

**17<sup>th</sup> Lecture at the Gramsci Monument, The Bronx, NYC: 17th July 2013**

**ONTOLOGICAL POVERTY**

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## **SEVEN FIGURES**

PRINT

**THE FIGHTER, THE ANIMAL, THE MONSTER, THE DANCER, THE KID, THE ARTIST, AND THE GHOST**

**A PHILOSOPHICAL POEM**

**By Marcus Steinweg**

*EACH FIGURE HAS TO BE PERCEIVED IN ITS SINGULARITY. NONE OF THEM IS IDENTICAL WITH THE OTHER. BUT THEY SHARE THE SAME GROUND OF LIFE. THE FIGHTER, THE ANIMAL, THE MONSTER, THE DANCER, THE KID, THE ARTIST, THE GHOST ARE PART OF THIS ONE WORLD. THEY POPULATE A WORLD WITHOUT EXIT, WITHOUT BEYOND. IF THERE IS NO SECOND WORLD THERE ARE ONE THOUSAND WORLDS AND MORE. ONE MILLION LOCATIONS HERE AND NOW. THE MULTIPLICITY OF THE ONE WORLD DEMANDS ITS UNDERSTANDING AS A FACTUAL LABYRINTH. LET'S CALL IT THE LABYRINTH OF LIFE. EACH FIGURE CONSTITUTES AN ONTOLOGICAL MODALITY OF THE SUBJECT AS SUCH.*

### **1. THE FIGHTER**

The fighter has no past.

Like Antigone who first has to fight against her sister Ismene who represents the doxa, the current opinion of her time, the tradition, the fighter does not look back.

It looks forward.

It looks ahead.

The fighter is a headless subject of this blind dynamics towards the unknown, towards contingency.

It is the subject of constitutive blindness.

You have to be blind to be a fighter because everything you see is invisibility as such.  
Everything you are in contact with belongs to the future.  
Nothing you deal with belongs to your past.

As a fighter you experience the very limit of experience.  
You are in touch with your fundamental weakness.

The fighter is another name for the human subject.  
It is a subject without subjectivity.

A faceless subject of its ontological poverty.  
A nameless subject of an abecedarian nudity.

To fight means to fight against reality.  
Reality is not simply a matter of fact.  
Its status as incommensurable reveals that it is expansive and distracted.

Toward what does reality open, to what does it expand, with respect to what does it distract itself?  
How to think a world without transcendence and yet not substitute for it a phantasm of immanence that negates the possibility of thinking something new, negates freedom and decision, autonomy and the consistency of the subject?

How to back out of the alternative of finitude and infinity, reality and ideality, the possible and the impossible?  
How to think an opening that opens toward something not-given — toward the nothing itself?  
How to affirm this opening toward closure without depriving it of its characteristic openness?

How to think an opening that is not one?

## **2. THE ANIMAL**

Imagine a sleeping animal.  
A sleeping spider that suddenly acts.

Imagine your brother, your sister.  
Their movements are incalculable but precise and unforgettable.

Imagine your mother, your father.  
Like Arachne they are hanging above the abyss of your life.

Imagine yourself as creature of your past.  
You will not recognize yourself.

Imagine a dream without exit.  
The animal is the subject of this dream.

The animal opens up to the closure of its world.

True opening is opening toward closure, toward emptiness and absence.  
It is a rupturing of the texture of options toward its implicit outside.

Toward the naked there is (il y a) or, as Wittgenstein puts it, toward the miracle of the "existence of the world".  
An opening not toward the world as it is, as a world of facts, but toward the miracle that it is.

### **3. THE HYPERBOREAN MONSTER**

"We Hyperboreans" is how Nietzsche headed a fragment from his unpublished works dated November 1887.  
A few months later he wrote The Anti-Christ.

We Hyperboreans, we who live in the "hyperborean zone", in inhospitability or uninhabitability itself, the exterior.  
The "hyperborean zone that is far removed from the temperate zones".

We Hyperboreans, we immoderates who only exist in contact with the immeasurable, the unmeasurable or incommensurable.

We who would rather live "in the ice", says Nietzsche, we withdraw from the "fake peace" and the "cowardly compromise" of a certain "tolerance" and "largesse of the heart".

We resist the "happiness of weaklings" and the ethics of compassion which these "weak ones" demand (for themselves, for good reasons) rather than practising it themselves.

We Hyperboreans also means: we, the community of those who are without community, without we-community.

We solitary ones.

We singularities.

We who touch the limits of the logos that represents the principle of the western we-community.

We who have fallen out of the we-cosmos.

We who have separated from the universality of a transcendental community, from the habitable zone of transcendental we-subjectivity.

We homeless ones.

We arctic natures.

We monsters who are in contact with the limits of what is familiar, habitual and habitable.

We contact-subjects, we border-natures, we come up against this limit and accelerate beyond this limit.

We uncanny ones or, as Heidegger also says, we homeless ones.

We who are at home in being homeless in uncanny homelessness.

We over-confident ones, we exaggerated ones.

We are subjects of an always violent self-overcoming.

Subjects of self-overwinding, of self-over-stimulation and self-unbounding.

We who are who we are by betraying the idea of the we and our self through transgression.

We traitors, we non-identical ones without a secured origin or future.

The hyperborean monster is the hyperbolic subject of self-transgression and self-surpassing toward an absolute exterior that is uninhabitability itself, chaos, incommensurability as such.

It is the subject of a non-identity-building self-assertion.

Subject of failed anamnesis, of transcendental non-recognizability.

Subject without name, without memory, without teleological inscription.

Subject of transcendental facelessness — barbaric subject.

#### **4. THE DANCER**

The dancer is dancing without stable ground beneath it.  
It is articulating its primordial contact to the abyss.

The abyss is the name for a fundamental lack of a fundament.  
Dancing means to open up to this lack.

The dancer is floating in the space.  
It is floating with the preciseness of its desire.

The dancer is an empty subject of emptiness: an originally emptied-out cogito.  
A subject that affirms itself as the subject of an empty sky, without divine substratum, without transcendent meaning.

A subject without subjectivity because it is the movement of this experience that remains incessant.  
A subject without return to itself, beyond self-mediation and self-appropriation in/constituting a present.

An empty subject because it experiences emptiness as the absent ground and absent telos of its existence.  
As the desert of a freedom that is so incommensurable that it cannot be experienced as such.

## 5. THE KID

The kid is constantly laughing.  
Nothing is less serious for him than reality.

Think about the kid mentioned by Maurice Blanchot,  
describing his “primary scene” (scène primitive) as the experience of a depopulated heaven.  
An experience that confronts an infinity he sketches as empty infinity:

*“I was a child, seven or eight years old,  
I was in an isolated house, near the closed window,  
I looked outside — and at once, nothing could be more sudden, it was as though the sky opened,  
opened infinitely toward the infinite,  
inviting me with this overwhelming moment of opening to acknowledge the infinite,  
but the infinitely empty infinite.  
The consequence was estranging.  
The sudden and absolute emptiness of the sky, not visible, not dark*

*— emptiness of God: that was explicit, and therein it far exceeded the mere reference to the divine — surprised the child with such delight, and such joy, that for a moment he was full of tears, and — I add, anxious for the truth — I believe they were his last tears.”*

It is the desert of this absencing of meaning, this empty sky, that Nietzsche and Heidegger call upon us to think as, respectively, a growing desert and a now fundamental abyss:

As the point of departure of any thinking that, instead of being religion or science,

remains oriented toward the intractability of its reality by accepting the encouragement of this intractability to a freedom that urges it beyond its certainties toward the domain of truth.

It is here that one of the oldest distinctions philosophy has proposed for its own definition situates itself: The distinction between meaning and truth, which names the rift between certainties of fact and their incommensurability.

The kid is the joyful subject of this desert.  
It represents ontological innocence as such.

In the game of the world, the subject grasps itself as the subject of innocence.  
Heraclitus, Nietzsche and Deleuze associate this playing subject with the image of the child.

In the kid, all the necessities of the traditional logos, of reason as world reason are compressed.  
Responsibility, beauty, love, freedom, justice and truth only exist as excessiveness, as a ruleless game of innocence, as excess.

## **6. THE ARTIST**

The artist is a dancing animal.  
Nobody is able to take him for serious.

The fundamental artistic claim is the claim of autonomy.

Art exists only in the here and now of this one world without an exit, the world of facts.  
Art is not an escape from it; it formulates its claim to autonomy in the midst of the world of determinants in order, in an opening to heteronomy, to escape this world's phantasmagoric mistaking of itself.

Just as there is freedom only under conditions of factual unfreedom, sovereign independence only under conditions of its absence, autonomy becomes a demand and necessity only in the field of factual heteronomy.

Art was never anything other than consent to the fragility of its times.  
Art does not come from a stable situation.

It is the experience of the inconsistency of its reality.  
Art exists only as the experience of the porosity of the system of facts.

Therefore, for it, there cannot be any alliance with facts, which does not mean that it disputes or misrecognizes their power.

But art does not exhaust itself in demonstrating this non-misrecognition through the analytical power that is also immanent within it.

As long as art does not surpass its knowledge, it is not art.  
It would be nothing other than a self-reassurance for the subject within the web of its critically commentated situation.

Only an assertion of form that evades a narcissistic self-reassuring by articulating the transience of the certainty of facts succeeds in confronting the universal inconsistency that is the subject's proper time and proper place.

## **7. THE GHOST**

The ghost is a subject permanently assuring itself about its impermanence without a stable securing in a firm order of being that puts its trust in its structural or transcendental substantiality.

The ghost is a subject insofar as it extends itself to the dimension of infinity.

It is life related primordially to death.  
It juts out into the space of infinity.

Because this is the case, it is a matter of giving the uncanny dimension which death is the status of something self-evident, of taking the non-evidence of death as evidence in order to affirm oneself as a finite subject, for it is this finiteness which lives and bears the infinity which death is.

It is not the human subject that is infinite, but death.  
But this infinity only exists for a finite subject.

The ghost moves along a border that separates the sphere of life from the non-world of death — between language and silence, finitude and infinitude, knowledge and truth, life and death.