p. 94.

Joselit applies this to the way in which art galleries and museums can bring cultural and economic capital to impoverished areas.

Buendia likes this concept of a worker who is capable of helping to transform his everyday environment, as he did this himself. Buendia collaborated with a group of friends and led them in moving and setting up their own solitary but pleasantly functioning town. In contrast to his positive response to Joselit's theory of social mobility, Buendia is concerned that he does this at the expense of the image. The image has no value in itself if it is a form of floating cultural currency. This would then have ramifications for the subject who, by producing only by consuming, could be led by pack instinct. Buendia begins to worry that the need to impress or be accepted by society will encourage a subject to identify him or herself by connecting with the most popular sites or institutions. This would suggest that Joselit's web-based system selects random areas, by an abstract interest or buzz, to become hubs worthy of regeneration. A system that has the potential to privilege corporations, which can afford campaigns that create more of a buzz, would be weighted against the production of alternative communities like Buendia's. Hubs that have enough connectivity to entitle them to regeneration might not even be in control of the image that is produced in place of their original community: resulting in a discrepancy that occurs in Joselit's democratic declaration for his theory. A conservative process has been endorsed when an image's sole import is to act as a form of currency because the artwork's ontology is displaced by an economics of buzz. This produces a conservative view of artistic practice, which is depicted as functioning like a browser or hard drive that facilitates cultural regeneration. Joselit's artists do not have any alternative conceptual agendas other than to enable the progression of capitalism. This actually preserves a hierarchical system, in which the wealthy remain at the top, as opposed to local publics

shifting the economic building blocks from the bottom-up. It also renders art as having no other purpose than facilitating systems of monetary value.

Joselit's theory, similarly to Jameson's account of Postmodernism, indirectly frames Benjamin's strategy, as a roadblock to art's circulatory power.⁵⁸ A loss of aura is inevitable in Joselit's scenario because dispersion is the aim. Any theory that wants to deploy a crystallised moment of the past to disrupt the present would still rely on an autonomous image that is able to locate a stable reason. Joselit points to a paradox that is also present in Benjamin's theory, as the latter undermines the aura in terms of individual artworks but then summons its power in images of the past. Benjamin's images have a quasi-aura and a semi-accelerationist tendency because he pushes for the circulation of reproductions but then puts the breaks on when he repurposes past images that expose the social unconscious. He aims to destabilise both a belief in autonomous works and the seamless velocity of production because each model has capitalist traits, but he invokes one to counter the other. Benjamin's theory of circulation and blockage is an attempt to alter the trajectory of capitalism but it risks reinventing the aura that it critiques. In an act of mutual critique, Benjamin's position also exposes the paradox in Joselit's argument, which aims to push along the same tracks as capitalism in order to change its channels of production. Joselit wants a quick recognition of surfaces that can exceed any obstacles: a theory of velocity, flow and circulation. These methods are deployed by accelerationist theories that aim at a paradigm shift but, as pointed out by Noys, what actually occurs is more of the same.⁵⁹ In response, Benjamin would most likely pursue the position he

⁵⁸ See earlier on in this chapter, pp. 27–9, for an account of Jameson's position on Postmodernism.

⁵⁹ See earlier on in this chapter, pp. 29–30, for an account of Noys' position on accelerationism.

took against the Italian Futurists in his Afterword to 'The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction'. At the end of this essay, Benjamin states that the Futurists staged destruction seductively, as the viewer is encouraged to take pleasure in the image of their own annihilation.⁶⁰ Benjamin highlighted the fascist tendency in Futurism and the theory's attempt to speed up the highway of capitalism towards war, which exemplified that the system's technologies had advanced beyond its logic. The Futurists aestheticized velocity by promoting images of efficiency and speed, often depicting the technological developments in cars, planes and weapons. Rather than trying to locate an alternative route to capitalism, they stripped away any social concern for people or things that were not efficient, fast or machine-like and accelerated the system towards an inhuman horizon. Despite Joselit's attempt to deploy a form of humanist reasoning, claiming that the circulatory image (capitalism) can build environments for communities or act as a tool against state violence, it is still a form of accelerationism - albeit presented with a friendly face.⁶¹ The artistic practices and networks, which are promoted in Joselit's theory, articulate the very markets and dispersion that make up the capitalist system they hope to rewire or disrupt.

Buendia fears that in a bid to demolish the link between image and spirituality the secular view has also ignored the objective reality of the image to a detrimental effect. If the image has no actuality or empirical reality in itself (ignoring the 'Scientific Image') then it cannot create anything concrete for individual subjects to collect around.⁶² Art can no longer create a collective or a community, as totems did for their

⁶⁰ Benjamin, *The Work of Art*, pp. 35–38.

⁶¹ 'In Fairytale, Ai [Wei Wei] did not critique the power of images – he exploited the power of art to transport people and things both spatially and imaginatively. This is our political horizon, after art.'

Joselit, *After Art*, p. 94.

⁶² See book 'Glossarium' under the title 'xxxvii Matter: Scientific image of man', p. 32–3, for a definition of the term Scientific Image.

tribes.⁶³ Images can only create random subjective hubs or islands permeated by individualistic investments. Buendia contemplates that perhaps for the secular image to be truly democratic it needs to provide actual community interactions or a dialogue.

Here, Buendia considers Nicolas Bourriaud's theory of 'Relational Aesthetics' because he proposes that it could take the place of knowledge aesthetics. In Bourriaud's scenario the artist can create an image-situation, in which a community becomes the artwork.⁶⁴ It is claimed that the artist and curator can stage events, which bring about cross-pollination between diverse members to forge a new art-based community. Buendia starts to consider that this is probably the most appropriate secular use of the image, while also being aware that the audience could be manipulated rather than facilitated by this form of artistic production. In Relational Aesthetics the viewer is a participant in producing the artwork, as he or she creates its relations, but Buendia is concerned that the viewer's involvement has already been predetermined by the choices made in the organisation of the event. In this sense, the viewers' interactions could be choreographed to fit the artist's and curator's image of an ideal community. If the viewers are the artwork then the community is composed, staged and fixed. A community aesthetic is produced, which does not necessarily develop an actual active community.⁶⁵ In this sense, a Relational Aesthetic is not democratic but dictatorial, as the participants are used to compose an ideal relational image. This is exploitative not only of the subject but also of the image, as

⁶³ Roger Callois, *Man and the Sacred*, Chicago and Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2001.

⁶⁴ Nicolas Bourriaud, *Relational Aesthetics*, Paris: Les presses du réel, 2002.

⁶⁵ See book *Artificial Hells: Participatory Art and the Politics of Spectatorship* (2012) by Claire Bishop for a critique of the communities produced by Relational Aesthetics.

the image is asked to act as an aesthetic conduit for social relations. The relational image does not acknowledge the artwork's objective dimension (for itself) so the practitioners of Relational Aesthetics produce an impoverished image.

Buendia reflects on his initial monolithic view of the image and now realises that the situation is far more complex. Buendia once considered that the image was a metaphysical coin, which documented the truth. He proposed that if the coin toss landed on heads then God existed and if it landed on tails then the abstract entity did not. However, through his recent encounter with multiple theories of the image, Buendia has created a different supposition. He now proposes that the image is entangled in a trinity with the subject. The subject can encounter the image in the following mixture or combine and sever the trio as they wish:

- 1. As a representation of the real (limited witness and subjective account)*
- 2. As able to communicate with the real (indexical and metaphysical)*
- 3. As a form of information or currency for social and subjective development (secular and relational)*

Buendia considers this trio in depth... and locates an overarching attitude towards the image in all of the above scenarios. Each of the trinity assumes that the image is tied to the subject by a teleological relationship with the viewer. The 'Speculative Materialist' philosopher Quentin Meillassoux coined the term 'correlationism' to describe this subject-centred point of view.⁶⁶ Meillassoux states that ever since the

⁶⁶ Speculative Materialism and Realism (SM/SR) are terms that were coined at a conference held at Goldsmiths College, University of London in April 2007. SM/SR are a group of contemporary philosophers (consisting of many strands), who define themselves in opposition to those philosophies that deploy 'Kantian Correlationism'.

See book 'Colliding Contingency with Totality', pp. 14–5, for an account of Kantian Correlationism and Meillassoux's strand of SM.

philosophy of Immanuel Kant humans have believed that the outside world correlates with their internal conscious projections.⁶⁷ This ties the outside world and, therefore the image, to the subject: the image exists for us. In contrast, Meillassoux states that science has provided us with the knowledge that the world existed before and will outlast human consciousness. This is different to the humanist and secular response, which reacts to the knowledge of the finite existence of humans - our mortality. For the secular image creates an imperative to make the most of your life and to increase your cultural portfolio.⁶⁸ In contrast, Meillassoux focuses on what happens when human finitude isn't the locus of philosophy. His conclusion is that the world and materiality continue, so human consciousness cannot be the reason for the existence of objects. As a result, materiality (both animate and inanimate) does not care for us. In light of Meillassoux's findings, the trinity of the image is biased and conservative; its coin is not only weighted towards the subject but actually ties the image to the subject. Buendia's trinity pictures the image as a foetus; an embryo full of potential but whose activation is dependent on the viewer's interpretations. The image's purpose is to direct its linear, open or relational meaning through its umbilical cord to the subject. The subject has a systemic drive to digest and give this received meaning aesthetic value (knowledge), which also provides the feedback that the foetus requires to survive. The value placed on this mutually parasitical image-subject-image cycle facilitates the perpetual production of both artworks and their insatiable subjects.

⁶⁷ See book 'Glossarium' under the title 'xv Outside: Subject centric and anthropocentric authorship', p. 12-3, for an account of Kant's subject-centric thought.

⁶⁸ See pp. 34-8 of this chapter for an account of the Secular and Post-Secular Image.

PART II. CATREN'S HORIZON

Buendia's trinity exposes the tendency to deploy the image in order to produce a demarcation line between phenomenology (earth) and noumenology (sky). This horizon is subject-centred, as it is produced for the human subject's own understanding, so Buendia's horizon echoes Meillassoux's conceptualisation of Kantian correlationism. Gabriel Catren critiques this Buendian horizon because the theory deploys an act of critical self-enclosure. Terrestrial human subjects rely on phenomenological appearances but they are also trapped in their own perception of them, which simultaneously creates a mystical atmosphere: a sky that points towards something beyond the finite earth.

[...] this self enclosure is lethal after all; if the critical delimitation restrains the possible movements, the projectively ideal accomplishment of this operation converges towards a stillness that coincides with terrestrial immobility [...] The horizon that defines the theatre of operations of worldly movements thus separates the immobile earth from the impossible sky.⁶⁹

In order to circumvent this self-enclosure, Catren posits the methodology of the scientist versus that of the philosopher. A philosopher's temptation is to provide an overarching theory for the world. This assumes that an author can step outside their subjective conditions to gain a complete picture of the universe. Supposing that a single human can transcend their social and biological constraints, constructs a foundational anthropocentrism because it is assumed that the universe will correlate with consciousness. Catren posits scientific

⁶⁹ Gabriel Catren, 'Outland Empire: Prolegomena to Speculative Absolutism', trans. by Taylor Adkins in *The Speculative Turn: Continental Materialism and Realism*, ed. by Levi Bryant, Graham Harman and Nick Srnicek, Melbourne: re.press, 2011, pp. 334–67 (p. 338).

inquiry as an alternative model because it is aware of the author's subjectivity and works with specific elements and abstractions, as opposed to producing a holistic overview.

In other words, such a reflexive tension should permit the subject of science to continuously go through the transcendental glass and force its progressive escape from the transcendental anthropocentrism of pre-critical science: it is necessary to think the particular – empirical and transcendental – localization of the subject of science within the real in order for theoretical reason not to be too human.⁷⁰

Catren does not invest science with the ability to directly uncover material truths or as having a privileged relationship with the real. In contrast, Catren advocates a scientific approach because his model proposes that the scientist is aware of his/her own situation (localization) within the very theory that is produced; a scientist does not position him or herself outside their experiment. Catren's scientists are aware that they provide the conditions for their experiments and they produce as much as they reveal the conditions of the real. As a result, Catren's scientist produces a fictional-real, which he claims is no less real than other forms of materiality.

Catren's theory of this scientific methodology is combined with his investment in a different form of objectivity, which does not depend on Buendia's subjective horizon or biased coin.

In opposition to such a theo-philosophical relativization of the absolute, a properly speculative philosophy aims to systematically deploy an immanent experience of the 'absolute absolute'.⁷¹

⁷⁰ Ibid, p. 342.

⁷¹ Ibid, p. 351.

Catren's statement establishes his endeavour to sever the theological impetus, which relates everything back to the subject, from the absolute. Catren's negation of a relational impulse can also be extended towards the philosophical operations of certain theorists, such as Bruno Latour, which relate every actor in a network (object or subject) back to the position of the other actors.⁷² In these theories the actor can be a subject or object so they have circumvented the subject-centric theology. Although this has been achieved at the expense of the actors in themselves, as the real is located entirely in the relation. In this scenario, the actors are locked in grids and fixed by their position in relation to each other. The philosopher is positioned outside this grid, in order to picture the different relational states and activate the theory. Asserting that actors have no agency in themselves but only in their relation actually resembles the very institutional power and sadist-masochistic system that Michel Foucault critiques.⁷³

In order to counter this relational stasis Catren suggests that agency can lie in objects and subjects, in the form of 'immanence'. Catren defines immanence as the force in the thing in itself: whether this is in an object or subject. Thought (consciousness) is just another immanent thing in a cosmology of things (objects and subjects). Immanence is used in opposition to 'transcendence', which is the idea that we can transcend (escape or move out of) our subjective

⁷² See Bruno Latour's 'Actor Network Theory' in which things create meaning through their relationship to each other in that instance. The meaning or real is, therefore, located in the relation and not in the things in themselves.

Bruno Latour, *Reassembling the Social: An Introduction to Actor-Network-Theory*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007

⁷³ See book 'Glossarium' under the title 'xxxvi Vortices: Cyclical power', pp. 31–32, for an account of Foucault's theory of power.

conditions. Catren attests to the conditions of the 'absolute', as the material in which we live. The absolute has no ground but, unlike theories of the non-ground, Catren tries to prevent humans from relating the absolute back to their subjective position. Relating back the absolute to humans would reinscribe a subjective circle or correlation. Catren deploys the term 'absolute absolute' to describe an absolute non-relation. By this Catren establishes that there is no subterranean virtual entity or correlationist horizon beyond the absolute.

Catren's account of the scientist and objective immanence produces the following questions:

- 1. Does invoking a universal immanence imply that there is no difference between objects and subjects?*
- 2. Is the fictional-real ubiquitous with all forms of materiality or restricted to those materials produced by subjective intervention?*
- 3. What is immanence? Is it a form of vitality, which acts as a virtual saving grace in order to implement change?*
- 4. What are the ramifications of immanence for art?*

The following sections respond to one or more of the above questions, in order to understand further Catren's repositioning of the subject, objective immanence and a world without horizon.

SENTIENT OBJECTS

In a direct response to the first question this section engages with the difference between objects and subjects. In line with Catren's interest in a procedure that produces a fictional-real it will engage with critical-fictional texts. It begins with the issue that if there is no difference between objects and subjects, then it is easy to assume that objects are also sentient. Subjects are aware of their ability to perceive and conceive so it is a seamless exercise to transfer consciousness

onto objects. If we do perform this exercise and believe that there is no difference; assuming that both objects and subjects are made-up of the same substance (sentient and able to communicate), we simultaneously invest in a monistic theory of openness. Mark von Schlegell highlights this tendency in his philosophically inspired Science Fiction novel *Venusia* (2005), in which a conscious plant speaks of a sentient life ('Oa') on earth ('Terran') that enabled human existence to continue to live under much deliberation and duress.

Back when homo sapiens was exterminating the Neanderthals (the superior cousin), the conservative plants had recommended species-wide extinction. These apes, they argued, might well replicate themselves at the expense of all other Oa. Humans were undeniably raising the chances of global catastrophe. But the conservatives were over-ruled by the neo-liberal majority. Not only did humans make good gardeners, but in the long run a Terran apocalypse was destined, regardless of human intervention.⁷⁴

Schlegell engineers a fictional exploration into a possible reality that resembles an actual non-ground or system without distinct parts. Sentient plants exist on a psychological continuum, which enables them to travel through time and into different forms of consciousness. In contrast, it is not his focus on a sentient continuum that is interesting for this inquiry, which has already attested to the pitfalls of such a theory, but, rather, it is the repositioning of the human, as just one more object in a cosmos of objects that is pertinent here. *Venusia's* human inhabitants do not have complete control over their surroundings: they are not the sole reason why the solar system will end but they were responsible for

⁷⁴ Mark Von Schlegell, *Venusia*, Los Angeles and New York: Semiotext(e) | Native Agents Series, 2005, p. 146.

accelerating Earth's demise and had to colonise Venus.

Humans are also useful to the world, as another form of technical life that tends to earth's garden. In this sense Schlegell's humans are not that different from Field Club's depiction of them in 'Whey to Go: On the Hominid Appropriation of the Pig-Function'. In Field Club's scenario it is the robin that attests to the human's existence and clarifies that they are just another form of technical apparatus. Unlike the sentient plant's conscious account, the robin's assertion is located in its relation to the human.

Norse mythology already anticipates the porcosapient affinity attested to by the robin, describing how the peculiar rooting action of the boar's terminal snout disk provided a model for the plough, and thus initiated mankind into agriculture.⁷⁵

Field Club's robin-relation suggests that humans actually appropriated and modelled agricultural machinery on the pig's technical function. The robin's initial relation to the pig was then transferred to a relation with the human, as the farmer or gardener tills the ground that exposes the creature's sustenance. This relation simultaneously asserts that humans do not have a privileged position in the world but actually imitate existing behaviour. Field Club locate a similarity between humans and their fellow organic life without assuming a conscious openness but this relation does not state whether inorganic objects operate in the same way.

In Philip K. Dick's novel, *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?* (2007), the inorganic android's position is precarious, as it is hard to distinguish a cyborg's likeness from that of their human counterparts. Racheal Rosen, the central robot

⁷⁵ Field Club, 'Whey To Go: On the Hominid Appropriation of the Pig-Function', *Collapse*, 7 (2011), ed. by Robin Mackay, Falmouth: Urbanomic, pp. 119–46 (p. 131).

clone, believes that she is a human due to the implantation of false memories in her circuits. Later on in the novel, Rick Deckard, the key protagonist and the Bladerunner trying to detect and terminate dangerous cyborgs actually falls in love with her. Deckard states the moral quandary he is in, in terms of the most recent variation of the 'Nexus-6' android:

The Nexus-6. He had now come up against it. Rachael, he realized, she must be a Nexus-6. I'm seeing one of them for the first time. And they damn near did it; they came awfully damn close to undermining the Voigt-Kampff scale, the only method we have for detecting them. The Rosen Association does a good job – makes a good try, anyhow – at protecting its products.⁷⁶

The 'Voigt-Kampff' system is the only mechanism by which humans can expose androids. It is important to identify cyborgs, as they are assumed to be dangerous frauds because of the absence of genuine human empathy. It is assumed that authentic empathy is an exclusively human quality and this innate assignation is used to define the human subject's superiority. This empathetic territorialisation becomes blurred when androids believe that they are humans, as their emotive responses become barely distinguishable from those of their human counterparts. Simultaneously, the 'Voigt-Kampff' system's credibility becomes questionable, as it struggles to detect the cyborg's lack of innate empathy. As a result Deckard is increasingly confused about the actual difference between androids and humans. He begins to question whether empathy is the right lens by which to judge androids and designate them as second citizens. Deckard's quandary highlights an issue with the assumption that the human ability to be reflexive, moralise or empathise actually causes

⁷⁶ Philip K. Dick, *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?*, London: Gollancz, 2007, p. 52.

an ontological rift between subjects and objects. Dick proposes, through the character Deckard, a question to the reader; *what is the actual schism between objects and subjects?*

All of the philosophical-fictional writers referred to above have repositioned the human subject. Recast, humans are not the only actors in the narratives and the authors refute a subject-centric plot. Contrary to this procedure, the authors had to rely on certain existing mechanisms in order to communicate the problems that they have located in the assumed ontological distinction between organic and inorganic life. Schlegell deploys examples of alternative conscious life, Field Club utilise a purely relational scenario and Dick narrates an inorganic life that emulates the human. This results in the absence of any positive alternative to the ontological subject/object rift because each scenario is modelled on human activity. They expose the lacunae that exist in the traditional plot of the image and this vacuum propels 'The Plot' into posing the following question: *do the subject and object have different ontological statuses?*

THE IMMANENT FICTIONAL-REAL.

In order to pursue the above question and expand on the second and third Catrenian questions about the fictional-real and immanence; it is worth visiting the work of Francois Laruelle. Laruelle's theory of 'non-photography' also brings us back to the photographic process, where this investigation began. His theory of non-photography relates to Laruelle's endeavour to forge a 'non-philosophy' that does not try to create a whole picture or schema of the world. It invests instead in the belief that the non-photographer, similarly to Catren's scientist, produces a fictional-real image.⁷⁷

⁷⁷ Francois Laruelle, *Philosophies of Difference: A Critical Introduction to Non-philosophy*, London: Continuum International Publishing Group, 2010.

Fiction is wholly real but in its own mode, without having anything to envy perception; it is not an image of perception (deficient, degraded, or simply operatively produced by abstraction from the object's characteristics). It enjoys an autonomy (in relation to perception) but one that is relative (in relation to the non-decisional photography subject).⁷⁸

Laruelle's fiction is not an impoverished form of the real but is also a real in itself. It is the fictional-real that is always produced in a photograph, which captures the world for itself but is also an image in itself.

Laruelle advocates a scientific method for producing images, in contrast to an aesthetic approach because he states that the latter is hybridised with art so it can distil the nature of the image. In the scientific model Laruelle positions the subject taking the photograph in the very image that is produced: the photographer is continuous with the image taken. He calls this active procedure 'being-in-photo', as both the world and the photographer's identity are in the photograph.⁷⁹ Laruelle argues that being-in-photo is a presentation rather than a representation of the objects in the photograph or the person operating the camera. This occurs by semblance, as the photograph is a semblance of this continuum between subject and world and, so, does not represent the objects in its frame. Laruelle aims to reposition the subject by stating that non-photographers are not separate from the world that they capture because their consciousness does not distinguish them from the environment that they are in when in the image. In order to remain seamless with the world, Laruelle's non-photographer must be spontaneous or 'non-

⁷⁸ ____ *The Concept of Non-Photography: Bilingual Edition*, Falmouth: Urbanomic, 2011, p. 49.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 45.

decisional' and not clouded by a philosophy, which would predetermine the meaning of the image that they are taking. This results in a representation that is produced by an 'invisible' author who depicts the objects in the photograph for a subject. In contrast, Laruelle's being-in-photo not only captures the world but also the author in its image, as well as claiming that this image can transcend both of these subjects by its autonomy.

Laruelle's non-photographic procedure not only repositions the producer in this scenario but also the viewer. The viewer can no longer look into a photograph to define the meaning that has been captured and is ready to be transferred to them by a self-reflexive producer, as Laruelle states that the viewer must now look out through the photograph and the being-in-photo. Viewers can look out from within the photograph because Laruelle's image does not create a distance between world and subject, so it does not require a correlation to bridge the gap. In this sense, Laruelle appears to suggest that an artist should not care for the viewer, as considering the meaning of the work would cut off the continuum opened up by the spontaneous or blind to the world capturing of the being-in-photo. Decisively, Laruelle's relationship between photographer and world does not simulate a valve, which would invent and act as an access point for the author and viewer in order to open out onto a total universe. In this sense, it differentiates itself from Henri Bergson's intuition because being-in-photo does not open up on a totality but is a fractal operation.

In immanence, one no longer distinguishes between the One and the Multiple, there is no longer anything but $n=1$, and the Multiple-without-All. No manifold watched over by a horizon, in flight or in progress:

everywhere a true chaos of floating or inconsistent determinations.⁸⁰

Laruelle's fractality occurs because there is not a united whole behind appearances but rather the universe is comprised of inconsistent determinations. Images are also determinations because they have immanence and a reality in themselves beyond their subject matter and author. Laruelle's immanence is located in the image's own appearance and distinguishes itself from those theories that deploy a notion of 'vitality'.⁸¹ Vitality is a force that exists behind the material realm at a virtual subterranean level and connects, as well as activates all organic and inorganic objects. Laruelle's non-photographer does not require this virtual vitality because he or she is not trying to represent a totality. Images have immanence because of the camera person's vision-force, which creates a horizontal or flat image. It is a flat image because there is nothing behind it; a virtual backdrop does not animate Laruelle's photograph. Laruelle does not idealise the image for subjective purposes because it is fractal and exists in chaos so an image need not index or represent objects to a viewer.

Photographic appearing is itself the immanent that-which-appears. The givenness is the thing itself in-its-image, rather than the image of the thing.⁸²

Laruelle's image is distinct from the objects depicted in it because the photograph flattens out its referents to present its own immanence. Buendia's horizon and sky are wiped from

⁸⁰ Ibid, pp. 98–99.

⁸¹ The term vitality relates to Henri Bergson's and Gilles Deleuze's theories of a virtual duration that facilitates becoming. See book 'Glossarium' under the title 'xlviii Change in State: Differences in degree and kind', pp. 39–41, for a disambiguation of the Bergsonian term.

⁸² Laruelle, *The Concept of Non-Photography*, p.95.

the photographic process, as Laruelle's non-photography is a hyper-phenomenological process that only exists in its appearance.

The condition consists, as appropriate to irregularity-force, in reprising the concept of self-singularity and of conceiving it, as we have said, as a radical identity, as an immanence that is no longer specified by a form, for example by a supposedly given 'self', but which is self-immanence through and through.⁸³

Laruelle's non-photographic image is the appearance of world for itself in the last instance. This is because the world and the non-photographer are stated to be non-reflexive and do not represent themselves in their appearance. Laruelle has not defined for whom this photographic appearance occurs and we could assume that this blind 'self-immanence' does not call for an interpreter. Resultant images are non-causal because they are not attached with an intention. Indeed this could be the image's force, acting as a bludgeon that does not care for the other. A ramification for this process in relation to art is that Laruelle's photograph cannot be directly applied to its display context; this is in part because his photographic process has done away with difference in favour of the multiple without all. Laruelle's self-immanence does not represent itself, which implies that there was never any need to enter the Kantian subjective circle because there is no demarcation line between subject, world and image. A fictional-real image or being-in-photo is coextensive with the real as it appears, so there is no need for images to be staged.⁸⁴ Laruelle's theory is not concerned with how an image is received, precisely because non-photography

⁸³ Ibid, p. 140.

⁸⁴ See book 'Glossarium' under the title 'Lens – Synonymous with science and empirical religiosity', p. 5, for Amanda Beech's critique of this attempt to escape, or naturalise a scientific form of, mediation.

naturalises a scientific process that appears as the real. It relies on a non-photographer who is able to resist their conscious mediations in order to produce a pure image fragment. When applied to art this non-photography is presented with the issue of its reception, as images are staged when they appear to an audience. In its practical dimension the art object is mediated and appears to human consciousness, so in this framework Laruelle's scientific photograph risks being tied back to the subject when the image is presented to a viewer. This would then create the correlation that Laruelle has stated does not need to exist. Although, Laruelle's non-photography has posed an alternative procedure to Buendia's subject-centric daguerreotype, we are yet to understand how an artwork can remain unmediated (even if it can remain unmediated at the stage when it is produced by the artist) in its display context and whether the exhibition space (and indeed art as we know it) is required at all.

The next section looks at Graham Harman's work *The Quadruple Object* (2011) in order to respond to the final Catrenian question regarding the ramifications of immanence for art. Harman not only produces an alternative ontological axis for the image by his object-oriented theory but also extends Laruelle's fictional-real stance by stating that even concepts are objects.

THE QUADRUPLE IMAGE

Harman's theory of the quadruple object is an asymmetrical answer to Sellars' quest to unite the manifest and scientific images in the world.⁸⁵ It is asymmetrical because Harman does not attempt to contextualise how this would create an accurate picture of humans in the world but questions the

⁸⁵ See book 'Glossarium' and 'xxxiii Representation: Manifest image of man', pp. 28–9, for an account of Sellars' position.

very delineation between object and subject. Harman critiques those that assume a two-world theory, as performing a 'Taxonomic Fallacy': a fallacy that places objects in one neighbourhood and subjects in another. In contrast, Harman states that there are two faces to every object and in this sense he situates the horizon in objects themselves. Harman does perform Sellars' stereoscopic fusing of the two concepts (Scientific and Manifest) but he does not posit them in relation to the subject but in the object's own immanent reality. The two faces are the real object and its qualities; the former withdraws from the world and the latter is relational. An object's qualities enable different entities (animate and inanimate) to confront each other but the real object always withdraws from this relation.

Harman takes this further and states that the two realms are also not distinct in the object but intermingled. The quadruple object has four poles and each of them interact with each other by a variety of tensions. Harman's four poles are the 'Real Object', 'Sensual Object', 'Real Qualities' and 'Sensual Qualities'. The four tensions are: 'Essence' (the real object that withdraws from relation), 'Eidos' (the real qualities of the object), 'Space' (the distance between object and quality), and 'Time' (the sensual qualities of the object). He grounds this fourfold landscape of the object by an analysis of Leibniz, Husserl and Heidegger. An exploration of these theorists enabled Harman to decipher that the object is made up of atoms that are radically different to it, yet it can maintain its autonomy unless too much of its genetic make-up is radically altered. These atoms also have autonomy so the object must be made up of other objects. This means that the object must have internal relations, as well as external relations and the ability to forge new objects. A tree's qualities may appear radically different at intervals over time (hours and seasons) but there is something that prevails, which maintains its ability to be recognised as a tree. It is this revelation, that the object can maintain its autonomy and

immanence, which is of the most import for Harman's theory of the object.

For the purposes of this book, an object is anything that has a unified reality that is autonomous from its wider context and also from its pieces.⁸⁶

Harman highlights the importance of the object's internal reality in contradistinction to those that either over-mine the object or under-mine it. Harman asserts that objects are under-mined by those who require a virtual backdrop to animate them and they are over-mined by those that only register the reality of objects in relation to the human mind. In the accused scenarios the object is always seen as on a different plane to humans and can only be known by the mind or by another entity that can communicate its reality. Harman asserts that the ontological aspect of the real object is that it does not care for us:

The watermelon itself is completely indifferent to the angle or distance from which it is seen, or the precise degree of gloomy afternoon shadow in which it is shrouded. There are times when these sensual qualities are placed into orbit around the ghostly withdrawn melon (allure), but this occurs on a purely ad-hoc basis, and the melon could hardly care less even if it were a deeply emotional creature. Thus, it is a form of fusion between previously separate poles rather than a fission of already attached parts.⁸⁷

Due to his assertion that the real object does not care for other objects (whether human, animate or inanimate) and withdraws from relations, Harman has to state how things

⁸⁶ Graham Harman, *The Quadruple Object*, Washington and Winchester: Zero Books, 2011.

⁸⁷ *Ibid*, p. 106.

can interact and change. In order for the status quo to be interrupted, Harman states that an act of fission or fusion has to take place between the object's poles; due to the fact that some poles are separate and others are connected. For example, Harman states that the Real Object and its Sensual Qualities are radically disconnected and need to be brought together by allure or fusion. This is what Harman proposes to be the operation of art; to produce an attraction that magnetises the Sensual Qualities to orbit the Real Object. In this scenario, and indeed in all interactions between the objects poles, fission and fusion occur by what appears to be an outside entity. As a result, Harman could be accused of situating the human as an activating force but his theory does not privilege the subject in any relation and indeed highlights that most objects (animate and inanimate) confront each other in some way. In contrast to his predecessors, Harman positions the subject in the relation, as a fourfold object that will produce different relations in its self and other objects, and states that every strong relation creates a new object.

If I perceive a tree, this sensual object and I do not meet up inside my mind, and for the simple reason: my mind and its object are two equal partners in the intention, and the unifying term must contain both. The mind cannot serve as both part and whole. Instead, both the mind and its object are encompassed by something larger: namely, both exist inside the object formed through the relation between me and the real tree, which may be very different from the trees found in everyday life.⁸⁸

If every encounter between objects produces a new relation and this creates a new object, then there is a constant perpetuation of objects. Much like space, there is no container for these objects and no outside to these relations

⁸⁸ Ibid, p. 116.

and objects. In this scenario the object is all of the following; composed of other objects, autonomous and is always in excess of its parts, whether the object is a rock, subject, tree-perception, or the United Nations. In light of this the human subject is just another object, in an infinite regress of objects. A finite regress would refer to an underlying entity or element that grounds and animates all others (Bergson) and no regress at all would mean that everything exists in relation to the subject (Neo-Kantian). In contrast, Harman's infinite regress is composed of a depth without horizon and is continually constructed from an infinite number of objects, as they are always increasing by every internal and external encounter. The image is just another object and produces relations with other objects to create further objects. For Harman, the important operation of art is focused on the internal relation between the image's real object and its sensual qualities. The image does this by allure and a loose orbit of the sensual qualities around its real object. An artwork, therefore, acts as a type of truth-procedure, which slightly draws out the withdrawn immanence of the real object. Artists are pictured as locating and intensifying a real object's qualities, which suggests that artworks are produced for an encounter. It also implies that objects can differ from each other in how they present themselves but it does not state whether every object can do this or if this is particular to human intervention. It is unclear whether objects that are tuned by the artist are ready-mades or completely fabricated. If artworks are the latter then it is increasingly opaque as to where the real object, whose qualities are being drawn out, resides.

EPILOGUE

Harman's image has not resolved this inquiry, as his theory of allure does not focus on the external relations between image and viewer. Despite referring to art's production of allure, Harman does not stipulate how art would differentiate itself

from other objects or what its purpose might be. *Should art enlighten the viewer so that they can be made aware of the object's autonomy or does this external relation produce a new object (image-subject) every time that it is encountered?* In the former, the image's truth-procedure is correlationist because it is tied into a service for the subject, albeit to communicate an alternative reality. In the latter, the value of art is in jeopardy because if every strong relation produces a new object then we have to question the value of individual artworks. This highlights a problem for Harman's philosophy when it is applied to the context of art. On the one hand, it is paradoxical for Harman's philosophy to deploy artworks to perform his theory because when this takes place the object is reduced to an example. In this scenario, Harman's artwork would act like a conduit for philosophical meaning and would amount to the very act of representing that his philosophy or Laruelle's non-philosophy condemns.⁸⁹ The artwork or image is also impoverished, as it would be asked to represent an anti-representational philosophy rather than to embrace its own immanence as a fictional-real object. On the other hand, the artwork could be negated from the theory entirely because it is just another object in the infinite production of objects. Harman does not provide us with an account of the difference provided by an artwork's allure that would enable there to be objects with distinct values: a theory that would provide objects with the ability to differentiate themselves in their landscape or infinite regress, in order for them to be interpreted as art.

'The Plot' thickens and congeals around two diametrically opposed questions, which are presented to artistic practices that deploy scientific images:

⁸⁸ At the 'War Against the Sun' conference (2013), referenced earlier in this chapter, many artworks were meant to speak for Speculative Realist/Materialist philosophy-in-action. Visit the following website to view talks at this conference <<http://lamatiere.tumblr.com/waragainsththesun>>

1) How can an artist produce an immanent image, when aware that it is made up of, and produces, new objects; without representing this knowledge to viewers?

2) If an image is not produced for its viewing (because every image is coextensive with the real) then what happens to art if an image cannot differentiate itself from its landscape and, as a result, what are the ramifications for the significance of art?

