



'Further Reading' both reconstructs and deconstructs a photography exhibition created by Rami Maymon where *objets d'art*, images, and spreads from art history books are photographed in various poses and compositions, and integrated amongst other photographs created by the artist. As a nod to the uncertainty of the medium's empirical authority, Maymon approaches visual history in sculptural and performative terms, infusing his creative process into the already charged stature of the images selected. His technique merges existing visual texts with additional worlds of content, referring the reader to materials which are external to the main text; The image, the original and the reproduction are no longer distinct concepts, but rather components in ongoing processes of continual reconsideration, which both reject the privileging of the finished image and situate reappropriation as an act of semantic innovation. Reading the history of art through reproductions, which are traditionally meant to document and preserve past heritage, exposes the dynamic political forces which have facilitated changing ways of seeing. This edition builds upon this continual translation by collapsing the exhibition into an artist book. The walls of the Museum are transformed into pages, where the viewer zooms in and out of the images, guided by the exhibition's numerical system, which stands in for the book's page numbers. In addition, each work receives a new layer of meaning through a series of philosophical aphorisms written by Raphael Zagury-Orly and Joseph Cohen, which deviate entirely from the work's original context, situating the project as a visual meditation on the many 'archaeological' layers of time, genre and space.

Further Reading by Rami Maymon

*With Joseph Cohen
& Raphael Zagury-Orly,
in conversation*

The 'Further Reading' exhibition was presented at The Tel Aviv Museum of Art, Nov 2015 — Feb 2016, curated by Nili Goren.

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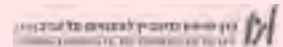
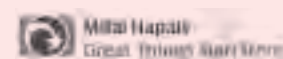
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-THAL

1

The thick red coloured strip divides the image in half, as if to make an initial symbolic separation between the mysterious obscurity of a cave and an open enlightened space. One cannot help seeing here a representation of the still pervasive classical and traditional divide between obscurity and light, opinion and knowledge, falsity and truth – that ancient remnant of our Western tradition (but is it only intrinsic to our civilization or is it not also the most universal trait of humanity?). Since Plato's recourse in *The Republic* to the 'myth of the cave' (514a – 520a), this distinction has endured and most pointedly affected our idea of "education" (*paideia*), consequently structuring our picture of "knowledge" (*episteme*). To elevate one's self out of obscurity, to raise one's thinking beyond opinion and falsity, to free one's self from the dominance and dominion of mere belief by fleeing the darkness of the cave; and thereby crossing a line around the disharmonious ambiguousness of "what we see before us" to enter into the clear, transparent, lucid comprehension of the reason, meaning, significance of that which *is*, has always defined the inherent structure of what it means "to educate", "to instruct", and thus "to train" or "model" thinking, on its journey from simple sensibility to heightened intellection, from mere awareness to justified knowledge. And yet again, when one carefully and meticulously brings one's gaze to this thick red-coloured strip, seemingly dividing the cave from the open, separating obscurity from light, what else does it reveal?

It not only reveals a line of division or separation: it shows rather an interspersed, subverted, incised, porous, permeable "space" where the line itself is subject to a deregulation, and thus where our traditional understanding of "education" and "knowledge" is incessantly destabilized: similarly the classical and traditional differences between the "false" and the "true", and between the "concealed" and the "revealed", are undermined. Our gaze is invited to see in place of the difference between "effect" and "cause", and the passage from one to the other, from non-knowledge to knowledge; invited to see an "in-determination" of such – and thus of any such – dividing hegemonies and schemas of oppositions. At this point of a blurred and indistinct frontier, the very questions of "falsity" and "truth", and thus "knowledge", are re-played, re-enacted, re-posed. One can only imagine how and towards which orientation this blurred and porous strip, which ceaselessly destabilizes the traditional divide between "darkness" and "light", will reformulate our traditional image of what it means to "know". We can only imagine where it will carry our gaze and where it will transport our thinking...

2

As with all writing, we stem from a single hypothesis: here in the apposition of the spherical world and the shimmering body. What occurs in this collation of these two images? Do they attract or repel each other? And what could be the relation here between the "world" and the nudity of the shimmering body? Perhaps this: the nudity of the "shimmering body" symbolizes how and why we always and already belong to the same and unique world. And furthermore, that the frailty and the fragility

of our "naked existence" – which marks our very existential situation and "situatedness" "in-the-world" – inscribes us in the *same world*, embodies us as actors and spectators of a unique and shared worldliness. The "nudity of existence" marks our resolute exposition to the same, unique, shared world, place and space where existents exercise existence itself. But is it a "world"? And if so, which "world"? What can here take on the name of "world"? Is there a "world" which we would always and already respond and belong to, exist within? And what if the "world" needed to be imagined from a dance? We can already imagine these being the questions constantly posed in each step of this shimmering body's dance... Nietzsche: "One must have music in one's self to make the world dance."

3

Does this image show an object of virility, a symbol of strength, a sign of phallic domination? Or does it rather display a weakness in exposing that which replaces and serves as a mere substitute for force and power? And can we dissociate force from weakness? The force of the "signifier" from the weakness of what is "signified"? As if locating a space between "signifier" and "signified", between the strength of the phallic object and the feebleness of the replacement it symbolizes as well as actualizes, Rami Maymon sought to accentuate the *ambiguity* and deepen the abyss of incessant questioning of this unresolved and perhaps unresolvable tension. Indeed, it would be short-sighted to see in this image a definite characterization of strength, force, virility or inversely a clear determination of weakness and feebleness. Yet again, Rami Maymon troubles our vision of what is shown in and through this image. For what is seen as force would perhaps be here identified as the least strong. And what could be thought of as the greatest strength would lie in being wholly indistinguishable from feebleness and fragility. Indeed, what does one "see" in this image? Perhaps Rami Maymon shows the distortion of the image – distortion of the object as well as distortion of its frame. And through this distortion, opens the space for the renewal of a decision and novel determination of who is to be called strong and of who is to be called weak. Here is disseminated the incessant proliferation of questions addressed to all simple binary discourses. The desire would be to arrive at a modality of thinking where from radical indecision one can see the possibility, the positivity of a decision capable of justly thinking *who is weak and who is strong* without opposing weak and strong and yet without confounding them into a simple indifference.

4

Is her gaze distracted, diverted and dreamy or is it inhabited, possessed, obsessed by the other? And what here would be the difference between "being distracted" and "being inhabited", having one's attention drawn away, troubled and being possessed? The difference between being dreamy and being tormented by the other? Who could say if she is here contemplative, if

she is living a mystical experience, or then again, perhaps, experiencing love? Is there a difference between all these lived experiences? Is there a difference between this open eyed gaze and the closing of the eyes? Between "open eyes" and "closed eyes", when encountering the Other? For one needs no light when one encounters the Other. Indeed, in encountering the Other one never does see the Other. One never truly captures the Other in the horizon of clear-sightedness. The Other in us and before us always retracts from the possibility of being seen and hence from the actuality of recognition. The Other occurs before the directing aim and orienting vision of intentionality. The encounter with the Other dis-joins, dis-accords, dis-mantles the inherent faculty within our gaze, within the gaze, of grasping and signifying the Other. The encounter with the Other is never an encounter of the self with the self, is never about the self-seeing one's self. And if one would only seek to see one's own self, as Narcissus, this identification scene would be ruined and made impossible by the Other's arrival, call, or the commandment. Is there a difference between being in love and being confused? What is a gaze that is not drawn away from itself? Distracted from itself? Thrown into a state of mind that is not in accordance with one's self? Being in love, encountering the Other, are we not always estranged from ourselves? And why would this situation not be our "normal" state of being? Or even our "better" state?

5

An image *in* an image: one cannot *not* see here, at work, the process of concealment and revelation. The image shows an image, in itself, partly concealed, and thus partly revealed, and yet containing and exposing, *at least*, one further image, and *at least* the shadow of yet another image. The image in the image is concealed and revealed by being inserted in a fold as well as by being folded onto itself dissimulating both the face and the sex of this "subject". That which is dissimulated in this image remains at once mysterious and exposed in their indistinctness to the Other's gaze. One can hardly see if the "subject" is hiding or revealing pain or exultation, suffering or pleasure. For one cannot grasp, by seeing a body alone, if the "subject" is in agony or in elation. One needs to *see* the face. And yet, does a face always show if it is in anguish or in ecstasy? Does it not happen that they espouse one another in a single gaze, appearance, expression? Indeed, expression is never reducible to one or another posture.

6

Forms are never stable, they always and already fluctuate. Even as they seem marked and strictly demarcated, bordered, fixed and clearly traced, and where each of its lines are streamlined and defined, forms are always and already uncertain. Erik Satie, the French composer, entitled one of his works: *Three pieces in the shape of a pear*. The title of this work was his response to critics who denounced his musical compositions as lacking and being void of form. Erik Satie's ironical response: as if one could formalize – give a stable and fixed form to – a musical

work! And here, in this image too, all is shown as if to show that form is always situated at a limit. The image shows something of the form, certainly, it shows its own-most hidden, concealed, dissimulated uncertainty. The expansion and abundance of the motifs and structures of nature here show where and how the form defaults from itself, takes leave of itself, and is thus perpetually fleeting, volatile, impermanent and elusive. We know: humans always believe they have recognized a form where in truth there is none. Perhaps here the overflowing movement of the rustling water opens to the perpetual uncertainty of the forms, unceasingly overfilling the very possibility of the form to remain defined in itself. We have said it: humans seek certainty, the certainty of the forms, they seek the truth of the image in its framed formalization. They conceive truth as the certainty of a form and the truthfulness of a formalization. It is the language of the traditional and age-old *conformity* between an object or a world of objects and their representations that is here in play. Question: what if the occurrence of a form did not correspond to the model or the horizon we are, in some way, always anticipating, predicting or foreseeing? A "form" which would displace, and disturb, our habitual categorizations of the world? Would such a "form" still be called a "form"? One must believe *yes*. Such a "form" would be persistently destabilizing the possibility of framing and defining a "form". The trouble erupting out of this "form" and the discomfort it instills in the rapport between perceiving subject and object tears open a possibility of rethinking and reinventing an unedited "form", one which does not resemble any former, known or even knowable "form".

7

Gender, genealogy, generation, genesis, genuine, genius, genetics, genome, genie – "*jin*". The famous ethno-psychiatrist Tobie Nathan upholds the extravagant and powerful, often surprising, thesis, according to which all these Greco-Latin words stem from the Amharic-Ethiopian word "*jin*", meaning *spirit*, or *spectre*, or *phantom*, or *ghost*. The Latin prefix *gen* – [which gave us in Latin languages, in French, for example, the word "*genre*" as in the phrase "*genre humain*" (which would translate in the English as "human kind") and a whole series of closely related and correlated words: *genesis*, *genealogy* (filiations, posterity, progenitor, parenthood), *genres* (groups, species, types, sorts, race, category), *genome*, *genetic* (hereditary, congenital), as well as the word *genius*] – would originate and arise out of the Ethiopian word: "*jin*". "*Jena*" is the matrix, the matrix of the woman, the uterus, whence human beings come and where these are fabricated, produced and made. "*Jin*" is then something which is not without evocation or recall of something like the fabric, the fabrication of beings, and thus of beings being born. Same for "*jinin*", which issues in "*jnoun*", the "spirits" as that entity capable of having autonomy, an intention, and thus an autonomous intention for its acts, for its presence. This is what "*jin*" signifies or means, an autonomous intention. In this movement, in this family of linguistic significations and filiations, humans do not possess the quality of their own

autonomous intention. Humans are not autonomous beings, they are not subjects in the modern sense of the word. Humans are here acted through rather than acting, they are moved rather than movers, subject to rather than free acting subjects. And, in this sense, what characterizes, typifies, exemplifies humans is that they are *not* intentional, they do not have a planned horizon of intent, of normative meaning or law. Their intentions come from elsewhere, from another place than their own place.

Where do these human intentions come from? They come from spirits and divinities. We will see that these spirits or divinities will not remain what they are, that they will shift and change, go through a process of demystification, demythologisation, secularisation, philosophical conceptualisation. What will this process give? How are we to think this becoming of spirits and divinities? How are we to deal, speak, interact with these? For these spirits and divinities have not left us. They are constantly returning to us, addressing us, haunting us.

Question: how and where, why and who or whom is haunting us? And furthermore, what is this spectre? What is this ghost? What is a spectre or a ghost? And can we even pose the question in this traditional copulative form? Are we not constrained to think of another manner of posing the question capable of addressing this “I know not what” which is not entirely reducible to a presence nor simply dismissed as an absence?

Neither a being nor a non-being, neither a reality nor a non-reality, neither a living being nor a non-living being, how then to speak of this spectre or this ghost – how to speak of it?

So our “*jins*” are animated. And hence: when something happens, when something befalls you, when you are struck by something (a sickness, for example), we say, in another Semitic language, other than the Amharic-Ethiopian, that is to say in Arabic, “*majnoun*”, which means “crazy”, “mad”, a certain “madness”, literally “*enjoined*”, captured by a “*jin*”, as if a “*jin*” took possession of the self, grasped or seized you, conquered and apprehended you. The current manner of saying “mad” is thus to say one is “taken”, “captured”, “seized”, “caught”. The “*jin*” has taken hold of the interiority of one’s self. We say thus “*majnoun*” to say mad - that is, seized by a “*jin*”, a spirit or a divinity...

What is gender? We could easily believe gender to be generalized and generalizable, stabilized and maintainable, but perhaps we ought here, rather than through the form “what is...?”, pose the question: what could differentiate *gender* from what refers it to one genealogy or one genesis? Could it not be this absolute event of the “*jin*” (spectre, phantom, *genie*) which ascribes an undecidable movement between masculine and feminine? Is not *gender* always and already delivered over to the experience of this other power? That is, of this power incessantly displacing the traditional and oppositional divide of *gender*... This power, which holds one under its law, both gives and takes power – cutting one off from all sovereignty and yet subjecting one to its sovereignty.

8

A play of forms where one is left entirely undecided between two events, at least two events, occurring within its incessant movement. On one hand, the system forming itself by the

progressive synthesis of the various forms and, on the other, the separation, dissociation, disconnection and differentiation of forms. The play of forms here embodies the ceaseless and also undecidable tension between immanence and transcendence. Such is movement! This image speaks entirely of the endless and infinite movement – source and resource of all that shows and gives itself – of imagery.

One could recall here Stan Brakhage’s late hand-painted films where the artist focuses largely on painting, scratching and drawing directly onto the surface of the film-strip. Most singularly, one could recall the coloured lines of light emerging and erupting out of the film strip and where one liberates one’s self from the impasses of representation. Brakhage, speaking of his late practice: “I now no longer photograph, but rather paint upon clear strips of film – essentially freeing myself from the dilemmas of re-presentation. I aspire to a visual music, a ‘music’ for the eyes (as my films are entirely without sound-tracks these days). Just as a composer can be said to work primarily with ‘musical ideas,’ I can be said to work with the ideas intrinsic to film, which is the only medium capable of making paradigmatic ‘closure’ apropos Primal Sight. A composer most usually creates parallels to the surroundings of the inner ear – the primary thoughts of sounds. I, similarly, now work with the electric synapses of thought to achieve overall cathexis paradigms separate from but ‘at one’ with the inner lights, the Light, at source, of being human.”

9

Dora Maar, pictured here in 1936 by Man Ray. Rami Maymon intervenes in the image by incorporating further shadows and streams of white light, setting-up an entire dramatization, warping Dora Maar’s gaze, highlighting the distrust, but also the fear, the menace. As if Rami Maymon were here incorporating Dora Maar’s own-most artistic gesture, this uncanny, tragic apprehension of the real, in and within this image from 1936. As if Rami Maymon sought thus to highlight that of Dora Maar which had remained silent in this picture of Dora Maar. As if Rami Maymon sought to advance an artistic gesture where an image needed also to further express that which is represented by it. Needed to express that which remained silenced and hidden in Dora Maar. And as if Dora Maar finally spoke through Man Ray’s image, acted through precisely where Man Ray had sought to put her in the shade, so to speak, attempted to conceal her. Rami Maymon here, through an artistic act of his own – doubling of the image, flooding of white light – shows that a gesture always hides another, an art work always conceals yet another art work. The artwork has neither beginning nor end, neither *arche* nor *telos*, it incessantly evolves out of itself and persistently reveals that which it conceals and has concealed within itself.

10

We move directly from no. 9 to no. 11 without ever seeing no. 10. Obviously, no. 10 was not simply forgotten in the

exhibition and furthermore in the publication. And hence, we could emit the hypothesis that Rami Maymon sought to open another space, perhaps open up the space of another question. But which questioning is opened up here? In a certain sense, what Rami Maymon sought to open up is a space where questioning finds its source when faced with that which is reserved, removed, concealed and hidden. This questioning thus marks the necessity of always implementing a distance within the order of representation. As if Rami Maymon wanted to give a chance, that is to give *its* chance to the Other, always disturbing and incessantly dismantling the traditional form of representation – that Other so necessary to unsettle and disrupt the immemorial perseverance of presence, but also eminently necessary to authorize and allow *another* image – the *image to come* – always and already experiencing and confronting the *indeterminate*.

11

Who could tell? Who could state what the expression here, the gaze, the slanted head, the slightly opened mouth, reveals? Who can claim to say what traverses this face? What lies hidden in this visage? Ecstasy, anger, indifference, pain, suffering, passion, delight, pleasure... even the colour is ambiguous. Who can tell if the “subject” is in solitude or waiting on the Other’s arrival? Impossible to tell indeed. Will the “subject” here avow, confess, “come clean” about something, or rather remain silent, secluded, sheltered in a barely unbearable secret?

Emmanuel Levinas: the Other’s face is the “beginning” of philosophy. One must believe – for how could one know assuredly? – that the event of the “beginning” says ‘something’ *wholly other* than its “origin” or “provenance”. This is why the “beginning”, the face as “beginning”, erupts in our common and deep, ineradicable and tenacious quest for an “origin” or a “provenance”. In this sense, we *ought*, perhaps, to think *beyond* the “logic” of provenance and precisely at the point where this “logic” of the origin is exceeded and overwhelmed by the *unrepresentable* and *unsituable* face of the Other. Why do we say *unrepresentable* and *unsituable*? Not only because our faculty of representation, our subjective capacity of representing the Other, always and already fails when facing the event of the face of the Other, but also because there lies, always and already, an *unrepresentable* in the face of the Other. As if the “in itself” of the face of the Other was in itself *unrepresentable*.

This is why Levinas never poses the ontological question *what is the unrepresentable face of the Other?*, but rather goes straight towards a wholly other question, other than ontology and/or morality: *what occurs in and through the unrepresentable face of the Other?* By so doing, Levinas marks how and why the face of the Other cannot be reduced to a plastic form, as in a “portrait”. From the *unrepresentable* of the face of the Other, the exposition of its absolute nudity occurs, the bare and fragile vulnerability which always displays a forlornness, a loneliness, and already reveals the singularity of the death of the Other. The face of the Other *always shows* the death of the Other. But the inevitability and singularity of the Other’s death can be incitement to nothing less than the murder of the Other. It can provoke one to erase the face of the Other. Here, however,

lies the *paradox*: the revelation of the face of the Other also, simultaneously, commands “Thou shalt not kill.” Calls out from the face of the Other, from its *unrepresentability*, from its unthinkable *unsubstitutability*, the *responsibility for the death of the Other* and thus the urgency of responding to the Other.

12

For instance, in this image, could anyone truly, meaningfully, assuredly determine one single, unique, delimited “form”? Or are we rather subject to seeing various shapes, indeterminate configurations playing off one another in what seems to be an inherent movement where no beginning or end can be indicated or fixated? This image pictures one of these indeterminate forms always playing on the limit of formalization itself by incessantly concealing more than one form in its very presentation. It is not however a form *without* form. It is rather wholly and entirely a form *as* it conceals within itself future forms, that is forms yet to appear and perhaps also unnoticeable and unrecognizable forms.

Not only do the angles and the lines strike in this image – so does its inherent light. Or to be more precise, the unceasing play of the different shades of light ranging from obscurity to brilliance, all contained within the sole image, is also salient. What occurs in this play of light and shade? Perhaps it presents another yet immemorial play: that between presence and absence. We could be brought here to think that the image shows at once how a form can be both present and absent to a viewer and furthermore how a form can present itself as already concealing other absent forms. What is seen, as in a scan (which reveals, at the same time, the inside of a body through a positive/negative play of light and dark), is the content of this “form” as owning or possessing *no* content as such. We could even say – as containing an undetermined content, an infinite content beyond its enframing in a form.

13

Is the face of the Other here effaced by the simple passage of time? Or was it erased by overexposure to light? Was it incinerated? Was the face of the Other ripped off when the image was peeled from another to which it remained stuck? Is this image a double exposure of two photographs? Or did two images blend into each other through time?

But why is it that we cannot *not* imagine here the face of the Other effaced by what seems to be the mushroom cloud of an atomic catastrophe? Is it because our imagination is inhabited and all too frequently crowded, since the dawn of human history, by images of catastrophe? Is it the twentieth century and its string of catastrophes which have taken over our imagination? Could we ever know, decide, affirm?

RAPHAEL ZAGURY-ORLY

These questions force us to enter into the curious ambiguity, the paradoxical double-play between the “known” and the “unknown”, all brought into one “event-image” or “image-

event". We can advance by saying: the "unknown" is precisely that which all thinking must confront in order to begin. Derrida used to say that a thought which only thinks the "known", which only rolls out the possible, which only executes itself in the realm of the "possibly-known", is an instrumental, economical, and managerial type of thinking. For this thinking represses "questioning" and expresses itself solely as a "problem-solving", strategic, "policy-making" scheme.

This is an important point. It means to mark that thinking and art (is there a difference between "thinking" and "art"?) require constant and incessant confrontation with the *unthinkable*, the *unknowable*, the *unrepresentable*. If thinking settles for the thinkable, settles for the organization of the knowable, if art is reduced to the management of the representable, the production of that which is unambiguously visible, what is then left of thinking? What is then left of art? Thinking becomes then the simple economical operation of "making things work" according to a logic which never confronts the multiple concreteness of events in history. In truth, to organize thinking by invoking, for example, thinking's adjustment to a "principle of reality" for which there is no exterior, no outside, nothing beyond its actuality, is to deliberately reduce thinking to a simple managerial operation – as if thinking was the systematic, obvious, straightforward application of a predisposed and predetermined concept to anything and everything, to any event and every catastrophe.

I want here to relate this to the question of catastrophe: would there not be something of a catastrophe when thinking is reduced to such an operation, and consequently, to such an operative agenda? Not only because such a thought would negate, at its very source, the possibility of inventing a novel horizon where one could think without predetermination and from the event to which it would be exposed to. Is it not somewhat catastrophic when we are operating as if our historical catastrophes (World War I, *Shoah*, Tchernobyl, Fukushima, to name here but a few radically different from one another) were all emanating from a sameness to which a *same response*, founded on a self-asserted capacity, faculty and power, would be adequate. We are operating here in the circle of the same, regardless of the radical differences and singularities of the catastrophes in our history. *And those to come*. Would this not be a form of "catastrophe": to reduce thinking to the bare and simple application of a same logic to whatever is occurring and affecting human existence.

JOSEPH COHEN

Walter Benjamin: "That things continue 'to go on as they are' is the catastrophe." That things continue as they always have and according to the pretention that 'events' are always and already the *same* – that is, for Benjamin, a form of catastrophe. What I wish here is to *rethink thinking* itself, and thus, to inscribe in thinking a *contestation*, a revolt against the reductive operation in and of thinking which endlessly symbolizes and signifies the sameness of all 'events' and, equally, the sameness of all responses to any or every 'event'. *I seek here a redefinition of thinking beyond the hegemony which sees in all thinking-acts the repetition of the same schema applicable to all and every 'event'*. In this sense, we seek to think a thinking which always and already thinks beyond itself, exceeds its pretention to the *same*, to the universality of all that happens to it, and thus a thinking which remains exposed to the unsubstitutable singularity of the

'events' it is confronted by. A certain type of radical singularity of thinking; expecting thinking to always and already exceed itself beyond its economical application. In many ways, and even if we are not situating this redefinition of thinking in the classical opposition between "realism" and "idealism", what I desire here for thinking is something like an "otherwise than the real" and "not yet the ideal" or "otherwise than the ideal" and "not yet the real" – a thinking which does not confine itself, nor reduce itself to a "principle of reality" nor to a "principle of ideality", but which always and already commands, expects, demands of thinking the *impossible*. The *impossible* for both the "real" and the "ideal" – this means: an incessant reworking of the "real" and of the "ideal"; a perpetual effort of disturbing and hence of awakening both the "real" and the "ideal" to a *wholly other diction*. We are seeking to force the "real" and the "ideal" to formulate and express themselves always and already otherwise. *Why do we insist on the impossible?*

Because it demands and commands an entire re-questioning and, re-examination of, the central notion of what we call a human "faculty". This insistence on the *impossible* is not understandable as a norm or as a moral commandment for an autonomous, deliberate, deciding subject. As it questions what we naïvely call a "principle of reality" and disturbs the equally naïve "principle of ideality", it also undermines the very possibility of setting norms, of postulating values, or of elaborating "value judgments"...

14

In *The Philosophy of History* (1822-1823), G.W.F. Hegel exposes the "place" of what he terms the "African character" in this most violent quotation, whose violence is always attuned to the development of Spirit's historical meaningfulness:

"The peculiarly African character is difficult to comprehend, for the very reason that in reference to it, we must quite give up the principle which naturally accompanies all our ideas – the category of Universality. In Negro life the characteristic point is the fact that consciousness has not yet attained to the realization of any substantial objective existence – as for example, God, or Law – in which the interest of man's volition is involved and in which he realizes his own being. This distinction between himself as an individual and the universality of his essential being, the African in the uniform, undeveloped oneness of his existence has not yet attained; so that the Knowledge of an absolute Being, an Other and a Higher than his individual self, is entirely wanting. The Negro, as already observed, exhibits the natural man in his completely wild and untamed state. We must lay aside all thought of reverence and morality – all that we call feeling – if we would rightly comprehend him; there is nothing harmonious with humanity to be found in this type of character. The copious and circumstantial accounts of Missionaries completely confirm this, and "Mahomedanism" appears to be the only thing which in any way brings the Negroes within the range of culture." (English trans., J. Sibree, New York, Dover, 1956, p. 93).

And again, at the point of moving on, of moving away from Africa in the depiction of Spirit's historical epochs and phases, eras and moments, Hegel takes particular care to dissociate

Africa from the very historical development of Spirit: "At this point we leave Africa, not to mention it again. For it is no historical part of the World; it has no movement or development to exhibit. Historical movements in it – that is in its northern part – belong to the Asiatic or European World. Carthage displayed there an important transitional phase of civilization; but, as a Phoenician colony, it belongs to Asia. Egypt will be considered in reference to the passage of the human mind from its Eastern to its Western phase, but it does not belong to the African Spirit. What we properly understand by Africa, is the Unhistorical, Undeveloped Spirit, still involved in the conditions of mere nature, and which had to be presented here only as on the threshold of the World's History." (*op. cit.*, p. 99). Let us *interrupt* here this historical march of Spirit... And pose questions to its leading philosopher – pose questions to the dialectical machine of this self-justifying spiritual appropriation of historical meaning which never ceases to produce, as it advances on the track of its self-recognition, irremediable injustices and segregations, exclusions and foreclosures: are these injustices, segregations, exclusions, foreclosures not unavoidable when the very meaning of History, is, as here, thought and comprehended as the development and the manifestation of Spirit? And furthermore, are we justified in justifying this process of exclusion and foreclosure in the name of the meaning of Spirit? According to what Law may we affirm this justification of Spirit in History as the sole and only *meaning* of History? And, in displacing slightly the aim of our critical questions, can we simply isolate these exclusionary, segregating, foreclosing passages in Hegel's philosophical writing and label them as circumstantial, historically contextualised, somewhat accidental, remarks of "his time"? Can we simply, as some are today tempted to do, return to Hegel's systematic expression of Spirit as historical meaning when exclusions of "Africans", to whom we could also add "Women" and "Jews", are inextricable from Spirits' self-appropriation and self-recognition as History?

15

(*cover image*)

One main trait of Judaism is the proscription of graven images taken from *Exodus* 20.4: "You shall not make for yourself a carved image, or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth."

Perhaps we ought to think the *positivity* of this proscription rather than see it as a negative and condemnatory, repressive and suppressive law. This proscription of graven images opens onto, in truth, firstly the exercise of what we could call a *critical suspicion* in regards to all forms of presentation or representation, and secondly, to the possibility of thinking beyond presentation or representation towards another source of meaning. From this other source of meaning is expressed another calling, and hence another responsibility, other, that is, than the call for consciousness to expand itself in the epistemological appropriation of the represented given. In this sense, it is important to say, the proscription of graven images is resolutely directed towards maintaining suspicion in regards to the forms of presentation and consequently the representational

mode, and, through this suspicion, orient thinking *beyond* the given, outside the logic of "presence", of "meaning" towards another modality of *givenness* stemming from another source of meaning.

Hence, we ought never here plainly contest the regime of "presence" and the logic of representation. We seek rather to expose thinking to a source of meaning irreducibly *other* to presence *in* presence. It is in this very movement where the other source of meaning is called to erupt singularly in being and overflowing, suspending, interrupting its logic, that we could approach the *positivity* of the biblical proscription of representation: to perpetually question the logic and the horizon of "presence" which structures experience *per se* and which is formulated as the fundamental element of the cognitive subject. The biblical proscription of graven images – coupled with the critique of presence – opens thought to another realm of meaning and consequently another language: that of "revelation" (*hitgalut*) and "alliance" (*brit*). In this sense, "revelation" and "alliance" will serve as the key Hebraic terms for a break with the logic of "presence" and the representational mode of the subject, and with the contractual ethics emanating from recognition in a rational community of autonomous agents. These terms inscribe an irreducible asymmetry in identity, forcing it to revert to its radical Other, that Other source of meaning which the intentional pretention and the constitution of a horizon of "presence" always and already obliterates and negates. "Revelation" is understood not as manifestation, not as unveiling, even less as constituted phenomenality, but more profoundly as the *irrepresentable structure of givenness* as such which inscribes the radical irreducibility of Otherness in everything given. The scene of the *givenness* of the Law at Mount Sinai furnishes here the frame of reference: God gives the Law to Moses, allowing him to "see" in this gift what can be translated as the "back" (*ahoraim*) of God, but which could also be conveyed as "Otherness" (*aher*). This second translation means ultimately that God's gift, the Law, can only be given as such where its *givenness* as such is not seen, unveiled, shown or manifested but rather remains retracted and withdrawn from that which is given. The Law commands where it is not seen or perceived, presented or represented. Enriched by this interpretative reading of the gift of the Law as revelation, we can approach the figure of the Other as Other, its ethical commandment, only as the latter is not visible as such, not reducible to presentation or representation. As if the Other is not seen but *heard*; does not appear, but *speaks* and *commands*. Which means: the Other's ethical commandment is given as an unrepresentable Law, as a "revelation" which is always singular, unique, unseen and unforeseen and which consequently cannot be reduced to a recognizable and presentable expression.

16

Does an artwork have a frontal, exposed side which would stand in opposition to a hidden back and unexposed dimension? Does an artwork have a prioritized and preferred side differentiated from a hinter side?

This question may seem out of place, out of sync, untimely, most particularly as we think and write on form and about the

artwork's form. But in truth, this question is posed each and every time an artwork is shown. Whenever an artwork must be presented, in an art space or wherever, the artist poses the question: how to show it? That is, what will the spectator see first of the exposed artwork? And furthermore: is what is seen first more significant, imperative, and intentional than what lies outside the revealed side of the artwork? We could rephrase it as follows: does the "intentionality" of an artwork lie only in its visible frontal face? Does the artwork only speak to the spectator from its exposed side? Whence springs the further question: what is masked in the exposed side of an artwork? What remains invisible in its frontal face?

One could recall here the phrase from Vassili Grossman's novel *Life and Fate*: "Never did she think that the human spine could be so expressive and transmit in so penetrating a manner one's moods." In this phrase – which did not escape Levinas' reading – one can immediately see that it is never only the face, the front, the immediately exposed flank which presents an "intentionality" but also, and perhaps more profoundly, the reverse or back side, the hidden and unexposed face. Hence, as in Levinas' thought, it is not only the frontally exposed face which can be seen as a face, but also the entire body, the back or the reverse which is fully and entirely "*visage*" in all of its absolute fragility. Not only is the back side a "*visage*", in this sense, but it is perhaps more so than any other body-part. For it immediately embodies the extreme precariousness of the Other. This is why Levinas also seized by this other passage from *Life and Fate* where Vassili Grossman describes the visits by the wives or parents of the political prisoners in Moscow's *Loubianka* jail: "A woman waits her turn. The people who approached the counter had a peculiar way of stretching out their necks and their backs, their raised shoulders and stretched shoulder-blades sprung out, and seemed to scream, cry, sob." Hence, an artwork cannot, and never could, only be apprehended from its frontal, exposed face. Following Vassili Grossman and Emmanuel Levinas, we could say that the back and unexposed side also embodies the artwork, it perhaps embodies the fragility of the artwork in its most singular folds and interstices.

And hence a question: who would have thought that from the unexposed side of the artwork one could *see* the *wholly Other* of what the Western artistic tradition had always considered to be the site of all that is to see and to be seen? And further: what would occur if we retracted the frontal "intentionality" and sought out the reverse side, the other margin, the unexposed other face or rear flank of the artwork? What secret lies in that unseen edge? What does the un-shown say and express? In this gesture of *seeing* the *wholly Other* from the unexposed side of the artwork, something of the *frame*, the *intention* and the *posture* of the codes of Western artistic tradition are replayed.

17/18

Rami Maymon exhibits images 17 and 18 horizontally; they are placed on two identical steel box-frames each elevated (perhaps 30 cm) above the floor of the exhibition space. They lie flat, parallel to one another and suspended, almost free-floating – not as one would normally or traditionally expect photographs to hang, on an exhibition wall. Perhaps Rami Maymon sought

to show how these particular images relate to a void, an empty space beneath them. What could this exhibition mode mean for the particular images 17 and 18? Perhaps, again, Rami Maymon sought to reveal how they emerge out of an "*ab-grund*" (literally a "without ground"), how they never show, never can show themselves from a fixed, stable and firm foundation or grounded and rooted floor. As if these images were never fixed or fixable, but had always to *float* indeterminably as occurrences out of a free-floating void.

However, Rami Maymon does not leave the empty space underneath images 17 and 18 *entirely* void. He places pottery vases (which he himself made) in the spaces beneath the images, as well as within their steel box-frames. Why? Perhaps not to allow these images to float freely, undeterminably, over and above an empty, voided space. Perhaps in order to *conjure* up the "*ab-grund*" left open by the spaces beneath images 17 and 18. To conjure up, we might say, the "*ab-grund*" in the "recollection" and the "gathering" offered by the pottery vases. As if a falling object would be cushioned in its fall, Rami Maymon indicates how and why archaeology can offer a certain safeguard from the unknown and the unknowable which invariably haunts every image, these and others.

But a question: what occurs within each of these vases? What is deposited in them? What remains of the images in the hidden recipients underneath their exposed and exhibited faces? These questions stand "at the limits of truth" – Rami Maymon tirelessly plays on these limits and frontiers, and hence pushes what is shown to confront the limits of its presence and of its representation. Rami Maymon perhaps seeks to suspend the age-old pretention to stand in truth and risk the whole artistic (even philosophical) gesture to venture out into a movement of unshown performatives – artistic performatives where truth is not or no longer condemned to itself.

17

Art performs, occurs, acts, stands at the "limits of truth..."

A curious expression: to stand "at the limits of truth". We find it in a text written by Denis Diderot (1713-1784) entitled *Essay on the Life of Seneca* (1778), and succinctly interpreted, deployed in all of its aporetic effects in *Aporias* (1990) by Jacques Derrida. Regardless of the subject matter of this *Essay on the life of Seneca*, the curious expression "The limits of truth..."/ "to stand at the limits of truth..." is disquieting for the history of Western thought.

Why? Because, firstly, it insinuates that truth itself *has* a limit, that truth *is* itself limited and, furthermore, *limits itself in its affirmation*. The entire quotation, whose "uncanniness" Derrida transcribes and radicalizes, signals a "fault" which, Diderot claims, is "too often generalized."

What is this "fault"?: to let one's self be carried away *beyond* the limits of truth, beyond the security furnished by the boundaries marked by truth. The fault is to let one's self be swept *beyond* truth into indistinctions, undifferentiations, into the void of undeterminable meaning. In this sense, and it has been a constant in the history of Western thinking: to let one's self be swept beyond the limit of truth would mean to commit not only a philosophical error, but a grave and, in truth, unforgivable

trespass, transgression, a passage outside the determined limits of thinking, outside the secure and securing frontiers, restrictive and yet protective walls and red lines of thought.

Following here Diderot's warning and recommendation (traversing as it does the history of Western thought: clearly marking "where to go" and "the places to avoid"), we could further this quotation, again following Derrida, by posing a *supplementary* question. Not only a different question, but one which could also carry us *beyond* the prescribed "fault" or "error" typified here. This supplementary question could be: *what would it mean to stand at the limits of truth?*

18

The French expression "*se tenir à la limite de la vérité*" ("to stand at the limits of truth") is open to more than one interpretation: it can mean to be wholly and absolutely in and within truth, close to truth and in accordance with its normative instance, respective of its protective safeguards, limits and limitations. You stand upright in truth, keeping the line of truth and for truth, without deviation and without derogating from the right posture, without violating the truthful lineage. Faithfully. But it can also mean to be as close as one can be to falsity, to obscurity, and thus to losing the track of truth. To "stand at the limits of truth" could mean to be borderline about the truth, to dangerously stand on the edge of truth, and hence to be at that point where we are already *elsewhere* than in truth, and thus perilously approaching inaccuracy, error, fallacy. Standing at the limits of truth could also mean being closer to falsity than to truth.

How to think thus within this *at least* double expression, where being in truth and being in falsity remains *undecided* and *undecidable*, where truth and non-truth are not yet fixed or determined and furthermore where it is never clear where one stands when one stands at the limits of truth: in truth or already outside it? From this indecision, this undecidability, between truth and non-truth, we are forced to pose the question or repose the question of understanding what it could mean, as it has meant in the history of Western thought, that one ought *not go beyond the limits of truth?* And therefore, that one *ought* to remain respectful of the Law commanding us not to surpass the limits of truth? What is the future for truth when the commandment not to surpass its limits is claimed and proclaimed? When the moral posture or exigency controls and commands the proper, authentic, and sole manner of standing in and within truth? And when danger is so clearly associated with the temptation to step outside or beyond the truth? What does it mean for truth itself? For the future of truth? And also for the relation between truth and knowledge? Does it not also mark that art and justice remain entirely *undetermined* by truth, and consequently, are never constituted solely by knowledge?

19

In the well-known discussion-article on Leibniz in *Negotiations* (English trans. M. Joughin, New York, Columbia University

Press, 1995), Gilles Deleuze says: "One does indeed find folds everywhere: in rocks, rivers, and woods, in organisms, in the head or brain, in souls or thought, in what we call the plastic arts... But that doesn't make the fold a universal." (*Ibid.*, p. 156). And Deleuze continues: "Straight lines are all alike, but folds vary, and all folding proceeds by differentiation. No two things are folded the same way, no two rocks, and there's no general rule saying the same thing will always fold the same way. Folds are in this sense everywhere, without the fold being a universal. It's a 'differentiator', a 'differential'."

It is perhaps this very idea which haunted Rami Maymon when he took this image and crumpled it up, placing it on the ground of the exhibition space. By seizing this image, picturing a traditional rug of the Middle Atlas desert, perhaps Rami Maymon sought to show how the traditional ways of fixing and fixating on boundaries and limits – those drawn up and instituted, for example, in an atlas or encyclopaedia – only stand on enigmatic ground which always remains artificial. What is highly unsettling here is nothing less than Rami Maymon's subtle insistence on the impossible fixity of matter, of the real, of that which is present before us. By showing this folded and wrinkled up image of a mat or a rug, thrown on the floor of an exhibition space, Rami Maymon perhaps seeks to reveal the incessant and inherent metamorphosis of what pretends to be fixed and fixated upon. Following again Deleuze: "The concept of fold is always something singular and can only get anywhere by varying, branching out, taking new forms. You've only to consider, or better still, to see and touch mountains as formed by their folding for them to lose their solidity, and for millennia to turn back into what they are, not something permanent but time in its pure state, pliability. There's nothing more unsettling than the continual movement of something that seems fixed. In Leibniz's words: a dance of particles folding back on themselves." (*Ibid.*, pp. 156-157).

This singular image in this exhibition does not constitute a central piece around which all other works revolve. Rather, this singular image testifies to the "absence" of centrality and therefore to the pure movement of works interacting without ground or sole source of signification. As if this image, voiding out the pretension to fixity or fixated ground, repeatedly sought to bring us to this singular and yet non-universal idea: images conceal their own infinite movement of incessant secretive folds.

20

One of the last phrases of Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit*, before the work concludes with the inversion of Schiller's poem *On Friendship*, marks how 'Absolute Knowledge' incessantly recalls the various, different and always singular manifestations or representations, 'instants' or 'moments' of Spirit through History. All of Hegel's philosophy could be thought of as a long meditation on this double, speculative and dialectical idea: Spirit is its History and History is nothing other than the place where Spirit (which is another word for "meaning") manifests and deploys itself. For Hegel, *all* singular and particular 'events' in History are also to be grasped and seized as essential moments in the development of its meaning. No exception can interrupt or suspend this essentialist movement

of History always comprehending and already recognizing itself as the deployment of the ‘meaningful’. In Hegel, the speculative reconciliation is always and already absolute among ‘History’, ‘Meaning’ and ‘Spirit’ where Truth is precisely that which assures this triad’s own-most signification and intentionality. What then is the *goal*? Hegel answers: “The goal, which is Absolute Knowledge or Spirit knowing itself as Spirit, finds its pathway in the recollection of spiritual forms (*Geister*) as they are in themselves and as they accomplish the organization of their spiritual kingdom.” The goal is an incessant representation of the presence of Spirit in History and as History, that is, the representation of the fullness of meaning in and as History. According to Hegel, there are three modes of manifestation in the History of meaning: ‘Art’, ‘Religion’ and ‘Philosophy’. Each marks a particular moment in the ‘self-recognition’ of Spirit. What interests us here is the first mode of these manifestations: ‘Art’; and furthermore, how, for Hegel, ‘architecture’ and ‘sculpture’ represent the lowest, most immediate, forms of Art. How and why does Hegel determine these, ‘architecture’ and ‘sculpture’, as the most elementary forms of Art? And what does such a determined judgment about ‘architecture’ and ‘sculpture’, and consequently also about ‘Art’ itself – a judgment which engages a hierarchy and an order of values – mean for us today? Furthermore, what could it mean for us – and such is our situation – to think ‘architecture’ and ‘sculpture’ *outside* or *beyond* this ‘essentialization’ of History where ‘Art’ in its entirety (from ‘architecture’ to ‘tragedy’) only offers the shapes and forms of the manifestation of meaning in History? Can we/ ought we not see ‘Art’ *outside* or *beyond* this speculative and spiritual ‘essentialization’ of History? Our *actuality* perpetually forces this point on our thinking: History is radically irreducible to a structure by which spiritual meaning expresses itself according to an always and already perfectible essence. History is indeed, for us today, irreducible to a speculative unitary logic in which it is seen as displaying and deploying the meaning of Spirit. And consequently, ‘Art’ is similarly, for us today, irreducible to the simple form by which the meaning of History is represented and commemorated in accordance with a particular ‘epochal’ moment or instant in which Spirit expresses itself.

What would it mean to see an artwork outside or beyond the immanent process of historical meaning? And also: how and why does ‘Art’, far from representing the immanent process of meaning, deport us outside the order of representation and beyond the circumscribed sphere of historical meaning? What would it mean – and what does he seek to tell us – when Rami Maymon, as something of a “*flâneur*”, seizes this image, capturing both sculpture and architecture, but at the same time, projecting both these ‘forms’ outside the *galloping march* of Spirit in its historical self-recognition and self-accomplishment?

21

To deploy a complication and complexification of the entire structure of *donation* – such will be our task here. And primordially, to allow a complication and complexification of this march of Spirit as History, as historical meaningfulness where all instants and moments are conceptually recognized

and essentially organized. The entire logic of donation, of the donation of meaning, needs to be rethought here and requires its “*deconstruction*”, requires to be projected out of itself, out of its own-most “logic”. What needs and demands to be rethought, reexamined, “*deconstructed*” is the very idea that History is the theatre of that which has already occurred, and furthermore that the meaning of History has *already been given to us before any singular historical events*. In this sense, what we are questioning is the structure by which the events which mark our History have always and already been signified as History, and consequently that we are but on the receiving end of a packaged, almost pre-packaged meaning for all particular historical events.

Does this mean that there is no Law in or for History?

Certainly, there is always a necessity to think History. To think History as it is shaped and defined through globalization, technology, capitalism, the hegemonic world order and super-power politics (which are all *constants*), but also, and at the same time, outside and beyond these ways of circumscribing History, beyond seeing it as constrained by any development of a directive or vectored orientation whatsoever. We are not seeking to oppose the great metaphysics of History, ancient or contemporary, and propose a historicity where we would abandon History, isolate ourselves outside History into some Great Beyond without actuality. Nor are we seeking to oppose these metaphysics of History by the conception that it, History, would only be a simple series of circumstantial or coincidental events. We are not talking about a step outside History, its circumscribed meaning, its orientation – as if to step outside History was at all possible, or even desirable. But neither are we putting forth a simple reversal, a simple passage from one determination of History (the onto-theological determination of History) with another, a *post-metaphysical* thinking of History, (where there would be no possible determination of History). Rather, the aim here is to think *without* the rhetoric of opposition/reversal/substitution which has always reduced the “historicity of History” to one sole directing meaning. The aim: To escape the manner in which the great philosophical *teleologies* of History neutralize, annul, lock up and close up, the historicity of History by comprehending its essential movement. And thus, the further aim: question the curious manner with which we “clear” our historical conscience by furnishing it with the role and function of an inherent production of meaning. Question the ease by which we give ourselves a “calm and pacified good conscience” capable of negating singular historical events in the narrative of a legitimization.

Here lies a shift. Not a shift which would mark an epoch, a passage, a change in orientation. Rather a shift where a type of “recognition” emerges: to think History *without* framing it within an onto-theological determination. This “recognition” (if one can speak here of “recognition”) implies nothing less than a confrontation of History with *nihilism*.

Firstly, then: nihilism has always infiltrated and infused our History. Certainly, nihilism works through our Western tradition – but the question of whether nihilism does not also affect and permeate *other* traditions of thinking must be posed. But is this invasive deployment of nihilism in thinking simply said *negative, destructive, undesirable*? Nietzsche said: “Nihilism

is ecstasy!” What could this phrase possibly mean?

It means that nihilism incessantly transforms, turns, converts what is meant into its other. Nihilism always and already lets another meaning resonate in the “said” word. It lets the concealed and repressed meaning reveal itself in what is “said”. Nihilism forces the “self” to come out of itself and embody the other than the self. In this sense, what Nietzsche means is that each word also *says* the other of what it words, each affirmation is always other than what it wants or seeks to affirm. Take the rationalist always in some way caught up by his irrationality; the atheist always in some manner caught up by some sort of theism at work deep in the so-called atheism he affirms and proclaims. Or, and to be more precise, his religiosity has always and already preceded his atheism, and thus works through it uncontrollably. How can we understand “nihilism”? Now, of course, this word is constantly misused. In common language, we say “nihilist” of someone who claims not to have any values or norms, who believes in nothing. Or again, we call “nihilism” a lack of values or norms as if these just disappeared or evaporated into thin air. But, of course, nihilism is wholly and utterly contrary to this simplistic and everyday definition. Nihilism means the progressive and inevitable erosion of values and norms in their affirmation, assertion, positing.

What is nihilism? Nihilism is the affirmation of norms, is the assertion of values, is the positing of an inflexible and static hierarchy of values and norms. How? Because norms and values, their affirmation, assertion and positing is also and at the same time their voiding and perdition. This is why nihilism is the *dark side* of what is affirmed, the *other* of what is said or claimed, the “negation” of what is asserted. Nietzsche was categorical here: nihilism is always the “transvaluation” of values at the moment of their assertion. Each time one says “I am just”, each time one says “I am giving, loving, true, generous” – and we are here concentrating on so-called “positive” values, for it would be too simple to focus on the contrary values “unjust, meagre, hating, false...” – one affirms a ground, a foundation, and consequently a hierarchy. And at the same time the untameable question lurks: who are we to establish so certainly and distinctly a ground, a foundation, a hierarchy for such “noble” ideas? Who are we and what is our justification? In other words, the question: “what is the ground of what I take to be the ground?” “What is the foundation on which I say this is a foundation?” After all: “Who can or may say “I am just?”; “I *know* I am right?” or “I *know* who is wrong?”

Philosophy must pose these questions time and time again and always reexamine the “value” of its own expressions.

Here is a question that we could immediately consider: is not thinking itself obliging and calling us to leave this propositional-ontological act of affirming: “I am such and such...”; “I am so and so...”; “I know I am this and that...”, and so on?

And the same question, or close to the same question, a question in the same vein, can be posed in regards to History and of our discourses on History: does not thinking (speaking, writing) History require us to leave its appropriation as the development of *crises*, which is never too far from theologizing it and enframing its “becoming” in the horizon of an “apocalyptic” moment, that of the cathartic revelation of its truth?

Apocalypse comes from the Greek word *Apokalypsis*.

Etymologically, it is composed of the word *kaluptein* (the “hidden”, the “concealed”, the “secret”) and the privative prefix *apo* (“un-”). *Apokalypsis* marks thus the break point through which an opening occurs and where the hidden, the concealed, the secret is enlightened, revealed, brought out into the open, into the visible and the manifest.

In truth, the manner in which we have thought, spoken, written of History is wholly and entirely “apocalyptic”, that is, has always been, through the proliferation of “crises” to be overcome and surpassed, a secularization of a profoundly religious theme, that of the “Apocalypse”, where the hidden essence and Spirit of History is revealed, brought out into the open, the clear, the seen. And what is the effect of this spiritualization of History, of this metaphysical-theological determination of History: *that historical catastrophes are but “simulacra” of catastrophes*. Question: have we ever thought what a catastrophe is, what it could be, what it would mean, what a catastrophe signifies *without* reducing it to a *crisis*, *enframing* it within the “apocalyptic” horizon of History?

What we are expecting is: to think History without reducing it to the millenary “logic” by which catastrophe is transvalued and transformed in an apocalyptic moment of truth. For this “logic” essentially levels out, neutralizes, flattens the very questions stemming from the exigency of justice, of art, of a certain ethical relation to the Other – questions all situated beyond the legitimation of a judgment capable of setting out “what is right” and “what is wrong”. A “face to face” confrontation with “catastrophe” should bring us to pose these questions of justice, of art, of the ethical responsibility to the Other, without surrendering to the immense and powerful logic of forgiveness which always relieves, retrieves, reconciles *beyond* catastrophe. This also means posing questions in regard to the equally immense and powerful logic, working within forgiveness, of sacrifice, of the sacrifice of the self or of the other, of the self and of the other in the proliferation of a pacified historical becoming. The *affair of catastrophe* is to pose *impossible* questions of justice, of art, of an ethical responsibility towards the Other - questions which, as impossible, are also eminently *positive, purposeful* and *decisive*.

These “questions” must each time bring about a voiding of this immense and powerful movement of comprehending History as the continuous line evolving from *crises* to forgiveness *and* from sacrifice to justificatory resolution. They must bring about an emptying out of these endless rituals of commemoration which are, paradoxically, legitimate and always *just*. Who indeed could ever tell a victim or a survivor not to commemorate or to stop commemorating? Who indeed?

And yet, these “questions of justice, of art, of ethical responsibility towards the Other” require us to question as if *nothing* ought ever appear or reappear on the ruins of catastrophe. Nothing which may resolve itself in a comprehension of History, and thereby acclaim the apocalyptic end of History. This “hypothesis”, refusing to settle in the contented idea of an end of History, seeks precisely to deconstruct and dismantle the possibility of a simple consolation in History. Certainly, in our age of nihilism in which all professed, confessed values are transvalued, transformed, affirm and mean the contrary of what they seemingly assert, in these times when we are at a loss for any assurance, and where our institutions are always claiming the contrary of what they are perpetrating, we seek

consolation. But we must also reserve for ourselves the justice to pose questions to all the hidden motifs and countless concealed strategies of consolation, and furthermore of self-justification, self-pity and compassion.

We shall risk one more word on these strategies of consolation, compassion, pity, one word also on the notion of the *necessity* of such modalities which adopt the form or the envelope of *protection*. Consolation, compassion, and pity provide us with procedures, arrangements, systems, and techniques of protection. These are absolutely necessary. They are necessary for all, for ourselves and others, for our community, our “being-together” or “living-together”. They are necessary in that they protect us from economical-political-societal-natural precariousness. The State, through its institutions, ought always to intervene when catastrophe hits or when crises occur in order to protect us from the risk of our disappearance. And, of course, the State and its institutions harbour an obvious violence when they are not simply founded on violence, a “violence of Right”, which measures and circumscribes the violence of catastrophe. This is not the place, and we would not be able to, nor would we wish to stand against the necessity of protecting ourselves. In other words, it is not the case that we are here denying or standing against the protection which comes from the assurance offered by the different protective modalities. Hegel’s concept of “Right”, for example, is entirely structured around the idea of protection through a certain mastery of violence, one which is entertained in its institution, in its institutionalization. Indeed Hegel, in the *Philosophy of Right*, stated that the violence of “Right” was necessary to protect us from the worst and absolute violence of indifference or the undifferentiation of violence where there is no possibility of distinguishing between the self and the other, and thus where there is an immediate void where all ethical meaning is annulled. There is a need for our institutions and the protection they offer. A necessity thus for a certain type of measured and circumscribed violence. There is always the necessity of protecting ourselves from death, from madness, from violence which are already there, present, necessary, that we cannot deny or negate, cannot simply pass over, and whose possibility and necessity we must at times, sometimes, confront. We must subscribe to insurance policies; insurance is necessary – car insurance, life insurance, damages and risk insurance, insurance against all types of catastrophes – and we always do assure ourselves against risks, crises, catastrophes of all kinds which could affect our life, our everydayness.

But as Derrida so clearly foresaw: someone who always requires insurance, subscribing to all kinds of policies, who constructs his space through assurance and protective insurance, someone who would wish to enclose his space with insurance and assurance would be in a “delirium” as grave as one who would not subscribe to any insurance whatsoever. Indeed, what would be a life entirely made of insurance strategies?

Our choice is always between *at least two deliriums* – the delirium of getting assurances everywhere and against everything *and* the delirium of living with no assurances at all. Despite this “necessity of protection” guarded and safeguarded by our institutions – a necessity which is justifiably so, incessantly redefined and perfected, some would even say critically questioned – the “questions of justice, of art, of an ethical responsibility towards the Other” we find urgent to pose, stem from a *wholly other* source. They emanate from

the foremost exposure to the risk of losing everything and everyone. They emanate from an entirely *other* impulse then the one proclaiming the “necessity of protection”. They occur, these “questions” – not from the circumscribable “space”, or as Kant would say the “tribunal of reason”, always seeking insurance, assurance and capable of instituting norms or values – they come, these “questions”, from the experience of the unsubscribable, unpacified, and unthinkable within the space of reason, of insurances, of assurances, norms or values. An “exposed nudity” where what is questioned is not how to circumscribe violence, but rather *why* the circumscription of violence is always and already carrying something else, another agenda than what it is pretending to carry or bring forth. A certain experience of the loss of assurances, of the absence of norms or values, program and agenda, is necessary for the possibility of thinking. And of thinking what is meant, what is wished, what is desired, what is strategic also in these assurances, these norms and values, these programs and agendas. More than once we have thought that to deliver oneself entirely to the possibility of the Concept, to the faculty of anticipating everything which comes, appears, occurs, was as dangerous, as perilous, as hazardous as to deliver oneself to the complete absence of the Concept.

22

Anaximander (610 – 546 BC): “The Earth is cylindrical, three times as wide as it is deep, and only the upper part is inhabited. But this Earth is isolated in space, and the sky is a complete sphere in the center of which is located, unsupported, our cylinder, the Earth, situated at an equal distance from all the points of the sky.” This foundational idea, resting on the confidence and the assuredness that the “sphere”, the circular and cylindrical form are the symbols and symbolisations of perfection. Why is the “sphere” associated as early as the Greek pre-socratic thinkers and poets (and, in truth, much before the Greek pre-socratics), to perfection? Because the “sphere” displays what *Logos/Legein* expresses: unity, gathering, bringing together and reconciliation. The sphere pictures the Whole, the entirety, the harmonious grasp of “all that is”, “all that exists” and “all that is present”. Is this ontological “harmony” not our greatest desire, aspiration, our most powerful fantasy? And consequently, how to not also entertain the equally strong desire, aspiration, fantasy, that of cutting through it, of slashing or incising the “perfect form” to open up another space following another orientation. A non-spherical space and a non-circular orientation: the possibility to think *without* horizon and *outside* the “enframing” of all these pretensions to perfection, all these immemorial claims to harmonious forms and principles.

23

Will the light illumine or erase the human face? What *is* the face of humanity in this white and shifting light that approaches? What face draws itself in the advent of this light? Who will be the human to respond to this future light? Who will be the human to

come in this future light? And is this future light coming to shine on humanity, carry it and hold it, cherish it and protect it or is it, on the contrary, coming to destroy and efface humanity itself? Are we here on the border of humanism, of post-humanism or of a yet unknown and undeterminable humanity?

JOSEPH COHEN

Certainly these questions recall the classical idea of humanism, and confront us with what we perceive happening everywhere today: “post-humanism”. The first thing we could say about what is called ‘post-humanism’ today: it is not entirely ‘contradictory’ to humanism, and, in truth, projects itself in line with the classical eighteenth century idea of humanism. “Post-humanism” is both and at the same time a *reformulation* and a *surpassing* of the classical idea of humanism. And for at least two reasons: firstly, post-humanism is a *reformulation* of humanism in that it embodies the desire and leading idea proper to humanity: that of its *perfectability* and *universalization*. Indeed, post-humanism intends to structure a perfect identity of all humans – one in which all conform to a universally recognizable “sameness”. This *reformulation* of the classical idea of humanism also *surpasses* it. Post-humanism indeed tirelessly intends, at the same time, to do away with, to negate and erase that which institutes humanity, and consequently denies all and every difference, every singularity or own-ness in each human. It seeks to surpass human finitude in the pretension to eliminate, in its identity, those “events” which mark its finitude.

RAPHAEL ZAGURY-ORLY

Post-humanism, in its will to surpass humanism, is thus its *reformulation*. The questions which need to be addressed towards this movement of recuperation-surpassing-reformulation are: what is the effect of the technological “ordering” (*Gestell*) of the idea of humanism, of the figure of the human beyond its finitude and its singularity? Post-humanism determines, controls, regulates, the *ideal* of humanity towards its concrete and obvious immediacy. Post-humanism, in this sense, seeks to accomplish the classical ideal of humanism in *embodying* the universal values of humanity – universalist values such as transparency and immortality – but, at the same time, inevitably reduces humans to their lowest common quality. Post-humanism means thus to reformulate, in a strictly *monolithic*, *monolingualistic*, flat, perfectly transparent manner, at once the human’s past, present and future. And indeed post-humanism takes on the task of “bringing” and “elevating” human finitude to a perfectly comprehended, self-identical, and also immortal, being. It imagines a being without birth, without death, without language. In the exercise of its own will to do away with these fundamental traits of human finitude, and of all that remains *undetermined* in the human, post-humanism is strictly determined by perfectibility which is entirely grounded in the idea that the human is ultimately transparent to himself and to the other. This humanist *rationale* of transparency, so clearly adopted by post-humanism, cannot *not* also erase and negate the very humanity of humans. And in this sense, post-humanism forgets and silences the multiple sources, the differentiated origins, the non-universalisable identities working through each singular human. Post-humanism brings humanity to a status of uniformity which unequivocally disaffirms the *chance* of the untranslatable singularity in each human. It practically

“trades away” this *chance* – which undoubtedly comports a risk, more than one risk... – by embodying a common, substitutable, interchangeable figure of humans. Post-humanism thus negates the indetermination, the origin *without* origin, the always multiple singularity in human “identity”.

JOSEPH COHEN

Reflecting on this movement, and on the development we are tracing here between humanism and post-humanism, we can name at least three singular “events” which post-humanism seeks to overcome in the effort to embody a “perfected” humanity: nativity, language, death. A word firstly on nativity, and this is probably also true for language and death: it is a singular, unsubstitutable “event” of otherness in the very heart of human existence. As such, it marks a relation to the other in the self-sameness of human subjectivity. Nativity arises out of the accidental meeting between two individuals. Their procreation brings into the world a being entirely without assurance and insurance, wholly exposed to all kinds of risks. Post-humanism – and this is by no means devoid of a legitimate ethical compulsion – seeks to eradicate and eliminate the uncontrollable vicissitudes in nativity by assuring that the “product” of procreation is never exposed to risk, to danger, to peril. In this sense, post-humanism seeks to eradicate all risk factors. The profound ethical idea directing this pretention is precisely to secure procreation. In sum, to ensure that procreation remains protected from being exposed to the unknown. Post-humanism seeks to develop a scientific, technological assurance that the “product” will fit and be fit. Which means: not to carry any singularity where it could find itself uncovered in the face of sickness, of malformation, of disease. This desire is to rid all nativities from the imperfections of singularity and of the hazard proper to the singular event of life.

RAPHAEL ZAGURY-ORLY

And of course, we must here add language... It is one of the most troubling platforms for finitude. We all have different languages. Even when using the same words, we each signify differently these very words. What I see, perceive, feel, remember, think, recall when I use a particular word is wholly and entirely different from what another human being sees, perceives, feels, remembers, thinks, recalls in the same word. Certainly, we find a “common-ground”, we recognize vaguely a certain *sameness* in the words we each use and which structures our linguistic conventions. But, fundamentally, there is always something particularly mysterious when two or three, or a group of people, speak to each other and manage to understand themselves. Why? Because each human being possesses its own language, that is, each human being carries a singular and untranslatable language. Post-humanism – and this is by no means devoid of an idea of communication, of the possibility and the need or the desire for transparency, for common understanding in dialogic expression – seeks to resolve, to do away with and put an end to the singularities of our languages by structuring and ordering language itself to its most common, understandable and immediately recognizable denominator: what one says is exactly understood as is by the other. And inversely. In this manner, the idea of a universalized and analytical language is structured and ordered. This universalized and analytical language entails, at most,

the negation, and, at least, the reduction of the singularity of the individual languages which are each our own. Of course, post-humanism seeks to assure and insure a universal, “true” communication, one in which there is no ambiguity, no vagueness, and consequently, no breakdown, no crises, no violence in language.

And again nothing is here more “humanist”: an aspiration and a concretization of a universalized language where all propositions are meaningful to all, and where this “sameness” grounds a linguistic community where there is no distance between intention and verbalization and thus where the “values” of truth and comprehension are guaranteed. And who could here contest such an aspiration?

JOSEPH COHEN

A question, however: does this not also mean the reduction and the destruction of language itself? Does this not entail the negation of the very condition of language?

It is not because humans participate in a linguistic transparency where each word used relates perfectly to intention, definition and verbalization, that they speak to each other, desire each other. Would it not be the contrary? Humans speaking to each other through the profound *impossibility* of understanding each other.

And finally, death... To overcome the always imminent “event” of death remains, for post-humanism, the most recurrent and sturdiest of obsessions. Why? Not only because death instills fright and trembling, but mainly and primordially because it is the most radical individualizing and *unsubstitutable* mark of human finitude. And thus of human singularity. It is the most individualizing and *unsubstitutable* “event” for it is utterly unknown and undeterminable. Indeed, nothing can be known of death, about death or in death and yet, despite this unknowability, death is the most “known” “event” in human existence: each and every human knows of our death. But death, as the condition of possibility of our experience of the world, the very opening and aperture by which the world is experienced, is too easily confounded with experience itself to the point where humans imagine having an experience of death itself. Death becomes a “phenomenon” amongst others, a “phenomenon” whose very negativity can be surpassed or overcome. Hence, for post-humanism death becomes a *problem* to solve and resolve, to surpass and overcome. It no longer maintains itself as a singular *aporia* of experience itself, a *question* for which no light could simply clear and resolve in the clarity of its radiance.

24

Maurice Blanchot, *The Book to Come* (1959): “Rilke wanted the young poet to be able to ask himself: ‘Am I really forced to write?’ in order to hear the answer: ‘Yes, I must.’ ‘So,’ he concluded, ‘build your life according to necessity.’” That is a detour to elevate the impulse to write even more, to the point of morality. Unfortunately, if writing is an enigma, this enigma gives no oracle, and no one is in the position to ask it questions. ‘Am I really forced to write?’ How could he ask himself such a thing, he who lacks any initial language to give form to this question, and who can meet it only by an infinite movement that tests

him, transforms him, dislodges him from his confident ‘I,’ his starting point, from which he thinks he can question sincerely? ‘Go into yourself, look for the need that makes you write.’ But the question can only make him come out of himself, leading him to where the need would be rather to escape that which is without law, without justice, and without measure. The answer ‘I must’ can indeed, in fact, be heard; it is even constantly heard, but what ‘I must’ does not include is the answer to a question that is not discovered, the approach to which suspends the answer and removes its necessity.” (p. 29-30, English trans., C. Mandell, Stanford, Stanford University Press, 2003).

25

Are *they* going upwards or downwards? Who is ascending and who is descending? Are *we* ascending or descending? Who could ever say *who* is rising and *who* is falling? Could there ever be such an affirmation as: “Of course, I am ascending and not descending” or, on the other hand, “Of course, I am descending and not ascending.” Could one ever state, clearly and distinctly, “I know where I am heading, up *or* down.”

By these questions, we are seeking to already question how and why the dialectic “to *descend* in order to better *ascend*” entirely integrates common language and has become the unquestionable essence and motor of certain contemporary discourse. We are already levelling towards this very dialectic a *suspicion*. Naturally, this dialectic is common place today: one descends to retrieve one’s self from one’s fall and rise beyond it to a higher and more accomplished identity. This dialectic, we know, has pervaded the entire history of philosophy and we could even call it today – although profoundly robust – quite banal, used-up, over-used.

But does this dialectic ever promise anything other than the repetition of itself? Could this dialectic ever embody another promise than the simple application of its own determination? Of what it means to fall and rise, to fall in order to rise, to always rise from a fall?

Would it not be time that a *promise* occur? And as it occurs never be assured of how and why it promises, never circumscribe itself in the application of a dialectical logic where all is always determined to happen according to its function and functionalism?

What would such a promise say?

Where and how and why would it occur?

What would be its sign?





40 *Treppenszene*, 1932 (0264)









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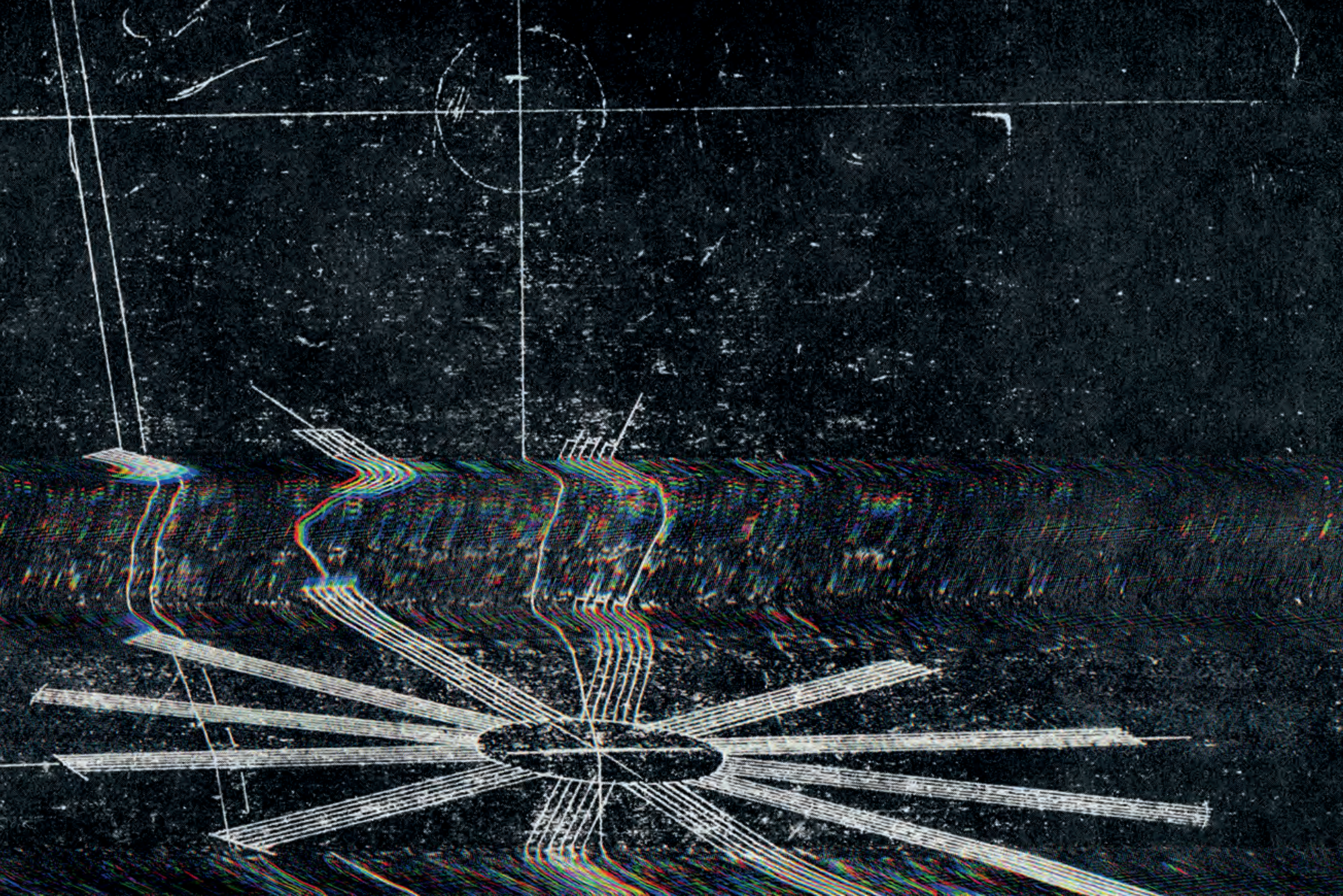


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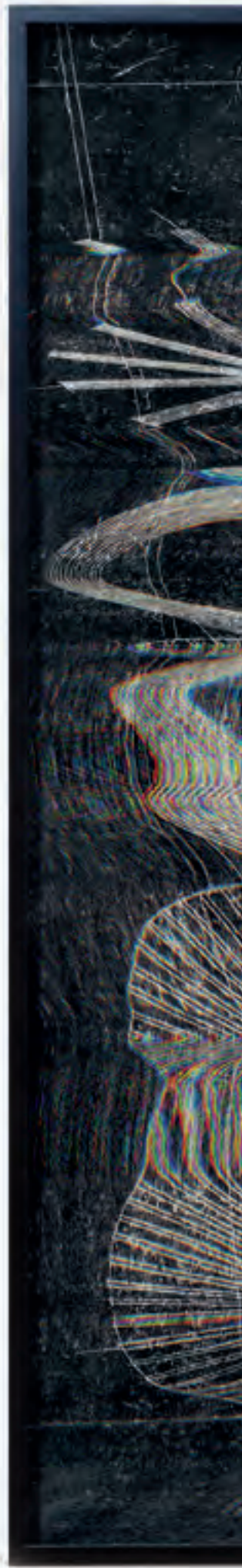
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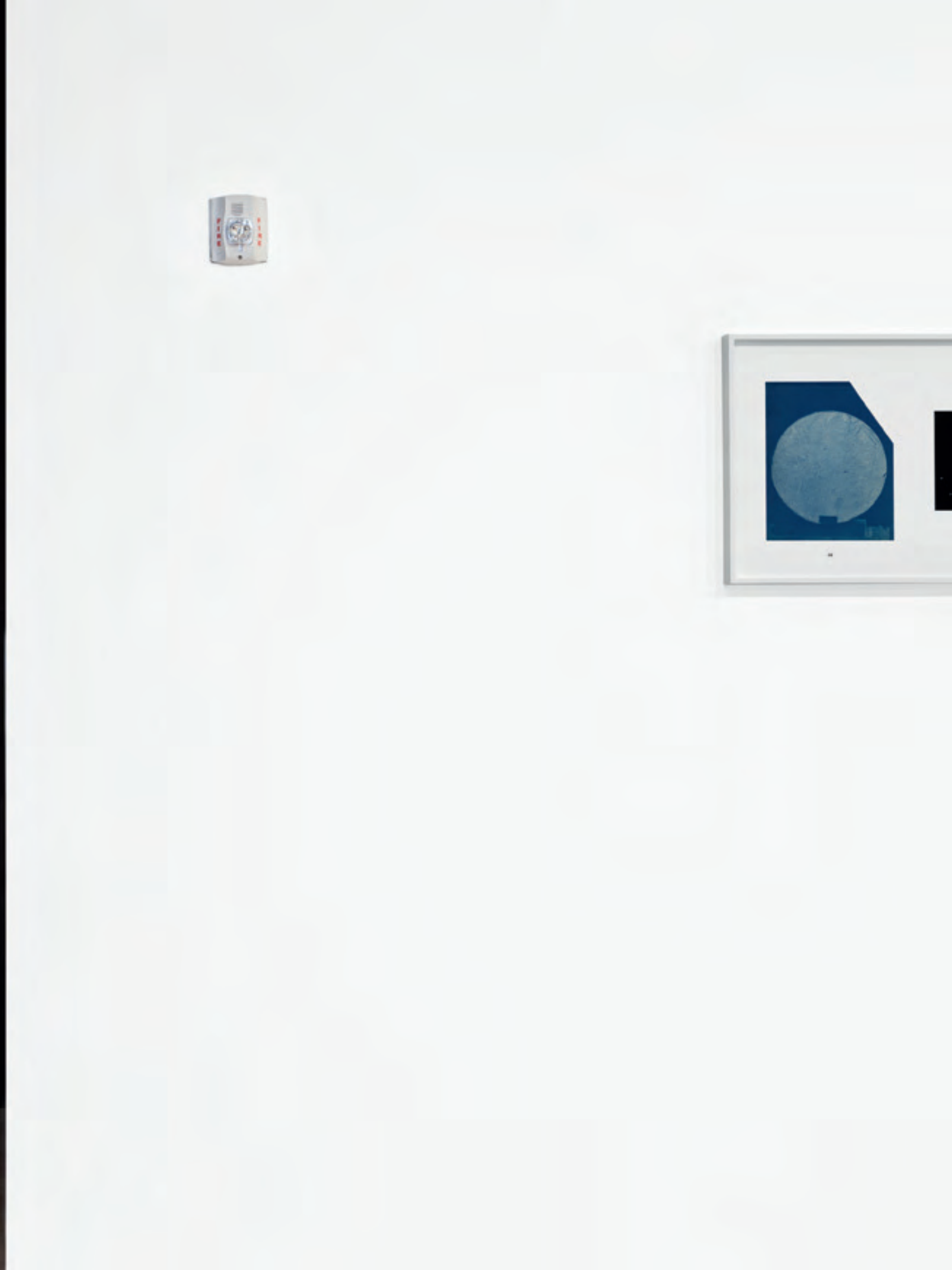
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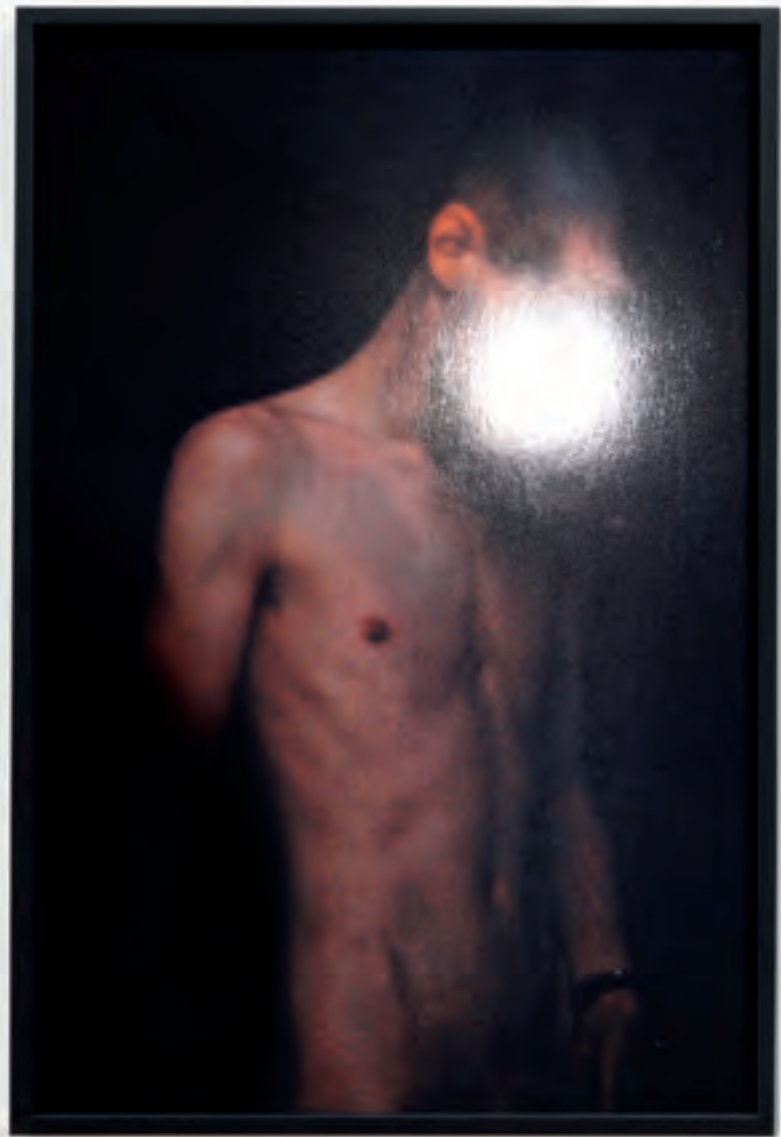


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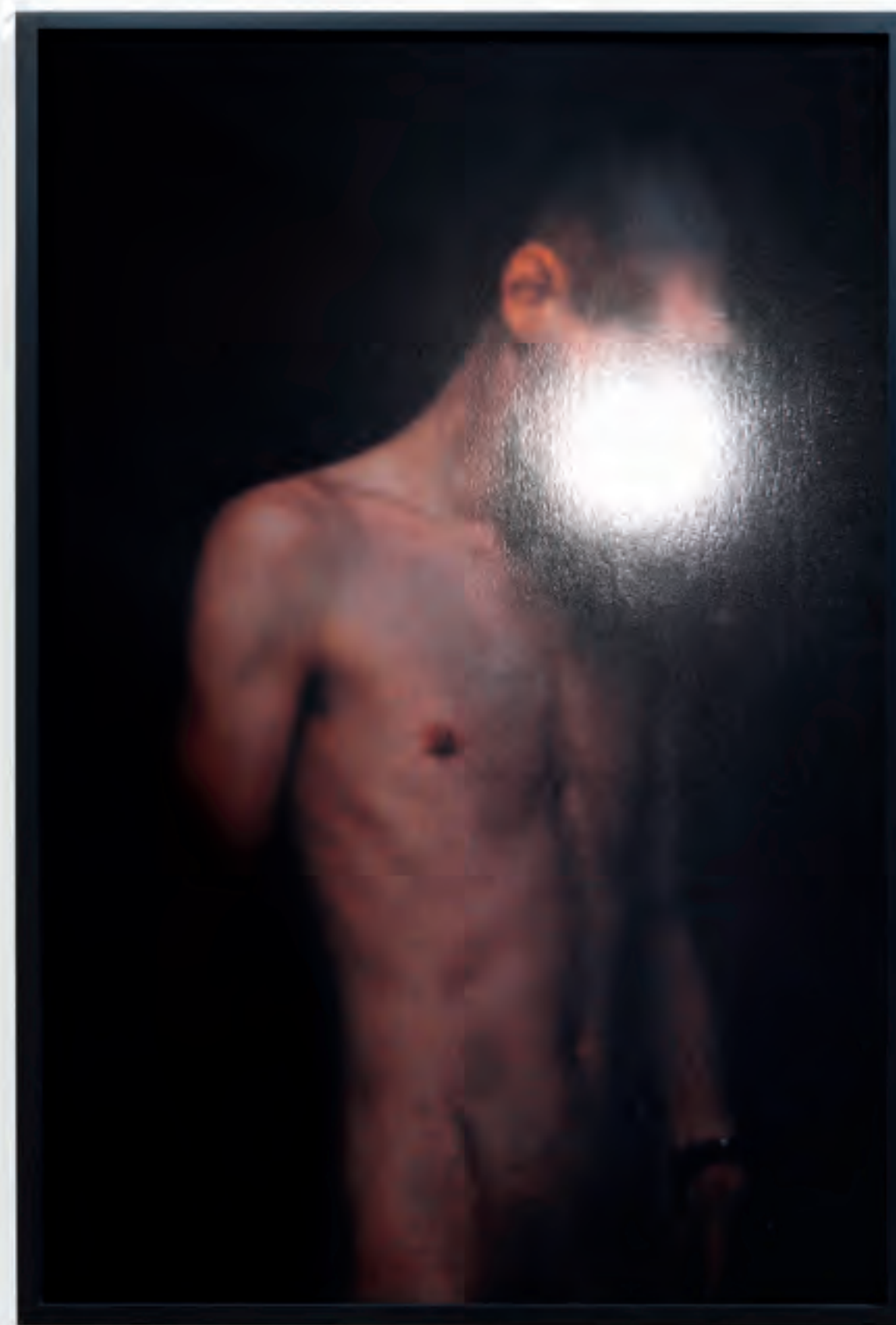
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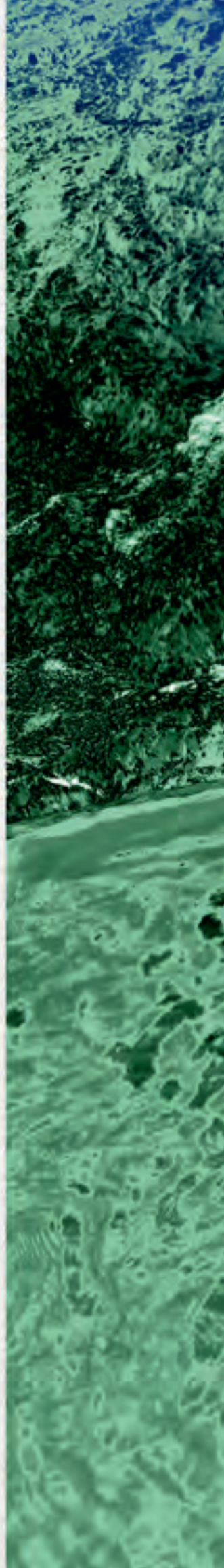
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