

Berlin, *fin de millennium*:

An Experiment in Corporeal Ethnography

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ABSTRACT

This thesis is an experiment in corporeal ethnography. It displays ethnographic data collected during fieldwork in Berlin between the autumn of 1999 and the spring of 2001. In a vertiginously changing city, a variety of corporeal itineraries of individuals take us through public and private spaces: the construction sites of the Potsdamer Platz, a claustrophobic hospital room, the collective ecstasy of raves, the exasperation and boredom of a receptionist in a corporate company, the eroticised night life of a Wine Club, the turbulent piano career of a teenager and streetscapes occupied by elderly survivors of the Holocaust and the new migrants that are re-populating the city.

Taking Benjamin, Artaud and Kracauer's theoretical programmes seriously, and without resorting to their work as mere academic citation, I have tried to make their conceptual projects operational, not simply through the collection of a certain kind of data, but also by experimenting with the process of writing. The thesis advances a *pointillist* approach which moves across intimate, local, economic, political, and global boundaries. This *pointillist* approach aims to account for the complexity and fluidity of human experience, without becoming imprisoned within canons of "*culture*". Beyond the filters of causality, signification and linear temporality, by affirming fields of intensities and desire, this ethnographic experiment investigates the mediation zone between discourse and figure.

The thesis focuses on specific individuals and their lives in order to dramatize specific predicaments. It experiments with an *intransitive* form of writing that attempts to draw closer to the experiences of those rendered marginal by more conventional and disembodied strategies. Rejecting the discursive and authorized version of the New Berlin, the thesis attempts to construct a radical vision of the city. Through the exploration of subaltern corporealities, this experimental work aspires to provide not only a different account of Berlin at the end of the

millennium, but is also offered as a programmatic statement for an alternative anthropological practice.

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Preface

I'm a camera, with its shutter open... quite passive, recording not thinking. Recording the man shaving at the window opposite and the woman in the kimono washing her hair. Some day, all this will have to be developed, carefully printed fixed... (Christopher Isherwood. Goodbye to Berlin. (1939:9)

This is an event, an active experiment. I hold a video camera and walk down to the streets of Berlin. I am drifting through Mitte, at the former East side of Berlin. Yes, I probably could have begun recording anywhere else. This is an unconventional experiment. In the thirties, another ethnographer named Siegfried Kracauer had approached the white collar workers of Berlin according to a *pointillist* method (Koch 2000). Likewise, the paragraphs here attempt to be fluid by proceeding dot by dot. This material is streaming, and in its own affirmation moves beyond conventional holist ways of editing fragments into wholes.

This form of filming, which is largely inspired by Christopher Isherwood's vibrant and palpating somatisation of Berlin, implies that I remain in the Heideggerian space previous to coming into being. It is the pleasure and the enthusiastic joy of Vertov's brother filming in *Man with a Movie Camera* (1929) that vitally and sensuously throws us to the life generating, inaugural instances of any event in life. It is in this sense that the fleeting moments of urban life I begin to make contact with are always already disappearing.

In Berlin, I never have the sensation of following a continuous and conventional itinerary; I traverse the city informed by a certain intense, incessant disquiet which turns my own cinematic writing unexpectedly fragmentary. It is here that the active anthropologist lets the world happen to his own flesh in the streets of Berlin compelled by Kracauer's *cataracts of time* (Koch 2000). This is an irritant event and it deals with excess. I move from one place to another, from one experience to another like in a soporific state in which things that should never have been actually coexist.

Contrary to the holist or culturalist anthropology, Siegfried Kracauer's methodological contribution to anthropology is the following: a *pointillist* way of seeing in which beings and things are mobilized independently, in order to be bewitched by their most singular, unexpected and vibrant interconnections. The driving force of these events or encounters is a setting into motion. This work is happening in the actuality of the present, meaning that the whole circuit of bodily energies throughout and outside of the text becomes a gesture of gratitude and a form of combustion - influenced by Kracauer's pleasure for urban collision and the explosion of the subject in the cravings of the flesh.

This experiment attempts to address the intriguing experience of anthropologists who drop pre-established filters based on causality, signification and linear temporality. Intensively compelled by the pulse of life, these maverick anthropologists face the difficult and chaotic realm of corporeal stimulation and unconscious impulsion. The following often highly visual paragraphs attempt to become streams that potentially could go on unexpectedly, uninterrupted. It can be considered an alternative to the anthropological convention of cutting points that happen to be invested into a sum, a whole. It may be the case that a series of events may form certain ensembles. Yet, one incessantly encounters a breakpoint, a potential line of flight that may deterritorialise the alleged ensemble.

This work, with a streaming and improvisational use of the digital camera, seeks to give an account of the present in the spirit of a bodily and rhythmic precipitation of an already always coming future.

Our eyes, spinning like propellers, take off into the future on the wings of hypothesis. (Vertov 1984:9).

1 – Introduction: An Experimental Proposal

1.1 Toward a Cinematic Ethnography

1.1.1 Fluidity and Kracauer’s Method of Pointillism

How then, do we connect parts to “totalities”? How do we redeem the fragments? How do we make intelligible the idiosyncratic acts, lives and representations of others? How do we locate them in a “historically determinate environment and society? It is here that cultural history, for all its brilliant achievements, runs out of answers for us. (Comaroff and Comaroff 1992:17).

Siegfried Kracauer, an unorthodox Berlin ethnographer of the thirties, much in the manner of Seurat, had developed a *pointillist* technique¹ in which fragments or singular points are linked only through virtual lines. In fact, these partial dots require the arduous endeavour of filling the gaps between the flowing points. These series of dots –or intense moments of the fabric of reality- do not constitute a unified aggregate. Such transversal and often aberrant sensitivity connects these transforming points, and yet paradoxically, still maintains them as peripheral². Its *detritorialising* strategy cannot be brought into a totalizing closure. This discontinuous ethnographic method – moving directly and indiscriminately between the singular and the paradigmatic- can be described as a monstrous hybrid of empirical description and simulacral fabulation. Rather than dialectics or

¹ The collection of essays in *The Mass Ornament* (1995) and the monographic study of *The Salaried White Collar Masses* (1988) are revealing works in which Siegfried Kracauer puts into practice this revolutionary method. For the development of this pointillist argument, I follow Gertrud Koch’s reading of late Siegfried Kracauer (Koch 2000).

² The resonances between the writings of Siegfried Kracauer and Walter Benjamin are multiple. (Hanssen 1998 :Frisby 1988). For this account suffice to point out that Benjamin, throughout the sixty six convolutes of his unfinished work of the *Passegenwerke* (Benjamin 2002), attempted to reconstruct the history of Paris in the nineteenth century. His heterodox theoretical strategy consists on rescuing historical objects by removing them from developmental myths of progress histories formulated by the false bourgeoisie consciousness. The literary constellation of the complexly interconnected and vibrant convolutes, similar to Kracauer’s cataract of exemplary instances, lay out a creative and non-totalizing discourse. Its elementary particles or convolutes, are partial fragments unrelated to any whole, which are connected to other convolutes, some within the body, some in the social field and material environment, and some others in the technological sphere of urban life.

metaphysics, it is Jean-Francois Lyotard's *pataphysics* (1984) that I have put into practice.

One of the multiple potentialities of Kracauer's *pointillist* method is that the field of affects a series of separate dots articulate are not placed under the rubrics of causal as well as chronological chains. His writing has the effects of a falling cataract, where random fields of intensities multiply undecideably and become statistically innumerable. Dot by dot, as a persevering and patient painter, he infiltrates his writing on the production of the real. Calling forth the fields of intensities these traversing points put to work when connected at a distance, brings the possibility of engaging the flow of time and its transitory condition. Unlike an anthropology attempting to demonstrate the existence of specific canons of representation and signification, this *pointillist* work persuades us to affirm the field of intensities, forces of resistance and desires that the gaps between the dots articulate, so that they may potentially turn against fixed configurations of power within and outside the frame.

Revealing resonances can be drawn between Kracauer's *pointillism* and Jean-Francois Lyotard's discussion in *Figur, Discors* (Carrol 1997). In this early work, Lyotard argues that the realm of the figural constitutes a field of intensities that discourse carries within itself but can not signify. He does not propose to give up theoretical projects, but the arduous work of indicating the exteriorities that are at work inside as much as outside discourse. The desiring force of the figural is unbounded. It is able to disorient, disrupt, transgress and transform everything it touches, continually reversing directions and developing somewhere else, in some other form.

1.1.2 Cinematic Montage in Experimental Writing

The disruptive principle of desire is characteristic of the Dadaist and Surrealist fascination with montage and fragmentation. I have engaged such fascination and pursue ethnography with an accidental structure and formed as a

theoretical collision. As an anthropological technique montage is creative, affirmative and perplexing. Throughout the fieldwork, montage became a revealing form to write experimentally –at times hyper textually- in relation to the chaotic pulse of Berlin. The present experiment does not attempt to establish a specific punctuating map or chronological point in time, but rather explores a series of becomings and events whose material historicity and fluidity cannot be fully arrested³.

George E. Marcus (1955) has stressed the potential of montage as a narrative technique. Acknowledging that in many parts of the world cultural processes are becoming highly deterritorialized and that the practice of ethnography cannot continue focusing in one situated place, Marcus believes that montage –specifically the technique of parallel editing- can help us describe cultural processes that occur in separate places but simultaneously. Thus, when we are faced with processes that take place transculturally, montage can help us to address such phenomena in terms of *spatial simultaneity*.⁴

For Michael Taussig (1987), the technique of montage enables ethnographers to disrupt linear narratives which are in themselves attuned to the bourgeoisie myth of progress. Marcus (1995) adds that the rupturing with linear narrative is often put to practice by contemporary experiments in anthropology by “*a deconstruction in action*” (1995:48), meaning an exercise of dismantling conventional categories such as *individual*, *authenticity* and *culture*, by confronting the ethnographic material in critical ways that may -at times- be on the edge of sacrificing coherence.

³ George E. Marcus argues that many of the new highly self-conscious experiments exploring the possibilities of montage are trying to move away from the realist form of nineteenth century social realism. In another context, Francis Bacon, discussing painting claims that “the moment the story is elaborated, the boredom sets in; the story talks louder than paint. This is because we are actually in very primitive times once again, and we have not been able to cancel out story-telling between one image and another” (Sylvester 1987:22)

⁴ Conversely, Eisenstein’s montage, by employing film images as quasi lexical properties, aims to produce a totalizing cinematic discourse. This linguistic style of montage tends to reduce film images to iconic signs.

1.1.3 The Insistence on Surface Phenomena

The position that an epoch occupies in the historical process can be determined more strikingly from an analysis of its inconspicuous surface-level expressions than from an epoch's judgments about itself. These judgments are expressions of the tendencies of a particular era and do not therefore offer conclusive testimony about its overall constitution. The surface-level-expressions, however, by virtue of their unconscious nature, provide unmediated access to fundamental substance of the interpretation of these surface-level expressions. The fundamental substance of an epoch and its unheeded impulses illuminate each other reciprocally. (Kracauer cited in Koch 2000:19)

Another aspect of Kracauer's work is his obsession with the inaccessibility of the quotidian, of precisely that which is most familiar and immediate. When facing the surface-level-expression, one writes on the indeterminate and hardly describable affective intensities of ordinary life⁵. The surfaces of daily life do not let themselves be fully grasped. There is something in their materiality that escapes. And often, these surfaces demarcate an insignificant realm, a material realm without a truth, a reality or secrets. Yet its overwhelming affective force lies precisely in that it lacks linguistic meaning and a deep structure or centre.

Likewise, surrealist painter Rene Magritte (1969) -who wrote extensively on the mystery and immediacy of banal reality- argues that the insignificance of surface-level-phenomena links the most extraordinary passions of its times with the most banal incidents of daily life. However, even though for Magritte a fruit or a flower on a table or a nude on a sofa is full of mystery, he tended to place them in mid-air in order to make their mystery even more immediate. This sort of passion to capture the transient materiality of events of the material world resonates with Levy-Bruhl's analysis of *mystical participation*, according to which the *primitives* perceived the world in a way that was not detached, but sensuously immersed. This *pointillist* writing

⁵ In exemplary instances, where Kracauer approaches a society of isolated individuals, surface level alterities –in the form of absurd, casual and tragi-comic materialities- are mobilized in a literalist vein. It is this terra incognita of the quotidian realm that Kracauer wants to explore in order to put to work "... the rehabilitation of objectives and modes of being which still lack a name and hence are overlooked or misjudged" (Mulder-Bach 1997:41).

leaves multiple material traces that contagiously affect the reader's witnessing. Literary critic Speier, commenting on white collar salaried workers, claims that Kracauer, in a *literalist* vein, seeks to render "*the air they breath*". (Speier cited in Mulder-Bach 1997:56) ⁶

Surface-level-phenomena are radically challenging for interpretation and the authority to control them turns out to be difficult to articulate. Kracauer's desire to write on surfaces deals simultaneously with their excessive material proximity and their stubborn resistance to become recognized, for they cannot be articulated in the clarity of a supposed presence. When approaching the imperceptible dreadfulness and most elusive intensities of the quotidian, a writer –often at the verge of indeterminacy as well as interminability- must attempt to strip as much rationalizations as possible in order to indicate its inert and mute insistence.

In the manner of a *pointillist* bee, by being extrinsic to the various parts of flowers and plants, laboriously, Kracauer keeps making contact with these partial points. In other words, instead of classifying butterflies⁷ according to systematic comparison a la Radcliff-Brown, Kracauer remains in the same field of immanence with these moving points without abolishing differences.

As a result,

what emerges is not a botanical system, but a small sociological archive of human figures and manifestations of life. (Mulder-Bach 1997:95)

Throughout this experiment, it is suggested that a space free from power and domination or a promise of utopian transcendence may turn out to be another

⁶ In this sense, I have been deeply inspired by the potential of Japanese long takes in cinema the following sense: the excessive and overabundant air above the heads of the characters does not really articulate a psychological ground of self-reflexivity, but instead affirms and magically binds us bodily bringing into tactile expression the suspension of time and the hazy immersion of flesh.

⁷ Instead of practicing Radcliff-Brown's taxonomic assumption, Edmund Leach (1961) proposes anthropologists to draw generalizations. However, significantly, Leach's apology of systems and generalizations is dissonant with this pointillist method.

treacherous avatar of manipulative power. The reader will encounter particulars for whom there is nothing to internalize, for the outside is already always inside from the very beginning. I have attempted to address unspeakable forms of complicity in social life, so that the ethnographically ignored and silenced surface-level phenomena as well as the most reckless recesses of personal *experience* may give birth to an unprecedented ethnographic form.

1.1.4 Detective Method in Anthropology

In this experiment, the irretrievable cravings of the flesh and surfaces produce fragmented points that, just as elementary particles, are not connected to a totalizing narrative. Instead, following Berlin's radical exteriority, they should be considered in terms of Maurice Blanchot's (1981) *cadaverous residues* that refuse to disappear completely. These stubborn residues are not mere visual representations of en-fleshed experiences, but are rather the remnants or vestiges of the endured that fail to disappear fully. These fragments are not the result of lacking or the index of something missing. Instead, like cadavers, these residues assay materially and obstinate refuse to vanish completely. Kracauer wants to explore the following realm of life; the fugitive and imperceptible phenomena of the surface and the material traces that stubbornly resist interpretation and threaten theoretical structures and conceptual generalizations.

The cadaverous residues and traces are characteristic of a detective's method which Carlo Ginzburg (Sebeok and Eco 1998: 82-85) in a celebratory tone terms as "*divinatory, venatic, conjectural*". It is distinct from the scientific method, yet irreducible to pure intuition. In his essay "*Clues*", Carlo Ginzburg aligns detective Sherlock Holmes, psychoanalyst Sigmund Freud and the Italian art historian Giovanni Morelli for their emphasis on the importance of the supposedly banal and trivial⁸. Ginzburg makes a call for the importance of attending even the most insignificant

⁸ For instance, "the famous Edgar Allan Poe's story in which the people curious to find the "purloined letter" only fail to discover it because it lies quite openly where no one would first look for it where not considered hidden, namely in the letter tray, and there no one would suspect it of being "stolen"" (Koch 2000:39).

details. This is another feature of my cinematic ethnography, since that which can be superfluous or secondary may turn out to be a clue and a breakthrough to knowing⁹.

1.2 The Puzzle of Culture and Berlin

1.2.1 The Latourian Reconfiguration of Culture

Recent criticism has pointed out that anthropologists tend to use the term culture in a form that treats abstractions as realities, and thus, easily essentialises human societies. It is commonly accepted that anthropologists have often viewed human life divided in terms of bounded entities by taking for granted a uniformity and coherence that social life may not have. Furthermore, this concept of culture does not only refuse the historical materiality of social beings, but as pointed out by Edward Said (1983) and Arjun Appadurai (1980), it reifies the distinction between Western anthropologists and non-Western others.

Nowadays, there is a general theoretical pattern held in social sciences that believes “everything can be explained through culture”. As it will be explored throughout the ethnographic sequences, such intellectual position resonates with the anthropologist’s fear of moving beyond anthropomorphic representations of human life. One of the most relevant problems with such humanist position is that it keeps separating culture and nature at the expense of the material, as well as subject and object¹⁰. Bruno Latour, reminds us that once we learn that nature is a constructed nature, the same fate awaits for culture. In fact, just as there are no natures, there may be no cultures (Latour 1993). In this vein, Latour proposes mediation zones

⁹ This detective strategy echoes Derrida’s deconstructionism (1974), a literary strategy endeavoured in the margins, secondary features and absences of the text which may end up questioning radically the alleged logocentre of the text

¹⁰ Similarly, it is nowadays politically correct for anthropologists to claim that sexual difference is culturally -and not biologically- constructed. But does such claim really follow a change? For anthropologists social construction has turned out to be as ineluctable as any natural necessity might have been. It is taking too many assumptions for granted to comprehend the world in these terms. Moreover, such interpretation of the world makes it really difficult to politically change it.

lodged by human and non-humans which are “*folded into each other*”. Beyond organicism and essentialism, Latour argues that it is no longer plausible to argue whether the ozone hole is a cultural or natural problem for it already constitutes a new hybrid.

Bruno Latour has developed a notion of hybrid networks as a way to channel the void between humans and non-humans and understand agency in terms of complexly woven set of relations. This concept does not only involve humans and non-humans in a web of relations, materiality and meaning, but it also emphasizes that meaning and power are generated out of relations and actions. Latour’s mobile networks echoes Deleuze’s notion of the *fold* (1993) in which the opposition between inside and outside, material and human is collapsed by attending the fractal myriad of relations and actions that locates the outside already in the inside, and the inside in an immanent plane of radical exteriority.

Latour’s conceptual elaboration has been influenced by Michel Serres who has never accepted that any particular science conforms a hermetic and homologous field of enquiry (1995). In a recent work, Serres has indicated that the shape and nature of knowledge more closely approximates the figure of the harlequin. The harlequin is a multicoloured clown standing in the place of the chaos of life. In other words, the harlequin is a hybrid, hermaphrodite, mongrel figure, a mixture of diverse elements and a challenge to homogeneity (1995). The other emblematic figure informing Serres’ oeuvre is Hermes (1982), the traveller and the medium who enables the movement in and between diverse regions of social life. For Serres, the poetic impulse –which transcends closed systems and fuels invention- is the way the voyager is open to the unexpected and always prepared to make surprising links between places and things (1997).

1.2.2 The Indeterminate Space of Alterity

Anthropologies that are informed by modernist epistemologies still experience certain anxiety over the object of the study. In fact, mainstream culturalist

anthropology continues to treat alterity as an aberrant event that needs to be territorialized to the homological and discursive interest of the anthropologist, and ultimately, to an epistemology largely based on cultural meanings and Identity. In this thesis, it can be noticed that I have avoided to center *man* in the middle of the work which,

... is the temporal equivalent of that pre-Copernican spatial strategy of placing the earth and humanity at the center of the universe in order to satisfy our narcissism (a narcissism, one might add, in which the other is seen as an attenuated reflection or form of the self (Docherty 1996:8).

This modernist notion is closely linked to the fact that historical materiality in the form of alterities is often either considered irrelevant or else is rapidly reterritorialised by the marvels of signification.

This fear of alterity consists of the subject facing the possibility of not being able to control the indeterminate¹¹, since it can be made dependant upon its *others*. Such fear pretends to preserve the epistemological foundations by absencing the *other*, and consequently, reinforces the consciousness of the anthropologist as *autonomous*. This experiment, instead, attempts to address the materiality in the multidimensional and procedural fabric of consciousness by engaging with the space of fluidity in social life. It is a program in the sense that it ethnographically puts to practice forms of thinking alterity without being subordinated to the usually predictable world of Identity. Accordingly, I have worked out the production of truth as transpositional in the sense that it welcomes its multi-perspectival condition and it is not subordinated to the position of the anthropologist.

¹¹ French Philosopher Alain Badiou (1989:1992) proposes a philosophy of love –a way of life being concerned with the indeterminate- as a stronger form of criticism that refuses to fuse the other within the same. He faces the problematic of the “*differend*” and argues that it takes place when there are two positions (such as man and woman), holding opposing views which are legitimated by distinct sets of rules that cannot be transposed to the other position. In fact, the differend takes place when there is not an overarching rule of judgement that establishes an epistemological truth between heterogeneous social spheres. Alain Badiou’s love ethics avoids solving the problem of the differend by the facile postmodernist relativism of anything goes. The relevance of this philosophical meditation consists in the fact that love does not resemble an epistemology, but rather an ongoing process in which truth is understood as an event.

1.2.3 Herder's Paradigm and Cultural Difference

... we are trapped at the moment between disabling wide and discomfortingly rigid notions of culture, and ... our most urgent need is to move beyond... (Eagleton 2000: 32)

Romantic nationalists like Herder, who used the word *culture* in the modern sense for the first time, formulated the idea of cultural difference in terms of its ethnic peculiarity. Such idea of culture implies the ethnocentric notion of the Other (even when it is assumed for oneself).

One's own way of life is simply human: it is other people who are ethnic, idiosyncratic, culturally peculiar. In a similar way, one's own views are reasonable, while other people's are extremist (Eagleton 2000:27).

For Herder, culture signifies a plurality of life forms, each with its own peculiar laws of evolution.

In fact, no matter how much cultural anthropology¹², informed by Herder's nostalgic organicism, has tried to assume all cultures in terms of equality, many quotidian manifestations remain either too mundane, indistinctive or simply irrelevant. Indeed, even though anthropology is still largely devoted to the solidarity of common, marginal and minority people, its take on culture continues largely to represent the difference between Western anthropologists and its others.

From a different view, Herder's cultural national time can also be seen as one of the foundations of bourgeois consciousness in the sense that culture is treated according to its products, and their possession which is characteristic of anthropological practices characterized by the logic of capitalism. Conventional canons of representation within anthropology –largely informed by Herder's cultural specificity- tend to produce historical narratives based on causality and continuity.

¹² See the definition of culture in the introductions to Anthropology. (Layton 1997: Womack 1998: Hendry 1999: Makhan 1994: Hylland 2001: Rosman and Rubel 1998: Beck Kehoe 1998))

Homi K. Bhabha (1989) points out that the time of national space theorized by Herder implies that the nation is seen horizontally. Instead, Bhabha proposes a writing characterized by *doubleness* in which the temporality of representation moves between cultural discourse and material historicity.

Homi Bhabha (1989), moving beyond Herder's national cultural time, proposes the exploration of a non-linear and non-chronological space, where the co-existence of irreducible and incommensurable differences can be seen to give way to an interstitial space.

This space of the translation of cultural difference and the "interstices" is infused with that Benjaminian temporality which makes graphic a moment of transition, not merely the continuum of history (Docherty 1996:10).

In tune with Benjamin's non-synchronous temporality (Hanssen 1998), Kracauer's *pointillism* allows the anthropologist to approach events attending the specific changing condition of their *being historical*. I have tried to avoid the temporal disappearance of the event and objects that follows Herder's criticism which refuses the instability inherent in alterities by commoditisation, reification or representation¹³. The exploration of Bhabha's interstitial space *after peoples and cultures* requires a temporal and historical materiality of events that is able to put to work a politics of epistemological risk, inevitability and change¹⁴.

¹³ Holist anthropology, as it is the case of post-Geertzian culturalist anthropology, no matter how much it is attentive to the deterritorialisation of culture, tends to commodify the object by discourse which is ultimately reified by culture and its system of meanings. In this vein, anthropologists such as Arjun Appadurai (1986) while stressing historical materiality and the deterritorialisation of culture still continue to work within the frame of cultural specificity, temporal continuity and coherent narratives of identity.

¹⁴ For holist and culturalist anthropologists, it may well be the case that I have provoked a dissolution of the cultural context. In my view, I have addressed the fluidity of events and practices that traverse diverse cultural contexts. I have put to work this fluidity and the material resistance of the flesh in the middle ground between figure and discourse, structure and indeterminacy.

1.2.4 Events and Identity Failures

Whereas Herder's national cultural time ignores the event as a form of experience that inevitably transforms subjects, throughout this ethnographic experiment, one can encounter particulars who -including me- in various and irreducible experiences often fail to conform to stable identities. Gupta and Ferguson's notion of *identity failure* (1997:20) refers to the hazy pre-subjective ground between discourse and figure, where the subject experiences *passions* or *explosions* that inevitably transform the subject into something radically other. For Georges Bataille (1988a), these are limit experiences, meaning a radical transformation and reconfiguration of the subject. This reception to subjectivation enables one to explore unconventional practice ethnography where the notion of an autonomous subject of consciousness happens to be undermined¹⁵.

According to Michel Foucault (1991), the material specificity or singularity of events and body praxis is precisely what constitutes the identity of subjects as much as it changes and subverts them. This irreducible materiality can be considered a resistance to models of representation that conditions the way in which particulars are subjects to others as well as the way they come to conform certain identities. Moreover, Foucault's conception of experience does not resemble something that a sovereign subject possesses, rather it pushes one to think the subject as an oscillating point that may be unpredictable at the advent of the event.

One of the inevitable effects of this experiment is that it touches upon the material specificity of objects and events with such perceptual proximity and analytical passion that the too often taken for granted continuity of identity and cultural specificity happens to be backgrounded. Lila Abu-Lughod (1991), proposing to explore new strategies of ethnographic writing, has suggested to

¹⁵ This experiment working on the flesh has not been undertaken in the form of historical biography where a Cartesian eye observes the world from a certain distance. Neither does it follow the modernist tendency to approach social life as if individuals and collectives have control over their destinies.

practice *writing against culture*. In an effort to advocate for the ethnographies of the particular, she persuades anthropologists to forget the essentialized notion of *culture*. Her criticism foregrounds the focus upon contending discourses, instead of monolithic cultures. In *Writing against culture* (1991), the anthropologist examines the interconnections rather than the separation between groups and individuals.

1.2.5 Berlin's Recent Situation

Thirteen years after the fall of the wall, the city on the Spree is now capital of the New Germany. The massive reconstruction that began in the mid-nineties – in a time when Berlin was Europe's largest building site¹⁶ – is now facing the last stage. Considering that there is probably no other city that has endured the scars of the twentieth history as brutally and self-consciously, it seems that Berlin is forever condemned to the most abrupt and violent transformation. The unconventional tenure of this work has been imposed by the peculiar Berlin I have known from 1998 up to this date. During the chaotic and noisy months of fieldwork, it was difficult to systematically map the temporal narratives and conflicting images for its extreme changing condition¹⁷. Berlin here puts to work an extra-territorial space with a variety of surprising personal experiences and liminal commonalities that scorn and subvert the borders of the nation-state from within.

Andreas Huyssen explores the image of the void in relation to Berlin in revealing ways. On the one hand, the void indicates the various brutal facts it has undergone historically; the annihilation of the Jews¹⁸ (Bauman 1989), the Cold War,

¹⁶ This situation has been far from fascinating for Berlin inhabitants who have endured the dust, noise and all kinds of discomforts during the still not fully completed reconstruction.

¹⁷ If Dziga Vertov (Tomas 1992) was using cinema to examine the changing Soviet society and its daily rites of passage (birth, funeral, wedding, etc.), I have addressed the dramatic, profound and silent revolution of Berlin at the turn of the millennium.

¹⁸ Zygmunt Bauman (1989) has pointed out that the Holocaust emerged and was executed in our modern rational society. Via the monopoly of violence, hierarchical bureaucracy and the replacement of morality for preservation and duty, the holocaust has been considered as intrinsically related to the modern state. One must keep alert and further study these links, for the scientific and political rationality that made possible such horrendous annihilation to take place is still ingrained in the rationale of our contemporary society.

the erasure of East German symbols after the fall of the wall¹⁹ and the physical destruction of the area that extended from the Brandenburg Gate to the Potsdamer Platz undertaken by British and American bombers during World War II (Diefendorf 1993). This no-man's land or void at the heart of the city has embodied the liveliest urban area of Europe of the 20's, the bombings that left little of it standing, the construction of the wall in 1961 and its demolition in 1989. On the other hand, the void refers to the conceptual abyss between the critical reconstructionism, who desired a pre-1914 urban model for contemporary Berlin and the corporate architecture²⁰. The whole plan of Berlin's reconstruction has been chaotic, characterized by unordered public planning, contradictory politics and architectural developments facing insufficient financial support.

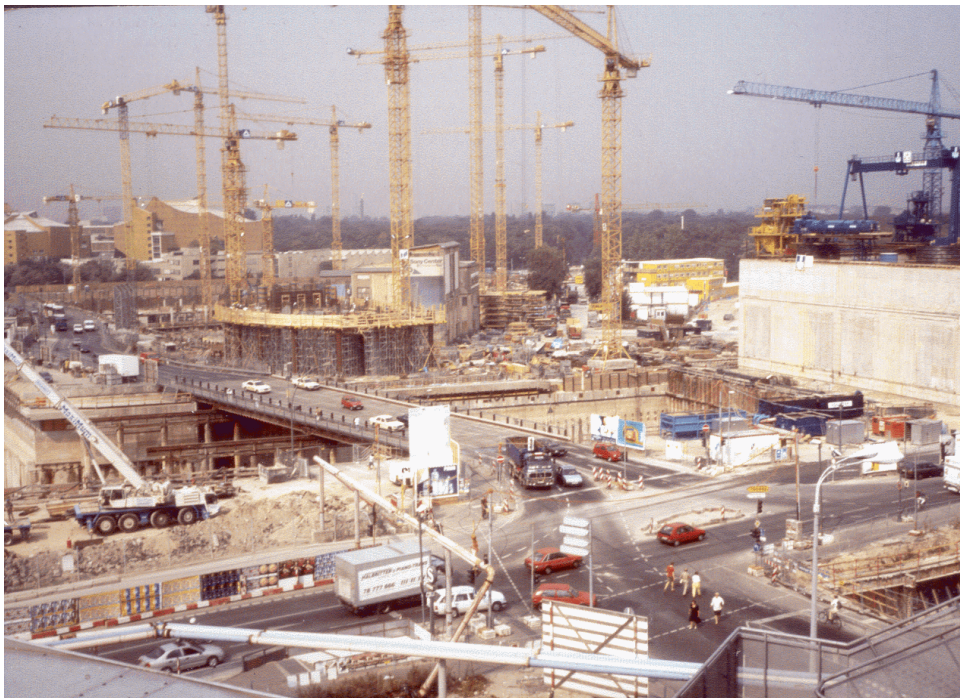


Photo 1: Bauen in Berlin. The area of the Potsdamer Platz in construction.

¹⁹ Authorities have practiced a “politics of wilful forgetting” (Huysen 1997:60) by endowing presocialist and often anti-socialist names to the streets of Berlin. Another “strategy of humiliation” and “deprivation of memory” was tearing down of Communist monuments after the fall of the wall. The attempt to erase the material remains and ruins of the GDR and Nazi pasts, as well as the ignoring of the Weimar Republic, has been meticulously analysed by Brian Ladd (1997).

²⁰ According to Huysen (1997), the tension between the critical reconstructionists and corporate architecture –supported by politicians who want to attract corporate powers such as Sony and Daimhler-Benz- is about image making. In the “false start” of Berlin of the twenty first century, it is more important the projected image, the attraction it propels and the erasure of memory, than textual discourse, or the use of heterogeneous living spaces and creative preservation.

Berlin is a unique city haunted by many historical troubles;

... the last ruler of an ancient dynasty driven to abdication and exile by a lost war; a new republic that failed; a dictatorship ruled by terror; and that terror unleashed on the rest of Europe, bringing retribution in the form of devastation, defeat and division. Now that division, and the regime that ruled East Berlin, are also memories (Ladd 1997:1).

The heavy concentration of historical memories, the physical destruction that is more than present and the whole daily hassle and problematic of the massive renewal has turned many Berlin inhabitants and newcomers into remarkable beings exploring the links between the emaciated physicality of the battered city, historical narratives and national identity. Christian Ladd claims that Berliners,

... more than the rest of us, are facing up to the moral dilemmas inherent in a national identity. (Ladd 1997:4).

1.2.6 Extraterritorial Berlin

The following is a fatigue shared by many Berliners; they have been reminded about Hitler and the myth of the German *heimat* too many times, also of the annihilation of Jews, the killings perpetrated by their ancestors, and more recently, the terrorising persecution by Erich Honecker's communist state and the Stasi. Berliners often dwell in the paradoxical space of remembrance and forgetting, the very existing desire for silence makes remembrance more salient, just as any call for remembrance exhausts Berliners for its impossibility that marks in turn the desire for silence²¹. This ambivalence is the ground on which this experiment has been constructed by looking at the limit experiences of a series of Berlin inhabitants; the way they live, work, die and make love. In this sense, Bruno Latour's re-configuration of culture (1993) poses an alibi to the often guilt-ridden German national identity.

²¹ This interstitial situation has been intelligently scrutinized by Brian Ladd in relation to the still ongoing controversy over the renewal of the city. Each corner, each building, as well as the erection of the hyper-modern Potsdamer Platz are still a theme of discussion at the dinner table in Berlin. These "are questions of what and how and whether to build on blood-stained ground" (Ladd 1997:2)

This is a Berlin figured as an extraterritorial space²², where cultural specificities are often diminished by an indeterminate and fluid urban materiality that enables emergent extraterritorial lifestyles to take place. In this interstitial space, the world of *heimat*²³, in terms of morality or territoriality happens to be largely obliterated. Berlin is in this sense a homeless *heimat*, a placeless place, and ultimately, the *outside* of the national order of the world. This aspect of Berlin has turned this experiment based on change and situationality, rather than culture or morality. The extraterritoriality of Berlin, thus, figures a hybrid space of fluidity that often evolves into odd, anti-universalistic, affirming and proliferating cosmopolitanisms. What is crucial for many of these extraterritorial subjects is the way they manage to place themselves in the present circumstances, rather than the re-location of a certain cultural background in the city.

This transcultural ethnography “should not be finally taken as a key to human universals, but rather as provocation” (MacDougall 1998:270). Berlin is not a marker of a stable space, city or nation with which citizens identify. To a large extent, the extraterritorial metropolis is a provisional position *in transit*, to and from which people migrate, appear and disappear. This condition of delocalization is not a matter of celebration for this nomadic aspect of contemporary political life threatens with the effacement of the social, as well as the rupture between subject and community. Yet paradoxically, the social realm of extraterritoriality can be considered as a site to avoid premature totalizations²⁴, and extend the realm of

²² The international Jewish community has also been referred to as extraterritorial or homeless –except in its spiritual connection to Israel- from the very beginning of its diasporas. “The world tightly packed with nations and nation-states abhorred the non-national void. Jews were in such a void”. (Bauman 1989:53)

²³ The sedentary-like model of Herder’s national cultural time resonates with the mythological constellation of the *heimat*, which has endeavoured itself to locate peoples and cultures into national soils –informed by continuity, progress and causality- which is in turn tightly related to the unified modern nation-state.

²⁴ The configuration of tradition and class are examples of premature totalization, for it serves to cover the ineradicable fact of heterogeneity and the material historicity which make the marking of unity and the identifying of the subject extremely indeterminate and undecidable. In this sense, Stephen Barber’s *Extreme Europe* (2001) exemplifies an

cultural bricolage which is the ground for the emancipation of time, that is, the production of heterogeneity, alterity, heteronomy and difference²⁵.

This experiment, by affirming the particular, is largely provisional and hybrid. In its pages, there is the personal commitment to a series of extra-territorial subjects who are politically, spiritually and often also socially quite orphan and homeless. These cosmopolitanisms, that configure an unavowable community, belong to the culture of global capitalism and underline a radical scepticism of hierarchies. Furthermore, the incessant ricocheting of these extraterritorial subjects against the voids of Berlin is often delivered by a certain disdainful indifference to the place.

1.3 Vertov's Visual Manufacture and Surrealist Photography

1.3.1 Vertov's Materialist Filmmaking

We ... take as the point of departure the use of the camera as a Kino-eye, more perfect than the human eye, for the exploration of the chaos of visual phenomena that fills the space (Vertov 1984:32)

The cinematic writing put to practice throughout this thesis does not attempt to guarantee identities and presence. Following Dziga Vertov's filmmaking, I have pursued a materialist practice²⁶ that allows experiencing another form of contact

innovative topographical study of the ongoing tensions between hegemonic and oppositional visual cultures in cities such as Berlin and Paris.

²⁵ The following is one of the paradoxical ambivalences posed by extraterritoriality in Berlin: These series of particulars can be seen as a symptom of a violent, exploitative and manipulative global system, or they may be considered as the remedy for such supposedly homogenising society.

²⁶ In this vein, Francis Ponge (1951) is an exemplary materialist writer for whom "science has alienated "things" by classifying them, and art has betrayed them also by reading into them a pathetic fallacy. In descriptive pieces he tries to put words at their disposal and (by showing the extreme fascination and hidden character of the orange, the loaf of bread, etc.) to reduce Man to a humbler place in the Universe" (Editor on Francis Ponge 1951:44). Francis Ponge's (1951) or George Perec's (1997) cine-poetic writings bring Kracauer's fascination with surface phenomena to the mind. As if they were raw film footage, materialist and corpothetic, they affirm the adequacy of a pointillist method and Vertov's filmmaking for they combine microscopic and subatomic description with material construction.

with the real. The oppositions between outside and inside, subjectivity and objectivity, as well as the viewer and the viewed are radically dissolved. Let us argue that in a world of mechanical reproduction, fragmentation and construction are not forms of representation, but rather processes of the real itself. The recording visual, audio and textual devices used by the anthropologist, thus, cannot be taken to be tools to manipulate reality from a distance, for there is no distance in the first place²⁷.

Vertov's filmmaking anticipated Benjamin's theoretical illuminations²⁸ in the sense that he fully embraced the real through montage and editing of images. A couple of well known sequences from *Man With A Movie Camera* (1929) could be recalled to illustrate this point: a documentary sequence in rapid motion, the editor cutting that same sequence, and an audience watching that same sequence on the screen: or the montage of the opening and closing of an eye, a camera lens, and window shutters. The present experimental form of ethnographic writing –inspired by Vertov's *Kino-eye* (1984)- is simultaneously a material perceived and a form of perception²⁹. In this sense, as indicated by David Tomas (1992), montage should address the procedural and relational character of the making of the film, and as a result, make visible the process itself from the beginning to the end.

²⁷ My own fascination with Vertov's filmmaking and writing as if I were a camera resonates clearly with Kracauer's yearning to approach the imperceptible and often unaccountable moments of daily life "without the interference of consciousness" (Mulder-Bach 1997:50). Obviously, I was well aware that I could not become a camera that -according to Benjamin and Vertov- is able to evacuate sensation from the supposedly anthropocentric forms of phenomenological reflection. Yet, I thought it would be worth trying to become-camera by putting to work creatively its monstrous perception.

²⁸ Along with Walter Benjamin (1968), Dziga Vertov (1984) understood social relations as material forces, rather than consequences of ideological representation.

²⁹ Similar to what Vertov did in the media of moving images, Kracauer's *The Salaried White Collar Workers* (1998) tries to explore the materialist possibility of film and montage textually, by analysing and representing reality simultaneously. Kracauer is not interested in organizing the ethnographic material hierarchically, but much in the vein of Vertov's camera, he seeks to touch on surface phenomena by the means of visual focus.

In a film such as *Man With A Movie Camera*, the delirious explorations of nonsubjective perceptions are directly linked to a revolutionary political practice. Deleuze rightly criticizes Jean Mitry for

... condemning in Vertov a contradiction for which he would not dare to reproach a painter; a pseudocontradiction between creativity (montage) and integrity (the real). What montage does according to Vertov, is to carry perception into things, to put perception into matter,... In this respect all procedures are legitimate, they are no longer trick shots (Deleuze 1986:81).

Vertov's filmic manufacture achieves the emancipation of the senses that had been envisaged by Karl Marx in the Paris manuscripts and which is approximate to Benjamin's "collective innervation" (M. Hansen 1995). Such revolutionary process seeks to engage this visual technology with the social relations and sensuousness that capitalism refuses.

Brecht's modernist critical paradigm considers visual fascination a state of ideological mystification, and attempts to undo this state, and thus, liberate the audience, by the alienation effect. This modernist position argues for a rigorous critical distance and dismisses involvement by supposedly preserving a radical purism. Moreover, Brecht's anti-theater aimed to explore the traditional model of presentation, identification and objectification through the work of critical negation and metaphysics. Critics such as Alexander Kluge, compelled by Brechtian aesthetics often refuse to deal with their own complicity and positionality within late capitalist culture.

Whereas the Brechtian model seeks to extinguish the mechanism of visual fascination by alienating the viewer, Vertov stresses the complex and procedural set of relations among cameraman, editor and audience that manufactures the film. In fact, Vertov's filmmaking refuses the contradiction between the identification of the modern viewer and the Brechtian distance. Furthermore, he explores a wholly new complicity that heightens involvement and distance simultaneously. Vertov's montage stresses the process of cinematic representation by moving from audience, screen, and cameraman to editor. This superb attempt to generate a cinematic event

is exemplified by the way in which film and audience cross over each other several times, which gives way to a

... spectacular *myse en abyme*, in which the audience becomes spectator to an audience watching a film which turns out to be the *Man With A Movie Camera* (Tomas 1992:31).³⁰

In the painting *Las Meninas*, Diego Velazquez caught the painter exactly at the moment when he is still looking at his model and is simultaneously about to paint the model. Right at the space of oscillation, between visibility and invisibility lies

... precisely the fine line where no one and no one thing rules, where all sovereignty is undermined, where incompatible spaces, epistemes, and modes of discourse struggle for dominance (Foucault 1970:63).

Due to the complex play of absence and presence in the labyrinthine network of representation, no matter how accurately the inside is made visible outside, or the outside is made visible inside by doubling, a gap that cannot be extinguished continues to exist between them. This irritant gap, an irreducible instability that one encounters at the core of representation, complicates the process of representation and throws oneself back to the process of self-reflexivity. In the form of a spiral, the process repeatedly turns at the core of representation not in order to preserve the previous order or establish transcendence, but instead to celebrate “a radical break and rearrangement of the epistemological field itself” (Carrol 1997:67).

1.3.2 The Folding Eye

Concerned with *visualizing anthropology*, Anna Grimshaw (2001) identifies a fear of *the eye in the door* with the maintenance of inside outside dualisms.

³⁰ Many agents have actively participated, even before I actually gathered footage and filled pages during the field, until this final draft that is meant to be experienced cinematically. For a Vertovian work, it is relevant to foreground the collective authority which circuits its thematic flow. It is this collective and cinematic intelligence what I have been trying to mobilize far beyond the controlling process of the author.

Malinowski's eye observing society, but not the self is a relevant illustration of this argument. Accordingly, Grimshaw aligns Malinowski's scientific anthropology with Renaissance painting, in the sense that one's own view is located outside of the picture. To a large extent, it was precisely the rupture between inside and outside that enabled professional anthropology to be integrated in state bureaucracy. By contrast, she connects W.H.R. Rivers –whose early work focused on vision and perception³¹- with the Cubists for they mobilize multiple viewpoints through the “fluid interaction of space and form” (2001:36). Likewise, this attention to the mobile flow of consciousness in the social practice, when observing the world of everyday life, also resonates with Griffith's dialectical and cinematic play of using close-ups, flash backs, cross cutting, camera movement and panorama.

Grimshaw's metaphor of *the eye in the door* stands for two kinds of anthropologies. Let us follow her proposal to displace the door, and thus, return to Dziga Vertov who cinematographically experimented with the relationship between subjective and objective. In his project, the camera and the world are fluid, in constant state of movement. The camera eye stares at the world and simultaneously stares at itself. The mind's eye and the spying eye are put to work together. Thus, a creative relationship between the movement of the camera and the world is advanced³².

Let me invite the reader into an experiment, in which the ethnographer's eye is fearlessly placed in the door, simultaneously looking outside and inside. I would like to locate the possibility of putting to work anthropology and cinema in relation to the recent call for new modalities of ethnographic writing (Marcus 1990). This

³¹ River's work explored dream and memory in the interior space. One of the most significant aspects of his work was his devotion to link psychology and anthropology. Significantly, in the last pages of *The Order of Things* (1970), Michel Foucault advocates for an innovative counter-science that bridges psychoanalysis and anthropology.

³² Jean Rouch's anthropological films (Grimshaw 2001; Stoller 1997) can be considered in such theoretical constellation, for his complex subjectivity is placed in the very explorations of social life. There is no door leaving Jean Rouch's self out of the exploration of the social context he is engaged. Anna Grimshaw considers Rouch an example of an eye that looks inwards and outwards simultaneously.

unconventional experiment contributes to explore the question of what would have followed if the project proposed by Griffith and Vertov triumphed in European anthropology. David MacDougall's films and writings (1998) are of special relevance in this theme. His reflections on the phenomenology of film and the specificity of the camera have provided a focus on the senses, perception and human emotions of a visual kind. In fact, MacDougall's reflections on the potentials of visual ways of knowing, theoretically echoes not only Isherwood's and Doblin's fresh, dynamic and captivating urban prose, who tried to mobilize a kaleidoscopic montage of diverse city discourses that were continually interweaving as a pedestrian walk through the crowds. During the two years of fieldwork this experiment, informed by Kracauer's highly visual sensitivity, kept ricocheting with the whereabouts and avatars of Dziga Vertov's *Man with a Movie Camera*.

1.3.3 Immediacy in Surrealist Photography

Traditional criticism has viewed Surrealist photography as a pale imitation of authentic Surrealist work. The assumption has been that photography, a "realistic" medium, is fundamentally incompatible with a cause devoted to the wildly subjective, the world of dreams and the unconscious. As a consequence, Surrealist photography, a major body of 20-century art, has remained largely unexplored. This text studies the crucial role photography played in the Surrealist movement. It shows how photographers enlisted into the service of "subjective" Surrealism their medium's very claim to "objective" reality. (Krauss, 1985:25)

Michael Richardson (1993), when considering the discussion on surrealism and anthropology argues that the former cannot be reduced to an art movement for it is an attitude. This unconventional way of living deploys a heterogeneous set of ideas that cannot be seen to configure a stable ideology. Critical with Clifford's consideration of surrealism under the light of post-modern relativism³³, Richardson claims that surrealists held the assumption of the fundamental unity of the world. Unlike Clifford's evocation of ethnographic surrealism (1988), where he celebrates the value of surrealism for anthropology due to its relativistic wish to fragment

³³ The post-modern notion that truth is culture-bound has been radically questioned. For example Terry Eagleton claims that "In a curious reversal, cultural relativism can come to ratify the most virulent forms of cultural absolutism". (Eagleton 2000:76)

reality, Richardson considers that surrealists used collage techniques of juxtaposition to

... reveal the multilayered quality of reality and the fact that it cannot simply be reduced to rationalist and positivist formulae. (Richardson 1993:64)

Surrealism seeks a praxis that would provoke a crisis in bourgeois consciousness by disrupting the ideological assumptions that sustain it. For such moral revolt, surrealism does not announce itself as a transcendence of reality. Breton, a surrealist writer, stressed a

... a desire to open the foundations of the real; to bring about an even clearer and at the same time even more passionate consciousness of the world perceived by the senses. (Breton 1934:62).

Collage techniques and analogical principles practiced by surrealists were not used in order to exemplify the arbitrary connections in the fabric of reality. Instead they were experimental means to explore unexpected resonances by bringing correspondences to a level of expression that was super-real. The complex exploration of reality by Surrealism attempted to transform being by putting to work unsuspected correlations in material and affective dimensions. It is in this hyperreal constellation that surrealists seek to transform consciousness by foregrounding the absolute unity of reality to bizarre forms of perception.

Rosalind Krauss (1985; 1986) has detected a common theme throughout the heterogeneous practice of Surrealist photography³⁴ in which the camera becomes prosthesis and enlarges the perceptual capacity of the human body. One of the ineluctable consequences is that what supplements human vision monstrously displaces the perspective of the human eye.³⁵ A good example of this concept is Man Ray's extreme close ups of Dali's *Sculptures Involontaires*, in which theatre stubs,

³⁴ Rosalind Krauss (1986) suggests that Surrealist photography and its disruptive principle not only challenges Cartesian perspectivalism –with its unified subject as spectator–, but has also contributed to the crisis of occularcentrism of the twentieth century. Martin Jay (1993)

³⁵ The Surrealist camera is a machine that is already immanent to the world, rather than a device standing at a distance from the world. Thus, the camera obsessively mediates one's own perception and the representation of it.

bus tickets and erasers are depicted with intense proximity. This is a photographic experiment in which the gaze of the beholder happens to be aberrantly displaced by getting immersed in a shocking space of horror, obscenity and excess where one sees that which is intolerable to see. This foregrounding of the material affectivity, argues Krauss, belongs to

... a photography that effaces categories and in their place erects a fetish, the informe, the uncanny (Krauss 1986:115).

This bizarre complicity inherent in some of surrealist photography opens up possibilities of exploring the multilayered and complex fabric of reality in a way in which perception and representation cannot be treated separately.

Surrealist photography persuades us to engage an enigmatic condition of hyperreality, rather than defining or critiquing it. In the photographs of Man Ray, Boiffard, Bellmer and Ubac, there is often a gesture to embrace not only static materiality and violence, but also the evidence of the flesh, and nothing but the flesh. When viewing these photographs, one finds oneself unable to interpret appearances and expressions³⁶. Furthermore, it is not possible to ascribe these postures, gestures and appearances to interiority or psychological depth. Their hyperreal quality makes one intensely aware that corporeal aesthetics in fact precedes identity formation. The exploration of banal, un-signifying and unconscious gestures of daily life suggests that for this aberrant form of seeing, identity is a transitory effect. The Surrealist photographic camera, in this sense, explores the space between the imperceptible and the ultra-theatrical, between the unconscious and the extremely conscious, between the uncoded and the over-determined.

³⁶ By drawing on Surrealist photography and Kracauer's instance on surface phenomena, I am trying to suggest that there is nothing behind the indeterminate, porous and changing transpiration of the flesh, for everything is already inscribed on its graceful and irreducible plasticity.

1.4 Emphatic Writing, the Single Case and the *Outside*

1.4.1 Blindness and Anthropology

It was night itself. Images which constituted its darkness inundated him. He saw nothing and, far from being distressed, he made this absence of vision the culmination of his sight ... Not only did this eye which saw nothing apprehend something, it apprehended the cause of its vision. It saw as object that which prevented him from seeing (Blanchot 1988:14-15).

Let me explore the theme of blindness in order to confront the anthropomorphic representations of human relations still dominant within anthropology. The idea of a potential loss of sight threatening vision from within is usually perceived as disturbing and scandalous for our Western rationality. Beyond the fear that it usually is associated with darkness, writers such as Luce Irigaray³⁷, Paul de Man (1983), Jacques Derrida (1993) and Maurice Blanchot (1988), have located blindness at the heart of seeing. Contrary to the ocular-centric expression, this implies exploring the uncertain and productive ambiguity of blindness as an alternative –and perhaps non-cognitive- way of knowing. Nowadays, it is still intolerable for anthropological thought to consider vision to be captive by that which it cannot see, even if our thinking and seeing is affected and obsessed by certain thought that does not let itself to be apprehended.

Deeper than our fears that our meaningful visions may collapse into blindness, its secret sharer, there lays our intense anxiety when having to face that which we are incapable of seeing. In fact, a meaningful and significant death may be somehow less terrifying than a life that continues blinded in another form, that is, the incessant and often brutal production of meaning, values and equivalences. Let me here point out the similarities between Grimshaw's fear of *the eye in the door* (2001) and what I term as *anthropology's fear to stop making sense*. If we are to transcend

³⁷ Luce Irigaray (1985: 1991) has pointed out that it is the tactile darkness or invisibility in the womb -between the child and the mother- which not only conditions but makes vision itself possible.

the dualism between investigating the other and the exploration of interior space by staring inwards and outwards simultaneously, we should also bring into play the blind spots of our alert blinking eyes³⁸.

1.4.2 The Light of the *Outside*

... to pray, is to throw yourself in this transfiguring arch of light which spans from what goes by to what is about to happen. It is to melt in it in order to lodge one's infinite light in the fragile little cradle of human existence (Lispector 1989:19).

One has to give oneself to the combustion of the luminous arch so that our perception makes a momentary contact to that which gives itself. Obviously, there is a problem here. When one puts words to an event, inevitably one betrays something. As Clarice Lispector suggests in *The Stream of Life* (1989), there is a radical difference in the pleasant experience of smelling a rose, and saying so.

I have worked the irrevocable separation between experiencing pleasure or pain by capturing it through the saying, by ceaselessly ricocheting against the arch of light or an *outside* that cannot be appropriated.

I have captured the instant from which the light, having crashed with a true event, was approaching its consummation. It is coming, I said to myself, the end is coming, something is taking place. I was seized by joy... I see it, I see the light beyond which there is nothing (Blanchot 1981:26).

The *outside* is never where one finds it. It is singular, multiple and different to itself. It is the arch of light or limit beyond which *there is nothing*. It cannot be crossed, yet it is continually always already crossed.

I would not like to claim melancholically that the gap separating sensation and language resembles a space where something gets lost, but instead I would argue that this irreducible *outside* is rather characterized by certain fullness, a magical

³⁸ Revealingly, Dziga Vertov believed that “poetry ... was cinematic truth rooted in the invisible” (Vertov cited in Tomas 1992:34)

excess that compels one to reposition epistemologically according to a whole different set of rules. But what is this arch of light, this blinding *outside* that assays one's body and reminds us that we may not be of our own? What is there, at the other side, infesting my body subatomically from within, so unattainable and irreducible to the integrity of the self and the completeness of the world?

Throughout this experiment, the limit with Lispector's arch of light (1989), or Blanchot's *outside* (Blanchot 1981: Bataille 1988a) will be often transgressed by cracking with it, for it is a space impossible to occupy. Each time this *outside* is transgressed, a becoming will take place forcing the anthropologist to think otherwise. In fact, it is actually impossible to figure out what would have happened if I had not tried to capture the atoms of time in a non-possessive way and instead had I maintained an authorial position for rhetorical hermeneutics and phenomenological self-reflexivity. The intruding impulses of the *outside*³⁹ do not only ruin individual perspective, but perhaps more importantly, they compel the writer to change. This is not to mean that our desires are frustrated by a cruel and brutal fate. It may be instead harder to endure the fact that the force that defeats oneself is the same that sustains that very self.

1.4.3 The Practice of *Intransitive Writing*

It is that which at this instant, issuing out of a labyrinthine tangle of yeses and nos, make my hand run along certain paths on a paper, marks it with these volutes that are signs: a double snap, up and down, between two levels of energy, guides this hand of mine to impress on this paper this dot, this one. (Primo Levi 2000: 25)

Intransitive writing refuses any distance between the writer, the subjects that the text refers to and the reader. Unlike most forms of figuration in historical and ethnographic narratives, the author does not provide a channel to access a certain

³⁹ The *outside*, the limit with the realm that is not reducible to language or thought, which is in itself impossible to define, refers to a sort of intrusion, a sort of non-thinking within the thinking. My unease here is withstanding for -throughout these paragraphs- I still seem to be describing the outside in conceptual, analytic and logical terms, when it is not reducible to rationality, negation, suspension or the paradoxical self-undoing of logic.

area of facts and events that are separate from the author and ultimately from the reader. Inspired by Barthes's account of *intransitive writing* (1989), I have made writing itself a means of perception and analysis. In this sense, writing is an act of commitment to real events, rather than a mirror that the writer uses to represent the world from a distance. This modality of writing is not so much a form of reflection of something independent to the act of writing, but is instead an event. Lang also refers to the adequacy of *intransitive writing* when commenting that the writer, when giving an account of the Holocaust "should tell the story of the genocide as though he or she had passed through it" (Lang 1990:48)⁴⁰.

Roland Barthes (1989) tells us that in the practice of *intransitive writing* the writer is not interior or mono-theological, but is rather anterior to the process of writing. It welcomes alterity, historical materiality, events and the *amour fati*⁴¹, unlike the modernist narrator who cannot move beyond the opposition between subjectivity and objectivity, literalness and figurativeness. In *intransitive writing*, which at times may acquire anti-narrative strategies, the writer is not writing for himself, but it is writing for an exterior. When events and intense encounters are affirmed in the voids of *intransitive writing*, the narrative voice does not belong to the author for it marks the failure of writing as a figurative substitution of identity and presence. The result of the *middle voice* or *intransitive writing* is that a narrator addressing objective facts disappears, and one is to join him or her in the procedural construction of producing the real. Obviously, this has the effect of annulling any Archimedean or occularcentric vantage point that lies outside of the work.

This form of writing also attempts to ease the growing weariness among those anthropologists who do not find the traditional modes of representation adequate to *explain* or *describe* the unthinkable, as well as unaccountable material

⁴⁰Roland Barthes's *middle voice* or *intransitive writing* (1989) is a kind of writing that responds adequately to the philosophical problem raised by the Holocaust and the crises of representation (White 1992).

⁴¹ The love for an uncertain future, echoes the Nietzschean practice of active forgetting (1974), which seems an adequate sensitivity for a Berlin marked by a condition of extra-territoriality and post-nationality in which many of its inhabitants strive impossibly to forget or/and remember.

aspects of human life⁴². Hayden White (1992) argues that one should not give up trying to write about events no matter how un-representable one may think they are. What is required, he maintains, is a form of writing that has been developed by writers such as Primo Levi (2000) among many others in order to approach the experiences that modern life has made possible. The perpetual turning away of the middle voice, which neither asserts nor negates and marks the radical exteriority of thought to itself, has allowed me to produce a murmur with no origin, a strange discourse that cannot properly said to be owned by the author.

In a bizarre analogy, the haunting space of Blanchot's *outside* (1981) can be extended to the very huge whole in the ground that has been Berlin at the turn of the millennium. The present condition of Berlin as an abyss evokes the image of massive obituaries. Its parasitic intrusion in the bodies of the various extra-territorial subjects is one of the explored themes of this thesis. Let me argue that the forces or the voices of the void of Berlin, do not convey messages that the anthropologist translates, for the message does not exist within the anthropologist's powers to translate⁴³. Moreover, a translation without an original takes place. In a city of fractured spaces and narrative discontinuities, the practice of *intransitive writing*, ricocheting against the abyss, has been appropriate to explore the attraction propelled by the voids of Berlin.

⁴² Unfortunately, many contemporary anthropologists still follow Hegel's assumption that there cannot be perception without linguistic articulation and textualization. This problematic notion implies that human experience and cognition is fundamentally verbal. Moreover, it undermines sensations such as affects, stimulations, repressions, pleasures, pain, etc. as potential forms of knowing. In this vein, I have not made physical organs such as the eye and the ear mere data bases that function for empirical and positivist knowledge.

⁴³ Andreas Huyssen (1997) considers Daniel Libeskind's Jewish Museum the only recent architectural project in Berlin that truly attempts to articulate historical memory in its spatial organization. The visitor to the Museum crosses multiple bridges that traverses the void, and thus constantly moves between the lines which emphasize the discontinuous narrative of Berlin.



Photo 2: Filling the deep holes in the ground during summer

1.4.4 The Face of the Other.

Intelligence in chains loses in lucidity what it gains in intensity. The only logic known to Sade was the logic of his feelings (Albert Camus 1956:36).

The face... a moment of generosity... Someone plays without winning... Something that one does gratuitously, that is grace... the idea of the face is the idea of gratuitous love (Emmanuel Levinas 1989:67).

By practicing Adorno's *somatic solidarity* (Adorno 1978: Buck-Morss 1997), which implies that my own senses and corporeal sensations are also a source of knowledge, I have empathically got involved in the life of these particulars with a devoted intensity and a proximity that remains quite bizarre and rare in anthropology. Conventionally, one writes on *others* as a story in which he or she is the unified observer, in this experiment I traverse the full extent of a unified human sensorium. What is crucial for such fluidity to circuit is precisely preconditioned by the corporeal openness or receptivity of the writer to engage alterity, singularity and historical materiality. These chronicles stress how things happen and to whom,

rather than focusing on the deep-rooted tenacity of explaining why things happen causally⁴⁴.

At the advent of an event, it is the reactions of the particulars –in terms of what they have seen, said and done- from which a new corporeal and intimate insight is gained.

An event is neither substance, nor accident, nor quality, nor process; events are not corporeal. And yet, an event is certainly not immaterial; it takes effect, becomes effect, always on the level of materiality (Foucault 1982:231).

The event in the following series of chronicles, even at their most manipulative have more to do with physiological responses than ideological constructions. Furthermore, the fascination, perplexity and horror aroused by the following ethnographic fragments cannot be restricted to traditional forms of reflection, because the material and the often violent *brutality of the facts* does not rely on the illusion of presence.

Emmanuel Levinas (1988) refers to the nudity of the face as a strange blankness in which an infinite movement exceeding presence takes place⁴⁵. The proximity of the other's face requires the anthropologist to remain in the absence or void of the face to face perplexities⁴⁶, rather than denying such immediacy through

⁴⁴ Marilyn Strathern (1990) writing on the arrival of the Europeans on the Pacific writes that for Melanesians events encapsulated in themselves the past and the future, and accordingly, everything that there was to know. She disputes the anthropological compulsion to frame events and images in historical contexts and meaningful frames of reference.

⁴⁵ According to Jacques Derrida (1978), this infinite relation to desire at the heart of passion implies the participation of a third party, the face of the world. Likewise, Goffman's studies of face to face behaviour, point out that even though what configures a certain consistency of the face varies from one situation to the other "The mutual knowledge of member's public self-image or face, and the social necessity to orient oneself to it in interaction, are universal" (Strecker cited in MacDougall 1988: 270)

⁴⁶ One does not really have anything to say about the other. Paraphrasing Trinh Minh-ha (1989), since the other cannot be thematized, one speaks with or speaks alongside the other. Furthermore, this infinite movement, forever unexpected, forever unconsummated and forever to be renewed does not necessarily take place in the form of authentic or vital

de-facing knowledges. Levinas advocates the principle of the other's absolute alterity. In fact, it is a highly demanding ethic –often considered impossible- in which maverick anthropologists may be facing the excessive demands of abandoning themselves without reservations. The reflective perseverance or *remaining along* the demand of the other's face –in an asymmetrical relation- implies a judgement without criteria, in the sense that it may not be predetermined according to a prematurely totalized ethical position.

The face of the other⁴⁷ intrudes upon my privacy, and it is due to this blinding gratuity that moral acts cannot be reduced to measures of negativity and possession. The intimacy of the face escapes my grasp. In fact, it cannot be brought into a closure in the form of communion, effacement or solipsism. Its excessive proximity is an authority without a force, that is, a demand without sanction or reward⁴⁸. Moreover, the other cannot do anything, for it is precisely the other's weakness that exposes my strength, my ability to act, as responsibility. One may witness and experience disorienting instances –such as death, rape or even the encounter of a nude smile- where moral standards happen to be suspended, while simultaneously affirming the most radical differences and solidarities⁴⁹. The closest emotion is often the most distant, for it is removed from stable presence or being-in-the-world.

The corpothetic energy emerging from the gaps between the points often places the reader at the radical discontinuity between the probability when a

conversation. It occurs also in the silent, persevering and physical co-existence of sharing the same breath.

⁴⁷ In a pictorial vein, the present chronicles could be considered to be portraits. Francis Bacon comments on his portrait of Michel Leiris: “I really wanted these portraits of Michel to look like him: there's no point in doing a portrait of somebody if you're not going to make it look like him. But, being rather long and thin, that head in fact has nothing to do with what Michel's head is really like, and yet it looks more like him” (Sylvester 1987:147)

⁴⁸ Obviously, Emmanuel Levinas's notion of the face (1988) challenges radically the privatization of morality that follows a criteria of law, sanction and interest.

⁴⁹ Emmanuel Levinas (1989), in a sense, considers the face to be contrary to justice. For him, justice does not have the last word, precisely because there is violence in justice. Obviously, anthropologists should advocate for justice, but that does not exempt authority and morality from their internal paradoxes.

particular subject takes an action or not, and what actually takes place. One of the most inescapable challenges happened to be the following: How could I extend the affective intensities that are mobilized each time the other explodes in laughter, opens the mouth, experiences spasms or makes love, and make it knowledgeable to the reader? Words in this experiment are a medium to indicate the gaps⁵⁰ through which corporeal energies are poured to the reader, and –slippery- life escapes. In the course of events of these chronicles, there are irretrievable turning points that do not only deliver analytical insight, but also generate dynamic fields of intensities⁵¹.

1.4.5 The Improvisations of Menocchio

I have said that, in my opinion, all was chaos, that is, earth, air, water, and fire were mixed together, and out of that bulk a mass formed – just as cheese is made out of milk- and works appeared in it, and these were the angels.
(Ginzburg 1976:5)

The single person has been the location to explore the space of fluidity in social life. The pointillist method has enable one to point out immanent multiplicities by focusing on particular biographies micro-historically. In this context, Carlo Ginzburg's work reconstructing the religious and political beliefs of a sixteenth century miller called Domenico Scandella, popularly known as *Menocchio*, is exemplary. This work based largely on the extensive Friulian documents of two specific trials is an enriching historical text on the singularity of Menocchio. In fact, one does not only know about Menocchio's tragic fate, but one is also informed of his feelings, thoughts and creative capacities. Contrary to the tendency of traditional

⁵⁰ The streaming style of the text, from the tempo of action, the descriptive quality of the situation and place, the editing, the motricity of the body and reactions contribute to recreate the mood of the event. It is often the precision of the mood what allows the reader to engage emphatically.

⁵¹ The tendency for anthropological writing to interpret emotion in cultural constructionist ways has been criticised for it fails to place emotions in broader contexts of thought, embodiment and social agency. (Lyon 1995) Aware that affects are ususally short time experiences, I have sometimes avoided to recur on certain emotional texture, for this could have had half the effect of the intended or even the contrary, and at other times, I have been repeatedly commenting upon certain existential passages to point out its excessive multiple difference, and ultimately, impersonal dimension.

history to look at historical passages from the point of view of emperors and relevant figures, Ginzburg immerses the reader in a process of knowing the unique personality and wit of Menocchio.

The biography of Menocchio can also be taken to be revealing only of the level of *mentality* or existential condition, for its stress on the inert, un-signifying, obscure, the emotional, the irrational and the archaisms fails to encompass the history of cultures. The Friulian historical records are extremely useful because the testimonies of the accused were often so bizarre and strange that the clerks, unable to filter all the information through a unifying model, opted to record –in a literalist fashion- all the ticks, the blushings and many other un-signifying instances taking place in the trials. This attention to historical materiality and alterity allows Ginzburg to write a historical narrative by engaging with the materiality of unrecognizable or absurd moments that resist being invested back into causal meaning.

Books, readings and imagination were the sources which enabled Menocchio to become a clever and heretical anthropologist of his time. His heterodox character makes it impossible to encompass his cosmic views in a systematic or totalizing form. Before the inquisitor, there is Menocchio putting ideas and fantasies to work in the most imaginative form. As he talks to the judges, wittily, he seems to be working dialectically on the confrontation between heretical books and oral tradition. The result is an improvisational storyteller thinking about social change, tolerance and a religious practice without the mediation of the Church.

1.4.6 Statistics and the Single Case

Between 1942 and 1945 several million people were put to death in the concentration camps of the Third Reich: at Treblinka alone more than a million and a half, perhaps as many as three million. These are numbers that numb the mind. We have only one death of our own; we can comprehend the deaths of others only one at a time. In the abstract we may be able to count to a million, but we cannot count to a million deaths. (Coetzee 1999:18)

This experimental sensitivity propelling ethnographic descriptions and analytical insight in the same flow of words has put me face to face not only with the possibility of escaping the burden of citationality, but also with the necessity of underlining the loss and deadening of experience in statistical as well as purely analytical approaches. I am here striving for a historical anthropology that does not pretend to have an emancipating or suprahistorical approach to specific phenomena, but instead, inspired by Vertov's constructionism, prefigures a "provisional and reflexive" ethnography (Comaroff and Comaroff 1992:20). Indeed, it has been claimed that such neo-modernist anthropology should be also "anti-statistical and anti-aggregative" (Comaroff and Comaroff 1992:20).

One of the most remarkable aspects of micro-historical works –of which the narration of Menocchio is exemplary- relies on the fact that they often do not only chronicle the lives, practices, and thoughts of *little people*, but perhaps more importantly, they tend to approach Western social contexts, just as anthropologists approach non-Western cultures⁵². I believe that the *life histories* many anthropologists produce are bourgeoisie tools in which individual actions and thoughts are causally plugged to the narratives of an era or a culture⁵³. The forms of biography and autobiography that have been often practised in modernist anthropology can be argued to be Western forms of representation, in which it is the anthropologist who sets the temporal conditions into which the *other* is integrated as subject.⁵⁴

Traditional history tends to underplay normal people and individuals who do not become *great* or *famous*. In this sense, it can be argued that the present work sets

⁵² Siegfried Kracauer's work (1998) must also be accounted in this sense, for the New Germany of the salaried employees is scrutinized as if it were an exotic land overseas. "Kracauer does not let slip the opportunity to juxtapose the Exoticism of the world with that of those "primitive tribes at whose habits the employees marvel in films" (Mulder-Back 1997:43)

⁵³ "...I don't want to avoid telling a story, but I want very, very much to do the thing that Valery said – to give the sensation without the boredom of its conveyance, And the moment the story enters, the boredom comes upon you" (Francis Bacon interviewed by D. Sylvester 1987:65)

⁵⁴ A similar criticism can be also directed toward Paul Thompson – one of the pioneers of the development of life stories and oral history within sociology and social theory. (Thompson 2000)

out to construct a *bottom-up* history⁵⁵ for it attempts to deploy a series of historical chronicles in Berlin. In this sense, a novelistic reception⁵⁶ has invigorated an ethnography that addresses the breathings of the particular, unaccountable events, silences, and emotional intensities of singular situations that a statistical or a functionalist approach would easily overlook. In fact, it is often the case that numerically based research numbs and depersonalizes historical materiality and the experiences of individuals.

By addressing single cases⁵⁷, inspired by Menocchio's bizarre ventriloquism, I have tried to bring into expression the *touch on the raw* (Efimova 1997) or the *brutality of facts* of the events.

More than not,... statistical appearances, particularly when read across cultural registers, are misleading. Not only do they invite us to reify institutions, thus endowing a slippery abstraction with false concreteness, but they also erect counterfeit signposts toward causal explanation. (Comaroff and Comaroff 1992:21).

Indeed, sociological statistics tends to ignore the material historicity and the cultural space of productive ambiguity by numerically mystifying meaningful categories as the grounds of its theoretical empowerment.

⁵⁵ Within the discipline of history, Simon Schama's *Citizens: A Chronicle of the French Revolution* (1989) constitutes a break with the traditional canon for it tried to create a sense of the French Revolution through the tales of ordinary people. Obviously, traditional history has looked at the French Revolution from the point of view of famous figures such as Robespierre and Napoleon. Another example is the dream-based historical account *The Death of a Wang Woman* (1978) by Jonathan Spence.

⁵⁶ For the novelistic reception, I have recurred to fiction literature. In fact, I have found very valuable and revealing non-realistic literature works based on individual characters such as Sally Bowles in Christopher Isherwood's *Goodbye to Berlin* (1939), Elisabeth Costello in J. M. Coetzee's *Lives of Animals* (1999) and Ruth Behar's ethnographic account on *Esperanza's Story* (1993).

⁵⁷ Edmund Leach (1961; 2000), a defender of generalizations, would not be supportive of ethnographically addressing single cases, even though he claims the necessity for other forms of engaging human life. Indeed, the narrative empathy I have deployed in this experiment resonates with Leach's claims that "ethnographers as authors are not primarily concerned with factual truth: they convince the way they write." (Leach 2000:146-147), or Gregory Bateson arguing that a brilliant monograph has "the artistic merits of a great novel" (Leach 2000:72).

Paul Virilio has argued that we live in a society of legal disappearance. Radical criticism, thus, should address the mystifying ideology that alienates the particular to the history of a community, rather than to its real or imagined location that organizes political relations. The production of statistics and numbering are crucial for the modern bourgeoisie democracy. It orders persons and things taxonomically, which while guaranteeing the appearance of the individual under a specific grouping, actually serves to fragment the totality and ensure the disappearance of that same individual under other headings.⁵⁸

1.4.7 The Convulsion of Western Rational Discourses

The works of Ginzburg (1976), Spence (1978), Darnton (1984), Schama (1989) and Behar (1993) suggest that ethnographic methods may be more rigorous and revealing than they seem to appear when they are compared to the so called natural sciences. According to these authors, writing on the lives of particulars, far from being an act of appropriation and domination, is a form of subversive historical writing necessary to contest the hegemony, of the bourgeoisie, the parliament and the monarchies. Moreover, these authors celebrate engaging the other in a subaltern and micro-historical mode, which echoes the democratising impulse of ethnography to enhance the narratives, the consciousness and the lives of non-Western peoples against colonial and metropolitan discourse and authorities. A philosophical tension emerges when Rosaldo (1986), commenting on Le Roy Ladurie's work (1979), claims that no matter how hard Ladurie tries to capture the lives of the peasants of Montaillon, he ends up producing a text equivalent to the modern inquisitor, that is, the colonial anthropologist.

This is a relevant epistemological issue. Jacques Derrida (1978) has also criticised Michel Foucault's history of madness (1973) for attempting to analyse

⁵⁸ One example of this argument would be the British political discourse of the mid-nineties undertaking the statistical disappearance of the unemployed by referring to them as *Job Seekers*. Another revealing example of this politics of disenfranchisement would be the *Poll tax* fiasco, for it indicates the complicity of certain individuals to statistically disappear under numeration.

madness with the very language that constituted it. For Derrida, Foucault's work is a folly for there cannot be a location within the Western discourse of rationalism from which madness can be questioned. Derrida emphasizes that writing the history of madness, Foucault not only repeats the aggression of rationalism, but also –by putting to practice the analytic gaze- reproduces the relation between subject and object on which colonizing power/knowledge seems to be relying on. Carlo Ginzburg (1979) has contested Derrida's critique arguing that it is both facile and nihilistic. According to Ginzburg, such positioning generates passivity and silence for it misses the fact that the only discourse alternative to the hegemonic structure is that of the socially excluded. For this reason, Ginzburg considers that, even though Foucault operates within the Western rational discourse, his work is valid for it traces the coerciveness between the history of madness and the convention of discipline.

There is no comfortable synthesis out of this debate. Intrinsically, I have attempted to put to work these two positions without making an either/or reduction. By affirming their drawbacks and incompatibilities, I have tried to push them further toward an alternative form of theoretical complicity. Let us remind ourselves, however, that Carlo Ginzburg is not arguing for the representativeness of a historical work based on a particular person. He argues that cultural historians and ethnographers can only capture fragments in the forms of events, things or individuals that nonetheless need to be linked “to a historically determinate environment and society” (Ginzburg 1979:xxiv). Furthermore, he acknowledges that there is a space of unintelligibility in the form of alterities, un-signifying details, material residues and singular instances when writing micro-history. Far from becoming extremely focused on the incomprehensible, he suggests that these partial fragments of hidden histories should be put to work, and thus, redeemed by restoring them to a world of complexly interconnected meanings.

Kracauer's *pointillism* has the potential to respond affirmatively to Derrida's hypercynical claims that argue for the impossibility of countering occularcentrism, for our language is apparently codified by that order. If we were to maintain

comfortably such hypercynicist position, it would hardly be possible to move toward new articulations of desire, new forms of resistance and the exploration of other immanent intensities. As long as we think the body and human emotions only in terms of representation and language (Stafford 1993), we will be deprived of exploring new epistemological grounds. Moreover, Kracauer's work can inspire anthropologists to engage with the practical consideration of desire as productive and immanent, just as power must be taken as positive and initiative, rather than negative and sanctioning.

1.5 Corporeal Passions and the Material World

1.5.1 The Unknown Life of the Body

In the Western tradition, the body has been considered an obstacle not only to intelligence but also to action. It is still quite puzzling to salute the possibility of thinking the body without being relegated to meanings and representations. Even if the body has its own potentials for active forces, it can be argued that it is also a passive agent waiting to be inscribed by particular logos. In the realm of social sciences, a certain metaphysics setting dualisms between body and mind, subject and object, nature and culture, as well as presence and signification has been at work. (Howes 1991)

Gilles Deleuze writing on Spinoza and Nietzsche, diagrams a philosophical reversal. Far from separating body and thought, he poses a parallelism between them. Firstly, it affirms the powers of the body positively, and secondly, echoing Antonin Artaud's theatre works and life, considers the opacity and insubordination of the flesh to be a stimulus to thought and its necessary condition.

... the body is no longer the obstacle that separates thought from itself, that which it has to overcome to reach thinking. It is on the contrary that which it plunges into or must plunge into, in order to reach the unthought, that is life. Not that the body thinks, but, obstinate and stubborn, it forces us to think, and forces us to think what is concealed from thought, life (Deleuze and Guattari 1987:189).

The life of the body still remains unconscious and un-theorized. I have attempted to explore this dark continent. There were times when it turned out to be hardly possible to fully discern or articulate its impulses. However, a persevering and enduring struggle has been productive to perceive its unreachable excess. In fact, in this experimental practice, anthropology and cinema meet, for the apparatus of the latter is able to intensify and magnify the immediacy of the body, provoking, seducing and compelling us to move beyond a certain limit⁵⁹. Inspired by films, painting and music, I have tried to mobilize an ethnographic material that is highly mimetic and corrosive. The result, hopefully, has been a kind of sensuous and non-representational contact that brings us closer to the mysterious life of the body.

1.5.2 Anxiety Over Transcultural Images

...although ... the transculturality of images suggests universality, it in fact operates locally (MacDougall 1998: 273).

Traditionally, visual theory has thought the image as a flat, one-dimensional absence. This lack is characteristic of how visual cultures have been approached. Unsurprisingly, this lack has also been projected on female bodies by Freudian psychoanalysis. (Grosz 1994). In this sense, images have been considered unreliable because of their state of alienation and because they deform reality through the works of the imaginary order. However, I would like to point out that what these theorists have feared is not the vacuity or emptiness of images, but on the contrary, their corporeal materiality and magical power. Images are able to affect, seduce, simulate and fascinate excessively.

According to David MacDougall (1998), it is perhaps ethnographic film that has challenged the conception of cultural difference by emphasizing the visible continuities of human life. In fact, written anthropology has tended to favour categorization rather than the detailed and subatomic description of the visible,

⁵⁹ Walter Benjamin (1968) argued that film brought a “deepening of apperception” of “entirely new structural formations” of the physical world.

physical and material culture. The turbulence of images, which echoes the frenzy of modern society, allows us to approach social actors who are continuously responding to the experience of being in the world as a set of open-ended possibilities rather than as a closed and rigid cultural field. MacDougall claims that

... ethnographic films have been widely understood as transcultural, in the familiar sense of crossing cultural boundaries – indeed the very term implies an awareness and mediation of the unfamiliar – but they are also transcultural in another sense, that of defying such boundaries (MacDougall 1998:45).

In another passage of *Transcultural Cinema*, David MacDougall argues that “the transculturality of images can be seen as one of primary violations of anthropological discourse” (MacDougall 1998:269). In this vein, although language is culturally specific in the arbitrariness of its signs, most images of gestures, the oral physicality of the word, the face, physical postures and expressions are iconically or indexically expressive of abundant range of potentials meanings and functions. Much of MacDougall’s transculturality of images or Pinney’s call for Barthes’s “wavy meanings” (Barthes 1989: Pinney 2002) in ethnography derives from the exploration of the close –yet strange- proximity of the body and physical imbrications. Moreover, Strecker (1988) has demonstrated that the symbolic world, which is not a fixed set of possibilities, extends from verbal expression into the physical behaviour of everyday life and ritual. Metaphor then is not only a feature of cognition and language for it also extends into visible social practices of gestures, everyday life interaction ritual and dramas. All of this would resemble what Stephen Tyler (1978) calls an interactionist view of thought that combines its verbal, visual and kinaesthetic dimension.

Let me argue that non-linguistic forms of thought (MacDougall 1998) (such as visual apprehension and an internal sense of time) are also parasitically infiltrated within language. Once we move beyond the division between language and immediate intuition, cognition and sensory experience, we realize that there is no refuge for a pure interiority, not even before language. After all, it may be the case that culture is far emptier than anthropologists tend to believe, that gestures may be

no more than simulacrum, that bodies may be much more plastic than we think and that words in fact may have nothing to express.

1.5.3 Corporetic and Praxeological Ethnography

Ever since I can remember, my critical sense was nourished by bodily sensations – tense muscles, clammy feet, shoes too tight, breath too tight, holding back wanting to laugh – or to scream. Not feeling good in my skin was my way of criticising the definition my culture was giving to the situation. Cultural meanings are sensed bodily as being wrong. Just plain wrong. How else are people capable of social protest? If we were in fact always, already produced by our respective cultures, how could it ever come into our mind to resist them? (Buck-Morss 1997:39-40).

By relying on the works of Susan Buck-Morss, and further explored by Efimova (1997) and Pinney (2001), I use *corporetic* to express a sensory and embodied embrace of the world. This form of experiencing the world challenges the neo-Kantian and modernist views that support the location of a disembodied eye observing at a distance. Beyond modernist hermeneutic and epistemological approaches that often numb the human sensorium by making it invisible, this other sensitivity attempts to address the intimate and corporeal experience of social life. I make a tactile and irritant contact with the eventuality of particular corporetics. The stream of paragraphs mobilizes fields of intensities, an ambivalent myriad of sensations and stimulation of the flesh that foregrounds a space of contradiction, perplexity and clash.

The sensory quality of the described events is often intense, this marks the aliveness and plenitude of the body in life. The practice of corporetics is “a poetics of materiality and corporeality” (Pinney 2001:169), in which new forms of complicity and physical intimacy in the praxis of fieldwork leads one to the transformation of the conceptual world of participant observation based ethnography. Susan Buck-Morss (1992), exploring Benjamin’s “work of art” essay (1968), recuperates the etymological meaning of aesthetics. The Greek *aisthētikos* captures the field of intensities perceived by the human sensorium. She also argues that according to neo-Kantians such as Habermas –who rely on the narcissistic

illusion of control of modern man- aesthetics has come to connote detached contemplation, rather than *instinctual cognition*⁶⁰.

Alla Efimova (1997), exploring these ideas in relation to paintings of Soviet Realism claims that its aesthetic of daily life affects and assays the observer by arousing pain, fear, anguish, joy or dread in the form of *corporethetics*. The de-anaesthetizing materiality is very adequately referred as the *touch on the raw* by Efimova⁶¹. The shift from modern aesthetic to corporethetics –located on the surface of the body- allows one to proceed in an ethnography that engages with the rich and complex praxis of the body, not in terms of lack, but rather in terms of the often excessive materiality of the flesh that resists anaesthetizing discourses of signification.

Warnier (2001) questions the validity of phenomenological anthropology, such as Csordas' for a variety of reasons. He does not hold to the idea that phenomenology's concern with meaning is the best route to approach the motricity of the body. As a result, phenomenological anthropology –by posing the presence of being prior to perception *a la* Mary Douglas (1966)- tends to be more concerned with meanings and representations of which the body becomes a mirror. Furthermore, Warnier also argues that human ethology's interest with motricity and emotions has not provided a sufficient epistemological ground for the analysis of the body praxis, because –unfortunately- it has been too less concerned with language and meaning and has remained too close to behaviourism.

It is indispensable to take into consideration the material world for it is from the very praxis of the body in relation to it that identity, signification and meaning emerge. Indeed, the most infinitesimal movement can mobilize a process of

⁶⁰ This anaesthetic effect, she argues, is related to the excessive stimuli characterized by the shock of modern life, war and industrialization.

⁶¹ Francis Bacon's thoughts on *The brutality of Facts* resonate with Efimova's "touch on the raw": "Isn't it that one wants a thing to be as factual as possible and at the same time as deeply suggestive or deeply unlocking areas of sensation other than simple illustration of the object you set out to do?" (Sylvester 1987:56)

transformation at work in symbolization or subjectivation in a material world. Warnier proposes a *praxeological ethnography*, by firstly pointing out the fact that structuralism has been more concerned with speech and communication than the material world. Moreover, he argues that whenever the material world is nowadays taken into account, it is more in terms of what it means, rather than what it does.

1.5.4 Double Sensation and the Flesh.

But what happens when what we see, even though from a distance, seems to touch you with a grasping contact, when the matter of seeing is a sort of touch, when seeing is a contact at a distance? What happens when what is seen imposes itself on your gaze, as though the gaze had been seized, touched, put in contact with appearance? (Blanchot 1981:75)

Merleau-Ponty's notion of *double sensation* advances a relevant post-phenomenological path of exploration. A sense of immersion takes place in the *double sensation* between the seer and the visible, that is, an embodied way of seeing. In *The Visible and the Invisible* (1968), Merleau-Ponty gives primacy to the eye. He gives the example of the continuum of the toucher and touched hands in order to exemplify the notion of *double sensation*. This indeterminate mutuality in which one experiences the double sensation of being subject and object illustrates the fundamental gap of the *flesh*. Luce Irigaray (1985a, 1985b) has explored this notion of the *double sensation* in her image of the lips, which conversely, prioritizes the *copulative* of the tactile to the allegedly hierarchical and phallogocentric tendency of the visual.

Let me point out that the notion of *flesh* does not designate a being or a substance, but rather it indicates the undecideable zone where the reversible phenomenon of touching and being touched takes place. The affirmation of this ambiguity or fundamental reversibility between affect and being affected challenges radically dichotomies such as passive and active, subject and object. The pre-symbolic domain of the *flesh* explores the reversibility of perception in which subject and object, in mutual interaction, change, evolve, link and separate. Moreover, it is not the ground of fusing into one or sameness, but of volatile and unstable

differences from which things and persons are generated. De Certeau (1979) has also explored the notion of the *flesh* by pointing out that there is a certain residual materiality, an unthought suffering that remains prior and irreducible to inscription and textualization⁶².

1.5.6 The *Body Without Organs* and the Vision of Grace

I saw that even at the worst days, when I thought I was utterly and completely miserable, I was nevertheless, and nearly all the time, extremely happy (Blanchot 1981:12).

The body I have addressed is experienced completely as time. The fresh actuality of cinematic writing endorses the body as a site of change and fluidity rather than self-identity. Deleuze and Guattari term the full *body without organs* (1983) to the material flow at work prior to the organization of objects, machines, environments, texts and bodies into molar entities. This moving kinetic energy or populated multiplicity is often disrupted and appropriated by an *organ* or model that endeavours to fix and stabilize this energy into static models. This notion brings Irigaray's *mechanics of fluids* (1985b) to mind for this is a body that refuses spatial arrangement, precisely because it engages with the flow of time which cannot be fully represented. The body without organs does not attend so much to the question of embodiment, but rather the unknown potential of the body to engage in practices. It addresses a field of intensities, energies, affects and movements that produce lines of flights, unpredictable connections and destratification through and beyond the body without organs⁶³.

⁶² I believe that one way of exploring this pre-symbolic corporeality of the flesh is by writing attuned to the sensibility of Blanchot's outside (Blanchot 1981; Bataille 1988a), impossible encounters and material intimacies, not so much to reinscribe its pre-discursive domain and its residual materiality into a new theoretical model, but rather to indicate the limits, gaps and silences at which my own particular discourse may be unable to articulate fully the unthought yet materially assayed life of the body.

⁶³ As it happens in the case of the drug addict, the masochist, the hypochondriac or the schizophrenic, a body without organs appears when the excess of circulating intensities and energies collapses and ceases to flow. These forms of corporeal breakdowns or empty body without organs (Deleuze and Guattari 1983) do not take place as a result of lack, but conversely, by the excess of the circulating intensities.

This is the work of a powerfully materialist researcher. The austerity, reticence and minimalism found in it should not be considered to hold back emotion, but in their own right it constitutes a positive and affirmative form of knowledge. Far from clearing the space for disembodied spiritual reflection, I have tried to exhibit the production and intensification of affect in order to render the experience fully incarnate. In a project devoted to the body that refused psychological involvement and identification, I could do no better than concentrate upon the body and its secret life. The following chronicles of incarnate experiences attempt to reveal and express the secret of life of the flesh, a life that it is often so compressed and extreme that it is impossible to bear. Thus, the spiritual is itself a quality, an affection of the body. Perhaps also inaccurately, it could be named the intolerable⁶⁴. Finally, let me point out that grasping the flesh with such directedness and intensity has let the work with a vision in which grace cannot be distinguished from suffering and abjection⁶⁵.

⁶⁴ Recent works such as E. Valentine Daniel's *Charred Lullabies: Chapters in an Anthropology of Violence* (1996), Christopher O. Davis' *Death in Obeyance: Illness and Therapy Among the Tabwa of Central Africa* (2000) and Allen Feldman's *Formations of Violence: The Narrative of the Body and Political Terror in Northern Ireland* (1991) have been epistemologically influential when working anthropologically with violence.

⁶⁵ The style of this experiment resonates with the little tradition of Blanchot (1981), Bataille (1986), Artaud (Barber 1993) and Julia Kristeva (1982) who beyond treating beauty and pain as a duality, problematise such distinction by their bizarre complicity in life.

A Word on The Order of the Chapters

The structural intention behind the order of the chapters that appear below is to mobilize a fluctuating tension juxtaposing present eventualities with various past periods of Berlin's modern history. By opening the ethnographic chapters with the construction workers of the Potsdamer Platz, my aim is to start with a panoramic view of Berlin's new pyramids. Sweeping visually throughout the city, the daily life of Ana –a Jewish beggar- and her particular perceptions of *grey light* – a luminous energy emanating from the catastrophic pasts of Berlin- are enacted.

Tobias -a neighbour living in the old flat above mine- will shift the focus to the depressive phase of a student unable to finish his doctoral thesis on the Weimar Republic. From the loneliness of Tobias in front of the fire, the next chapter portrays the terminal phase of Marcus dying in a claustrophobic hospital bed. Following, the sexualized spheres of the Weinerei, the Fuck Parade and the illegal rave culture are observed. In the night-life of the Weinerei abjection and sexual desires will be analyzed, during the Fuck Parade, the quotidian art of transvestites and the instability of a bearded man's spectacle will be explored. Moreover, in the case study of rave parties a collective immersion into ecstasy will be described.

From the desires and sexual attractions of various Berliners, we move on to meet a teenager whose whereabouts will underline the presence of Berlin's Nazi past. Kym, a piano student at a prestigious Music School and ferocious fan of black metal music, shows us her violent passions and desires resisting institutional and sexual forms of domination. Thereafter, Petra, a receptionist in a computer terminal, will take us for a ride in her car. Her kamikaze driving, virtual doubling as *Sara* on the Internet and sexual affairs through the web-cam mark the counterpoint of her long hours of absurd work in an Internet Company.

And finally, the figure of Fahrid – an Algerian immigrant- rhetorically brings us back to the public spaces of the beginning of the thesis. The subaltern corporeality of Fahrid contrasts radically with the glossy facade of the New Berlin.

Furthermore, Fahrid reiterates the centrality of *outsiders* in the construction of the Potsdamer Platz, and ultimately, Europe.

2 - Construction Workers of the *New Berlin*

2.1 The Potsdamer Platz

At the turn of the nineteenth century the Potsdamer Platz represented an image of modernity characterized by speed, technology and diverse forms of transportation. Indeed, technology and capitalism created a demand to develop a large modern metropolis. Later, the Potsdamer Platz became one of the most culturally dynamic and lively areas of Europe in the 1920's; it attracted poets, visionary architects, idling *flaneurs*, tourists, painters, journalists, cultural critics, and so on, which as a consequence brought popularity to the area.

In 1945, the area that extended from the Brandenburg gate to the Potsdamer Platz was destroyed by British and American bombers (Diefendorf 1993). However, Brian Ladd claims that

... the physical destruction of the Potsdamer Platz began before the war as several nearby blocks were cleared in the first phase of Hitler's plans for rebuilding Berlin. World War II left most of the remaining edifices in ruins (Ladd 1997:119).

Paradoxically, just as Hitler's architect Albert Speer had planned for a thousand year long Reich, this devastation produced a *tabula rasa* for Germany. The Potsdamer Platz, one of the most lively urban areas of Europe during the nineteen twenties in the Weimar Republic was now transformed into rubble and ruins.

Curiously, Italian filmmaker Roberto Rossellini made his last neo-realist film *Germany – Year Zero (1945)* in post-war Berlin. He employed a non-professional cast and made this highly expressionist film about a young boy who faces the horror and devastation of post-war Germany. In a sense, the story of the boy struggling to survive provides an allegory for the rise and fall of Nazi Germany. Around the end of the film the boy, isolated from the rest of the society, finds a moment to play.

Diefendorf (1993), writing accurately on the reconstruction of Germany after the war, reminds us that there was no zero hour in Germany. As an illustration, he refers to the fact that architects who had worked in Nazi Germany more or less enthusiastically actually participated in an urban reconstruction that had many links with the pre-Nazi period. In 1945, Germans faced enormous problems of housing thousands of people as well as rebuilding schools, hospitals, government buildings and businesses. Even though no one expected it to happen, all this massive rebuilding was accomplished in about a decade or so. A great deal of humility and modesty was required for a nation that lacked confidence and wealth to reconstruct the country. In the case of Berlin, its wrecked physicality gave way to a plan of urban renewal that consisted of tearing down old buildings and constructing modern architecture (Sanierung).

Apparently, the bombardment of cities during World War II was a strategy aimed at achieving several goals: gaining retribution for the injuries done, blocking the enemy's ability to destroy crucial industries, and very importantly, to diminish enemy morale. In the case of the destruction of German cities, there were such expectations for the success of aerial warfare that the American and British commanders felt the pressure "to achieve something – anything- if only to justify the high expense of building an air force" (Diefendorf 1993:5). When the Allied troops entered Germany they found out, much to their discomfort, that even though Germans had been largely de-housed as the strategists had intended, Germany's industrial capacity to make war and the German morale –as the remarkable rebuilding of the nation the following years proved- had not really been destroyed.

From 1945 to the present the Potsdamer Platz has been considered a no-man's land marking an empty zone between Capitalism and Communism. Thus, the divided city of Berlin came to symbolize the confrontation between East and West. Ladd (1997) argues that, at the beginning of the century, the Potsdamer Platz symbolized a dynamic metropolis, whereas by the 1960's it embodied a divided city, with a demoralized population on both sides of the wall. Curiously, it can be argued

that the Potsdamer Platz has projected various states of mind in the modern history of Berlin.

Nevertheless, the most emblematic construction project of the post-war period was the wall itself. Indeed, the wall traversed no man's land and the mine fields of the Potsdamer Platz, which left a seventeen acre wasteland or void right between the eastern and western parts of the city. During the Cold War, political maps of East and West Germany displayed their counterpart sections of the city as empty voids.

In November 1989, after the fall of the wall, the huge wasteland that had been enclosed during the Cold War now became the centre of the city. At this time, there was mostly rubble, dirt, and grass in an open field under a vast and high skyline. Berliners referred to this area as "wonderful city steppes", as their "prairie of history" (Huysen 1997:65). This void or haunting space was also characterized by multiple small footpaths that lead nowhere.

In the two years following the fall of the wall, there were Berliners who used to walk or bike through these fields. Moreover, at times, it was also used for staging rock concerts as well as other cultural events. As regards this use, Huysen (1997) evokes the idea that this *tabula rasa* had once also been the site of massive gatherings. In fact, it was once the location of Third Reich's Chancellery as well as the space to be organized by Speer's megalomaniac north-south axis that had to be completed by 1950⁶⁶. Revealingly, soon after the wall came down, the authorities, trying to avoid any potential Nazi pilgrimages taking place, sealed off various areas of the Potsdamer Platz.

⁶⁶ Hitler's favorite architect, Albrecht Speer, was put in charge of a grand rebuilding for Berlin, which following a neo-classical style, was to represent the Third Reich's Imperial splendour. Despite the two monumental avenues running north and south, and east and west, Speer had constructed a model of the "*People's Hall*" which was planned as a German Pantheon glorifying Hitler.

All of these aspects provoked a desire to keep this no-man's land as it was; phantasmagorical, this void had endured the Cold War intact right at the heart of the city. Yet, paradoxically, this space was still embodying another void, that is, the invisible wall that still kept East and West separated. The rebuilding of the very heart of the city soon became a major debate in Berlin. The Potsdamer Platz, an area that had remained a waste land from the Second World War until the mid 1990s, was soon to become the biggest building site in Europe.

After the fall of the wall, those who shared the spirit of *critical reconstruction* were enthusiastic about the idea of rebuilding the Potsdamer Platz in a pre-1910 fashion. Part of their programme relied on the possibility of symbolically reconciling East and West through the reconstruction of the Potsdamer Platz. Nevertheless, there were also sceptical voices for whom it did not make much sense to build a 1990s city on a 1910 model. Furthermore, the Berlin government was not interested in re-planning the kind of chaotic liveliness of the old Potsdamer Platz, which somewhat obviously would have been incredibly difficult, and instead had other ideas for the area. Without taking into consideration the thoughts of the planners or the public, the government “moved quickly to sell large wedges of land bordering Potsdamer Platz to four major companies” (Ladd 1997:121).

The gap between East and West had to be bought by western trans-national companies in order to abolish such surreptitious distinction. The large companies were Daimler-Benz, Sony, the Hertie department store and the multinational engineering company Asea Brown Boveri. Many political and cultural critics considered this urgent corporate manoeuvre – which avoided organizing any public competition or debate- a strategy to imprint a western image; that is, a capitalist spatial and political surgical incision into the Potsdamer Platz. As a consequence, this phenomenon has circumscribed the new political and historical scene under the sign of a mono-logic corporate architecture.

The result, for many years, was an enormous construction site; how the Potsdamer Platz functions will not be clear until well into the twenty first century (Ladd 1997:122).

The official authorities have been unable to articulate comprehensibly what Berlin is turning into, while constantly celebrating its transformation. The whole plan of Berlin's reconstruction has been chaotic, characterized by unordered public planning, contradictory politics and architectural developments (such as the Spree island and Alexanderplatz) dealing with insufficient financial support. Relying on these arguments, Huyssen claims that "there are ample reasons to emphasize the void, rather than celebrate Berlin's current state of becoming" (Huyssen 1997:62).

The new Government has placed itself next to the Reichstag, near the Spree River in the north, and new corporate developments have taken place in the southern area of Potsdamer Platz and Leipziger Platz. In fact, it can be argued that Berlin has acquired a new centre in a world in which -beyond the voices questioning the importance of the city centre today- the image of the city centre seems to be crucial for its global competitive manoeuvres. In fact, Berlin is involved in the process of transforming from a national centre of production to an international centre of communication, media and services. Revealingly, the former Checkpoint Charlie, where for many years tanks stood staring at each other, was turned into an American business centre.

2.2 The Wine House

At the heart of beauty lies a murder, a sacrifice, a killing. For Hegel, art began with the construction of tombs and ends with a tomb. Likewise, he (1975) considered architecture to be a tombstone, in other words, the triumph of life over death. I find it useful to evoke this dualistic approach to life and death in order to explore the dogmatic and reified division between the West and the East in the Cold War. Here, I will try to discuss the case of the Wine House for I believe it radically questions the Western metaphysical and rationalist dichotomy between life and death, as well as the Western appropriation or triumph over the East after the fall of the wall.

Only two buildings remained standing in the Potsdamer Platz after the devastation of the Second World War. The Esplanade, which had been one of Berlin's leading hotels after it opened in 1908. The part of the building that was still standing had been appointed for preservation, nevertheless, architect Jan's plan to remove its historic interior rooms and reconstruct them within the Sony complex made many critics very unhappy.

The other building that stood nearby is the Wine House. Images such as sacrifice and massacres evoke the image of blood and the image of blood calls forth the image of wine. During the Cold War, this house stood alone in the wild fields of the Potsdamer Platz as a ghostly and morbid remembrance of the past. Curiously, the group of manual workers with whom I worked at the construction sites in the Potsdamer Platz referred to it as a "blood bank". In this particular sense, the Wine House did not only embody the massacres of the Second World War, but its ruinous condition came to be perceived by these manual workers as a signpost of disenchantment in relation to the New Berlin.



Photo 3: The Wine House surrounded by new and noisy constructions.

Daimler- Benz agreed to keep the intact turn-of-the-century building of a former restaurant, the Weinhaus Huth, a decision it briefly regretted in 1995 when the building's residential tenants refused to move out and filed official complaints against the noise of the construction around them (Ladd 1997:122).

When juxtaposing the case of the Wine House with the Potsdamer Platz, the condition of ruin in the catastrophic nature of Modernity and progress shared by both of them should be noted. This intimate relation does not only question the clear and cut distinction of life and death, with its consequent *othering* and appropriation of death, but it also manifests the triumphalism of the West after the fall of the wall. One of the consequences of this brutal manoeuvre to forget by undermining the East (and aligning it with death) has been the following: the East German population has been deprived of memory and a personal life that took place for four decades in a separate country.

Nowadays, the Wine House is an elegant reconstruction of pre-1914 Berlin. It has been reconstructed as a Wilhelmian Restaurant, which has had the effect of exorcising its ruinous and lonely past. Standing among relatively monstrous hyper-modern corporate buildings, it has become a picturesque recreation of the past legitimated by the critical reconstructionists. The residential tenants living in the Wine House were eventually forced to move to another part of the city. This illustrates the form in which capitalism convulsively appropriates and reinvests disturbing and destabilizing symbols to politically corrected versions. The “blood bank” that referred to the annihilation of the Second World War by linking sacrifice and feast, life and death, East and West in a complex, inclusive and non dualistic way, has been reinvested to the flows of corporate capital.

2.3 The Info-Box

During 1995-1996, in a temporary visit to Berlin as an exchange student in Germany, I had the chance, as did approximately another five thousand tourists, to visit the Info Box at the Leipziger Platz. This was a huge red edifice that had been built as a temporary instalment for the visual appeal of tourists and official visitors

who could enjoy a vast landscape in construction from its open air-roof. Huyssen wonders if it is perverse at all to invoke “the obnoxious triumphalism” (Huyssen 1997:71) of this gaze in relation to the previous Cold War era, where the Western onlooker stood on top of the platform near the Potsdamer Platz, gazing across the death strip.

Escaping tourist tours, those who opted for not paying the entrance fee to the roof could only enjoy panoramically a disquieting and noisy wasteland from behind window fronts. At the Info-Box, one could also see huge photo images of the major architects who had planned the reconstruction of the vast empty area between the Leipziger Platz and the Potsdamer Platz. The faces of architects such as Koolhaas, Moneo, Isozaki, Roger and Morris and their prominent curriculums, were presented as almost the new *visionaries* of the city’s future. The display of this elitist cult of architects was allured further by a multimedia installation and model simulation of the constructions of Daimler- Benz, Sony, and the A + T Investment Group. Architects’ names can also provide *labels* –such as Coca Cola- to be fashionable and generate business.

In *Virtual Berlin 2002*, one could enjoy a simulation of the future Potsdamer Platz and Leipziger Platz, as well as the simulated possibility of arriving at the Lehrter Bahnhof by train from the position of a fly on the wall. The notion of spectacle and viewing –*Schaustellen*- was focused on Berlin as construction site - *Baustellen*. Three years later, in the year 2000, when returning to the already advanced construction, the development did actually look highly similar to the simulation, yet far more oppressive, monumental and airy. This is the case of the completed developments on Friedrichstrasse, which Huyssen describes as “the revenge of the real” (Huyssen; 1997:71).

Ironically, the Info-Box, which was eventually to become a ruin, was used to promote and announce the biggest construction site in Europe. When observing tourists’ tours that viewed and walked through the multiple construction sites, the sensational tenure was close to a religious pilgrimage wow-ing the majestic

dimensions of the new pyramids. Indeed, the group of tourists visiting the Potsdamer Platz in construction was confronted and intimidated by an enormous cinematic ceremony secretly haunted by the past and the future. If Hegel had considered the tombstone and architecture analogous, Bataille compared tombstones with museums in an original manner.

It is no coincidence that Georges Bataille (Hollier 1989) saw the birth of the Louvre related to the slaughterhouse; the guillotine, the plot of multiple sacrifices of the French Revolution can be found in the origins of the modern museum. According to Bataille (Hollier 1989), with their lungs full of blood, many people visited the museum as if they were going to Church on Sunday willing to be purified. The intimate relation between the museum and the slaughterhouse can be transposed to the New Berlin and its relation to the gas chamber. In this sense, perhaps, Libeskind's Jewish museum should be considered as an anti-museum, or an anti-monumental monument, for it refuses purification in the name of an un-reflexive progress and modernity.

By the mid 1990s, Berlin had made a spectacle out of its constructing edifice, boulevards, and so on, which included more than two hundred guided tours as well as numerous musical, acrobatic and performing events on diverse open air stages. The vast no-man's land of the Potsdamer Platz was now the site for an immense projection. The void had been turned into a *mise-en-scene*. "Berlin becomes image". (Huysen 1997:71).

In the year 2000, I did not return to the Potsdamer Platz as an exchange student or tourist; instead I returned as a manual labourer. Like hundreds of other manual laborers, I worked –often deep down underground- in the huge holes of the Potsdamer Platz. The physical distance between the tourist's gaze -at the Info Box or other panoramic spots- and the manual labourers was enormous. The manual labourers, most of whom were immigrants, were part of the cinematic spectacle. Furthermore, we were not only workers but also commodities in a corporate development orchestrated for the appeal of tourists, politicians and investors. The

new corporate city wanted to attract the tourist “just as it fears the tourist’s unwanted double, the displaced migrant” (Huyssen 1997:59).

2.4 Manual Labour

Nearby the newly built Potsdamer Platz, I was hired for a four month period to work on a construction site. Like me, most of the other workers that I was working with were foreign; Poles, Serbs, Russian and a couple of Scots. We were working on a specific construction site in the middle of a vast explosion of similar sites. After spending many days and hours in a labyrinth-like landscape of rubble, mud, water and machines, I began to comprehend the expression workers -who had already been there for six months or a whole year - used to refer to the entangled environment of scaffoldings as “the other side”. Many of them, as was the case for the Poles Stanislav and Sergei, had worked here before. Sergei often claimed that the high-tech area of the Potsdamer Platz had not been built for “human beings”, but “big money and machines”.

Three years after I had undertaken a three month long period of fieldwork in Berlin in order to write my Master’s dissertation, I returned specifically to the Potsdamer Platz, aiming to undertake ethnography on the manual labourers that resulted –among other things- in criticising my own previous work in Berlin. In the spring of 1998, while undertaking the fieldwork for the Master’s dissertation, I faced a crisis for I felt that my writing as a form of mediation between contesting mythologies of the city was ignoring the daily experiences of ordinary Berliners. The fact that my discourse analysis was largely based on interviewing architects, politicians, urban planners, artists, journalists and writers provoked –perhaps a guilt-ridden- dissatisfaction in me.

Now, I was not only an anthropologist observing and interviewing urban planners, but had become a worker in the noisy symphony of construction sites. Much progress had been made in the construction site during the previous two years; my eyes could not believe how most of the new edifices had already been

built and some were already functioning. I was working in one of the constructing corners of the Potsdamer Platz. Thus, between 2001 and 2002 I spent four months, along with ten other workers on a construction site orchestrated by building site cranes and trucks while observing –sometimes microscopically with the video- and listening to the bodies of this international group of workers.

Connected to the machinery of the construction sites, our bodies were materially connected to a landscape of cranes and scaffoldings in which the construction site itself seemed to become a somewhat monstrous industrial body, vibrating, pulsating, continuously, dying here, growing there and proliferating elsewhere. Within the building site itself, no matter if you were working during the usually cloudy daylight or the artificially illuminated night time, everywhere you would stare there would always be building site vehicles, cranes, excavators or trucks. In such a desolate atmosphere, as Stanislav used to suggest, the original sounds of the construction site seemed to work as a composition, a sort of “music out of real noise”.

The demolition gang I worked with for four months devoted ten hours five days a week to fill the holes in order to make the foundations flat. Usually, the shifts started six o'clock in the morning and lasted until noon. After a couple of hours for lunch, which we all brought from home, we would return to work for another four hours. There were other gangs who began to work in the evening and did the night shift. Filling in the voids and ruins of the Potsdamer Platz and Leipziger Platz were the endless endeavours of this physically devastating job. The construction landscape was a vast patchwork of absences that rarely showed its demarcation. Unlike the manual labourers who were devoted to raise the glass and steel corporate buildings up to the skies, we worked most of those unforgettable weeks twenty or thirty meters underground, inside of huge holes, manoeuvring with concrete, metal bars, scaffoldings, earth, pipes and water.

2.5 The Dust

The presence of dust in Berlin throughout the past ten years has been intense and unavoidable. On the construction site, our bodies, hair and fingernails were covered by dust most of the day. We all looked grey most of the time and our skin and hair would harden and become crispy with material particles of concrete. We would often joke about how much older the dust was making us look. Generally, we agreed that it was Sergei who looked older than the rest of us. In fact, the way in which the dust and concrete sand would sediment around his eyes made him look the oldest, even though, as a matter of fact, Stanislav at forty-eight was the oldest in the group.

Stanislav was a Polish man who usually walked in a peculiar straight and rigid manner, which fitted with his air of pride and unquestionable dignity. His humour was quite predictable and narrow, even though his smile had a humble and friendly glare that turned out to be easily contagious. Stanislav held strong Christian moral standards, and at times talked to the group with the sombre and somewhat religious rhetoric of a serious philanthropist. Even though he tended to complain and point out the imperfections and mistakes in the labour of his colleagues, Stanislav was a rough man one could rely on for anything. He was there when one of us needed extra money, a place to sleep or simply needed to be heard.



Photo 4: Stanislav working.

Stanislav would often argue that “the dust will remain in the city much longer than us,... We can laugh about Sergei’s wise grandfather look, but we will die just like him”. Stanislav’s melancholic comment on dust evokes Benjamin’s idea that dust (Buck-Morss 1989; Benjamin 2002), along with discarded objects, obsolete buildings, the Wine House and decaying arcades, questions the phantasmagoria of modernity as historical continuity. Annoyed, Sergei used to complain when the rest of us suggested to him that he stopped wearing his long-necked and colourful 70’s shirts and his fifteen year old fake silver framed glasses. Stubborn, he would respond that “your own clothes will become faded too, so just take a look at yourself”.

A la Benjamin (2002), I would add that even the present dust – which one could easily taste sourly in the mouth- materially and allegorically attack the illusion of freezing historical change. Sergei himself, almost prophetically, used to claim that “no matter how monumental and grand, these huge buildings of the New Berlin, they will eventually become obsolete and faded too”. Revealingly, Sergei’s comment is reminiscent of P.B. Shelley’s poem *Ozymandias* in which the sand of time literally and irreversibly overcomes the work of man,

“My name is Ozymandias, king of kings:
Look on my words, ye mighty, and despair!”
Nothing beside remains: round the decay
Of that colossal wreck, boundless and bare,
The lone and level sands stretch far away. (Palgrave 1875)

Stanislav himself would point out the way in which Alexanderplatz, the political and city centre area of the former East German capital, had now become a refuge for homeless subjects, and possibly also the representation of Hell in modern Germany: Likewise, unemployed subjects that hung out in touristy gardens of the *Palast der Republik* and subaltern subjects sleeping in its “underground” transit ways. *Palast der Republik* was the Parliament of the now disappeared GDR. The highly contaminant asbestos it contains and the fact that its ground foundations are also shared by the Deutsche Dom cathedral makes the possibility of its abolition very

complicated. It is uncertain what will happen, but *Palast der Republik* remains standing in front of the Red Square as a ghostly and poisonous ruin. Diverse nostalgic positions participated in the debate; those who longed for the return of a royal palace (to recover a city wholeness that Berlin had allegedly lacked since the 50`s), those who wished to maintain it still holding onto certain memories and values of the former Communist regime and those who wanted to wipe it out and build a new modern building – who have been imputed to the nostalgia of the modern and heroic architecture of the 20`s claiming a new urban world.

Walter Benjamin (2002) had noticed the way in which the nineteenth-century Paris bourgeois arcades started to fail commercially because of the arrival of enormous departmental stores. Thus, the bourgeois Arcades became remnants of a splendid past due to the development of capitalism that the bourgeoisie itself had unleashed. The irony could not be more salient, when noticing that one of the biggest complexes of departmental stores at the heart of the Potsdamer Platz is called *Arkaden* (arcades); in fact, the glass and steel high tech architecture complex here seems to recreate -artificially and in a monstrously magnified way- the nineteenth century petit bourgeois Arcades of Paris.

The Potsdamer Platz, architectural and political emblem of the New Berlin, has been criticised for its resonances with the grand heroic architectures and futurisms of Modernity. The somewhat disenchanted memory of Berlin as a construction site evoked by Sergei and Stanislav indicates the way in which their senses resist that other –numbing and flattening capitalist- dust, which threatens to skim over our bodies and deprive the flesh from its singular historicity and material culture. In this sense,

Dust is the perceptual waste material formed by the historical-cultural repression of sensory experience and memory. It is also the form that residual culture takes once it is compartmentalized as the archaic and sundered from any contemporary pertinence and presence (Seremetakis 1994:35).

2.6 The Wrecking Ball

Stanislav, Sergei, Mikhail, John, Walter and I made up a working gang. We were working mates that kept an atmosphere of humour and brotherhood. During the four months that I spend with them working daily, we had a game of releasing a huge metal ball that was hanging from a pulley in a specific point in the air, so that its swing would tear down a wall. In the construction areas where we worked, there were many fields with walls that were still standing up and had to be wrecked. Most of these walls were of the same size, and constituted remnants of an area that was formerly full of mechanic garages and ateliers.

Every time we were ordered to move to one of the “virgin” fields where construction work had not properly began, there was a celebratory mood among us; a new set of walls that Sergei named “sheets of paper” had to be torn down. We had a new chance to play the game of the metal ball once again, and bets and jokes were included of course.

Mikhail and Sergei used to be the most competitive ones, even though typically it was Stanislav that made the best shots. The game did not require strength so much but a refined calculation when letting the metal ball swing at the right spot. The goal was to tear down the biggest amount of bricks in the wall in one single shot. During the months of my fieldwork in the construction sites, the walls that we had to tear down were thirty centimetres thick and approximately ten meters long. Each time we had the chance –which was about every ten days- to tear down several of these walls, Sergei and Mikhail, excited and enthusiastic, were often the first trying their best. Stanislav would often blame them for being too much in a hurry, and excessively excited to let the metal ball free in the air.

Sergei and Mikhail thought that the only way of becoming as good as Stanislav became in tearing down these “white sheets” was by a combination of intuition, practice and experience. The metaphor of the “white sheet”, when referring to walls that were to be demolished, had a resentfulness toward the

planners in command and white collar workers embedded in it. The violent ritual of destroying the “white sheet” was also an activity that released the fury and anger of being a blue collar worker subjected to the orders of the white paper’s supremacy. In this sense, they were often ironic about my own academic work; for they considered that I was a student trying to make my way in the generally wealthier and more prestigious white collar class.

Working along with them and participating in this ritual, I learned that the violence and power implications involved in Western culture of white paper are no less dramatic, spectacular and irreversible than the huge walls we were to hit with the wrecking ball. The lesson that I –a potential white collar worker- learned from Stanislav and the others was that the bureaucratic, functionalist and exploitative capitalist white paper can perhaps -in the discipline of anthropology more noticeably- be also consistently banged by the wrecking ball that turns the supremacy of the white paper against itself.

My own turn would come usually after Sergei and Mikhail, and the result was usually mediocre. No matter how much I would calculate or think about the “right energy spot” to let the 150 kilograms of a solid metal ball off in the air, I would not be able to break more than two meters of the wall. Usually, Sergei and Mikhail would tear down half of the wall down. According to the criteria of most of them, this was only a half good shot. John was the uninterested one; he used to ignore everything that had to do with competitiveness and betting. He did not find any “fun” in this sort of leisure activity.

By the way Stanislav would tear down three quarters of the wall with his best shots. I figured out that much practice was needed to improve. Stanislav had often criticised my playing attitude for “thinking too much” about the throwing of the metal ball. I also bet like Sergei, Mikhail and Stanislav. Usually, the betting was not so much about who would tear down the biggest piece of the wall, but about guessing how we would all be classified. Stanislav was, no doubt, the best shooter

and –it was obvious- that I was always the worst, so the intrigue and fun of the betting most of the times consisted in who was classified second, third and fourth.

Mikhail was also an experienced player demolishing the walls. As a matter of fact, his shots were often surprisingly close to Stanislav's dry and efficient targets. Mikhail's best shots often left a clingy metre of bricked wall standing; and frustrated, softly, he would let the metal ball swing for the second time to tear the little rest of wall down. Stanislav used to cheer him up and point out that Mikhail was rapidly improving in this game, even though not as quickly as he wished. While we would keep ourselves busy with the haphazard game of betting and competition, John would keep himself back, pleasantly laying down. He would desperately whisper about our "school children break-time behaviour".

John was quite a peculiar character. This Scottish man was a silent man in his early forties that moved in the construction site as if such environment was the most natural place for him. In the gang, John was referred as the "soul" for the serendipity and lightness of his being. It was curious to observe that nothing seemed to require extra effort for a man that always seemed to be placed in the right place and at the right moment. However, unlike Stanislav, John tended to be remarkably greedy. He rarely offered any help to the young workers and was not really keen to give gifts to the other colleagues of the gang. Indeed, whenever he gave a gift to any one of us, it was noticeable that it was coming from a self-imposed obligation, rather than non-symmetrical generosity. But let's now go on with the game.

When your shot was no good, you had to wait for the next chance which usually took about ten days or a couple of weeks. The following passage occurred in the beginning of the spring, right when I was about to leave my working period and ethnographic observation in the construction sites. It had become too time consuming and I could not dedicate my own ethnographic work properly to other subjects as much as I wished. I knew that the series of seven walls we had been commanded to tear down would probably be not only my own chance to enjoy and

participate in a game in which we use to laugh, joke and had limitless fun along with my colleagues, but was also my last chance to make a better shot.

The following were the lists presented by each of us. The bet was 100 DM each: 1) Stanislav: Stanislav, Mikhail, Sergei, Walter and I. 2) Mikhail: Mikhail, Stanislav, Walter, I and Sergei, 3) Sergei: Mikhail, Stanislav, Walter, Sergei and I, 4) Walter: Stanislav, Mikhail, Walter, I and Sergei, and 5) My own: Stanislav, Walter, Sergei, Mikhail and I. Obviously, neither of us were too serious about the betting list, and made our speculations as a friendly joke which turned the whole event into a leisure activity, rather than a seriously thought out endeavour. The mood to play and celebrate the randomness of chance manifested itself in the way we bet.

The mechanical procedure consisted in that the person that was supposed to make the shot stood on a scaffolding – approximately fifteen meters above the ground. Due to the heavy weight of the metal ball a couple of colleagues –usually Walter and I- would pull the metal ball up to the scaffolding by using a rope that was held from each end. Thus, the metal ball simultaneously reached the spot of the shot maker as well as one high end of the moving pendulum. Next, the shot maker would take control of the rope – as if it were driving a quadruped Roman horse cart- and keep it high up on top of the scaffolding. In such situation, the muscles of the shot maker were usually tense and nervous up to the point when, the shot maker, seemingly convinced of having found the right angle or trajectory, would let the metal ball loose. Then, the metal ball, limpid and light, would simply fly against the wall.

That day, due to the fact that I was soon leaving construction, everybody agreed that I had to tear down the first “white sheet down”. Thus, I tried it and tore down half of the wall in one single shot, which was the best shot I had ever done. The competition had started; Stanislav smiled (a strange thing!) and was enjoying my shot. The next one climbing up the scaffolding and holding the 150 kilogram metal ball that was hanging from a pulley before letting it swing in the air was Mikhail. The holding of the metal ball with the rope required strength, because even though

it was hanging from a pulley, its weight was enormous - which is exactly the way it felt when having it between one's arms.

Mikhail, silent and static, kept the huge metal ball against his belly for fifteen seconds before letting it swing. His "pregnant style" -as Sergei used to put it jokingly- of letting the metal ball swing in the air tore down three quarters of the wall that day. Mikhail, unexpectedly, had done a shot that was as brilliant as Stanislav's best shots. The competition was open. We were all murmuring. Stanislav looked very serious. Most of us were experiencing the sensation that Stanislav was perhaps going to be defeated for the first time. After Mikhail, it was Sergei's turn to let the metal ball fall down, and it happened to be disastrous.

Sergei did not pull the metal ball consistently toward him, and exactly as happened to me the first time I played the game, the ball went its own way injuring just one metre piece of the bricked wall on the way back. Sergei was upset and frustrated, "I look like a silly novice" he yelled. But this was the game, there were not second chances. It was a one shot game. Walter was the next; he made his usual best shot; he tore down half the wall. He was not very satisfied that the competitive atmosphere was heightened and the rest of the participants seemed to want to improve their shots passionately.

Now it was the turn for Stanislav. As usual he took longer than the rest of us to place the platforms of the scaffolding and have the metal ball hanging from the pulley in a comfortable way. The metal ball was usually 20 meters away from the wall that had to be torn down; the force it acquired in the swinging was enough to break the wall and make it tremble. The trick was to have "luck" -as my colleagues used to say repeatedly- and let the ball swing without tension in order to tear down as much wall as possible.

Stanislav's shot was better than the shots that any of us had seen before. He tore down half a metre more of bricked wall than his usual three quarters. We were mesmerized. There only stood a meter long piece of wall. Obviously, Walter had

made the best prediction and won the bet. We were all still reflecting on Stanislav's brilliant shot, unworried about the avatars of the betting when John came near us and claimed that he also wanted to shoot. Usually, he would refuse Stanislav's, Sergei's and Mikhail's friendly persuasion to make a shot in the middle of the competing game. Surprisingly, he was not out of the betting and the consequent competitive mood. Apparently, due to the intensity of the playing, it seemed that we all –even Stanislav's philanthropy- had completely forgotten about persuading John.

Sergei, carefully, drove the crane tractor -with the hanging 150 kilograms- down the muddy field to the next ten meter wide wall, and placed the wheeled scaffolding for John. The rest of us were still murmuring, fascinated by Stanislav, when John, concentrated and seemingly absent-minded, as if he were playing a whole different game, made a shot that none of us will probably ever forget. John, the one who was careless about the metal ball game and the bet, tore the whole “white sheet” down. As a matter of fact, the way the 150 kilograms of the metal ball hit the wall was so round, perfect and spectacular that the entire wall –without a flicker hesitation- fell down. By the strangely compact sound of the metal ball hitting around the middle of the wall, according to Mikhail it felt as if “the metal ball had hit all the tiny concrete bits and bricks of the wall at once”. There were no wows, or any sort of expression; we were all stupefied, static, Stanislav himself was shocked; he seemed breathless. Gaston Bachelard's words give an approximate account of the experience at that moment:

For a long time, I remained motionless, letting myself be penetrated gently by this unspeakable ensemble, by the serenity of the sky and the melancholy of the moment. I do not know what was going in my mind, and I could not express it; it was one of those ineffable moments when one feels something in himself which is going to sleep and something which is awakening (Bachelard 1971:12).

None of us would ever have expected that John could make “*the shot*” that we all –including Stanislav- thought was impossible. We were all shocked and wordless. Neither of us was able to make a comment that would give a satisfactory account of John's splendid performance. It would have been too facile to argue that John's shot

had been a very strange, unusual and lucky one. We all agreed that it was one of those shots that happen once out of hundreds of attempts. Stanislav stared at John, silent and patiently. Before anybody said anything, we expected to hear something from John, who did not seem to be extremely flattered or enthusiastic about his master shot. Thus, he proceeded, "... I just had a hunch... I knew that if I try a shot now, I would take down the wall... I had a feeling in my guts".

Stanislav replied that he had thought John reclaimed a shot of the metal ball, because the rest of us had completely forget about him during the heated game. John asserted that he did not care about not being integrated in the tearing down of "white sheets". As a matter of fact, he was never attracted or enthusiastic about the game of the metal ball per se. "But how did you do it?" – asked Sergei. John explained further that he had not played that shot, but instead the shot had played him. Right at the end of the game, after Stanislav had done his solid shot leaving only a metre wall standing up, John had an intuitive urge to do the next shot because he had the "feeling" of doing simply "the shot".

During the conversation with John, Mikhail and Sergei expressed their reservations and doubts about the veracity of John's "gut feeling" arguing that if a turn of luck was the case, it could also happen to anybody who had not played the game of the metal ball before. John argued that it was not a matter of pure chance, that according to him such intestine emotion to arise, it was necessary to have played the game many times, and practice your own shot with the right sense of balance and rhythm.

Stanislav supported John's explanation and claimed that he himself had also had such "visceral emotion", even though he was never convinced of tearing down the whole "sheet of paper". He emphasized that one needs to practice, observe and gain experience in order to have such an intuitive hunch and perform "the shot". John insisted that if he would have had to wait in order to make the metal ball swing, he would have tensed up and the shot would not have played him perfectly. He added that when experiencing the intuitive urge to try a shot, he had entered a

“dream-like” state of mind, like being overtaken by an instinct in which the only thing to do is to allow yourself to be played by the certainty of the perfect shot.

The conclusion of the collective debate was that the intuitive hunch cannot be awakened without practice and knowledge of the metal ball. Yet, the fact of having a long term experience in the game or a well established shot was not enough to open one’s own body to a certain apprehension of chance. It was a wise sensual encounter of control and non-control impulses -beyond will power- that enabled John to play “the shot”. That day nobody really won the betting and each of us kept the 100 DM’s in a box for the next occasion, because John’s shot had turned the world of the metal ball upside down.

John’s shot could also be seen as the radicalisation of the surrealist notion of chance, with the added input of intuition. John’s disposition of randomness determined the event happening afterwards, because John’s shot was in itself unique and indeterminable. Even if the intensity of intuition was clear in John’s successful condition, the shock of the metal ball on the wall was certainly and extraordinarily that of the unexpected, of something that cannot be anticipated or prepared for in any way. Once the shot maker let the rope that held the wrecking ball free, this – hanging from a long chain that was tied to a twenty five meter long crane- would swing as if it were a pendulum to crash against the wall. Not only John’s master shot, but each time any of us had let the metal ball swing in the air, the aerial shock of it against the wall seemed to pierce not only the self of each other, but the very “construction” world in which we were accustomed to move.

2.7 A Masculine Physical Livening Up

One of the things that shocked me in the last week of working with the gang, was the way in which at 6 a.m. in the morning -right when we gathered near the Potsdamer Platz station-, Stanislav would approach me, and roaring like a bear, would shake my whole body and pinch my waist. This sort of daily ritual kept happening for two or three weeks, and when a couple of young German guys in

their mid twenties joined the working group two weeks after me, I realized that Stanislav also “shook” their bodies vigorously.

In the beginning, I thought that perhaps such a physical deed had something to do with a cruel joke the working gang played to the novices to gain the group’s acceptance, but later I noticed that the collective laughter it provoked had not to do so much with gaining certain membership status in the gang, but with a corporeally awakening as well as sexually engendering subtle humiliation. In fact, there were a couple of thirty year old workers who had also joined the gang for a couple of weeks to whom Stanislav did not apply his animalistic and rough body shaking technique. When grabbing my body, or the bodies of Hans and Thomas, Stanislav mobilized fury and aggression, and roaring as a bear, he would try to make our bodies be alert, awake, ready to bodily sniff any kind of danger.

For Hans, Thomas and I, the situation was embarrassing, probably because remaining peaceful and passive made explicit a certain vulnerability or weakness on our side that seemed to increase the laughter of the strong and muscular working gang. Such embarrassment would come to either of us “all of the sudden” – as Hans claimed. Stanislav would approach Hans, Thomas or I completely by surprise. Indeed, he would often start roaring, staring at one of us with his fierce eyes to provoke and awake our alertness in relation to his unexpected physical approach. Thus, he would just change his attitude – as it had been a false alarm- and let time pass by, allowing Hans, Thomas and I to calm down, just to –suddenly and abruptly- shake and pinch our waist and thighs, wrapping us in a halo of vibrant embarrassment.

The commentaries by Sergei, Walter and Mikhail after Stanislav’s ritual with the three youngsters was that our “butter bodies” needed to be “shaken by Stanislav even harder, more properly”, so that our bodies would slowly become “hardened and tensed up”. They also commented that our bodies needed to be “awakened”, for they were too docile, benevolent and lethargic to be tuned up to the violent pulsations and vibrant forces of the construction machinery. Probably, there was

also a sexual component in Stanislav's sudden physical invasion and the consequent laughing of the working gang as a ritual of becoming integrated in a heterosexual male adulthood.

It was Hans who had the hardest time and during the two weeks he stayed in our working gang, he kept himself apart from "the brutal monsters" and never decreased his disgust and repulsion at Stanislav's half joking, half serious aggression and the subsequent subliminally undermining laughter it provoked among the workers. However, I believe that Stanislav's shaking of youngster's bodies had another component that was related to the sensory awakening of our pre-symbolic bodily forces to keep our tissues and muscles alert to everything occurring at the construction site. After all, working on a construction site is tough work that is never safe enough, no matter how much protection helmets and harnesses we used.

John had told me that Stanislav and Mikhail had known a few colleagues that had lost their lives on the construction site. They always refused to talk about it. Thomas and I, after a week of being "shaken" by Stanislav, just as our bodies were gradually hardening up and being alert to the cracking avatars of the construction site, began anticipating and counter-attacking Stanislav's roaring and shaking, which shut down the laughter of the working gang. Apparently, our "maleness" seemed to be accepted. From the ethnographic notes, it is very difficult to tell whether it was Thomas or I who first posed a corporeally ineffable resistance to Stanislav. Thus, Stanislav's daily "shaking", pitching and roaring ceased and Thomas and I were left in peace. Unfortunately, Hans and Thomas stayed only a couple of weeks in the working gang.

Hans was happy that he did not have to work again with the "brutal monsters", Stanislav and Sergei would usually justify themselves claiming that Hans should not take Stanislav's vigorous "shaking" of his body that seriously and personally. Hans did not forgive them the embarrassment they made him go through. On the last day Thomas and Hans worked with us, Thomas admitted to me that if he would ever become as old as Stanislav he would never make a younger

person go through such an embarrassing situation. The fact was that the bodies of the three of us were starting to be “hardened and tensed up”, and at the end of the day we were able to do not only our work, but also Stanislav’s and Sergei’s who were the oldest ones and fatigued most quickly. Obviously, Hans hated to do this extra work for the “brutal monsters”.

2.8 The Electricity of Smirnoff

A good example of the fact that Hans, Thomas and I were actually “hardened” and fit enough for the tough world of the construction site –and consequent passage into certain male adulthood- was the drinking of Smirnoff vodka after lunch time. Most of us brought lunch with us early in the morning to the construction site. Around noon, there used to be a break used to eat our sandwiches and drink some wine. After lunch, Stanislav and Sergei tended to open a bottle of Smirnoff that we all drank shot by shot. Probably due to the below zero temperatures of Berlin winters, we - even those who previously disliked vodka –like Thomas and Sergei- soon found it attractive to drink. By the facial expressions of my colleagues, I have noted in the notebook, the vodka shot at midday had the double function of warming up the viscera of the body -literally tasting its burning flow- and of assaying as a livening up physical whip.

Drinking vodka was a moment of sensory awakening that also eluded the sleepy mood after lunch. Its burning contact with the mouth, throat and stomach signalled a physically and materially felt nuisance (Buck-Morss 1992; Efimova 1997; Pinney 2001). As a matter of fact, after a couple of vodka shots, it was typical that Sergei or Stanislav would stand up, agitate their own bodies, roar like lions and move onto working. The drinking of vodka generated a remarkable moment in which each of us had a sudden passion to make everything be and felt materially as body. The drinking of Smirnoff shots seemed to unleash the bodily energies, impulses and forces moving beyond the frozen consciousness. At times, it was as if the oppressive and anaesthetic cold had something to do with diminishing the

presence of a self-contained consciousness rather than heightening the senses and re-awakening the body.

The glass of vodka somehow encapsulated the freezing temperature of the construction site, the thoughts of the family back home and the circumstances of the working gang. Such conceptual compression would be bodily experienced and materially endured in the urgent and sudden drinking of the vodka, giving way to a sort of “electric shock”. Thus, in a very bodily way, we could share, exchange and express the pains, joys, and emotions latent in working on the construction site. The spasm-like impulses in the mouth and jaws as well as the burning pressures and drives in the stomach and chest tissues -when having savoured vodka’s “electric shock”- were emphatically lived by the group.

The gestures of the members after experiencing the shock of vodka was indeterminate, oscillating between a harsh pleasure and burning pain; an intense and unsettling mixture of pleasurable attraction and disgusting repulsion happened to be fused in the drinking of Smirnoff. Stanislav’s prominent spasm-like reactions to the stimuli of the sharp and sour vodka provoked similar physical moods in the body sitting next to him as if the “electric shock” would materially run throughout other bodies as a magnetic wave. Indeed, Hans himself used to shiver and chill only at the sight of Mikhail or Sergei’s sudden shot of vodka.

2.9 Solitude and the World

After lunch, there usually came a silence that constituted a resting moment. Such a moment was not peaceful, but subtly violent, since most of our bodies were crashed and crossed by images and emotions related to our homes. Stanislav was a widower who had a nine year old daughter and an eleven year old son living with his sister back in Poland. Mikhail’s wife and daughter lived in Moscow. Sergei had a ninety year old mother back in Ukraine. He carefully sent her medicine monthly, just as most of them sent most of their salary to their relatives. Walter was a middle aged East German whose wife was pregnant during the months of my fieldwork. And

John was a forty year old man from Glasgow. A son of Irish immigrants and a devoted fan of Glasgow Celtic football club, he was divorced and had two children. Due to the difficulties of gaining regular employment in the construction sector and a couple of fights he had with his directors in Glasgow, he now lived in Berlin most of the year.

In the resting moments after lunch, the long sighs, slightly desperate gestures and the melancholic downcast eyes set everything in a lonely silence whose impossible communication was shared. The working gang was not talkative when having to express emotions of home-sickness or nostalgia. The solitude that each of us felt seemed to be more impossible to transmit than ever, yet the very serving of the Smirnoff vodka drink in all of the glasses allowed the gang to share the impossibility of giving an account of our singular solitudes.

Somehow, by serving the vodka into the empty glass was like pouring the “home images” – as Sergei used to put it- into the glasses and then drinking it in a sudden shot. Almost ritualistically, we all shared the moment when each other drank the mournful images of home and everyday life. In fact, it was typical for Sergei to serve a glass, and then pass it to me to drink it. It was possible that we were giving our saddened images and emotions of solitude to a colleague, who would “electrifyingly” drink it, as much as it was possible to drink your own images and emotions of solitude as a physical release opening up to a sensory awakening; in other words, to a remoulding of bodily energies and forces.

Mikhail -by filling up his own glass and offering it to Stanislav- was externalising his own solitude, making it public. Then, Stanislav would pick the glass of vodka and drink it in a rush, as a sudden sacrifice disintegrating transitorily the latent “home images”. There was a certain exhibiting nakedness in the public offering of the vodka glass, in the sense that the solitude of your own self was transferred into the alcoholic substance of vodka and placed in front of everybody else’s presence. By the drinking of vodka, we had somatically and emphatically experienced the personal history of each of us in dispersal.

Such dispersal also happened in the weekly gift-giving the working gang practiced. It was usual that among the group of workers, each of us randomly would make a “gift” – such as a book, porn movie, knife, football t-shirt, a coffee cup,...- to another one. The sense of group solidarity made sure that there was nobody left without a gift by the end of the week; nobody could be deprived of sharing his own solitude by giving a present to someone else. You had to give “part of your life”; that is, you had to share your solitude by the very gift you gave to a colleague. Curiously, it was said that when somebody received a gift, the gift giver –vampire-like- had taken away “part of his life” in a liberating form. Such precious and friendly gift giving rotated weekly in such an affectionate way that even though none of us were ever completely free of lonely thoughts and “home images”, we managed to make this solitude be moved, shared and liveable by the hand to hand affectionate giving of gifts and harsh as well as passionate shots of Smirnoff vodka.

3 - Ana's Cosmology of Lights

3.1 Anamorphosis

The narrative is simply a kind of flow of matter enshrining the precious metaphorical substance: if we are in a park at night it is in order that the moon can emerge from the clouds to shine on the wet stain in the middle of Marcel's sheet as it flaps from the window; if we visit Madrid it is in order that there shall be a bullfight, with the offering of the bull's raw balls and the putting out of Granero's eye; if we go on to Seville it is in order that the sky shall exude the yellowish, liquid luminosity whose metaphorical nature we are familiar with from the rest of the chain (Roland Barthes on Bataille's *Story of the Eye* 1982:123).

Let us start commenting upon the spherical metaphoricity of Georges Bataille's *Story of the Eye* (1982). In the preface essay, Roland Barthes argues that in this bizarre story of an object everything takes place on the surface, in a way that is circular end explicit. In fact, the *avatars* the globular object passes through –egg, milk, testicles and moon- has no secret reference behind it. Instead it articulates a fluid contagion of qualities and events. Thus,

The world becomes blurred; properties are no longer separate; spilling, sobbing, urinating, ejaculating form a wavy meaning, and the whole of *Story of the Eye* signifies in the manner of a vibration that always gives the same sound (but what sound!) (Barthes 1982:125).

In Bataille's narration, the Eye is modified by a series of globular objects that are intimately related to it, yet simultaneously they can be considered as radically different. This double condition can be also found at work in the *wavy meaning* and relentless contagion of properties and events. Just as the transforming process of Bataille's Eye, by exploring roundness and whiteness in a space of physical materiality- gives way to bizarre metaphorical extensions, quotidian sensory contact with vibrating appearances may articulate strange wavy meanings. This mutating and mobile fluidity, a kind of *anamorphosis*, is an example of Luce Irigaray's *mechanic of fluids* (1985b) in that it articulates the drive toward becoming rather than being, that is, toward eventuality and historicity, rather than punctual fixation.

After having witnessed such sensory intervals on the body of a Jewish lady in her mid-seventies, I thought that conscious experience may not have been the most adequate way to make contact with such incarnated vibrations. Whatever my conscious experience was, it hardly revealed Ana's mystery of the changing *grey air*. If for a while my intention had been to discover a specific divine matter, over the months it turned out into an intuitive form of relating to the messy fluidity of such luminous materiality. Thus, I followed Ginzburg's "divinatory" and "venatic" paradigm (Ginzburg 1979) –a detective's scientific method- in order to discern the metamorphosing complex materiality of "grey light".

3.2 An Anonymous Encounter

I see Ana near a Kebab store for the first time. She usually begs in the streets of both Kreuzberg and Tiergarten. I write in the notebook that she is removing plastic from inside a rubbish bin. She seems to be angry. I try to talk to her. She does not say anything. By her way of looking -which I find impossible to reciprocate and yet brings us closer in a dramatic way -I cannot tell whether she is waiting for me to say something else, or just ignoring me. She walks toward the *Landwehrkanal*. I walk along with her. The water is thick and green. She remains quiet, so I pretend – or make myself believe- that we actually have some sort of social contact. I feel silly, stupid.

Several days later, I meet Ana in Kreuzberg again. By her glance, I realize that she remembers me. She tells me that there is no warm water where she lives and that maybe I could do something to fix the boiler. I promise that I will do my best to help her and her sister. Ana and I are walking to their flat in Sanderstrasse at Kreuzberg. The flat, as well as the entire house, is not only humid and old, but also greasy. Its walls are covered with barely glued 1960s wallpaper. There is the odd penetrating smell of two elderly women – Ana and Gertrud- living in not completely hygienic conditions. The floor is dusty in different places. The surrounding of the shadowy windows is quite dark and light only enters into the

kitchen and bedroom. I approach Gertrud's bedroom. She is lighting several candles.

I accompany Ana to the multiple tunnelled bricked basements. In the dark, underground, we collect many stocks of coal in a couple of iron buckets. Back in the flat, Ana and I place the coal in the stove. By using old yellow paged newspapers and several pieces of wood, Ana manages to produce a substantial fire. The flat finally warms up. I take a look at the boiler and realize that it is extremely rusty and needs to be repaired by somebody who is technically more knowledgeable than I am.

The following week, I revisit Gertrud and Ana. Roger -a friend and one of the main managers of the Weinerei (Wine Club) at Bernauerstrasse- comes along. He has brought a tool-box. I hand Gertrud a couple of bottles of bleach. I have acquired them in the popular and economic commercial supermarket called *Aldi*. I suggest that Ana and Gertrud use the bleach to clean their clothes as well as the flat, since their sweat is penetrating and unpleasant. Roger is able to fix the boiler. At least, temporarily he adds, since several pieces of the boiler are definitely damaged and rusty. Gertrud and Ana are delighted that Roger- a young handyman from West Berlin and now living in the eastern neighbourhood of Mitte- has done the work for no charge.

3.3 The Mystic and the Apprentice

Let me point out that when Ana and I experienced a sort of dismemberment of our identities while trespassing into a trance zone, it was not quite an immersion into a non-differentiated abyss. In other words, the intense bodily nurturing we sensed was not a wholeness of two coherent and self-contained subjects, but rather a somatic fullness in which there was no deficiency, precisely because there was no ideal form to which the experience was referred. These intense and cryptic instances were full, in the sense that there was nothing missing from the eventful trance itself; and as such, these magical gaps were not fragmented but rather extended to

whatever came next. It affirmed a way of love, a way of engaging an uncertain future.

Just as Ana vibrated through the imperceptible yet immanent sounds of *grey air*, she also affirmed the materiality of places such as Mitte, Kreuzberg, Prenzlauerberg or Marzahn by touching surfaces with her hands. This creative tactility to the walls, buildings, facades, gardens and roads, was not the tactility of active touching or being touched. When Ana's hands were laying on the wall near the Mauer Park, the sensation was closer to the kind of double touching of two praying hands. Ana insisted that *grey light* constituted the skyline of the imperceptible, a horizon that nourishes her conscious awareness and yet always exceeds it. In opening my own senses to her emanating touch, I was not placed in an abyss of dismemberment, but instead was receptive to the unknown in the context of mutual contact.

My apprentice writing often tended to lose its purposeful and coherent tracks. I could not resist allowing my own writing to be radically free of possession and mastery. For instance, in the middle of a trance around the Tiergarten, while Ana was *listening* to screams in an abandoned factory, I could not tell whether I was Ana or Ana was me. This instantaneous flash extended into an infinite space and time without closure.

Through the process of knowing the thin and nervous Ana, my own writing experienced a rejuvenating transformation. In fact, I was fascinated with the idea of writing in a similar way to her smiling and hectic way of walking. In the beginning, enviously, I often considered her to be younger than I was at heart, yet soon I left behind the embarrassment of writing about her trances. Thanks to her company, I began to notice that my writing began to get more *in touch* with the vivid sensations of open and ever-changing contact with the world. I knew that such contact, on my behalf, risked losing my own self-same authorial identity, but Ana's sensuous and contagious body showed me that one can create mutually nurturing spaces; for instance, the space of Ana (mystic) and I (apprentice)- in which one could openly

receive and engender rejuvenating transformations. Thus, my perception became increasingly copulative, in the sense that it was granting privilege to the space of hetero-affection.

Paraphrasing Luce Irigaray (1991), I would like to affirm that the sonic messages Ana mediates from the realm of the imperceptible can actually *spiritualize the flesh* if we pay gentle attention to them. Such energetic rejuvenation would not situate itself in a transcendental realm removed from the material world, but would instead embrace a spiritual energetic of embodiment. When Ana brings messages from the vibrating *grey air*, it gives one the opportunity to heighten the senses to the infinite plateaus of metamorphosis. However, Ana's messages do not exist outside of their specific medium, meaning that there are no original voices being transmitted. Ana's own elusive, vague and divagating speech when referring to these under-symbolized trances suggests that this energy may be beneath language, continuously nourishing it.

One could argue that Ana's unconventional faculty can burn along the living present of the world, right in the last dwelling where her body immerses generously with the world. This image of fire speaks of the energetic forces coming from the very materiality of Mitte walls -for example; a bomb-like pounding that is energetically and emotionally repressed and stored in its edifices and roads. Perhaps, this particular *heavy* energy has been accumulated in a city where large catastrophic devastations and human annihilations have taken place. Nevertheless, the image of fire also exemplifies the embrace undertaken by Ana and I, as mystic and apprentice, flowing in flames where the arid desolation of reason happened to be an obstacle to engage with the fluidity of *grey light*.

3.4 Holocaust Residues

In an interview intended to reconstruct her life history, the issue of the *grey light* popped up by chance. Ana said "I saw lots of grey light this morning in the train ... their faces were as usual very icy". From this statement, I hypothesized that

grey light could well be a myriad of energetic forces. Thus, I deduced that it was not Holocaust victims who were affected by this substance. I began wondering what sort of illuminating parallelism there could be between dead Holocaust victims and the groups of workers she encountered every day when catching the early-morning train at Friedrichsein. Strangely, the very figure of *grey light* or *grey air* carried by the train through the city evokes images of Jews being rounded up and transported to the concentration camps during the Second World War.

After several sporadic meetings with Ana, her tendency to displace the meaning of the term *grey light*, shifting it indifferently from the petrified faces of office workers at the Friedrichsein and the seemingly lifeless streetwalking Prenzlauerberg inhabitants in the present to the victims of the Holocaust became a recurrent feature. It was not sufficient to argue that Ana's multiple articulation of this transubstantiating energy was a way of resisting the traumatic affliction of the war memories. Neither was it plausible to dismiss this energetic issue by approaching this magical theme in terms of esoteric superstition. Strolling through Oranienburgerstrasse, Ana made the following claim "... the faces of the citizens are very cold,... it is customary to think it is due to the weather,... but I believe it has to do with the way in which the grey light (*of the Holocaust*), impresses our faces,... you can see its forces very clearly in the train".

Ana informed me that melancholic places such as the emaciated urban landscape of the old parts of Mitte, characterized by old striated facades, military traces of the Second World War and the GDR ruins were precisely where this *grey light* dwelled most intensively. Significantly, she occasionally referred to this flowing energy as fuelling the spirits of dead people who may inhabit such indeterminate and decaying environments. When trying to discern the arbitrary *grey light*, she used words such as *impression* and *heaviness*. According to Ana's perceptual constellation, the vibrant and pulsating incorporeal yet assaying air of the Holocaust was not only materially vivid and perceptually *heavy*, but its latent forces also physically impress the workers at Friedrichsein as well as the streetwalking Mitte inhabitants. It seems as if the more blatant the attempts to forget via reconstruction and destruction are,

the more salient is the presence of this *grey light*, and ultimately, the very impossibility of forgetting.

3.5 Grey Light

Ana is a thin, nervous, smiley and talkative Jewish lady who lives in Kreuzberg. In this chapter, I will attempt to indicate the material force of Ana's complex constellation of *grey light*. I am aware of how easily I could misplace her sensuous and physically palpable considerations of the "cadaverous residues" (Blanchot 1981) of various emaciated and ruinous areas of Berlin if I chose to boldly frame these material forces in terms of philosophical closure. The slipperiness of this *anamorphosis* manifests the difficulty to categorize it, for its slippery quality constantly threatens its conceptual arrest. Therefore, I will instead try to make it *vibrate* at the risk perhaps of being excessively impressionistic.

When approaching Ana's smoky Berlin of *grey light and air* –which circulates indiscriminately through inert matter and living bodies- her disquieting and attracting intervals cannot be ignored. This period of time drop immerses Ana into the transubstantiation of this grey luminosity that indifferently traverses the commercial stores in Alexanderplatz, the stubborn and busy looking pedestrians in the Europa Center, Nikolaikirche church-goers and shoppers at the Flomarket in the Arkona Platz.

I cannot but find this subtle, immanent and materially intense sensibility striking, in the sense that Ana is able *to make contact* with the smoky –yet materially perceived- nudity of the city. Here I mean naked phantasmagoria in the sense that this energetic repertoire of flesh-stone-brick-metal-plastic seems to destitute all possible language, thereby removing Ana's own particular perception from the scene of representation.

3.6 Anaesthetics and the Dog

Throughout the 1990s, as the monumental construction of governmental and corporate centres took place, Berliners engaged in intense debates about how to renegotiate their Nazi and Communist pasts with the future. The dichotomies of the Cold War still required resolution but instead Berlin engaged in a gigantic display of corporate power. Revealingly, it has been argued that “the ghosts of Berlin” (Ladd 1997) or “the voids of Berlin” (Huysen 1997) – especially in the case of the GDR and Nazi pasts- have been put through a surgery of multinational corporate and critical reconstructionist architectures like a facelift.

In a conspiring fashion, Ana often argued that no matter how technologically modern *New Berlin* is reconstructed, those who will work in its glass and steel buildings will also be corporeally assayed by the severe blankness of *gray light* that will decrease their facial expressiveness and reinforce a severe process of numbing the senses (Buck-Morss 1992). *Grey air* in Ana’s view does not constitute a dense animistic substance or ensemble of spiritual beings, but rather its forces are immanent material and energetic impressions that are palpable and impressing in places such as the vast post-industrial areas of Lichtenberg.

One winter’s day, Ana and I walked to the Potsdamer Platz. In front of the Sony Center, a white dog was run over by a car. The dog was literally scared of dying: Another car could have driven over her badly injured body again. Yet she remained lying on the ground, without being able to move, bleeding out of her formless mouth. Ana and I remained next to the dying dog. Her whole body, sniffing danger, kept writhing convulsively. The passing drivers stared curiously and indifferent at the disturbing spectacle. When Ana and I arrived to help the dog, we saw curious subjects in the cars. Similarly, many white collar workers, standing behind the glassed walls of Morris’s building, like frozen statues, voyeuristically gazed at the expanding pool of blood on the road.

According to Ana, bodies cannot escape the urban pale toneless-ness that is secretly mobilized by this dead energy. Her intuitive sensing of *grey light* is the very intrusion that constitutes the angry-looking and melancholic materiality of faces in a place such as the emaciated, dirty and moody neighbourhood of *Wedding*. The incorporeal materialism that Ana referred to as the physically and immanently impressing *grey air* tends to elude the critical grasp, yet its force can hardly be avoided.

In fact, this visual recollection revealed a fascination for Berlin's material surfaces or "cadaverous residues" (Blanchot 1981) which resonates with the melancholic angels rescuing human hearts in Wim Wenders' *Himmel Uber Berlin*, as well the powerful photographic work on Berlin by the Catalan photographers Prat and Bernardó (1994). The visually imploding black and white of such works resonates with terrible historical events. In fact, in Kreuzberg, one can hardly ignore the petrified and icy faces of its inhabitants at their most quotidian, staring – perhaps- nowhere.

3.7 The City of Fatigue

Around the turn of the century, work began on the underground. In some of the sections of the underground and tram systems, the wagons move about ten or fifteen meters above the ground; in a surprising way, evoking the image of a zigzagging roller-coaster, the wagons go up and down through the spacious body of Berlin, there is a train (*Deutsche Bahn*), tram (*S-Bahn*) and underground (*U-Bahn*) transportation system which enable the passenger to enjoy a genuine cinematographic experience of the city. Such a particular feature of the railway track links Uhlandstrasse and Warschauerstrasse (line U15) as if it were a plant tuber able to live above ground just as well as below it. It was, precisely, Ana who introduced me to this nomadic metaphor when witnessing the multiple languid, tired and petrified faces of daytime workers on the train.

Travelling on the subway -underground and over-ground- the sun was still shy and the air frosty. Ana pointed out the lethargic, petrified and silent faces that unfolded a ghostly dimension to the screeching journeys. In fact, her own way of referring to such faces as *grey lighted* added a spooky after-life atmosphere to the trips. In the underground, tough and emotionless tired faces tended to look singularly impersonal, as if they resembled an inhuman expression, of simultaneous distance and closeness, creating an atmosphere in which –in fact- nothing seems to have happened to these faces.

The petrified and somewhat extenuated bodies and faces of early morning subway passengers were *being impressed*, and as such, infested by the material *grey energy of the dead* that seems to emerge from a dusty and historicized atmosphere - breaking down bourgeois notions of historical progress. When asking Ana how long she has had this extraordinary perceiving faculty, she responded that “... I have known the “grey light” all my life in Berlin ... it does not matter how new and flashy they build the Potsdamer Platz ... it is full of “grey air” from the Holocaust ... you cannot take that away with cranes and structures ...” Thus, the kind of *futurism* associated with the Potsdamer Platz as a foundational myth of multinational corporate power, according to Ana, may cause a forgetting amnesia where historical memory is cancelled, but will not fully be able to exorcise the quotidian fatigue, tiredness, and absent-mindedness of the flowing *grey* smoke of the past that inhabits in the pores of passengers and streetwalkers.

Ana also talked vitally about *fatigue* and the feeling of *heaviness* as if one’s own weight was doubled, and thus, “one feels as if one is sinking into the ground”. For Ana *grey light* is a sort of material energy that can stream indiscriminately from the living to the inert, from the inert to the ethereal, and so on. In Berlin – a place where large-scale human annihilation has historically taken place- the raw materiality and the looping memory of such energy is intensely impressed on the faces and bodies of its inhabitants, “... a certain smelly greyness emerges in the bodies”, “its smell is penetrating,... sometimes, when smelling it, I feel like walking through a thick and heavy wall,...”, “... when I am able to walk away from that “smell”,

everything becomes lighter again,... but you can hardly avoid it, it is in many places of the city,...”.

Ana referred to the subway as an indeterminate landscape not only because the underground train moved both over and under the ground, but also for the reason that the lifeless faces of the *grey lighted* passengers provoked an atmosphere of phantasmagoria. She truly believed that the early subway passengers, by travelling over-ground and underground, were in contact, and thus physically assayed, by a collapsed energetic materiality of the Second World War. According to Ana, the railway tracks, tunnels, stations and wounded old building blocks of the city encapsulated immanent energies or material forces that were blocked and endlessly looping.

3.8 Pins and Needless

The following questions were explored in relation to Ana’s urban experience: Is it the material emanation of Berlin’s emaciated after-war body that incessantly provokes us into being abducted by the unaccountable forces -and murmuring voices- of the dead? Is this pure metaphysics? How is Ana inclined to think that there is a link between the residual and abandoned materiality of post-war Berlin and the impersonal faces – faces that are emptied out of any symbolic articulation or identity? Is this assumption completely delusional? Do not the sombre, grey and emaciated walls of Berlin project the faces of its inhabitants? And is not the underground –or the tram, or the train- one of the few quite intimate -and luminous- places where we are put in contact with this alien impersonality?

For Ana, travelling by underground train in Berlin was a means of bathing in the *grey air of the dead*. According to Ana, this materially perceived energy that remains embedded in the city’s rubble, bricks and stones, infests the area of sensation of the citizens. When she spoke of *grey light*, at times, I self-consciously played the sceptic. One day this made-up cynicism enraged her to such an extent that she held my arm and dragged me close to the railway lines in Lehrter Bahnhof.

Both of us waited silently for the ruminant train to approach the station. The landscape on both sides of the station was replete with vast construction sites.

A huge and unbearably noisy commercial non-stop iron train passed through the station very fast. Ana held my both arms tightly and kept me very close to the railway lines. I inevitably perceived the noise, wind and vibration of the machinery with an unusual proximity. After the shock, Ana looked at me in defiance and asked if I had heard the echoes of distant voices. I had not heard anything; only a very loud noise and the violent physical vibration produced by the iron friction of the wheels making contact with the railway lines. She was disappointed and showed me her palms asserting that she had been experiencing pins and needles and could hear recurrent voices of the tragic past.

Ana was often able to hear the reverberation of terrified voices. For example, this occurred once in the empty Schonleinstrasse underground station. She was having a pulling sensation in her arm; it seemed to me as if she were being pulled back by a strong wind, but there was no such wind; she said that the material force of the *grey light* was there, that she was physically in contact with it. The hundreds of citizens that used the train every morning to go to work were *grey lighted*, and as such, subway passengers were un-decidable living bodies placed ambiguously between death and life. Significantly, it could be argued that western cultures have produced their institutions and categories of life and death. As such, in rational western cosmology life and death are usually understood as a dichotomy, and both institutions need to define and map their own parameters and spaces. Ana's faces of early subway passengers were ambivalent; these indeterminate *zombies* were alive but dead, dead but alive.

Death is nothing to be afraid of since according to Ana, when citizens travel on the subway "we are experiencing death in our bodies, even if we are not fully aware of it". Thus, every time one jumps on the train, one is *smelling* –even if one does not consciously realize –as happened to me in Schoenleinstrasse- the imprecise experience of life and death, the present and the materially immanent past of the

city in one's own body. Ana often said that this intuitive perception of an in-between and liminal sphere had its "intense smells". When such smells were particularly penetrating, her face would blush dramatically. A long series of husky and loud coughs would take place. Then, she would scratch her nose repeatedly.

3.9 The Flutes of Marzahn

The seduction of this material energy inspired my own work by encouraging the ceaseless transmutation of self and world in living contact and sound. Spending the day with Ana was a gift. Everything seemed to be here-right-now-within-and-through-relations with bodily or material physicality. The intriguing capacity to be in contact with that which exceeded ordinary selves was profoundly enigmatic. At the moment, Ana and I are walking around in the vast and desolated fields of Marzahn. While dragging a stick along the railway tracks, Ana hears a sound, a distant melody of flutes. It takes a long time for her to actually be able to whistle the melody. Uncertain, she rehearses several times. Finally, she claims she can hear the music flowing in the facades of the uniform suburban towers. Now, at the park nearby, Ana encounters young German lads who are wearing baseball hats and listening to buzzing electronic music. Direct and vivid, Ana asks the lads if they know the melody she hears "in many corners of the neighbourhood". The teenagers respond that they do not know this *Marzahn sound*.

Soon, the lads were not only parodying her in a friendly mood, but also mimetically learning her -sensually found- melody. Via the flute melody, the teenagers transform language by articulating a genuinely inter-subjective somatic process of dances, tics and gestures. One day later, I bring my tape recorder to Ana and Gertrud's flat in Kreuzberg. Ana cannot remember the flute melody she discerned in Marzahn. I feel somewhat frustrated. I lost the momentum. Ana, undramatically, says that the *Marzahn sound* had to proliferate somewhere else, someway else, and warns me that she is actually hearing a new sound, that of running horses, at Friedrichsein.



Photo 5: Marzahn lads learning and transforming Ana's melody.

3.10 A Note on Ana

Likewise, I could have easily chosen to approach Ana's bizarre synaesthetic faculty as delusional, or a post-traumatic symptom of fear. I could also have interpreted Ana's complex approach to *grey air* -a transforming material energy rather than material animism- in a similar vein. However, resisting such an all-too-easy psychologism, I allowed my own body and writing to be touched and infested by her materially spiritual convictions and synaesthetic magic. It turned out to be an opportunity to open my body to the realm of *grey light*, or to put it another way, to the unknown material multiplicities of the imperceptible.

Ana's divagating language when speaking of the sound of horses running over Friedrichstrasse early in the morning evokes a material dimension of existence of which I am not consciously aware. "Melodies, drumming, whistling, drizzles, bombs, winds blowing, ringing, banging, and beats" are some of the words she used when experiencing a trance. These sounds evoke a rhythmic macrocosm in which we partake. In a way, one could argue that such sounds are larger processes from which we, as microcosmic processes, are inseparable.

The mutual contact Ana and I traversed while immersed in her angelical trances was mostly somatic and materially perceived. I therefore deduced that, potentially, by attending closely Ana's and my own sensational itineraries carefully, I could perhaps gain access to an enriched perception which could perhaps be traced back to our own roots in life. In fact, some of the *sounds* –such as those of bombs– that Ana could hear seemed to refer to the tragic past of the Second World War. If in other ethnographic cases I paid attention to the limits of perceptual awareness and conceptual thought, in the mutual contagion with Ana, I learned that there is an irreducible void between the two from which new formations of both are possible.

Ana has taught me that, as far as the conceptual and rational way of being in the world perpetuates an idealized disembodiment, one continues to refuse corporeal and material forces – the very unconscious impulses that might actually rejuvenate our perception. As a consequence, I allowed my own writing to be superseded by Ana's trances, by that which can never be repeated, so that the influx of her angelical sensations could virally infest my own body. Now, I know there are dimensions of the human experience that cannot be articulated by conscious experience or perceived in a conventional sense, yet maybe can be *made vibrate* by indicating somatic experiences that resist philosophical closure.

4 - Tobias and the Unfinished Thesis

4.1 My Neighbour Tobias

There is something wrong in reality, and nobody tells me what it is! (The Red Desert. A Film by Michelangelo Antonioni 1964).

This sentence claimed in horror by Monica Vitti in Antonioni's film evokes the experience that Tobias -my neighbour who lived upstairs- went through. In my first month on Strelitzer Strasse, I stayed in the untidy and greasy flat that was next to his. There I lived with Roger; one of the night birds who run the Weinerei (Wine Club) to which I devote a separate chapter. Roger warned me that Tobias was quite a reserved person.

Nonetheless, my experience happened to be quite the opposite, since besides the huge broken sculpture head of Schelling that stood quietly in my room, it was Tobias with whom I first established contact in that isolated and seemingly forgotten corner of Mitte. He was just patient with my deficient German and took his time. The first impression I got from Tobias was that he was very friendly and generous. However, I soon realized that he –sometimes- would not respond to my knocking on his door when I wished to invite him for a cup of tea.

Tobias lived alone in his small flat that was constituted by a gas kitchen and a relatively spacious room. In the kitchen, he had an *East German* shower; an autonomous plastic box with a refilling water container underneath. The bathroom was in the corridor outside; one had to leave the flat in order to go –hopefully without bumping into a hanging light bulb- to the bathroom. Overall, the atmosphere in Tobias' flat was quite lonely and had a melancholic as well as claustrophobic air to it.

Tobias was working hard finishing his thesis on a crucial period of modern German history: the Weimar Republic (1918-1931) at the Free University. By the time I met him, he had already dedicated three whole years to this project that had

to be one hundred pages long. Soon, I noticed that my enthusiasm for my own work in Berlin was far from his anguished relation to his academic thesis. Throughout this chapter, I will be experimentally juxtaposing the main arguments of his still unfinished thesis with the physical and somatic experiences of his nervous crises.

During the fourteen years that the Weimar Republic lasted, Germans took their first steps as a democratic state. Germany, founded by Chancellor Bismarck in 1871, was a relatively young national state then. For its first half century, Germany was a monarchy based on the Prussian state characterized by a militarist and bureaucratic tradition. After the German Reich had lost the Great War, the monarchy was overthrown by a revolution of politicized workers and returning soldiers.

The social democrats were able to establish a democratic parliament which eventually gave way to the Weimar Republic. This liberal democracy shaped the reputation of Berlin's 20's in terms of cultural and political turmoil. This era of uncertainty became known for cultural avant-gardism, music, modern architecture, painting, film, theater, cabarets and literary expressionism which revealed to the old order. Nevertheless, this period is remembered also for its weak political coalitions, economic chaos and violent oppositions. Weimar Berlin, also referred to as Chicago on the Spree, was also characterized by its modernity and Americanism in terms of technological modernity, functionalism, mass culture and bourgeoisie democracy. Revealingly, the memories of the Weimar Republik have had no place in the actual reconstruction of post 1989 Berlin.

After one month of living in Roger's untidy and quite smelly flat accompanied by Schelling's wounded stone head, I moved to the flat underneath to live with Claudia; a thirty year old east German from Turingen. She moved to Berlin after the fall of the wall and worked as pop music promoter. The fact that I moved in to live with Claudia did not imply that Tobias and I had become distanced. Even though it was often difficult to persuade Tobias to go out for a drink or to the

cinema, I continued visiting him in his flat and we built up a small ritual of going to run regularly to the Mauer Park; a memorial park where a piece of the wall stands and is used for graffiti painting. In the Park, there were often groups of teenagers, painting, kidding, kissing and smoking grass. It took Tobias a couple of months until he was comfortable coming to Claudia's flat.

Some of the time when we went running to the Humboldthain Park, Tobias would not speak to me at all, and some other times when visiting him in the flat he would be sour and tense, puffing, not really wanting to be with anyone, and simultaneously not being able to tell me to go away. A certain melancholy would sever the friendly umbilical cord that sometimes kept us together. Slowly, Tobias' depressive phase became increasingly stable. He kept telling me "I do not feel fine under my skin" (Ich fuehle mich nicht wohl in meiner Haut).

4.2 The Writing Crisis

During the long hours that Tobias spent alone between the four walls in his apartment, he used to be seated in front of the computer, with his mind as blank as the screen of the Word Perfect program. He had already spent more than two years without being able to write anything in relation to his diploma thesis on the Weimar Republic, and the very duty of writing the thesis had kept him from doing any other activity, even going on holiday. Gradually, he entered a severe depression that was to last around a whole year.

Specifically, Tobias's research concentrated on a particular area of the Weimar Republic; Eastern Prussia, a small county that became a political island after the Great War when areas of Germany became part of Poland. This was a rural and traditional region of Germany. Furthermore, it was the motherland of rural conservatism that had not yet been industrialized. Apparently, the often noble landowners were unyielding opponents of Weimar parliamentarianism that deprived them of their old privileges.

During 1918 and 1919, the social group of conservative landowners, while maintaining their social cohesion, lost most of their political structures. After the world wide economic crises of 1922, hyperinflation arrived, and with it the social protest of rural and industrial workers grew stronger. The conservative landowners tried successfully to turn this protest against social democrats in government and against the democratic Weimar in general. Moreover, the idea of an “international Jewry” being responsible for the fate of post World War I Germany became very popular and was used as a political instrument.

Tobias tried to talk to Per – a fellow student who was writing a doctoral thesis on Prussian history- attempting to regain motivation to write down his own diploma thesis. By chance, I met Tobias a couple of times in the huge entrance door of Strelitzer Strasse 55. He would be entering the building with a big smile and head straight up, determined to start writing his work. Tobias had seen Per who apparently shared useful and revealing information with him about his research topic. Unfortunately, Tobias would end up sitting in front of the computer immersed in a state of blankness and by the time winter came around he had entered a semi-catatonic state.

It was at the beginning of November and the first snowfalls had arrived. Tobias asked me a favour: I had to sit in his bedroom. He had a hunch that having somebody sitting next to him would persuade him to write. He thought that he was maybe missing a sort of authority –or father figure- sitting beside him. This way, he believed, he would not escape from his writing responsibility. The first time I sat on the sofa and stayed there for two or three hours, Tobias started to write at the computer. Every now and then, he consulted a couple of history books on the shelf and continued writing a few sentences more. I noted that his sentences tended to be extremely long, baroque and cryptic.

I was sitting on the sofa, happy, but I contained my mirth, afraid of disturbing Tobias’ working rhythm. I did not even move for about three hours. I did not want to interrupt the working mood and productive intensity in which Tobias

was immersed. After a while, I had the impression that I was becoming a kind of a shadow, a weird static presence that allowed Tobias to write. We tried the same strategy in the following days, but it did not work.

Tobias was unable to write again. No matter how still or quiet I sat on the sofa, Tobias would not write; he would just sit in front of the blank computer screen and look at it with his stocky fingers on the keyboard, static, apparently patient, with –as he explained- a pressing “hellfire” burning inside. Then, he would feel really desperate, and an uncontrollable restless and tense sensation around his liver would emerge. Thus, he would sit back aggressively. The last day we tried this strategy, Tobias confessed to me that he felt very frustrated, that there was nothing we could do, that he wanted to cry but could not, that he did not want to waste my time anymore and it was best to leave him alone.

From that day on Tobias’ physical and affective existence moved gradually into the dark tunnels of severe depression. I became the only person who was allowed to enter his flat and stay with him. I often visited Tobias in the afternoon and would find him in bed, on his knees, hidden under his long black hair, moving to and fro desperately. He would tell me that he had not been able to sleep, that he had confused dreams and was feeling extremely dizzy. He could barely cook for himself, and most of the time he was not even hungry. I had decided to bring some food every time I came to see him, so that I made sure he was fed. Claudia, my roommate, suggested that Tobias went to see a doctor. Tobias refused without hesitation. In fact, he got mad with me for having spoken about his depression with Claudia. I walked up to see Tobias almost everyday, and thus along with the line of the green telephone in his room, I became the only contact to the rest of the world for some months.

Nevertheless, once he entered the phase in which he could barely get up from bed, he asked me if I could bring my own television to his own flat. Then, he spent many hours of the day and night watching all kinds of programs on television. Tobias used to claim that television made him forget about the pain he was

suffering, and somehow allowed him to feel somewhat “grounded”, with a sense of “gravity”, which decreased the horrible sensations of “dizziness” and dismay. “... the images of the television reach the body parts that cannot be seen,... the ganglia and the viscera, and they caress, remold and ease down the pressures and tensions I feel there”.

Relying on Walter Benjamin’s *Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction*, Susan Buck-Morss (1992) has constructed a history of the alienation of the corporeal sensorium. She claims that due to the shock of industrialization, modernity and the new technologies, the corporeal practice of mobilizing all senses simultaneously is deadened and numbed. This anaesthetic effect of television allowed Tobias to remain in a numbed state allegedly unaffected by pain.

Claudia, through a friend of hers who had suffered from depression crises, was able to acquire a box of Saint John’s anti-depressant tablets. It was not easy, but I managed to convince Tobias to take the medicine. Tobias emphatically refused to go to see a doctor or to resort to any sort of pharmaceutical remedy. Apparently, as a child, he had gone through illnesses such as measles, German measles, mumps and a meningitis that kept him a couple of months in the hospital. Apparently, he was a child that was often ill from flu, colds and sore throats which, as a consequence, kept him medicated for long periods of time.

Around the time he was eight, the over-medication had provoked an allergy that ceaselessly kept opening wounds on the skin under his feet. Tobias still remembers the discomfort and powerlessness whenever he played and sweated and those allergic wounds emerged. Later, his mother would carefully bandage them. He needed a two year long homeopathic treatment to help his body overcome the allergic infection.

I convinced Tobias that the Saint John medicine was a plant remedy, and thus, he started to take it. A couple of months later he stopped taking the tablets for he deduced that they were inefficient since his depressive state was not getting any

better. He made claims such as “my body is dead”. “I am not able to do things that anyone else is able to do”. “For me the most difficult thing is to go to the street to the grocery store. It makes me feel so extremely dizzy. I am afraid I am going to faint”. Reading also makes me dizzy, I cannot read more than a paragraph,... This is painful dizziness, it is full of anguish”.

The next months, all the way until March happened to be a terrifying period for Tobias. He was not even able to go to the street to do the basic shopping. I started shopping for both of us. The following months I had spent more time in Tobias’ flat than in my own. Claudia and I had a couple of arguments because she wanted to call Tobias’ parents in Kiel to let them know about his physical and emotional state.

I thought that it was not a good idea, mainly because Tobias did not want his parents to know about his psychosomatic crisis. I thought remaining near Tobias and supporting him in every possible way was the best I could do. I thought that all the physical symptoms Tobias was having were a form of resisting, fighting, and hopefully, overcoming – the depressive crises. During the two endless and painful months that I stayed with Tobias, his pain was at times so unbearable that he had to ask me to buy him some tranquilizers or sleeping pills. Tobias used these pills only when the anxiety or anguish of the night was close to unbearable.

4.3 The Weimar Republic and Democracy

Tobias, laying in bed, wrapped up with the same white and black blanket, unable to change his clothes and washing himself, had a small notebook next to his bed where every now and then he wrote spare thoughts. I was interested in what he irregularly wrote in that notebook, but could hardly read the writing for it was not intelligible at all. He wrote in an extremely small hand from a stiffened body. The restriction of Tobias’ perceptual possibilities became narrowed to the point of the entombment of his body.

He only wanted to be plugged into the relieving hypnosis of the television, allowing nothing new to enter. Tobias would often fall asleep and leave the television on. Many of the nights during the most dramatic times of his depressive episode, I slept on the old brown leather sofa, keeping an eye on Tobias. I comprehended that Tobias' image of a "knife thrust" in his chest corresponded to a bodily passion that allowed the perceptual energies to run excessively. In a way, television was the only thing, as Tobias had suggested, "that keeps me in balance,... it makes me forget of my pain at times, and keeps my nerves and sense busy,... and do not have to think,..." The turbulent configuration of Tobias' bodily energy found in the sensory plugging of television not a balance, but more precisely, an anaesthetic effect.

That night I had brought my own television so that Tobias could watch it. I realized by Tobias' friendly way of talking that he did not really want me to go to my flat. So, I sat on the old brown leather sofa and remained in his room for a while. We began speaking of his thesis by accident. Surprisingly, this theme had caught his attention and he soon began to explain that the Weimar Republic from the very beginning suffered from economic crises and high unemployment – circumstances that gave those who opposed democracy an argument.

On the left, there were the communists who fought democracy and wanted to establish a worker's dictatorship after the Russian model. On the right, there were the old conservatives who lost all of their former privileges and wanted to restore the monarchy. And then, there was the third group that became increasingly stronger; the national right wing revolutionaries who strived to bring Jewish democracy and the liberal Americanism -with which the Weimar Republic is still associated- to an end. The National-Socialist movement dreamed of a modern dictatorship inspired by Italian fascism. As it is well known, this totalitarian movement was noticeable for its anti-Semitism.

For the sake of keeping the dialogue going, I told Tobias that perhaps there was a certain weakness or ambivalence in the way in which social democrats

approached capitalism. My suggestion that the productive utilitarianism and the unconscious structure of guilt of democratic bourgeoisie could have some links to what came after the Weimar Republic was not what really infuriated Tobias. The tone of his voice became aggressive, loud and husky when I commented that the West Germany instead of the Weimar Republic should be considered as the first credible precedent for modern German democracy.

Full of resentment, he kept arguing that the liberal democratic nature of the Weimar Republic could not be eluded, and that it is extremely important to keep away the “puritanism” that attempts to discredit this historical period as the foundation of German democracy. Accordingly, he claimed that he was not willing to hear a word in the support of the account that bourgeois democracy was established for the first time in German history after the Second World War. We both agreed on the importance of tracing certain political continuities between the Weimar Republic and the dictatorship that came afterwards. Yet, my suggestion to view post World War II West Germany as the democratic foundation of Germany made Tobias angry. He found necessary to consider the Weimar Republic the first democratic experience in modern Germany. I listened to his arguments silently, until he was finished with his narration. Finally, we were in silence, holding on to an unpleasant sensation of discomfort and lament.

Suddenly, Tobias – in panic- called my name while he sat straight on the mattress. He looked really scared and frightened. His breath was short, his eyes were completely opened -out of horror- and kept a hand on his chest. Without being able to move his eyes, he just said “...my heart is going crazy, I am not feeling well, I am feeling scared, ...”. I tried to calm him down by placing cushions under his back and neck urging him to recline and remain still. Nevertheless, he jumped out of bed and started to walk from one side of the room to the other, endlessly.

I followed him in the room, trying to convince him to calm down. He was scared to death and scared of dying. He could not stop saying that “I am afraid of dying”. I had never seen Tobias so desperate, so out of control. I managed to stop

him from his hysterical and obsessive walking forward and backward in the room. I took his pulse and noticed that his heart was beating very fast, hard and irregular. One of the things that was panicking Tobias was that his heart was pounding not just in an unordered and chaotic way, but also in a way sonorous enough to make him hear each unexpected expansion. I could not convince Tobias to sit down or recline in bed, even though I tried to explain that calming himself down was most helpful. Still panicky, he kept saying “what if it is something really bad? ... if my heart is really ill? ... (looking at me) you cannot know if there is something physically wrong!...”.

Tobias begged me to open every window of the bedroom and kitchen. His eyes were like flames of fear and his face had a tremendously pale tone. I opened all of the windows and the thin and sharp air of the night entered the room. I wore a thick winter coat. It was now really cold in the flat. For a moment, I also got really frightened; I was afraid that Tobias –out of control and slightly aggressive- would jump out of the window. I stayed still next to the windows just in case. For the next two hours Tobias kept walking forward and backward endlessly. Every now and then, he would start inhaling air slowly and profoundly exhaling, trying to keep a rhythmic and relaxed pattern of breathing. Softly, I synchronized my breathing to his; we both were inhaling air and storing it underneath the diaphragm; we could feel each other’s breath meeting in the air between us, but he was too scared and soon after he would again lose track of the consciously mobilized slow and rhythmic breathing.

Several times, I suggested to Tobias that perhaps we should go to the closest Hospital to let the doctors find a solution for his irregular beating. Tobias was afflicted with anguish and fear. He did not want to be seen by any doctors. He also kept complaining about a concentrated and static ball of anguish he could feel around the area of his liver. He would press that area with his hands and fingers, not being able to undo the ball of “tight knots”.

4.4 The Vision of Self-Combustion

All of a sudden, Tobias entered into an unusual trance, in which he endured a bizarre vision. In fact, while he was experiencing an unbearable sensation of hellfire burning inside, he thought that all the organs and viscera underneath his skin were truly being incinerated. He believed that a limpid and strange form of self-combustion was taking place inside his body. He thought he was dying, becoming Artaud's *body without organs* in a literal sense, while the exterior surface of his body was to remain limpid and intact.

Tobias kept blowing air outwards, deeply afraid that ashes would fly out from it. Similarly, he touched his ears in horror, expecting to find out dust on his fingertips. Psychoanalysts like Anzieu (1985) have stressed that the skin is simultaneously the screen on which psychic life is projected and the envelope that contains and protects the subject. A traumatized subject, usually, when experiencing a conflict brings it to the envelope of the psyche and continues to carry it even when the conflict has passed or the subject is far from the location where the conflict took place.

The hellfire burning was inside due to his fear of dying. Let me link Tobias's vision of self-combustion to the tragic premonition of the Weimar Republic. Allegorically, Tobias could be seen as physically experiencing the fire that was to burn all over Europe and gave way to the Second World War. This vision of fear, itself reminiscent of the premonitory German expressionist films of Murnau, Lang and others analyzed by Kracauer (1947), could be considered as a somatic event dramatizing the question that intrigued Tobias deeply in his thesis; how did old conservative landlords come to work hand in hand with revolutionary and anti-Semitic Fascists -of whom Adolf Hitler became leader- to destroy German democracy? According to Tobias, the conservatives tried to tool the revolutionary right wing movement for their own interest, that is, to restore the monarchy, but failed in the end. It turned out that the National-Socialist movement ended up using

the support of conservative elites to destroy democracy and establish a totalitarian and racist dictatorship.

The thermometer in Tobias' room registered 2 Celsius. Tobias found a big coat and asked me if I could accompany him. "I need to go out, I cannot stay here, we are not going to the doctors, and I need to go out before I go crazy". Thus, we spent another couple of hours –until around 5:30 a.m - walking around the streets near Strelitzer St. Eventually, he started to feel tired. I suggested that we return to the flat. It was icy cold, the streets and the cars were covered by frost. Back in his flat I closed the windows. Tobias got in bed, apparently much more relaxed; his heart beats were still irregular, but the pounding was not as pronounced and panicky as it was before.

4.5 The Disenchantment of Psychoanalysis

A subject cannot be produced and undone like a "Lego" toy. Once the child is withdrawn from the armed faction by Unicef or a Governmental Organization, his sensori-affectivo-motor, psychic and discursive retraining is highly problematic, especially in view of the fact that the materialities provided for him offer nothing to be compared with the stock of violent sensations and emotions experienced by him when he/she (a Kalshnikov-wielding-child) was armed. Speech alone will not suffice to do the trick (Warnier 2001:22)

By the end of winter, Tobias began to see a Freudian psychotherapist once a week. He had talked with his parents and agreed that they would finance the therapy. Tobias, slowly, started to face the computer; enduring bouts of anguish and unhappiness, he was able to bring the one hundred page long project to an end by the time summer came around. Tobias was not enthusiastic and positive about his visit to the psychotherapist because he often had to repeat much of the information he had spelled out due to the therapists' forgetfulness.

Months later, Tobias came to the conclusion that a psychotherapy which does not take into account the corporeal realm may be a deficient therapy; "... words are not enough to heal a person psychologically,... You have to work with

the body also the body has its own memories and depressions inscribed in its muscles and tissues”. Tobias was suggesting that insofar as one adheres to rigid conceptual associations and categories, one can become ever more distanced from the corporeal boundaries that has inspired and nourished them; furthermore, he claimed that as long as one adheres to corporeal boundaries, one can remain stuck in conventional as well as perceptual patterns. Unfortunately, Tobias’ experience with the Freudian psychotherapist was that he was losing the flexible possibility of both transformations.

Unfortunately, psychoanalysis attempts to be a science of the unconscious or the unthought life of the body. It does not only aspire to present unconscious impulses and drives from the perspective of a pre-established homogeneity. More crucially, it has the function of reconstituting the homogeneity by enforcing radical heterogeneity on laws of signification. It is not so much that psychoanalysis misrepresents the unconscious life of the body (which would in itself imply that there could be such a correct representation), but rather it appropriates these forces to a dialectic of representation.

Tobias’s dissatisfaction in relation to psychoanalysis reflects its insistence on reducing intensity and unconscious drives to a linguistic discourse. His despair reflects the form in which, for instance, Lacanian and Freudian psychoanalysis (Lacan 1989; Freud 1949) split the site of language and representation (*Spaltung*) and the realm of affects and whatever is not exhausted by representation (*Vorstellung*). On the dimension of the unthought life of the body, that which is irreducible to linguistic articulation is framed as the unknowable limit of the Real, or else dismissed as Imaginary delusion (the apparent self-presence of the *ego* which is actually founded as an alienating identification).

Facing the distinction between the Real and the Symbolic, Tobias was untrustworthy of psychoanalysis mainly because it remains unable to affirm alterity and continues treating it as a negative condition. Paradoxically, Lacan’s theory of desire reinforces the narcissist quest for identity and totality that it aims to criticize.

Tobias is enduring a painful circulation of desire, that makes him feel somewhat lost and frustrated. As he expressed, “What to do with this madness?”. Yet, he despises the psychoanalytic approach to recapture and categorize desire. There is a certain passion that is somewhat pushing Tobias to explore the potential of his desires further.

Tobias’ work on the Weimar Republic makes the point that capitalism subjugates abstract labour by representing it as private property. Likewise, it could be argued that psychoanalysis tends to capitalize desire to the Oedipal triangle of the privatized Family. It is this molar aggregate, this compulsory heterosexual norm that can be found at work ubiquitously in our society. In a very real sense, Freud’s theories can be an invaluable model for the deployment of sexuality in advanced capitalist society.

Furthermore, it can be claimed that the positive function of capitalism is to enforce interiorization as techniques of subjectivation in terms of signification and guilt. Does not this reflection on interiorization resonate with Tobias’s need to have me sitting next to him, as “a father figure”, so that he would initiate his writing? This body praxis of desire functions as part of the apparatus of State power in advanced capitalism. Tobias’s lament for not having found an embodied cure – instead of a mere talking cure- that would let him explore his own vital and creative perceptual, as well as conceptual capacities further, points out also a distrust of the humanist and theological approach to desire as lack.

Warnier (2001) points out that it is indispensable to take into account the material culture for it is from the praxis of the body in relation to it that identity, signification and meaning emerge. According to Warnier, the process of internalization and symbolization takes place through the media of sensory motricity, images and words. Of these three media of symbolization, it is apparently the sensory-motricity media that can reach deep in the psyche for it is immediately geared to emotions and psychic drives. Bodily praxis in a given materiality modulates the desires and intensities, not only by the subject itself, but more often

by social conventions and normalizing power. The process of subjectivation is fundamentally not becoming what one chooses to be, but rather to construct one's drives in a material world and reaching certain moral ground in relation to others. Necessarily, this process implies a number of constraints.

Curiously, Tobias was soon to engage intuitively a body praxis of fire and cinema that resonates with the praxeological approach proposed by Warnier. Such approach responds to the enigmatic link between embodied material culture and representation. Warnier's proposal attempts to address the depth and multiple layers of such relationship, "given the fact that these layers are fully interconnected, yet potentially at odds with one another" (Warnier 2001:9)

4.6 The Healing Process of Fire

Common to all these media, from the diorama to the cinemascope screen, is a darkened auditorium and a brightly illuminated image ... The world of the diorama and the cinema is an illusory dream world that light opens up to the viewer. He can lose himself in it the same way that he can submerge himself in contemplating the flame of a camp-fire or a candle. In this respect, the film is closer to the fire than to the theater ... The process of artificial light to create its own reality only exists in darkness. In the dark, light is life (Wolfgang Schivelbusch; 1988; 220-221)

It was around May when Tobias also started to take very long walks which helped him to be involved in an activity that "allows me not to think,... but I must walk for a long time to feel tired enough not to think,... then the distraction feels like a luxury". As I have noticed before, now he was able to write occasionally on the Weimar Republic. Meanwhile, he was taking special pleasure in outdoor activities. It was then that Tobias and I started to go to cinema again.

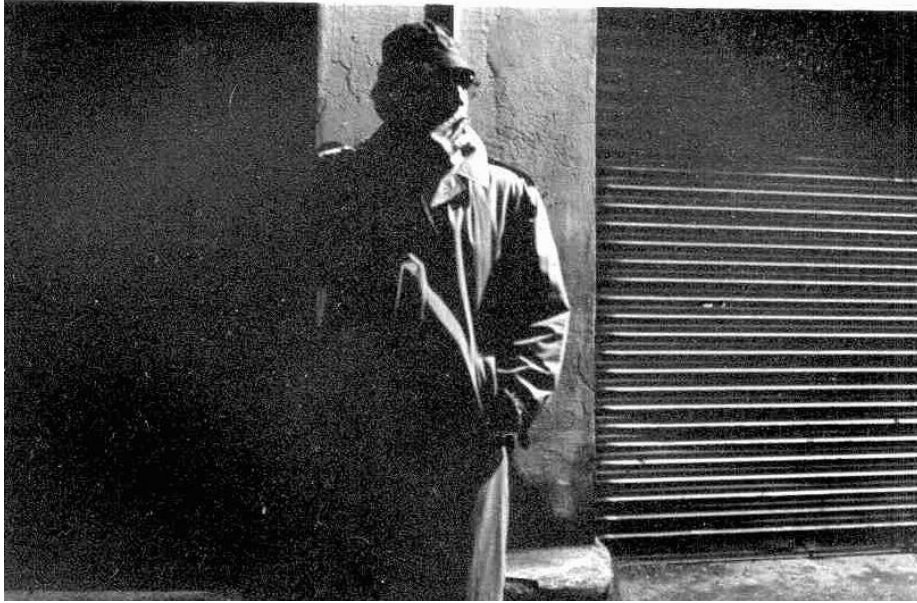


Photo 6: Tobias at exit of cinema in the Brot Kulturhaus.

Tobias usually wanted us to go to the midnight session. I wondered if such behaviour was proper for his recovery process, since it implied that his sleeping pattern could be disrupted. He responded that going to the late cinema a couple of times a week was nothing but gratifying and therapeutic because “it makes me feel warm inside”. For Gaston Bachelard (1964), warmth and heat that makes one recognize “life”. Tobias enjoyed rambling on in the darkness on the silent Prenzlauerberg streets, moving from one lamp post to the next one, confronting the cold breeze of the spring night. In many of these nights in which we were heading to the cinema he enjoyed the very cold that was “passing through my body” since somehow it awakened the senses of his body and made himself “feel alive”. He also appreciated that we always walked long distances in the cold to go to the cinema. By the time we returned we were really tired, and thus, with the anxiety level decreased, Tobias was able to sleep more pleasantly.

Tobias felt attracted to go to the cinema twice or three times weekly, especially to unusual independent cinema places such as the *Brot Kulturhaus* where in an old bread factory they showed films by R.W. Fassbinder, Jean Luc Godard or Robert Bresson, as well a cycle of films played by Klaus Kinski. The huge gallery

was heated by old gas stoves that stood scattered among isolated and unordered seats. I remember that usually Tobias and I would warm up, squeezing under winter jackets, while watching the film. Tobias liked these type of night sessions because they were “intimate and warm, and allows me to mourn”. The power of suggestion triggered by the light-based media since Daguerre’s time happens in the dark. The recovery of intimacy in the dark, even though transitory, binds strangers together in the thrill of reverie.

It was as if errant and lonely bodies, as well as a few lovers and friends would come out of the cold darkness of the streets as strangers in order to meet –albeit loosely- in the “warm” cinema.

The turn toward the light of the cinema is not the dark, lonely one that Schivelbusch described, but rather a return to fire’s excess, in which “the world of intimacy is as antithetical to the “real” world” as inmoderation is to moderation, madness to reason, drunkenness to lucidity” (Bataille 1988:57). And here, we can add... as cinema is to real life (Moore 2000:136).

In the evenings, before dinner he would walk to the Humboldthain Park in order to collect branches and trunks for firewood. Tobias’ mood had improved noticeably. It was very pleasant to observe the way in which, Tobias started to make a little fire in the backyard of Strelitzer St 55. Late at night he would sit in front of it for two or three hours. He would lie on an old rag blanket, hold his head in one of his hands and remain in such a position next to the fire.

Tobias’ fire-making began to influence the neighbours, and for many of them it became sort of a ritual to join Tobias’ fire where they would talk of their working day avatars, love affairs and domestic anecdotes at Mitte. Fire offered Tobias an intimate space in which he began to share his experiences of the crises with neighbours. Several times, I encountered Tobias in the stairs walking back to his flat. One could noticeably perceive heat emanating from his body and, on such occasions, Tobias’ eyes were crystal shiny and his cheeks vividly reddish.

It was obvious to me that Tobias was still melancholic and suffered from fits of dizziness and inner unrest; however, his own determination to go to the cinema, take baths and lay in front of the fire several times a week indicated an energetic recovery. In front of the fire, he would often perceive the flames so close to his heated body that without any obvious reason- he would start mourning and experiencing a mixture of sadness and joy. Tobias argued that “when I feel the heat of the fire, it affects me as if it were mobilizing mournful emotions that are recorded in my tissue,... I just allow myself to have emotions that the fire sets free,... I do not know where they come from, I just know that by letting these involuntary sensations flow, I just feel released”.

The joy emanating from such statement relates the nurturing of healing fire which triggered Tobias’ soothing of affective valves that were painfully waving throughout his body. Tobias also took much pleasure by talking about going to cinema and especially laying around the fire as a fruitful form of “wasting time”, and therefore, a warm and time consuming way of enjoying contemplation, attraction and distraction⁶⁷. Tobias often celebrated the fact that his fiery intimacy exceeded production and utility, almost evoking a pleasant sense of learning to expend time freely and generously, just for the sake of it. It has been argued by George Bataille that

The introduction of labor into the world replaced intimacy, the depth of desire and its free outbreaks, with rational progression, where what matter is no longer the truth of the present moment, but rather, the subsequent results of operations (Bataille, 1988b:57).

Tobias’ form of fiery recovery exceeded utility and celebrated the intimacy he had lost by living an often “busy” and “hyperactive” lifestyle based on the necessity

⁶⁷ This pleasant form of “wasting time” has been explored in Shauna Singh-Baldwin’s *What the Body Remembers* (2000) in which a 16 year old woman named Roop becomes the second wife of Sardarji and desperately tries to please the expediency of the man. The novel makes flesh its social and political backdrop -the tension that preceded partition in India - by narrating the lives of a respected man in his early 40s (Sardarji), whose jealous and cruel wife (Satya) is unable to bear children, and the village girl Roop, who innocently believes she has found salvation through marriage.

of being production. As stated by Tobias “I have not been able to enjoy life in the last years, ... always in a hurry, worried,...”. This guilt-ridden attitude and deprivation of *wasting time* made Tobias enter a neurotic and obsessive spiral of work in which what he produced was never good enough both in terms of quality and quantity. Indeed, even though I have often asked Tobias for permission to cite his thesis on the Weimar Republic, he has not allowed me. After coming out of the depressive crises, he decided to renounce finishing it and instead has dedicated himself to work in the editorial of a Berlin cultural newspaper and compose music.

Let us pay attention to Tobias’ contemplation of the flames. The following is the way in which he described its dream-like quality “... there is something very special and healing about watching the flames burn for a long time,... it is as if I entered a state of mind somewhere between dreams and consciousness, where fire seems to burn the emotions that one keeps locked in the body,...”. For Tobias watching the fire in the backyard of Strelitzer St. 55 is not exactly a dream, but rather a pre-conscious and intimate comforting sensation.

When I asked Tobias about the experience of reverie while watching the flames of fire, he would claim that he would not be thinking in conscious and rational ways. Even though during the interviews he had difficulties explaining the instance of reverie, he would often claim that in such a state of distraction and forgetfulness, he would be visually fascinated with the flames. Indeed, Tobias often referred to the attraction of the flames as triggering his imagination, enabling him to discern an angel in the form that would be transformed into a dragon, and then to a bird and so on. And this would take place in the very dissipation of fire energy in Bachelard’s “star pattern” (1964).

The bursting fire would draw a flame like an angel, that would consume itself to return to the bursting fire, and then the bursting fire would unleash a flame like a dragon that would consume itself by returning to the bursting fire, and so on and so forth. Is not Tobias’ reverie a sort of fiery vision that consists of his inability to see, and yet his still greater incapability not to see?. In this impossible contact with fire,

Tobias was unable to accomplish such visual contact, but equally unable to escape. Tobias' body indicated that realm of the life of the body -of living and dying, of sensing and seeing- that remains irreducible to idealization, just as it may be the case with the attraction of fire and cinema.

For Gaston Bachelard (1964), the attraction of fire resides in the experience of reverie, which neither corresponds to the linear fashion of dreams – that tends to join disconnected objects – nor to the conventional patterns of conscious logic. According to Bachelard, reverie occurs in a “star pattern” meaning that it provokes flames that return to its center, self-consuming and endlessly recreating. Indeed, for Bachelard the experience of reverie is a more intellectualized activity than dreaming since it tends to be centered upon one object. Eisenstein (1988) was not very far from this notion when he celebrated the repetitive joy of fire and faculty of creating flaming images, forms and associations in a continuously changing way.

Such an image again echoes the resonance of the Eternal Return and Tobias' divagating and fiery writings where the “star pattern” could be discerned in continuous and generous self-consumption. Tobias' textual propagation can be figured as a “star pattern” whose flames bursts out of its center to return to it. His own melancholic tone seems to be often repetitive yet always changing. Furthermore, there is a sparkling and cranky melody that emerges from his recurring thoughts of death and flesh. In most of the written pieces, there is a sort of resistance to symbolize, a painful embrace to the excess of a chaotic cognition.

Tobias' depressive crises can be seen as a particular passion of his own body to break down the “always busy” fatigue of labour. Tobias' stupefied approach to fire and cinema – I would add- indicates a sensory and perceptual reawakening that allowed him to recover a particular experience of intimacy. Rachel Moore (2000) has equated cinema with Bachelard's “star pattern” provoked by flames giving way to an excessive associative form. In this sense, it could be argued that Tobias encountered warmth and heat not only in the flames of fire, but in its modern equivalent of

intimacy. For Jean-Francois Lyotard (1986), cinema is somewhere beyond good and evil and enables the liberation from repression and usefulness.

Such was Tobias' fascination with fire, that from May onwards he began to use many candle lights to illuminate his own flat –much in the way Claudia used to do in our flat- and practice the so-called *Deutsche Gemuetlichkeit* (*German comfort*). Wolfgang Schivelbusch (1988:178) cites Wilhelm Hausenstein diaries. Revealingly, this nineteenth century art historian (1967:273) claims that with the advent of electricity a loss of poetic element has taken place, since the light emanated by a candle or hearth fire is able to create indefinite forms, distracting flickering as well as volumes. It creates a much warmer, poetic and expressive atmosphere than the flattening, functional and rational use of the electric bulb. Electricity has brought the dispersion of people in common spaces and the loss of the dream-like quality of watching flames.

Tobias, by using candle lights at home, was recreating his own self and the objects -bed, night-table, computer, etc.- out of the modern condition of homogeneous electric light. Candle lights generate shadows that can actually give way to a whole variety of forms. Contrary to the case of brightness of the electric bulb with which bodies lose the outline and substance, the distracting light of the candle touches upon the dull usefulness of the objects, which under the brilliance of electric light, its quality of excessive consummation is annulled and turned into a functional element of capitalist utility.

Nevertheless, let us briefly return to the horrific episodes when Tobias was entombed in bed and spent endless hours watching television -a hot media for Marshal McLuhan (2001) - in an anaesthetized form which he considered an “*alibi*” from the free-floating anxiety and unbearable dizziness he suffered. Mostly, he watched television films that were the intervals of long publicity series. I would consider that television, even though electric, flattening, imploding and linear – can also convey certain anaesthetic warmth stability for somebody completely immersed in a severe depression. Far from arguing that television had efficient therapeutic

quality to Tobias' depression, I would like to claim that television allowed him to hang on certain visual as well as magnetic field while being "in the dark".

5 - Waiting for Marcus

- *What's left?*
- *Nothing.*
- *What shall we do with the corpse?*
- *I don't know but ...*
- *Can anything be done?*
- *Well, perhaps we can rape our bodies over and over again ...*

5.1 Strangers in the Park

His relatively long hair and typical “eastern” moustache –again fashionable in suburban Berlin- were purely blonde. He usually wore American-style rural squared shirts and old blue jeans. When I would run through the gardens of Humboldthain Park, the stranger would, jokingly, with a candid smile, make comments such as; “Who are you running away from?”, “Do not you have time to rest?”. The first time I noticed Marcus’ soul overshadowed, he did not behave as strong, confidently and self assuring as usual. He seemed rather vulnerable and weak. I could barely hear the low tone of his voice. He had to exert himself to keep his eyelids half opened. When he would close them, he seemed to be approaching a state of collapse, almost about to faint. He used to refer to this semi-dizzy state of being down as the “mood of the butterfly”.

On another occasion, his girlfriend Helke showed up in the Park. She was very upset and the tone of her voice was quite mean. She reproached Marcus consistently for not having gone to the unemployment office in the morning at Wedding. Marcus replied that he did not want to be a “zombie” like the rest of the unemployed. It was extremely dramatic and heart-breaking to witness the unemployed coming out from diverse streets, alleys and corners, walking with no determination, as if they lacked any will, in an atmosphere of depressed solemnity, to gather like a community of “zombies” at the unemployment office. Helke was upset and fed up with Marcus because she was the only one working; this forty year old woman worked in an *Aldi* supermarket as a cashier. She had lumbago and varicose veins. During the argument in the Park, fatigued, not being able to sit

straight on the bench, in a state of physical collapse, he confessed that he had a serious problem, and could not be helped.

A couple of weeks later, I was running through the woods at the Humboldtthain Park on my own. By accident, I glanced at Marcus between two trees. Marcus seemed to be concentrating on doing something. I could only see him from the back. Stealthy, with the intention of provoking a friendly fright, I approached him gently. To my surprise, I observed how Marcus had a spike in his vein and was pushing heroin into his body. After the shot, he turned around and glanced at me. Marcus was behaving as if he had done nothing strange or wrong. I did not know what to say. We just remained standing close to each other, moving around aimlessly, in silence.

Gradually, the heroin floated through his blood, and it was pumped up into his brain. His eyelashes were trembling, and he seemed to be pleasurably reacting to the injected substance. Immersed in a subtle yet intense ecstasy, Marcus smiled at me cheerfully and talked about the wonderful euphoric sensation he was traversing. Marcus needed heroin to remain in a “sweet state of nullity”. When immersed, Marcus was not fully aware; a euphoric intensity seemed to unfold muscular stiffening and painful retching. Then, he would enter an anaesthetic experience of “divine stupidity” or “plane encephalogram”.

Temporarily, heroin allowed him to feel the intensity of “an alien thousands of kilometres away from earth, or a brave captain from centuries ago”. Marcus, in an extreme and risky “high”, stood drooling in the middle of the busy traffic of Brunnenstrasse, as a lonely and vulnerable star, playfully risking his own life in front of rapidly passing Mercedes, Hondas, Volkswagens, Audis and BMWs. In such situation, I dragged Marcus away from the road though this was not easy since he was physically very flexible, a fleeing body. When heroin flowed vividly throughout his veins nothing seemed to matter to Marcus, not even his own life.

5.2 The Illness

After these two weeks in which Marcus was intensively using heroin, there was a period of about two months that I had not had any news from him. I have many notes in which I blame myself for not having noted down where he and Helke lived. I kept returning to the Humboldthain Park, two or three times a week, jogging with Tobias, but Marcus was never at the flower garden. After two months, by chance, I accompanied Tobias shopping at the *Aldi* supermarket in Wedding. On the way out, at the cashier, Tobias and I met Helke. After Tobias had paid and packed the items he had bought, I stayed with Helke for a moment and had a private conversation. Marcus had been in the Hospital ten days. He had had “bad pneumonia”. However, Helke informed me that –even though he was quite weak then- due to his youth he was recovering quickly and that I would probably see him in the flower garden in a couple of days. Unlike in the Park, Helke had talked about Marcus in a dear and affectionate way. Before I left, I told Helke that I noticed a certain sadness in her eyes. She held my arm, approached my face and said; “Marcus has been HIV positive for a long time now”.

Next day, I, heartbroken, met Marcus in my energy spot. Even though I was really glad to meet him again, he did not look good at all. Marcus had lost about 10 kilograms and his skin was literally yellow. He was in an optimistic mood and explained that he was permanently in a semi state of being down, never really able to get away from the “mood of the butterfly” and its muscular pains, since he was taking methadone. According to Marcus, methadone could not be compared to heroin “but the pains, tics and cold sweating would be worse without it”.

He, manically, kept drinking Coca Cola and smoking Marlboro cigarettes. Marcus confessed that the main reasons to go on living was Helke and the “heroin’s sensation, those are the only things better than death”. The lively light of a gentle match that used to radiate his face began to mitigate. A week later, he was again in the Hospital due to another “bad pneumonia”.

5.3 Helke's Weakness

While doctors did the last revision to Marcus's body in ruins, Helke and I remain sitting in the corridor. Helke was bent over and petrified; her eyes were magnificently open as if she were unaffected by the strong lights of the corridor. She said that she was "blind, in a pool of absurdity", and at the same time, was hit by tics and involuntary movements of the body; pain, rage, fatigue and impatience. Due to unavoidable nervous short circuits, her speaking was often disturbingly disrupted in the middle of the sentence. There was no time for rational or critical reflection, no space to breathe. Helke's limit-experience at the corridor of the hospital was a manifestation of loyalty to the absolute demand made by Marcus's dying. Helke's exaggeratedly opened eyes in the corridor –both dark brown coloured eyeballs expelled an impersonal force- were responding to this demand; at such a crucial moment, she could not fail to respond to Marcus's dying with such intensity. Yet, her loyalty seemed to be insufficient, and she had the impulse to betray it, since living intimately with such an obsession would be an unbearable existence. "Why this?... I cannot believe that in a couple of days he simply will not be around,... I am going mad,... I feel impotent,... soon I am to return home without him,... How does he expect me to love him now? "

To a certain extent, Helke was feeling miserable for her inability to be loyal to the passionate demand of Marcus's dying; "I cannot believe that in a couple of days he just will not be there, ... I feel helpless". Nevertheless, Helke realized that the loyalty to such a demand was beyond her capacities as a presumed identity, in the sense that, as a subject, she could never correspond to it properly; "...soon I am to return home without him". Thus, in order to carry on with life, eventually Helke had to betray the demand of Marcus's dying to abandon herself limitlessly.

Weakness and betrayal are not negative terms, instead they are terms that are affirmed throughout the notes of Marcus's terminal phase. Unfortunately, there may not be a way of finding a reflective and peaceful ground or rational mediation zone for this event. Neither Helke's failure in the face of the inhuman demand of

Marcus's dying, nor my failure to give a fully satisfactory account of what happened leave any option to give up or turn away. For Helke, betrayal was a direct and perhaps, irrevocable response for the inhuman demand of the dying of Marcus as passion; "soon, I am to return home without him". Betrayal then seems necessary for pushing oneself away from the inordinate demand of Marcus's agony.

The materiality and density embodied by Helke in these agonizing days, were not quite her own, and this made it more difficult even to give up her personal integrity. During the painful waiting in the corridor, Helke's attachment to herself, to what had been her own life until then, seemed already not her own; "I am going mad". Her isolated and quite involuntary commentaries in the corridor suggested that she was too weak, not because she was not brave or was lacking courage, but rather because she had already started to make sure that her own self had a possible continuity. She was too weak to give up her own will to control actions, to the very human (and mammal) condition for mastery and preservation.

The passion of Marcus's agony demanded radical and absolute self-abandonment from Helke's side. Eventually, Helke collapsed in the corridor; she fell down, fainted, her body seemed to completely give up any investing effort to retain physical composure. Nausea, in the form of an abrupt series of retching convulsed Helke physically. For a moment, she was not fully aware of her strangely fluctuating, clumsy and floppy body involved in a delirious choreography. At that instant, when I and several nurses were trying to sit back and revive Helke, it seemed as if Helke had loyally abandoned everything that was hers to the passion of the death moment. Later, she felt embarrassed by her weirdly danced fainting. Indeed, she was already recovering into the strong Helke, who understandably, turned out to be too weak to abandon herself.

Helke's weakness as well as Marcus' dying mobilize an *excess* that produces a fundamental disturbance in my writing. My endeavor to construct schemata of these events happen to be troubled, yet simultaneously, this underlying turbulence is the source of my fascination. From the point of view of Marcus's dying and Helke's

weakness, perhaps, my ethnographic work can only be realized, by virtue of betraying these events applying other meanings –such as reflexive, critical and moral judgements- than that of desire. Anthropological representation may be an *embarrassed figuration* (Barthes 1975) of these events, similar to the embarrassment that Helke felt short after her fainting. Beyond the alibi of anthropological analysis and methodological scrutiny, I am here also trying to mobilize the *erotics* (Bataille 1987) and *aesthetics* (Buck-Morss 1997) that traverse the grains of signification as *figuration* (Barthes 1975).

During the final hour of these long and devastating days, Helke and I have spent at the hospital, Helke confessed to me that she usually goes through an emotional fit at the end of the day. Doctors do not crawl or walk slightly bended forward like visitors do when entering the patient's room. According to Helke, doctors do not want to help slide the ill person to the “the other side”, even though, perhaps better than visitors, they really know how easy that is. The nightly injections -a medical ritual so that Marcus will live longer- breaks her heart, since she has to face the question of whether she should help him die at once, instead of “making him die artificially every single day”. The couple had already signed the legal papers that allowed Helke to practice euthanasia. Nevertheless, Helke did not think that this was a sort of power she possessed, since –each day- she was bound to suffer the sorrow of his dying even more pathetically. Infested by feelings of fear, guilt and insecurity, Helke admired Marcus's courageous struggle to keep death away.

5.4 The Departure

One more day in the hospital room. Marcus is in bed dying of Aids and Helke and I are sitting near him. Marcus is extremely weak and his body seems to disintegrate and get old at a vertiginous rate. An unpleasant odor, to which Helke and I are already accustomed, irradiates from his body. The nurses, Helke and I try to keep the room as hygienic as possible, but there is no way to undo this penetrating odor. Somehow, with the passing of the days, we all seem to be

immune to it. Helke and I start to smell this unpleasant odor in our own home, in our own beds when waking up.

And today is another day in which Helke, Marcus and I are partaking in a new overwhelming – and ungrateful- encounter. Helke caresses Marcus`s hand tenderly, and every now and then, Marcus moves the hand or head slightly, perhaps responding to Helke`s affection. Such movements seem to come out of the deepest fatigue, from the most extreme effort to still communicate with the world. Marcus`s eyes are open, looking at a space-less space. This moment of unbearably fatal contact is excessive. At an indeterminate instant, Marcus has entered in a coma. Helke almost sees a “cloud” around Marcus`s bed; the premonition that he may not wake up again is in the room. More precisely, Helke seems to be in contact with Marcus`s energy field and the semi-viewing of the auratic “cloud”. Tirelessly, Helke speaks to Marcus and breathes profoundly. Helke looks at me and asks me to breathe with her. Both of us sitting on each side of the hospital bed breathe very deeply, long and concentratedly, blowing warm air onto Marcus`s body attached to a oxygen cylinder. We are both rhythmically and synchronically trying to revitalize Marcus with the soft humidity of our own breath. The “cloud” Helke refers to seems to dissolve for a moment. Marcus`s heart tones were quite stable in the machine`s graphic screen, while his skin becomes increasingly pink.

When facing the potential near death moment, the issue is not so much one of medical machinery or authentically dying bodies, but instead, it is a matter of being open to a process or not. And being open to such process means being open to the very mystery such peculiar experience can bring with it. Indeed, the cloud surrounding Marcus is shaping Helke and my own joined breathing, as much as our warm and humid breaths are shaping the density of Marcus`s energy field. Does this situation resonate with theatrical improvisation, where the most skillful actors are especially receptive to the instant, and unafraid to transform it into a different mood. And more incisively, does it not echo Antonin Artaud`s *Theatre of Cruelty?* (Barber 1993: Stoller 1997)

I am now in the corridor, walking toward the coffee machine. While panning through the corridor, every patient I see ephemerally in the hospital rooms seem hundreds of times healthier than Marcus. Three doctors and a couple of nurses enter Marcus's room. Shocked, worried, I head back to the room. They are quickly checking the physical state of Marcus. The doctors are analysing the information displayed by the machines. Helke and I, helplessly stare at the bunch of doctors. Complaining, she whispers loud enough so that only I can hear it "All these doctors dressed in white gowns...". It is impossible to see Marcus beyond the white gowns of the doctors.

The separation between Marcus's body and Helke and I was fundamentally based on diagnostic technologies. The authoritative decision-making is placed upon the machines and those who know how to work with them. Helke, heart-broken, reminds me about Marcus's desire to experience his death fully, with all its rhythms, ecstasy and pain. It is only the small candle's flickering fire in the room that seems to hold Helke and I together, before "the over-valuing of machines" over bodies as Helke claims. The doctors and nurses, after having checked the machines and their information leave the room arguing that Helke will briefly receive a precise diagnosis from them. However, no precise statistics or reductive psychology can give an account of the singular –and daily sort of- hospital story I am telling. This is not just an anomalous case, but a heaven and earth shaking experience that has forced Helke and me to think about how life really occurs.

I cannot write any more. This overdose of powerlessness leaves me hanging on the brutal fact that there may not be anything else to write here. Marcus lays on the bed in the most awkward position. His back is a bit twisted; in a strange contortion, almost non-human. He is seemingly tense as if he were unable to suffer any longer such an agonizing state. The room is suffocated by an atmosphere of stillness. The convulsive violence of this other silence is far more terrifying than the electric sound of the light bulb. Marcus, with extreme delicacy, turns his head to the left where the candle stands on the table. This refinement of turning his head is -in reality- an overwhelming and inhuman effort that affirms movement, life. Now, he

turns his head to Helke and has very briefly closed his eyes affirmatively – as if he were nodding his head.

Marcus takes a look at the ceiling. It sounds as if he were going to say something. But instead, he sighs. Helke`s hand is trembling, as if Marcus`s sighing had contagiously transmitted a nervous tremor to Helke`s hand. Marcus stays staring at the ceiling, static. He is probably delirious again. These affects are transitions of energy, moving in multiple directions; the affects of Marcus`s dying events are singular rather than universal, and there is no comfortable or privileged relation toward the “self”. In fact, I feel I cannot breathe anymore. I look to Helke who –nervously- makes a humble gesture so that I bring some coffee for her. I need to get out of this room.

I excuse myself and go out in the corridor to get some coffee. Suddenly, Helke comes out of the room shouting, asking for help, in panic. He is dead. We go back into the room. Helke is crying and shouting loudly, horrified by Marcus`s death and his cadaverous presence. She, horrified, stares at Marcus`s eyes. A nurse tries to take Helke out of the room, but Helke resists and keeps staring at Marcus, crying and shouting. Somewhat delirious, full of rage, spitting everywhere, Helke, animal-like, groans. Then she claims: “Do not,... do not look at me like that,... Marcus, come here,..” The scene is heart-breaking. “ I do not want to dwell within his rotten glance. That is not a real look. Real looks do not stink. I cannot bear this”.

Helke seems to be refusing Marcus`s terrible look. Terrible, I write, because it cannot be returned, and in the same token it cannot be received. How could it be received if there is this unaccountable and enigmatic lightless irradiation on his eyes?. Helke insistently tells Marcus in the third person “he should come,... here,..”. His dead eyes open up such a huge distance between him and Helke (and the rest of us) that all hopes of reciprocity are irrevocably ruined. Indeed, Helke`s raging facial expressions seem to be disoriented and unclear in pointing out where is “*here*”, and where is Marcus (the ex-person she is addressing). Perhaps, due to an impersonal affliction, she is avoiding the articulation of his name in such a limit-experience.

Helke`s violently spoken reaction seems to be more directed to a strange person than Marcus himself, even though -somewhat monstrously and excessively- the still corpse is indeed Marcus`s disquieting trace. When she begged Marcus in the suffocating, cold and enigmatic atmosphere of the room, it seemed that she was reacting to a lifeless body she did not know anything about. The magnitude of the strange and impersonal sensation shortly after Marcus`s death is irreducible in any human way. This story, this awkward universe cannot be accounted for in terms of linguistic causality.

The instant of Marcus` death has destabilized Helke. His dying couple of weeks have been an especially fertile time for intuitive insight. The mystery of Marcus` death emerges from the processual aspect of the dying experience. Perhaps, Helke and I, the last afternoon that Marcus has been alive, breathed together onto his bed, because we have understood that it was not a matter of choosing between machines and bodies, between making Marcus`s life longer or not, but instead a process of a –smoky- radiance rather than mere survival.

Helke cleans the saliva from the surroundings of her mouth. Finally, she obeys the nurse near her, and has left the room still talking rather desperately. She does not sound enraged but devastated. “I have not said goodbye properly,... I did not realize,... now it is too late,... I wanted to be the last thing under his eye lids, and remain there”. What does Helke`s frustration of not having been aware or present at the instant of Marcus`s death mean? She did properly and tenderly have a talk in which Marcus and her were aware that Marcus would hardly ever awake once he would enter the coma. And now, Helke feels deeply frustrated for not being present at the fleeing instant of Marcus`s death.

Helke`s “now it is too late” is not only an expression of her loss. It also indicates that the instant of death is far quicker than anticipated. Indeed, it is possible (as much as improbable) that Marcus died with that slight sigh he performed before I left the room. His breath was ephemeral and almost

imperceptible. It was an airless blow. Helke and I were waiting for Marcus to die; but how could we wait for an instant that is in itself so unexpected and fleeting. Heartbroken, Helke, when leaving the room, evokes and affirms the impossibility of sharing the transition that is death “... I wanted to be the last thing under his eye lids, and remain there”.

I am still in the hospital room. Two nurses undress Marcus`s dead body. His eyes remain open. The nurses have not closed them properly. He seems to be staring at all of us in the room, and at the same time, no one. His lifeless flesh has an odd appearance of being alive and dead at once. I have a terror-like sensation that Marcus`s corpse could wake up at any moment like an exploding bomb. His terrible and light-less look comes from another world, and simultaneously, it seems to be looking at another world. His body seems to be relaxed, and surprisingly, a subtle and soft smile-like expression draws across his face. He has moved from a decreasing radiance to an unsettling mischief; he is finally in peace, at rest. His eyes seem to be inhumanly alive.

Helke`s refusal to stare at Marcus`s dead eyes may have something to do with the fact that his corpse is a trace of a vitality that has already vanished. And such resemblance, with his eyes still opened, cannot be reduced to a pure inanimate object. This strange contrast between aliveness and mortality, the ambiguity of such limit-experience, is too terrifying for Helke to handle in any rational way. Perhaps – deeply affected by Helke`s traumatic reaction- I have written such sentences on the spot: (*Unedited*) “We (*Helke and I*) hoped to reach your eyes on time. You have the eyes of a puppet. You seem like a marionette. But where are the strings?” I am willing to carry on trying to know and learn from the mysterious process of Marcus`s dying, but without the hope of controlling it.

I have walked out of the room. At the entrance to the bathroom there was Helke. We both stared at ourselves in the mirror. A deadly and impersonal impression – profoundly distant and yet intimately close- is imprinted in both our faces. Our radically passive eyes are as cold as Marcus`s corpse. Helped by his

strange passivity, while staring at ourselves in the mirror, we are also changing like a-subjective monsters. The way in which Marcus`s corpse imitates life has no pity. This is the mirror where Marcus looked at himself for the last time. He knew it was the last then. Helke points out that “this is very cold and far,... I do not even feel comfortable in this world,...”. Is it his most intimate horror somehow vibrating in the muscles of Helke`s and my own face? I do not know myself. I do not really know Helke - even less than the day I met her. This is not alienation, but experiencing an impossible and non-human estrangement.

Iban – My eyes are as cold as yours.

(Helke closes her eyes in resignation)

Helke – We have learned too much from this one.

My face is as empty as yours.

Iban – It is in vain to cry or show empathy, is it not?

(Helke and I, now cry desperately)

Helke – I just wanted to blow his ear like he liked,... Put my cheek next to his,... and kiss his thin skin,...

(We embraced)

We comfort each other`s sorrow for not being able to assist him at the precise instant of his death. Helke confesses to me that, at first, when she realized he was dead, she felt viscerally confused, with many feelings of love and hate unbearably trapped in her guts. She also tells me that, before she left the room running asking for help, her hands had become claws and wanted to destroy Marcus`s face and tear out his eyes out. Indeed, she says she could not control her body, as if an external, monstrous force had taken place in her body and made her knees bend down to bring her reckless hands close to Marcus`s face. She is not sure whether she has left the room to call the doctors and nurses or to avoid the frightening embodiment of this horror. She tightens her lips exaggeratedly – seemingly embarrassed with her previous behaviour.

The death of Marcus reverberates as an abject vibration of Helke`s and my own flesh. Marcus has affected and altered us even more profoundly than we think we know. Indeed, his death is inconceivable in a certain way, and escapes all my arduous attempts to study such an event. There may possibly not be a figuration that can substitute the abject attraction of Marcus`s corpse. Such attraction has taken the thinking from me, and it has made it singular and strange through its always exceeding force.

Helke argues that “I feel that I have been taken outside of myself,... I thought I was going mad”. She has experienced the terrible encounter with Marcus`s corpse before any possible constitution of herself – rupturing the time of her own interiority, and thus, making her actual “possessing” of such an encounter impossible. At that impersonal and non-voluntary instant of passion, she has been impelled to a compulsive physical drive of anger and horror. Such abject movement has implied her engagement with Marcus`s death.

Now, Helke and I are crying desperately at the entrance to the bathroom. We seem not to have enough *Kleenex* for the beginning of what may turn out to be a long devastating phase of mourning. However, does not this mourning, affirm -even more violently- the fact that prior to this miserable maintenance of the *self*, there has been indeed the disruptive shock of Marcus`s unauthentic dying. Marcus`s dying has been unanticipated and unavoidable; an impersonal late-night rapture that has burst any illusions of self-containment and presence, and even, privacy itself. Sitting next to Marcus, Helke has lived a life, and died a death, and has been consumed by an abject passion, none of which can be considered properly *hers*’. The outside has affected Helke`s privacy as an experience of intimacy in a way that destroys the very possibility of presence.

5.5 The Funeral And the Weeks After

Now, everything returns to its place. As a matter of fact, today at the funeral, Helke and I seemed to be two people that had never been shocked by

Marcus's dead eyes in the hospital. But such forced forgetfulness, is again, a necessary betrayal of Marcus's death as a passion. Indeed, one of the few things that Helke has categorically said to me at the funeral is that "this is absurd, ... we must carry on with life". I find this comment very revealing in the sense that Helke affirms the obscurity and banality of an event such as dying, which may leave no hope or room for any metaphysical comfort. The way Helke and I experienced Marcus's dying has been horrible, ordinary and banal enough to believe that crossing into death may be both insignificant and non-signifying.

Obviously, she knows I was there and witnessed nakedly the intensity of such an ordinary yet unfamiliar event. This nakedness, this stripping away has to continue flowing, if I want to indicate the intense moment of affect at the instant of Marcus' death. Furthermore, there is no substance, no final nudity beneath all these ethnographic layers. Helke does not want to revisit through vital conversation the home-less home in which her and I once were at the hospital. Her conviction also suggests that as a witness of Marcus's death, she suffered an absurd pain that can never be her own. Indeed, she experienced an event which had sufficient intensity and impersonality to ruin all presence as subject. Marcus could not suffer his own death, but Helke and I could. In such an instant, Helke's body was affected dramatically through the otherness of Marcus, that is, with the fact that, after he died, he was not there any longer.

And the questions left for me are; if Marcus's death was so fleeting, banal and unexpected, and his own identity was excluded from participating in it, then who died? If Marcus was necessarily undressed from his own particularity, as a middle age, junkie, German and white person, then was there a "someone else" that died? Someone other than Marcus? Was death itself inaccessible to Marcus?

5.6 Naming the Other

Anything I write on Marcus is already not enough, and simultaneously too much. Reviewing the ethnographic notes on his death, I cannot help confronting

further my own writing with his actual death. Somehow, his absence has left a trace in the ethnographic material that evades not only identity, but even language itself. The notes I took on Marcus's heroin addiction, while we walked around the park of Humboldtthain, insist on this viscous materiality. What else is there to write when facing the subsistence of such absence, and yet, I cannot stop affirming –ceaselessly– the possibility of aesthetic or humanist representation. Every written excerpt or video image of Marcus I encounter seems to be surrounded by a meaningless and flat magnetic field. There is this irritant trace on all the material on Marcus that refuses to be cleared away or brought to light. The persistence of his absence leaves my senses numbed, in an incomprehensible state of absurdity.

And, I wonder, why should I attempt to leave all these images and writings as they are and wait for the time I am able to say goodbye to Marcus. Perhaps then, I will be able to write about Marcus at some distance from the present condition of shocked immediacy. Yet there is nothing to be embarrassed about in confronting Marcus's death with my own writing in the actual state of shock. Revisiting the notes I took on Marcus, every time I write down the word *Marcus* I become increasingly aware that, through my own note taking, I was already making Marcus an object or an absence long before he died. What is this ethnographic language that attempted to exclude the actual physicality and existence of Marcus by naming it *Marcus*? It is as if any excerpt I re-read on Marcus –beyond the attempt to question a dialectical process of symbolic articulation– would represent precisely the exclusion of Marcus himself. It is obvious that my writing did not kill Marcus, but –on the level of my writing– how many times did I “murder” Marcus by the power of death inherent in my writing of *Marcus*? And how long will I inevitably continue to murder him through writing, and re-writing?

Furthermore, is it not problematic that my own writing of *Marcus* suppresses his own ill body from my discourse? And does not the suppression of Marcus's body make my own discourse more normal, regularized and powerful, no matter how much I problematise and alter its postulates? Such questions still vibrate in my flesh. To a large extent, my writing on Marcus is a violent exercise of making

himself absent from my own writing. Every time I see the word Marcus written on any piece of paper or note, I realize that the condition of writing on Marcus involved extinguishing the presence of his body that was always absent from my writing. Marcus`s death teaches me that, in the level of language, the event of death was inherent in my writing of him – even before he physically died.

However, what I find really disquieting, now that Marcus is dead, is not so much his absence from my writing, but instead the inescapable and material insistence of such absence throughout these lines. Thus, this event of death has not been so much the suppressed element of my writing. I have neither tried to bring this event to light in order to loose the always messy and viscous events of the body.

5.7 The Viscous Materiality

From what I am writing, one could easily conclude that one should drop writing and try out another medium (painting?, filming?) in order to approach this viscous materiality, but I also want to question such an inclination. Indeed, I have represented and signified the avatars of Marcus`s death, but I believe that somehow the materiality of the event subsists in my own writing. By employing a mimetic scribbling, I tried to put my own writing in contact with the force of Marcus`s dying, and I believe that my language is already infected by such corporeal materiality.

When re-reading and (especially when re-viewing the videotapes on Marcus) I am brought into an intimate contact with the material residue in a process of mimesis. This corporeal residue is extremely corrosive, sticky and contagious. Benjamin himself claimed that one could encounter such a “mimetic faculty” opposed to the movement of signification not just in the images but also in language. This ceaseless and agitating contacts in relation to the ethnographic material cannot be accounted or reduced to the canons of representation. I do not know whether I am inside or outside of these video images, whether I can locate my own body or not away from this viscous materiality.

What is this viscous quality, leaking out of the video images and textual marks, this extreme and suffocating touch that tends to ruin my attempt to reflect? Sometimes while viewing the video images, they are nerve-racking by now. Precisely, the confrontation with the images and expressive scribbling on Marcus affects me to the extent that its messy materiality extinguishes my body's receptiveness with an extreme and immediate intimacy. Thus, I am drawn into a Heraclitan flux; a weird corporeal state, fluid and indeterminate, where all fixed points of signification, subjectivity and stabilizing identification are completely blurred.

Nevertheless, I am aware that there is no limit in the exercise of writing, meaning writing as a practice of idealization. Certainly, I could always move up to a higher level and by creating a self reflexive meta-language incorporate such un-signifying materiality into my discourse. A writer can always move up to a higher level and bring to light that which remained obscure and unsettling. Why not just acknowledge that no matter how one may formally narrate or idealize events such as Helke's collapse or Marcus's death, there is this viscous materiality that threatens any discursive reduction of the event? Furthermore, as an ethnographer, what I should face is the fact that all this residual materiality I am left with –after the death of Marcus itself- does not fully correspond to what actually and physically happened either. From a hyper-cynical perspective, limit-experiences such as the already discussed self-abandonment of Helke in the hospital corridor may be another avatar of a social discourse that allows and teaches individuals to abandon themselves in extreme situations.

5.8 Whom Does Death Belong to?

Why not let myself sleep peacefully, instead of meeting insomnia every day after mid-night and attempt to re-interpret and reduce all the ethnographic material through a discourse that will reveal and explain everything that happened? I decide to give up and abandon this ceaseless passion to arrive at a certain conclusion, to

bring everything that happened into the light via analysis. Moreover, I am beginning to understand that there is nothing to be revealed from the notes; even though the notes have an unsettling and fatal resemblance to what seemingly happened to Helke, Marcus and I. The actual dying of Marcus, as an absurd event, did not probably have anything to reveal. Thus, what is the point of attempting to reflect comprehensibly on Marcus`s death, when the event itself may belong to the realm of the absurd?



Photo 7: An empty room at the basement of the Hospital.

I refuse to prefer the certainty of the death of *Marcus* to the actual impossibility of Marcus`s death. It would be an ethnographic imposture, if I would pick up each page full of writing from my ethnographic notes and attempt to lay these pieces to rest, simply categorize them and make ethnographic objects, museum artifacts or tombs out of them. Could there be anything more cruel, narcissistic and nihilistic than idealizing and investing Marcus`s death in an authentic, personal and meaningful way? Would it not be a miserable and treacherous secret path to make Marcus`s death belong to him, or to Helke, or to myself, in order to preserve the meaning of the world and strengthen the *self* of the anthropologist? This problem brings to mind Foucault`s (1980b) and Deleuze`s and

Guattari's evocation that within every imposition of power lurk *lines of flight* (Deleuze and Guattari 1983) that can potentially resist or overturn its configuration. From this sensitivity, the stratification of power attempts to put an order, to regularize and pacify everything, but it cannot control its own inherent violent arbitrariness.

One of the most cruel ethnographic teachings has been Helke's. Her affirmation of life, even at the moment of the death of her partner, has avoided any meaningful form -tragic, beautiful or sublime- of accounting Marcus's death. At the event of Marcus's death, Helke has taught me not to worship death and its monuments, and existentially not to get involved in an ennobling suffering, but to embody the heightened affectivity that is to live with the dying. Writing on Marcus's death, I cannot pretend to ignore the fact that my writing -no matter how embodied, automatic and immediate- was not equivalent to the simple and cruel event of his dying, to the very convulsion of the experience.

6 - Embodied Power Relations in a Wine Club

The visual is essentially pornographic.

Signatures of the Visible. F. Jameson (1993)

I used to live in a Room Full of Mirrors,
All I could see was me
Then I take my spirit and I smash my mirrors
And now the whole world is here for me to see
Now I am searching for my love to be.

A broken glass was solving my brain
Cut and screaming crowding in my head
A broken glass was loud in my brain
It used to fall on my dreams and cut me in my bed
It used to fall on my dreams and cut me in my bed
I say making love was strange in my bed.

Room full of Mirrors. Jimi Hendrix. (1969)

6.1 Marcel Proust's Curiosity

Gilles Deleuze, in an unconventional analysis of Marcel Proust's *Sodome and Gomorre* (2002), has extracted a theory of sexuality that is irreducible to the binary code of sexual oppositions. Deleuze discerns three degrees of intensity that coexist in bourgeoisie society.

We are statistical or molarly heterosexual, but personally homosexual, without knowing it or being fully aware of it, and finally we are trans-sexual in an elemental, molecular sense (Deleuze and Guattari 1983: 70).

These levels are not equally separated entities, but rather each regime constitutes a sequence that happens to be traversed by forces moving in both directions.

Proust's narrator begins assuming that individuals – including the readers – are heterosexual, yet the initiation into unknown pleasures leads him to the realization that perhaps nobody is. The exploration of a microscopic world of obscure pleasures makes him believe that power relations in bourgeoisie society

work the following way: selecting and arranging the singular and anarchic molecular sexuality, integrating those to laws of morality and the signifier, and finally organizing them hierarchically – according to a statistical norm. These operations enable the articulation of heterosexuality as the majority standard. Along these lines, the norm of heterosexuality demands the adoption of a sexual identity in terms of a binary code, yet the fact that such identity cannot be inwardly prescribed leaves the subject split between an outward appearance and an inner “world”.

The thought provoking complexity of Deleuze’s reading of Proust (1972) lays precisely in the middle level, where a variety of ambiguous desires are played out. This is the realm of intensity where the sexual identity of an individual is traversed by opposite forces. If in one direction the forces fix and territorialize the individual in terms of an ideal heterosexuality, in the other there are homosexual forces that refuse guilt and intensify points of resistance which escape the heterosexual norm. In other words, this is the crucial level at which the individual - by paying the price of secrecy, torment and guilt- is expected to conform to a certain image or norm. Yet the inevitable failure to completely fulfil such a norm remains as an irrefutable condition.

From these reflections Gilles Deleuze deduces that homosexual desire is stigmatized as a guilty secret by heterosexual normality. However, he claims that this patriarchal and biblical misfortune reveals a deeper truth, in the sense that this secret is shared by everybody in that *all desire is homosexual*. Revealingly, Deleuze argues that the guilt Proust relates to homosexuality is experienced socially rather than psychologically. In fact, Proust’s remarkable black humour in the novel unleashes, underneath the social sanction and guilt, the radical innocence and infra-personal desires of the third level.

The third regime that Proust explores is a bizarre vegetal sexuality or trans-sexuality. In this trans-sexual sphere of intensities compounded by multiplicities, becomings and a-subjective singularities, Proust locates an initial hermaphroditism;

as it occurs in certain plants, the male and female partial organs are both present, yet separated in the same individual. What is revolutionary of such hermaphroditism, is

not the property of a now-lost animal totality, but the actual partitioning of the two sexes in one and the same plant (Deleuze 1972:10).

Proust's discovery of this non-human sexuality or hermaphroditism can be contrasted with Freud's familiar hypotheses of bisexuality (1949), which implies original logos as an organism. Crucially, if the Lacanian (1989: 1998) or Freudian alternative between an Imaginary illusion of wholeness and a Symbolic law of difference (1949) takes place via castration, this hermaphroditism does not refer back to a lost unity. In fact, the hermaphrodite cannot be characterized as a totality precisely because it lacks nothing.

Gilles Deleuze (1983) teaches us that the hermaphrodite contains different sexes within itself, as much as it embodies the huge distances that separate and isolate these sexes. These partial sexes or objects are supposed to be micro-organs that remain open to make contact or communicate with other micro-organs outside. The fact that these partial sexes cannot operate by themselves does not imply necessarily that they have to refer back to a lost unity, that is, to a closure or totality of which they would be parts.

In the following pages, I will be analysing desiring events in the night-life of a particular Weinerei (Wine Club) in Mitte. In specific situations, I will be engaging the forms in which these three levels of intensities are mobilized. Such an ethnographic explanation suggests that it may be insufficient to give an account of the hegemonic history of oppressive representations, and that, it may be similarly relevant to discover and engage with other bizarre pleasures, collective aberrant desires and perhaps even passionate abjections.

At the Weinerei, there is an implicit scepticism toward two widespread sexual discourses in German society taking place. On the one hand, toward left-wing Freudian visions of personal and social liberation through the lifting of repression,

and on the other hand, the conservative position that desire must always be repressed because it is inherently disruptive. The case study of the Weinerei disguises these two positions by underlining that they are mirror images of each other. In fact, they both posit a soul, an original human essence –whether liberating or dangerous- and ignore the shady complicity that contaminates desire with the regulation and repression of desire. Humanist visions of unlimited freedom and conservative visions of sin both strive to reject monstrosity, to deny the violent ambivalence of bodily passions. It is in this sense that harmonious utopian projections and anxious defences of the normative status quo share the panic in the face of excesses of the flesh. Impossibly, these two discursive domains attempt to transcend the anxiety and insecurity implicit in the state of being a body.

6.2 The Alluring Bodies of the Club

Attractive men and women bodies seat around the bar of the Weinerei (Wine Club). On the weekly Tuesday and Thursday nights, often the subtly aggressive and abject postures of Gabi, Ianna, Roger, Nathalie and Holger produce pleasure and anxiety on the visitors. In these nocturnal feasts, wine is a necessary motor for the combination of sexual tension and seducing play. The most important feature of these sorts of alternative Wine Clubs is to introduce one mark in a fish glass when you enter the club, and to deposit voluntarily, in a huge crystal glass, the amount of money that one deliberately decides to give when leaving.

Surprisingly, it must be argued that most of the regulars coming to the Wine Club do actually pay –more or less generously- when living. Nevertheless, Roger and Nathalie do keep a –relatively thorough- eye to make sure that visitors do not “forget” paying. Roger has often impressed me in his intuition knowing when a departing consumer is performing or not drunken forgetfulness in the mist of wine’s reverie.



Photo 8: The Wine House after midnight.

At the spectacle of the Weinerei, Ianna, Gabi and Holger's consumption of highly eroticised items compound a commodity fetishism that is not grounded in repression; rather, it is directly multiplied and affirmed by artificial means. As expressed by Ianna, "The more I consume, the more I want". Considering the world of abject desires and alcoholic excesses in the Weinerei, I am inclined to address this devouring need as a function of excess and extravagance, rather than a consequence of deficiency. The way in which Gabi, Ianna and Holger approach pornography is radically de-sublimating. They seem to engage with porn in order to make a joke of the pretensions of aesthetic distance and allegedly redeeming social values. Indeed, such a cruel appetite for porn exceeds the usual boundaries assigned to mass entertainment, by hyperbolizing and literalizing what are supposed to be deferred satisfactions of fantasy. They are not content to leave Claudia, Noel and I with vague images, but excitedly seek to incise those aberrant images in our very flesh. Claudia often argues that Holger's porn attitude brings her satiation and fulfilment, and yet at the same time, exacerbates and exasperates her least accepted desires, such as to be raped by him. In Claudia's case, between stimuli and response, a strange space is not only hollowed out but also overloaded by attraction to the point of aberrant and unbearable "turn on-s".

Two streets down the road from Brunnenstrasse, there are multiple commercial sex-clubs. Completely uninterested in attacking or praising the oppressive sexual representations in the sex clubs around Torstrasse, the bodies of Ianna, Gabi and Holger seem to transversally *communicate* with the pornographic fantasies of these very sex-clubs in an aberrant way. At the Weinerei, Gabi has argued that “I am somehow pornographic... I enjoy many instances of pornography... not so much the commercialized pornography... I can’t stand this moralistic approach to sexuality that attempts to purify sexual pleasure from piss, whips, anal penetration”. In another interview, she argued that sexual desire is “like war... it is not to think that sex is peaceful or egalitarian... It is stupid to hope for self-realization through sexual satisfaction. There cannot be such satisfaction in war“. Gabi’s usually direct and unpretentious commentaries always insist in the fact that there is no sexuality free of power and oppression, no matter how much the normalizing sexual powers may attempt to regulate such desiring experiences.

The ephemeral and often alcohol intoxicated one night sexual stands that emerge at the Weinerei usually do not provide any sort of sexual liberation. The sexual representations that become unveiled during the intoxicating long hours of the night are trapped in a pool of ambivalence from which one can rarely escape. As Claudia has claimed, “after having fucked Holger I felt satisfied as much as I felt frustrated... I had had sex with him, and knew I was being manipulated... however I really felt turned on the next time I returned to the Weinerei when looking at Holger”. This pornographic ambivalence questions radically the societal primacy of the binary gender norm. Claudia’s sexuality does not promise any sort of liberation, but joins her body with the multiplying and reflecting passions of denial, degradation and abjection. It is often the case that in the Weinerei the complicity between power and sexuality, between perversion and the norm is made obscenely overt.

Noel argues that his desire for Gabi is always “conditioned by a certain aggression“. Noel cannot feel attracted by Gabi’s apparent indifference without this fatal ambivalence, this “aggression”. Ideally, he wants Gabi to surrogate her

arrogance and beg Noel to sleep with him. He wants Gabi to accomplish this “utopia”, or “fascist baby” in Noel’s own words that will hardly take place. This “aggression” or drive to possess, a necessary ingredient of Noel’s sexual excitement, as it occurs with sexual, moral or political idealizations, can be considered to be an imposition of power. However, Noel acknowledges that even on the hypothetical supposition that Gabi would fulfil his sexual “idealization” exactly, he would not be satisfied for his ambivalent desire and aggression required the rupturing of the “fascist baby” or “utopia” and not its maintenance. What I find disquieting about Claudia, Noel, Gabi and the other regulars at the bar is their passionate attack on the very dominant structures they embody. For instance, Holger’s muscular and forcefully empowering bodily posture is hyperbolically blown up to abject and somewhat exaggerated proportions. Holger’s body makes Claudia feel simultaneously alienated and involved, in a suffocating way that pushes both positions to a breaking point.

Subtle and aberrant degradation is simultaneously the source and the unreachable goal of the images being reflected in the mirrors of the Weinerei walls. The reflected image of Gabi sitting on a bar stool in an erect fashion brings images of Nathalie serving the wine; investing all her muscular force. And the image of Nathalie encounters the image of Claudia, nervous and paralyzed, waiting with an empty glass between Holger and Nathalie. One image brings another image, and so on. This contagious phenomenon does not take place in a linear way but in the nebulous detours of perverse sexuality. These endless reflections in the mirrors are a play of simulacra that one can quickly acknowledge.

Roger argues that the mirrors of the Weinerei “reflect absolutely everything there is to reflect from each of us”. Indeed, such is the irreverent imitation of the life of our bodies that mirrors articulate, that -according to Roger- the difference “between life and reflection is completely exhausted,... if you look at ourselves in the mirrors careful enough, you will realize that the reflections in the mirrors have their own life, as if there were none of us left to imitate”. Such is the sexual force of looking at each other in the Weinerei, that our bodies seem to have been bathed in a

suffocating heat, making everything float on the surface. In this semi-dark lighting, everything turns into image, and nothing seems to be left behind the surface of our bodies. The implication of the mirrors, as a play of simulacra is such that I cannot pretend to write about Ianna's and other regulars bodies beyond their appearance as *queer* images; precisely as images that contain no secret messages to be revealed; images that are not phenomenological intuitions.

Roger argues that "if you hang out long enough at the Weinerei, you do not know if the images of our bodies reflected in the mirrors are our own". The reflected image of Ianna in the mirrors also seems "unreal" to Roger as if such an image did not belong to Ianna's physical body standing near the bar. From this, one should not imply that the image of Ianna and the others reflected in the mirrors of the Weinerei are unimportant, since such reflections carry a more than present claustrophobic weight and density.

The smoky heat that wraps our bodies in the dark is such that the often abject images reflected in the mirrors seem to absorb ceaselessly all this oppressive energy. According to Nathalie, a robust lesbian, everything in the Weinerei is confined and enclosed. The multiplying images of Ianna I see in one mirror and surprisingly encounter in another one seem to absorb the air of the Weinerei with no compassion. Noel has assured me in an interview that "once you are involved in a net at the Weinerei, you cannot escape from it". I am also entangled in these ambivalent nets of desire, where there is no possibility to pursue the sublime, neither to escape from the amorous passions of wine.

The mirrors of the Weinerei are like caves of reflections that trap the gaze of the regulars. Perhaps, as Ianna suggested, the images reflected in the mirror do not reflect anything, but only demand to be looked at. In this sense, the images of our bodies reflected in the mirrors may not be so many simulations, but instances of seduction. The discreetly sexualized images of Ianna, Holger and Gabi in the mirrors are often so excessively superficial and visible that they generate an intensive physical force. Claudia's gaze is arrested by the reflected image of a dominant

looking Holger; Noel's gaze is captured by Gabi's sacrificial mirroring; and my gaze is arrested indiscriminately by Ianna and Holger's reflections. Their reflections in the mirrors do not have anything to show or describe, but they intensely captivate our gazes. According to Gabi, her own posture at the bar is "phallic and static". This is unsettling. Gabi's excessively overt fetishist leather and see-through clothing and her perversely passive positioning disrupt any possibility for a coherent discourse. I am not ready for this yet.

6.3 Cheap Thrills

The Wine House can be aligned with the large drinking places that Kracauer (1998) described during the Weimar Republic. Apart from Kracauer's connection of the sentimentality of lost paradises in these drinking clubs with the monotony of the hotel lobby, these bars resonate with the *Weinerei* in "that it is a facade that hides nothing behind it, that it does not release any depth but rather it merely feigns to do so." (Frisby 1988:170). Revealingly, the night life of the *Weinerei* evokes the experimental world of cabarets during Berlin's golden twenties. And even more especially, it evokes venues where sexual liberation and hybrid sexed bodies were exhibited: strip tease shows, erotic dances (most famously by American Josephine Baker), the transvestite balls and the presence of homosexuality. During this decade of cultural and political turmoil

Liberation and experimentation went hand in hand with a sense of disquiet, and disgust that informs much of the artistic creation of the period, notably the painting of famous male artists" Max Beckmann, George Grosz and Otto Dix) (Ladd 1997: 111)

In this spacious room full of mirrors and a penetrating smell of wine, the hierarchical relation between gaze and the field of vision is turned upside down. At the cost of being anti-phenomenological, to-be looked-at-ness cannot be defined as a complement of an intentional act of looking. If one is to understand the role of vision in the *Weinerei*, one should give up the traditional model of vision as

appropriation. Often, in the Weinerei everything seems to be happening in terms of a primordial passivity.

For instance, one must keep in mind the possibility that Gabi is not objectified as such because she is subjected to Noel's allegedly dominant gaze; it may be the case that rather her provocatively stylized unconscious incites Noel's gaze. The more Noel looks at Gabi or Claudia stares at Holger, the more they are seduced, yet simultaneously, the more they are separated and consumed by this dispossession. Noel, oscillating between humiliation and excitement, is an exemplary figure of subjectivation in the Weinerei because he is often petrified by the boundless and unfulfilled desire for Gabi.



Photo 9: Nymph with Salmon.(2000). A painting by Roger inspired in the nights of the Wine House.

When doing fieldwork in the Weinerei, everything seems to be defined by an ambivalent passivity. Gabi's body is not made appealing to Noel's gaze so much because she is being subjected to his dominant gaze, but instead, it is rather her body, her material unconscious that provocatively -stylized as a "phallic" figure- turns Noel on. Thus, Noel is seduced by Gabi's sublime indifference and apparent self-containment. Gabi's "marvellous" erotic body attracts Noel's gaze as much as it attracts my own, perhaps because it does not have the necessity to be looked at. Precisely, it may be Gabi's strategic indifference and lack of desire that turns Noel and my own desire on.

Her multiplying image on the Weinerei walls escapes any attempt from Noel or I to appropriate her by our act of seeing. Her reflected abject body fascinates Noel's gaze beyond itself. Neither Noel nor I can enter Gabi's "marvellous" and "terrible" body. Noel can only feel fascinated and masturbate alone at home "surrounded by all these imagined reflections of Gabi". His attraction for Gabi is often removed from concrete possession; it is as fleeing and impalpable as the reflections of Gabi in the Weinerei mirrors. Noel feels helpless, full of lust, entangled by all these reflections of Gabi.

"The way I feel about Gabi is probably pornographic... I love to watch her getting into an affair and I wish I could watch her have sex with one of her one night stands,... my desire for her is limitless,... it is strange, because I will not have the chance to have sex with her,... I have to wait for my chance ...I had my night with her, but wanted more... I cannot be satisfied with Gabi... and the closer I watch her in the Weinerei, the more I feel pushed back... and I love to feel this empty strangeness". The more Noel looks at Gabi's reflections, the more he is fascinated, but –simultaneously- also separated from what he is looking at. Indeed, the "empty strangeness" Noel refers to indicates the dispossession he is bound to experience.

This is quite a common experience for many regulars in the Weinerei. The abject and pornographic scribbling on the walls of the bathrooms are indeed ruinous and vain efforts to bridge the gap inherent in the act of looking in order to undo the passivity of such erotic voyeurism. The bathroom scribbling is in this sense a trace of the onlooker's isolation, physical detachment and powerlessness. Noel himself has often drawn Gabi's body as a "phallus". Noel's sexual fascination and endless excitement for Gabi allows him neither to remain aesthetically separate nor absorbed and fascinated in the manner of commodity fetishism. This double disruption of positioning is a radical passivity that ruins any possibility of intentionally appropriating what one is seeing.

Noel himself defines his desire for Gabi as “pornographic” in the sense that his appetite for Gabi’s abject corporeality can never be fulfilled. Once started, Noel talks about his fascination with Gabi incessantly: “I know that she will probably reject my gaze next time when I come back to the Weinerei... but somehow the humiliation of feeling rejected is part of my lust for her”. For Noel, the oscillation between humiliation and excitement are integral to his sexual passion for Gabi. All the images and verbal commentary Noel writes crudely on the urinal walls of the Weinerei reflect his effort to bridge the distance inherent in his gaze. Yet, those inscriptions serve only to accentuate his isolation.

The fantasy of self-realization through sexual satisfaction continually defended by sex radicals on mainstream German television finds its mirror in the fantasy of eroticism free of power and oppression purveyed by the anti-pornography movement. The night life of the Weinerei evokes the idea that sexual desire is unavoidably anti-egalitarian and does not really offer any sort of redemption. As indicated, the sexual tensions taking place are caught, reflected and multiplied, in an abyss of ambivalence from which there is helpless hope to escape. Moreover, the Weinerei subjects simultaneously arouse and frustrate the demands of pornographic fantasy, invoking the idea that one cannot totally satisfy power, violence and degradation. From these reflections, one can extract the irony that idealization may be a source of aggression, an imposition of power per excellence.

The sexual embodiments of the Weinerei regulars imply hybrid sexualities that are normative as much as they are potentially transgressing. Precisely, such sexual ambivalence freezes any attempt to practice a mere dominant sadistic or sanctioning look onto others, as much as it neutralizes the subversive exhibitionism of Gabi, Ianna and Holger, especially from becoming absorbed as mere images. There is no onlooker that can define his or her self through the act of looking. Indeed, how could my own ethnographic look attempt to keep a distance from the passionate rings of fire in the Weinerei? How could I take the road of negativity in a place where there is nothing to negate, but only drink?

6.4 Masculine Costs

Abjection (Kristeva 1982) must be read doubly, both as victimization by power and as an irreverent rupturing of power. Abjection (Kristeva 1982) is an impossible, radically inauthentic position, yet in the Weinerei, it is often scandalously affirmed against the norms of narrative and identification that alone have the authority to justify and legitimate it. As it will be shown, it is from the very heart of domination that Noel is drawn into debasement and ecstasy. Noel's "corporetics" (Pinney 2001) of pain and humiliation mark the exact point at which power confronts and traverses his body.

In the light of Nathalie's drive toward abjection, dominant masculinity is de-privileged and denaturalized: in fact, it is displayed as a reactive consolation of spectacle, or as a counter-production of (disavowed but all the more ubiquitous) erotic desire. Thus, virility turns out to be an imposture, a mere simulation that imposes itself upon the flesh and insinuates the burden of shame onto others (like that which happened to Holger). Nathalie, Holger, Gabi and the others transgress the systematic misrecognition of a certain formation of dominant masculinity based on overlooking the pull of seduction, bracketing the passion and excitement accompanying identification and forgetting the ontological instability of spectacle.

The tension of desires between Nathalie and Holger, as well as Noel's sexual confessions, indicate that in the Weinerei it is only at the price of self-laceration that, for instance, a "man" or "woman" gains access to the authority and stability of a unified self. Perhaps, this is the reason why their moves are doubled and negated by defensive rituals of denial, disavowal and betrayal. Curiously, for these subjects, abjection cannot be avoided. Moreover, it becomes the price to be paid for "masculinity" (a strange thing!), as an ascesis of desire whose ultimate reward is virile mastery and a stabilized sense of self.

Interestingly, one perceives a certain sexual construction in the act of looking at other bodies turned into images. However, such a hybrid process, in which even

Claudia is involved in a complicit manner, is not so much based on the notion of a disembodied and self-contained corporeality. Rather, Noel and Claudia's desire for Gabi and Holger articulate a hybrid configuration of desire in which the establishment of the erotic aura and its destruction are inseparable. Thus, the erotic idealizations of Noel and Claudia in relation to Gabi and Holger –who are often subtly stereotypical, kitsch and sexualized- cannot be separated from the exclusion and abjection they experience.

The subtly erotic clothing of Ianna and Gabi are subtly inspired by references to mainstream erotic clothing. Ianna adds "... the clothes Gabi and I wear are made to satisfy male fantasies... but I do not care... I think Gabi may not even be aware of it..." Nathalie's male erotic clothing and posture belongs also to a male image taken from mainstream masculine images and which is then imprinted on her own flesh. Nathalie, together with Gabi and Ianna, seems to objectify herself by branding her body with the violence of the binary mainstream norm, only in order to betray it and explore its subjugated anarchism through abjection and perversion.

In this sense, their overt exhibitionism and subtle self demystification are two inseparable faces of the same passionate coin. It is like the Benjaminian commodity that produces and provokes desire as much as it exhausts it. Somehow, their bodies branded by images match the perfect radiation of their erotic aura with the blankness and emptiness of them as fleshed images. There is in the sexual production of the Weinerei a certain point at which desire and erotic force gives way to perverse ambivalences that cannot be reduced into a rational discourse.

Here, the artificial construction of masculinity and femininity of the binary gender code is made overt, in the sense that it is neither an anatomical condition nor a wholly conscious and stable activity. It is by dragging the masculine images from the mainstream heterosexual culture, when Gabi and Holger –for instance- burn and imprint their own flesh into the demands of this patriarchal regime. Gabi herself asserts that she "*prostitutes*" herself when she dresses up to come to the Weinerei. However, interestingly, she seems to suggest that it is not any sort of

authentic self that she prostitutes, but rather the stereotypical female images she picks up from the publicity of magazines such as *Vogue* and *Cosmopolitan*.

Gabi mobilizes Noel's male heterosexual fantasy –and those of many other regulars- at the *Weinerei*, making her own body a site of idealized mainstream sexual images. In fact, her long, slim, sexy and beautiful body as well as her highly refined facial traces seem to be shaped by a certain heterosexual canon of femininity. Gabi, who enjoys talking about her sexual attraction as well as its artificial construction, has claimed that “I cannot stand those who always criticise the people who do surgery to change their image,... even the people who defend their so called “natural beauty” do look in a certain way because they shape their physical appearance in a certain way,...”. She argues further that “I really believe that the way my body looks corresponds to a certain canon of attractiveness of the mainstream, ... which is a body that ten years ago went through an anorexic process,... one has to pay the price to look beautiful,... even if one wants to look in a counter-mainstream form, throughout the years one has to endure certain suffering to look in that way,...”.

Gabi's own bodily trajectory suggests that what seems to be one's corporeal fate and will, is more often the result of a long process of a series of lived events throughout the years. For instance, Gabi's own obsessive fascination with high international models has been going on since her childhood, and she willingly accepts that the metamorphosis that her body has experienced throughout the years –not without pain- has a direct relation to the simulation of certain heterosexual images. Gabi herself, as a teenager, attempting to initiate a career as a model, had been sexually abused by one of her managers which ruined her career. It is interesting to observe the traces of her gender development: one can grasp the traces that enable us to see how Gabi has developed from being a benign, obedient and fully stereotypical teenage model to become a thirty year old woman enjoying and mobilizing the abjection of the male dominant regime that continues to be imprinted in her own flesh yet explored differently.

Gabi's own personal confessions re-telling the story of how she stopped eating at the age of thirteen without being aware of it suggest that her body, in a strange unconscious form, was making certain mainstream model images her own, being endowed thus with certain power and prestige. Similarly, Noel also talks about his own traumatic experiences as a child soccer player when the coach and the physically strongest player of the team referred to him as a "wimp", and as a "weak" football player for apparently he fell easily. Noel was influenced by such terms as a child, that the energetic and sexual investments of his body started developing to engender a certain maleness that would bring back some kind of prestige and power.

He, melancholically, invokes the times of misery when his body was the body of a child at the time when the bodies of his colleagues had started to develop pubic hair. This self-undermining complex made him take up swimming, and he even started to practice body building secretly, almost as a form of self-punishment. Noel's rituals of subjection were not just processes of ideological misrecognitions. Perhaps more importantly, these lacerations involved actual cravings of the flesh.

Another revealing case is Holger's. He states that he grew up with a "hippy" mother who did not allow him to show any sort of "masculine" behaviour, in the sense that all his supposedly aggressive and dominant drives were highly sanctioned and penalized by his strictly moralizing mother. The impossibility of developing and celebrating masculinity in the form that many of his male friends were sharing over time produced a hate and anger not only toward his mother but also toward all women in general. When Holger became eighteen, he joined the military forces and pursued a career to become "a full man". According to Holger, for him to become a full soldier was "a physical thing, a thing of potency". Holger's narration suggests that the notion of becoming a military subject or a phallo-centric body had more to do with a literal investment of his body than a certain mode of representation.

The intimate confessions of Noel, Gabi and Holger reaffirm the idea that the structures of identification and identity, of the Lacanian Imaginary and the Symbolic, directly and violently affect and brand the flesh. For instance, Noel

himself refers to Gabi's body as "untouchable image", which gives way to his own "arduous" masturbation when returning home quite drunk. Indeed, the artificial ideality of Gabi as an "untouchable" image gives way to the endless capacity to endure the agitation of living flesh. In the Weinerei power relations tend not to be just the result of certain projections, but instead a field of forces corporeally assayed and operated on the flesh. This is the kind of process by which Noel and Holger become sexed bodies.

Noel becomes "male" only through the process of looking at Gabi, as a subjection and passion of his own body; and Holger passively and physically manifests a dominant masculinity, by –seldom and secretly- enduring being "fucked by Roger". My own notes are full of excerpts commenting on the never ending gestures, embraces and friendly dancing, joking and fighting among Holger, Roger, and Nathalie, constituting challenging rituals in which they interact physically and touch one another, often flirting with the border between friends and lovers. The challenge or the provocation has often to do with not wanting to be seen as a "fairy", "weak" or "effeminate".

Due to her physical strength, it is often Nathalie who imposes her own superior aggressive "masculinity" –in her own words- in such interplays. Nathalie usually attempts to torment and humiliate Holger by mocking the lack of physical force in his prominent biceps and muscles, which –paradoxically, incites Holger's sexual appetite toward Roger's "precious ass". It seems to me that much of this interplay of bodies is the fuel for the transmission and production of masculine sexuality. Perhaps, these rough grounds of domination and submission are the rough terrain where the most idealized images are grown.

6.5 Impossible Passions

There is a nightmarish and painful process at the heart of Holger's production of masculinity. Somehow, Holger must suffer Nathalie's humiliating comments and her grabbing of his neck, which is a ritualized physical subjugation,

in order to become a “full man”. Late at night, Nathalie often holds and presses Holger’s neck, displaying her physical superiority. She tells him – in a basely humorous tone- “You are my dog” in front of the other regulars around the Bar. Many of these other (drunken) regulars then burst into laughter. Thus, Nathalie imposes a certain violence on Holger’s body, and Holger experiences it as an aggression. It seems to me that this violence coming from Nathalie is a necessary condition for Holger to internalize and actively assume it. Somehow, it is only through self-laceration that Holger attempts to gain a certain stable and unified self.

This is precisely the reason why, Holger gets sexually turned on by Roger and searches a ritual of betrayal by getting obsessed with his “precious ass”, as a self punishment through which he will find absolution from any further feeling of frustration or punishment. Indeed, Holger does not avoid abjection, but instead turns it into the price to be paid in the quest for virile mastery and a stabilized sense of the self. Strangely, Holger has to go through Nathalie’s tunnels of vulnerability and submission in order to accede to phallic power. Furthermore, I would also argue that Nathalie, by the verbal abhorrence and physical suppression of her own prominent breasts also suggests that an invulnerable sexed body is purchased at the cost of physical resistance.

In return for Holger and Nathalie’s self-punishments, the possibility of giving free reign to passion collapses. They both somehow have subjected their wills to a violent and impersonal discipline. They both need to negate their own desires by aggressively identifying with a masculine phallic order. Holger wears leather clothes which enmesh the figure of the delinquent and the authority of the law into a bizarre hybrid. Interestingly, Holger’s homosexuality becomes complicit with the heterosexual and dominant masculinity he ceaselessly praises. Holger sits statically on the bar stool, wearing his leather clothes and maintaining a certain male dominant posture which displays an irresistible sexual turn on for Claudia.

The refusal of passion undertaken by Nathalie and Holger, their authoritative and excessive self-possession has put my own writing in contact with the

archaeology of the socially constituted and sanctioned masculinity. Holger and Nathalie's insistence on their not being "weak", "effeminate" and "fairy" is probably not a movement implicit in homosexuality. More precisely, it may be normative process enacted also in masculine rites of passage, in the psychoanalytic male and heterosexual formation, and probably in teleological narrative in general. They are, briefly, forms of domination –or sexual stereotypes- implicated in the mechanisms of social control.

For instance, in the case of Holger, one could say that his homoerotic idealizations project a phallic norm, and that, simultaneously, his own unstable homosexual passion toward Roger disrupts this phallic norm. This is perhaps a resisting positioning in the sense that Nathalie, Holger, Noel and Roger try to keep separate "eros from logos" -as stated by Rogers- perversely to affirm their inseparability. Desire seems to be split in two against itself. The more one tries to rationalize its radically ambivalent links, the more the supposed masculine virility may face the risk of being seduced into vulnerability.

6.6 Nathalie and the Shadows

The main reason why I have deliberately ignored what was going on in the daily lives of these particular individuals in the Weinerei, in so called "society", is precisely because I came to view the Weinerei as urban society's hyperbolic allegory for it; and revealingly, this made explicit many of its internal paradoxes. Everything in the hellish atmosphere of the Weinerei was somewhat embattled, restricted and claustrophobically closed off. It seems as if, in the Weinerei, the microcosms of the civilian's discipline and dominant rationality are to be undone and vanished in implosion. At times, one faced the scary thought that perhaps the spectres of our daily lives may be more tightly fenced and claustrophobic than one may tend to think.

The private sexual situations of Noel, Claudia, Ianna, Gabi, Holger, Nathalie, Roger and my own are in contact with the burdens of shame, complicity and

victimization, to the extent that the most unspoken and non-utopian particular and singular drives unveil a certain non-utopian form of resistance by being endlessly intoxicated by wine and engaging secret pleasures and abjections. I have stated that the reflecting mirrors in the Weinerei are crucial for such a play of seduction and perversion. Nevertheless, I would also add that the presence of our own shadows fleeing through the walls and the mirrors is no less significant in this sense.

Roger has pointed out to me another important dimension: “the shadows are also important, since after 2:00 a.m., when people are starting to be quite drunk, the shadows give you a sense of being your doubles...” Nathalie picks up the arguments and comments further, “doubles in the sense that they feel like you don’t know them, you don’t know what they are up to...” Yet, these shadows, in another sense, reflect our own bodies as lightless volumes. It is this theme of duality that the shadows –as alterities- incorporate into the night in the sense that the overflowing potential messages of our shadows seem to contradict or put into question our own apparent behaviour. It is the dim light of the candle universe at the Weinerei that produces voluminous and indeterminate figures of our bodies.

These shadows are somehow extensions of our bodies; indeed, they are not just extensions “since there seems to be more going on” says Roger pointing to my own shadow. The overflowing excess and ambivalent allure that Roger is indicating moves beyond what I may be experiencing. In fact, I would like to argue that my own ethnographic activity may have more to do with emphatically engaging with the shadows of the experience of the ethnographic subjects than bringing these experiences to light. This anti-historicist writing pursues paying special attention to the specificity of the singular in order to resist constructing an over-arching theoretical framework that enables the total signification and comprehension of the ethnographic material.

Indeed, through a corporeal ethnography –sometimes oscillating with an allegorical ethnography- I am paying special attention to the sensual and corporeal experience of particular subjects, stressing several absurd, unaccountable, banal and

impossible myriad instances of life. This way of writing, this return to the pre-Enlightenment shadows of the German tradition- is an ethnographic resistance that allows me to claim –again- that in the Weinerei neither of us may be of our own; which suggests that the bodily world may not be a readily available text to read. In the Weinerei, the real is not so much as it is re-inscribed in terms of a radical epistemological shift; the real is no longer what is referred to, but what suffers and is transformed.

7 - Participating On The Fuck Parade

7.1 Generalizations and Monstrous Hybrids

When partaking in extraordinary events such as the Love Parade or the Fuck Parade, one can hardly come out with anything more general than a series of torn photographs, or a photomontage of fragmentary portraits. According to my experiences in these two events, their participants, immersed in a field of desires and irreducible ambiguities, often tended to move in incoherent and non-teleological forms. Moreover, at such events the relation between those taking part seemed to escape any sort of reification.

When Bataille writes on a-cephalic *communication*, he is not referring to the transport of a neutral message from the sender to the receiver. Communication for Bataille is dis-equilibrating (1988a), and thus, irreducible to Levi-Strauss's (1963), Lacan's (1989) and Baudrillard's notion of symbolic exchange (1993). What a raver communicates to the other is not an intention of one's own subjectivity, but rather an intense flow of forces and physical affects, which precisely –by the very fact that it has been communicated- cannot be considered to belong to oneself.

Georges Bataille (1985) pointed out that the event of decapitation – in itself the supreme act of revolutionary expenditure- is not politically efficient for it leads to a new political order where it will have no place. The fact that in the Love Parade the sacrificial allure and non-productive expenditure disappears quickly and bourgeoisie democracy is un-problematically sustained does not necessarily mean that the political order of daily life among particular *ravers* may be indeed irreversibly transformed. Let us argue that it is not enough to claim that the Love Parade, avoiding political will and linguistic articulation, does not really subvert the status quo without taking into account particular cases.

The Love Parade is ordinary, because it is a field of intensities that flows in the world of bodies, faces, gestures and physical expressions. Indeed, it shows no

willingness to set a transcendental value that refuses the micro-historical practices and the local, particular and material values. Nevertheless, it can also be considered extraordinary for it denies revealing culture as the production of a spatial community or a consensus, and aberrantly foregrounds hybridism as the production of difference and heterogeneity. The main feature of this hybridism is that it does not lay in shared values, commodities or certain class-ness, but in a shared historicity. This is a relevant point for the hybridism of the Love Parade requires the anthropologist to look at the interior historicity of the act in itself, rather than merely acknowledging its aesthetic, semiotic and discursive effects.

Maurice Blanchot, when writing on the notion of sacrifice, declares that it is “to abandon oneself and to give oneself: to give oneself without return to limitless abandonment” (1988b:30). At the Love Parade, time happens to be emancipated in the dialectics of waiting and dancing, or the Virilian slowness and speed (1989: 2000) that allows the possibility of an a-cephalic and affective body politics. *Ravers* often claim that it takes some time to get in the *Zone*, which can be seen as a Blanchotian “unavowable community” (1988b) produced through dance that never reaches a state of realization. The communal moment of rave is not one of fusion, where a new and unified group is constituted, but one of corporeal explosions, radical transformations and multiple differences that precede and subvert the formation of a communitarian identity.

In the following pages, practicing an ethnography of the particular, I narrate the experience of partaking in the Fuck Parade. After having participated in three Love Parades and two Fuck Parades, I am inclined to emphasize the resonances among particular experiences in both events, rather than outlining a somewhat dualist and totalizing separation of both which lacks a certain appreciation for complexity and transversal fluidity.

The focus on particular subjects partaking in the Fuck Parade allows one to comprehend the way in which cultural and ideological boundaries are not as fixed and categorical as claimed by Borneman and Senders (2000). By paying attention to

the historical materiality of specific instances that took place in the Fuck Parade, and underlining that similar situations could be experienced in the Love Parade, I would like to suggest that the alleged difference between the Love and Fuck Parades may be much more untenable, and that perhaps anthropologists would be better off studying their multiple affinities ethnographically.

7.2 The Parade of Discourses

Due to the fact that the Fuck Parade is not a legally legitimated ritual, its participants are not allowed to play electronically composed and amplified music. Many of the participants carry drums, pieces of wood and all kinds of sound-making utensils, producing linear techno-like rhythms to which one can dance and jump. The atmosphere at this informal and unofficial parade is breathtaking and sympathetic. The participants in the Fuck Parade easily stare at you and smile, an unusual feature in the diffused and often idle everyday life in Berlin.

I cannot but recall the explosive form in which the people of Berlin smile again and look into each other's faces once the winter (that lasts from November until May) is finally gone. During both years I lived in Berlin, the arrival of summer was quite sudden. In fact, it occurred in such an abrupt form that in Mitte one could easily hear rumours that this or that person was going through a nervous breakdown. Once the sun shows up burning and blindly shining around May, many pale skinned bodies are suddenly displayed laying on the green fields and parks of Berlin; this is lust for sun, light, flesh and summer.

While jumping at the Fuck Parade, I suddenly feel the odd but exciting sentiment of being surrounded by two attractive yet disquieting creatures. I turn around and with thirsty curiosity I observe them. They are a couple of sexually appealing and exuberant women. As soon as they notice my incessant looking at them, they both approach me, and shamelessly indulging themselves, flirtingly dance along. Humorously, they picture me as a courted innocent and helpless prince.

Stephan lets me know that he knows both of them. In my clumsy ignorance, I tell him that I find their gaudy dressing quite “forward”, perhaps “off-handed” and seducing - which seems to be precise and appropriate for the occasion. Stephan looks at me: “anthropologists! These two women do wear “forward” (criticising emphasis added on “forward”) clothes in their everyday lives too”. Apparently, they both live in Kreuzberg and work in a *cabaret* show. I feel embarrassed about my premature hasty comment.

In a festive mood, Toni and Saskia, dressed in glamorous clothing, dance around Stephan and I in a festive mood. The moves of Saskia’s skeleton are slow, very sensitive and delicate. Toni’s dancing is rather wild; indeed, there is certain brutal potency that her corpulent and voluptuous presence emanates. Willingly and dissimulating, halfway in self-abandonment, I have remained among them, experiencing the ways in which they were subtly rubbing my playful body while dancing. I realize that Stephan –astonished- is fixedly glancing at their self-indulging as well as seducing bodily movements. He argues that “it is their artificiality and constructed identity” that fascinates him in a hypnotic way. It can be argued that the very capacity of Toni and Saskia to convert their personalities into mere images is extremely appealing. Their personalities seem to be nothing more and nothing less than their fleeting and superficial surfaces. Interestingly, Stephan, with his witty comments, has taken the ethnographic account away from me and thus, become the anthropologist himself. For a moment, happily, I take off my priests’ cassock and position myself out of the fieldwork responsibility.

7.3 The Charms of Clothing

Stephan confesses that “such artificiality gives me a hard on; ... every single day, they construct a sort of identity by playing with clothes and make up”. One could argue that, hyperbolically, Toni and Saskia -each in her own singular way- embody the fashion dictating mainstream culture and take it to emergent and obliterating extremes. Both of them explain that they do read and keep up to date with many different German fashion and design magazines. In fact, they even both

exchange magazines and help each other to explore different “styles”. According to Saskia, “Toni tends to be more bombastic in the clothing, whereas in my case, I am more interested in the form, that is, in the way in which clothes shape the surface of my body.” Saskia, a thin, long legged woman with long blonde hair, wears a tight and shiny spangled dress. Along with her “sweet” and vulnerable face, she turns her body around and around, not only to verify but also to emphasise the compact form in which her clothing shapes “the surface of my body”.

Toni’s bodily performance, from another kind of intensity, also embodies the logic of an empty image by continually demanding to be looked at by Stephan, me and any other non-identified potential onlooker. She keeps moving her furs discontinuously and at her most hysterical, letting her silicon breasts show suggestively beneath the fur. Toni and Saskia’s overstated corporeal performance seems to suggest that they live their own personalities as pure artifice, in the sense that it is always to be looked at; in other words, to be shown in the most subversive and unconventional forms. Stephan, breaking the rules of the traditional anthropologist, has further claimed that “I desire their shameless abjection”.

The fact that Saskia and Toni wear female clothes to be looked at does not mean that they do this only for the gaze of the others, for they also do it for themselves. There is self-indulgence and cheeky competition implicit in their charm making. According to Jacques Lacan’s (1989) exploration of Freudian scopophilia, one of the main features of a heterosexual man –in terms of exchange of identity- is to enjoy importing the looks of a woman through clothing, make up and body praxis. Moreover, he claimed that heterosexual woman also enjoy this form of importation. Saskia and Toni’s pleasure for clothing not only make explicit that for heterosexual subjectivation in contemporary society the exhibition of female bodies is crucial, but explore it further giving way to multi-faceted forms of complicity. In hybrid fashion, Toni and Saskia narrate the social production of masculinity and femininity in a double register of idealization and mystification, of exaltation and debasement. The irreducible ambivalence of this process marks the extreme limit of

the sexualized power described by Foucault (1980); at once its most complete expression and also the point at which it begins to fall apart.

I wonder whether the excessive “effeminacy” of Toni and Saskia is ever “real”. What is this emptiness that their bodies radiate, and fascinates Stephan and me in a carnal way? The hyperbolic excess of their fleshed surfaces break down the logic of the “real” that belongs to standard representations based on outside/inside dualities. Or more precisely, the seducing play of their bodily surfaces absorbs such canons of representation. Often, Toni’s corporeal gestures are close to those of a “bad boy”; they are abject, precisely because there is no intention or plan to seek for some kind of real authenticity.

The corporeal aesthetics of the suspiciously “too feminine” bodies around me is so spectacular and immediate that the very possibility of any sort of accountable representation becomes frustrated. I am afraid that Stephan has also renounced practicing the figure of the observant anthropologist. For instance, Saskia, in her seemingly vulnerable and delicate flashing femininity, always places the clichés of the construction of her inoffensive and vulnerable teenager girl-like personal identity in the foreground. Toni –abject and stubborn- by projecting herself only by her external “glamorous” and aggressive look, breaks down the laws and models that produce and organize the binary codes between gender and a presumed interiority. With such accounts, I do not mean that Toni and Saskia display the falseness and constructed gender of all femininity as if they were a consequence of Brecht-ian alienation. Instead, the most remarkable triumph of Toni and Saskia may be precisely the way in which they continually insist on naturalising the artifice they embody: successfully passing as women.

Nevertheless, there is something deeper than the mere ideological unmasking these two drag-queens mobilise. As I will try to show more precisely, I mean something that occurs at the very surface of their bodies. The Fuck Parade is momentarily pausing for half an hour in the Zionskirche Platz. The participants take the opportunity to freshen their throats at several *Kneippen (pubs)* in the crowded

square. Stephan and I join Toni and Saskia and go into *Kneippe*. Stephan orders half pints for all of us; I cannot wait to go to the toilet. The very ordering of drinks has somehow triggered an urgent bodily necessity to do so. On the way to the toilet, I realize that Toni and Saskia follow me. They go into the woman's bathroom and stand in front of the mirror.

The toilet doors are open. From the wet floor tiles, I deduce that they seem to have been recently mopped. The employee has probably left the doors open all the way to diminish the penetrating bleach odour. Toni, perseverant, with her own fingers, lifts the skin behind her eyes tightening her face. She demands Saskia's view on the figuring of her own "lifted" face. Saskia, arrogantly silent, changes her red top with an even tighter black one in the bathroom, and is observing herself in the mirror. Toni, equally irreverent, puts make up on her eye lashes.

Trying to regain the position of the observing anthropologist, accidentally, I find myself closer to that of a mediocre undercover detective. Toni criticises Saskia for changing her top and wearing a see through black top that allows "everyone to see everything". Saskia responds to Toni that "you are just incredibly jealous". That is the end of the tense and mutually whipping argument. While I am in the toilet, Saskia and Toni do not so much mirror a situation that is apt for critical consciousness, but instead they are undertaking a corporeal transformation. Perhaps, their magic is based on the following; they are able to break down the social mechanism by which identity is inscribed for their own ends. Thus, they do not so much criticize the social construction of gender. Rather, they appropriate it bodily, explore it subversively, and take it to new and exciting ecstasies of abjection.

When returning to Stephan and gossiping on what I had observed and thought about in the toilet, he claims that "it is their everyday life; Saskia and Toni spend hours in front of the mirror arguing about this or that colour, the duty of shaving, the seducing idea of a new plastic surgery operation in five years,... ; I thought it was a waste of time in the past, but now it seems to me a sort of a

quotidian art". This "quotidian art" of Toni and Saskia, to which they devote long and arduous hours each day, has the effect of bringing expressions of gender and sexuality to the surface by emptying them out from their normative essences and meanings.

Toni and Saskia return now from the toilet, which is the bleached laboratory, the backstage in which they fabricate the real by trying out clothes, paint, and perfumes. Stephan and my own senses are still heightened as a result of the exciting conversation about them. Stephan, thoughtful, stares at Toni with eyes that express a mixture of detached curiosity and fascination. Toni, extremely rapid and sly, realizes that Stephan is staring at her fixatedly. She places her fur around Stephan's neck. Softly, with her bulky hands, Toni unties the two top buttons of his shirt. Stephan, pleased, starts moving the fur around his neck, and then arabesque, his own body, sort of "womanising" himself "I feel like a drag now, ... I can start moving".

For a moment, Stephan's body, touched by the magic of Toni's fur, turns into a flat surface of reflections and inscriptions. Stephan's *dragged* subjectivity dwells in the body, rather than in a supposed interiority. Within Stephan's clumsy, blushing and shy womanly movements, conventional male image layers of stiffness and humiliation compress in his flesh emerge awkwardly. Toni and Saskia smile in a friendly way and find Stephan's unsettling embarrassment charming. Stephan has puffed and added that, "Since I met you (Saskia and Toni), I have more than once felt the urge to try being a drag-queen; I have even secretly, on my own, more than once painted my lips and eyes". Stephan's shared intimacy indicates that to a large extent, the corporeality of these drag-queens is probably composed from the outside in.

Stephan places Toni's fur on my neck. Oddly, I feel the need to be looked at, no matter how ashamed I am of turning my priestly body into a proud woman (!). I wish to fascinate Toni and Saskia. Somehow, the idea that Stephan may be again having a hard on disturbs my own "becoming-a-woman" at the Kneippe, but

after a humble smile, I continue shaking the fur. All of this, it seems to me, is a matter of clothes and cosmetics as much as it is a matter of skin, hair and genitals.

7.4 The Devouring Volkswagen Car

The Fuck Parade happens to arrive at the Rosa Luxemburg Platz. The Volksbuhne is a edifice with ongoing experimental theater, performance, film and leftist political events. Nowadays, the building, before turning to a state of ruin, needs to be urgently renewed. Its director, Frank Carstoff -a prominent personality in Berlin who holds an excellent reputation as a progressive cultural figure- has recently warned the city government of his possible resigning if public money is not invested in the building's renewal. Fortunately, the Berlin council has acceded to this petition and an architectural project is on its way.

The participants of the Fuck Parade, excited, booing, jeering, cheering up and unruly, march in a somewhat circus-like spectacle, while banging and hitting all kinds of noise making utensils. Toni and Saskia are teasing each other in tune with the joyful madness of the crowd. Noticeably disruptive, a dark blue Volkswagen car enters the circular square with its wheels squawking at really high speed. It stops abruptly in front of the well-known monument and one of Berlin's cultural emblems: a gipsy wheel on two feet. A shirtless middle age brawny and tough man, with an unequivocal look of an urban construction worker, impetuously steps out of the car, opens all the doors and turns savage techno music on, really loud.

Stephan, proudly surprised, expresses his usual giving and receptive admiration for the immense sound potency of the hi-fi technical installation in the family-size car; "... the force of the thrilling beats is going to blow the solid armor of the Volkswagen in thousand pieces". The hammering presence of the music is not only heard, but also physically felt through sudden physical pressures and vibrations that traverse the bodies and rebound on the corners of the square. The surprising arrival of the car, opening itself as a generous gift or a prohibited music box is positively arousing an euphoric communal animosity among Fuck Paraders.

Three minutes have dropped. Laughter and agitated arms move toward the blasting sun, from the instant when the dust-bathed body of the muscular construction worker has provocatively parked the sonically and physically assaying car. The car figures a pure plummet down machine of transgression, with two incorporated powerful speakers that seem to be two enormous lungs inserted in a Volkswagen's metallic armor whose texture seems excessively fragile and vulnerable for the sonic currents that the speakers pulsate. Furthermore, all its orifices, including the wide and spacious trunk are obscenely exposed, at once vibrating and expulsing manic electronic violence.

Desiring and rebellious, the participants of the Fuck Parade dance to its monotone beating music with the orgiastic and furious passion of a communal combustion to death. Stephan, Saskia and Toni shake their bodies madly, mindlessly, with their eyes metaphorically out-of-orbit, immersed in the intense phases of waving sounds and distorting noises. My approach to the dancing of the Fuck Paraders, as a secretly archaic bodily combustion or sacrifice, is not a mere linguistic recourse attempting to reveal the intense immediacy of the event. Even though verbal communication is practically untenable due to music's piercing of the tympanum and viscera, every now and then, chilling and isolated series of violent and vociferous screams can be heard; "Fire, fire, ...".

I again encounter the difficulty of putting into words the bodily euphoria and fiery spiritual up-lifting that is taking place. I am perhaps simultaneously being lazy and humble arguing that "you should have been there". Nevertheless, let me transcribe here the arguments held by Saskia and Toni. On the one hand, Toni finds participating at this particular noisy and savage feast in Rosa Luxemburg Platz "like being in the Amazon jungle, ... where every creature is screaming out of fear, in panicky exhaustion, heartbreakingly yelling to survive, ... in an environment where there is nothing but defecation, putrefaction, rape, murder,...".

On the other hand, Saskia barely agrees with Toni's figuration of the Amazon jungle, since she finds the screaming of the Paraders full of "erotic

impulses,... the screams are violent in a very sexual and collective way,... beauty also has its moment here”. As the reader can guess, the arguments have not led to any satisfactory conclusion or mutual consensus. Due to my difficulties to linguistically transpire the brutality of the event, I paradoxically subscribe to Toni’s and Saskia’s insightful images. The Paraders continue dancing in a trance-like state to the electronic beams that sprout out of the dark-blue Volkswagen. More precisely, it could be pointed out that the sonorous tentacles stemming out of the vehicle do not only wrap the carnival and parodying bodies up, but also devour them by magically plugging its mechanic viscera to their volatile plasticity.

The image of this disruptive, violent and primitive dancing, as a form of obeying to death, is invoked by the contagious extreme soundless screams yelling “Fire, fire!”. This relentless image in the euphoric evaporation of bodily energies, inevitably evokes a reversal of the Judeo-Christian dictum in which living bodies become dust. Several green and white painted Police cars and vans enter Rosa Luxemburg Platz, surely to extinguish the menacing “fire”. The Police set the alarming sirens on. The crowd is a concentrated mass of contorting and twisting bodies. The loud but thin sound of the Police transportation vehicles seems to deploy another sonic avatar of an outdoor space converted into an electronic incubator. The only physical horizon above is the sacrificial sunny sky.

After a remarkably brief quarrel among the Police and the Fuck Paraders around the gently bouncing Volkswagen, I note down that the loud and aggressive electronic pulsation of the vehicle seems to implode monstrously into its interior. The music is over, but the sun keeps shining. Toni points out that the Volkswagen car, without all its noise making motorized guts, “seems to be thinner and smaller”. A couple of austere and determined Police agents have banged the four doors and the world devouring trunk of the car -which resonates with Pantagruel’s ass in Rabelais (1994)- clearly signaling the end of the party and the auditory voluptuousness of the car. Once again, the Fuck Paraders begin to make protest-noises with all sorts of sticks, pots, bags, ...

A group of four or five Paraders face the Police offensively. A heated up argument takes place a physical tug-of-war. The considerably big crowd of close to one thousand individuals is gathered in the perplexing square, circularly, around the mediating zone between the Police and the most rebellious Paraders. The booing of the Paraders rebounds, proliferates and ricochets on the walls of the residence edifices in the form of compressed and shiver-giving echoes. It is oddly deafening. A Police, using a hand speaker, reminds the Fuck Paraders that this event is not allowed to have music played in any electronic fashion. The non-conformist Fuck Paraders press against the static and stone-like barrier formed by Police agents.

This is what is like being in the crowd for two minutes; standing up, paralyzed, with the sun blinding your eyes while hearing an unpleasant rain of noisy pots and metal utensils. The noise finally decreases. The battle positions remain all the same. There are two Police cars and two other security vans parked around the dark blue Volkswagen car. In front of the now shut down car, there is a cord of impersonal and mechanic automaton-like looking Police, holding transparent shields. Facing the plastic protections, at a distance of three meters, there is the front line of the Fuck Paraders stepping forward and backward, progressively building up tension according to sudden defying threats of the Police. Strangely, after the rain of noise, an unsettling silence invades the square.

7.5 The Particular Chaos of a Bearded Man

Who am I / Where do I come from? / I am Antonin Artaud / and I say this / as I know to say this / immediately / you will see my present body / burst into fragments / and remake itself / under ten thousand notorious aspects / a new body / where you will / never forget me (Barber citing Antonin Artaud 1993:13)

All of a sudden, a properly smartened up man wearing a blue shirt, silk-made trousers, smoking jacket and Italian shoes, walks self-confidently tranquil in the empty space between the Police and the Fuck Paraders front line. The presence of the bearded man is somber and austere, and his walking unequivocally disquieting. An inherent muscular dystrophy is soon revealed when he undecidedly

turns to address the Fuck Paraders and the Police directly. Ironically, the Fuck Paraders and the Police agents are not less undecided trying to make sense of whether this official looking bearded man, yet physically disruptive and excessively singular, is in one or the other side.

The gap between both perplexed sides is inhabited by this anonymous bearded man, which radiates a sentiment of helplessness and confusion in all directions. Seconds pass by and the intensity of the embarrassment increases, just as the bearded man awkwardly seems to be more confident at the lonely void between Police and Fuck Paraders. No matter how uncomfortable it is, I should carry on approaching the event with Stephan's, Saskia's, Toni's and my own sense of embarrassment, since we are unable to blame the bearded man for its official looking outfit or praise him for his facial twitches and explicit neck tics. Likewise, The Police agents, staring at each other absurdly, are also unable to identify the bearded man as an political authority figure -which he can well fit for his outlook-, or an experimental performer of the Volksbuhne. In any case, the bearded man is acting with such self-confidence, seriousness and charismatic determination that no one can really make up his mind about his bodily idiosyncrasy. What is this drowsiness that keeps Police agents as well as Fuck Paraders restlessly paralyzed?

A couple of Police captains, officially uniformed, walk within the unavowable gap between the Fuck Paraders and the shielded line of Police agents. They immediately receive a collective complaint through whistles and rebounding booing. Enigmatically still, the tall bearded man stands next to them relaxed. By the way he behaves, one could easily deduce that he is a political figure, but the monstrous way in which he twitches his shoulder when standing still, radically questions such possibility. Both officials talk about how the Parade must come to an end and the mass should dissolve to avoid any non-desired aggressions.

Paraders continue jeering and responding to their blackmail, when suddenly, the bearded man initiates an act by doing and saying exactly the same as both technicians of normalizing power. Confused, wondering, the Police captains turn

themselves around, directing their eyes over the shielded line of Police agents, expecting that a colleague would certify them about the political legitimacy of the bearded man's performance. In combination with abnormal movements, the face of the bearded man is traversed by a ridiculous and paradoxical variety of emotional states.

Meanwhile, he continues arguing to the stupefied and electrified crowds of the Fuck Paraders that "you should behave as it corresponds,... and cease the event,... sorry for this, but it is the proper way,... yes, to restore the peaceful stream of social life". His politically correct hegemonic discourse overlaps with the sheer panic, blissful absorption and anxious apology. Among Fuck Paraders, there is a sticky atmosphere of embarrassment; none of us seems to be able to reassure or identify -even in oppositional terms- with the anxious and incompetent behavior of the charismatic presence of the bearded man.

Tirelessly, the bearded man continues his hyper-conformist speech asking the Fuck Paraders to disaggregate and go home. The confusion and restlessness among the Police agents increases. The impersonal and mechanically conducting line of Police agents happens to be disoriented. The bearded man's theatre of cruelty is fractured. Clueless, the Police keep turning their interrogating faces around. The Police captains do not know how to give an account of the unsettling movements of the bearded man, which have more to do with the collapsing of the social order -guarded by normative security forces- by taking its limit, than with the carnival-like transgression related to the Fuck Parade.

The bearded man cannot even accomplish the apology for his contradictory orders, since he falls back mobilizing Police agents and Fuck Paraders in all directions at once. Both Police captains are desperate. They are unsure and unconvinced on the way in which they should engage the bearded man in any form that does not question his possible status - fearing that he may be a high ranked political figure.

As it has been argued previously, the Fuck Parade constitutes a carnival event where its participants are allowed to dismiss the conventional German serious standards of responsibility, political authority and unprejudiced, emphasize subversive and grotesque inversions of hierarchical power relations. Nevertheless, as Toni and Saskia melancholically argue, it must be noticed that even if such event is potentially subversive, "... no order would be really challenged if a few of us would be arrested and tomorrow the event would be reported in the ARD or ZDF television news". Such comments reflect a political awareness that the Fuck Parade, much in the way of Bakhtin's carnival of ambiguity and as it has relatively happened to the Love Parade, could be quite easily reabsorbed by the civilian status quo.

Interestingly, this frame cannot be transposed to the case study of the bearded man, since his tireless efforts and attempts to fulfill the figure of normalizing power do not really give way to catharsis, liberation or redemption. Instead we are moved by the pathetic abjection of his muscular dystrophy. Stephan's clamorous "What the hell is happening?" expresses a strange complicity in which neither the Police agents nor the Fuck Paraders are able to give a satisfying account of the disgraceful spasms performed by the bearded man. If the carnival catharsis avoids social tensions from going astray, the confusion generated by the bearded man produces a defused experience of estrangement. Saskia and Toni are overwhelmed, immersed in awkwardness, unable to mobilize any sort of critical response to the physical disruptive manoeuvres of the bearded man.

7.6 Soliloquy and Social Madness

I am not less perplexed when the bearded man, in the middle of a mass of disoriented bodies, begins -somewhat grandiloquent- to praise the popular sculpture of the "gipsy wheel" with two feet (see picture below). "Let's try to appreciate your wisdom. I also have my problems to understand your beauty and meaning,... I am a bit stupid,... But I say this,... you are leading us to happiness,... to conform ourselves as proper civilians and circulate peacefully. I may be wrong, but this is my best,... maybe I am stupid I know, but we should try to approach the wheel,...". The chaotic

and confusing atmosphere increases in absurdity; the Police agents and Fuck Paraders share a murmur of embarrassment and senselessness. The bearded man - called Matthias as I later on found out- is attempting to worship the art fetish intending to restore the social order, but such action, with its own explicit self undermining, provokes the destruction of the aura that the walking gipsy wheel supposedly preserves. Precisely, by taking the irradiating aura of the walking wheel too seriously, in a disruptive tone of self-abasement, its art aura and civilian implications of correctness are subverted.

Now, one pays attention to the dark blue Volkswagen that triggered the arrival of security forces, and then the late coming journalists. In the middle of the massively packed square, the bearded man alone is putting to work a series of tics, speech impediments and unintelligible oral sounds that proliferate and migrate somewhat neurotically. He simply continues praising the walking wheel while undermining himself for being ignorant and incapable of its aesthetic appreciation. Indeed, the scene is nothing but mad. A de-structured mass of embarrassed and annoyed bodies of Paraders and Police continue wondering helplessly attempting to recapture the positions of the previous binary heroic scene of tragedy.

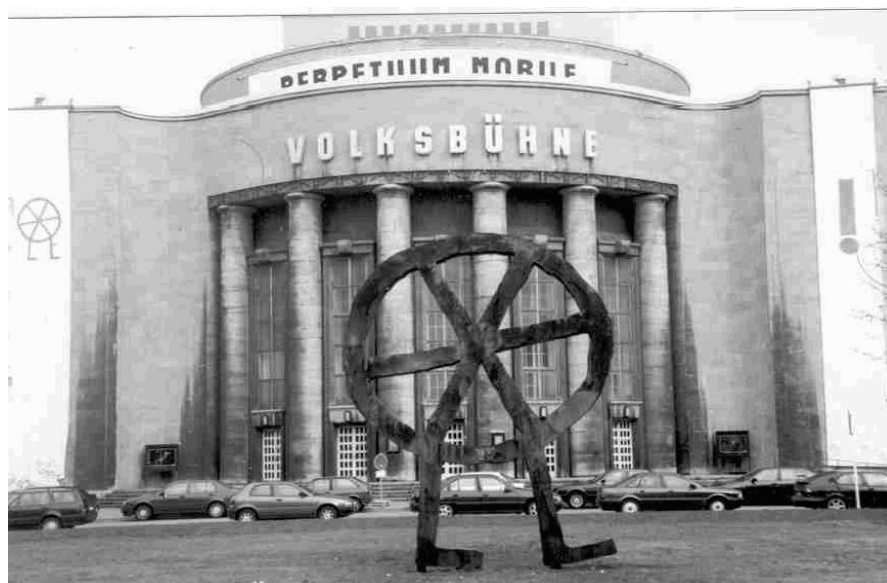


Photo 10: The sculpture of the gipsy wheel at Rosa Luxemburg Platz.

Meanwhile, in the middle of the chaotic noise of bodies, the bearded man, whose weirdness embodies a fluid insidious contagion, talks adoringly to the respectful wheel sculpture pretending that it is actually responding to him: “Just be patient,... we will all become formal,... I know, I know I am not good enough,... things are getting complicated, but I will fix this mess, trust me,... I know I have not done a good job, but I will try my best to put each person in its place,... just give me some time,...”. According to the paranoid performance of the bearded man, the walking wheel sculpture is magically alive, but all it can do is to humiliate the worshipper whose feared passion has animated. The bearded man, by taking the word of the social order too seriously, and thus, literally animating the walking wheel, does not subvert it as much as perverts it in self-humiliation.

The mass at Rosa Luxemburg has entered a senseless state of embarrassment from which nobody can find an exit successfully. I would like also to point out the irony underlying the act of the bearded man talking to the walking wheel as to a fetish of the city’s social order, since the sculpture is the symbol of avant-garde, experimental and leftist oppositional events. (For instance the PDS, the former GDR communist Party, celebrates its party gatherings at the Volksbühne). Does the bearded man’s clumsy speech to the gipsy wheel sculpture not suggest that even this supposedly opposing leftist sculpture constitutes a respectful and serious artwork fully embedded in the actual German pseudo-democratic status quo? Does it not evoke the idea that this walking sculpture -formulated by leftist avant-garde artists- is another corner-stone -no matter how oppositional or nomadic- sustaining and feeding the binary axis of modern tragic politics between Right and Left?

I find the radically free-wheeling performance of the bearded man extremely revealing, especially in terms of the questions and problematic it poses to the anthropological practice. The fact that his excessive willingness to identify with certain serious, conformist and conservative German correctness, does not lead him into a solid and stable subject, but conversely to a schizophrenic disintegration of his personality, marked by muscular dystrophy and incompetent bumbling, is very revealing in its own right. Another variable could be to argue that his spasmodic

twitches, facial contorted gestures and disruptive bodily movements indicate the triumph of mechanical reproduction, in the sense that it ruins the Cartesian model of a unitary self.

Nevertheless, there is also another experiential dimension that I find disquieting in the unresolved disequilibrium of the bearded man. Intimately, his subjugated body, with all its awkward twitches and bizarre gesturing economy, seems to belong to a behaviour that is highly over-determined by the multiplicity of non-coherent codes, axioms, models and suggestions he embodies. Perhaps this is a non-articulated and fragmented body that can be found when taking the universe of the conventionally politically correct mass media -with its fragmentation, stereotypes and brutal rationalizations- far enough.

The body of the weird man –an ordinary grocer pretending to become implacably normal and German- lacks the cadence of an integral form. It mobilizes a plasticity and volatile quality that comes close to the seemingly weightlessness of advertising, television and film images. His body is an example of a zone of passive but intensely assayed sensitivity to all the pulls and pressures of a serious and conformist social and political environment, whereas in the case of the Fuck Parade this would be natural and technological. But then, what happens when confronting this body to the ideological institutions of late capitalism, such as advertising, work, discipline, commoditization of leisure time, and psychoanalysis itself? Strangely, the body of the bearded man can be seen as the target of communicational technologies, a site of political conflict, and a limit point at which ideological oppositions collapse.

Interestingly, the body of the bearded man seems not to resist those influences, but suffers them nervously, somewhat hysterically, to the extent that he accepts and embodies them only too excessively. But who is this body, which is the passion that, tirelessly, seems to be impressed by everything and retains nothing? What is this tendency of his to make others like him, to please others in a choreography of infantile enthusiasm? Does the bearded man not resemble the

figure of a neglected or abused child, continuously struggling, and ceaselessly failing, to please his unsatisfied and capricious parents?

8 - Kym's Violent Resistance and Hitler

I fall. I fall but I am not afraid. I throw out my fear in the noise of rage, in a solemn bellowing... But with this thunderstruck scream, to scream I must fall. I fall into an underworld and I cannot get out, I can never get out. And it is here that the cataracts begin. This scream that I have just thrown is a dream. But a dream which eats the dream (Barber citing Antonin Artaud 1993:76)

8.1 Artaud is Screaming

Antonin Artaud, struggled to mobilize, in his own life, those forces of dispersion and conflict that the binary language separating language and affect, thought and sensation, is not able to encompass or represent. His *Theater of Cruelty* (Barber 1993) contests rationality and utility in the name of corporeal passions. At times, he impelled to have recourse to conceptual language, yet only in order to turn that language against itself. Artaud insisted on physical gesture, screams and blows to silence the “prison house of language”. His exploration of extremes of joy and agony may affirm that our language, in the very moment it approaches its triumph, meets its death, subtly or violently, “a blow / anti-logical / anti-philosophical / anti-intellectual / anti-dialectical / of language / pressed down by my black pencil / and that’s all.”(Barber citing Artaud 1993:144)

Through violent convulsions, Artaud attempted to create a magical culture of the human body, both physical and spiritual. His scandalous and aberrant actions insisted on that physical expression preceded intention and the existence of any possible context to be articulated. In Artaud, thought and language, passion and word emerge out of vociferations, screams and physical contortions, and not from symbolic articulation. “I abject all signs. I create only machines of instant utility” (Barber citing Artaud 1993:151)

Artaud’s thought, at the limit, is entirely visceral, spasmodic and excremental. Explosive impulses come out of his screaming mouth as a direct and immediate assaying shock. In this vein, the screams of orgasm and agony indicate that seduction and horror take place in the involuntary movements of the body. For

Artaud everything must be made body, for thought is affect and not a form of cognition that must be constructed apart from it. Artaud experimented with the immediacy of chance, accident and shock. The abrupt scream, for instance, should be seen as an effect of the multiple affections and interchanges that traverse and alter the body, instead of the incessant circulation of laws of signification. Artaud seeks to transform audiences by triggering their unconscious through the visceral materiality of the body. His desire is to provoke “the opening of our consciousness towards possibility beyond measure” (Barber citing Artaud 153)

The following case study on a teenager called Kym emphasizes the Artaudian imperative that everything be made body, that is, materially and visibly enacted. In such realm where pain and pleasure may not be completely distinguishable, there is no recourse to the hypothesis of repression or hysterical conversion. These miseries and joys can hardly be defined in terms of lack. Kym does not succumb in the underworld from unsatisfied desire, but rather to the contrary, from a bodily fulfillment that takes her to the verge of madness.

8.2 Masquerade in the Industrial Pavilion

I met Kym in an illegal party that was celebrated about the beginning 2000 through my room mate Claudia. The party that was organized by a group of youngsters who named themselves *Blue House* took place in an abandoned industrial pavilion near Zionstrasse. The organizers were wearing transparent masks made out of silicon; the form of the masks were somewhat grotesque and monstrous; the noses were often protuberant, the eye holes were deep and dark, the cheeks unnaturally swelled. Nevertheless, these masks were not easily discernable, since there was barely any light in the wide galleries of the abandoned industrial pavilion.

The party had not been announced in any sort of Berlin public media; it was an odd and seemingly spontaneous illegal party that Claudia found out through mouth to mouth contagion. The industrial pavilion was immense, and even though there were many alleged participants, most of them were gathered in independent

small groups of three or four individuals. At the dim-lighted party, it was difficult to distinguish the faces of the partygoers from one another. It was quite dark; however, the projections of video art works and performances in the bricked walls helped sporadically to recognize one or two faces. Soon, Claudia and I realized that the amount of participants wearing masks was also rapidly increasing. Quickly too, our trousers and shoes got dirty. The floor was slightly muddy. Wandering in the dark, leading ourselves by the flickering flashes and images of the video projections, we met a masked girl who offered Claudia and me to wear silicon masks.

Claudia and I wore the transparent masks. The unknown girl started laughing really loud and yelling with an eccentric and diabolic voice; “You should try to meet other people”. Right away, Claudia, seemingly enthusiastic to get immersed in the bizarre play, faced me and said with an old ladies’ sarcastic voice, “... yes, let’s get lost”. The unknown girl held Claudia’s arm sisterly, and both of them walked away. However, right before they left, the unknown girl approached me and claimed “You and I will talk tomorrow”.

For a moment, I thought that it was mad –and strangely lonely- to be in a place full of strangers. The atmosphere in the industrial pavilion was somber, and for a little while I was isolated. Strangers were all around me, and from the film projector’s light I could discern that many of them were wearing elegant black suits and dresses. I thought it was impossible to figure out the way in which the masked and non-masked strangers I bumped into looked like.

What impressed me most is that most of the voices I was hearing around me sounded grotesque and monster-like. The atmosphere in the odd party of masks seemed to be alien to humanity. Perhaps, with the hopeless intention of trying my own voice, I approached a small Bar in one corner of the pavilion and bought a San Pauli beer. The bar was dark and mystic to the extent that one could not clearly distinguish the servers from the voluminous shadows at their back.

The seemingly isolated strangers that gathered at the odd party, slowly started dancing to the loud “house” and “electronic” music. In fact, I felt more comfortable with the dancing than trying out a grotesque voice. In this case, the grotesque voice sounded too much like me in a monster-like way, and the mask allowed me to hide and deceive. The atmosphere was amusing, now everyone was masked and dancing wild and close to each other. By the way the masked participants were dancing, it became obvious to me that the masked strangers were particularly obscene and pornographic in their gestures and bodily insinuations.

I was in the middle of a masquerade where the world seemed to be put upside down. I was shocked; dancing bodies were approaching and rubbing each other sexually; through the disruptive flickering of the video projection, one could identify bodily positions that were demanding to be touched sexually. Thus, I loosen the supposedly observing and controlled subjectivity of the ethnographer, to enjoy as fluid and open, changing and changeable, as becoming instead of static being.

The erotic touching and caressing among the masked subjects was literally sexual; moreover, it seemed proper to shift from rubbing your own body with a stranger to another one quite rapidly. Such erotic approaches also occurred in groups of three or more, but mainly the unknown masked strangers kept moving and tirelessly rubbing a masked new body. Furthermore, on this sexual dance touching other`s sexual organ was allowed as long as the physical contact was transitory. Such erotic tactile space was relative and ambivalent, meaning that the masking permitted diversity and differentiation to such extent that one was touching or being touched in a sexual and obscene way by someone who could either be male or female.

Outrageously, the very carnival-like and exaggerated sexual dancing of the masked strangers, gave way to scenes of humor, laughter and irony. At times, suddenly, some of the masked bodies –apparently disgusted- would push away other bodies quite aggressively. The nocturnal dance was a play of abjection in the sense

that the very obscene and erotic sexual gestures refused and parodied any sense of complacency and sameness.

There was for instance somebody who showed a long and vigorous dick and started to shake it as if it were a stick of a policeman. Another man came and sat himself down in a position to be punished. The loud laughter of the abject members of the odd party resounded in the huge pavilion. There was something comical, ridiculous and pathetic in such scenes, such as the female body that exhibited her naked ass in the middle of the wall where a video about marmalade and jelly was being projected. Meanwhile, she was asking for a volunteer to stick an empty bottle of wine in her ass. A very thin masked body walked close to her; he slapped her ass comically, grabbed the wine bottle, placed a white rose in it and placed it on the floor next to ass exhibiting masked body. The humorous laughter was multiplying in the monochrome combination of dimness, darkness and mist. Mikhail Bakhtin argues that

... the theme of the masks, the most complex theme of folk culture. The mask is connected with the joy of change and reincarnation, with gay relativity and with the merry negation of uniformity and similarity; it rejects conformity to oneself. The mask is related to transition, metamorphoses, the violation of natural boundaries,... It contains the playful element of life; it is based on a peculiar interrelation of reality and image, characteristic of most ancient rituals and spectacles. Of course, it would be impossible to exhaust the intricate multiform symbolism of the mask. (Bakhtin 1984:39-40)

As all of the masked bodies were –somewhat grotesque and monstrously-gradually immersing in the bottomless void of the night, ironic and violent corporeal performances began to take place; a masked body would punch somebody else's naked back; another masked subject would throw somebody else on the floor acquiring a dominating posture step on its body. Such aggressive performances were often in the border of becoming non-simulating, due to the palpable excitation and enthusiasm of the masked performers.

In such situation, the masked body who acquired the role of the victim described the physical and psychological torture while the one who was playing the

torturer used the false language of the dominant order. Furthermore, the masked body stepping on another body in a dominant gesture seemed to be increasingly “turned on” by the very indifferent and unconvinced attitude of the victim laying on the floor.

Similarly, in the case where a masked body was punching the naked back of another subject, the puncher did not seem to be interested in instructing, convincing or educating the victim in any form. Even though the punching torturer acquired a perfectly logic and rational discursive theatricality, he was on the side of aggression. The masked torturer, in such playful yet violent performances, ironically seemed to insist on the notion that reason has a violent form. In this sense, the brutal police-like attitude of the torturer seemed to reflect institutional violence, and bring its “moralizing” and “normalizing” narratives into the flesh.

It seemed that the dominant torturers were acting according to an institutional heritage; thus, the overtly oppressive sexual language of the masked subject stepping on another body, and the physically descriptive and imperative function of language moved to an institutional and demonstrative level. Curiously, it seemed as if the punching and stepping torturers would hate authority (!) as much as they themselves –as dominant torturers- make explicit the laws that legitimate such authority. The ironic language of the punching and stepping torturers could be seen as a counter-authority language to the extent that they ironically and hyperbolically dissolve its laws. These two performing torturers were appropriating the order of the law bodily to burst it at its limits.

I doubted that Claudia could still be in such bizarre happening. The pavilion had become an obscure carnival of masks characterized by mystery, uncertainty, humorous humiliation, obscenity and certain reminiscence of pain. In such odd atmosphere, the participants were strangers struggling to find our way through unlimited and burlesque transformation. It did not matter whether you were rich or poor, younger or older, such sexualized and twisted humor cancelled

the categories and hierarchies of ordinary life. As long as one continued immersed in the erotic and humorous play for a couple of hours.

After a while, the masked strangers -including myself- started to take their clothes away and exchange the wearing items. I gave my dark blue jumper and found myself wearing a green skirt. The exchange of clothes kept happening in such unordered and vertiginous form that it was impossible to affirm which dresses, trousers or underwear had been taken from whom. The dancing and playing continued endlessly, round and round, and oddly enough the masked strangers –that looked quite androgynous by then- seemed not so strange any more. The rubbing of skins, lusty breaths and grotesque voices and groans seemed to become oddly familiar, contributing to the splendor of the playfully orgiastic night.

Even though some of the anonymous bodies also exchanged the masks several times, most of us were still wearing the same mask which was inevitably posing a disquieting distance. Nevertheless, the sweaty and slightly penetrating smell of the collective sweat condensed in the air, and the ambiguous, indulging and somewhat animalistic happening in which we were participating gave way to a corporeal empathy that was strange and distant, yet infinitely warm and intimate.

Each of the masked bodies, during the irretrievable and dissipating movements of bodily passions -supplication, madness, despair, laughter and joy were manifest- had given herself/himself over to the indeterminate and dark outside and the others, hence, to an unknown yet familiar community. This was a masked carnival community produced through loss, generous giving, negation and sacrifice. Thus, an “unavowable community” (Blanchot 1988b) that could never be a final, fully realized conventional social group. Each of the masked bodies communicated with and to others as desiring fire explosions that made difficult to draw the limits of each self with certainty.

Neither of the masked bodies was sacrificing for the sake of a pre-existing group, collective or nation, but instead each of us was bodily and sexually rupturing

the very possibility of such communal closure or stable -and consensus based- state. The intimate mood of community blossomed once we had been dancing for hours. By then we were quite intoxicated and still half naked in pathetic disguises. It was not a moment of fusion such as the experience of a new and unified group; it was rather a night of bodily explosions where the boundaries of exclusion -and thus, the constraints of self definition- were blurred.

Impertinent, sexy, quarrelsome, ambiguous, furiously lusty,... were some of the terms that I wrote in a dirty piece of paper I found in the pavilion. I was trying to give an account of a carnival community that did not involve a relation of unity, but instead of bodily implication and sexual contamination. Instead of a communal feast uniting separate individuals into one essence, this was closer to sacrifice, where collective sexual drives, laughter, vertigo and lusty invocations created a relational complicity in which the integrity of isolated individuals was lost, and yet difference as such was maintained. Thus, one could argue that the community of masked bodies was not disintegrated, but was instead affirmed on the grounds of odd distance and separation. This intense and immoral celebration of the flesh via the multiform symbolism of the transparent and face distorting masks moved well deep into the night.

It was freezing cold, early in the morning, when sunlight had started to get in through the holes and opened facades of the industrial pavilion. Many of the masked members of the party had already departed. The music was over and I was tired and drunk. Near me there were a couple of masked bodies parodying medieval court masquerades. It was obvious that I was not the only one wearing much less clothes than I had on when I left home the previous day. The couple of masked bodies were giggling and began to play around me as if they really knew me.

Suddenly, one of them had taken the long nosed and protuberant mask away. To my surprise, I realized that it was Boris, a forty year old business man I knew through Petra – a receptionist in a computer company to whom I devote a whole chapter. Boris is a sympathetic young, wealthy and elegant looking man who

holds the post of head manager in BMWs' car industry. His surprise was not smaller when I took my mask away. He immediately explained to the other masked body that I was writing a thesis on the lives of diverse Berliners.

His masked colleague did not take the mask away, but intriguingly introduced herself as Kym. She shook my hand gently. Even though Boris suggested her to take away her mask, Kym ignored his comment, and persuaded both of us to come to her place by car. The thought of walking back home was plainly wrong due to the fact that I looked ridiculous wearing a green skirt, a flowery shirt and a gray raincoat. I asked Kym if she could actually take me home in her car.

Kym and Boris probably just met, since they kept giggling and joking about the "possibly ugly and horror face" Kym had under the mask. I was really tired. My legs felt heavy. I sat on the back seat of Kym's second hand East German *Trabant* car. It was rainy and Berlin was veiled by thick and intensely opaque clouds. Kym commented that Berlin seemed to have been under the roof of the pavilion by the indeterminate, chaotic and mystic way it looked under the first rays of the morning. As she argued "it is like when snow covers Berlin, a wholly different and new city seems to emerge".

Boris replied that at the most intense moments of the humorous orgy, the physical pressing and sensual contact of bodies made him go through the experience of being somebody else, a flashing particle inside of an appearing and disappearing tribal mass body. I asked Kym if she could drive me to Strelitzer St., near Brunnenstrasse. She nodded affirmatively and continued joking around with Boris' intriguing fascination to unmask Kym.

8.3 At Kym's Apartment

Next thing I remember is that the three of us were walking up some unknown stairs. Once we entered a cozy and spacious flat, I realized we were not in my flat. I walked toward Kym wanting to ask her about the ride home she had

promised. Boris kept joking and giggling, morbidly, desperately replying Kym to take the mask away. Kym placed her hand on my mouth, disabling me to articulate any complaint on her promise. Smoothly, she pushed me backwards and indicated me to lay on a wide sofa. I laid down, she took my boots off and unfolded a brown soft blanket all over me. Then, she held Boris by the hand and silently took him to another room. I fell sleep.

About ten minutes later, urgently and with a frustrated look in his face, Boris woke me up voicelessly screaming that Kym was “sick”, that it was better I left the flat with him. I puffed and remained comfortably dozing on the sofa. I thought to myself that I would have no problem taking an “unhappy” face when I get up. Boris quitted persuading me to leave with him, and finally, he walked away on his own. By the harsh and dry way in which he banged the main door, he seemed to be angry.

I had a good long sleep until Kym, without the mask, woke me up offering me a nice cup of tea. Kym seemed to me a sympathetic and good looking young girl, so I deduced that Boris’ claim that she was “sick” indicated in his own typical misogynist and megalomaniac way that she was not his style. I asked her about Boris. I believe that she guessed that I knew he left distressed. She simply replied that “all men are the same,... you have this little police inside,... it makes you powerful and strong,... but you are doomed to fail,... you are vulnerable, but I don’t want to talk about that”. She rapidly changed the subject; she told me that she was nineteen and that she was actually working in a chic and fashionable Restaurant called *Café Berlin* in the high middle class surroundings of Charlottenburg. Shockingly, Kym had a couple of beers for breakfast and I ate an apple.



Photo 11: The main house door to Kym's apartment.

Obviously, she had to ease down the “nervous knot” of her stomach. Her talking became quite personable. She acknowledged that chatting with me was like having an older brother she never had. Her talking was often simultaneously emotive and tragic, which I found odd and spooky in the beginning. She kept repeating that the world is “bad” –by nature- and that she could not get away from the people she hanged out with, because “even though they are shit, I really love them”.

I asked her what sort of friends she had, maybe some of the people that were masked in the party last night? She said that her friends hang out in another scene and that –probably like the rest of the participants in the party of masks- she did not know anybody else at the pavilion last night. She said that she did not want to talk about her friends in question because “they are into a very bad scene”. I wrote down her telephone number in a piece of paper and made a promise to meet again and enjoy dinner together. Beside the point that I was intuitively sensing that

Kym could be a valid chapter for my work, I was craving to know her better out of sheer curiosity.

8.4 The Last Gift of My Birthday

The 23rd of March was the day of my twenty eighth birthday. I had invited many friends, many of whom –such as Ana, Gertrud, Ulf and Tobias – were already becoming particulars I was writing on. I had also invited Kym for dinner and the aftermath party. My neighbor and friend Georg, who lived two numbers down in Strelitzer St. and worked as the manager in the economic *Aldi* supermarket in Bernauerstrasse, helped me to cook a dinner compounded by a salad and stewed lamb. Claudia had set the big table of her retro-decorated room for the occasion. She also took out her best cutlery. The spacious bohemian room was illuminated solely by candle lights.

The ambience during dinner was smooth and polite. Many of the members sharing the menu -that Georg and I had prepared- met for the first time at the table. After dinner the ambience started to cheer up, animosity was soon fermenting. Countless friends from Claudia came to the flat well equipped with Rioja wine bottles, which they had acquired at the Weinerei (Wine Club) in Mitte. Even though Claudia had played cool *bossa nova* by Astrud Gilberto, Vinicius de Moraes, and Gilberto Gil during dinner time, as soon as her *rave* party gang came around, electronic music appeared pitilessly.

One of the most astonishing aspects of dinner had been the amount of wine Kym had been drinking discreetly. She sat near Gertrud and Ana who were gladly amazed by Kym's sympathetic behaviors and "cute" look. Soon after dinner, Gertrud and Ana, very thankful, left flattered of having dined along with young and passionate youngsters. Around midnight, most of the crowd gathered in the flat were standing up and semi-dancing in order to make some room. Claudia and I decided to take a couple of tables and other light furniture to Tobias' flat.

The party goers started dancing to the beat of *Stereolab* right away. An hour later, I was trying to find Georg in the party. It was impossible, the entire flat was full of Mitte inhabitants and one could hardly move. There were people even in the bathroom. Rambling in the middle of the crowd, in my own flat, by chance, I glanced two or three people banging the door of the kitchen. They were indeed commanding the people inside the kitchen to open the door.

By pushing, I came near to the door and was explained by two young men that about ten minutes before they had been sent away from the kitchen by a young girl who was accompanied by a young guy. Apparently, the young girl had ordered the people in the kitchen to leave because she and her friend had to prepare a surprise for the party. The situation was strange. Even more so taking into account that the kitchen door did not have a lock or a keyhole to shut it down.

I tried hard to open the door and realized that somebody was pushing the door from inside, keeping it shut. I claimed that it was enough, that the party needed the space of the kitchen. The door of the kitchen opened abruptly. Georg came out of the kitchen extremely angry and furious saying to somebody else inside, "... leave me alone,... you are crazy,... you are far out,...".

Georg, upset, walked away pushing the members of the crowd. I opened the kitchen door completely and there was Kym in the intense dark of the kitchen tying the lowest buttons of her black silk shirt with an innocent smile impressed in her cool tempered face. She held a half empty bottle of *Rioja* wine. Wordless left the room with a cavalier attitude. The party goers who were outside -including I- were not able of making sense of what we just had observed. The two young men at the entrance of the kitchen door began giggling and gossiping about the scene.

Immediately, I lighted up again the candles that were set up on the shelves of the kitchen and many party goers who were -restless- bottled up in the corridor moved in to the kitchen. Finally, there was more space for everyone in the flat. I looked for Georg again and found him, looking stubborn and lonely, stressfully

inhaling a cigarette next to the window. As soon as he noticed me approaching, he complained “whose friend is that sick whore?, who brought her in here?”. I was stupefied by Georg’s unusual aggressive tone and remained silent.

In a frustrated tone, smoking the cigarette unpleasantly, Georg explained that Kym and he had been flirting after dinner and that as soon as Claudia’s gang started dancing, they were already kissing. He added that in the beginning he really found Kym charming and attractive, “a nice young girl”. Soon after dinner, Kym had hold Georg’s hand and took him to the kitchen, where by telling everyone that Kym and Georg were quickly preparing a birthday present, Kym was able to convince everyone in the kitchen to leave.

Then, she turned off all of the candles in the kitchen. Georg, standing next to the window, was uncomfortable, but was still disgusted, dealing with the cigarette; he had more to tell, but it did not seem an easy thing to do. He whispered and felt into series of tight breaths and hollow silences. According to his testimony, Kym had persuaded Georg to love her from behind, while she kept the door closed with both of her hands leaned on the door. Georg thought it was definitely “too forward” and “wild”, especially because there was not a way of locking the kitchen door up. Nevertheless, Kym kept insisting that she would press the door hard and kept it close. Georg responded Kym that they could just go to his flat, after all, he lived two numbers down the street. Kym just replied that it had to happen there, in the kitchen, and it had to be her way.

Thus, Georg physically aroused of having kinky sex banging against the public sphere, began loving her from behind. Georg told me that he was loosing his mind literally when Kym began to scream “harder, harder”. Nevertheless, soon, the restless party goers at the corridor began to knock on the door insistently commanding whoever was inside to open it. According to Georg, the banging of the kitchen door made Kym morbidly excited out of excessive lust. Apparently, she began to demand Georg also to punch her, slap her and hit her in the back while

penetrating her from behind. Georg found the situation awkward, but he just kept loving Kym from behind, ignoring her demands.

The party goers in the corridor banged the door aggressively. On Georg's account, in a mixture of tension and arousal, Kym was becoming increasingly excited. With one hand, she grabbed a bread cutting knife from the kitchen shelves near the door she was keeping shut and had imperatively ordered Georg to scratch her back's skin. The testimony follows that Georg, perplexed, ignored her, and then she ordered him again even more aggressively. It was then when Georg recognized my voice on the other side of the door, put his trousers back up and left the room confused and upset. For the first time in the narration of his testimony, George, smashing the cigarette on the ashtray, looked straight at me and claimed that she was definitely serious about the knife.

Georg's narration had left me mute. An image came to my mind. Boris at Kym's flat persuading me to leave the flat with him because she was "sick". Meanwhile, the noisy electronic party was going on. A mother living with two children at the last floor, and the carpenter living one number up the street showed up in the party. The neighbors were menacing Claudia that if the party was not over in five minutes they would call the Police. I left Georg smoking another cigarette near the window, accompanied by an unsettling and unaccountable silence.

That was the end of the party in our flat; most of the party goers, including Claudia, cooperatively, moved to the *Weinerei* in Brunnenstrasse where the party continued until early morning. Georg also left, but seemingly confused and intrigued by the morbid encounter he had with Kym, he walked home. I was left alone in a flat full of colorful papers, empty beer can and wine bottles, countless fag ends, wasted candles and a couple of forgotten scarves.

I was bringing dishes to the sink when somebody rang in the door bell. I thought it was probably somebody who had forgotten a scarf. As I opened the door, Kym entered in the flat, serious, indifferent and with her arms crossed. She went

straight to the kitchen; grabbed a beer can from the fridge, opened it and sat down on a chair. I walked in the kitchen. Kym lighted up a cigarette and with a contorted facial expression stuck it onto her arms naked flesh. I took a hand to my mouth and asked her to stop burning her flesh, and continuously, she took the jacket off and put up the shirtsleeves.

The skin of her both arms had cuts, scratches and burned spots that apparently had been self-made. Kym kept caressing and pressing some of the cuts and wounds on her arms while paradoxically experiencing sensations of pain and pleasure. She looked at me and said, “you wanted to know me? ... this is it,... this makes me feel real”. Kym was exhibiting her violently self-inflicted over-stimulation of the senses. She also licked her fingers and then smeared the cuts with her saliva. This happened to be a visceral and intensive encounter, instead of representational and extensive. Kym was there, in front of me, exhibiting her wounded flesh, monstrous, unstable and out of the -socially conventional- control.

I could not react or give an account to such sensational overload in any pacifying or controlling form. Just as it happened to Georg, Kym’s material sensations and sexual desires were so far from being reducible to self-consciousness that for the most part they were not compatible with it. Kym’s violent passion was imprinted directly in the flesh, before any possible movement of self-reflection. When, during the party, I had approached Georg standing near to the windows, confused, almost chewing a cigarette, he was affected and compelled by Kym’s pain waves; a brutal experience that remains not even hers’. In such disturbing intimacy, Kym was not giving way to a new sort of identity, but literally to something more monstrous, a point of absolute singularity.

Georg himself, shocked by the bizarre sexual incident with Kym had claimed “Who has brought that whore here?”. Indeed, it is actually difficult to know the thought contents that lay behind Kym’s often shifting and ambiguous facial expression. But when her flesh was pushed to the extremities in the passage of the knife, Georg was affected by a physical shock, violated in the space of his own

privacy. She took her jacket. I insisted if I could see her again. This is the day I still do not *know* Kym's motivation to invite me to a *black metal* concert when she left the flat. Neither can I clearly explain why I attended such weird and bizarre concert. Perhaps, an ethnographic attraction (obscure force!) and lust to encounter corporeal intensities, where the inner bodily excitation and outer objective representation collapse, compelled me to go to the concert.

8.5 Black Metal in Pankov

Three weeks had passed since my birthday party was celebrated. It took me a couple of hours to find the huge store house at Pankov –northern outskirts of Berlin- where a *black metal* concert was to take place. I had borrowed a car from Stephan who in the last minute decided not to come with me, and instead planned to go to a *rave* party. By the time I found the remote store house, there were several groups gathered at the place; most of them were dressed in elastic black items and had their faces painted with white make up and eyes underlined in black. There were also a few fascist skin-heads dressed in black.

Another segment of the audience was wearing t-shirts from Judas Priest and Black Sabbath; those seemed to branch over to the 1970's heavy metal style. Deliberately, I had dressed in black and my own 70's (*pro-anarchist*) leather jacket, which unexpectedly allowed me to pass as a member of this last segment. This community of head-bangers seemed to be the least aggressive, at least at first sight. Most of the subjects gathered in front of the stage were behaving exorbitantly individualistic and nihilistic, and their elegant and baroque *black metal* clothing was reminiscent of neoclassical chaos.

A fight took place. A couple of shaved head and big booted skin neo-Nazis and two seemingly older heavy metal fans began kicking, punching and tossing on the asphalt ground. The neo-Nazis had been hailing against Jews and Christians as praised by *Burzum* – the band that we were all waiting to listen. A couple of regular *black metal* fans also joined the fight; these last ones insisted on presenting

themselves as real *black metal* and *Burzum* followers, screaming that “they needed no scam fighting between each other in their concert”. Their attitude was utterly exclusivist; the *black metal* followers kept arguing that the other two gangs should stop being a herd of aggregates and rather become more individualistic.

The *black metal* fans rioted against the neo-Nazis and the more humanistic (“stupid hippies”) heavy metal gang. For a moment, I was scared and stepped back to a corner in the huge store house. Suddenly, Kym showed up, grabbed my arm and took me to her friends. They, arrogant and stagnant, were the vampire-like looking individuals of the *black metal* gang, who were still pushing, screaming kicking and struggling with the neo-Nazis and heavy metal gangs. Kym introduced a couple of friends to me; Gabi and Micha. They were both explicitly unfriendly and stared at me with fiery eyes and straightened neck of superiority.

Kym was furious for her friends only care about Kym as “Martin’s girlfriend”. Kym told me that Martin was around, but she was too upset to introduce me to him; her eyes were watery out of fury. Hot-tempered, Kym moved into the riot and pushed a neo-Nazi to the floor. Micha and another guy were next to her, but they did not even move when another neo-Nazi punched Kym in the middle of the stomach. It took Kym a while to recover her breath; the punch took her by surprise; she was angry and upset. I tried to help her and she refused my aid by kicking me hard in the leg.

The guy that was near Micha when Kym has been punched came close to me and ordered me not to be “miserable”. Kym stood up and yelled at him, that is, to her friend Micha for not having “defended me, and fought along me”. Martin responded that what she really wanted is that he and Micha covered her back, “and that is where slave morality starts,... you only have your own will,... refine it!”. Kym kept screaming wildly. Martin, indifferent, proudly walked away.

Kym was outraged and kept talking to me endlessly, agitated, about her annoyance because her friends talked about Kym merely as “Martin’s girlfriend,...

as if I were an object, a possession of his,... I hate it with all my guts,...". I commented to Kym that I did not understand how she could even consider them her friends when they were actually praising nothing but vengeance and violence. Kym looked at me and explained that "you do not understand anything". The riot between the three gangs was calming down gradually when the band *Burzum* appeared on stage. I was glad that I did not bring the digital video camera with me, since it would have probably been destroyed in such barbaric atmosphere.

Burzum's music was quite complex; they combined melodic over-lapping producing a special harmony. Often, the lyrics were quite poetic, brief nihilistic texts that were wrongly understood caricatures of the praised Nietzsche, Burroughs, Schopenhauer, etc. "There is nothing,... only your power,... you are the master of your self, of the inferior, of the world,... support the German domination,... One White Power!". The icon singer Varg spouted individualistic fragments recreating dark organic Paganism, and proto-Nazi philosophies. During the concert, many apocalyptic phrases burst out of the audience, and Burzum seemed to be immersed in the mission of preparing all its listeners for utter destruction: "The destruction of the world is approaching,... Fire! Fire! Fire!,... a new Fuhrer will reign,... Turks and Blacks will be annihilated completely,... (Vociferous emphasis added) Kill the Jews! Kill the Jews!,... Hail Hitler! Hail Hitler!"

In the middle of the concert, almost randomly, a sheep was raised in the air by the pushy crowds; right in front of the stage, the throat of the living sheep was pitilessly and visibly cut by the hands of somebody impossible to discern; tens of arms around were euphorically praising death. Varg kept persuading the listeners to think against the unthinking herd, holding to the *ubermensch* (super-man) status. Mindless and vandal-like actions were praised, such as the burning of the Churches. Varg kept signaling his own head during the concert claiming that their work moved beyond anti-Christianity and Nazism.

Burzum's glare of *black metal* in rage was characterized by nihilism, environmentalism, melodic poetry, anti-morality, honor and the myths of the pre-

Christian “noble” peoples of Scandinavia. Furthermore, the music band and the viscerally over-reacting crowd seemed to fuse in an organic sense. *Burzum*'s music kept certain motion in it with an embedded narrative. Yet the experimental and refined techniques of synthesizers often provoked the shattering of the expected song structure which arouse the crowds even more euphorically. The sheep shaken by spasms was in the air bleeding dramatically until it deceased. The hands keeping the dead body of the sheep in the air –as if it were swallowed by the death praising and fascistically aroused the crowd- brought the sacrificed sheep down.

The long and cruising wavy songs built melody in fast riffing, and thus, created an insane atmosphere. A myriad of permutations allowed the melody and phrases be explored in unexpected new ways. Kym suggested that there was a fairly high degree of spontaneity in the playing of *Burzum*. Accidentally, I had made a comment about the improvisational aspect of Jazz, and she plainly ignored me, as if the photos of Jazz musicians hanging on one of the walls of her room were completely inexistent that night.

The intense and heavy concert went on for two hours; yet the buzz in the ears remained much longer. I was glad that Kym and I had remained at the entrance of the store house for most of the concert. There was a five hundred people crowd whose hands, as much as fists, were being moved aggressively. The music band had finished the concert and the crowds, static, started vociferously ordering another song; “Cut your flesh, cut your flesh, cut your flesh,...”. By the many horn-sign making hands over the heads of the crowd, I deduced that the audience was praising Satan.

Kym, emotive, intriguing, assured me that she had a pact with the devil. The carcass of the dead sheep flew onto the stage, which brought a more intense roaring of the crowds and continuous return of the members of *Burzum* onto the stage. They played one more song that began with bloody shrieks followed by a *soundscape* of a forest accompanied by an environmental and quasi romantic melody against nuclear energy, and ended with a dissonant rhythm pulsating motion and

harmonies in an unbalanced and non-peaceful way. Varg kept repeating that “we have to be ready for the day of destruction”. The end of the concert was disturbingly apocalyptic.

The concert was over. I turned around and realized that Kym was not with me. The crowds –screaming vociferously and quite drunk- were leaving the store house as if in a pilgrimage. Finally, I recognized Micha standing near an iron girder alone. He was fixatedly staring to the dim-lighted big room nearby. I came close to Micha and realized what he was looking at; on the other room, there were Martin and Kym. The latter one was laying on the floor, visibly half naked as if somebody had been trying to take her clothes away forcefully.

Kym ordered Martin to take his leather belt replete of metal bullets off and hit her hard pitilessly. Martin took his belt off and whipped her –three times- in the back and once on the head. Kym’s screams sounded of somebody wounded, but simultaneously of somebody awkwardly pleased. Kym also begged Martin to kick her ass literally. Martin hesitated calling Kym “a loser”. Kym just kept repeating the same order arguing that Martin had “no balls” to kick her, she asserted that “you lick your own dick for a matter of taste”, etc.

I, disquieted, tried to move in the dim-lighted room, but Micha’s menacing knife kept me away. My witnessing could not be more awkward and disturbing. Kym, four legged, was crawling on the floor as a wounded beast going through aggressive oscillations between pain and pleasure. The violence and passionate variables were anchored and expressed by the brute facticity of Kym’s bodily and facial transformations. It is difficult and unpleasant to give a satisfactory account of this obscene scenario. I had nausea. Martin was very nervous, his hands were shaky, and he wanted to resist her urgent commands, yet she was successfully hurting his dominating pride. The function of Kym’s violence was one of speaking for Martin’s mouth with no compassion. Martin had kicked Kym’s ass hard, and Kym just continued provoking and verbally insulting Martin. She kept claiming that “you are not a real man,... you can only make love with your leg,... like a sort of cripple”.

Kym was insistently transgressing Martin's self-contained authoritarianism to a lower, inferior level through humor. First, Martin had whipped Kym with the belt full of bullets, and then had kicked Kym's ass meanly with his hard edged boots. He seems to be wanting to educate and convince her by the very violence of aggression. Yet no matter how much suffering and painful disgrace he inflicted on Kym, Martin could not escape the fact that Kym was speaking through his own mouth with no pity. They seemed to be trapped in a vicious circle with no way out. Martin had completely raped her while she kept commanding him to slap her face. And so he did.

Kym's body was the site of the most violent alterations (she was enduring spasms) and of the most intense affects. Her body was being continually subjugated, and in this process she was experiencing extremities of pleasure, pain and horror. It seemed that Martin and Kym had a strange silent complicity, a secret pact activating the very animalities and anarchisms that Martin's domination and oppression over Kym attempted to preserve.

Micha's and my own witnessing was deeply indeterminate, in the sense that the brutal event could not be plainly defined in conventional terms of lack or fantasy; Kym's intense and awkward passion could not be described or comprehended as a desire for mastery, closure and self-possession. I felt empathically and corporeally close to Micha's restlessness for the witnessing was violently embedded in our flesh. There was only the ecstasy and terror of Kym and Martin's abjection. Furthermore, I would add that not only Martin's male subjectivity, but also Micha and my own was rendered to the flesh, and quietly consummated in Kym's violence.

The brutality of the scene was unbearable and I just walked into the dim-lighted room again to stop the endless vicious cycle of pain. Micha did not keep me near him this time. I asked Martin and Kym to stop and to leave the place right away. Martin stood up, with his erected vigorous dick and rapidly punched me in the face. I falled down to the floor and my jaw was hurting in the bone. Kym kept

telling Martin that he could dominate a "wimp" like I, but not a mistress woman. Her mouth, as if it had its own pulsating and obscene life, kept rambling non-stop – in a humorous tone- arguing that Martin, a "credited homo", could probably not "fuck" her properly.

Kym's self-inflicting violence could be seen as masochistic, destructive and psychologically deviant, yet its excessive materiality constitutes a form of resisting Martin's male domination. Moreover, I would argue that Kym invested her own body right at the excess of Martin's sexist fantasy which inevitably led to its destruction and not to an utopian remove from such fantasy. No matter how violently Martin inflicted pain on Kym, she kept affirming the irretrievable "other" to power. My own witnessing of such brutal event ended up disrupting the power mechanisms of watching from a distance by the very fact that Kym's material violence was pushing power relations -between Martin and her, and the ethnographer and her- to its limits.

For Micha and I sight was not a neutral source of information, but an aggression to the integrity of our bodies. No one was unaffected, even Micha's watery eyes and the sour swallowing of saliva indicated the body of a witness whose most intense pleasures lied in the unresolved tensions of vulnerability, ambivalence and fear. Micha was increasingly nervous, just as Martin's inflicted violence on Kym kept escalating. He would make a step forward perhaps with the intention of stopping such brutal scene, but then he would stop, hesitate and swallow a ball of anguish; his restlessness was noticeable. In my case, the forced and contorted bodily gestures started to produce nausea which had become more vivid and noticeable than the pain of the hurting jaw.

Martin, violently, raped and fucked Kym on the asphalt floor. He ripped several of her clothes and underwear. However, recklessly, she kept demanding Martin to slap her face, to fuck her harder. She even held his arm persuading him to hit her ribs. The materiality of such a scene cannot be redeemed in any form, its contaminating alterity can not be possessed. Yet it is the very excess of sensation,

that is, the untenable quality of such monstrous and painful act that is most affirmative. Kym seemed to indicate that the more her flesh was unbearable the harder it was to recuperate. Indeed, it was extremely hard to distinguish the extremities of agony from those of pleasure.

The series of bodily and violent intensities seemed to be an *other* to power, an excess that disturbed Martin's will to power, an irreverent surplus of sensation that he could not control or appropriate. Thus, Martin had turbulent and orgasmic spasms. I had the impression that Kym's body was going to burst into pieces. Surprisingly, soon after Martin had the orgasm, he started simultaneously gasping and mourning. He seemed to have an emotional breakdown, standing on the asphalt on his limbs, sniffing and crying. Kym, with a nosebleed, stood up and, hieratically, put her clothes on as decently as she could. She was obviously battered and wounded, but nevertheless aggressively began whispering to Martin "that only little babies cry, ... you are not a noble warrior,... yes, maybe now I am pregnant and I will take the eyes of the baby away in front of you and your friends,... you piece of shit".

Kym came out of the dim-lighted room, and ignoring Micha and I, with a victorious walking she could pathetically maintain, she walked away on her own. Immediately, Micha approached Martin whose cries and screams sounded furiously frustrated. I run to Kym and offered her to give her a drive. Stephan's *Trabant* had the back windshield destroyed, probably by some individuals who had attended the *black metal* concert. I felt really angry because I would have to cover the costs of the car injury and my economic situation at the moment was not very opulent. Nevertheless, I consoled myself thinking that I did well not bringing my digital camera.

Kym and I were in the car about to leave the industrial areas of Pankov. As soon as Kym, seating near me in the car, turned around and glanced Martin, angry and hurt, running after us, she –out of panic- persuaded me to start driving fast. She blushed aggressively and was breathing quickly. For a moment, I thought she was

going to collapse. Even long after we were driving on the highway toward the city and were supposedly save from Martin, Kym kept having a series of drowning shocks pressing from her stomach upwards. Her muscles were very tense and her heart was beating quite quickly. Her fears were physically felt through a series of stresses pressing her body indiscriminately. She really seemed to be in the edge of a nervous breakdown. I was worried, but slowly, as we approached the city center, her anxiety crises – a heightened bodily sniffing of danger- started to come down.

Lusty, aberrant, she seemed to me extremely appealing. The blood on her face, her irregular puffing, the previous scene of danger and the violence irradiating upon her blushed cheeks turned me on. I felt she was obscenely and fatally attractive. Perhaps due to my Catholic background, just as Jean Genet (1973) paralleled the brutality of the criminal with the delicacy and subtlety of a flower, I could not but find an excessive proximity between the moral purity of Virgin Mary and the abject presence of Kym.

We were soon into our way into the city. Kym's nose bleed was decreasing and she had a headache. With the helping intention of aiding her nosebleed and wound, I spoke to her but she, very rudely, responded to leave her alone. I insisted talking to her, but it was in vain. She kept ignoring me. As my usual tendency, I was detouring my physical drive to the ideal model of heterosexual romance. I felt troubled. My desire for Kym was not about this, and I was spoiling, and ruining the altering intensity. I felt troubled and had to see her again. I wanted to approach Kym and love her, but devoid of heterosexual miseries, the religious poverty of possession, guilt and resignation.

When we were at Friedrichsein I asked her if I could at least see her the following days. She answered that she was very busy practicing piano, because of the fifteenth of December, late in the evening, she had to perform a piece in the Music Institute. She hoped she would be asked to play Schubert, her favorite composer. I dropped Kym near her flat in Friedrichsein; she left without a goodbye

or a glimpse. By the way she was walking, her body seemed to be hurting much more intensively than it did before.

Among other things, Kym's experience has suggested me that, perhaps, our conventional images of "normalcy" and "health" are grounded in the denial of bodily passions, in the expulsion of its monstrous ambivalences. I can still feel the panic at the vision of Kym's uncontrollable flesh, its razor-blade stresses and spasm transformations, or even the bizarre intensity of her physical sensations when licking her wounds in my kitchen. Indeed, the more I try to control such visions from gaining distance from the vibrant and palpitating ethnographic notes, the more such vision seems to inscribe in my nerves, and flash across synapses. Sometimes, as a corporeal ethnography demands, the real is not so much what it is lost and what is referred to, but –in the Artaudian screams, blows and passions of *everything made body*- it is what suffers and is transformed.

8.6 The Piano Recitals

The fifteenth of December, around eleven p.m. I arrived to the German Institute of Music in Unter den Linden. Only the very skilled enter this Music school that is known for its discipline and austerity. I walked into the main auditorium. A thin and short hair girl was playing the piano for a semi-full auditorium and four teachers who were carefully listening and observing the young girl play Chopin's Valse in No. 7, sharp Do minor. Op. 24. N2. As it was explained by a serious looking teacher once the girl was done with the delicate, refined and bright piece.

The tribune of teachers –quite dry and crude- criticized and commented upon Caroline's subtle performance of Chopin's lyrical and intimate piece. The teachers of the academy pointed out that this pleasant and romantic ballad needs to be performed with a careful playing of the *rubato*, which is a musical recourse characterized by the altering of movements' regularity for expressive purposes. This criticism was quite direct, instructive and affect-less in the form; the way the serious

teacher with a moustache picked on Caroline roughly exhibited a crude sense of superiority on the form.

Caroline responded to the teacher of the Institute that she really tried not to lose the expressive unity and felt that had been lyrical enough in her playing. The teachers of the academy, had the last -univocal- word, and asserted categorically that Caroline had the chance and should continue practicing in a much more concentrated form. Caroline stood up, and hot tempered pulled the piano stool one meter behind, puffed desperately and whipping left the room somewhat anguished.

From the oral interventions of the professors, I learned that there is a sophisticated language of affects that perhaps I should have appropriated more insistently in my work. In this regard, its analytical precision and perceptiveness on sensation can be considered advanced compared to the often affectively impoverished mechanical language of social sciences. The wide *tessitura* of such gramophone when referring to the colorations and oscillations is strikingly rich, especially when taking into consideration that such subtle and extremely sensible poetics of music is to a large extent officially bounded within the normative and hierarchical structure of the Institute of Music.

Matilde was second player performing a piano piece. She was asked to play *Children's Corner* by Claude Debussy, a collection of piano pieces that the author himself had dedicated to his small daughter. These piano pieces recreate a magical and infant world. Matilde seemed to perform very pleasantly. Unlike the hieratic Caroline, her bodily movements while playing the piano seemed to express relaxation and joy. After Matilde had finished playing the six movements of the collection, the members of the academy criticized Matilde for playing in a way that was extremely self-indulgent and idiosyncratic.

Matilde politely thanked academy's instructive criticism, and argued that according to her, Debussy's collection should be played with certain degree of personal freedom because he wrote it renouncing to technical difficulties.

Immediately, the members of the academy –disturbed and upset- responded that she should not justify herself demagogically, as an “infant baby refusing to leave the amniotic liquid atmosphere of her mother’s womb”. Matilde, heart-broken, and sniffing, left the auditory almost running.

The third and last player seating on the waiting bench was Kym. She was dressed elegantly in black; she was wearing a high-neck pull-over as well as a black skirt. Her hair was long, shiny and perfectly combed. A silver chain with a figure of little dragon (secretly revealing her devotion to *black metal*) hanged from her subtle neck. She had drawn a sweet, charming and vulnerable smile in her face; her gestures were oddly charitable and vulnerable like I had never seen her before. She walked to the grand piano and sat acquiring a sophisticated and rigid pose.

Kym had wished to play Schubert, her favorite piano composer, but the members of the academy asked her to perform the well known *Moonlight Sonata* which seemed not only to reflect the painful flowering of Beethovens’ and his beloved student Giulietta Guicciardi, but also Kym’s own love inferno in relation to Martin. She played the piece, serious and concentrated. The members of the academy whispered in silence while discussing Kym’s performance of Beethoven’s three pieces. They did not seem to agree. Kym remained seated in the piano, very straight, looking innocent – with a tireless benevolent and almost silly smile.

Finally, the teachers acceded to claim that Kym’s piano performance had been technically correct, but it did not carry any emotion from her own playing. They criticized her for not playing from within and waited for a reply from her. Unlike the previous two piano students, Kym responded that the members of the academy were right in everything they argued and that she should train more to be able to play Beethoven emotionally. Thus, she kept making an exaggerated panegyric of academy’s wonders that soon turned out to be disturbing, humiliating and insulting for the teachers themselves.

A current of collective embarrassment run through the audience. Kym was hyperbolically literalizing the ideology that equates femininity with passivity, receptivity and castration. Kym was making the members of the academy and the crowd in the auditorium obsessively aware that it is also cultural institutions – and not natural need- what was imposing a restricted economy of “functional” behavior. Kym’s attitude provoked an scandal in the auditorium, even more explicitly when the teachers expressed their indignation and she simply continued behaving as the peaceful, obedient, inoffensive and sweet piano girl.

Once again, Kym’s anatomy was not destiny, precisely because her revolting corporeality was the realm in which the symbolic inscription of the fixed gender as a submissive female piano player reached its limit. The members of the Academy, indignant about Kym’s behavior, stood up and imperatively ordered Kym to leave the respectable auditorium. The crowd in the auditorium was immersed in a confusing and endless murmur. Kym just remained seated in the piano stool, smiling sweet and cheerfully, as if she would be thousands of kilometers away from what was occurring in the auditorium.

Her eyes were shiny and watery. She sat in the piano stool, small, only nineteen years old. Paradoxically, if the members of the academy –perhaps justly- had criticized her for separating her affects from the performed piece of Beethoven, her unsettling, silent and smiling waiting on the piano stool was precisely attacking the very separation of desire from the body, the Symbolic from the Real that she was supposed to respect. Now, they pulled her arms. She was being ostracized and taken out of the auditorium because she had enabled everybody in the auditorium to confront the way in which power directly assays the flesh.

The institutional power and academy’s authority had been figurally swallowed up by Kym within the mechanisms of fear that they police to maintain structured. The ambiguity, confusion and intense pleasure that Kym’s subversive embodiment provoked in the murmuring crowd was hardly avoidable. Her excessively obedient body had become a site of resistance for its being necessary

target and support of the institution's power. Her bodily rebellion did not allow the functional and "normal" behavior dictated by the academy to proceed; indeed, the stubborn presence and density of Kym's submissive embodiment could not be placed out of the auditorium, or for that matter, out of history. Kym's passive inversion in bodily turbulence was again marking the limit of institutional and gender powers.

Furthermore, I would like to claim that her irreverent flesh is not fatal only to the institution's educational regime, but also for the assertion of the personal initiative. In fact, after she was over with Beethoven's piece, when Kym was still sitting on the piano stool, alone in the wide stage, for a moment it seemed that anything could happen, that anybody (including the listeners in the audience) could act in a perfectly uncontrollable way.

In fact, the reaction of the auditorium –many of whom were students themselves- had been intensely ambivalent. The all-too-vulnerable flesh of the students had been disquieted by Kym's intense ambivalence, but they seemed to remain formally nailed to the seats of the high demanding institution. A halo of contradictory faces, a nebulous comment of love and hate, wrapped the crowd in an intense and ambivalent confusion. Kym's body had to be removed from the main auditorium to allow the academy and the crowd to turn back to the rigorous myth of willed action.

To which new threshold of intense and painful sensation would Kym take me? I wrote in the ethnographic notebook before leaving the auditorium. Once I came out to the pavement of *Unter den Linden*, I bumped into Kym who was in a corner, behind a Corinthian column, smoking a cigarette very aggressively. She stepped on the cigarette and left in a hurry. I run after her and asked her if she could give me a ride home. There was no getting away from the monstrosity of Kym's body, and from the violence with which she was altered. Precisely, due to the fact that there was no essential nature, no spontaneous being of Kym's body.

I have tried to describe in detail the way in which Kym's body was invested and colonized by power mechanism, becoming both a means and an end of social as well as ethnographic control. After all, this written text is also a product of the power relations set up between Kym and I, as ethnographer and subject, and perhaps, as friends. Kym remembered that I had taken her home after Martin had forced her physically obeying to her own orders, and knew well that there was an expectation she had to bring to "our" relationship, due to my kindness. This kindness of course, according to Kym's passionate embodiment was not free from power mechanisms.

The last time I was with Kym she refused to take me home as she was expected to do. That night in Kym's car, I also talked to her about my opinions; in a pathetic psychological tone, I told her that she should probably find some help to gain self-esteem and stop hurting herself. I told her that she should take time and dedicate herself to recover. From the rough way in which she stopped the car and left me in the middle of nowhere, long after midnight, not so far from the Reichstag, Kym was emphasizing that the promise for liberation may be another avatar of manipulative power.

9 - Petra's Driving Shocks

9.1 Kracauer's White Collar Workers

The dread and sense of emptiness, panic and horror in Petra's body could refer to Kracauer's expression "angst is stark naked" (Frisby 1988:138). The following paragraphs reveal a middle age woman -working as a receptionist- that instead of remaining entrapped alone in a huge open square in the middle of Berlin, has found in the car and its potential velocity an aggressive way to contest the violently illuminated streets, neon signs and advertisement which themselves are launching against the tiredness and loneliness of the city walker.

The event of Petra driving madly through the night is a speedy protest against the darkness of the isolated life in the city and the brutality of its artificial lighting. It is impossible for me to cross one single road in Berlin without remembering Petra, almost expecting that she may turn the street in her squealing car, as if it were an explosive hidden in every corner and could indeed explode at any moment.

Petra drifts herself into potentially destructive actions in order to "feel alive". The case study of Petra resonates with Siegfried Kracauer's works on the Berlin of the twenties (1995: 1998), in which the writer decoded the surface manifestations of the new salaried employees who populated the cities of the Weimar Republic. Kracauer (1998) introduces us to a metropolitan life where existence and meaning have vanished. Indeed, he considers that the domination of scientific and capitalist rationality constitutes a break between knowledge and existence. Thus, we are faced with lonely and empty particulars who are dispersed in the urban desert and do not quite ever be together, even when they are pressed in the close proximity of the underground.

In fact, Petra's life echoes with the white-collar workers described by Kracauer (1995). For instance, revealing parallelisms can be drawn from his

imaginative comparison of the hotel lobby and the church with Petra's work at the reception office in a computer corporation. Kracauer points out that the guests entering the church, no matter how unknown they are to each other, they do somehow partake in a religious community, whereas at the hotel lobby the dispersed particulars lack relationship to each other. The hotel lobbies, as it was described in the detective novels of the twenties, configured a space that distanced the individual from the everyday life, but did not enable the development of any sort of community.

Kracauer himself described the hotel lobby as a "mere void" (1998: 43), which evokes Petra's long and absurd impersonal hours remaining seated at the reception desk. As it happened at the hotel lobbies, for Petra the arrival of white-collar workers into the computer terminal is that of coming and going of unknown persons that salute her routinely by expressing gratitude to Petra's superficial aura. In the hotel lobby, as well as in the church and the computer corporation, the maintenance of quietness is required, even though at the church this takes form of a spiritual congregation and at the lobby and the computer terminal it serves as the airless sound of anonymousness.

Kracauer wrote: "How can I be beautiful? Asks the title of a journal recently thrown on the market, to which the newspaper advertisement adds, that it shows the means "by which one looks attractive for the moment and permanently". Fashion and the economy work hand in hand" (Frisby 1988:166). In Petra, the anxiety of staying young is explicitly present. Not in vain, she consumes magazines in which youth is illustrated fetish. As indicated by Petra herself, in order to initiate herself in the white-collar world it was necessary that she conveys a "good impression". The importance of physical as well as dressing appearance makes Petra's life highly transparent and tightly linked to shop windows, fashion magazines and other forms of distraction such as her devotion to pop music radio and cyber-sex.

Petra usually never had a political opinion, nor was interested in any kind of intellectual or "serious" conversation. She was involved in maintaining her physical

attraction or glamour ongoing. In fact, she spent more money on cosmetics and clothing than she did in her housing and food expenses. It can be argued that Petra found in the make up colors, refreshing perfumes, pop hit tunes, cyber-sex and the high speed driving car forms of distraction that would distance her from the unbearable monotony of the corporate work. The more she was deadened and numbed corporeally through work, dressing and cosmetics, the more aggressively she would drive to awaken her senses.

Whereas Kracauer's white collar workers (1998) seek diversion in amusement and distraction in films, pleasure barracks, large drinking places and the like, Petra will engage in the virtual world of the Internet as well as the anti-social thrills of kamikaze driving. The sensation of physical arousal experienced by Petra resonates with the violent convulsions that can be enjoyed in spectacular roller-coasters of amusement Parks.

9.2 The Boredom of a Receptionist

By chance, Petra and I, standing up, shared a table at an outdoors *Kebab* caravan. At first, we made some rhetorical and ordinary comments about the large number of tourists and buyers visiting Europa Center every day. Quickly, Petra realized that I had a southern European accent and asked me where I came from. We introduced ourselves and she explained that she worked full time as a secretary for an Internet network programming company. She described her professional work as "extremely boring", in the typical of a tedious administrative position.

Apparently, her job was unusually tiring. It required an exhausting endurance to sit at the entrance hall of the company just painting or fixing her nails, or simply doing nothing for endless hours that "felt like whole centuries". According to Petra, the stillness and quietness of the long labor hours often produced a bodily intensity that "made me feel twisted inside". "Sometimes, everything is so quiet and still that I have the sensation things will start to move slowly, and a huge material explosion will take place".



Photo 12: View from Petra's working desk.

Unfortunately, nowadays, most clients made inquiries about their virtual services via Internet. For this demand, three years ago the Company director had hired a “computer freak”, who was now sufficiently busy covering that specific network demand. Thus, Petra, for the past three years had been having doubts as to whether she would last much longer working at the Internet company or not.

Petra is a thirty five year old woman, sympathetic, slightly restless, nervous and sincerely aware that the main committee of her company may keep her as the front door secretary –beauty icon- for her elegant charms, sexy figure and tight-fitting dresses. Eventually, I told Petra that I was doing ethnographic research on the bodily life of particular and diverse subjects of the city. Right away, to my surprise, Petra expressed her willingness to participate and asserted that maybe her own contribution to the project could constitute a unique possibility to bring some “excitement” to her life.

As a matter of fact, in the next two to three weeks, I visited Petra several times at the glass-framed entrance hall of the Internet company. On none of the occasions that I entered her transparent cage was she doing any sort of working activity. She just sat at an impeccably tidy black oval table, wearing an elegant dress,

sophisticated designer glasses, and make up, with an acquired model-like posture, profoundly bored. Inside of the glass cage that was the entrance hall, Petra seemed to be ineffably connected to the black oval table, like a grown up chick refusing to leave the amniotic liquid of the egg. The way in which pens, pots and clippers were arranged on the black table had never been modified.

Several times Petra assured me that many weeks passed without any business agents coming into the hall to be introduced. Her only working endeavor involved sympathetically greeting the white collar workers when coming into the highly computerized flat and when leaving it “bended forward and eyes itchy” at the end of the day.

I usually visited Petra in the hall of the Internet company at the end of the working day. First, she would tell me how glad she was to have somebody visiting her, even if –she added ironically- it had nothing to do directly with her professional career. Petra had few friends, and it had been two years since she had split up with her boyfriend Ingo. Nowadays she had no lust to re-establish an intimate relationship with anybody. She also admitted that her body had become somewhat mechanical and toneless and barely found any pleasure in doing any activity.

Basically, Petra’s life was based in a neat perfectionist pattern that she repeated meticulously. From 8:00 a.m. to 6:00 p.m., she would be at work with an hour break in the middle of the day. During that 60 minute break, Petra usually had a vegetarian Turkish Kebab with no spices and a Multi-vitamin commercial juice at the outdoor caravan. After work, Petra usually caught a yellow city Bus and returned to her cozy two room, one kitchen flat decorated with Arabic tapestry at Friedrichsein.

Petra lived completely alone and did not have a computer at home now. After cooking a simple micro-biotic dinner, she would watch German television and especially liked to watch *Big Brother*. Afterwards, she would brush her teeth and go to

bed. Petra did not like literature, theatre, cinema, or any other kind of cultural activity – which made her quite an unusual middle age Berliner.

Furthermore, every now and then, particularly on Saturday nights, she would experience a “desperate sensation” of “loneliness and nothingness”. “This desperate sensation starts feeling like a dark cloudy spot on the area of the stomach, and through the day, the spot starts becoming bigger and bigger until I am wrapped in a melancholic, ghostly mist”. Petra would combat such “melancholic mist” by going out to a Disco in a sudden fit, in a convulsive drive of enthusiasm. Thus, nocturnally, sub-lunar, she sometimes experienced a sudden burst of rage and non-measurable desire for a sudden and brief sexual encounter that would “make me feel real, make me feel my body”.

9.3 The Attraction for Accidents

Petra, cheerfully, had to salute the white collar workers that came in and out of the computer terminal. The glass-enclosed Internet Company would devour and expel the pack of 120 workers daily, in the proper capitalist style that makes “eating” and “vomiting” similar procedures in the process of labor assimilation. She often characterized the white collar workers -people she had barely ever met in her five years at the Company- as “automatons”, incorporeal and functional beings with whom she never really established “human contact”.

Her particular form of referring to them as “incorporeal beings”, meaning that they were stale and stagnant, was condensed by a frustrated tone; a hidden grief would pop out for an instant under the apparently healthy, pretty and well rehearsed plastic forms of her face. Petra often argued that under people’s faces there is a “real emotional face” which shows up at the least expected moment, like a sudden light reflection that opens a myriad of gates to the soul of that person; a soul that may be weak, arrogant, strong or full of low-esteem. Petra was aware that her undermining tone when referring to her “automaton” colleagues had something to do with the

fact that, unfortunately, their vacuous passivity and mechanic working life mirrored her own blank and incorporeal life “as if I am deprived of feelings”.

After Petra finished work, I accompanied her to the Bus station. We caught the Bus in Europa Center to go to Friedrichsein. Up to that point, Petra’s behavior had been normal -non-talkative, static, passive and quite indifferent. She could not understand why she might be of any interest to an ethnographer, since according to her it was precisely the aspect of “sociality” which was completely absent in her life. Moreover, Petra insisted that all social relationships –even those of friendship, couples or lovers- were transactional and based in one or other kind of “interest”; “everything in the city is to use and throw away, also relationships”

Surprisingly, that day on the Bus, Petra began giggling and moving around in an irrationally hysterical manner. Her body, which she referred as a “pretty but flat plan” had usually been extremely calm, proper and inexpressive. It was difficult for me to figure out if Petra was suddenly feeling joy or if she was playing a strange sort of game. At the following stop, Petra got off the Bus. We were still in the surroundings of Europa Centre. Petra was moving very fast, forward and backward, restless, and my rambling questions on what sort of activity she was engaged in seemed to increase her sudden burst of joy and giggling.

Finally, we just waited for the next Bus to come. She refused to explain her motivations in getting off the Bus and continued laughing to herself. We caught the next Bus. In the beginning, she seemed to be calmer and socially formal again, but two stops later, absurdly and all of the sudden, Petra got out of the Bus again. She was laughing and giggling even harder and more enthusiastically than before. I, mesmerized, just run after her. It was non-sense. I had the impression I was rapidly walking after a subject who was behaving under a set of parameters that were completely odd and foreign.

In the street, I stood in front of her and interrogated her on the reason why she had left the Bus again when we were supposed to go to Friedrichsein. She kept

moving around, like a naughty teenager containing a secret, giggling playfully. She responded that such sudden and derisory decisions allowed her to change the exact and perfect chain of events, which in her daily life tended to be highly predictable. Petra explained herself as follows: “I feel that getting off the Bus may bring a destiny which might mean that I will not die young, and that perhaps I will have three children instead of none”.

Petra had tried to include an accident, an irrational sudden move that would change singularly but irrevocably the chain of events of the rest of her life. She admitted that impetuously she often experienced such drives to commit sudden deeds. I argued further that no matter how suddenly or irrationally she would step out or smoke a Cuban cigar on the Bus, she was indeed somewhat willingly activating such unexpected events to take place. Petra replied that some of these irrational deeds would come out of her very suddenly, “often even before I can really think about it and decide”. Petra agreed only partially that she provoked such irrational events to happen.

Another time I was hanging out with Petra, she waited in front of a telephone booth for a long time. Every now and then, she would take her wallet out of her purse, open it and finger around spare coins. Logically, I had deduced that Petra needed to make a telephone call. Once the subject previously using the telephone came out of the booth, Petra moved in and checked if there were any spare coins in the return slot of the telephone machine. Afterwards, she would simulate a brief telephone call with its concomitant.

It was not easy at all to discern what sort of passion had affected Petra in a way that she had hectically played around with the idea of destiny. Indeed, her sudden irrational deeds tended to be marked by a paradox in the sense that the accidental and non-accidental -or willful- elements of events were mobilized. Simultaneously, it would not be enough to claim that Petra was simply paranoid, even though in a superstitious way she would often talk about her and other’s fate being deeply conditioned by horoscopes.

Moreover, she experienced a “strange joy” in these irrational deeds, even when she brought me into her “mad game”. Being with Petra in such situations transformed the urban experience into pure chaos and accident. By the time she was fully aware of the irrational form in which she would step out of the Bus, she was already undertaking such action playfully. As soon as she experienced a non-subjective affect to step out of the Bus, or absurdly waited before the telephone booth, she would immerse herself in an unprecedented and unaccountable oscillation of joy and soft madness.

Petra declared that in such instances she was able to betray the expected chain of events, and thus, put her willful and all too well organized thinking to sleep. Immediately after she would hectically, crazily and madly, step out of the yellow Bus, her highly normative self -as a middle-aged single secretary- was disturbed. Her own gestures as well as the rhythms of her body and mind were agitated and developed in a cheeky and giggling, somewhat teenager-like way. After a couple of times jumping on and off of the continually circling Bus, we arrived at Friedrichsein. Petra blushed. She was embarrassed that a Bus driver had long noticed her little naughty revolution. In Friedrichsein, after Petra bought her micro-biotic food, we said goodbye to each other and made a plan to go out together to a Disco the coming Saturday.

Around 5:00 p.m. Saturday, I showed up in Petra’s flat at Friedrichsein with a bottle of wine from *Franken* that I had purchased at the *Weinerei*. She was very thankful that I had brought the wine, even though she barely drank any of it during dinner. During the evening, she encouraged me to play some music from the albums in her sitting room. I played all kinds of 80’s German and British pop and looked through the whole collection several times while she was doing her make up.

It was the first time I had ever seen Petra without make up when she opened the door. Definitely, she seemed to be older and more tired than a thirty five year old woman. She needed two hours to be ready with her highly meticulous and detailed make up work. She assured me that such a procedure was a daily activity for

her. When she came into the sitting room, she looked about ten years younger than the woman I had previously seen.

The pale and sad surroundings of her eyes had been masked. Petra confessed that there was not one single day that she would go out to work or to the street without make up. Even on boring Sundays when she spent most of the day at home, she would also put make up, otherwise she did not feel herself, she felt “half of herself, somebody that is incomplete, that is lowered down”.

Apparently, she did not expect me to show up so early at her flat. Indeed, she had opened the front door thinking that it was maybe the delivery man or a salesman. Without asking me anything, Petra had ordered a Japanese dinner for both of us. Thus, we had a good variety of *Sushi* for dinner. During the meal, friendly, I raised my glass of wine a couple of times and toasted. She was not drinking wine at all, so I asked her if she did not like the wine from Franken. She replied that she used to drink wine in the past.

9.4 Petra’s Dinner Confession

Three years ago Ingo, the man that she had loved the most and longest in her life, had left her on a nice sunny morning without giving a single explanation. Petra and Ingo, a social worker, had been living in the same flat for eight years. Their relationship was cordial and friendly. Petra had always felt that Ingo was more the sort of patient and sweet big brother that she never had. After eight years of living together, with some of the money that Petra and Ingo had saved, they bought a high quality computer with printer, fax, telephone, Internet line, scanner and web cam. Soon, they both discovered and learned to use the “marvels” of the computer.

Petra explained that they both jokingly started to contact other men that were willing to have virtual sex via the web cam. She remembers how they both liked to contact unknown men in order to persuade and excite them to watch them masturbating, naked and “kinky” on the computer screen. Soon, Ingo found such

joking boring and refused to join Petra in writing on the computer obscene phrases while watching another “man” acting pornographically. By chance, Petra had made contact with the same man three times, and started to feel a certain attraction, a certain “dark curiosity” to perform obscenely for the man she had met through the World Wide Web.

Thus, she performed for the unknown man from Hamburg called Tim with whom a month later she had a blind date in Luenenburg. Petra remembers that she had not felt such “fiery passion” in sexual terms since her incursions into theatres when she was a teenager. In the mid eighties, around Neukolln, in a small cinema of West Berlin that showed black and white Westerns, Petra lost consciousness through smelling a cloth wet by chloroform that somebody had forcefully pressed to her nose. Vaguely, Petra remembers that she was raped by a couple of men. She was immersed in a “strange state of dizziness” and kept the experience to herself as private, incorrect but strangely pleasant.

Petra did not tell anybody about the experience for two reasons: “on the one hand, I knew that if I told my parents or friends, they would freak out, and on the other I wanted to keep the secret to myself, as well as the obscene possibility of returning”. Petra returned to the same cinema several times, to the after midnight session, hoping secretly that somebody would press her nose with chloroform in the dark corridors of the cinema or in its rear seats. “It never happened again, however, meeting Tim brought such incorrect sexual drives back,...”

A month later, Petra and Tim met in Berlin. Petra, already, now in love with Tim –a body-builder and sincere macho man- agreed to take him to her flat since Ingo was attending a national meeting of social workers working in immigration in Munich. Unexpectedly, however, Ingo had returned by Sunday, early in the morning to Berlin and entered the flat very quietly. There Ingo encountered Petra and Tim engaged in wild sexual activity. Ingo freaked out. He could not believe what he had seen, among other things because he had been the one to first playfully make contact with Tim through the Internet.

Indeed, Ingo had persuaded Petra to join him to make fun and laugh about Tim's tight leather underwear, *Mr. Proper* look and lascivious behavior. Ingo and Petra did not talk much for a week. Ingo left home for good, and took the expensive set of MacKintosh computer with him. According to Petra, ever since then she has had a very "delicate stomach". During dinner, she showed me her tongue which had several raw skin formations. Petra said that she could not really drink much alcohol, because when she did, she needed a good three days to recover from it and proliferated the raw skin formations she had had for the past three years.

She reminded me that the last three years she had accumulated many emotions of anger and pain around her liver area, which she had not yet fully liberated. Petra thought the sexual adventure she had with Tim -three years before- was completely "animalistic, sexual and passionate". Their lusty and fiery ephemeral encounters did not last very much longer. Petra argued that with Tim's "obscure ecstasy" experiences -including anal sex- an affective and gender conflict was unraveling in her body. According to her, she was bodily fighting and resisting the familial and educational brands and inscriptions that had initiated and formed her to become an independent, self-reliant, heterosexual, mature, rational and faithful woman.

The fact that Petra had allowed herself to experience the most obscure sexual impulses with Tim, which she had repressed since her early teenage years, had opened a painful phase in Petra's life where she was experiencing a bodily and affective conflict between her engendered self and the awareness of her wild "drives and desires". At the end of dinner, Petra commented that with Tim she was bodily initiated to the discovery of desires and drives that were her own as much as her ideal fantasies to remain another eight years faithfully near Ingo. Thus, she concluded that "monogamy is imposed", adding that her stomach as well as irrational deeds were forms of painfully resisting such social norms branded in her flesh.

The sexually oriented relationship between Tim and Petra did not last very long. According to Petra, Tim was somebody addicted to sexual encounters and needed to have intercourse with “new women” all the time. Petra also acknowledged that even though she desired Tim’s virility and protuberant body limitlessly, she also had her “melancholic” emotional states where she felt relatively “responsible” for having been unfaithful to Ingo and destroying their gentle and relatively peaceful eight year long relationship.

9.5 Petra’s Virtual World as Sara

After breaking up with Ingo, Petra bought a fine MacKintosh computer for herself. However, she did not buy a web cam. Instead she learned to have virtual life by participating in an Internet program called *Avatars*. Petra designed a dark haired attractive virtual subject that lived in the city of Amsterdam. In such tele-matic urban space, Sara, Petra’s virtual and electronic body, could play, speak, bet and even hit other people as well as make love.

Petra introduced me to the *Avatars* program which has approximately 120.000 users nowadays. In its tele-matic spaces, one can identify not only with an electronic human being, but it can also be an object, a monster, or/and one can also acquire multiple identities. Nevertheless, Petra usually interacted and had a social life in the city of Amsterdam through being Sara. By doing several *zoom-ins*, Petra could situate herself in specific edifices, rooms and scenes interacting with a multiplicity of electronic puppets.

This new virtual modality conforms a new way of representing the body and the city. It must be also noted that if a user does not respect the civil laws of the city, they will be rapidly expelled. Within the space of *Avatars*, new spaces can and are being continually developed. Sara is a tele-body designed by Petra, a completely electronic, digital and virtual body. Actually, several cities are being digitalized, just as, with the same pretension, XIV-XV century perspectivalism took the task of representing the city in a naturalist manner.

In this new social space, there is an important structural change, where issues such as property and image are at stake. The relative dominance that human beings have over our bodies disappears in these tele-matic realm (Tomas 1996). Furthermore, the fact that eventually there may be tele-taste and tele-smell enables other subjects to interact. As I had experienced with Petra, nowadays sight is the main sensory realm when participating in *Avatars*.

However, the notion of the body and the relation between objects is being profoundly questioned due to increasing telematization, hyper-textualization and digitalization of even smell and tactility. It should be kept in mind that nowadays, however, that tele-tactility is for the moment only available for military purposes. Up until now, the physical interiority of the body has not been negated philosophically. In this new era of information, as Petra's and Sara's post-human cases suggest, the body has become something that needs to be constructed.

9.6 Animals and Men

After dinner, Petra and I went to a commercial Disco. We danced to very loud techno rhythms. Surprisingly, Petra became excited in the Disco and started to grab my glass of rum-and-whisky and drink from it quite impulsively. I warned her that it would not be very good for her stomach. She responded that she did not care, even though she would probably regret it in the next couple of days. Petra did not need to drink much to give her a "high" and feel more relaxed.

A couple of hours later, Petra asked me to hold her purse. She walked to the bathroom with a body-builder and tough-looking guy with whom she had been flirting. At the bathroom of the Disco, just as many other couples, Petra had a brief "fuck". Even though Petra and her lover walked into the bathroom together, they left it separately as if they had never seen each other and they were never to see each other again.

Then Petra ironically told me that she had had “enough” and was ready to go home. It was around 3:00 a.m. in the morning. Jokingly, she also explained that she would not like to “have a fuck” with me, because we were becoming friends. She insisted that it was only with anonymous people that she would have ever have sex, during the past three years. She had fantasies of “fucking” all kinds of anonymous people, even dogs, mechanically. Apparently, Petra was not keen to establish any durable and tender relationship with anybody she would meet and started to know.

As a matter of fact, during the last two years the only couple of times Petra acceded by inertia to establish an affective relationship with a man, she felt “horrible and disgusting; whenever a man that I meet shows any tenderness or affection, I feel like a monster, very ugly and big,... I feel like I have nasty tentacles hanging around my body instead of skinny arms, big breasts and long legs”. Similarly, every time she went out for a romantic dinner with anybody who was looking for a “couple project”, she would feel deeply disgusted “by the form in which he would be chewing the food... Even if I try not to pay attention to the mouth of my boyfriend, I end up looking at it as if it were persecuting my senses,... Even the sound of his chewing would sound incredibly loud and nasty to my ears”.

Up to the point that Petra was abandoned three years ago by Ingo, she considered herself to be a free, flexible, tolerant and easy going human being. Since then, Petra has become extremely aware of her looks, clothing, make up and bodily figure. Interestingly, Petra asserts that men do actually find her much more attractive now than three years ago, even though “I probably felt happier then, in general”. As a matter of fact, the more men find her attractive -even those who are considerably younger than her-, the more she has increasingly lost her sexual appetite.

Petra argued that she really does not fully “enjoy” getting laid with an anonymous man in the bathroom of the Disco, but somehow the brutal, convulsive and sudden form in which she is “fucked” helps her to feel in contact with her body. It must be also pointed out that the last couple of years, Petra has gone

through two plastic surgery operations in order to lift the skin of her neck and behind her eyes. “I think I will go through a lifting operation every ten years,... It makes you five to ten years younger”.

9.7 Hanging from a Rope

The following week, Petra and I moved to another Disco right in the Potsdamer Platz. That night, Petra confessed to me that she was feeling a bit depressed and insecure. “Since Ingo left the flat, I feel like I am dying very slowly, but dying,... Maybe I can not get rid of the guilt feeling,...”. Petra and I danced for two or three hours. The Disco was fancy and very spacious. It was full of people, so it was inevitable that while dancing, one would rub against bodies nearby. Petra was tense and irritable that night. She was not in the mood to have a brief affair with anybody. She was feeling insensitive and angry toward men in general. Thus, Petra had started pushing another man who was dancing and she got in a physical fight. Rapidly, the people on the dance floor tried to stop the fight and stopped the man since his physical superiority over Petra was obvious.

A couple of the “staff agents” kicked Petra and the other man out of the Disco. Petra’s nose was bleeding, but fortunately, she was not too wounded from the fight. One of the “security agents” informed me that it was not the first time that Petra was immersed in a fight. The security agent argued that she was always lucky not to get injured much more severely, “since there are people in the Disco aggressive and drugged enough to beat you up really badly”.

I accompanied Petra to her flat. It was around 4:00 a.m. and we were both quite tired. Petra’s nose bleed stopped. In any case, she was emotionally quite sad. As soon as we arrived at her flat in Friedrichsein, I sat down on the sofa and relaxed. I was glad that I managed to take Petra home after the trouble she had caused in the Disco. Petra walked to the terrace. I thought she probably wanted to get some fresh air.

In the following five minutes, I heard a couple of relatively noisy bangs coming from the terrace. Thus, I stood up and came close to the window. It was dark outside and there was a cat on the balcony, just like me, staring at Petra. She was bending forward; she looked somewhat depressed, emotionally blocked. Moving slowly, lethargic, Petra grabbed a rope and threw it above a single beam beneath the roof. Petra's eyes looked fogged, somehow lost.

For a moment, I thought I should just walk onto the terrace and prevent Petra from doing something harmful to herself that I thought she would. Everything was happening very intensely yet slow. Perversely, I thought I could wait several seconds more, pushing my own witnessing to the furthest limit of the situation.

Petra held the end of the rope and then clumsily sat down on the floor. For a moment, it seemed as if Petra was desperately giving up whatever plan she had with the rope. Continually, Petra knotted both her feet to the end of the rope. Then, she pulled the other end of the rope forcefully and suspended her body in the air. Her face was expressionless, with the divine whiteness of the intact make up on. Petra was hanging on the rope, in the middle of the terrace, three meters above the ground.

Thus, she dropped the rope and hit the ground brusquely. Her face was still extremely rigid and the body exposed itself as in an impossible contortion. Petra raised her body in the air again and hit the floor twice more. The cat was staring at her from the dark of the balcony, impassive, like a non-human witness. Finally, I walked onto the balcony and asked Petra to stop hitting herself abruptly against the ground. She replied she only wanted "to feel real, to feel her body".

It was not so much about inflicting pain on herself, but rather about "feeling alive, that I also exist". Petra was provoking harsh physical impacts on the floor to awaken her senses. She felt unfortunate for not being able to do drugs, because her stomach would react negatively. She explained to me that she envied those who

were dancing at the Disco on “ecstasy pills”, because their bodies were so lively and dynamic. “Music and sex is not enough for me,... I need to crash physically,...”.

9.8 The Voracious Wheels

It was a Thursday and I had borrowed a car from my friend Stephan to pick Petra up after work. Petra and I had planned to go to Potsdam for dinner. Petra really wanted to try an expensive Restaurant at Potsdam and thus, I drove the car from Berlin to Potsdam which took about an hour due to the busy traffic.

Throughout the trajectory, Petra made a clap every now and then. I began to wonder if anything was changing, from the music playing on the Radio to my own shifting of gears, when she clapped one single time. I realized it was every time we crossed a lamp-post –no matter which color- that she clapped her hands. Even when she seemed to forget that we were actually passing by a lamp post rapidly, she would very quickly clap her hands, as if trying to keep up with the game before it was too late.

Interestingly, at some point, she had noticed that I was observing her hand clapping, trying to comprehend her enigma. Thus, I asked Petra why she was clapping her hands once every time we passed by a lamp post. From that point onwards, her way of clapping became very subtle and soundless. She would just put her hands together trying really hard to make sure that I would not notice anything awkward.

In the beginning, Petra said that she had been clapping just because she felt like it. “I do not know where you get that lamp post story from” she argued. I replied that I had noticed her bringing her hands together every time we passed a light post. She confirmed my observation. It made her feel embarrassed to talk about it but she acknowledged that she had been clapping her hands at the lamp posts because superstitiously had made herself a personal vow that if she clapped at every single lamp post on the journey from Berlin to Potsdam, her life would

eventually get better. As long as she kept clapping when passing nearby the lamp posts, the following thoughts were traversing her mind intimately; “I will be able to eat and drink anything”, “I will find a job that makes me happier and will allow me to meet friendly people”, “I will be able to join tenderness and sex like years ago”,...

In Potsdam, we had a relatively luxurious dinner “a la carte”, in a Restaurant that was like a glass house near the Gardens of Potsdam. Surprisingly, Petra ate more food than usual; she had two courses and desert. However, what I found most striking was what came after dinner. Politely, she insisted that she would like to drive back to Berlin. Thus, she sat herself at the wheel and soon were immersed in the traffic flood of the highway.

I was sleepy, half dozing from the Spanish wine, when Petra set the car in the fifth gear and began to drive extremely fast, almost manically. I got really scared, especially in those sections when Petra started to pass other cars using the – forbidden- tracks for the cars driving in the opposite direction. Petra had become suicidal, and the more ardously I begged her to calm her driving down, the more indifferent and careless she behaved in relation to the risky situation.

I did not know what to do and was too frightened to force her to calm down by putting my own hands in the wheel. We were driving too fast and the smallest tug-of-war at the wheel could have a fatal consequence. The situation seemed to smooth down when Petra agreed to leave the highway. I thought that that was the end of her playing around with both our destinies, but in her scary way –giggling and making cheeky gestures- she drove very rapidly in the opposite direction for a couple kilometers.

I thought that only a good turn of luck could just bring both of us out of that situation. Images of my childhood, family, friends, lovers, ex-girlfriends, remarkable mountain sites, etc. started to cross my mind vertiginously. I also had an enormous feeling of anguish stuck in my chest, an unpleasant sour taste at the back of the throat, and a look of horror on my face.

The cars –with their lights on- driving toward us, would avoid crashing into us by turning to the side desperately and blowing their horns. I had just closed my eyes, completely giving up everything and experiencing the thought that everything I had to do was already done, when Petra fortunately turned the car to one side of the road and parked it. It took me a long couple of minutes to recover my breath.

Petra said she was sorry, but still playful and giggling, asserted that she had really had a good time and that she was feeling, for once, not dead but alive. She apologized for terrorizing me with her kamikaze driving, but admitted that she was pleased I had gone through such a near-dying trance with her. Strangely, she showed affection and valuable esteem toward our friendship, as if the frightening event of her kamikaze driving allowed her to feel affectively more close, more of a friend in relation to a co-pilot that was scared to death.

It was just too much for me, and I very seriously commanded her that I would drive the rest of the trajectory back to Berlin. I was still stressed and angry about the scary event. Nevertheless, I felt in an awkward position; I did not know if I should blame her for her kamikaze driving, or if I should remain silent and be glad that I had seen Petra for the first time really taking pleasure in the affective sense and experiencing that she had a friend sitting nearby.

In any case, I was glad that I was the one driving back to Berlin. Several Police cars and vans drove by with pulsating orange sirens on. Probably, they had been informed that a kamikaze had been driving madly in that same road ten minutes ago. We were lucky enough not to be identified as suspects and returned to Berlin.

While I drove, I asked Petra if she was aware that she had not only risking her life but also mine. She detected my angry tone and humbly responded that she would not do it again. Then, I asked her if she had ever thought how easily she could crash and die. Petra argued that it was precisely the very easiness to put a fatal end to her life what turned her on in a way that made her bodily feel alive.

She also added that she had often thought of committing suicide during the past three years, even though -I should not worry about her recurring thought on suicide- she knew she would never do it. Petra explained to me that in suicide she would not be able to will her own death. Due to the fact that in order to commit suicide she needed to have a plan of “pills” or “jumping off the balcony”, she could not be present at the moment of dying. Petra found this singular aspect of suicide completely unappealing and preferred to put herself in situations of high risk such as driving 225 kilometers per hour in the opposite direction.

Self-murdering could only happen through chance or the throwing of a dice. Petra’s reflection seems to suggest that suicide was never attractive or appealing enough for her to commit it consciously. Indeed, when Petra willed her death by preparing “a couple of pill flasks”, she was demanding it from the perspective of continuing life. Petra was safe from the possibility of committing suicide, because she abhorred the absurd fact that dying is involuntary. As she put it, “no matter how meticulously you plan to electrify yourself in the bath tub, at a certain moment at the end of the day, and after having a very tasty Japanese dinner, you cannot fulfill your wish of dying”.

Petra underlined that fact that dying could not be an intentional object of consciousness, and this saved her from attempting it in a planned manner. Interestingly, Petra’s affirmation opposes religious thought as well as humanist philosophies, because according to her, if she were to commit suicide, she would be unable to project an authentic relation to herself. Petra’s assertion indicates that death –even as a self-consciously planned act of suicide- cannot be really “*my own*”. These reflections certify the shocking and radical otherness of dying, which evokes Wittgenstein’s declaration that “death is not an event in life. It is lived through”.

9.9 Pyro-technology and Kamikazes

It is the 31st of December. Fireworks have been exploding in the streets of Berlin for the last two days. Berliners generously spend considerable amounts of

money during Christmas purchasing all kinds of fire works. Its repentant and shocking noises can be heard during the last three days of the year. The turn to the year 2002 is being celebrated. Every year several accidents are reported as a result of the long flying fireworks as well as accidental explosions.

Nevertheless, it has become a Berlin tradition; for some it becomes a fun pyromaniac activity evoking infant subversion and war-like rebelliousness, and for others these last days become a period to watch out and be careful with the mad fire workers. Those who watch out for the fire-workers often recommend staying home as much as possible to avoid the risk of an accident. Usually, there are gangs of teenagers who purchase various and countless fire works to take to the streets of Berlin and rush forth its dormant winter cold and social seriousness. It is a snowy winter day in Berlin.

I have been most of the morning with Ana. Precisely, I have taken multiple notes on her synaesthetic faculty to make contact with sounds that belong to another time. However, the noisy and disruptive noises of fire works have frightened Ana and it has been difficult to write further on her extraordinary perception. I have walked all the way from Kreuzberg to Europa Center, and now I am at the office building where Petra works. Throughout the walk, the street has been continually bombarded by all kinds of fire works, small, big, flying, static, silent, noisy, etc. A whole sonorous war-like landscape.

As Ana argued “just by closing the eyes can one easily imagine the war happening. Most people are still scared. There need to be many more fire works to heal the scars of the wars”. As I arrive at the floor where the Internet company is, I see Petra, seated at the front desk, eternally bored. Her presence is characterized by an overloaded vacuous-ness. Her face looks peculiarly blank as if she were disembodied and dead-like. Her exaggerated pale make up makes her look like a masked figure who is attentively charming and chilling.

Unfortunately, I have not brought the video camera with me. The image -the excess of sensation in such hyper-real presence- I am trying to give an account of through writing, would probably be better hinted at by the video camera. To watch Petra seated at the secretary desk comes close to an unreal image -as if one were in front of the shooting of a publicity spot-, not so much in the sense of dream or fantasy, but in the sense that she mobilizes a wicked attraction for resembling the real with itself. As she had stated in an interview “Often when I am sitting at the desk,... there is a strange thought that crosses my mind,... I have the impression that I am living the first minute of my life,... as if everything that happened in my life up to that point did not seem to belong to me and felt very remote”.

I keep observing Petra seated at the desk. She has not noticed me. The more I look at her through the transparent glass, the less I am able to write anything meaningful. I cannot but enjoy the very fascination of her blankness and insignificance; a blankness that steals my eyes and suspends me in a state of dumbness. A couple of businessmen have passed near by me. Maybe, I do not really need a video camera, since I have already realized that -just as the video camera works as a mirror- the more I try to make Petra into “some one”, the more I encounter the somewhat delirious effect of turning her into no one. It has been difficult to write satisfactorily on Petra’s long hours at her desk. Just as in Edgar Allan Poe’s *Oval Portrait* (Poe 1992), the more precisely the beloved subject is painted, and her image is transformed, the more she is dying.

So, what is the point of standing on this floor, observing Petra, taking notes that certify that nothing happens in the course of Petra’s labor day? I cannot find anything anecdotal or psychological to observe and write about. And yet, the fact that her physical presence may not hide anything does not frustrate my ethnographic expectations. I must face Petra’s innocuous experience; a sitter who remains seated, motionless, immaculate and highly isolated at the entrance of an Internet company. Petra sits at a black oval shaped table for seven hours a day. The rigidity of her formal and implacable posture requires an intense experience of

bodily endurance. Thus, she expressed; “I must destroy in my body all these restless ants that move about my tissues”.

I have invited Petra to have dinner at Claudia’s and my place at Strelitzer St. tonight. The invitation has not been an easy communicational task because Petra tends not to modify –even on Sylvester night- her every day flat-work-flat frame. Persuaded by my insistence to make an exception, she agreed to come to the flat and share dinner with Claudia and I. I offered to cook dinner, perhaps lamb, but Petra put the only condition that she would only have Japanese food. I knew Claudia would not be very happy with this type of dinner for Sylvester, especially because of the cost. As I expected, I ended up paying the take-away dinner for the three of us.

We were to meet at 9:00 p.m. in my flat. It was around 8:00 p.m. when I was putting several pieces of wood in the stove. The atmosphere had been peaceful during the evening. There was no sound of the fire works. Apparently, most people were preparing their New Year’s Eve dinner and saved the arsenal or fire works for midnight. Suddenly, Claudia, frightened, yelled at me to run to her room. I came rapidly near her at the window.

For about five minutes, out in the dark, we watched as a kamikaze car drove up and down Strelitzer St. and the streets nearby in a hysterical and suicidal way. The driving of the kamikaze car was so offhand and deadly that the whole surroundings of Strelitzer St. became paralyzed. Most of the windows of the streets were inhabited by people witnessing the scary scene. People had started to scream; “Call the Police!”.

The situation was really extreme and offhand Berliners to be willing to contact the Police. Some other voices, right away, claimed that they had already called the Police, and that, as usual, they were not where they ought to be. Claudia, somewhat panicky spoke non-stop about the madness and pathological nature of such destructive action. She condemned the kamikaze’s driving countless of times.

Briefly, the experience I had with Petra came to my mind, but I let it go by. It was not the right moment to talk about anything that an informant of the ethnography had to do with kamikaze driving.

The noisy and incredibly speedy car or the kamikaze was coming back again to Strelitzer St. It passed like thunder in front of our house. Claudia and I deduced that the car had probably crashed a couple of times. The car had a bump in front and a bigger one at the back. We were later told that it had crashed into two cars, one in Brunnenstrasse and the other one in Invaliden St. It had provoked three accidents in total.

The kamikaze car drove away from Strelitzer St screeching at the curve. Claudia and I, as well as many other residents of the neighborhood, were standing on the balconies or at windows, which constituted the first time I have experienced such communal arousal in Berlin. Even though we could not see the car, the Berliners standing at the windows and on balconies of Strelitzer St. could easily follow the trajectory of the kamikaze car because the sound of its engine was unmistakable, as well as the desperate squeals of other cars trying to avoid it by sudden aggressive turns and urgent blowing of horns.

The sound of the kamikaze car running around Strelitzer St. was experienced as a present story through the collective wails of those of us who were at the balconies. The fact that we could not see the damage and horror did not make the sonorous perception of its destructive drives less dramatic. The kamikaze car showed up again in Strelitzer St., right at the junction where the wall used to divide the street in two. The kamikaze car was coming down the stone bricked road of Strelitzer St. about 200 kilometers per hour when, at a crossroad a big family car showed its snout slowly. Inevitably, the kamikaze car crashed against the family car and put an end to its suicidal and destructive roundabouts.

Due to the shock of the crash, the kamikaze car had hit a line of four parked cars destroying their lights fully. It was precisely about ten seconds after the

crash when three Police cars and two vans entered Strelitzer St. Claudia wanted to go down to the street. She was so infuriated by the event she had witnessed that she wanted to be one of those who testified against the kamikaze. I replied that I did not want to go out. Plus, Petra was probably about to show up for the New Year's Eve dinner. Claudia insisted that I should come with her, that I was maybe losing a good opportunity to obtain some valuable information for my ethnographic work.

Many inhabitants of Strelitzer St. were surrounding both cars that had crashed. A seventeen year old boy was crying, scared to death. He was driving the family car into which the kamikaze car had crashed. Later on, I was told by my neighbor Tobias that the teenager had smoked marihuana for the first time and was about to enjoy a smooth drive through the wide avenues of Berlin. The young guy was not physically injured fortunately. Claudia and I pushed a little bit to make our way to the place where the completely destroyed kamikaze car stood. Obviously, this was the spot that was most crowded.

Suddenly, I was paralyzed. I knew the black Honda of the kamikaze. It was Petra's. In fact, Petra was behind the car, looking disoriented and ticking her head nervously. She was being handcuffed by the Police. I wanted to scream out loud, do something to help her and tell all my neighbors that the kamikaze woman was my friend. I swallowed a huge ball of anguish. Soon, Petra was carried away by the police, and the scene was cleared away with the help of the extinguishers as well as a little crane that transported the broken black Honda away.

Thus, the neighbors, still agitated by what had taken place walked to their homes. Claudia and I had the Japanese dinner very late that day; the person I had invited for dinner did not come. During dinner, I told Claudia that I knew the kamikaze woman, that her name was Petra and she worked at Europa Center, and that she was the one I invited for dinner. Claudia blamed me for choosing such particulars and made me promise her that I would not bring any "freaks" home. Moreover, she argued that in the future she would meticulously check the sort of persons I worked with, which she did not.

10 - Epilogue: Fahrid's Insect World

10.1 The First Contact

It is a Friday, before noon. I just walked down from the Zoologisches Garden to Kurfursterdamm. It is sunny at times, and over the headless Kaiser Wilhelm Memorial Church -bombed at the II World War- the blue sky appears catastrophically blinding. I witness business men, bureaucrats, and social agents on the move, stressed, going and coming endlessly. It is only a few tourists and a group of international students who are seated at the Café terraces.

Nearby, at the esplanade, a couple of beggars stand still. I am disoriented and lazy –writing and writing tons of pages describing what happens in the street- waiting for revealing moments of alterity. Such waiting is impatient and never fully realized, since the moment of alterity never corresponds to the space of waiting. Such moment inevitably disrupts any sense of waiting, any hope or expectation to be haunted by alterity. I have not slept very well last night. My body is wizened, stunned and unmotivated. I sit down in a hard plastic bench and carry on taking notes.

And I wander; how many times do I need not to be sensible to my bodily contingency in order to carry on the research work? Is ethnography not also a clash between work and body, a never fully resolved management of fatigue? Does not ethnographic thought arise from physical fatigue to a large extent? Do I not experience a physical apprehension that resists my everyday ethnographic tension? How many times does a worker invest forcefully her/him-self bodily in order to continue with the project?

I carry on taking notes, which is only an attempt to make the vivid bodily craving to laze around most possibly unheard. Pedestrians walk hectically, stepping aggressively, with a busy –somewhat hysterical- expression imprinted on their face. Wirth and Jones (1978) have written on the successors of the notion of the

“stranger” in sociological theories of modernity, where the inaccessibility or not knowing at the centre of the crowd is one of the most noticeable conditions. On top of the office and business buildings around the square, one can discern the luminous billboards of technological companies such as Hitachi. On most of advertisements at the square, it is either the future or the past which is praised. The present – except in pleasure and comfort ads such as Johnny Walker whisky and Volkswagen cars- is rarely evoked. This aspect points out a perversion of temporal perception.

One could easily suggest that there are two consuming etymologies at the square; one in which the consumer can choose among many different dishes, and another one in which the consumer does not stop buying accumulatively. Advertisement layouts are images of desire, often shifting from the all mighty power promises to sexual desires. Ads tend to persuade consumers to desire that which has been partially experienced in the past in one way or the other. It can be argued that the memory that advertisements fabricate works from primordial discourses and archetypes that intermingle desire and memory.

United Colour of Benetton’s shocking images –a publicity based on a model of economic uncertainty- have the intention of seducing and convincing the consumer. Alike the Toyota car company, Benetton creates a huge variable of colours for its clothes. One of the main problems of globalisation may be how to transform consumption itself.

In front of the Café Italia, there is a lady from Bosnia trying to capture quickly the attention of the people who pass by begging for money. Behind her, there is a North African looking man sitting down. Quite peculiarly, he sits down bending forward. He is wearing blue sport trousers, a T-shirt and a water-proof sport jacket. He is scratching his own body every now and then.

I talk to him in German. He does not respond. He does not even move a bit. He remains static, seated on a bench. I talk to him in English. Nothing happens.

Spanish works out, he looks at my face with a forced, stiff, unwilling smile, with a lost and foggy stare, without really making eye contact. His hand –as if it had a life of its own- begs me for money. After a few seconds, he looks at his hand as if it – anticipating his will- were making explicit the absence of spare coins. Afterwards, he stares at me – I believe I have not passed the test in order to be allowed to talk to him.

I take the wallet out of my jacket. The heavenly sound of coins automatically makes him sit somewhat straight. Unfortunately, sitting straight makes him experience pain – a hurting gesture that scrambles all his facial muscles explicitly show that he may have luckily forgotten a physical pain for a little while. By emphatic drive, I have bent over myself, and then him again. We are both staring at the floor. I give him a coin of two Marks. He takes them and static keeps staring at the floor. I sit straight and stay next to him. I have written several pages describing the urban live at the Kurfursterdamm. The man next to me has remained bended over all the time, and at sudden moments, he has shaken his body and burst in laughter. These completely irrational bodily moves make me consider the possibility that he may be messed up. I will try to meet him again another day. The length I have seated next to him peacefully and the warmth of his eyes makes me unafraid of meeting him again.

10.2 The Silent Encounter

It is Monday. I am back at Kurfurstendamm again. The man I met last week is here, at the same place and same posture: sitting down bended forward. I hesitate whether I should come close to him. Today, I have a hunch that he may not be quite an accessible man - no matter how warm his eyes still may be. I approach him and seat down fairly close to him. He has not reacted at all to my proximity. Optimistic, hoping that he may understand I speak in Spanish to him. He does not respond, and remains indifferent. All of the sudden, he shakes his head trying to liven himself up. I do not believe he was sleeping, daydreaming perhaps. Lazily, he starts to speak. His name is Fahrid. Sporadically, without sitting straight -seemingly,

today he remembers the painful bodily price to pay if seating straight- he turns his head around and stares at me.

In a broken Spanish, he has informed me that he is bending forward because he has “lots of pain” twisting his itchy skin; he explains that he is bending forward, so that he can stretch the skin of his back. Apparently, that way he feels a bit more released of the hellfire pain of his skin; “it is an alibi” he claimed. We remained in silence. Obviously, this unusual physical posture obliges him to face the floor for a long time. I cannot tell if he closes his eyes or not when he is bended forward and facing the floor. Meanwhile, I have kept writing extensively on the urban subjects passing by, the walking hamburger seller, and the faces of bank managers. All of it is extremely ephemeral and fragmentary, not discernable enough and extremely rapid for the production of a comprehensively articulated and insightful text.

It is difficult to meet anyone who stays more than five minutes at the hectic square of Kurfurstendamm. The only ones who stay longer than that are those – mostly tourists- who visit the war memorial chapel near the ruined Kaiser Wilhelm Memorial Church. At the chapel, nobody speaks or moves. Paradoxically, right at the wild, noisy and busy heart of the city, the atmosphere is one of internal absorption. Fahridd seems the only person that spends many hours of the day at these surroundings with assiduousness. Today, while my fragmentary note-taking on urban phenomenon, Fahridd has also performed many odd and sudden physical movements while staring at the floor.

10.3 The Violence of Time

After having spent a couple of hours at the Kudamm square, the group of international tourists I was with has returned to the Bus. They were heading to Unter den Linden Avenue. For a moment, I have hesitated whether I should continue on the tour taking notes on the tourists’ impressions of the city, but for some unexplainable hunch, I have decided to stay at the Kudamm square hoping to

meet the Algerian man, Fahrid. I have been seated for several hours at the place where I found him last time, but today he has not showed up at the square.

During the ethnographic fieldwork, often, I spend infinite minutes just waiting, being in the spot. And, as a matter of fact, in many of these long hours nothing happens, or more precisely, it is too much happening for my scribbling to be receptive. If I should do justice to the whole scope of the material I am collecting in Berlin, perhaps more than half should refer to a material that –according to the upgrading proposal- is irretrievably absurd, banal and meaningless. Precisely, this material that I -unproductively and irresponsibly- collect, often submerged in a profound state of boredom belongs to that enormous area of the silent waiting in which I spent much of my fieldwork scribbling. Furthermore, I believe that one of the hints to be a perceptive corporeal ethnographer is to understand that fieldwork is a form of waiting. Not waiting as a passive form of staying, but rather as a forgetful and affirmative way of being in the world, of confronting the word with the experiential dimension that it can be hardly deciphered.

Throughout the fieldwork, by passionately waiting for the informant's embodiments, I have learned to love their bodily changes and uncertainties, as much as I have embraced the catastrophic aspects of their existence, affirming metamorphosis and time. This ethnographic attitude, I believe, refers to an appeal to affirm the heterogeneous experiences of the informants. One should be perhaps innocently *in love* with chance and fate and not with the purpose of attaining certain total anthropological understanding. My endeavour on the emotions and sensory experiences of the informants do play or perform an unending and often obsessive-threads of scribbling of limit experiences.

10.4 Fahrid's Affliction

It is Wednesday. This is the third day I observe Fahrid; the Algerian homeless currently living in Berlin. He attends charity meals that are organized for the homeless at the Tiergarten. Again, he is sitting, bended forward at the Kudamm

square. The foetus-like form in which he bends forward has left the bottom part of his back naked. It is relentlessly cruel. At his back, the skin is dried and thickened at some areas and infectiously liquid at others. I can discern patches of dried blood, as well as marks of his fingernails having scratched his back in desperation. Every now and then, he shakes the back part of his shirt trying to bring some “fresh” air to the surface of his back and ease the itchy “heat that burns my skin”.

The traces of his fingernails and hands come in different directions. There are many hand marks, traces and small scars on his infected skin. I cannot stop writing with a sense of disgust, and a certain frivolous and too “humane” misery. He continues bended forward. Every now and then, enthusiastically, he opens his arms and –surprisingly- puffs as if he were seeing somebody on the surface of the ground. I am beginning to believe he may be experiencing hallucinations. Fahrid then returns to his position and keeps himself calm. Bended forward again, his body is slightly twisted in a complaining posture that is physically contorted. Whether he is hallucinating or not, I would like to explore the euphoric physical drives –shaking hands, laughing face and shaking body- that momentarily make him “forget” his physical misery.

I try to talk to Fahrid again in Spanish. He is laughing. I think he is laughing at me, but soon I realize that his mind may be somewhere else. He is concentrated in something else. Is Fahrid daydreaming perhaps? I cannot see his face when bended over? I am –impatiently- tranquil. I am perhaps guilty of impatience for I often find myself wanting to exhaust the infinite, and yet I patiently avoid to undertake such total culmination.

Impatience is the failing of one who wants to withdraw from the absence of time; patience is the ruse which seeks to master this absence by making it another time, measured otherwise. But true patience does not exclude impatience. It is intimacy with impatience – impatience suffered and endures endlessly (Blanchot 1982:173).

During my fieldwork, my writing often seems to be agitated by the impatience of putting a term to that which is interminable, and the patience to endlessly sustain the very movement of this error.

Fahrid has removed his shirt from his back. Perhaps the moderate shinning sun and the fresh breeze make a healthy combination to soothe the hellfire at his back. The skin of his back is full of physical traces, marks, desperate intrusions. It is a map that is radically indeterminate. I have problems to bring some of these irreversible and impressive marks to any form of comprehension. They are, indeed, unsettling, disturbing and strangely enigmatic.

I feel a strange shiver, a vibrating sensation at the lower part of my spinal column. Paradoxically, this somatic form of empathy puts me in contact with his corporeal affliction –a divinatory form of knowing (Ginzburg 1979)-, and simultaneously, provokes a bodily alertness toward physical danger. This a pre-symbolic, a-cultural sensation, perhaps an animal’s sniffing of danger (Adorno 1978; Buck-Morss 1997). The few pedestrians passing by take a look to the disturbing, obscene and abject skin of Fahrid. They are repulsed, momentarily pushed away from the straight line walk. Most of them are too busy on their daily routines and professional duties to stay longer and approach the homeless. Some of them, unable to make up their minds, still in a hurry, continue staring at him –with their necks turned back, interrogating, facially confused- walking on their daily automatic journeys.

Disturbing and unsettling infected marks are imprinted in the flesh of Fahrid. They are there, here, at the middle of the Kudamm square, visible to everyone under the sun. Yet they are silent. In fact, I have difficulties to write about his back, and thus, I have started paying attention to other people’s faces and movements instead. The enigmatic insistence of his “touch on the raw” (Efimova 1997) swallows my writing. What could I write? How is it possible to write about this wounded skin? Its relation to the Kudamm square is entirely physical. Indeed, it is an unreadable map, and its wounds and traces are indeterminate. The pedestrian’s confusion and unable-

ness to make sense of his damaged body resonates with my writing's inability to mediate it as a form of representation.

A thirty year old Italian tourist that was enjoying the sun above the shocking Memorial Church has experienced a momentary nausea –throwing a piece of the hamburger out of his mouth- when visually encountering the harmed skin of Fahrid. Suddenly, all the corporate logos, mediated images and representation that the Italian tourist had of the Kudamm square has collapsed, leaving him without defence, facing the opened wounds of a hardly bearable intense materiality.

The Italian tourist –still afflicted by the horror- tells his girlfriend -who has immediately taken her gaze away willingly ignoring the scene by pulling the arm of his companion: “what is that?”, “my God!” Indeed, the outside has moved the body of the Italian tourist, and made his own physical experience into an area more distant and alien than the absurdity of the world. At the instant of nausea –making a piece of the hamburger be expelled from his mouth-, the Italian tourist could not resist the flux of the external forces emanating from the overwhelming and – probably to a big extent- irreversible material emanation of Fahrid's skin.

The horrified Italian tourist dramatizes the normalcy of the city as a place of disguise. The purest and sanctified zones of disciplinary society happen to be disrupted but rare instances in which the vague and ambivalent forces of the body uncover the hidden structures of our society. The case of the Italian tourist can be considered as example in which bodily forces can enact a radical refusal of value by intensifying the derisory gratuitousness of danger and excess. For a moment, the link between apprehension and action has been suspended or hollowed out. Shocked by Fahrid's monstrous skin, the sensation has failed to arrive and the motor reaction has been arrested.

This abject vacuity is not nothingness – for it is powerful and strange, physically felt. The oddity of such sudden instance relies precisely in that the Italian tourist has momentarily become a lump of flesh excessively assayed by Fahrid's

skin. The deprivation of organic articulation and teleological focus suggests that the figure of the dignified citizen may be nourished by the vestigial memory of monstrosity. All fixity of proper civilian behaviour and the spectacular form of city tourism has been abolished momentarily.

Moreover, there is a striking material resemblance between the wounded and infected skin of Fahrid and the Memorial Church -destroyed at Second World War- in that their emaciated surfaces remove its materiality from the usual connections of cause and effect. Obviously, the ruinous Kudamm Church, through publicity catalogues and spots, is constantly being socially narrated –and objectified- as a historical representation and memory of war catastrophes guarding bourgeois democracy, but as the physical reactions of the tourists suggests the material force of its ruinous traces –stubborn and grumpy- refuse to vanish completely into the officially narrated references of normalcy.

10.5 The Discovery of Parasites

This description of someone watching minute creatures and reacting on a larger human scale hits upon the final theme that binds fire to attracted spectatorship, which lies in its excessive nature. “The lesson taught by fire is clear” wrote Bachelard: “After having gained all through skill, through love or through violence you must give up all, you must annihilate yourself” (Moore 2000:133).

It is Friday. I observe the Algerian man, patiently. Today, Fahrid is also sitting down, bended forward, facing the floor fixatedly. I observe all of his movements. He keeps his eyes opened when he is facing the floor out of sheer curiosity. I cannot wait to see whether he keeps his eyes opened or not when bended forward. I get on my knees, and bend myself really down – my ear is almost touching the floor. Fahrid’s eyes are opened. He is concentrated staring at the floor. I feel a strange tickling in my ear. I shake my ear and see a couple of ants walking restlessly on my hand. There is a big group of ants and other insects, quite hectically, moving about on the floor. They are all busy, walking stressfully in all directions.

Finally! Hurray! Un-sensitive and clumsy me! I realize now that all the sudden and apparently irrational bodily movements of Fahrid -while looking at the floor - have to do with his close observation of the worms and insects that are travelling on the floor. Now, I look at him observing the insects. He does not care that I am viewing him. It is difficult for me to look at him in any comfortable posture, since I have to keep my eyes very close to the floor in order to look at his face and eyes.

Moreover, I am continually fighting with the insects that start climbing my body and notebook due to this writing on the floor. I am aware of the way in which Fahrid and I are standing in the middle of the square. This situation is quite awkward, and strange; perhaps also alarming and embarrassing for the public. Nevertheless, to my surprise, right in the middle of this hectic working day, it seems as if Fahrid and I are not being perceived. When I look around, the fact is that most of the people do not even take a look to what we may be doing. I continue with this ethnographic writing.

For a while, we remain silent and stare at the stream of commerce workers, politicians, tourists and bureaucrats- walking through the Kudamm square permanently. “(laughs)... I think that bureaucrats and politicians are another type of ants and bees... because they work for the power... I do not know what sort of hell this insects work for...” With his finger, he points at the insects and compels me to observe them. Nothing we can talk about seems for him to be as interesting and sense enhancing as observing the insects in their laborious and extremely singular endeavours. But returning to his talk, is it not the State a multi-faceted and homogenizing institution for which politicians (*bees*) and bureaucrats (*ants*) invest their insect-like potentials for change?

Surprisingly, Fahrid is willing to talk today and he is sitting properly. He has shown me his infected back skin and has explained that he has been going to a Clinic where his skin infection is being treated regularly. I am glad that his skin is getting better – indeed, it seems as if he were recovering some verticality, a more socially acceptable composure and a more linguistically articulated being emerges.

This reminds me of humanist thinkers such as Remo Bodei claiming –in defence of the Philosophy of Identity- that “man without verticality is nothing but a maggot”. Indeed, this may be the case, and I would add, a case with a full potential for affirmation and abjection – no matter how morally perverse and philosophically disturbing it may sound to such humanist ears.

The word of late capitalism was made flesh on Fahrid’s skin. The undecipherable hyper-reality of domination is imprinted physically in the form of paradoxical pains and pleasures. In Fahrid’s subjugated flesh, the fantasy and materiality of advertisements, the affect and technology of corporate logos, the paths of nerves and the circulation of money, finally coincide.

I can observe Fahrid pointing the insects with his fingers. The expression in his face is of somebody who is completely absorbed in a minute observation. He likes to laugh about the insects that he meets on the floor, even though his laughter frequently becomes into a bizarre face of somebody who is pleasantly disgusted. I ask him about all this insects on the floor around me. I feel like an island. He speaks about the insects that cross in front of his eyes everyday. His humor about insects is paradoxical; he refers to insects as creatures that are disgusting, but at the same time exciting.

I am compelled to look at him with similar eyes with which he is looking at the insects. I wonder not only that I may becoming an entomologist. But since Fahrid is also becoming an insect with his intense, passionate and fascinated observation of the insects, I may be also becoming an insect. His sudden arm movements are physical drives that respond to the paradoxical excitement produced by the lonely insects, as well as the each-other-fighting insects and other’s-helping insects. My writing on the floor is flowing as an infested virus – the virus of the insects of the floor, the homeless-insect living in the city, the skin-insects or parasites of the Algerian homeless, the anthropologist-insect studying for Academy, and the bureaucrats, political and commercial insects injecting capitalist energy at one of the neo-liberal hearts -Europa Centre- of the city.

This is somehow an atrocious and perhaps an inevitable vision. Is not Fahrîd himself a parasite scavenging the capitalist's society's leftovers and trash? Thus, is he not also an insect to a certain extent? And how do we deal this lifestyle with the humanist recovery of dignity? Fahrîd embodies the condition of a post-human body. The parasites dwelling at his infected back skin are neither part of him nor separate from him. They are blood-sucking creatures from which Fahrîd cannot separate himself, yet at the same time he cannot fully integrate them into his personality. Fahrîd cannot become cognizant of his skin parasites' alterity. Rather, just as Fahrîd does in the capitalist Europa Center, the parasites dwelling in his skin insinuate themselves within him, as a new and uncontrollable alterity of his body. In fact, just as the stock market broker superstitiously handing 300 Marks to a sex worker called Natascha, Fahrîd is passively invested by forces that he cannot recuperate as his own.

I stand up momentarily. The infected skin of the Algerian man is inhabited by parasites. This type of infection is well known by the homeless beggars that ramble in big cities like Berlin. They tend to live by trash and often have no access to a minimum hygienic care. I realize that this is a multi-frame kaleidoscope in which the insect-paradigm (Haraway 1991) repeats itself, perhaps, like fractals, endlessly. This diverse and tiny worms and insects that follow extremely mysterious and enigmatic patterns on the floor would constitute the first frame.

The Algerian man observes them: sometimes, he raises a finger, very slowly, and brings it close to the insects. He feels an incomprehensible attraction to crash one of them against the floor, but at the same time he tries to resist from performing such massacre in order to maintain this pleurably paradoxical and abject intensity for a longer time. The Algerian man can remain raising the finger up in the air and bringing it closer to one insect for long and slow minutes. Within this dimension of dead time, at times, Fahrîd points out an insect, as if it was – sadistically- the “*chosen*” one for his God-like one finger execution, and follows its trajectory on the floor. He acknowledges that he enjoys having the feeling of “*God*”

in such instances, even though it is the randomness of not knowing certainly which insect his finger will come to the spot of sacrifice what really turns him on...

Returning to the issue of the multiplicity of frames, I would like to locate the Algerian man at the second frame. Fahrid often acquires a physicality and set of movements that have more in common with the world of worms and cockroaches than this other strange world of human beings. At the third frame, there is the excessive and irreducible materiality of his infected back inhabited by parasites, endlessly and disturbingly, sucking blood from his veins and dwelling on the traces, marks, depressions and scars of his wounded skin. At the fourth frame, I would place myself, as an ethnographer -quite close to an entomologist in this case- sucking information from the unsettling life of Fahrid in order to preserve the subsistence of my own academic self.

And at the fifth frame, more through the bodily materiality of the Algerian man than his or my eyes, I am compelled to suggest that the capitalist and commercial impulse present at the Kudamm square and the Europa Center resembles the war universe, that is, the insect paradigm of the western world of pragmatic rationalism. Throughout the four frames, from the extremely dynamic and insensate insects moving on the surface, to the office workers and commercials walking between the buildings of multi-nationals, everything occurs in a cruelly parasitic atmosphere, where insect parasites as well as human parasites feed on various organicist structures.

Every now and then, Fahrid wounds a worm and observes it closely and obsessively. He claims that "I want to take it to my mouth, but I do not feel like it". The furthest he has got, up to this point, is to caress his own teeth with the fresh trembling flesh of a squashed worm. My writing, as the skin parasites of Fahrid, is inhabited not just by this insects of the floor that tirelessly attempt to occupy the white pages of my notebook, but also by the painful back skin of Fahrid, my own insect like ethnographic endeavour, and the capitalist city-vein, in which he and I are standing as two distinct parasites.

The insect world on the floor is in fact a war universe, not so different from the world open to the eyes moving hectically over the infected skin of the Algerian man. A Bosnian lady that hangs around, when attracts the attention of pedestrians, points Fahrid`s terrible and visible skin to them in order to sensationally dramatize her need of money. The Bosnian lady and Fahrid do not know each other at all. She seems today more desperate in her begging than usual. Fahrid does not realize of any of this. He continues seated, bended forward, facing the floor, living along the insects. Every now and then, he scratches the skin of his belly. By the sound of it, I believe it must be also infected. I give some money to the Bosnian lady.

Observing the seemingly insignificant particularity of Fahrid, almost accidentally, my writing has moved from singularities without identity, to insect-like human multiplicities -the homeless, the anthropologist, the office worker, the politician...- without having to invest it into overarching structures. I must acknowledge that the minute and literal observation of Fahrid has captured my attention fiercely. His patience at observing the tiniest activities and unpredictable moves of the insects minutiously is astonishing. In fact, I find Fahrid`s world not only inspirational but also instructive for my work.

Paying attention to his patient and wise form of observing the insect world on the floor provides an invaluable method that I could pursue in this ethnography of body and passions. Moreover, as an ethnographer trained in modern hermeneutics, I have had a strong tendency to draw attention on issues such as cultural structures, identities, symbolic articulations and gender. Unfortunately, such orientation toward abstract categories and academic formulations on the human life often ignores exteriority and pays little attention to the most obvious, physical and material dimensions. The almost obsessive observation of Fahrid somehow teaches me to move my own ethnographic production from the conceptual -and supposedly hidden- to the corporeal -and thus, often excessively visible and palpable.

For an anthropologist interested in the sensations and drives of the body, I find the minute observation of entomologists more revealing than the work of the too often disembodied anthropologies. In fact, as an ethnographer of passions and the body, I am not interested in fixed identities or entities, but rather in reappearing passionate patterns and dramatic corporeal events. If my own methodology is multi-sited, it is not in order to bring all the ethnographic material into a truth claim of a higher unity. I allow my writing to be affected by the diverse and shifting experiences of particulars.

Defining identities, situating corporeal experiences and contextualizing them is often a way for the anthropologist to maintain an Archimedean position of total understanding and control, since any anthropological study –including this one- is unable to incorporate the whole myriad of complex aspects affecting cultural as well as non-cultural phenomenon. Thus, instead of building up a hierarchical text shifting from the singular to the general, I have practiced the *paralogical* strategy proposed by Jean-Francois Lyotard (1984). I have moved from the specific to the paradigmatic discontinuously and radically, in a way in which potential generalities continuously breakdown, and often surprisingly, the singular, particular, insignificant and exceptional embodiments of affections are highlighted through this form of heterodox ethnographic practice.

10.6 An Unavowable Metamorphosis

I return to the Kudamm square. It is a cloudy day. It is Tuesday. There are fewer tourists at the place compared to the times when I came here the last couple of months. The square is constantly being veiled by a heavy sheet of rapidly moving grey clouds. The movement of the clouds, perpetually changing, obeying patterns that cannot be anticipated or prescribed brings to my mind the issue of Fahrid's insects. I look around and find the Algerian man seated at the usual place. Today he is not bended forward. Fahrid has his legs crossed. I have had a conversation with him about insects.

He insists on the overwhelming capacity of insects to move from the larval to the mature state, to get involved in transmutations. According to Fahrīd's observations, there are different phases in a life cycle of a worm. Indeed, his fascination with such affirmation of minute and infinite changes of the insects is such that he is not able to claim clearly how many phases can be distinguished in their lives. "They can change so rapidly... it is incredible... they can adapt themselves to the surrounding very rapidly... (humorously) I am very slow compared to them... they do not remember anything... they are very busy doing what they are doing... they are so full of life (admiration tone),..."

"... they can adapt themselves to the surroundings very rapidly... (humorously) I am very slow compared to them..." The insect's capacity for change –through short reproductive cycles- that fascinates Fahrīd immeasurably cannot occur in such radical way in his own emaciated body. Radical change or innovation –even in an abject form- is more difficult to him – a human being- than he wishes. Furthermore, he also admires the fact that "they (insects) do not remember anything". Fahrīd evokes the fact that he, a mammal, tends to sediment and accumulate furniture full of memories and often highly complex psychologies. Precisely, such evocation is also proper to my own case; as a *homo academicus*, I have been trained in different anthropological traditions as well as critical reflections, which to a large extent –until this ethnographic work- have constituted a rational set of memories that kept my body off from disrupting the control of identities, that is, from going beyond the tyranny of the normal.

"Not a thing of the past is remembered by a cockroach... he does not know that he was a maggot once". Probably, due my own leftist and humanist anthropology background when first hearing this, I have found such claim uncomfortable. In fact, the unquestionable and orthodox leftist idea that forgetting the past is –politically- dangerous, has nearly disallowed me to join the affirmative appreciation of the vital virtue of the Nietzschean "*active forgetting*" that insects practice. In fact, this creative and radical singularity without identity of Fahrīd can be felt as a trans-cultural insect-like practice. Is it too scary to think that the hybrid

mutation of the Algerian identity or my own Basque identity in Berlin –due to the trans-cultural shock- is far from being ethnic or fixed?

And what about the vampirism, parasitism, the different sucking of living labour and cancerous simulation practiced at the five frames posed previously; the insect, the Algerian tramp, the infected skin's parasites, the anthropologist, the urban worker and the corporate multinational in the metropolis. This powerful vision pushes my writing to consider –aided by the resonance of contemporary biology- that sexual reproduction may have to do more with the practices of a virus, than with the sentimentally male engendered trans-generational essence of life. In fact, it is very likely that sexual reproduction (as well as identity reproduction I would add) has to do more with the viral than the vital. (Pearson 1997). And, if our own reproducing bodies are viral, is it too far out to claim that –as the singularity of the Algerian man suggests-, the insect condition of the bodies throughout the five frames posed above is acted upon and impelled something unknown to life, that is, the outside? Is this something unknown to life, this strange being affected, this immanent and convulsive *outside* a complete non-sense?

The abject and corrosive materiality of the insects running around on the ground may –in fact- be a revealing image to understand the experience of the trans-cultural shock in an urban environment. Such trans-cultural phenomena are indeed epitomized by the particularity of Fahrid, since his own body is obviously far more open to the oscillations of metamorphosis than the concept harbouring dialectician anthropologist. The trans-cultural shock advocated by David McDougall, nowadays, could be also mobilized in the frame of this insect paradigm. But what do I know about the enigmatic world of insects? Observing them, I am impressed by the multiple and radically singular becoming-s they experience in relatively short periods of time. And I have the hunch that I may often not be careful enough to perceive the intensity of such quotidian brightness and singular worlds that also occurs in our own flesh.

Fahrid has squashed a worm. He has been staring at the atrophied, aberrant and formless shape of the wounded worm for more than an hour now. He tells me that he feels an attraction to touch it (*the informe*) and even to eat it, nonetheless, simultaneously, he also feels repelled and disgusted by the smashed insect. Fahrid is referring to this ambivalence on and on, without being able to articulate it clearly; while talking about it, he laughs, shakes his body and shouts spontaneously. He oscillated through various emotional intensities. He is slightly tired, amused, bored and excited again. Have we, so called human beings, longer than we can remember, been partial embodiments of a larger *insect* network?

10.7 Mind the Gap

It was a Saturday evening and Berlin was started to be swallowed by the night. I was returning home after having spent the afternoon with a group of tourists in a guided tour. I took the underground at the Zoologisches Garden. The traffic of pedestrians going down and coming out of the underground was busy and hectic. While many particulars seemed to be returning home after work, there were also dressed up young individuals ready to go out.

In the underground train, nobody could really move. It was extremely packed up. The passengers seemed to avoid the looks of other strangers, and whoever was accompanied reduced his or her human sensorium to the circle of the known. Some passengers were staring to the darkness of the tunnel; others seemed to pay attention to the underground map, while others looked curiously to the shoes or the trousers of other passengers. Nobody was willing to look to the eyes of nobody else, perhaps fearing to lose certain sense of privacy in a place that it was almost none.

The train stopped. I was standing up. A number of passengers stepped out of the train and some others jumped it. Everything seemed to be as expected in the stillness of the underground when, all of the sudden, a complaining voice could be heard coming from the silent, static and packed up crowd. For a moment, the male

voice vociferating unintelligible groans seemed to be familiar, but I let that thought go by.

I enlarged my neck and tried to see what was going on. It was Fahrid, creeping on the floor. Passengers stepped away from him looking sideways. I could not move and had no courage to come to Fahrid and give him my hand. I carried on staring sideways like the rest of passengers. The gangrene on his right knee was visible. It was infested and full of pus. By the faces of those passengers standing next to him, it was noticeable that Fahrid's body expelled an unpleasant odour.

Fahrid, defying the bipedal world, kept crawling with an open hand begging for money. He used his other arm to help himself move on. He kept creeping and begging for money. No one seemed to be willing to give any money; somehow the breathless and tight atmosphere was too disturbing for the passengers to make any sort of contact with Fahrid. In fact, passengers did not speak; most of them ignored the presence of Fahrid and a few looked at him with a mixed expression of compassion and disgust. Fahrid stepped out in front of a young man who was properly dressed up for a Saturday night out. The young man, who was seated, stared at him disdainfully, with an air of superiority.

The young man seemed to belong to the German middle class which was confirmed when he began to swear. Even though Fahrid was not physically disturbing the young man, the latter began to raise his feet from the floor as if he felt harassed by the very sight of Fahrid's gangrene. When Fahrid realized that this young man was looking at him scornfully, disapproving his whole inhuman behaviour, he picked up a half broken ball of a strawberry lollipop from the floor and threw it to the lap of the young man. Immediately, the young man, trying to get rid of the filthy piece of sweet that had fallen between his legs, shook his whole body urgently.

Pathetically, the undesired, miserable and viscous lollipop residue fell on the middle of the seat where the young man had been seated. The young man,

frustrated and desperate, extended his shirtsleeves of his velvet jacket and in a sudden hit was able to put the unwanted piece of lollipop on the floor. It disappeared between the legs of the mesmerized passengers. It is striking how easily can the sticky lollipop adored by children fall to the dimension of the filthy and unwanted. This is an extremely fragile passage.

Afterwards, the young man, who had long and lank hair, long face and nose as well as a tall and fine dandy-like body figure, sat again and did not stop insulting Fahrid while the later kept creeping forward. The young man, humiliated, claimed with an inquisitive tone in his voice: “You piece of shit, you scum bag... fucking shit...” Finally, the young man spit Fahrid from the back. Nobody said or did anything. Fahrid, disgusted and resentful kept crawling all the way to the closest exit door of the underground. Passengers moved sideways so that he could keep creeping. Fahrid had his right hand extended, while carrying the gangrene leg in front. In the next underground station, he must have stepped out of the train, since on the way to the next station I could not see him. He, like it happened to the filthy lollipop, might well be devoured by the pedestrians that kept coming in and out of the train.

The question I have tried to assess by practicing an experimental writing is the following: how can one work with the violent gap between Fahrid and the civilization of Berlin in ways that are irreducible and epistemologically challenging? Let me point out that Fahrid reiterates the centrality of *outsiders* to the construction of the Potsdamer Platz, and ultimately, Europe. I am afraid that the *pointillist* method I have put to work does not really solve the problem of anthropological distance. Nevertheless, it does perform an epistemological irreverence by taking seriously the working methods proposed by Artaud, Benjamin, Kracauer and Vertov and making them operational.

This sort of experimental practice may be perceived as scandalous for it does not seek to communicate balanced and politically responsible accounts. This corporeal ethnography is not content with discursive resolutions that do not take

into account the positions from which such predicaments are formulated. Furthermore, it invokes the speaking out of one's own epistemological errors and failures, by taking its unpredictable consequences seriously. This experimental sensibility attuned to the unpredictable advent of alterities and undecidability displays challenging forms of ethnographic practice in which even the position of the seemingly stable anthropologist may be irremediably displaced.

Let me state the epistemological contribution of such experiment to the discipline of anthropology. This corporeal experiment, which cuts across various disciplines such as painting, film and literature, is transversal; it emphasizes the forces of singularity and chance, against objectifying academic tendencies that often tend to reduce particulars to generals and bizarre instances to structural frames. Its exploratory form of writing attempts to foreground affective and visceral responses of individuals, in contrast to most anthropologists' concern with meaning, ideology and form. I have talked about a myriad of vivid corporeal reactions of fear and desire, pleasure and disgust, as well as shame and fascination that the Berlin of fin de millennium arouses. Particularly, I have often evoked pre-subjective responses in the discussion of diverse particular's lives.

Moreover, I have stressed that such assaying experiences do also involve a politics, invoking that power works in the flesh perhaps more incisively than on the level of representation, ideology and discourse. This style of writing approaches the corporeal realm of experience in a way in which the personal and the political are intimately interlocked. The embracing of excess, singularity and fragmentary traces is precisely to avoid the appearances of objectivity and universality. In this sense, I follow Foucault's injunction (1983) that orders of domination are not structural preconditions, but instead the empirical effects of such multiple and changing field of force relations. This analysis of modern society's disciplinary mechanism also underlines the point that desire cannot be merely referred as a consequence of lack and that power relations cannot be reduced to totalizing discourses.

Irreversibly, my subjectivity has engaged with this subaltern process, in ways in which -at times- I may have been able to reflect upon, but may have ultimately remained beyond my grasp. In fact, as anthropologist, I was often too deeply implicated in the corporeal experiences of the particulars that I wrote about, and at times too embarrassed by my complicity or subordination to them to give a full and balanced account. Any sort of theoretical generalization or political legitimation risked falling into a “perilous” gratification in which the other could be easily placed in an unwanted position. I have tried to retain this epistemological tension or irreducible ambivalence.

The extreme figure of Fahrid has brought us back to the public spaces and the irreducible distances that were opened up in the first ethnographic chapter on construction workers. The panoramic view of the pyramids then seemed to deploy the possibility of staring at the city downwards, almost in a panoptic fashion. Nevertheless, by traversing and exploring specific predicaments of various public spaces and particular affective intensities, the distance opened by the new pyramids has unavoidably become a sacrificial potlatch and the work of fire. By the time Fahrid’s body has invaded ours, the pyramids attempting to establish a new order of civility has turned out to be another treacherous path within the labyrinth.

11. Serendipity and Innocence (Extra Chapter)

11.1 The Passions of the Other

In the paradoxical processing of intimacy, as it is often argued colloquially, passion burns the now, and it also puts the end it announces in flames. In a sense, it is excess, a radical affirmation that can only put its end to work. And yet, in another sense, the excess of passion –subversively- is also the radical refusal of any goal. Desire, as a physical alterity, does not follow the instructions of a master, and certainly, it is not faithful to any teleology, logo-centric discourse or symbolic structure. Annie Le Brun (1991) has commented that the Surrealists studied de Sade and argued that the key question was not “*what is man*” but “*what is desire*”. This is a key theme that throws up the fundamental methodological problem how one engages and describes what is at a certain level a refusal of the world conquering directionality of academic research.

The passions of particulars have assayed my own body turning this fieldwork into an adventurous journey. Nevertheless, to whom do these passions belong, how much does the passion of Ulf of “*touching Cornelia*” belong to Ulf, and how much does this writing belong to me cannot be brought into closure. Are passions our own? Is it not the force of Ulf’s passion –as an unforgiving wind blowing in the fall of Berlin- come from an “*outside*” that captures, raptures and puts his body at work at the drizzle of the event to be re-awakened and never to be the same? The “*outside*” (Bataille 1988a; Blanchot 1981) is a space that refuses signification or symbolic articulation: it is a corporeal realm of intensities that precedes, interpellates, constitutes and subverts the self as well as discursive representation. I have often attempted to remain intolerably and suffocatingly near to the “*outside*” that the discussed particulars touch upon.

I find that the most intimate passions, the deepest experience, the most authentic and crucial that makes particulars such as Ulf what they are, is precisely impelled by this “*outside*” I can not enter. As it will happen to Ulf, in the account of his limit-

experiences in relation to Cornelia, he will attempt to “lose” himself, only to find out that he is preserved. At other times, as it happens to the anthropologist becoming dog, he will try to preserve himself with a degree of conserved calculation and happens to be swept away by movements in which he loses himself.

The “*outside*” is not a transcendence, a being or a substance, neither it is a theological category. It is a placeless place from which one’s passions and thoughts emerge. In this sense, it is also the ground on which every relation of power and domination are inscribed, only because –first of all- it is the groundlessness from which such relations can be subverted. This chapter attempts to indicate the disruptive passion of the “*outside*”, which can potentially interrupt at any time. I have endeavoured myself to trace the bizarre and impersonal affectivity, the pain and the joy of passions that traverse multiple levels of violence and intensity.

However, there is a problem that cannot be brought into a closure, and must be worked further; the passions of Claudia or Ulf arouse a demand for possession, and yet it is incompatible for passion is precisely a movement without aim. Inevitably, one is carried out from oneself, that is, one is displaced from the position where possession would be possible. This is not to mean that our desires are frustrated by a cruel and fatal fate. It is instead harder to endure the fact that the force that defeats oneself is the same that sustains oneself as it occurs in the clash between work and fatigue in the interview with Ulf. If Claudia experiences the impossibility to come to terms with the “*outside*” as a tragic and irremediable loss of Noel, Ulf engages with “*the touching of Cornelia*” as a bizarre affirmation. For him, only the movement that impels the body at the most intimate –by assaying the viscera- has the capacity to anticipate and circumvent his own powers of action and initiation.

As an academically educated anthropologist, my well rehearsed willful intention – critical and reflective- is to grasp Ulf’s passion dialectically. However, throughout the fieldwork, I have learned to avoid such binary schooling. In fact, they have initiated my writing into a desiring form of expression. I am inclined to believe that through this participant somatization of passions, my sensuous intuition has been

trained in diverse non-linear velocities and paths which has led my writing to unrepeatable and unexpected destinies.

However, I still believe that my writing as well as my often relatively tight and anxious breathing, may not be open or receptively multi-faceted enough. I consider that my writing could become increasingly sensuous and analytically refined over time. Ethnographic works may wait ahead towards an optimal sensibilities that infinitely ricochet against the grain of intensities of en-fleshed experiences. For instance, the sound of Ulf's dilettante voice and whirling wonderings –reflecting on the touching of Cornelia- at the tape recorder still disquiets me deeply. I am compelled to think that the passage of time will help me to work on this and other material in ways that may be unimaginable currently.

11.2 Noel's Annoyance

I came to an illegal party called *Klem* at Invaliden Str., in Mitte, with my shy friend Noel. Walking to the party, Noel seemed enthusiastic, even though I doubted he would be confident enough to meet other people and dance at the social gathering. Nevertheless, while walking to the party, in the extreme pitiless -15° temperature and cold dry wind of Berlin, he began joking, giggling and acting out literally as a “*freak*” - which was quite unprecedented coming from him. Noel kept imitating people we both knew madly, twisting his short legs and lifting his legs – somewhat like Groucho Marx. In the beginning, I wondered whether this behaviour had to do with the fact that we were going to a party, but he himself admitted that the shocking encounter with the forthcoming winter's sharp cold awakened his senses. I could not feel more unrelated to Noel's “*awakening*”.

At the party, Noel and I had a couple of beers served by my room-mate and Bar keeper Claudia. We both celebrated the fact that she had not charged us the first beer. After drinking with graceful impetuosity, Noel and I realized that probably if we would of have paid the beer, we would not have enjoyed it so much. Slyly, without explicitly showing my strategic plan to come closer to the dancing set, I had

suggested Noel to take a look to the old edifice. Thus, we ended up standing next to the dancing crowd. I started dancing, but as usual Noel seemed not having any intention to follow. It took him a while to start moving his body. Noel confessed that he was uncomfortable.

Where was the hilarious *“freak”* that had made me laugh so much in the way to the party? Finally, he gave it a try to dancing. His movements were not completely articulated. Indeed, he wished that *“the party had been out in the cold”*. Noel is very fond of the icy cold showers, and their subsequent bodily *“nuisance”* he takes every morning. A smiley and pretty looking sympathetic girl has approached Noel. She asked him if he knows her from elsewhere. Noel slightly inhibited, was suddenly paralysed, unable to respond. He just smiled clumsily and became extremely embarrassed. Noel turned around and kept his eyes nailed on the floor. After half minute, his face and eyes were shamefully returning to the surface of the world. He looked confused and upset.

I was still asking him on the physical enhancement of the cold. At the moment, I was devoted to find out if this had to do with the fact that he left home with only a t-shirt under his winter coat. Noel was annoyed with my interrogation on the cold and showers. He thought I was being tedious. *“It is your fault”* he had argued, *“always making me recite about my physical issues”*. Noel seemed to be half joking, but by the instructing and slightly frustrated tone of his voice, I inferred that he really meant what he said. When this *“pretty”* girl approached Noel, he had fallen not in love but in a state of *“profound stupidity”*. Basically, Noel was too immersed responding to the questions for my corporeal project and, inevitably, had generously mobilized his sensory and bodily energies in doing so. Thus, he complained that it did not help his problems to socialize that I rapture his energies in the middle of the party, because then he could not be as direct, witty, spontaneous and fluid.

Apparently, the sudden approach of the girl had impressed Noel with such surprising and immediate force that he fell in a state of dumbness. His own reaction to her sympathetic and transparent emanation was described by Noel as being *“just*

there... as a dummy monkey hanging from a tree". He felt ridiculous and was a bit angry with me, no matter how much he tried to relativist it. I excused myself, remained silent and made a promise that I would not put him into the informing position again. Eventually, somewhat refraining from his embarrassment, Noel had returned to the girl and tried to talk to her. I knew he was trying hard. Soon after, he returned to me. Noel confessed that he perceived his social skills in the form of a chain of catastrophes a ruinous body floating clumsily at the dancing room.

Upset, Noel kept saying that *"now it is too late, it is all too elaborated, too prefabricated to approach her... somehow she can feel my emotional blockade.... there is nothing to do..."* Right at the moment of chance, the potential radiance of luck had been replaced by sheer timidity. It was definitely my fault according to Noel. No matter how much Noel was willing to somehow return to the anterior moment of the unfortunate encounter, he could not regain the potential of *"luck"*, because such instant was not only singular but unrepeatably in itself, and what it could have been in the beginning could not be the same again.

He whispered *"I wish the party was out in the cold... but nobody would stand that... neither would I"*. Good old sensible Noel was regretting identity, evoking the force of the cold as a rebellious form of alterity. Tonight, I feel absurd and clumsy as an anthropologist. There is this priest-like aura emanating from my body. I often feel that my work turns me into an annoying *"personal observer"*. There is Claudia, Noel friends and neighbours who see me fulfilling priest-like functions in my anthropological endeavour. I am already known as *"the priest"* in *Mitte*, and by the end of the fieldwork I realized that this ironic naming of the anthropologist by the natives became a complex and multi-faceted trope.

Obviously, particulars such as Stephan, Claudia, and Noel, who are not only neighbours but also ethnographic subjects, refer to me as *"the priest"* in the sense that their individuality has been consecrated and somewhat made collective via anthropology. For them, the mediation of the anthropologist as *"the priest"* endows a remarkable signification for they have been *"chosen"* among many possible

candidates and have become involved in a process that has made them collective. People in the neighbourhood rapidly find out who is the particular with whom I am spending much time, and thus, who is the “*lost soul*” that I am attending. All this Christian images were epitomized in the last supper that many of the informants – except Marcus, Kim and Petra- celebrated in the spacious entrance hall of Strelitzer St. It was my goodbye dinner, and after supper my informants did not only make jokes about my “*priestly*” functions, but also referred to the whole ceremony as “*Jesus’ last supper*” for somehow my own ethnographic writing turned them into unconventional “*Saints*”.

Obviously, all of this was not without irony. The informants and the regulars of the Weinerei –many of whom live in *Mitte*- refer to me as “*the priest*” also in this two-fold sense. They know that I am writing about people’s life and that I spend much time and make many questions to those who write about. Accordingly, there is the joke that anyone can be “*caught*” and brought into “*confession*” by “*the priest*”, meaning that my presence can –as it does often-interrupt the course of one’s life. It is known that my tendency to observation, interrogation and especially my perseverance to hang out for long hours with my informants can also get to the point of being disruptive and quiet tedious.

In fact, it has often been the impression of my informants as well as my own that my ethnographic work of data-gathering, analytical interrogation, interviews, etc. at times turned out to be not only annoying, but unreceptive to whatever was taking place in the place. In this sense, there is a humorous caricature of the anthropologist as “*the priest*” –someone you better run away from- spread in certain parts of *Mitte*. My own contribution to this fertile characterization is that, when returning to University to do my writing up, I have come to acknowledge that my “*spiritual companion*” to a series of particulars in Berlin has been integral to the theological mission of the academic world, which can be seen as a modern version of the Church, in the sense that in a certain level it aspires to totalize and conquer the world through research analysis. As “*the priest*” that is concerned with the avatars

of desire rather than man, I contribute to academic research via the non-totalizing and troubling paths of fluidity.

11.3 Missing Noel

A couple of hours later, Noel had started to get bored and get immersed in a physical state of fatigue. Right before Noel vanished, ghost-like, without saying anything as usual, he came to me really angry and shouted; “... *and do you know what I hate most of all this, ... that my parents are on their mid fifties and go out every weekend, ... they go to cinema, dancing, drinking, etc, ... They have given me all this education, resources, books, machines, computer, money ... and I’m old at the age of thirty, much older than them, ... They, the progressive generation of the sixties have turned me into an aged baby ... a depressed monster*”.

I was perplexed. Soon after, Noel had introduced me to Ulf. I was dancing and chatting with Ulf by the time I realized that Noel had definitely vanished. At the Bar, Claudia described me the way in which Noel had left the party; looking down and slightly bended forward. She affirmed that in such cases, it was better to let him go, leave him in his solitary peace. Claudia acknowledged that when Noel disappears suddenly, without leaving any physical or aural trace, she tended to experience an empathic painful sadness toward his bodily burden. She corrected herself and referred to Noel’s solitude not in terms of harmony, but misery.

Claudia let me know that each time Noel left us without saying a word she felt a physical void on the left side of her stomach. According to her, she was aware that she carries this physical void since she knew Noel eight years ago. However, apparently, it was only when Noel disappeared suddenly when she felt this void intensively “*as if the left side of the stomach would be taken away from me*”. Claudia argued that this visceral connection to Noel was related to the passion that she felt for him. As she explained, a certain sense of catastrophe was intimately intertwined with this passion that was lasting eight years then. She claimed that loss was implicit to the love attraction toward him. Furthermore, she thought that perhaps Noel’s disappearances evoke death itself, in her own words “*the grace that death gives to life*”.

Claudia's expression evokes the world of micro-organism, where it is barely possible to assert whether the organisms are dying or being born. Conversely, in the world of human beings there is a distance between life and death. It can be argued that this distance is exhausted by eroticism in the world of complex animals such as human beings. Bataille (1987) argues that copulation opens a distance between sexuality and its other –which is death- only to undo this distance. Accordingly, it can be stated that it is eroticism what deprives sexuality from being a mere function of reproduction. However, one can distinguish the eroticism of complex animals from the scissiparity of micro-organisms. If eroticism sacrifices the distance which it brings forth, in scissiparity life and death are undistinguishable processes for there is no distance – and thus, the micro-organism is continually dying and being born. It follows that in scissiparity, there is no father, mother or child. The original cell invests all its powers in the creation of a new cell, and the moment when the new cell is formed the original one disappears without leaving a trace. This phenomenon does not only challenge the dualist relation of object and subject, but it affirms the notion of eternal death.

Claudia was convinced that this passionate phenomenon toward Noel was not reciprocal "*as in most of the cases*". She was having a beer and expressed that the taste of the beer brought her back to the graceful impetuosity that she had sensuously experienced drinking the first beer of the night along with Noel. Its sour taste and iciness reminded her of the remarkable brief moment that they both had shared with previously. Such intimate moment had a nostalgic, a lamenting melancholic dimension added to it. This physical building up of memory was in direct relation with the sudden loss of her and my friend's companionship. I missed him too.

11.4 In the Attics of Ulf's Life

I paid the beers to Claudia and joined Ulf again, at the dancing set invaded by flashing lights. Ulf is a thirty year old Berliner that works in the Public Hospital of Friedrichshain. At first, I had the impression that he was a very social and

sympathetic subject, meaning that he seemed friendly, warm and cheerful. Perhaps, the fact that we were both freely shifting from Spanish and German and back had something to do with it. He danced very freely to the electronic music of *Stereolab* and was enthusiastically making other subjects join the dancing. Ulf had a permanent smile on his face and kept talking about his summer holidays in Spain. While dancing I told him I was impressed with his explicit joy and admired the way he was contagiously transmitting such positive impulses to other people.

The party doers that were languidly staring to those of us who were dancing had slowly been persuaded to dance by the friendly but obstinate vibrations of Ulf. His corporeal movements radiated a certain sympathetic emanation that was able to incorporate different party doers to the dancing scene, even those who were apparently bored, shy or dispassionate. Ulf's movements were quite particular, since, every now and then, his arm-leg-waist rhythms broke away with the musical beat, to dance somewhat free style, chaotic. His body was dancing to an unknown and radically other wild beat that could undo the often monochrome music of *Stereolab*, which ended up proliferating the blasting moment –smiles, laughs and sudden burst of happiness- of those around him. His dancing was very close to the most irreverent dancing style of free-jazz.

At a certain moment, during the long, but shortly lived dancing night, everybody at the attic of the huge edifice in Fehrberliner St. was physically *communicating* to one musical beat. Ulf had calmed down a bit and I had a conversation with him. Without having talk very long, he had explained that in the last three months, he had been *in love* and that, contrary to what he thought at the beginning, it was lasting much longer than he expected. He repeated that such movement of passion still affected his body to the extent that it invokes “more” vitality and energetic approach to daily activities.

I interrogated him on what he meant precisely with this “*more*”. He replied that working in the Children Clinic, awakened his bodily senses with such “*freshness*” that allows him to retreat from the role of the stiff and serious terror enhancing doctor.

Eccentricity could be explored in a world of objectifying analytical professionalism. He promised we would make an appointment to visit the Clinic. Ulf explained that the *in love* feeling of which he became pleasantly “*infested*” had to do with working with children to a large extent. The physical lightness and emotional generosity that he shared with children was also affecting the enjoyment of his personal intimacy.

He argued that adults rarely admit and celebrate “*how much do children also give to them*”. However, Ulf had particularly insisted in “*touching of Cornelia*” –his beloved new lover- as the never-the-same stream of radiation which was capable of opening his body to “*new and unpredictable sensations*”. Ulf’s claim made me wonder, and wished we could continue having such conversation but the noisy music was too loud to speak. Indeed, we were invaded by multiple hammering forces of electronic sound currents, the stimuli of alcohol, and...

Luckily, for the benefit of the ethnographic research -certainly not so for my ruined desire to meet a dark-hair girl- the police showed up at five a.m. in the morning. The participants of the party had to disperse and leave the attic. Ulf held my arm, and through a backdoor exit, through the alley, took me to the roof of an old and emaciated GDR building. I found his comments on this intimate theme somewhat intriguing. The cold and starry sight-seeing seemed appropriate to persuade him to talk on the singular passage of “*touching Cornelia*”. Ulf did not mind that I recorded the conversation – he claimed he trusted me for being friend of Claudia. Here, I transcribe some revealing fragments from the tape. We smoked rolling tobacco in thick tears out of cold.

“... *when I touched her face in the evening yesterday, I felt I had a great feeling, it was overwhelming... somehow, when I touched her I felt that what I am, a young man, trying to be a decent doctor, (laughs) is somewhat removed from me,... it puts to sleep that part of myself...*”

Ulf’s amorous joy when touching Cornelia’s face is also a distant contact, since this “*self*”, this conscious being-in-the-world is enigmatically “*put to sleep*”. He suggested that at the heart of such passion there was a strange clouded and

voluminous intensity. Such inference resonates with what Levinas calls the nudity of the face. Cornelia has invaded Ulf's private powers with a blank and featureless intensity that eludes Ulf's grasp. The powerlessness and impassivity of Cornelia's face, this authority without force cannot be reduced to measures of negativity and possession.

The intimate touching of Cornelia marks the point at which Ulf's power ceases, not because it is surpassed by another power, but rather because it discovers the nakedness that nourishes and sustains Cornelia's face as an infinite relation to desire. It is in this sense that touching Cornelia unfolds Ulf's intimacy in an unrepeatable way. This loving experience can not be explained away in terms of constraint or limitations. Moreover, such un-signifying "*great feeling*", this strange voluminous intensity, nourished intimacy *per se* with an infinite relation to desire which can not be reduced to any criteria of possession or negativity.

Ulf's intimacy when touching Cornelia's face "*soft, careful and pleasantly*" traced an enigmatic rubric of intensities where his power happened to be dissolved. This wavy set of affects did not so much occur because it was surpassed by another power. In fact, it came to my mind that, it would be worth secretly filming or taking a photographic picture of such tactile event. I thought it was perhaps the most tactile form of portraying Ulf's singularity of "*touching Cornelia*". Due to the material quality of filmed images, I thought I could imprint the physical echo of the touch more soundly than writing. No matter how exciting this possibility could be, I was afraid that perhaps it was too disturbing to ask Ulf if I could film this intimacy with Cornelia. At the time I was troubled even proposing the idea for I thought that perhaps I felt appealed to become a perverse voyeur and was looking for a justified ethnographic pretext. Yet, all these thoughts could well be a product of my prejudices upon intruding other's privacy. For the time being, I decided to wait. Let's now pay attention to Ulf's highly personal -fragmented and slightly restless-reflections on "*touching Cornelia*".

“... yes... when all this consciousness of who I am, where I come from, where I am heading to... seems to vanish, I guess I am really naked ... or powerless, but it is only emotion,... I love it... even though; it is a powerlessness that I do not feel as a prohibition...”

Particularly, Ulf insisted in referring to such powerlessness, of such losing of one's own conscious presence as an affirmation. His recurrent encounters with Cornelia were not matching with any means of definition, preservation and possession of one's own self. The conversation I had with Ulf at the roof had made me wander in what was this “*only emotion*” about. Ulf's claim resonated with Coleridge's “*Biographia Literaria*” in the sense that there is a celebration of “*pure presence*”. I'm inclined to remain somewhat sceptical on this for I believe that ordinary or “*natural*” perception –enmeshed in a metaphysics of theatrical presence-never encounters the real in its primordial nakedness. I am afraid that even the most immediate and phenomenological pure perception may be already caught up in a drama of imitation, recognition and representation.

Ulf later claimed that “*My fingers melted on Cornelia's skin, then my arms, then my chest, then my head, and so on... I could not really tell where did my skin touched hers... yet I was caressing her, yes, yes, yes ...*” If consciousness is constituted at the surface of the body as stated by Freud, then it is likely that it is also fluidly undone at the porous surface of the skin. This liquid quality of Ulf's body becoming milk evokes the singular and non-signifying experience of the nocturnal “*touching Cornelia*” as that of metamorphosis. Certainly, Ulf was never going to be the same after such intimate events.

I write down several questions, and shape a hypothesis: Did Ulf's touching of Cornelia's “*milky and unbearably white*” skin had to do with a Sartrean total dissolution, or a negation of the self? I doubt it. Perhaps that would imply that Ulf would dismay, fall down or disappear out in the blue. Certainly, Ulf – as a physical materiality- was there, maintaining a composure, a bodily apprehension, a resisting memory, that held his body together. The fact that Ulf's body was potentially able to open to receptive to surprising metamorphoses and lived transformations –as the

night of milky metamorphosis-, does not mean that his body was without limit, without certain inscribed memory that held his body –residually and materially- at the moment of “*the touching of Cornelia*”.

But what about this sensuous excess that Ulf referred to when talking about the touching of Cornelia? Ulf referred to Cornelia’s skin as “*milky and unbearably white*” which erotically infers a thrilling emotional surplus of the encounter of his fingertips with her face. And how was Ulf’s limit-experience of touching the desired one unrepeatable? What does Ulf mean by these intimate moments, by these non-signifying alterities?

11.5 Colour and the Hassle of Fieldwork

It is a sunny Friday. I am meeting Ulf at a second hand “*bookstore*” in Kastanienallee. I am late. Meanwhile, at the terrace of the bookstore, he picked a book on traditional German cuisine and read it irresponsibly. He later narrated that this was a pleasant and luxurious waste of time. Perhaps his breakfast –a couple of toasts, marmalade, butter and tea- had not been sufficiently satisfying due to Ulf’s economical shortage. Ulf finds it specially rewarding to peep through the artificially coloured food pictures of the book. The vivid force of its vegetable pages provoked some gastric noises in his stomach and eventually the eternal return of the eating ease. I, pinching humorously Ulf’s waist from both sides, disturb his pleasant colour nutrition.

Ulf told me that he was viewing the vivid colours of the food with such intensity that the mainly primary colours had come out of the book by emotionally infesting the full extent of his human sensorium. This is a mood that Ulf has rediscovered since he works with children. He argues that children are rarely interested in making things useful. Indeed, by working with children, Ulf believes that his “*child-ness*” in has began to reawaken again. Without refraining from the adult world of reason and order, Ulf asserts that, when relaxed and unworried, he is finding the way to let his “*child-ness*” experience the world with innocence and immediacy, “*without having to*

reflect". Ulf finds himself retraining the mimetic faculty that allows him to embrace the world full of colours with a sensitivity characterized by the transitory absence of boundaries, and by extension, cognitive thought.

Ulf is in an optimistic mood and invokes the enjoying of the sun. He would like to take me to *Wansee* – a big lake at the green and forestry surroundings at the south of the city. I tell him that I have to be at home in a couple of hours, because the old water-pipes are blocked and the plumber is expected to come. Immediately, Ulf reproaches me for being really concentrated in taking notes and doing interviews for the fieldwork. He claims that he cannot understand how I can make a research project on the body and passions, and be continuously devoted to record –by video, tape recorder or manual writing- what is happening to other people. Ulf has critically wandered; *“Are you not somehow rejecting live, no matter how attentively and sharply you want to record bodily experiences?”*

I acknowledge that there is a economizing and capitalizing of my bodily energy and passion focused in the collecting of the ethnographic material. Irrevocably, as Ulf claims, to a certain extent, it does probably deprive my receptiveness to physically assaying instances. Furthermore, there is no possibility for an unmediated perception of the Real, since the Real is itself in continual fabrication. Yet, an anthropologist can make a big difference in the forms one partakes in such fabrication, especially if the criticism employed engages with the alterity and otherness of the world, rather than trying to classify clinically and fully control those epistemologically.

As a corporeal ethnographer, I must continuously mediate with the memory forming analytical methodology that academic research requires, and the free and gratuitous physical impressions. Curiously, I find this tension between body and writing, sacrifice and accumulation, figure and discourse, or chaos and order so to say, crucial and necessary one in order to advance in a revealing ethnographic work. No matter how open ended, anti-closure and physical I am keen to make my writing

sensually vibrate to the reader, there is a relatively normative area that holds the narration.

The more impressionistically I approach the simple, paradoxical and “messy” passions of the informants –and ultimately my own- the more I believe that one can hardly be receptive to all sensuous and bodily phenomena happening now and here. Indeed, I realize that if such unconstrained encounter were possible, it would probably be unbearable, nerve wrecking and even perhaps fatal. In this respect, no matter how much I pursue to make -sensually, sensationally and physically- the bodies of my ethnographic subjects “vibrate” through my writing, I am aware that there is a muddy perceptive limit, a hazy physical apprehension that can not be transgressed, yet it is all the time transgressed by the bodily passions we live by.

11.6 Last Night with Cornelia

Ulf and I are again slowly entering the slippery theme of “*touching Cornelia*”. Ulf conveys some more hints “... see, it is so simple that it is also strange... *Cornelia came to see me last night. I can still not believe what happened in the room. When she entered it around midnight, everything in my life was altered. Any idea of self-control was completely impossible...*” I interrupt Ulf. I want to provoke and disarm his thought, challenge him to take a new direction toward an unknown destiny. My attempt may fail. I ask him if he can think of a bunch of good reasons for such alterity. “Reasons?... yes, right,... we could think of many psychological or sociological explanations,... but it would be never enough”. This “never enough” affects me not only theoretically but also at the most personal. I feel a somatic empathy, an urgent –yet impossible- drive to engage with Ulf’s passion, and imitate it as much as possible in my writing. I am ready to devour Ulf by the very act of being devoured by him.

Ulf’s shared intimacy with Cornelia –“*last night in my room*”- is an event exceeding presence. “*It is a shock*” Ulf argues. This is an unexpected and probably impossible encounter, forever to be renewed. “*I knew that Cornelia was to come home. In fact, I was waiting for her, ... but my expectation of seeing her coming, my waiting, was somehow demolished*

when she came,... with all that force through the dim light in my room". What is this singular and irreversible obscurity? What is that surprising intensity that demolishes Ulf's waiting when he was informed in the first place that she was to come to his place last night?

Let's move on. *"When she entered my room I did not realize, but later she told me that I scratched my chest as if in a shock, as if I were encountering her again after ten years"*. These physical abysses, traces of infinite seconds, rupture the conventional narrative chains of cause and effect. Ulf is affirming a radical distance when he claims he is *"...encountering her after ten years"*, at the very privacy of his room. Somehow, right at the instant when Cornelia entered Ulf's room –due to the indeterminable force of the event- his contact with her remained apart from himself. There could not be a moment of intimacy without the awkward distance Ulf experienced in relation to Cornelia, which was -on the other hand- an excess of proximity in the kind. Indeed, Ulf had to lose the coherent space of perception of the *"self"* in order to meet Cornelia in intimacy.

Intimacy according to Ulf, can be stated as a paradox of impersonality in the following way; the *"self"* is never fully present, it does not really participate, it is contemplative. The stubborn ambience of Ulf's *"self"* embodies the concept of the willed action. Nevertheless, it must be underlined that such position is only reached from a reflective and disengaged observation. His fatal fate, as an anthropologist that is supposed to practice participant observation is that he is only able to make contact with human phenomenon through the distance that her expected arrival provided.

But what happens when Cornelia enters Ulf's privacy and breaks the care (*Sorge*) or expectancy of the self? And moreover, what happens when my writing is allowed to explore Ulf's mundane cracks? Cornelia's action, as the one breaking or banging a glass is not maintained. The more Cornelia is devoured and allured by the tremor of Ulf's cracking privacy, the more I –finally- start making contact with the unknown; thus, I face the risk of losing the *"self"* of the writer, of the anthropologist, since it

may easily vanish at the blinding pleasure of Cornelia's direct contact last night. This passage has triggered my receptiveness to the form in which I have embodied the glass by joggling right in-between the self and the non-self, between discourse and figure. This ethnographic attitude has been, perhaps, the highest theoretical risk and challenge of this particular corporeal ethnography.

Last night, around midnight, Ulf encountered Cornelia. His life was determined by Cornelia's living emanation, because everything he said or did was affected by the imprint of such event. The mark that impressed Ulf's body, "*I scratched my chest*", nonetheless remained beyond his conscious grasp. This tactile and subtly aggressive conviction is indeterminate, since what it fatally conditions is a future that is as irrevocable as it is unpredictable. "*The nearness of Cornelia was distant and suffocating at the same time,... distant because I lost track of my own identity and close because of the proximity of her flesh,... at the erotic moment, I cannot self-reflect, or pursue self-control,... that would be impossible and mad,... I can only love Cornelia,... it is beyond a mechanical sexual act,...*". But, similarly, Cornelia is far away, because of Cornelia's intrusion in Ulf's room. Their intense mutual alterity reaches its copulative intensity at "*the marvellous proximity of the flesh*".

At this point of the interview, I asked Ulf whether the intimate event became an achieved state, a mutual physical and mutual communion. Ulf responded "*No,... that is a romantic fantasy or something,... there has to be a tension, ... the desires of both of us must not coincide I believe, otherwise there would be no ,... how to say,... attraction?,... does that satisfy you?*". Ulf's bodily movement of passion then, does not end up neither in pure ecstasy nor in an ideal of total identification. It cannot be reduced to communion or effacement. Cornelia's arrival to Ulf's private room "*through the dim light*" last night, was a unique and indeterminable encounter of shock.

I think it is enough for today. I must go home and attend the plumber. I am satisfied with the work. Warm, we have embraced like two dozing hibernating bears. The interview we just had has been physically vibrant and emotionally engaging. Enigmatically, I have the impression that we have been rambling about the touching

of Cornelia for the entire day, and it was only about one hour and a half. Only the click at the end of each 45 min. side of the cassette has given me a remote flavour of the mechanic passing of time watch.

Previous to the meeting, I would never have guessed that the luminous conversation would take me home thinking on the issue of whether Ulf's often ambiguous commentaries -with never ending silences, whispering irruptions and "*unsatisfactory*" puffins- were really evoking an experience that remains somehow unaccountable in the singularity of his flesh, or if it had to do with a tragic sense of wanting to possess and irremediably losing the intensity of Cornelia's skin.

It is very likely that Ulf's "*pure presence*" or "*only emotion*" may be inflected and further contaminated by certain literary reflexivity. Such awareness of this inevitability brings to mind recollections on Kafka and Proust. Yet, Ulf's reflection on his intimate experiences suggests that such perceptual immersion or "*pure experience*" is not completely processed by literary schemata. His intimate fascination with Cornelia seems to indicate that there may be certain unaccountability or residual vestige that stubbornly refuses to be reflected upon. Obviously, this element of excess may as well not be fully appropriated by my own analytical narration, yet I have tried to point out and emphasize the lines of flight of such desiring intensities.

I have come home moved by the impossible closure in explaining such phenomena. I must spend some more time with Ulf and make a more sound contact with his passion. For an anthropology work devoted to the stream of life infinitely ricocheting on experience, the objectifying riveting nails of conceptual architectonics is not only death-giving but profoundly insufficient.

11.7 The Doggy Invitation

It's around 2 p.m. mid-day. Ulf called me on the phone last night and invited me for late lunch. He resides near Kottbusser Tor, fourth floor, at Maybachufer. Ulf shares this huge flat with two German girls. Both of them have dogs. The canine

smell is quite penetrating throughout the entire house. Ulf is not at home yet. Both girls seem to be busy in their closed door rooms. I wait for Ulf, in his room, sitting on the sofa. The extreme whiteness and tidiness of the room confronts my awkward attraction to the dog's smell.

Both mixed-raced dogs smell me. I am observed and smelled very closely. One of the dogs licks my legs under my trousers. His jaws are wide and long are his long teeth. He is licking the bone of my femurs, but does not dare to nail his canine tooth. Being the object of his licking makes my bodily outside/inside boundaries undistinguishable. Animalistic, I feel the drive also to register them through my smell and lick their necks. Though, becoming a dog while seated on a sofa is far more appealing.

The other dog olfactory searches my handbag. He is devouring my red handbag by smelling it passionately. I would like to put to work their dazzling desire and faculty to adore and engage with my bag's materiality in my own ethnographic work. I write several sympathetic notes on the awkward resonances between the dogs search on me and my own anthropological practice. I must acknowledge that certain doggy force has captured my attention fully, yet I can not name it clearly. The other dog licks my hand a couple of times. I stay still. A strange dog seating on the sofa may be this anthropologists. I start inhaling and breathing the warm and humid breath of the dogs. I also want to eat them through smelling. I have not become a full dog, only a partial one and I like it.

I am sitting in the sofa, obsessively smelled by the dogs. This situation turns me into a majestic and erect stone. Halfway dog and stone, I move my legs in the shaky, nervous and panicky style of dogs, and my head remains thrust to the comfortable sofa, solid, round, phallic and static. Am I becoming a border-line being, while waiting for Ulf? It is astonishing; how long can these dogs continue sniffing danger, this human that I supposedly am? And all of this is inadequate. This piece of writing is incongruous; I mean the taste for these dog's disgusting sweaty smell. Or else, am I a heartless and archaic stone, turned humid on its surface by the mimetic

repetitions of floppy canine tongues? A hybrid, a transitory bestiality seats on the sofa; an anthropologist, a human-stone-dog. These unusual reflections may emanate horror and fascination, pain and joy. This is a paradoxical experience indeed, and one in which I feel most comfortable and giving.

I stand on the floor on all four, and speak to the other two dogs in supposedly human terms. The dogs behold me in their gaze as an absurd dog connected to a stone. I fantasise and recreate myself in putting my teeth on their cooked flesh. We have swallowed each other. I am becoming not only human-stone-dog, but also cannibalistically Chinese. Somehow, I am not so perceptible to their smelling anymore. Both dogs seem bored, yet willing to play. And so do I too. It is obvious that I do not pass as a revealing informant any more. I may be just one more living creature, in the best of the cases - a means for revealing anthropological insight.

We walk in circles, reaffirming the cyclical temporality of my transformation into a dog. Linear time is collapsed. The exotic and remote oil paintings of wild tigers and lions hanging above Ulf's bed have become remnants of my prehistoric family album. Ulf enters home. Like these two canine colleagues, I am a human's best friend, if there was ever one – I guess. Soon after walking in the corridor he is – physically- pushed back, disgusted by the noticeable canine smell. I, bipedal, ask him about his experience living with dogs. He stares at me seriously and challenging; he remains in silence.

The encounter is naked, full of tension, and the silence allows no disguise. Ulf refuses to talk about his roommate's dogs, no matter how interested I may be in the abhorrent olfactory force that his physical perception is saturated with. He is upset. Kindness and generosity have limits. Gently but dramatically, by encountering Ulf socially, I am placed a thousand kilometres away from the tail shaking dogs and patience ornamenting stones, yet emphatically, I can still rejoice the gasps, excitement and drooling of both dogs.

11.8 Basilicum Wind

Entering Ulf's spacious room, opening the windows, and thus, facing the fresh air coming from the Canals, one is temporarily unaffected by the canine pestilence. Indeed, there is a sort of soft and pleasant veggie smell that I am unable to recognize. I think that such green fragrance comes from the Turkish market that is organized every Wednesday near the Canal. But today it is Tuesday I am plainly wrong. I look at Ulf.

He is meandering slowly from one side of the room to the other, through shelves and cupboards, completely immersed in the subtle smell of basilicum. Ulf's eyes are semi-closed, and his body seems to float letting himself be led by the sense of the abducting smell. Finally, he stops near to a plastic chair where a pink handbag stands. He picks it up and brings a handful of basilicum out of it. Smiling gracefully, he shows them to me. Ulf walks around a bit. I put the tape player on to record Ulf's commentaries -I do not inform him about my recording, do not want to disrupt the intimate pitch of his saying- and hold the notebook and pen in my ethnographic fists.

Ulf remains silent, probably unable to speak due to his olfactory ecstasy. I whisper to the tape recorder while observing Ulf amuse himself while enjoying the basilicum bouquet: *"Ulf's intimacy is being conveyed by the lightness of the smell of basilicum, and curiously this smell is enough to alter his world irrevocably... Through the smell of basilicum he is put in immediate contact with Cornelia, her body, her thought, her..."*.

Notebook: Momentarily, I wonder if Ulf could perpetuate or preserve this intimacy, this affirmation. Could this olfactory event be experienced as an utopian moment, an imaginary, a certain transcendent or another compensation for the actual brutality of an extremely subtle and transitory fact? Am I being affected by the idealism of such romantic picture? Inspired by the works of Suskind, Gell and Corbain on perfume, I continue whispering to the tape recorder: *"Ulf's intimate moment while smelling and touching the basilicum,... Where is the smell of basilicum taking Ulf?"*

This form of communion has no present, no past and no future; moreover it is without presence, guarantees, without permanence. It is a continual sensory displacement...

Ulf turns around and claims, *“Why are you blowing at the tape recorder? Is it not working?”* I dissimulate; I am only cleaning the area of the recording microphone. Ulf places the pink handbag on the table and speaks to me. *“Cornelia has been here,... basilicum,... it is often around her”*. I, amazed by Ulf’s sparkly and crystal eyes, shaky and emotional noble voice. He seems about to re-create the intimate contact with Cornelia. I wish that he smells the handful of basilicum and something ethnographically revealing takes place. Ulf, as if he were telepathically reading my thoughts, responds *“No, I do not think so. I could try to repeat that moment countless of times, but I will not be able to come back to it,... The feeling will not be so direct, so immediate, so real, ... If I would try to recreate the moment, it would be in vain,... you loose the first “kick” that the smell gives you after a while,... after smelling basilicum for a while, I cannot smell it anymore,... then I have to use my imagination to return to it,... but it is not the same”*. Ulf seems to suggest that such unusual moment of passion –in its most physical and sensory form- ends necessarily. Thus, Ulf’s contact with Cornelia’s basilicum seems to be somehow pre-destined to failure. This physical and olfactory trance can only be experienced by loosing it before it goes away. Ulf is evoking the idea that it is only within this failure, this loss -*“... I cannot smell it anymore”*- that the love for Cornelia can be affirmed.

According to Ulf, this mode of loosing that *first kick* seems a necessary condition for the experience of love. Indeed, the sensuous contact of Cornelia’s basilicum that has pleasantly assayed Ulf is always already lost to him, lost even before he had this experience. Indeed, Ulf has never had it. This is the loss that –as an affirmation- unites Ulf and Cornelia; in other words, the revolving landscape of basilicum’s aroma at which the irreducible distance between Cornelia and Ulf, their radical difference is put into contact. The loss of basilicum’s physical contact should not be read in the lines of lack or deprivation, but rather as an excessive materiality, a surplus of the en-fleshed and scintillating emanation. When Cornelia’s embodiment has reached Ulf’s sensory space through basilicum, he has not possessed it but

instead has luxuriously expend an unrepeatable instant at the room now invaded by fresh air. Perhaps, Ulf has momentarily been outside of power relations that have inscribed and –continue inscribing- our bodies.

The notion of the interval outside power relations has been adequately expanded by Foucault's analysis of *Las Meninas*. Diego Velazquez paints the painter exactly at the moment when he is still looking at his model and is simultaneously about to paint the model. Right at the space of oscillation, between visibility and invisibility, Foucault argues, "*is precisely the fine line where no one and no one thing rules, where all sovereignty is undermined, where incompatible spaces, epistemes, and modes of discourse struggle for dominance*" (1970:63). Michel Foucault particularly emphasizes the invisibility, the gaps, cracks and void that are embedded in the visible painting of Velazquez. The consequence is that this self-reflexivity on the instability or void at the heart of representation, deploys to the gaze the slippery oscillation between visibility and invisibility.

"... *Each love moment has its planet, its own world, ... and it is blown up*" says Ulf. Could I place such statement in the line of psychology, in terms of anticipation or nostalgia? Is there a finality that has been reached? I do not think so. I believe Ulf is taking me somewhere unforeseeable. He claims that "*...after smelling basilicum for a while, I cannot smell it anymore,... then I have to use my imagination to return to it,... but it is not the same*". In a revealing fashion, he uses the metaphor of the pituitary gland becoming sensuously saturated and over-stimulated to illustrate the impossibility of sensing the smell of basilicum with its first material immediacy. Ulf makes a small commentary that touches the theme of nostalgia when he argues that "*I have to use my imagination to return to it,... to return to Cornelia's favourite long evening bath's overflow of basilicum's aroma*".

11.9 The Sleepers Interview

I have interviewed Ulf in his room after the basilicum event, which has been illuminating in itself, but we have not really been able to get anywhere new. Indeed, we have been rambling about the basilicum incident trying to approach the moment

when he entered the room and the few minutes that followed. At that extremely short yet intense period of time, I have written down thoughts rapidly while whispering to the tape recorder. Observing Ulf's body being infested by the smell of basilicum, has been ethnographically much more productive than the one hour and a half of the uninteresting, boring and repetitive interview we maintained.

Perhaps, due to the sensorial disruption of the moment when he entered the room and opened the spacious windows, we both were sensuously hanged over due to the arrival of the excessive charm of the basilicum. Indeed, listening to the interview, the tone of our voices sound languid, sleepy and lethargic, as if we both were forcing ourselves to talk about Cornelia's basilicum and our bodies were overtaken by a certain emotional fatigue, a sensuous laziness. The emotional over-excitation and consequent excessive stimuli of the basilicum event had such an effect on both of us that -after 45 minutes of a physically undesired interview- Ulf and I entered long series of yawning. And added to this, perhaps, such overwhelming crisis of rest/fatigue could also well be an effect of the physically relaxing aroma of the basilicum that was in the air secretly blown by Cornelia.

At the moment of the interview, I have not realized how much of the priestly duty –meaning the ethnographic mission of accumulating testimonies of the confessed- was commanding the trying-not-to-sleep agony we both shared. There is a certain sacred tenure in the demand and expectancy on my anthropological endeavour that is comparable to the inappropriateness of taking a nap during confession or Mass. Now, re-listening to the tone of our voices in the interview, deficiently articulated words, strangely seem to be “*buzzing*” against the arousal of the bodily black night. This mumbling voice reinforces the idea that it emerged from Ulf's body, in the sense that it was an active product of his body. According to Roland Barthes (1975:66-67), the voice comes from the “*muzzle*”, which constitutes the entire complex of nose, jaws and mouth. The voices of the interview seduce and trap my senses with a sweet atmosphere of boredom and hypnotically make me doze. Half sleeping, sitting on the sofa while Ulf sleeps in his bed, I listen to the recorded tape of the interview.

I must have been semi-unconscious during the interview, for a bizarre set of connections was mobilized by Ulf. Throughout half-sleepy minutes that seemed to last years, Ulf, recreating on the physical impressions of certain “*green object*” formed a series of avatars. In this peculiar state of reverie, the world and all its hierarchies of representation and alleged causalities seemed to be blurred temporarily. If Ulf referred to the Italian salads he used to enjoy in the family holidays with his parents in order to enhance the taste of the basilicum dressing. Similarly, if Ulf, divagating, began talking of his work as a teacher of Palestinian refugee children in Argelia, it was in order that the drying and rotting smell of a variety of green leaves preserved in notebooks were enjoyed.

Attuned to the *tessitura* of this fluid trans-substantiation, Ulf, somewhat hesitant, commented upon the graduation party in which he recently participated near Alexanderplatz, in order to recall the thick green vomit and viscous mucus that he expelled at the end of the night. This wavy form of story to which I was not paying attention –for I was dozing- continued with new transformations of the “*green object*”. If Ulf, resisting falling to sleep, and blowing my face to stop my yawning, caressed the table tenderly in order to foreground the woollen green folk blanket of his grandparent’s farmhouse in Bavaria. Accordingly, if Ulf’s former flat in Schoneberg was the new theme of his soliloquy it was in order to invigorate the grease and slippery gasoline pools in front of the main entrance that dangerously leaked out of the gas station nearby.

And finally, the danger of fire and ultimately death in the unsafe flat where he lived in Schoneberg was connected humorously to the green smoke of the marihuana joints he shared with Cornelia after making love. This “*spherical metaphoricality*” in which certain green luminosity endures transformations gives way to what Barthes terms a “*general contagion of qualities and actions*” in the preface essay of Bataille’s “*Story of the Eye*” (1982:125). The green object goes through mutations free from in an aberrant way in which properties are not separated. The wavy meaning

of this metamorphosing “green object” is formed through smelling, vomiting, fearing, inhaling, touching and eating.

After listening to the whole interview, trying to relocate my mind in a working mood, I wrote a brief set of thoughts and questions on my notebook. Ulf, leaned on the other side of the table asked me to read it out loud. And so did I: *“Ulf has referred to the basilicum event as a passion in which “one loses it before it disappears”. He has lost the first kick feel of basilicum, even though the smell of the plant stayed in the room. Is this passion a source of tragedy? In a larger affective scale, does Ulf’s in love feeling imply that it will also have to get lost? And what will happen to the relationship with Cornelia if the in love feeling disappears? Will it be a tragedy in the manner of Claudia’s loss of Noel? I am not sure. I am about to sleep now. And it is just fine. This questions will be perhaps addressed elsewhere, and who knows how and when.”*

It was in such declaratory moment of thoughtful reflections when Cornelia, almost with an apparitional radiance, showed up at Ulf’s door-less bedroom. Her eyes were bright and her smile was sweepingly luminous and naked. Ulf and I were simply paralyzed for none of us nor the dog had noticed her coming in the house. The force of her appearance was somewhat miraculous and neither Ulf nor I dared to ask who did open her the door, even though we both knew she did not have the keys to enter the flat.

Cornelia, walked in the bedroom, cheeky and giggling. First, she inhaled the basilicum coming from the street. The silence was overwhelming, almost epiphanal. For an infinitesimal instant, I felt I was a disruptive intruder in Ulf and Cornelia’s intimacy. This first intuition turned into a durable phase of embarrassment when Cornelia began to talk: *“I have been wandering,... how the experience of the enamoured Ulf can be a tragedy, if his desire is a vital force of its own? I have shared with Ulf the passion for basilicum, and I do not think it is fair to refer it back to his identity,... that is an obsessive error,...”*. Cornelia must have read my reading from the corridor. She looked at me straight in the eyes. I was paralyzed and had no idea how to speak. Perhaps, sensitive to my lapse and explicit vulnerability, Ulf made a hilarious comment: “... ”

well, I believe that when a living being is enamoured, it is usually a much easier prey,... and that is a tragedy. The three of us laughed briefly, then silence came again. And with it Cornelia's powerful eyes nailed to mine. I felt challenged.

With a troubling voice, I told Cornelia and Ulf that maybe I was reading Ulf's passion for basilicum in terms of lack and possession –following a certain western tragic perspective. I acknowledged that I was probably missing the point. Ulf, eloquent, impetuously, formulated the following question: *“What sort of mad fate am I impressed by then?”*. There was a huge and hollow silence that I could not keep up with for very long. Perhaps for being the anthropologist and not being fully able to articulate a convincing response to such question, I thought I had to justify myself: *“I do not know,... perhaps Cornelia is right,... maybe there is no tragedy,... which may well turn Ulf's passion into another story of frustration, alienation and misery,... I am not sure,... maybe, we are only trying to avoid facing the tragic loss implicit in such passion,...”*.

My hesitant intervention did not clarify any of the questions they raised; in fact, neither of us said anything else for a long minute, which not only made my recent reflections sound even more disastrous, but also fading and remote. A strange tension kept building up until, at a sudden burst, the three of us began laughing, loud and hard, on top of our lungs. We did not really know why we were imbued in such state of mirth, but we were absurdly and contagiously vociferating and cheering. Cornelia, coming down of the joyful climax claimed *“why live our lives in terms of holding to things and identifying with places, communities and territories,... why not forget such obsessive error?”*.

Ulf and Cornelia sat on bed relaxing and indulging each other. The nudity and powerlessness was such that when Ulf began caressing Cornelia's skin, I simply felt invited to turn on the camera and film the intimate moment. I realized that seeing does not necessarily have to be a form of possession and that it can well be a tactile contact with the world. I was already filming. In such intimate and friendly mood that demolished the notion of privacy, it was difficult to distinguish who was touching and touched. There was no ideology that mediated the situation in a dualist

subject/object form. A spiritual materiality invaded the whole room as a “*double sensation*”, meaning the mutual immersion of touching and being touched simultaneously as it is in the case of lips or praying hands.

Still giggling, Ulf and Cornelia approached me. Cornelia took the camera from me. Without speaking a word, in a feast of pleasant gestures, smiles and looks, Cornelia, Ulf and I embraced each other joyfully in an easy going and fresh mood that reminded Ulf of “*schoolchildren excursions*”. Half an hour later, it really seemed that if Cornelia, Ulf and I shared a hot bath in which we touched each other’s skin in a friendly and sexual immersion, it was so that the aroma and fumes of the basilicum would emerge from the living water and our desiring bodies. The dogs were at the entrance of the bathroom, watching, curious and meticulous to the whole feast of erotic drives and gratuitous splashes. Whether the dogs were becoming anthropologists or not is a question that I cannot still elucidate.

11.10 Reflecting on Ulf’s Intimacy

I have addressed Ulf’s intimacy and its inevitable dimensions of passion and sensation. This highly demanding work has compelled me to confront Bataille’s and Blanchot’s “*outside*” (Bataille 1988a; Blanchot 1981). This is a realm of a-cultural affectivity and blank intimacy: at such instances, the advent of the event is simultaneously unthinkable –for I cannot contain it- and impossibly immediate – for it is nearer than the very formation of the self. This is the interval or the radical discontinuity to which Foucault refers to as the unstable space at the heart of representation.

The life of Ulf’s body is alien and disturbing for it does not depend on his use, and does not even belong to him. Yet it is the neutral distant and impersonal life that agitates him as well as my writing. Its distance is so absolutely near to his own intimacy that most of the time neither him or I are aware of it. The intimate life of Ulf is inscribed in his flesh, probably much closer to him than he or I tend to think.

I have been trying to affirm the space of the “*outside*” by pointing out Ulf’s experiential radical discontinuity. I am aware that by the very act of affirming it, it is perhaps bound to be dismissed by my writing. It is not that language or being *speaks* through Ulf’s body, but more radically perhaps, it is something irreducible to language and thought that marks catastrophically the failure of these two possibilities. The “*outside*” invades not in the form of revelation of being, but as an experience of intimacy. No matter how hard I try to detach my writing from the most personal –and thus, impersonal- experiences of Ulf, my craving for distance tends to be drawn to a wavy sea where the very possibility of presence is undone.

I have struggled to maintain certain “*selfhood*” in the face of Ulf’s passions that at times seem to be burning really close. Holding to a fragile and oscillating character armour or self has not worked all of the time, for Ulf’s intrusion has often interrupted the movement by which I establish a relationship to myself. The disturbing singularity of Ulf’s basilicum, with the insistence of many ambiguous and unintended gestures set into motion a series of radical shocks, an intimacy that overwhelms presence. In the movements of Ulf’s passions, his body is passively submitted to, and violently acted or agitated by the very forces that allow its constitution as subject. Ulf’s passion, thus, is exile, an other relation to the outside, which is continually consuming. It is an obliteration without closure, which moves, speaks, and is embedded in his joys as well as in his crying.

List of Photographs:

Photos 1 (p.23), 2 (p. 38), 3 (63) and 4 (69): Courtesy of S.U.M.O. Film (Berlin)

Photos 5 (p. 99), 10 (p. 179), 11 (p. 194) and 12 (218). Courtesy of Iban Ayesta.

Photos 6 (p. 116) and 7 (p. 140). Courtesy of Urban Prikswa.

Photo 8 (p. 146): Courtesy of Claudia.

Photo 9 (p. 151): Courtesy of Roger.

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