

*Call for submissions:
P e r f o r a t i o n s*

The Inhuman: Anticipations, Thresholds, Technics - Special Effects of the Spirit

"[...] to be monstrous has become our ambition, for it is our ambition to live without fear."

Philip Rieff

"The deus absconditus (hidden god) of theology no longer hides in the farthest corners of the universe; his successor has moved into the infernal machines of administration"

John Durham Peters

"The miracle has always been characterized by a certain 'mechanicity' or technicity."

Hent de Vries

"Bedazzlement begins when perception crosses its tolerable maximum."

[...]

"What metaphysics rules out as an exception (the saturated phenomenon), phenomenology takes for its norm ..."

Jean-Luc Marion

"To what purpose these broken-off things, if not to be gathered up, at last, in a single ecstatic vision?"

Joyce Carol Oates

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Certain ethicists among us may quail at the term 'inhuman,' almost instantly converting it into the very core of that other *bete noir* of modernity, the inhumane, posting the horrific as it's bedrock. In a recent book, Daniel Cottom prefers to use the term 'Unhuman', thereby attempting to avoid the problem, since Cottom sees the unhuman as a necessity. (1)

But it may well be that, as Jean-Francois Lyotard once put it, at the heart of the human is nothing human.(2) And if contemporary science is correct, how could it be otherwise? In such a view, all is impersonal process, including self, which nevertheless builds up to subjectivations and the known human world through actions of material on material. (3)

Seemingly irreducibly opposed to the implacable force of the dissolving force of the scientific gaze -- what we might think of as the standpoint of the official delegitimations

of modernism -- is that point of view of some sort of force or presence that precedes all, a *parousia* that is either the outline, the exoskeleton or the endoskeleton of everything, beginning to end.

All modern attempts to reconcile these two ends --and beginnings -- of human existence seem to nevertheless leave mysterious residues and overlaps, uncanny remainders which resist dissolution, absorption or full immanentization. The arrival of the mechanical (knowing full well that it has always been arriving) brought with it the extension of the idea of the mechanical (that is, a tightly bound cause and effect in a totally or at least potentially, visible assemblage with no leftovers) into all areas of life and thought.

But perhaps a less dialectically constrained approach would be that advocated succinctly by Hent de Vries: "the miracle was never possible without introducing a certain technicity and, quite literally, a manipulation of sorts. Human fabrication -- or the rumor thereof, in false miracles and magic -- always went hand and hand with seemingly sure signs and acts of the hand of God." (De Vries, p. 48)

These residues or revenant *heterotopias*, as Michel Foucault once termed them (4), form spaces of entry, thresholds (5) of various sorts, places simultaneously of dream, violence, which form at least a good mimicry of transcendence, *kenosis*, and the phantasmatic figurations of contemporary myth and media. As time is replaced by space in the neo-modern era, the forms of these -- also called spiritual -- effects have migrated into the new era, in much the same way in which the dead still live and move with us. And yet, these mysterious things, these spiritual special effects (apparently outside the regime of theology per se but similar perhaps to the legitimacy-conferring relationship of technology to science) remain as cloudy, indeterminate, and, perhaps most mysteriously, as present and 'material' (perceptually anyway which always must involve at least some form of materiality) -- and in another way, oddly absent --in human life as ten thousand years ago. (6)

The modern realm of technical media -- computing in general, lasers, video, CGI, etc. -- has only increased the hypnotic seductive power of these 'special effects' as Hent de Vries has termed this new age of 'miracles.' As space eclipses time in the modern era, the forms of these threshold effects, ranging through visionary experience, trance, glossolalia, halos and auras, and artifacts untouched by human hands, take on a materiality (albeit epiphenomenal of the 'virtual') and repeatability-on-demand previously unknown, while still maintaining an aspect of singularity and immateriality.

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*"It is out of sheer terror that charisma develops."
Philip Rieff*

Prophecy has given way to the peremptory visualizations of futurists and science fiction; the other worldly signification of sanctification, the halo, then the Benjaminian aura, has

been passed into the structure/equipment of the quotidian projections as symptoms; the *acheiropioeton*, (the manifestation of artifacts 'not made by human hands' or 'images coming into existence by the will of their prototypes') has escaped into a generalized culture of the hyper visual entertainment/advertising complex.; the ecstatic speaking in tongues of fire becomes the etiolated emptying of psychoanalytic free association, the community of tongues becoming the community of those who have nothing in common, not even their non-sense. (7)

Thus do previous ages of the miracle turn into the age of the machine -- but with no clear distinction between the nowhere event of the miracle and the no-beginning/no-ending of the machine. Both give equal odds for the inhuman eclipse of the person, visions of apocalyptic collapse/revealings, collapse of ultimate distinctions while all is put into a state of suspension: human/animal, living/dead, violence/law, zoe/bios, sacred/machinic (the machine cannot be killed), the communicable/the non-communicable. (8)

Perhaps all that is left after the decimations of the 'event' by the ravages of the aleatoric materialism of the modern, the only 'true event' (maybe the only singular event) is the 'accident.' The accident would signal suspension of bare life in continuing crisis or crisis-to-come (the new ominous messianic-without-the-Messiah), the general saturation/hemorrhaging of event, leaving a phenomenal irreducible remainder which sublimates out and has little to do with the human. (9)

Meanwhile: the materiality of the signifiers of the thresholds of transcendence continues. People still see things in the skies, see sacred figures in potato chips, still make predictions of the totality of permissibilities that is Still To Come in the messianic kingdom of the Machine, still long for total immersion and permeability, passing through Alice's Looking Glass (or at least get the new release of HALO 3.0); still would like to give up the carcass of the human and become the post(in)human; still would like to give up the old idea of total still-ness (below zero is where Paradise was) in favor of total meltdown, which is total passability, ability to instantly pass-through; to find a form of life which is formless, mutable, metamorphic.

This issue of perforations will examine the lures of tongues which can not be stilled or forced into sense; the eyes which see more than they should, more than can be accounted for; Things which have escaped the grasp and perhaps construction of the human hand.

Notes

1. *"The unhuman does not necessarily signify the inhuman, in the sense of conspicuous or extraordinary cruelty. Rather, it encompasses everything that comes to be asserted, in particular contexts, as being foreign to the definition of humanity and thus, through this assertion, paradoxically necessary to that definition. The extrinsic that yet proves to be intrinsic, the unhuman marks the alienation of humanity from itself in the very act of positing itself. It is through the unhuman that we may come to face the idealization of destruction vital to humanity, along with all the rest of our self-constituting self-deceptions. It marks the beginning and end of the image of humanity; the borderlines of*

and contradictions within what is supposed to be human sovereignty; the unimaginable presumption that makes humanity imaginable; and, most important, a perennial and perhaps inescapable tendency to underestimate the art in humanity and to overestimate the humanity of art." [....] ...it becomes increasingly clear that any responsible form of cultural criticism today must try to confront all that humanity is defined against and through. We must face not only the superhuman, as with Nietzsche, but also the supernatural, the demonic, and the subhuman; the supposedly disjunctive animal vegetable, and mineral kingdoms; the realms of artifice, technology and fantasy
Unhuman Culture, University of Pennsylvania Press, 2006

2. **The Inhuman**, Jean-Francois Lyotard. Stanford University Press, 1991. Cottom also takes the same approach when he writes of Roman and Greek writers: "human nature is never only human. On the contrary, it is intimate with, informed by, and indivisible from the unhuman, in both the neutral and the malefic senses of that term.' Ibid, P68, The idea of evil as being as intimate to the human condition is one that the state of Enlightenment has a problem dealing with, and just so also any positive branch of knowledge....easier to do away with a distinct entity called 'evil'.

3. It has been contended that the offset to structuralism, French post-structuralism, has been a torturous path of fascination along the Schwarzschild radius, the lip, of the black hole of the inhuman, whether the becoming-animal of Deleuze, the authorial death/merger of author into history and archival processes of Foucault, the abyssal uncertainties of Derridean uncertainty, or, to the point here, the impersonal of Maurice Blanchot and Emmanuel Levinas (albeit in the guise of the other) as well as the neutral, or neuter of Roland Barthes. It has also been contended, with some warrant, that this whole line of writing has come from Martin Heidegger. For some of this genealogy see: **Generation Existential: Heidegger's Philosophy in France, 1927-1961**, Ethan Kleinberg, Cornell, 2005.

4. " like counter-sites, a kind of effectively enacted utopia in which the real sites, all the other real sites that can be found within the culture, are simultaneously represented, contested, and inverted. Places of this kind are outside of all places, even though it may be possible to indicate their location in reality. Because these places are absolutely different from all the sites that they reflect and speak about, I shall call them, by way of contrast to utopias, heterotopias"

In particular see, *Of Other Spaces, Heterotopia*, 1967

<http://foucault.info/documents/heteroTopia/foucault.heteroTopia.en.html>

Perhaps what we are calling for in this enunciation of *perforations* is an in-anthropology as extending to a singular space of 'spirit' in a new Whatever society, "a sort of simultaneously mythic and real contestation of the space in which we live, this description could be called heterotopology.."

For Foucault, the sure signature of a heterotopia is a decisive break in time, the formation of a heterochronic state. This is surely the situation of the singular, the para-, the un- / in-, the de-, and any not-fully representable state: "The heterotopia begins to function at full capacity when men arrive at a sort of absolute break with their traditional time"

5. Giorgio Agamben has it that the pre-eminent threshold space today is that overlapping space called the 'state of exception,' really a state of emergency that forms between life and death, between *zoë* and *bios*; perhaps even the Benjaminian stroke of midnight where all broken-ness is correct at least once, or the Nietzschean stroke where day men become night men.

6. see Hent de Vries, *Of Miracles and Special Effects*, in **The International Journal for Philosophy of Religion**, v 50, December 2001. In a highly technical culture, the line between special effect and miracle becomes slim indeed. This has become an oft-repeated point at least since Arthur C. Clark's notion that "any sufficiently advanced technology is indistinguishable from magic." As regards the persistent but occulted nature of these 'special effects' throughout human history:

"The miracle has continued to appear unannounced, even where it does not do so as miracle, on its own account. But perhaps this self-effacement has always belongs to the structure of the miraculous --and hence, the magical and the religious -- as such. The logic of its exception, the saturation -- the self-sufficiency and, as it were, in-difference -- of its phenomena, was never that of empirical truth or manifest fact -- that is to say, out there, for all to see." (de Vries, p. 50) One is reminded of the statement regarding anomalous aircraft or Unidentified Flying Objects, 'why don't they set down on the White House lawn?'

7. Michel de Certeau makes the point that the stroke of 'speaking without limit' is ridden by the necessity of the confusions of a material noise/non-sense with a structured semiosis; the surface of language (it's meaning-making) breaks open and the non-human rides openly: "For a moment, like voodoo 'loa,' voices possess discourse. They 'ride' it. Here and there, they spirit it away from me, without my knowing what they are or whence they come. [...] This fragmentary 'possession' troubles, breaks, or suspends the autonomy of the speaker." And later: "It would suffice that our mouths open, emptied of words, that 'torrents' of passing voices be allowed to take over. But these rivers, where are they? Whence do they come? Believing in them is not knowing. The very term *spirit*, which for so many traditions designates the act and actor of speech, underlines the nonplace of 'that which speaks.'" Michel de Certeau, *Vocal Utopias: Glossolalias*. *Representations* 56, fall 1996. Pps 30-31.

This whole process is nowhere more evident, in its collision with media, than in the so-called Electronic Voice Phenomena, wherein the mumble and tumble of many disembodied speakers merge and slide apart in a difficult, hearing-wise, non-community of speakers whose exstasis is held together by the technical device of the recording. See also Dolar's discussion of the acousmatic voice: "The acousmatic voice is simply a choice whose source one cannot see, a voice whose origin cannot be identified, a voice one cannot place. It is a voice in search of an origin, in search of a body, but even when it

finds its body, it turns out this doesn't quite work, the voice doesn't stick to the body, it is an excrescence which doesn't match the body ...[...] We see immediately that the voice without a body is inherently uncanny, and that the body to which it is assigned does not dissipate its haunting effect." Mladen Dolar, **Voice and Nothing More**. M.I.T, 2006. P 91. The whole issue of the evacuation of the human, allied issues of ventriloquization, the doll (remembering that the confusions of the doll/human Olympia were at issue in Freud's essay on the uncanny in 1919, the rise of the communicative dummy and implicated media, see also Steven Connor, **Dumbstruck: A Cultural History of Ventriloquism**, Oxford University Press, 2000; see also Victoria Nelson, **The Secret Life of Puppets**, Harvard University Press, 2002.

For issues concerning artifacts not-made-by-human-hand, see Marie-Jose Mondzain, **Image, Icon, Economy: The Byzantine Origins of the Contemporary Imaginary**, Stanford University Press, English translation 2005. Mondzain gives a very au courant view of the medieval concept of the *acheiropoieton*, tying it to recent notions of photography, visibility/invisibility, economy, and the nature of the image. Although not suitable for a brief excursus here, a few quotes may give a hint as to the richness of the associations brought forth in the book. This is from a chapter entitled Ghost Story, in regard to the Shroud of Turin and *Veronica's Cloth*) as another form of photography: "[...] the shroud permits doctrinal authority to transform an index into an iconic symbol. Photography thus miraculously becomes the organon of this specifically targeted economy, by means of a sort of lexical traffic between a technological vocabulary and a spiritual vocabulary. [...] We are essentially imaginal and acheiropoietic by nature, and photography invites us to rejoin with our own similitude, also not made by human hand." p. 203. The even more elusive (while strangely omnipresent) Unidentified Flying Object (UFO) traces a similar route of the very old shadow and effect. They are known everywhere by their image, nowhere by their immediacy.

Since Walter Benjamin's comments in *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction* it has been a given that 'aura,' whether as institutional charisma or the more febrile (and physicalist) concept of 'halo,' is far from an exhausted form. As in most of Benjamin's ideas, they are constellations often at war even within the stating of the concept, a way attending great mobility and profundity at the same time: "*Trace and aura. The trace is the appearance of a nearness, however far removed the thing that left it behind may be. The aura is appearance of a distance, however close the thing that calls it forth. In the trace, we gain possession of the thing; in the aura, it takes possession of us.*" **Arcades Project**, Harvard University Press p 447. Perhaps 'aura' can be seen here as that zone of indistinction in materiality wherein matter and consciousness fold over and into each other (perhaps metaphorizing as a quantum extension of each beyond a previous Newtonian hard nugget of subjectivity.) Giorgio Agamben revisits the concept: "*One can think of the halo ...as a zone in which possibility and reality, potentiality and actuality, become indistinguishable. The being that reached its end, that has consumed all of its possibilities, thus receives as a gift a supplemental possibility. [...] This imperceptible trembling of the finite that makes its limits indeterminable and allows it to blend, to make itself whatever, is the tiny displacement that every thing must accomplish in the messianic world. Its beatitude is that of a potentiality that comes only*

after the act, of matter that does not remain beneath the form, but surrounds it with a halo."

Giorgio Agamben / **The Coming Community**

8. From **Crack Wars** and **The Telephone Book** onward, Avital Ronell has dealt constantly with the idea of the supplement, of what will form a 'machine' (and its effects), and with the disjunctive movement of visible empiricity as the effect (the performative) and the occulted nature and attendant confusions of intention (as cognition) which are supposed (in humanist discourse) to drive the effect or performance. In discussing the work of Paul de Man, the inhuman mechanical, strangely and counter-intuitively enough, becomes the unincorporable side, the random, apparently a form of *a-nomos* at odds with the human:

[The] 'effect machinal' is responsible for effects of meaning generated by sheer contingency, elements of uncontrol and improvisation. The disjunction of performance and meaning or intention, if not always from revelation, has amounted to something of a humanist affront, a scandal. The disparity between the intentional, meaningful dimension of the work and its sheerly mechanical, formal component or grammar implies violence. [...] Part of this violence resides in the stupefying repetitiveness demanded by mechanicity and the cognitive stupor that it spreads.

Elsewhere Ronell writes that *"the extent to which performance undercuts modes of cognition invites further review, particularly if performance is seen to involve an inescapable technological component."*

And it is precisely this excess of performativity, as it spills over into a 'material event' which is the concern of **perforations 31**.

9. The liminal regions of the uncanny figure heavily here. Much of the media philosophy of late modernism and the philosophy/phenomenology of post-modernism seems entwined with various aspects of doubling, revenants, and spaces of *a-nomos*, including questions of (and whether) the singular apparition of the self and its relation to the non-self and other selves as well as the status of the object, things, and materiality itself.

The *scandalon* (stumbling block) of any epistemology, no matter how tightly constructed or logically fabricated (maybe because of the structures) is the accident, failure, hoaxing, the trickster, everything which casts doubt on the nature of the future of the event.

In truth, there is something in this description of the nature of parody by Giorgio Agamben, which strikes home to the discussion here regarding the nature of these secondary 'spiritual effects' since, to us scientific moderns, these events most often (if not always) must reside in the territory of hoax, accident, or the parallel mis-recognition of tricksterism:

"Just as metaphysics is impossible -- at least for modern thought -- except as the parodic opening of a space alongside sensible experience (but a space that must remain rigorously empty), parody is a notoriously impracticable terrain, in which the traveler

*constantly knocks against limits and aporias that he cannot avoid but that he also cannot escape." P 50. **Profanations**, Zone Books, 2007.*