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3. ibid, p. 136.

4. After the bad fortune of Galileo’s affair, Descartes postponed the publication of Le Monde and stressed in his Principia the role of God in every process. However, when Le Monde was finally published, the first exposition of his theories was available – consequently we can attest that the relevance of God was not at a first instance the most significant factor.

5. For a comparable use of dotted surfaces, see Lucía Ayala, ‘Surpassing human nature: reinventions of and for the body as a consequence of astronomical experiments in the 17th and 18th centuries’, Metaverse Creativity, vol. 1, no. 1, 2010, pp. 109-10.


8. ibid, p. 226.

9. ibid, p. 186.

10. ibid, p. 146.

11. ibid, p. 99.

12. ibid, p. 107.
The Pineal Eye and the matrixial void

The image is not an idea. It is a radiant node or cluster; it is what I can and must perforce call a Vortex, from which, and through which, and into which, ideas are constantly rushing.¹ This essay aims to elaborate an anagogic reading of the production of my short film loop *El Castillo Interior*. Nowadays the term anagogic refers almost exclusively to the explication of mystical readings of religious texts. My use of the word is much looser, approaching the colloquial, or at least a common usage that was once in favour. In terms of this essay anagogic simply means ‘mysterious considerations’, considerations that are speculative, sometimes counter-intuitive, and certainly radically tangential to what is lamely called ‘materialist’ analyses of cultural productions these days.

Secondly, I take it for granted that human consciousness is fundamentally participatory with the cosmos, even though this participation may not ordinarily be accessible to quotidian consciousness. This position allows me to explore the liminal space between actor and object, artist and idea, idea and matter. This in-between space constitutes both the virtual and actual space of my discussion: in and around the production of the film loop *El Castillo Interior*.

And lastly, the aforementioned liminal space can justifiably be characterised as a metaphysical presumption. Elsewhere I have noted the unjustifiable dereliction of metaphysics in late twentieth century thought,² so I think it is time that we acknowledge that there is no ‘outside’ to metaphysics, as Derrida emphasised, and I will here explore and embrace the notion of a speculative (metaphysical) aesthetics.

Speculum
About two years ago I was searching the internet when a pop-up window appeared advertising an ‘adult’ website. As I am sure
you will agree, this is hardly an unusual occurrence, but what was unusual in this instance was the short moving image that accompanied the advertisement and which grabbed my attention. The image was a slightly blurred film loop of a woman in what one supposes was a hot tub, with only her head and shoulders moving above the swirling water. At first she smiled at the camera, then her attention withdrew and she—at least it seemed to me—began to move with the water itself, this movement culminating in a look of contemplative ecstasy. St. Theresa! I thought. Quickly I searched my computer for the cached image, and dragged it to my desktop. Now that I had a version of the moving image, I left it on the desktop for a few days, finally putting it away in a folder with other images I have collected over time. Anybody who has seen Bernini’s Ecstasy of St. Theresa, either ‘in the flesh’, as it were, or in photographic reproduction, will know immediately why the name flashed into my consciousness. The girl in the film clip closed her eyes and opened her mouth ever so slightly, almost exactly as Bernini imagines St. Theresa doing in his famous sculpture. I was well aware that the real St. Theresa, the historical saint, had written a mystical work called El Castillo Interior, so I eventually set upon finding the equivalent of this ‘interior castle’ in the interior of the image I had accidentally found.

Within any image is a history, or perhaps more precisely, une histoire, a story with a beginning, middle and end. This story, the image’s history, is the equivalent of what physicists call its ‘phase space’. This phase space includes all the putative moments that constitute the image, from the very first brush stroke on the canvas to the varnished, finished work hanging in a gallery or rotting in some dusty atelier. An image is a holon, a whole which, if we had the appropriate tools, we could unravel into an extended timeline and examine its beginnings, its middle, and its final culmination as, well, Rembrandt’s Nightwatch, or Bernini’s Ecstasy of St. Theresa. This manner of regarding the image is of course not medium specific; it can apply to any iconic production, in any medium, including digital film.

One cannot however just ‘think’ the image out. No amount of meditation on the image of the girl in the hot tub would bring the castillo interior out of the image, if it was in fact in there at all: I had to work to bring it out; push the matter of the image about, subject it to dilution, smear it, mould it, reconstitute it. This is what Rembrandt did on a daily basis, as did Bernini. This is what artists do when they produce an image, they get their hands dirty with turpentine and pigment or shards of marble and plaster dust. In my case, I had to get dirty with pixels and software, virtual buttons and sliders, so I came out relatively pristine after a days work, but the nature of the process is the same.

James Elkins in What Painting Is has characterised the production of an image in this way:

To an artist, a picture is both a sum of ideas and a blurry memory of ‘pushing paint’, breathing fumes, dripping oils and wiping brushes, smearing and diluting ... material memories are not usually part of what is said about a picture, and that is a fault in interpretation because every painting captures a certain resistance of paint, a prodding gesture of the brush, a speed and insistence in the face of mindless matter.

Elkins compares this form of activity to that of alchemy in order to answer the question, What is thinking in painting, as opposed to thinking about painting? For Elkins this is
much more than just a simple analogy: painting and alchemy are sister pursuits because ‘paint is water and stone, and it is also liquid thought’. There is an auric glow within pixels too, as anyone with an open mind would attest, and the pursuit of the Philosophers Stone can just as easily be enacted with the ‘matter’ of the computer — its software, its hardware, its inputs and outputs — as it can with quicksilver and sulphur. Mine was an alchemical process too: in manipulating the image, I was thinking in and with the image, not thinking about it.

The Pineal Eye

This metaphysical plunge into the vortex of the image that I am attempting to elucidate can only be accomplished through the activation of a dormant parietal eye that I will call, with deference to Georges Bataille, the Pineal Eye. This organ would not, of course, be recognised by any contemporary neurosurgeon, yet that should not prevent one from speculating as to its particular mode of functioning.

Bataille’s The Pineal Eye and its sister text, Solar Anus, both originally drafted around 1930, are orgiastic, scatological, scabrous and undisciplined, like all of the very best of his work, and it is not my intention here to engage in an in-depth reading of either of them. Rather I want to engage with the spirit of these two texts, and that is a spirit of inversion, mirroring and mythopoetic thinking as opposed to a linear, anatomising analysis.

In an orgiastic reverie, Bataille dreamed of a new propensity within him:

[The eye that I wanted to have at the top of my skull (since I read that its embryo existed, like the seed of a tree, in the interior of the skull) did not appear to me as anything other than a sexual organ of unheard-of sensitivity, which would have vibrated, making me let out atrocious screams, the screams of a magnificent but stinking ejaculation.

Bataille’s notion of a peculiarly sensitive sexualised eye within the skull is reminiscent of another eccentric idea propounded by Ezra Pound in his postscript to his translation of Remy de Gourmont’s Natural Philosophy of Love. Pound considers that it is ‘more than likely that the brain itself, is, in origin and development, only a great clot of genital fluid held in suspense or reserve’, and that the effect of this fluidic reserve was ‘both a matter of quantity and quality, some animals profiting hardly at all ... the baboon retaining nothing; men apparently stupefying themselves in some cases by excess’. This would explain ‘the enormous content of the brain as a maker or presenter of images’. Pound’s logic allows him to note that ‘the power of the spermatozoid is precisely the power of exteriorising a form ...’ This notion of a phallic-encephalon evolved to produce stupefaction by excess — an excess of images — would, no doubt, have been enthusiastically received by Bataille himself and is moreover implicit in his conception of the pineal eye.

As one writer has it, Bataille’s pineal eye is ‘the primitive cosmogonic vision of the sun as an orifice of the human body — thus of sky as the outer or inner surface of another, much vaster body — to the wildness, violence, randomness, freedom of a “modern poesia” in which virtually any metaphoric connection or “copulation” is possible’. In Solar Anus Bataille writes:

And when I scream I AM THE SUN an integral erection results, because the verb to be is the vehicle of amorous frenzy. Everyone is aware that life is parodic and that it lacks an interpretation. Thus lead is the parody of gold. Air
is the parody of water. The brain is the parody of the equator. Coitus is the parody of crime. Gold, water, the equator, or crime can each be put forward as the principle of things. And if the origin of things is not like the ground of the planet that seems to be the base, but like the circular movement that the planet describes around a mobile centre, then a car, a clock, or a sewing machine could equally be accepted as the generative principle.¹⁰

In this passage Bataille adumbrates the complex that is the 'pineal eye'. Let me attempt to reconnect this complex in another way: this vibrating organ of 'unheard of sensitivity' produces an integral erection, that is, an integrative verticality that mythopoetically links the earth, the empyrean and the human corporeity in an 'amorous frenzy'—something I imagine is akin to the 'divine madness' or heroic frenzy of Giordano Bruno and Ficino, remembering that 'heroic' is etymologically related to 'eros'.

There is more here however: Bataille characterises the activity of the pineal eye as a kind of alchemical organ where all kinds of matter—gold, water, the equator, a car, a clock, or Lautréamont’s sewing machine can equally be considered as 'generative principles'. One should note that the English words *genesis*, *generation*, *genital* and *knowledge* all share the same Proto-Indo European root word, *gn*, having the meaning of 'to know' or understand. The unlikely set of 'generative principles' that Bataille invokes are, to my mind at least, akin to the *arché* or elementary principles of alchemy, the practical pursuit of which sought to reveal 'knowledge of an unheard-of sensitivity within an integrative, amorous frenzy'—which of course Bataille did not say, yet I think is a valid reading of his texts.

In the passage above, Bataille conflates all manner of things into a singular *stuff*: not the dull, lifeless stuff of Descartes *res extensa*, but the kind of alive matter, the matter of literally infinite potential, that was the stuff of the European alchemists and their forebears in the great centres of alchemical learning of Islam and Daoism. This alchemical stuff is also the stuff of the matrixial void.

**Matrixial void**

In the important text, *Truths Golden Harrow* by the English Paracelsian doctor and alchemist Robert Fludd, the question of ‘stuff’ is discussed in terms of seventeenth-century intellectual debate. *Truth's Golden Harrow* is in the form of a reply to another work, *The Tillage of Light* (1623) that maintained that the *lapis philosophorum*, the Philosopher’s Stone, was not a material substance but an immaterial entity entirely spiritual in nature. Fludd, perhaps because he was a medical doctor accustomed to dealing with potions and poultices, contrarily maintained that the Philosopher’s Stone was a material substance. The Primal Stuff or ‘philosophical hyle’ as he called it, was analogically similar to water, the same stuff referred to by Moses when he states that the earth was 'without form and void'—the formless void being Fludd’s 'philosophical hyle'.

Aristotle identified his term *hyle* with the *Receptacle* (*Hypodoche*) or *Chora* of Plato’s *Timaeus*, and Fludd did too. Plato defined the Receptacle as the ‘nurse of all becoming’ and the ‘natural matrix for all things’¹¹ adding that the *Hypodoche* is a ‘receiver’ without any qualities of its own. As Alfred North Whitehead has interpreted this, the Receptacle receives its forms by reason of its inclusion of all that exists, and in a way not to be abstracted from all that exists:

The Receptacle ... is the way in which Plato conceived the many actualities of the physical world as components in each other’s
natures. [This] mutual immanence of actualities [is] Plato's doctrine of the medium of intercommunication.¹²

Fludd's alchemical conception of the Hypodoche as identical with Moses's 'formless void' also presages Whitehead's interpretation. Whitehead thinks that while the Platonic Receptacle and the Epicurean/Lucretian Void 'differ in some details', both conceptions, are emphatic assertions of a real communication between ultimate realities ... It is part of the essential nature of each physical actuality that it is itself an element qualifying the Receptacle, and that the qualifications of the Receptacle enter into its own nature.¹³

In Whitehead's view, the Hypodoche represents the first appearance in the West of a model of universal intercommunication. Or, in layman's terms, everything interacts with every other thing. Which returns me, ouroboros serpent-like, to the nature of things as perceived by the Pineal Eye, for Bataille states that 'all things would be visibly connected if one could discover at a single glance and in its totality the tracings of an Ariadne's thread leading thought into its own labyrinth'.¹⁴

The Pineal Eye then is a manner of looking/operating that recognises the totality of a situation, the entire story: the phase space. And this phase space is a breaking hypersurface embedded in a higher dimensional space which Plato called the Receptacle — just as current cosmological M(embrane)-Theory (re)imagines.¹⁵

**El Castillo Interior**

*El Castillo Interior* is not the result of some willed activity, such as is imagined to typically occur in a life drawing class, for example, where one imposes one's will (as it were) on the drawing surface. Rather it is the explicate emblem of the unfolding of the phase space that began when I chanced upon the original image on the internet. I certainly did not set out to produce *El Castillo Interior* through some sort of well-honed 'artistic practice'; on the contrary, I searched for something that I hoped was there already.

In a very real sense the series of procedures that produced *El Castillo Interior* were already within the one original image, invaginated within it: the one became many, the many were combined into one. The moving image, the explicate emblem, is a kind of dynamic hieroglyph: it was not constituted by my deliberative actions, but rather by the intersection of experimental procedures on my part and the cumulative responses of the apparatus. The apparatus should be conceived of as a totality, like the Copenhagen Interpretation in quantum mechanics: the totality of myself, the computer, the software, the logic of play and our combined interactivities. This is a complex phase space processing what Schrödinger called Verschränkung, entanglement. The collapse of the wave-state occurred when I pressed 'save' on my computer.

I would sum it all up in this manner: The nature of poesis, of creation, is a series of entailment events within an autopoetic, participatory system involving the artisan, aesthetic object and various levels of interpretive activities. The self-organisation (autopoiesis) is the holon I mentioned earlier in this paper: me, the machine and the matrixial void conspired together in the dynamics of the phase space. This autopoetic holon is immanent and virtual:

Self-organisation is a virtual property of ... interactive non-linear dynamics. It becomes actual when the dynamics are materialised in some substance and their intensity of interaction increases so that they become swirling (vortical).¹⁶
Which, of course, brings me back to where I began: with Pound’s idea of the image as a vortex. El Castillo Interior is just such a vortex, the result of ‘self-propelling feedback loops’ that ‘tend to form a vortex-like whirling structure sustained by forces directed towards its centre’.  

Part of this vortex-like whirling structure will be a viewer’s interpretations of El Castillo Interior. These interpretations constitute ‘pulsating vortical layers, similar to ... fractals’. An image is therefore an event, not a thing, and therefore [It] is constituted anew each time. Like weather produced in a system around a landmass, the shape of the reading has a codependent relation to the structure from which it arises. ... [It] is a highly complex system, containing a host of thermal sinks and bases of attraction. To see the image anew, then, I would encourage you to gaze into the matrixial void with the Pineal Eye.

NOTES
4. ibid, p. 4.
5. ibid, p. 5.
6. A vestigial eye found in some reptiles and amphibians.
13. ibid.
17. ibid.
18. ibid.
CONTRIBUTORS

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