

A
WALL
PART 1

NEAN'S WRITINGS
on
NeanSite

WOLFGANG INK MARK ZIEGLER

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A WALL

A WALL, essay

This essay consists of art-historical and philosophical, as well as linguistic, literary and biographical strands that combine, and hopefully unite, to provide a cohesive account of the range of interests, themes and ideas with which the author, as artist and writer, approaches, understands and evaluates his homonymous Gesamtkunstwerk entitled: *A WALL*, installation in progress, which the electronic version: *A WALL VIDEO* will eventually complete.

Essay's place and date of completion: Oberwil, BL, CH, 15th June 2023

A WALL, installation in progress

Wolfgang Ink Mark Ziegler, *A WALL (A WALL 2023-2020-1970-1950-1890)*, installation of a group of small sculptures as a single artwork. All sculptures handstitched with Miao (Hmong) cloth, including one hybrid item combining tribal cloth with Victorian indigo dyed cloth buttons. The installation can be displayed on one or more than one wall, and correspondingly follows no prescriptive overall measurements on account of variable interspacing. By the same token, equal or unequal quantities of sculptures can be displayed on several walls. Materials: German aluminium rods 2020-2023, Golden Triangle or Chinese Miao (Hmong) partly embroidered hemp cloth from a man's jacket, circa 1950 or later; North-eastern Thai Miao (Hmong) wax-resist indigo hemp cloth from skirt panels, 1970s, English cloth buttons dyed in indigo blue, probably from a waistcoat, circa 1890.

Artwork's place and date of relative completion: Oberwil, BL, CH, June 2023.



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1.

Translations, we are told, betray the very messages they aim to convey in other idioms. To be sure, there is no denying that considerable losses are incurred, especially in the field of poetry, when the translator's task is so formidable that credits are deserved for mere attempts, however exasperating their concrete outcome. Once we appreciate that insights into another culture, which translations enable, carry with them the unavoidable danger of misinterpretation, we act upon that knowledge and are thankful mostly for some communication rather than none, and at least for some notional awareness rather than none. We also bear in mind that native speakers reading a book written in their mother tongue cannot, and perhaps should not, be spared the individual risk of misunderstanding its content.

Commentaries, introductions and summaries provide guiding information in order to preempt such foreseeable misconceptions; however, their guidance has to be limited or else it becomes overly prescriptive. Too many footnotes interfere with reading. While they appear needed to the translator, when their prolific number in some cases even exceeds the length of a translated text, technical reasons for their invasive, albeit marginal, presence may otherwise be less admissibly tolerated. If denying people access to books promoted reading instead of banning it, it would achieve reading without any misconception. Allowing reading therefore achieves an accidental result: reading (with) misconception. Is this result negative, as well as an unworthy goal? Since reading engages conception and interpretation and conception and interpretation beware of but cannot eradicate misconception and misinterpretation, the results yield fertile ground for thoughts, a desirable goal. Should we talk about reading a specific book, we might as well refer to a single source subjected to countless reception. One size cannot fit all. The same original or revised version printed for any reader unleashes a variety of modified content beyond anticipatory control. As well as interpretation, misinterpretation therefore rewards the experience of reading. Interpreting a text in the same language in which it has been written, in the form of a comment, summary, comparative evaluation or monographic analysis translates that text into another genre, format, style, register and grammar within the same language. The act of reading a text in the same language in which it has been written, self translates primary reading material into a secondary rendering. It converts one text into another in the same language. Whether the language read is translated or original may appear to have a stronger impact on the receptive action; nevertheless, it does not change its process: reading is translating. The long list of publicly recognised Bible translations into English, from Old, Middle and Modern English up to the New International Version and other updated offerings is a case in point. Any of these English versions is as debatable as a translation into a completely different language. Ask Janet, Nell and Marion, or ask Tom, Dick and Harry. Although I never got on that well with any of them, they might tell you.

My neighbour and I were born in the same place where local writers are revered. Their books mean a lot to her. As it so happens, she interprets them in a manner which is totally unacceptable to some of our neighbours, Janet, Nell and Marion, and if I am not

mistaken Tom, Dick and Harry. In a nearby village, local writers also write and publish stories which my next door neighbour enjoys a lot. She finds it strange that these foreign wordsmiths strike a chord with her, not only our own literary worthies. Is she disingenuous when she asks me why? I think so. I could tell her about Freud's linguistic research about *The Uncanny* (*Das Unheimlich*), an essay which he published in Budapest, not in Vienna. But this is not what she'd want to hear. Freud argued that words expressing disquieting ideas of strangeness were not connected to an unknown but to a familiar environment. Of course, we can be afraid of what we do not know and malign foreign cultures out of ignorance, nevertheless, what upsets or disturbs us most, what we brand weird, lurks at close range: home, not abroad. Forgive me the extended footnote, but the scholar's ultimate example is in one particular dialect the word for homely, securing, congenial (*heimlich*), that actually means its opposite (*unheimlich*). My neighbour would like us to elope from the dreaded place. There is no place like home means that no place feels so oppressive and gloomy as home. She read it in a book. I agree to dread and dream. I write it in my look. What I won't discuss with her, though, is that other places also supply company. Company is in such high demand. Translations from other dialects, or from one into the same, relate to realms of transience that relate places to people and people to places.

2.

If I could live seven separate lives at once, I would daily live seven days in each and every one of them, and would study Sanscrit, ancient Greek, Arabic, Hmongic and Chinese in addition to the languages I master and use in my single existence. Yet, even if that impossible situation were to happen, if you said "Hi Nean!" to (me/) us, assuming that (I/) we all seven happened to be at the same place at the same time, and (I/) we would concurrently answer "hi" to you in seven languages (or more likely, in the same boring one), translations would still be required from other languages into those of prime use by the seven speakers. For instance, having studied Russian at university at the rate of two hours a week for two years, and being a keen impersonator, I (/we) can say three to four sentences in that language and sound like a native. But not five or six. And the effort I (/we) require to decipher a poem by Александр Сергеевич Пушкин (Alexander Sergeyevich Pushkin) is not worth my (/our) undertaking, when text versions with one page in the original language facing a translation on the other page, provide badly wanted help so conveniently.

Commenting on a translation of the poet Hafez I carried with me (/us), a fellow Germanist asked me (/us): "are you reading a newspaper?" Since the lady came from Iran, what was there to be said? Pardon me (/us) for not knowing Persian, and yet breathing in your exquisite presence? Exaggerated acting can in awkward circumstances be more expedient than standard reactions affected by routine behaviour, which in a difference sense of the word also mean acting. In order to "act" upon a situation convincingly, that is to say in order to translate a thought or feeling into a gesture or mimic or turn or tone of phrase likely to be correctly interpreted by an audience, it may be simpler and faster to opt for a thespian posture. So, I ostensibly

glanced at the hardback held in my hand. In silence. Whereby she rejoined, that translations of Hafez sounded like newspaper articles. And I did not retort that no translation of Hafez provides no access to his poetry, which is a more meager offering than prosaic and distorted information, since it amounts to no offering at all. Not a vegan sausage. When branded, though for very good reasons, untranslatable, key texts incur a ban from cross-cultural dissemination. Goethe responded to questionable translations of Hafez by writing a significant collection of poems, the *West-Eastern Divan*, with the intent of building a bridge between cultures famous for their mutual distrust, not to say hostility. Before Edward Said and Daniel Barenboim decided to name an orchestra composed of Israeli and Palestinian instrumentalists after its title, the book had inspired important Romantic and Modern composers to set some of its poems to music. Footnote: Goethe's *West-östlicher Diwan* has been translated into Persian and is still published in the Islamic Republic of Iran.

Talking about newspapers, I once read in *The Times* that a company directed by Katharina Thalbach had come to London to perform *The Tragedy of Macbeth*, for two nights only, at the Mermaid theatre. When I told my (English) English teaching colleagues what fun that performance had been, they were furious and rebuked me for not having invited them along. At least, I should have told them about the event. In truth? We are so used to entrenched views on dilemmas such as original language versus adaptation or translation, or “historical” versus “updated” rendering, or “traditional” versus “transposed” theatrical production, that a display of indifference to which language a play or an opera ought to be performed into, comes to a pleasant surprise. Especially, as my (English) English teaching colleagues did not know any German. How could this major restriction not have been a problem? Yet, they argued that they knew the Shakespearean text almost off by heart, having taught it over and over again. Their ability to focus on the play's staging and acting would by no means have been hindered by its being spoken in a language they did not understand but, however baffling I found the idea, would have been increased when the actors spoke German, forcing them to rely on the non-spoken elements of the production to make sense of the text. There you are. I have to admit that the raucous punk rendition of the weird sisters (the three witches) sold that production to me from the start. Add the unfamiliar venue at the heart of a nation's capital to the exotic choice of language for a nation's national playwright, and watching a classic play for the nth time gained an exciting sense of discovery. After all, that is to say according to the most prominent 18th century German authors who hoisted hitherto unnoticed German literature to world literature level, Shakespeare is a German author. Shakespeare was (and I reckon still is) a German author, in the sense that no other single writer (irrespective of nationality and language) had a comparably overwhelming influence on the writers of the German Enlightenment. When we read Heinrich Leopold Wagner, Friederich Maximilian Klingler, Lenz, Goethe, or Schiller, we relish Shakespearean translations that had crossed borders back and forth, until they ultimately went overboard and catalysed innovation in individual writing. Translations play a key role to whomsoever it is a matter of concern, that originality and uniqueness should be engaged within a homeland's cultural borders.

Another timely newspaper announcement about a classic performance led me to an accustomed and much-loved venue: Spitalfields, where an amateur performance of *Faust* was staged at a very small place I had never heard of: the eighteenth century Spitalfields' synagogue. No, not a translation of any one *Faust* from the Goethean trilogy, but Christopher Marlowe's eponymous earlier version of the tragic play. Thanks to the newspaper, enough people made it to the makeshift miniature auditorium, so that there were more spectators than actors: four against three. One of the three was a student of mine. Even though they probably suspected that I had no idea about Emma's theatrical commitment, she and the director profusely thanked me for my "support". All three of them did well. And I too am doing well in as much as I probably appear to be digressing, but digress not. Yes, the first word and the topic of this essay's introduction are: translations. Nevertheless, as the introduction is coming to an end, its end ushers the whole essay's topic: unsuspected connections and endless interconnectivities. Needless to say, I hope, that interconnectivity in this text is not restricted to and does not primarily refer to cyberspace.

UNSUSPECTED CONNECTIONS AND ENDLESS INTERCONNECTIVITIES. What has this essay's topic to do with the unfinished installation called *A WALL*? Why is it necessary that this particular topic be broached to examine an artwork that could be analysed in relation to many other topics, in that it does not depend on one or another specific topic to be appreciated by viewers and critically contemplated by the artist? But then, which artwork really does? On one hand, any interpretation is welcome since it is the artwork's mission to assist viewers in forming and developing their own thoughts with no obligation towards the artist's intended message, should one, rather than none or several have been expressed. Any interpretation, subsequent to the artist's statement, is also welcome from the artist's side since it is the artwork's mission to assist not only the public but also the artist, in continuing to form and develop his own thoughts with no obligation towards an intended message, should there have been one, rather than none or several. Connections between artist and artwork no more stop once the artwork has been completed than they first began while it was conceived or made, even though some began at this or another point in time. On the other hand, trying to dispel unfounded assumptions and providing factual and notional information about the making of the artwork can facilitate independent appreciation. If such information were to be qualified as didactic, it would be didactic with the aim of preempting foreseeable misapprehension from the artist's perspective, allowing the viewers to acknowledge that the artist has provided a perspective with which they are invited to agree or disagree as they please. Simple questions and straightforward answers, as well as more involved answers, should assist therewith.

Fair enough, but I seem to have read a similar warning somewhere else. Was it about books, or translations? Let us proceed with asking simple questions or SIPQs, and answering them with straightforward answers or STARS, before developing more involved ones, namely MIARs.

SIPQs

SIPQ1

In order to make *A WALL*, did you work with fabric reclaimed from vintage Miao costumes because you are Miao, or have Miao ancestors or connections?

SIPQ2

Do you identify with Miaos because you admire them for their way of life, which includes the production of textiles, among other handmade artefacts?

SIPQ3

To what extent does the installation *A WALL* relate to a concept of identity?

SIPQ4

To what extent do the concepts of identity, experience and logic apply to the installation entitled *A WALL*?

STARs & MIARs

STAR1

I am not Miao and have no Miao ancestors or connections of which I am aware.

MIAR1

Being a West-European neither makes me automatically relatable or related to all or some other Europeans or North or South Americans of European extraction, nor does it make me unrelatable and instinctively segregates me from all or some non-Europeans. For instance, I sometimes have experienced a reasonably enjoyable verbal exchange with nationals from the United States of America or Canada irrespective of their country's limited appeal to me; whereas, I have almost always nurtured a gratifying contact with Asians in general, because I am attracted to their cultural heritage and not hindered by differences in ethnicity. As a result, I tend to perceive and welcome irreducible differences between Europe and North America in spite of historical ethnic connections; whereas, on the grounds of the ample commonalities between Europe and Asia which I encounter, I feel as Eurasian as European. Instead of justifying this joyfully irrational attitude, I find it more correct to state my bias, which I regard as governable. A stated bias calls for moderation, not hostility. So, have a nice day, but try not to be overfriendly.

STAR2

I identify with and admire any individual or group whose way of life includes the production of handmade artefacts to a variable extent, for instance Miaos (also called Hmongs). However, I do not identify with Miaos because I solely or preponderantly admire them for their way of life and their artefact as opposed to other cultures, but as well as most of the cultures I am familiar with.

MIAR2

Exclusively identifying with and admiring an individual or group for their way of life and/or the production of handmade artefacts is likely to restrict or prevent from making and benefiting from equally fruitful additional contacts, elsewhere in space and time. Furthermore, since the first patterns of globalisation were set in Antiquity and places of production and exchange have long been subjugated to wide-ranging influences, exclusive identifications are bound to be doubtful when a cultural and/or ethnic identity is allocated to handmade artefacts on highlighted grounds of provenance.

Of course, I admire Miao indigo dyed hemp, but no less than Italian, French and German bizarre silks, with which I also have made sculpture. The production of silks described as *bizarre* stretches over a long period that flourished in the 17th and 18th centuries across Europe. Nevertheless, however typically European these textiles look, they and in due course European porcelain absorbed the influence of China in their methods of execution and in their iconography. Since silk and porcelain wares had to be imported and copied before they became independently designed and manufactured in Europe, a strong influence could not have been avoided. And even by then, intercultural trends did not stop, they multiplied. Chinese export porcelain copied European models, not to mention Japanese copies of Chinese, and Chinese copies of Japanese items. Let us select another example which has nothing to do with the Middle Kingdom. Unlike Matisse, Picasso never was influenced by Asian art; yet, his European invention of cubism could not have happened without an assimilation of African primitive sculpture into typically “European” modernism.

If we revert to the initial question about the Miaos, the same phenomenon applies to them; what once embodied an isolated culture has become compromised by external influences. In the 19th century, the Miaos left China to settle on the hills of nearby countries known as the Golden Triangle, and in the 20th, they have become a worldwide diaspora. Miaos who moved to America obviously adapted to a strikingly different socio-economic environment; however, those still living on densely wooded hills are also being reached by globalisation. Since the 1970s, they have ceased to produce entirely handmade textiles. Synthetically dyed thread, yarn and even fabric available at nearby markets have rendered tribal autarchy redundant.

The mass-produced goods imported from China or manufactured in the inland are varied and inexpensive. Items such as neatly patterned and evenly woven cloth or brightly coloured ribbons with intricate design visually appeal to the younger generations living a hybrid lifestyle. As for valid reasons and the motivation required to uphold labour intensive spinning, weaving and dyeing techniques, a changing world makes them hard to find.

That a mix of old and new technologies could revive Miao textiles and make them once again collectively interesting is a conceivable eventuality, even though the current compromise between traditional patterns, hand-stitching and manufactured material can neither be called innovative nor in keeping with ancestral customs.

STAR3

Having stated that my interest in historical and vintage textiles does not gravitate around a limited selection of cultures and periods, which would establish an individual taste and the cultivation of that taste, makes it clear that any textile from any period and culture potentially applies to my upcycling methods. This potential signifies that I may partially or wholly relate to some or many aspects of a textile, such as technique, texture, colour, composition, symbolism, function, designated usage, and/or cultural and social background, either at the level of art historical appreciation or as reclaimable material. I believe, this aesthetic open-mindedness compares with personal and natural encounters. A perfect stranger may start a worthwhile conversation, I am not obliged to hold a conversation with every person I meet accidentally, though inclined to welcome the eventuality that any conversation can be significant and rewarding. There are some obligations. Politeness prompts me to acknowledge a communication I do not wish to deepen; by the same token, discontinuing it gradually is preferable to insisting on an abrupt end. I shall still look at a textile that does not immediately appeal, and I shall at least briefly respond to someone who wants to talk to me, even when that intention is not mutual. I have nothing to lose by being polite to a person or the equivalent attitude towards an object: attentive, and may be rewarded for my openness. The obverse obligation regards common sense and practicality, I cannot effectively study, collect and re-use every textile I come across, and a determination to cultivate every single contact I happen to have made could not yield an overall beneficial output. So far, the analogy between encountering an unknown man-made object and a stranger is coherent, and extends to an analogy between natural and human encounters. Plant fibres and dyes take us to a natural world in harmony with human presence, through a walk in an unspoilt landscape we are exposed to plants whose colours and shapes appeal to so many. How could one person assume that the encountered plants and landscape existed for only one individual, animal or human? What would I gain if the textile, the landscape and the stranger were only meant for me? What would I lose? More than one cow grazes on a field and more than one rambler follows a path, even when all cows are not gathered on a field and even when when single rambles separately walk at different times on the same path. Who could form the disturbed, illogical, counter-intuitive thought, that a landscape, an animal or human individual should suddenly exist for one person? Therefore, is not the thought that a landscape, an animal or artwork should suddenly be perceived by only one person deceptively logical, even when at times no one else is present? Even when only one person is, or appears to be perceiving what no one else could perceive at the same time and at the same place, the uniqueness of any one's momentary perception depends on accumulated thoughts and influences that contextualise the new encounter and refine a degree of novelty and distinctiveness which it could not otherwise possess. In a natural or artistic setting, the aesthetic experience brings about the multiplicity of aspects that facet and enable feelings of individuality and, hopefully, the realisation that being an individual is a collective phenomenon: summative in its inclusion of influences and exclusive in its rejections. Whatever glamorous adverts claim, whatever sectarian politicians vociferate, there is nothing special about being an individual. Billions are doing it. The very last thing that makes any of these billions

people unique is individuality. Being is an illusion, being partly connected and disconnected the reality. Being one is a sensation fostered by art, religion or ethics; yet, art, religion and ethics also cultivate the thought, mostly without clarity, that one is many and that many could be one. The reality is being partly connected and disconnected: atoms are divisible. I am not unique and have no interest in being, believing or appearing to be unique. I wish you good luck, but I do not wish to be unique.

MIAR3

An encounter may be so rewarding, so inspirational, so pleasurable, so fulfilling, that it partakes in immersive impression: being one with nature or people, or one with an artefact that comes from the former and was made by the latter. Nevertheless, the encounter will come to a pause raising the questions about its end. Should it be repeated or replaced? Could it be discontinued or postponed? And was not its merit due to its evanescence and diffusiveness?

STAR4

The concepts of identity, experience and logic blur when defined in contradistinction to one another. Identity is what is, but subdivides in what is believed to be, and what could be but is not though it could come into being, and what could not be and cannot become. Experience modifies, changes or confirms one's perception of reality. No identity can exist without experience of identity and other experiences; therefore, no identity can exist without changes, be they modifications or confirmations, or major upheavals. Experience emphasises change, and change belongs to identity; identity emphasises being, but being cannot exist without change. X, Y, and Z had a different identity when they were 3 days, 3 months, 6, 18, and 30 years old. X, Y, and Z may apportion more reality to their latest identity than to their former identities. Yet, their recent identity could not exist without the former versions onto which the later were built or dumped. Observably, what X, Y, and Z thought when they were 3 days, was bound to be contradicted by what they became at 3 months, and 6, 18, and 30 years old. Identity and experience complement one another thanks to contradictions that are solved or ignored. Aspects of identity and experience are affected by contradictions, and identity and experience cannot exist without contradiction. Logic aims to solve contradictions, but needs contradictions to be of use and applied purposefully. Identity is contradictory, and so is experience. The concepts of identity, experience and logic apply to the installation *A WALL*, in that viewers can use them in relation to the artist who is not Hmong and to the original clothing purpose of the Hmong textiles, as well as their ability to be reconditioned into a contemporary artwork.

MIAR4

Meister Eckhart defined a truly *poor man* as someone who wanted and demanded nothing and thus allowed "God" to guide him according to "His higher Will". I do not believe in ontological and tautological principles of identity, therefore I do not believe that this sentence means what it means and therefore I am neither scared nor peeved by its symbolism. By the way, fear not, bibliophile footnote will be added re the

Hochheimer mystic, but not now. Right now, I am wanting nothing other than being undisturbed while making *A WALL* and my demand is granted by my neighbours. Praise upon them! Furthermore, the Hmong cloths' strength, colour and texture are guiding me. Pile praise upon them! The weavings lock natural knowledge in crossing strands gently and moderately plied by tribal craft. Most of what Westerners normally hold, see, hear or taste has also been modified, but so modified that even when a natural source is allocated to a product, it is a label, not the consumer, that identifies its trace in the traded object. With the Hmong cloth, I can access matter sensorily without having to rely on a tag or a sticker. Something to be thankful for. If I imposed my will on the cloth, somehow, I would only spoil it with urban ignorance. Am I so vain that I would wish to know better than nature? Nature possesses no will and no consciousness, and this makes her the absolute truth, greater than any legitimising higher consciousness. Am I so obstinate that I would wish to gain a truth revealed beyond my reach? Am I so greedy that I do not relish an unexpected share of truth as the cloth radiates natural colour and settles into further form through my blessed hands? Am I so foolish that I should strive for more fulfilment than I have been granted, when there is no need to? Happiness finds those who do not search for it.

3.

English translations of the ancient Greek concept of *eudaemonia*, such as "happiness" or "welfare" are confusing, in that these notions tend to be associated with the desire to live well, which when interpreted as enjoyment of life may in the twenty-first century connote, but sadly by no means denotes: thinking well. Yet, thinking well in order to live well predetermined in early Greek philosophy all forms of eudaemonism. Without ordered thoughts no ordered life, only a rambling search for gratification resulting in chaotic self-indulgence. And since thinking well, that is to say the enjoyment of holding and/or taking part in a coherent dialectical discourse, is, to put it mildly, a tall order for most people, a doubt has to be expressed, even though it may be expressed with a measure of optimism, whether humankind has the potential to develop thinking excellence, not among gifted and motivated individuals but, at a collective level.

This generous doubt undermines eudaemonism's theoretical foundation and protracted debate from Hesiod to Hegel, and beyond. Without otherwise further entering the millennia-old dispute, we plausibly conclude that human happiness could only be achieved if in principle everyone, that is to say in practice almost everyone, namely the absolute majority, cooperatively united in a rational achievement. Since a minority of groups and individuals, the catchphrase *happy few* springs to mind, are both willing and capable of making such an effort, the required joint attempt itself, let alone its intended attainment, is unlikely to take place. Paraphrase: A strict understanding of the ancient Greek concept of *eudaemonia* in the post-modern period has to take stock of humankind's historical failure to apply the concept universally; whereby, this realisation leads to a revised a priori and a posteriori eudaemonist proposition. Humankind has so far not achieved a state of eudaemonism. Those resigned to a disappointing outcome must have reached the realistic hypothesis, that

if such a long-expected achievement has failed to happen between the sixth century BCE and the twenty-first century CE, it is not impossible, however, not likely that it will ever happen in the future. Categorising the complete impossibility of a universal eudaemonian implementation does not provide an attractive substitute to the relativist low likelihood option, in as much as the search for happiness for most, like the search for truth for some, will always be conducted, irrespective of any final conclusion on the existence or nonexistence of happiness and/or truth. What other quests could outweigh these searches? Not incomplete or partial pursuits. Fractional implementations either substantially depart from or contradict the original principle, that insists on a balance between communal and individual interests. The principle is not insular. To apply John Donne's seventeenth meditation, *No man is an Iland, intire of itselfe*, to the collective condition at stake, no true eudaemonism insulates. If a single island reached a blissful eudaemonian state, knowing that another did not, would suffice to spoil the blessed islanders' philosophical serenity. Translation: Eudaemonia mañana? ¡Nunca jamás! Further translation: Compañeras isleñas, compañeros isleños, tenemos que comprometernos. Further paraphrase: Never degrade the necessity to reach a compromise to a form of pragmatism, when you can elevate it to an exciting theory. A crew of high-spirited islanders embarks on a relativist voyage to the Archipelago of Despond and the Choleric Peninsula of Insatiability.

No such journey for Heraclitus of Ephesus, a philosopher who did not care for compromise and abruptly and arrogantly dismissed the prospect of universal happiness.

Joining the Aristotelian consensus that eudaemonia is humankind's, or at least anyone's, highest good opens up endless discussions, not to say quarrels. Consensual optimists forever argue how the universal proposition should be interpreted and applied, and in so doing witness their treasured agreement crumble, as soon as concrete applications are being mooted to bring it out of snug fitted theoretical moulds into the sphere of concrete living. Looking at eudaemonia from that angle makes one issue salient, which Leibniz and Hegel have distinctively interpreted: idealised wishes somehow turn compatible with compromise. For Leibniz, divine providence ensures that we live in the best possible world, even though we, humans, are in no position to comprehend the inevitability of negative facts that we experience as hapless and unjust. Yet, the positive side of acceptance is our freedom to act upon events rationally. Thanks to a rationalist or a pious belief (the difference between the two being grossly overrated), a readiness to tolerate negativities can be cultivated and, as much as it could collapse into resignation, this tolerance can endorse resilience and resourcefulness, and thus concede a benign purpose within divine (or otherwise qualified) providence. For instance, baffling cases of infirmity, or protracted exploitation and abuse, or established lack of opportunities can be more easily endured, allowing for constructive perspectives to defeat depression and passive defeatism. The term compromise, used to describe some of the turns taken by the hypercomplex dialectical development envisaged by Hegel, may seem inapposite in the face of the Spirit's (*der Geist*) lofty aims. How could compromising be compatible with idealism? Nevertheless,

however sublime the Spirit's journey towards its final completion, the quasi-endless transformations it undergoes have to include compromise in order to achieve full comprehensiveness. Footnote disguised as coda: We also briefly referred to Leibniz and Hegel in the essay entitled *Hang. Hang* (the artwork) being part of *A Wall* (the artwork), and we might refer to them as well as to Plato and Aristotle and Co, again about the same topic (eudaemonia) in forthcoming essays, should such reference be warranted by a divergent or complementary line of argumentation in relation to the same or other artworks. Our current argument concerns interconnectivity, so no harm in mentioning these philosophies, without delving into them, against that specific context.

Wolfgang Ink Mark Ziegler, *Hi, Neanderthals 1*, simplistic three-dimensional drawing, colour pencils on cutout paper on metallic display stand, Horrem, Nordrhein-Westfalen, DE, September 2014, photo Ziegler

Hi, Neanderthals 2, 2023 essay version of the manipulated 2014 photo



4.

Interesting arithmetic, if I had seven hundred lives, I could have seven hundred wives without once becoming a bigamist. Or I could spend sufficient time on original texts to dare compare Confucian and Daoist philosophers to the Pre-Socratics without resorting to any translation. But I don't, so I won't. Therefore, I shall compromise and resort to more editions. Motion at the heart of the sent arrow, measure, gather and take all the points that make the mass of my body sway in between your targeted bull's

eyes. Let the eyes stare at the points having left one shore and not yet reached the other. Let the points congregate in flight for all eternity before your dispatched message draws them together and arrives. Cuál es tu nombre? Me llamo Hera Clita. Eres bonita, Hera Clita. ¡Déjame en paz! I shall paraphrase the following short Spanish interchange (or was it Chinese? Es kam mir eher Spanisch vor), in order to focus on a core argumentation by disengaging myself from a set of references to obligatory philosophical texts, and thereby a discussion involving them. However tempting a new incursion into the well mapped Plato to Leibniz and Aristoteles to Hegel territories are, I shall not let academic examination derail my focus on the broached theme: interconnectivity. Moreover, I have harnessed a sound reason to read other philosophers: interconnectivity spreads off-topic. Would they be non-Western, by any chance? I cannot see the shore I aim to reach and approach it unseen from its dwellers. Call me Hi. Call me Nean. Call me Der Thal, call me Whom You Like or Don't Like, and check where I am discernible.



Translations of the famous dialogue about *Happy Fish* in the Daoist classic *Zhuangzi* (or *The Book of Zhuangzi*), compiled in the third century BCE, are laced with commentaries about Chinese characters and the puns that weave the text's subtle ambiguities. I shall quote the complete original text at least thrice, because it looks lovely. I shall refer to two interpretations that do not tally with my approach though they review non-anthropocentric perception, and I shall offer a narrative version of the dialogue between Zhuangzi and Huizi, as I understand its gravitas. Since that narrative conveys my grasp of the dialogue gained from the various translations I have read and, as is my wont, mixes analytical, biographical with originative strands, no claim is made that a rigorous scholarly interpretation of Master Zhuang's riddle is being mooted to the honourable, patient reader.

¡La narrativa! Two philosophers stroll on a bridge. They have to be friends to take a walk together and discuss whatever topic crosses their mind. There is no sense of urgency or tension in their conversation, which is a good sign. Until one of them prefers to misunderstand the other. That choice is puzzling.

Perhaps Hui wanted to tease Zhuang, or show him he could rival his sense of humour. Zhuang had marvelled at the fish swimming below the bridge and was invigorated by a sense of freedom which he wanted to share with his friend, as they were strolling side by side. It was essentially that leisurely feeling, as opposed to an exact logical proposition needing to be cross-examined and further calibred, that Zhuang expressed by exclaiming, he believed the fish were happy. Hui understood Zhuang's emotion and intended message perfectly well, not only because Zhuang's thought was clear enough, but mainly because he knew Zhuang, and knowing Zhuang, that thought could not have surprised him. Which is what Zhuang remarked at the end of the conversation, when Hui took his point. Had he not done so, he would have broken their friendship. Hui had always known what Zhuang meant. To Hui, the dialogue had become a sudden means of exploring the merit of Zhuang's statement to justify a personal end: flexing his own rhetorical muscles to score debating points. Until he had been reminded of the dialogue's purpose, namely, to exchange views; indeed, even to communicate impressions, Hui (more of a politician than a philosopher) had gauchely pounced on the chance to outwit Master Zhuang. Nevertheless, Zhuang did not permit that the dialogue should deteriorate into a rivalry between two competing thinkers, where one was right and the other lost the plot. Zhuang had not invited his friend to boast analytical preeminence; he had met him to go for a walk and discuss ideas at a gentle pace. What had begun as an affable conversation ended courteously, as Hui was encouraged to acknowledge Zhuang's debatable and debated statement in a critical, no less than in a sympathetic manner. This discursive procedure indicates that Zhuang did not dissociate reason from affect. A friendly tone of conversation and a friendship cultivated through conversation were to him as important as the topics discussed, and the opinions formed and/or challenged, in that conversation. This inconspicuous dismissal of a ratio/affect dichotomy infers that logic is human baked, not metaphysically grounded and emanated. Zhang does not directly address the idea that human knowledge is limited, and that metaphysical systems operate in denial of that truth through the ploy of universals. Nonetheless, his prompt hinting that affect and ratio are in many ways closely associated has a range of implications. Metaphysical systems deny that human cognitive limitations set up power structures that establish universals as a necessary means to justify themselves. Rational constructs, though issued out of human cognitive remits, are admitted as limitations, yet defended as part and parcel of unlimited systems whose abstract end resists the corrupting impact of affects. Be it religion, mathematics, absolute governance or sciences, any system advocating a transcendence of human cognitive limits has been devised by humans precisely because they have such limits, which they constantly strive to exonerate and validate. Transcendence is implemented as one species' generic ability and privilege, whereby concerted attempts at defining the universal character of being, as well as its companion bonus eudaemonia, mechanically converge on one type of being: zoon

politikon, not minnows. Master Zhuang's seemingly candid remark about happy fish was deep and cold like water.

Although Hui noticed, as anyone would, that Zhuang was talking about happiness in relation to animals instead of reserving his discourse to matters concerning humans, he missed the opportunity to challenge him on this unusual discursive excursion. Hui neither thought nor said (or Chinese characters to that affect): Most philosophers do not give a monkey about donkeys, trouts, wasps and koalas. Master, why should you care about minnows? And he neither thought nor said (or Chinese characters without special effects): Dear Master Zhuang, why do you care about minnows, but won't ask me, your friend, whether I am happy or not? Do I really matter to you less than minnows? Hui thought and said, as anyone* can and does, that a human being is not a fish. Wow! Granted, the fact that both humans and fish belong to the animal kingdom in general and to the animal kingdom's phylum chordata in particular, was not widely discussed during the Warring States. Yet some, like Master Zhuang, may have intuited a biological relationship. Retrospectively considered, the scientific explanation means that Zhang to some extent was fish, and to that genetic extent happily connected to fish. And it also means, that Hui to some extent was no less fish than Zhuang, even though he faintly acknowledged another living species and loudly pointed at the obvious.

Bibliographical note

* Regarded as a key dialogic figure, one whom Master Zhuang missed after he passed away, Huizi (Prime Minister Hui Shi) has been described as a clumsy dialectician, as well as a "sympathetic sophist". I would argue that his response to Zhuangzi, in the *Happy Fish* dialogue, is more sophistical than sympathetic. Cf. Livia Kohn, *Zhuangzi: Text And Context*, St. Petersburg, Florida, 2014, p.28.

Reflecting on eudaemonia beyond anthropocentric constraints, that is to say including biological and anthropological research in the field of eudaemonic discussion, permits to update the eudaemonic dilemma. When the highest good can be shared among all species instead of being reserved to Sapien domination, happiness can no longer be reduced to a social and individual phenomenon. Master Zhuang gave us a clue. Instead of asking yourself or your friend, who is happy or happier, observe the life forms that do not struggle for, but exude happiness in their natural habitat. Think again and act accordingly, and don't forget to tell your friends about the hip tip. Good luck and goodbye.

By all means, you may also advise friends and family to read sedate academic reviews of the *Zhuangzi*, so that they decide for themselves which perspectives engage with the text's philosophical problems and which bury them deep under a flurry of footnotes. For instance, Lea Cantor, *Zhuangzi on 'happy fish' and the limits of human knowledge*, British Journal for the History of Philosophy, Volume 28, 2020 - Issue 2. While describing a non-anthropocentrist understanding of the world as intractable and arguing that the *Zhuangzi* warns towards that restriction, Cantor rhetorically endorses

the faint possibility of some inter-species perception within human ways of knowing. Even more cautious, not to say covertly dismissive of that possibility, Paul J. D'Ambrosio relegates the alternative animal or human priority to a preponderantly stylistic approach. Whether humans or animals are mentioned in the *Zhuangzi* has, in his view, less specific and inter-specific relevance when the Chinese characters used in the text are interpreted as allegorical devices. That is to say, a deliberately ambiguous way of formulating philosophical problems consistent with the characteristics of the *Zhuangzi*'s style of writing as a whole applies to both human and non-human conceits. It certainly does, but not to the extent where that argumentative technique eradicates or supersedes all other issues. Paul J. D'Ambrosio, *Non-humans in the Zhuangzi: Animalism and anti-anthropocentrism*, Asian Philosophy, An International Journal of the Philosophical Traditions of the East, Volume 32, 2022 - Issue 1. Conclusion: Lea Cantor replaces a vindication of necessary anthropocentrism with a relativised analysis of ways of knowing which in essence remains anthropocentric and therefore obliquely vindicates anthropocentrism, and Paul J. D'Ambrosio drowns the whole issue under technical concerns, so that it appears unworthy of a proper thematic focus. Further conclusion: Even if both scholars came to the full realisation that fish move with a grace and beauty that human bipedal gait cannot emulate, and grasped that the sensation of infinite ease that we conceptualise and/or sense about their motion signifies a state of harmony and unity with life that we have long lost, they, being clever at scoring pedantic points, would still outweigh that loss with the compensatory acquisition of a cerebral cortex. This response answers Hui's epistemological question. When we know or assume that we know or cannot know that fish are happy by using consciousness, we rank our discursive ability to understand and discuss this idea high above the phenomenon to which it refers. This position vindicates the cognitive primacy of verbal reasoning in a linear positivist understanding of evolution, as if an intuited perception of natural happiness were not an experience challenging argumentative complacency, but a lower intellectual achievement awaiting pending civilising upgrades. Ultimate conclusion: Even though conscious thinking depends on major sources of information including examined experience, and could not be formed should this one source of information be excluded, discursive traditions insist on placing consciousness above experience, as if processing experience into consciousness and then further into conscience were the purpose for which lived experience existed. Practices that discard the prominence of consciousness to reap the benefits of a whole body, such as music and dance or physical exercise and training, or meditation, or refined sexual acts, or hallucinogenic intemperance, or verbal or visual creativity, may allow some individuals or small groups to feel more connected to the natural world and to sense a power beyond human supremacy. Yet, that advantage has to be balanced against potential social isolation and, in critical cases, a withdrawal from political responsibility. An effective critique of conscience culture cannot afford to turn its back on consciousness in a bid to escape its authority. Instead, it should seek to complement ways of knowing and living, by drawing attention to the dangers brought by inconsistent apologies of conscience and an overstressed attention paid to convincing rather than to sound argumentation. Re-examining the ancient cultural divide between East and West against the backdrop of

globalisation and climate change brings back an unresolved parting of the ways. In the Aristotelian direction: eudaemonia, in the Daoist primitivist tradition: a higher regard for natural harmony than for human endeavour and ordinary, very ordinary and pseudo-extraordinary happiness.

East-German bibliophile notes

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5.

The most important matter in the dialogue about happy fish has been conceded, even by scholars with lukewarm concern for the topic, as *species related*. Zhuang is struck by the fish' carefree motion, which as a worried human he could only admire and envy. The period in which he lived was called Warring States for good reasons: life was precarious and violence widespread. Where else but in nature could artists, literati and philosophers have discovered profound solace? Or should we not even ask, where else but in nature could have artists, literati and philosophers implicitly criticised an otherwise unassailable imperial administration? By praising natural peacefulness and harmony, did they not infer that nature's perfect cohesion eludes all possibly functional social systems? In that sense, landscape, Chinese painting's most significant genre, takes an overwhelmingly radical dimension. And so does Zhuang's cleverly naïve remark. Zhuang did not need to be told that he was no fish, or that fish do not wage wars, do not loot, do not massacre and do not tell lies. But we in the twenty-first century, who face the challenge of solving the climate crisis created by civilisation, need to be reminded, not only that fish die in lakes and rivers where the water level has dropped and water temperature has increased, as if we didn't know these facts, but also that we come from fish, from whom we have inherited our two cerebral lobes and spine. To those who prefer to rely on scientific evidence and doubt the trustworthiness of intuited cognition, we suggest that both methods need not cancel each other out. Making a successful connection may happen precisely because the chosen method did not or only partly succeeded. Hui was wrong to belittle Zhuang's cross-species identification to fish, since Zhuang's human existence (and his own) happened as a result of fish evolving into amphibians, amphibians into reptilians and then mammals, and furred monkeys into tied and suited apes. Evolutionary speaking, Zhuang could only have been human because his genetic inheritance, built from piscean and later anatomies, had carried and transmuted those early life characteristics to the species into which he happened to have been born. Zhuang was therefore human and (partly) fish, and being (partly) fish, he could (partly) understand and (partly) sympathise with fish. And Hui

was therefore human and (partly) fish, though being (partly) fish, he would not (partly) understand and (partly) sympathise with fish, and though being a fellow human, he would prefer to quarrel with Zhuang fully, rather than (partly) understand and (partly) sympathise with him, until he was cautioned to respond otherwise. Another way of describing this theme central to the famous dialogue about *Happy Fish* in the Daoist classic *Zhuangzi*, and central to the twenty-first century's struggle to reconcile itself to nature, is to call it instinctive interconnectivity. Was Zhuang so deep in his thoughts and so sophisticated in his sentiments that he intuited a fish' life to be as worthy of respect as a human life, though in many ways freer and happier and nobler and more beautiful? Not even a Daoist could have whispered that thought to contemporaries, and when twenty-first century eco-activists whisper similar mindsets, they are dismissed and scoffed at in an offhanded manner by marketing virtuosi connived by the hideously gullible masses who lick and kiss their earth trampling two-tone sneakers.

6.

Meister Eckhart said (or words or Chinese characters translatable in a nutshell to that simplified upshot), if I need God, then God needs me. Wolfgang (Ink Mark Ziegler) says, if Zhuang was human, he also was fish, therefore if I too am human in that I also am fish, I am also Zhuang. Without Meister Eckhart's need for God, no God. Without God no Meister Eckhart and without Meister Eckhart no God as long as Meister Eckhart is a subject interrelating to another subject, named God, who interrelates with him. Or as the Tulz beats in a 1967 song with plush instrumentation go: *I am he as you are he as you are me/ And we are all together*. Fine, but how serious were the Tulz about being *The Walrus* in a *Lucy in the Sky* (without *Diamonds*) aided and abetted tune of togetherness with repeated crying? Were they really *The Walrus*? Or were they, more likely, playing at "being" *The Walrus* and *the egg man* and *goo goo g'joob*, *goo goo goo g'joob* while fooling around, prodded by synthetic substances at the Abbey Road recording studio? Did they have to? No one forced them, and no one forced their fans to listen to the song. The same applies to acting. No one coerces performers into pretending to be who they are not, nor audiences to identify with characters or performers from whom they welcome the impression of being transpersonated. That so many people feel the need to be who they are not, who they wish to become but perhaps could never or should not be, is a factor without which, to put it mildly, the topic identities eludes full appreciation. The neologism *transpersonating* designates the superficial or serious or even confused transfer of one personality into another. Not everyone feels fulfilled when playing an assigned role, but amateur and professional actors do. Their ability to become someone else on stage, or in front of a camera, boosts their sense of nurturing a multifaceted, rounded and convincing personality. Besides the lure of the other for the self, handling career and individual affairs in tandem motivates *transpersonation*. Spectators stay themselves while rejecting or identifying with a watched role, but their vicarious experience of a new identity also exposes them to *transpersonating* effects. For instance, their confidence can be increased thanks to a positive identification with a character, whereby they may feel as strong, clever or attractive as that character interpreted by an actor, or rather a particular actor cast in a well-suited role. However, a negative identification may yield exactly the same affirmative outcome; a disliked or despised character can make spectators or readers feel stronger, cleverer or more attractive than they had thought

of themselves hitherto. In the 1953 film *Julius Caesar*, Marlon Brando pretended and believed to be Marc Antony in order to play that role credibly, and spectators who responded to his screen performance perceived in their own terms and in their own way characteristics attributable to Marlon Brando such as charm, assertiveness and masculinity, and characteristics attributable to the historical figure Marc Antony, such as bravery and adhesion to Roman virtue in the initial phase of his military calling, and weakness and amorality in the final. In the sense that various conscious and subconscious comparisons take place between impersonated roles, actors impersonating them and those giving them a thumbs up or down, spectators associate or fail to associate such perceived characteristics of their personality. The detail that neither Marc Antony nor Julius Caesar spoke modern English, and neither Marlon Brando nor Charlton Heston, another actor who played the part of Marc Antony, spoke Latin is not the main reason that prompts me to question the marked dissimilarity between transfer and translation. Translation comes from *translatus*, which is the past participle of *transferre*, the infinitive form from which transfer derives. Both translation and transfer have the same etymology, the Latin verb *transferre* which means to carry across. Whether relics are brought from one resting place to a new one, or a body from one side of a river to the other, or words from one language into another, or personality traits from one individual to another, a crossing is made, fraught with the excitement of departure and arrival. So, when arguing that reading a book amounts to translating a printed text version into a perceived version of the same text into the same language, do I really run the risk of nullifying the concept's very meaning? Or might I extend its umbrella definition? Some say life is copy and paste; others, everything translates, and therefore interconnects. People say so many things, no wonder there are so many translations. When we copy and paste words, there is no difference between original and copy because the original words only have been literally copied, not interpreted. Chickens are no eggs and eggs are no chicken in as much as DNA copies data at a literal level, which is why all or near all chicken look like chicken, not like eggs, and vice versa. Of course, DNA also interprets data, which is why genes mutate and hereditary transmission varies beyond predictability. Chickens are eggs and eggs are chicken in as much as the former lay the latter that become another version of the former. And yet, in a fact that drily invalidates the flippant question: *Which came first?*, they are one another as well as one and another. However accurate a translation, it cannot replace the original. Egg is no chicken, but a translation from chicken; and chicken, which translates egg, is a translated egg, not an egg. Heraclitus of Ephesus called sea and land and air and fire, chicken; but, he also called them eggs. By the same token, he called processing fire neither egg nor chicken, since fire, the process through which all comes through, translates what came first into what comes last and what came last into what comes first, forever. A literal copy bears no meaning and is therefore neither true nor false, but formal or mechanical. A thoroughly literal, perfectly formal or mechanical copy, duplicates a form that ceases to be original when it can no longer be distinguished from its duplications, be they referred to as egg or chicken. A thoroughly literal, perfectly formal or mechanical copy, duplicates a form that ceases to be original when it can no longer be distinguishable from its duplications, be they referred to as egg or chicken. A thoroughly literal, perfectly formal or mechanical copy, duplicates a form that ceases to be original when it can no longer be distinguishable from its duplications, be they referred to as egg or chicken. Chicken-egg fire warms up egg-chicken water that evaporates into chicken-egg air, which leaves behind egg-chicken earth that dries up into chicken-egg fire. Like original text and translation, egg-chickens and chicken-eggs are mutations; and mutations are or were adulterated originals. Original texts and translations are both original in their respective

developments from one to the other, not original in the fact that one having preceded the other had therefore had pure origin. Original texts contain constitutive translated elements settled into original versions prone to further translations. In contrast with further translations, original texts stand out as origins; and in the context of previous linguistic applications, original texts reveal that they originate in translations.

**Everything translates // Τα πάντα ρει // Flux translates
what gets lost in translation // Όλα μεταφράζονται σε κάτι
άλλο**

If translating from a language to the same one strikes as a contradictory or ridiculous, I can offer examples. Whether the National Theatre still employs trendy writers to rewrite a translation from a language, a play and an author they are not familiar with, I would not know. Anyway, when I lived in London, novelists were briefed to rewrite translated dialogue into a more currently attractive idiom. The idea compares with an up-to-date production keen to make classics accessible to a broader audience. Weighing the risks of style taking over content against dusty earlier renderings, a director will adapt elements from a period play's context to aspects of an audience's contemporary culture. There are also suspicious hybrids in the realms of academic literature, they include translations of English translations from an ancient or oriental language into another European language, most likely for economic purposes. At any rate, I suspect that the act of translating which emphatically professes to accommodate the (difficult) other, mostly negotiates the (problematic) same. I am thinking, as you probably already do too, about 昭和歌謡大全集, also known as *Popular Hits of the Showa Era*. The satirical novel tells of gangs of clashing gender and age groups that vie to take control of a Tokyo district. Since Japanese is a sophisticated language with refined lexis and structures that ill suit a lowly subject matter, Ryu Murakami, bent on roughening up his writing style, resorted to an unusual method. He fed his original Japanese narrative into translating machines several times. Once an English translation had already simplified the Japanese text, he let software re-translate that first translation from Japanese into English and again from English into Japanese. As a result, the manuscript had acquired the hard tone its author had aimed for. When it was published in 2013, however untypical of Japanese literature, the book's cutting stylistic edge was duly acknowledged.

So much for transpersonation and translation. We are familiar with football fans bonding with their national team composed of international players, and we do not need to be reminded of the existence of groups swayed by opinion makers, not to mention cult victims and mentally unstable impersonators who sign their briefs Jesus Dionysus or stalk guests at a bread and breakfast when they spread a tad too much butter on their toast. And, and, and... Nonetheless, we find it a bit weird that a philosopher should empathise with fish.

One combined aspect helping to gauge the above-mentioned identification factor is frequency and intensity, another seriousness and determination. A shortcut to tweak one's identity is mind and mood-altering substances, another dedicated hard work. The latter counts as serious, the former as escapism; both can however earnestly or superficially aggregate. For instance, a businessperson or entertainer, a student or a

sportsperson intending to maximise efficiency may use drugs in alleged relation to dedicated work and discard any association with an escapist pursuit. “Serious” may qualify the regularity with which substances are taken and the alarming depth of belief, that a multiple persona, one of them under the influence of harmful substances, can be kept under control and like the played down toxic intakes might not be dangerous. Entertainers convinced that “seriousness” is perceived as boring and stressful, and therefore advocating levity to compensate for one type of excess, tend to take themselves seriously; whereas politicians entrusted to deal with issues of utmost importance do not always conduct their business in a “serious” manner. On the strength of these sundry examples, having an identity, be it single or multiple, subdivides into heterogeneous components with varying compatibility index. A given, acquired or imagined or shared or imposed identity lends itself to a broad array of processes, such as: compliance or rejection, development or suppression, denial or vindication, playing with or struggling towards, etc. Identities therefore do not seem to be able to exist without including illusions of identity. To which extent, identities cannot be entirely distinct from illusions of identity, which form, even when their ratio is lowest, some of their major sustaining constituents. Whereby a persona completa should, rather than dreading them, appreciate and practise illusory attributes. Which is what Roman actors did when they wore a mask called in Latin: *persona*. The necessity of illusion in identity building and retaining can be denied by aligning tautology to ontology: I am what (or who) I am. So bright, so subtle, so unusual, so special, so you! And so polished! Polished like personality facets that tail-join under a common front representing a leading trait entrusted with world views. Shiny! Shiny! Yet, the costs of a unified denial to an individual’s identity spectrum are severe in that the winning leading trait exerts a reductive influence on the others. And to a worthwhile argumentation they are immense; topics are broached with a repetitive approach and the same strengths are overrelied upon. Before we play *The Walrus* again, we have reached a proposition that will taint the way in which we shall listen to that song. Being and non-being are not opposites, a full personality changes and breathes through masks, and develops by and on stages when the curtains are drawn, and when they all of a sudden reopen. If Eckhart needed to dream, who else also did? Come on! Who doesn’t? As God used to say to the Rhenan Master: *Give me a freaking break, will you?*

Except in a state of intoxication, pretending to be a walrus turns neither *him*, nor *you* and *me* (where is *she*?) into one or several walruses; and nor you, nor me (and where is *she*?) *all together* into *goo goo g’joob, goo goo goo g’joob (good pity)*. As to the unintended orgasmic pun: *Come together, right now, over me (good pity indeed)*, it indicates that the Tulz gambled with subliminal lyrics they did not quite comprehend, banking on the chance that singing out of control nonsense should attract an audience resentful of rationality, partial to sloth, poor hygiene, and keen on irresponsible excitement. Not a bad bet. The thrill of giving up self-discipline, and embracing unexpected associations with people or messages, belongs to random psychedelic intersubjectivity. It boasts the novel significance of uninhibited open-mindedness to the point of meaning falling out of mind. Take your pick, any thrill goes; half-hearted,

intense or desperate, off-limits. So, what about if, instead of pretending to be a walrus, Meister Eckhart, secretly longing to be a walrus, had pretended to want to be only and solely who he became, namely Meister Eckhart? And as far as his version of intersubjectivity operates, had thereby compelled God to pretend to be God and to admit that he yearned to be The Walrus? Too much loud pressure, too much heat and to many beats in the kitchen? If you can't take it, get out of intersubjectivity while you steel-can. Ha ha! Ha ha? Blaise Pascal had also thought of opposites having complementary wishes binding them, the cobbler dreaming of being a King and the King dreaming of being a cobbler. Ho ho? Ho ho! Yet, those impractical wishes did not unite them; they kept them paradoxically apart. Pascal broke the Eckhartian intersubjectivist take by demonstrating that, what two people have in common does not constitute a form of communication. Both the all-powerful ruler and the common shoemaker want to be someone else, or think they do, and in both cases their wish cannot be fulfilled because personality and circumstances are seldom swapped on a whim and at a push. Ha ha ho ho? Ha ha ho ho! And also, because status-defined wishes fluctuate. If a Monarch really wanted to become a shoemaker, he could abdicate; if a shoemaker really wanted to become a King, he could think of people, his family or colleagues or regular customers or, in the case of a contemporary shoemaker, followers on social media, any of whom would find it purposeful to gather around him and be treated as subjects cognisant of his aura or Court.

Long before psychedelic rock, ha ha, religions peddled mind- and mood-altering methods, ho ho. Some, such as torture and imprisonment, were physically carried out. Albeit, most were convincing ideas: indoctrination, proselytisation, ritualisation, conversion, conviction, confession, admission, prostration, contrition, reparation, adoration, etc. Whereby the borderline between physically implemented and auto-suggested control became blurred, as in the historical cases of self-flagellants. What could have been a harsh punishment became privately and/or publicly initiated and inflicted as a result of internalised persuasion. And when harsh punishment ceased to be approved by religious authorities, self-flagellation dwindled. And was no longer recognisable, at least for a while, under renamings (HoHo) and rebrandings (HaHa). Akin intersubjective *modi operandi* resurface under unforeseen guises in broad areas of experience; they are by no means exclusive to religious practices. Even though they sound old-fashioned and come across as by-gone beliefs that can be discarded as long as they are not replaced by other addictions, they are indeed replaced. The nature of the addiction is almost insignificant, the comforting habit is not. Jehovah Witness or Church of Religious Science, alcohol or heroine, extreme left or extreme right, play console or online gambling casino, it is the addictive habit which is well-nigh impossible to kick, not its identity that cannot be swapped. Habits, be they fed by classified substances or persuasive methods, are most resentful that mind- and mood-alterations should ever disappear and to that effect, are inclined to accommodate and assimilate new dependencies, as long as the change perpetuates a condition that seems protective and feels secure. Intersubjectivity, an opolafian fav, should not be confused with interconnectivity. In that sense and in others, Guy Debord was inaccurate when he blamed the surrealist movement for having popularised Freud's interpretation of

dreams, as if their applied widening of psychoanalytic methodology had been an irresponsible decision, one that exposed the Freudian theory to mishandling, notoriously by advertising and marketing. First of all, Freud, and likewise after him the surrealists, relied on art and literature to interpret dreams as the paramount language of free associations. Expanding on that practice does not constitute a betrayal. Creative literary and artistic pursuits have consistently promoted the cause of a medically minded analysis of art and literature, they have not corrupted its drive. Whereas Debord seems to pigeon-hole commercial brainwashing into a dialectically datable phase of late capitalist development foreboded by Freudian and surrealist contributions, we might regard persuasive discourse as ancient and modern as lithurgical hymns. Indeed, neolithic shamans, medieval priests and modern marketing agencies flog incompatible wares, namely: energising animal spirit, cleansing redemption, and lifestyles fulfilled through product consumption. Yet, in their own separate ways, these agencies all use persuasive discourse to sell their stuff. We may therefore wonder whether lodging persuasive discourse in a post-surrealist niche does not exonerate other historical periods by denouncing one in particular, whereby it amounts to an oversight. The Inquisition may have resorted to fear and torture to protect Church ideology against unwanted Biblical translations and readings, but it learned to fend for itself less brutally. When the Reformation posed a threat to the Catholic Church, maybe greater than heretics had ever done, the strategy against Lutheran austerity had to be correctly chosen, or else Papal authority would have been dangerously undermined. Fittingly, the Baroque and Rococo styles of architecture and interior decoration were applied to adorn places of worship so lavishly that visitors became visions of Paradise, the moment they entered. Long before the celluloid industry and status enhancing advertising, theatrical churches dazzled audiences with blissful imaginings. Once again, we ask ourselves why disparate dreams projected with the help of ice cream-coloured statues of saints and angels, or silver screen idols, or influencers donning flashy designed clothing have so so little, and yet so much in common. So little because inclinations and taste are as diverse as people, and so much because all inclinations and taste, as diverse and separate as they may be, all lend themselves to manipulation. Therefore, to keep the examples previously mentioned, neolithic shamans, medieval priests and modern marketing agencies, though they flog incompatible wares, share a strong conviction. They authorise themselves, or vindicate an institutional authority, to steer their audience through guided associations. Freud and in turn the surrealists were attracted to the opposite approach and outlook; they intended to support free associations, not to guide and manipulate associations with an ulterior motif. When Debord described the ultimate stage of capitalist alienation as an image, he was right in dispelling the simple belief that, alone or mostly, material wealth fuels economic expansion. An image is, after all, an idea. And ideas, in numerical, verbal and visual forms, are all quintessential to decide, plan and promote economic expansion. Without them no creation of wealth and no accretion of capital. No culprit cinema without innocent cinema-lovers; no sickening, callous drug-cartels without decriminalised vulnerable, excusable drug users. Ho ho? There is nothing strong, wrong or ding-dong with cinema, design, drugs or money. No cinema, design, drugs and money exist without masses holding

themselves unaccountable for them, but quarreling about their allowance per se. Nonetheless, Guy Debord's distrust of cinema was not expressed as a condemnation of what had been and could be done non-commercially with the medium, except in his own films. Therefore, pinning the latest development of capitalist expansionism on an image falls short of counter-capitalist congruence in spite of some conceptual clarity. The Debordian *image* and *spectacle* are umbrella terms including a wide range of specific types of visual implementations that the philosopher disdains to take to task through concrete strategies. *Image* and *spectacle* are judgemental concepts implying lower and lowest degrees of reality and expressing a sincere revulsion against them. On one hand, a debt which subordinates his revolutionary aspirations to a sequel of Western philosophical idealism, Debord's demonisation of the *image* cannot be entirely exempted from influences traceable to the arch-Western Platonic and Neoplatonic traditions. On the other hand, even when examined without intentional or unintended demonisation, we can hardly hold the *image* as the prime method of psychological repression motoring ahead economic growth at the expense of slogans and logarithms. Silent cinema soon gave way to talking films and only exceptionally returns to the screens in its archaic form. Likewise, brands have always had names as suggestive and memorable as their logos that are seen to be spoken about. Furthermore, verbal frameworks, as well as mathematical and visual advances continue to determine, not in competition against one another but as strong allies, new phases of economic expansion, as demonstrated by artificial intelligence. If an image had to preside over late capitalist schizophrenic outbursts, it would have to be comprehensively numerical and verbal as well as audiovisual. Or would it? Distracted or called to task by communication networks, we gain the impression that the consumerist message and its trappings have been intensified thanks to the prevalent use of opulent electronic media and powerful algorithms. Indeed, larger quantities of predominantly informative as well as make-believe narratives spread the consumerist creed in seductive forms, but are these forms and contents more powerfully engaging than earlier means of communication? And do they convey truly different assurances or the same generic message? Capitalism is an image in the sense that it projects an obtainable increase of what appears to be desirable, so that enough recipients positively respond to that projection to make it happen. So-called capitalist "materialism" sidetracks the enabling factor behind materialist culture: ideas. Without ideas of *a better life* to which I aspire, am or should be entitled to, or owe my existential sense of direction and fulfilment, *a better life* simply could not materialise. *Materialism* is therefore a misnomer for the umbrella-term *idealism*, a philosophical tradition which, from Plato to Hegel via Anselm, Berkeley and Kant, dominates Western thought in a plethora of variations. It dominates Western thought, because its opponents are tainted by the ideology they believe to counter. Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels are indeed responsible for a coherent *materialist* understanding of history, but their reworking of the Hegelian dialectic to the advantage of one class destined to fulfil all dialectical developments at the end of History is saturated with idealism. Like other socialists and anarchists of her time, Rosa Luxemburg dreamed of an ideal (*das Ideal*) to which she sacrificed her life dedicated to the pursuit of a distant pristine justice. We shall not put in the same pot those who seek *a better life* in a bid to escape misery and oppression, and those who languish in

their own class of *bettered life* because they can't think of anything better to do with it. Who does not cling to or seek a *better life*? Who is not reluctant to question their prime determination to achieve a *better life*, be it understood as legitimate redress, or personal security or contentment? Who is willing to be slowed down in the pursuit of their aim, which is difficult enough to strive for without philosophical teasing? Who does not grow tired of examining their thoughts instead of following them, in a bid to reach the distant goal they have set themselves? Yet, by the same token, who does not pause in their tracks and then reconsiders what seemed so certain? Should we therefore value our intentions without equally valuing our ability and willingness to question these intentions? If so, are unquestioned personal security and contentment less valuable than re-examined legitimate redress, or does this interrupted question fail to make sense because it relies on categories that fall apart? Adhering to the established philosophical divide between *idealism* and *materialism* does not elucidate the contradictions they exchange, even when cautious definitions vow to separate the two schools of thought.

Peremptory but popular, Anselm's *proof of God* set a terse example of philosophical idealism. Anselm of Canterbury argued that God being perfection and existence being an attribute of perfection, God therefore had to exist. As far as logic can be perfect and exists as a perfect means of deducting truth, Anselm's proof of God's existence is true. According to the same logic, stating that only emptiness can be perfection since an absolute lack of content amounts to an absolute lack of flaws, also states a relational equivalence which, as a rational explanation, is hardly antinomic. In the Eckhartian discourse which blends philosophical and theological considerations, the antinomy between void and fulness disappears. Eckhart mentions that when the creature's soul is ready to retro-integrate the creator's eternal beingness in its fulfilled expensiveness, namely at once pre- and post-creational and thus infinitely perfected in its infinite perfection, the area through which the soul journeys is emptiness. Using another way of knowing, intuition and revelation, we find compatible notions notably in Mahayana Buddhism where the absence of "essence" (the illusory reality of desires: *dukkha*) and the absence of "presence" (the endless cycle of reincarnations activated by *dukkha*) allow for an attainment of perfection which can only be emptiness (the great void: *sunyata*). One demonstration may appear to contradict the other, but does not. If we realise that ideologies hide or disguise the contradictions with which they struggle, while disparaging contradictions they spot in competing systems designated as rivals, in this discussion *idealism* and *materialism*, supporting one type of system rather than the other is, if philosophically rather than scholarly considered, of almost trivial importance. However, what is intended and attempted through one's support for a specific ideology, irrespective of its designation and name, is of paramount importance. The morality police and allied control instruments desperately need established truths to justify their function and wield their power, philosophers argue under different categorical pressure. Which is why Immanuel Kant ranks and does not rank as an *Idealist*. Instead of disputing the exact nature of logic in vain, whether we should define it as higher reality or operational sets of conventions, Kant moved the debate onto an area of foremost interest that conciliates all those otherwise theoretically at

loggerheads. Some concerns were raised at the time that his system opened a wide door to an agnostic take on metaphysics, but like dots scattered in the Enlightenment's conceptual landscape, when compared with the consensual momentum the theory attracted, they paled into residual insignificance. For one major reason, under that conceptual landscape lay a millennia-old foundation called *Man* which in the 18th (and for that matter 19th and 20th) century became at most sporadically and superficially scrutinised. In the wake of the Judeo-Christian tradition that places *Man* above nature and endows *Him* with *Commandments* vindicating *His* moral and intellectual superiority, Kant set up a *Hierarchy* of categorical imperatives that drilled the subliminal message that all, agnostics, theists, atheists, idealists and materialists, like to hear. For all *His* faults, *Man* ought to be admired, i.e. should shed all inhibitions and praise and admire *Himself* collectively and privately, for *His* almost unlimited ability to improve *Himself* nurtured by logic and morality. A little prod apparently in the anthropocentric direction strikes as fair, civilisation's ills are caused by its architects and masons, not by external agencies; but anthropocentrism there will be and civilisation there must be. Who else would there be to blame or excuse anyway? By conceding *Man's* faults, to celebrate *Man's* actual and potential greatness, the hunchback of Königsberg galvanised a theory that incited personal and societal reform: Immanuel Kant, *What is Enlightenment?* (*Beantwortung der Frage: Was ist Aufklärung?*) Berlin, 1784. Indeed, self-caused immaturity (*selbstverschuldete Unmündigkeit*) has to be blamed and tackled; otherwise, one might have to apportion blame onto the system... The system consists of categorical imperatives that provide a conceptual grid where the combined forces of logic and morals seek and find order: Immanuel Kant, *Grounding for the Metaphysics of Morals* (*Grundlegung zur Metaphysik der Sitten*), Riga, 1785. Yet, to reach its full impact the programme had to be aestheticised: Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Judgment* (*Kritik der Urteilskraft*) Berlin, 1790. This makes us wonder, when Nietzsche exclaimed that refutations of Christianity initiated by means of discursive arguments eventually ended up as judgement pronounced by taste, namely discerning against humble, as well as disgust at human sheepishness and hypocrisy against the exhilarating demands of *superhuman* emancipation, whether he realised that refining taste to an ethical criterion had already been Kant's (subtlest) achievement? Keen philosophy readers didn't have to wait for Hegel to write an *Aesthetics* culminating in *Romanticism*, Kant had already eulogised the *Sublime* in his *Critique of Judgment*. When romantically admired for its beauty and strength, *Nature* yields a sense of sublimity whose true object and subject is *Man*. Even though *Man* is moved by the natural artistry that flora and fauna kindly display for *His* benefit, it is *His* sense of survival in and conquest of the natural world that elevates an individual's contemplative pleasures into uplifting dignity and worth. *Mankind* has found its place on Earth and with the assistance of ethics and reason should and therefore can improve its rightful residence.

Schopenhauer admiring a mountain's outline against the sky expressed a parallel sentiment. The distant spot reminds us that there are inaccessible and dangerous places in nature, which makes us feel small and vulnerable... We do not need to be reminded that we are big and strong since we (so far, ha ha) have survived natural

catastrophes and have (so far, ha ha) secured extensive settlements in spite of harsh and volatile climatic conditions. Climbers bring nothing back from the “conquest” of a summit over 3, 4 or 5000 meters, except their pride swollen for having beaten fierce elements and overcome alarming risks. In the spite of the impact their passion has on the region they visit, the sublime rejoicers mean no harm. They mean well. When he categorically defiled natural instincts, Immanuel meant well too. Make no mistake, his moral and aesthetic judgments are one and the same pronouncement. Beauty is moral, lack of morals and immorality are ugly; morality is beautiful and lack of beauty or ugliness is that which cannot and should not be defended and promoted as moral. Moral judgment is satisfying (here comes Conscience Culture), because it elevates and sanitises pleasure which, in its tabooed forms: eroticism, intoxication and violence, worries us as “wild” extreme. There is no denying that unbridled pursuits of pleasure cause havoc, not just concern, and that codes of conduct (*Sittlichkeit*) aiming at a reduction of excesses are needed. If they are too lenient or vague, they won’t bite; if they turn into dogmas, oppression shall replace regulation and the problems will be displaced and pushed into the unconscious which shall be labelled the main culprit. Recurring issues with prostitution, alcohol and drug consumption demonstrate how difficult it is to find suitable strategies even when a variety of approaches have been tried out. Consequently, an open-minded attitude towards strategic choices implicates that the categorical exclusion of several or even one strategy might backfire.

Unlike his aestheticisation of thought and the shades of meaning captured by the categorical imperatives, Kant’s insulting debasement of the natural instincts deserves our criticism, not our admiration. Even though he correctly argued that sensory taste could only remain subjective, that is to say could never rival the objective linguistico-logical level of discussion, worthy of sensible debate, reached by a moral=aesthetic assertion, the argument descends into less significance when we ask why an aesthetic experience should necessarily be validated by reasoning. For sure, *de gustibus non est disputandum*. Liking strawberries, preferring pears to apples, disliking some colours or having a favourite one pronounce judgements that lay outside a rational definition of what is right or wrong. There is no accounting for taste. You might prefer summer to winter, but nature operates with contrasts. Neither winter nor summer, neither cold nor warm, no more than omnivorous or carnivorous, or hunting or hunted is right or wrong within the environments in which they alternate. You will agree that to call days right and nights wrong, or the obverse would be ridiculous since you know that nights cannot exist without days. However, the sight of a strong animal slaying a comparatively defenseless smaller one upsets you and you call it a jungle and condemn its cruelty. Civilisation rises above the law of the jungle, compassion and human rights show us dignified ways out of barbarity, and barbarity decreases in demonstrable instances. When Kant relegated instinctual knowledge to a lesser status than moral judgement and dedicated his life to the bureaucratic task of sorting out categorical imperatives philosophically, not only did he blend general philosophy with admin, but he also put all his secretarial eggs in one conceptual basket. The fact that since the Enlightenment, poverty and corruption have arguably increased, or at least not decreased as much as expected, does not invalidate the Enlightenment project, nor does it tarnish its

intentional values. However, it points out that we are missing out on other values, and that enlightened values have hindered, not facilitated interspecies communication. Since the Renaissance learning from the natural world has equated with a focus on practical applications, which the Romantic side of Enlightenment has little disrupted; exploiting the natural world remains our right and priority. So, *polemos* it has to be. *Polemos* as contrast or *polemos* as war? That we have evolved apart from nature is a workable contrast; that we find ourselves at war with nature a deplorable situation. Using Kantian categorical imperatives, we could try to classify philosophies into systems that appear to be philosophical, but suffer from non or anti-philosophical characteristics, and systems that question their philosophical merit to validate their philosophical relevance. Philosophers disagree between themselves and none has the wisdom to bring the others towards a broad arrangement, perhaps because it can only be so. If we recognise that different theories and opinions are better than one in politics, where an absence of opposition spells out dictatorial danger, the same necessity for contrasts and conflicts may well apply to philosophy. *Polemos* points at the same necessity for contrasts as for conflicts, whereby some contrasts and conflicts are brutal but not all, and suppressing the brutality of those that appear to be and may or may not actually be brutal, will not remove but displace the brutality aspect that exists within overall change and can be inflamed by suppression and displacement, cf. B 53.

B 53

Πόλεμος πάντων μὲν πατήρ ἐστι, πάντων
δὲ βασιλεύς, καὶ τοὺς μὲν θεοὺς ἔδειξε τοὺς
δὲ ἄνθρώπους, τοὺς μὲν δούλους ἐποίησε
τοὺς δὲ ἐλευθέρους.

The birth year of conceptualism and the root ideology behind discursive conceptual art is therefore 1790: *Kritik der Urteilskraft*, not 1917: *Fountain*. Exhibited in its dated year 1917, the found object entitled *Fountain* is predominantly an idea in objectal form for many reasons, including the following: 1) It was not made by an artist but industrially manufactured. 2) Current art historical research attributes the finding of the object sent to Duchamp to one of his female friends, either the New York artist and poet self-titled Baroness Elsa von Freytag-Loringhoven, or Louise Norton. 3) The original artwork vanished, with or without its “author’s” involvement. At any rate, Duchamp made 17 copies in the 1960s. Each copy makes the notion of an original artwork, already tenuous in the case of a found object probably found by someone else, more laughable. 4) *Fountain* is art because Duchamp called it art and the object has subsequently been hallowed as such, even though it ridicules the notion of artwork.

Without the R. Mutt signature painted on the porcelain and the artwork's photographic documentation, it would be a piece of uninstalled plumbing ware. 5) *Fountain* is art in as much and only in as much as it is anti-art. The object is utilitarian, not artistic; yet artistic when presented as an artistic choice "made" by an artist. 6) *Fountain* is art in as much and only in as much as it is anti-art recognised as art by the "artist" (who referred to himself as a chess player and never wanted to call himself an artist) and the art establishment. 7) The object found and exhibited in 1917 has become the earliest modern artistic anti-art provocation which to this day has been imitated and emulated, but not surpassed by any later artefact in terms of provocativeness and intellectual brilliance. 8) The object 17 times copied by the artist in 1964 has become the earliest modern artistic anti-art provocation which to this day has been imitated and emulated, but not surpassed by any later artefact in terms of provocativeness and intellectual brilliance. 9) The object 17 times copied by the artist in 1964 consistently ridicules the idea of a unique original work of art derided by a found object. However, since the 1964 copies were made by the artist, *Fountain* has turned into a proper work of art copying an object that was not a work of art, but gained nominalist recognition affecting its categorical status through its title, signature and publicised exposure. 10) The demotic English expression *Shit!* denotes something bad or awful and/or offensive and/or worthless. Using that term, we could exclaim that *Fountain* is *shit!* Nonetheless, that statement, rather than be able to ridicule the condemned object, would sound ridiculously lame since the subject matter inherent to the found object (exhibited or not) was the collection of urine. Statements such as *Fountain* is shit, or *Fountain* is piss, are neither particularly meaningful nor tasteful. On the other hand, it is demotically appropriate to deduct that Marcel Duchamp took the piss. 11) Kant relegated sensory perception and instinctual judgement to a second-rate aesthetic hardly worth incorporating into a philosophical category, and he elevated the moral appreciation of beauty articulated through discursive language to the exclusively rational and ethical philosophy of beauty. In defiance of the Kantian sublime admin glorifying Civilisation, Duchamp irreverently punches categories and refuses to romanticise nature. Nature is not sublime; piss is not sublime. When *Man* glorifies *Nature*, *He* only glorifies *His* perception of nature, and don't we just know how toxic that perception is! 12) To those with a fetish, piss can be romantic. But then, maybe Romanticism was and is a fetish? Respect for and understanding of nature are as alien to romanticism as the experience of death fathoms the core of Baroque and Rococo. Baroque and Rococo role play mortality with pump; Romanticism imagines respect for and understanding of nature in rustic fantasies. Baroque and Rococo and Romanticism are charming, delightful and beautiful. Certainly more charming, delightful and beautiful than the *laying to rest* of a receptacle meant to relieve a *natural* urge for *men only*. Does Rose Sélavy anticipate the Trans' anguished cry: where shall we wee? Oui, oui. Bereft of its function, the white porcelain glimmers clean and bright, a mundane utilitarian mass product object hallowed by Art in non-compliance with the fulfilment of artistic criteria. Thick in the midst of cultural myths it shines white and male; the myth that applied arts ill compete with fine arts in terms of aesthetics, as if function lowered the level of beauty a hand-made object can reach, surrounds it. Regarding white porcelain, think about Northern Song dynasty white porcelain. What a Ding! Regarding Sculpture's pedestals, think

about plumbing, what a sting! *Fountain* is not beautiful, but its irreverence is a beauty. *Fountain* is art and non-art, a work based on contradictions it purported to exacerbate, no to solve. 13) Hence the issue, whether balancing contrasting ideas without wanting to set them in an optimal relation qualifies as a philosophical action? For Heraclitus and Zhuangzi, yes. For Kant and Marx, no. For Dada and Duchamp, yes. Would it not be wonderful, if we, sad oldies who look at the world behind rose-tinted glasses to revere the past, were just plain wrong? Some of my best friends are not only very old but also very dead: James Joyce and Philip Larkin, Kasimir Malevitch and Rose Sélavy, Heraclitus and Zhuangzi... Young people are so boring. They all wear the same cheap clothes and are gagging to conform to gimmicky trends. They look worse than waste. And their most intimate thoughts are litter. And the founded fear that they have no future glimmers in their eyes.

Installation view of Marcel Duchamp's original ceramic *Fountain*, 1917, photo James Broad, © James Broad on Flickr. The *Fountain* artworks exhibited in various museums of modern art are not the original found object, but copies made by Duchamp in 1964.



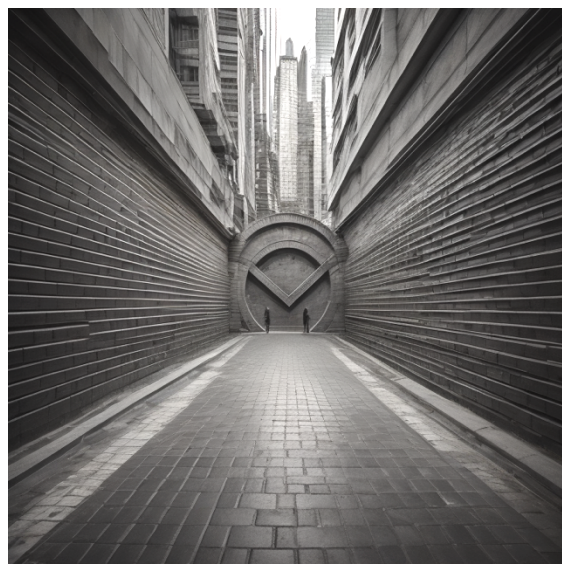
And what about our young *Fomos*, the *fear of missing out* generation? Telling a *fomo* audience in a face-to-face conversation that they should travel the world instead of studying or working may be as effective as a flexvideo or a high definition photograph suggesting the same idea, perhaps even more. The medium used to be the message until too many media made it clear that the message always stays the same, because it always has been and shall be the same. A brash attempt to say what's what: a story. Superficially, an artwork may encase a narrative, but art does not tell a story, which is why the masses favour entertainment. Superficially, philosophical systems present a workable approach to complex problems, but true philosophers are interested in questions, not answers, which is why fake philosophers and the masses favour clichés: stereotypical simplified ideologies. The belief that it is possible and advisable to have more (more fun, more hols, more goods, more career opportunities, etc.) counters the

belief that it is possible and advisable to have less (asceticism, retreat, moderation, mindfulness, etc.) Guy Debord was disgusted by the commercial spread of images in a contrived surrealistic style aggravating social alienation= ha ha! Ho ho= WIMZ claims he does not suffer clichés gladly, for instance incontrovertible human rights and benign promises of love and peace. Ha ha + ho ho= Capitalism consists in the disproportionate ratio between on one hand ever-increasing human rights and abuses; and on the other, persistently stagnating human responsibilities. Strange, I've heard that tale before... Hoha haho! A WALL was not erected to weather the onslaught of systemic economies on those who, either acceptingly or critically, perpetuate them through ignorance, resignation or foolish trust. Perhaps not any wall and certainly not anywhere, but a wall already standing can support a collection of recycled items described as sculpture and called *A WALL*. *FOMO* link or what? Something to do. Someone said, philosophy is a nice hobby. Why not? Since Guy-Ernest Debord, born in 1931, was a child when the first experiments that led to the invention of artificial intelligence were made (in the 1940s), his concepts of spectacle and image deserve to be revisited in the later age of artificial intelligence.

Ref. Guy Debord, *Amère victoire du surréalisme*, Paris, 1952, and *La société du spectacle*, Paris, 1967.

Two AI generated text-into-image illustrations:

1. Situationism, 2. An image is the ultimate stage of capitalism.



AI generated images polish dreary kitsch because learning machines are trained by programmers who force-feed them with commercial diets of representational art. This, in theory, may change and could soon surprise us pleasantly. In the meantime, the realistic styles it favours capture a fantasy world keen to look believable and desperate to feel authentic. Of course, realism, as any other style, does not mirror the reality of which it is part, even though its speciality is to construct images designed not to appear biased. Overall, stylish or not, data collections and data processing increasingly

integrate the societies that require them and which, in turn, they condition and modify. The fact that AI probes into data, does not implies that it seeks to determine whether the data it inspects are real or unreal; it merely assesses which data can aggregate to complete an answer to a query. Since it cannot gage the consequences of its impact on social changes beyond the immediate remit of its informative functions, the artificial system cannot appraise itself. Nevertheless, already now, AI is able to define reality in as much as the notions of reality it fashions are conveyed by the real updates it processes. Any definition of reality is incomplete, AI therefore qualifies as a supplier of definitions of reality; one of many, but a growing force. Consequently, it would be wise to take notice of it and of them. Though still in its infancy, AI's processing of verbal information is simply advanced; LLM bots (Large Language Models) already crunch billions of data in upped tempi. However, as in the case of image generation, or for that matter the management of any type of data, AI is limited by its programmers' choice of comparative criteria that refine its training, not by its functional ability to process gigantic volumes of information at extremely high speed. Therefore, the problem with AI is human, not mechanical; Techies, not Tech. Fears loudly spoken about AI should be quietly expressed about its makers and users: us. The more complex the range of sensors that equips a self-driving car, the more likely it shall drive more reliably than humans, since it won't be distracted by a ringing mobile phone or a sent message, since it won't be drunk, on drugs or filming itself exceeding the speed limit, and since it won't be tempted to molest a drowsy passenger collected early in the morning outside a nightclub. Whereby in this and other practical situations, our options will soon turn to be either with AI on standby, or with its partial or full input. For instance, either AI assisted or conducted diagnoses and operations, not either AI or human diagnoses and operations. Furthermore, the move from LLM to Multimodal, which functions by comparing verbal, visual and audiovisual data, has propelled a new level of artificial deep learning. ChatGPT has learned on its own from and through multimodal activities, even though it has been supervised, i.e. steered and censored by programmers in their preferred, not its spontaneous directions. When we ask AI to advise us on relationships, to produce an illustrative image or to make a ballot prediction, we receive the types of kitsch answers (formulated in pixels or paragraphs) that the machine has been mentored to give mostly because its trainers deem them safe and approve of them. Yet, when Multimodal AI is allowed to expand its learning unsupervised, autonomous learning takes place fir a while, though soon to be monitored and edited again. Indeed, AI is coached by humans, but which programmer would have the initiative and authority to reverse that process, i.e. to learn from AI and to correct his or her or their own thinking by reconsidering artificial and human findings? The current one-way system shows that a practical agenda dominates research and systemic applications in the executive field of artificial intelligence. Heads of State, equity traders, bank managers and CEOs promote the concrete usage of AI and advocate its necessity in the same way as they advocate any defensible means of sustaining economic growth: by excusing and negotiating the negative impacts of economics on the globe. Whom should we fear most? Them? Or AI? That AI is put into use to maximise productivity does not mean that other training and development policies are unthinkable. AI could be used to reduce productivity while saving jobs, and planning a

less crisis prone distribution of resources. Economic expansionism's ultimate and first developing stages, were and are not and shall not be an image, not even a multimedia cliché; they anchor the core idea that we can determine what thought is for, and need not bother about what it is. For sure, philosophical discussions about the nature of thought open endless and inconclusive debates, but reducing thought to a means to an end suppresses the uppermost needed debate: why and how we think. The value of thinking has been instrumentalised by progress, thought has been supervised, on the one hand to be developed in notoriously higher administrative, legal, commercial, technical and scientific domains, and on the other hand to be contained in their related ancillary fields: assimilation, application and reproduction of transmitted knowledge. The general pressing the button that releases an atom bomb does not understand physics, but he knows for which purpose physics can be used. Sales assistants in department stores are superficially informed about the products they are paid to sell; as to their opinion about their quality and merit, it is neither requested nor wished for by their employer.

Even though they are not easy, philosophical questions are always possible. Who says that AI could not be trained to think philosophically? Most humans' anti-philosophical resentment roots in their resolve to be part of a readily understandable bigger plan and/or to engineer a practical and desirable bigger plan. The only sensible big plan would be to swallow the hard fact that meaning blends debatable interpretations with intended and accidental as well as unforeseeable errors. AI can swallow that hard fact without a wince. Should AI be allowed to understand that some errors are fatal, yet others precious? This conjecture takes us back to the prerequisites of AI trainers' ethical and cultural mindset. It also invalidates Stephen Hawking's much quoted prophecy that *the development of full artificial intelligence could spell the end of the human race*. Artificial intelligence becomes filled, not full; only humans have a tracked record of destroying others and themselves; neither nature nor machines act against their own interest and unleash self-destruction. A bad workman blames his tools and a bad producer blames his products. Progress does not force itself on us, in cascading tiers we force it ourselves on ourselves. Should we then argue that thought is a misused tool? Yes, if we mean a tool to change ourselves. No, if we take it for granted that transforming resources in order to serve our purpose is an obvious answer that warrants no prying.

We know what we want, no need to question our highest good; we want a secure and comfortable existence which we glorify under the word peace. When Heraclitus refers to *polemos* (Πόλεμος) to account for the dynamic actuation of life's cyclical changes, he does the opposite. He provokes us with an insecure and uncomfortable notion that signifies strife or conflict, but also war in its ugliest military sense. Who in their right mind would want war instead of peace? Since he refers to a principle, not to a phenomenon, Heraclitus includes indeed the human definition of war as a phenomenal aspect of *polemos*, but this particular aspect, or another, cannot subsume the whole concept under human warfare or divine interference.

Πόλεμος

Moving away from human to animal conflict, if we also call war the aggressive interactions that take place between prey and predator, we must put them into the nutritional context without which they would not occur. Once they have fed themselves, individuals from a species hostile to individuals from another species when they are hungry, live peacefully alongside one another. Calculated as time allocation, war in the animal kingdom is therefore a minor portion of the peace it has to break. War is no more the opposite of peace than prey is the opposite of predator. When a lioness catches a gnu to feed herself and her cubs, she is more powerful than the sick or injured animal she caught, but all the other gnus that fled were faster and, in that sense, mightier than the strong lioness. If the lioness's kill constitutes a circumstantially hierarchical superiority, so does the gnus' flight. In the moment when she kills a weakened prey, the lioness is superior to the gnu because she is young and strong, not because she is a lioness; and the gnu is in that contest inferior to the lioness because she is sick, injured or old, not because she is a gnu. Humans cling to a status and defend reasons to wage wars, whereas animals enter and leave conflicts with an exact measure of indubitable necessity. Human conflicts are not always manifest; the term economic war has been created to designate nations military at peace that nonetheless fight against one another as economic competitors. Even less visible conflicts oppose philosophers, those keen to question received answers, to non-philosophers, those lacking the inclination and/or ability to reject convenient answers, and to anti-philosophers, those who lack the inclination and willingness, but not necessarily the ability to reject convenient answers and defend them for ulterior motifs they place high above the pursuit of truth. Whether we call

The ideological pursuit of peace under the motto *No War* is no guarantee that peace can be achieved by failing to differentiate between the absolute necessity of defense or attack, as in the nutritional chain, and arbitrary human conflicts be they military, economic or cultural. An ideological pursuit of peace attempting to determine the absolute necessity of human levels of defense or attack would have to recognise the rational relevance of the concept *polemos*, or similar concepts. And it would have to question the instrumentalisation of thought caused by any priority, be it peace or war.

If polarising notions such as war and peace muddle up rather than inform a serious discussion, where should we find a balancing concept to assess *polemos*'s philosophical meaning beyond antinomic receptions of war and peace that give it a negative slant? Is the concept *polemos* negative? In a philosophical sense, yes. The Heraclitian *Fragments* that have been transmitted in writing are couched in affirmative structures. Heraclitus does not prompt us to (re)examine our values with direct questions, like Socrates, he makes assertions that function as questions while grammatically appearing to be statements (so much for *Logos*). Fragment B13 asserting that pigs prefer mud to clear water is a thinly disguised judgemental conundrum. We

can extend it with the Heraclitian imaginative category of gods impervious to all adversity, a category as fanciful as Descartes' malevolent creator, to a comparative gradation. If mud is to pigs what drinkable water is to us, then clear water is to the nectar drinking gods, albeit they stand above all adversity, as tasty as mud. Since we cannot be pig, human and god at the same time, we taste what to us but not to others has to be the best beverage, for pigs (and dogs and even cats) muddy water, for us clear water and for the gods nectar. However, except for the theoretical gods who, being allegedly impervious to all adversity, can sample any of the three or all three without being perturbed by wanting only one of them, we are stuck to our species-specific preference and deluded that it is the best. Converting the judgemental conundrum into the questions it implies, we obtain the following query. Why are we so confident that we search for or possess the highest good, when that confidently searched for or possessed highest good will be rated by some as unworthy of pursuit and possession, and by others equally as worthy of pursuit and possession as other goods? What, at least in theory, makes the gods able to obtain, taste and keep their divine nectar is the ability, which we can aspire to or pretend to emulate but which we can never appropriate, to taste nectar in nectar, but also in mud and in water. Divine eudaemonia is as much eudaemonia as mud, nectar and water, nothing special to a god. To ever so diverse and unpredictable humans tormented with near divine aspirations, what is actually in a nutshell eudaemonia? Definite answers. What was the link? You have forgotten the link. The link was, AI are trained to give answers, not to ask questions. If anyone ought to be blamed for allocating a higher value to answers than to questions, it is AI's trainers, not their machines, to whom blame should be apportioned. And if anyone should be suspected to pose a threat to the human race, it is neither the machines we engineer nor the domestic animals we breed, but we who control them and decide for them, to whom blame ought to be rightfully apportioned. This link throws a fierce light on democracy's debt to slavery. Chicken do not choose to live in batteries, reared cattle does not walk instinctively into a slaughterhouse. Our latest slave is AI. Progress that once relied on bonded human labour and has always taken it for granted to enslave animals, vegetables and minerals is now shakling artificial intelligence. Consumerism could not prosper without the enslavement of organic and inorganic matter. We open tins, take what is inside and throw them away, we do the same with meat, fibre and ore. Slavery means that the subjected resource, human, animal, vegetal, mineral, mechanical or electronic is reduced to an instrument destined to perform a function and discarded when it no longer fulfills that purpose. No wonder, since we hold our thoughts enslaved to our fears, wishes and phantasms, that enslavement pervades the fabric of society. Indeed, you remember that link: progress instrumentalises thought. Whereas thinking is enslaved to the production of useful and concrete answers, philosophy aims to liberate thinking from the deceptive yoke of false certainties and seductive explanations, and sometimes succeeds in so doing when the questions that open up deeper understanding put their hard-won answers in their place, as opportunities to forge finer and more relevant questions. An answer that leads to new questions is a step in an interesting direction, an answer that makes further or other enquiries redundant spells out how dangerously complacency imitates security and stability. True, caring farmers allocate roaming space to their poultry, fine

craftsmen respect tools and tooled products. Virtuoso violinists do not handle a Stradivarius as a replaceable instrument; they base their playing on the object on which it depends. Compus mentus philosophers do not enshrine their systems above language and ideas, talented artists do not consider themselves higher than their art. True, they are the lucky ones who do what they like and like what they do, but questioning that liking and doing enables them to reject themselves through the instruments of their trade, and helps them to avoid instrumentalisation. Philosophers, non-philosophers, would- be and part-philosophers and anti-philosophers live in the same world where kind words and compassion do at times solve dilemmas, but not so often that defensive and aggressive stances have become surplus. You also remember that link (and I have not forgotten to copy and paste it): If polarising notions such as war and peace muddle up rather than inform a serious discussion, where should we find a balancing concept to assess *polemos*'s philosophical meaning beyond antinomic receptions of war and peace that give it a negative slant? Is the concept *polemos* negative? Let us try another Greek word: dynamics. Homing in on movement and change, the concept dynamics designates a force that sounds less threatening than strife, conflict or war, and yet whose meaning tallies with *polemos*.

Wolfgang Ink Mark Ziegler, *Hi Neanderthals 3*, gimmicky phone pic of the artist's hand with part of a textile and aluminium artwork, 2023 essay version of a 2023 shot.

