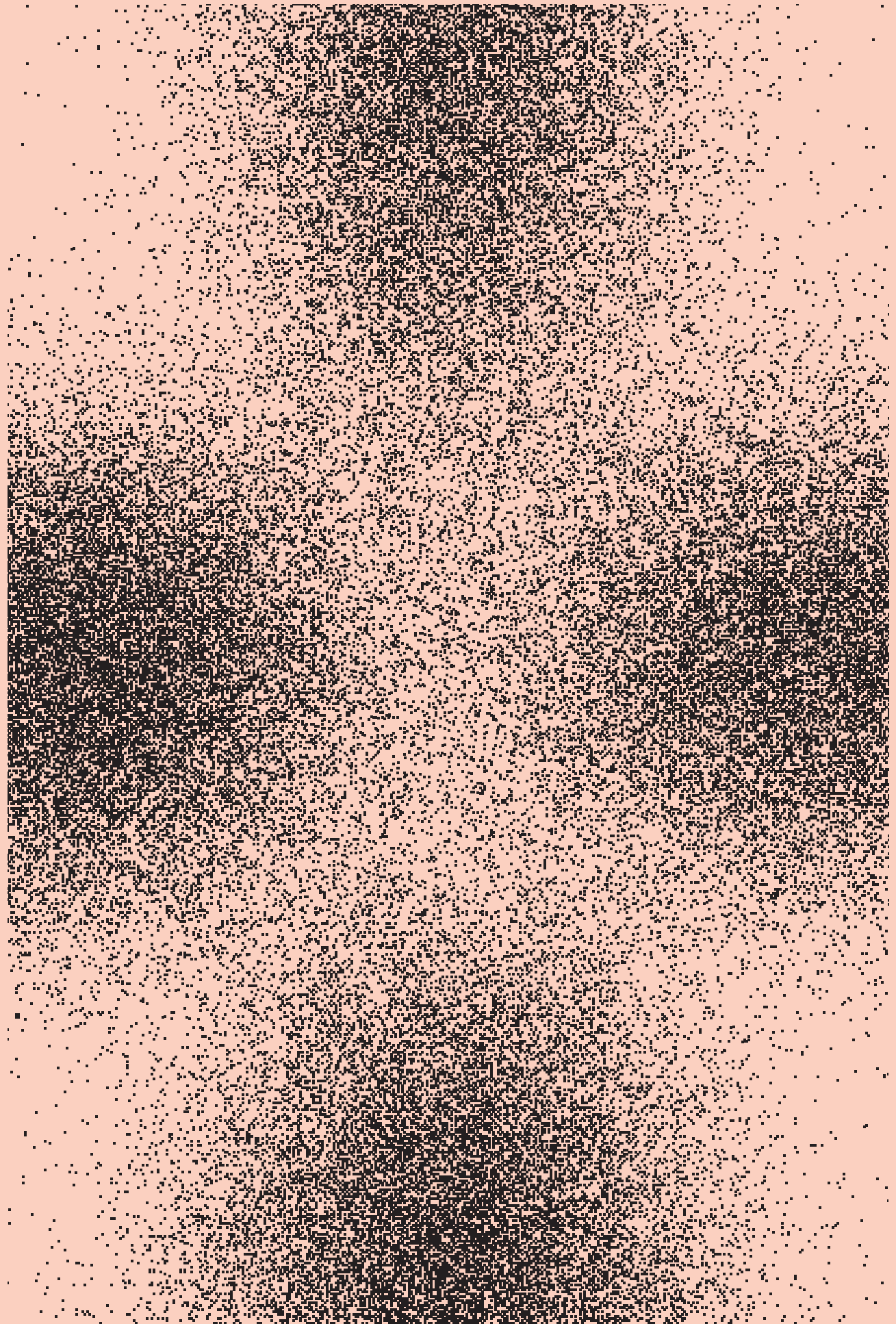


SMARTPHONES & SCIMITARS



GIULIA CRISPIANI

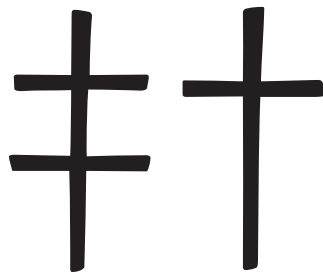
Warning This publication contains visual content
that some viewers may find disturbing
(strong, bloody violence)

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Composed in Adobe Jenson and ITC Franklin

Giulia Crispiani
Smartphones & Scimitars



Ceramics Department
Gerrit Rietveld Academie

Amsterdam, 2015

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¹ — “On the summit of the mountain was a small hut, evidently for the sale of beer and tea, but that day there was no one there. We sat down on a rock and began to eat. Each of us, spellbound by the grandeur of the scenery, silently thought his own thoughts. Suddenly my glance rested on the face of Professor Skridlov and I saw that tears were streaming from his eyes. 'What's the matter, old fellow?' I asked him. 'Nothing,' he answered, drying his eyes, and then added: 'In general, during the last two or three years, my inability to control the automatic manifestations of my subconsciousness and my instinct is such that I have become almost like an hysterical woman. What has just happened, has happened to me many times during this period. It is very difficult to explain what takes place in me when I see or hear anything majestic which allows no doubt that it proceeds from the actualization of Our Maker Creator. Each time, my tears flow of themselves. I weep, that is to say, it weeps in me, not from grief, no, but as if from tenderness. I became so, gradually, after meeting Father Giovanni, whom you remember we met together in Kafiristan, to my worldly misfortune. After that meeting my whole inner and outer world became for me quite different. In the definite views which had become rooted in me in the course of my whole life, there took place, as it were by itself, a revaluation of all values.' Before that meeting, I was a man wholly engrossed in my own personal interests and pleasures, and also in the interests and pleasures of my children. I was always occupied with thoughts of how best to satisfy my needs and the needs of my children.' Formerly, it may be said, my whole being was possessed by egoism. All my manifestations and experiencings flowed from my vanity. The meeting with Father Giovanni killed all this, and from then on there gradually arose in me that "something" which has brought the whole of me to the unshakeable conviction that, apart from the vanities of life, there exists a "something else" which must be the aim and ideal of every more or less thinking man, and that it is only this something else which may make a man really happy and give him real values, instead of the illusory "goods" with which in ordinary life he is always and in everything full.” Gurdijev, G. 1963. Meetings with Remarkable Men. New York: Penguin Compass. 2002. p. 245, 246

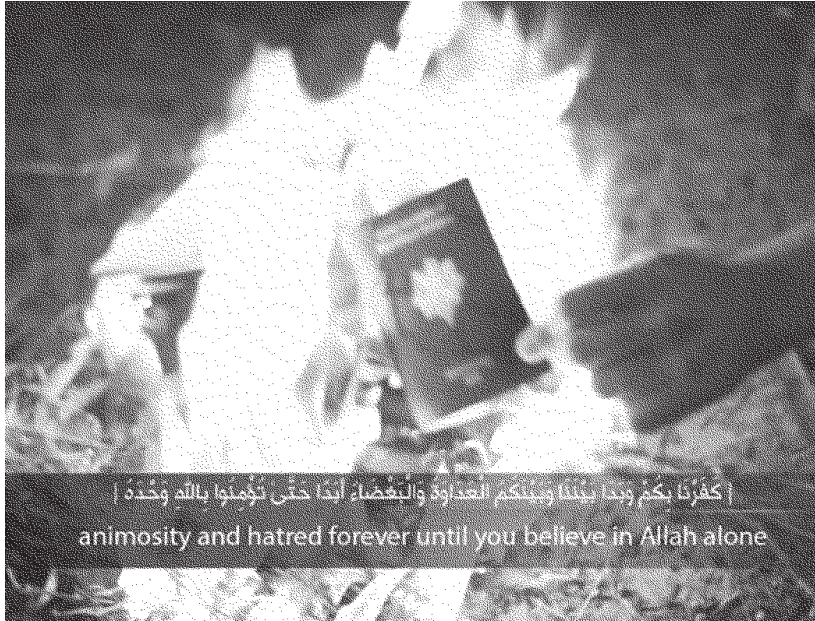
Introduction

This paper aims to investigate a blank space, both visually and thematically, as the black of the text will overcome the white of the paper, an attempt will be made to understand why it must always be about everything, and never about nothing. Once the direction – or rather the intention – of this essay is specified, a justification might be also useful to both the writer and the reader, in order to grasp the space in between the beginning and the end, the preface and the conclusion. What if one has been brought up religiously, and then slowly changing throughout her adolescence decides to embrace atheism, how does one cope with this sudden ontological deficiency? It is like feeling moved any time watching a sunset, with no need of beaming any extra layer upon it.¹

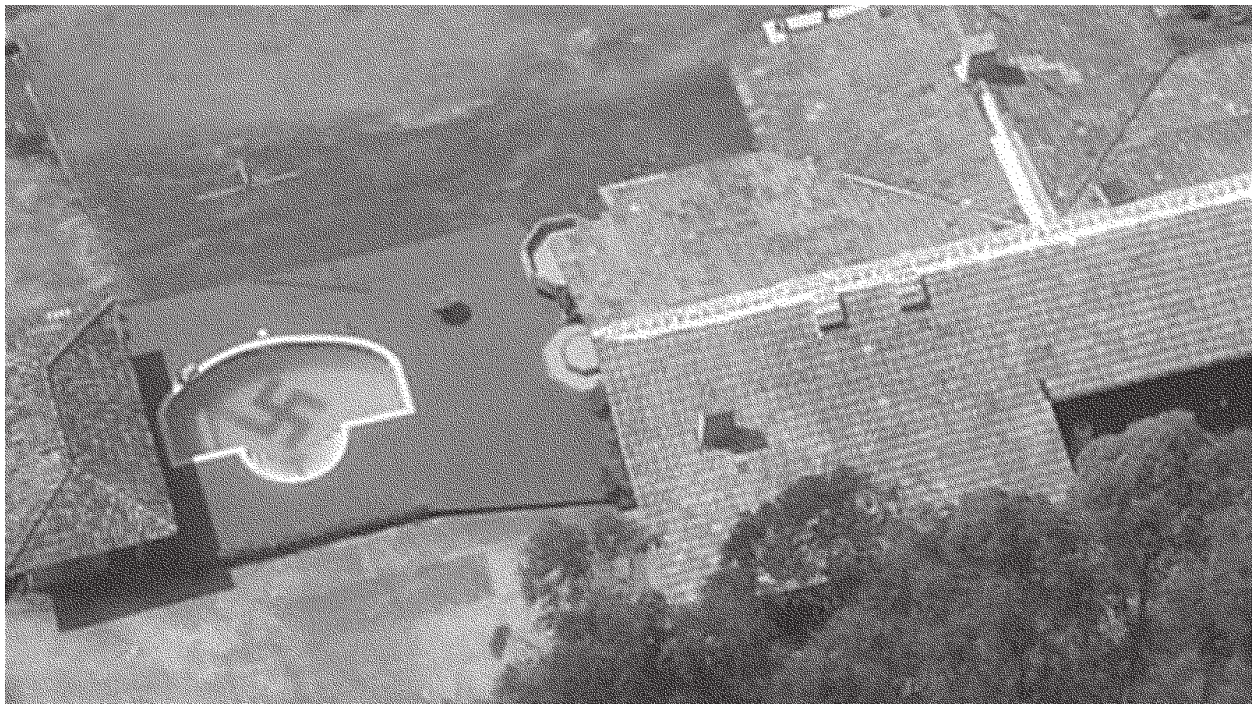
Therefore, my first study case is actually my own case, as my closest thus most convenient empirical witness of this reckless abandonment towards any faith. In order to better grasp my background, the writer and historian of religion Mircea Eliade (1907-1986) helps me understand what it means to be a (non)religious human being in a contemporary world, the origin of such an attitude, and the motivations. The epistemology of the philosopher Michel Foucault (1926-1984), is relevant as well, as he offers a critique on the approach of Christianity towards the “self”, which Carl Gustav Jung’s psychology deepens, through a study of Christian figures and symbols. Here I necessarily have to involve the *Gott is tot* (God is dead) of the philosopher Friedrich Wilhelm Nietzsche (1844-1900), who certainly was my main initiator, and first source of justification, and inspiration towards my individual freedom. Once the void is laid, philosophy gives me a different and diverse vocabulary to express my position, while importing significance. The french philosophers Gilles Deleuze (1925-1995) and Félix Guattari (1930-1992) help me visualize this break through the transcendental view, with their becoming of the plane of immanence.² On the other hand the philosopher Martin Heidegger (1889-1976) and his notion of Dasein assert fundamental matters on the human condition³, from an atheist point of view, reinforcing the paradox that I fall so much for every time I encounter it. Aiming to escape dogmas theoretically, my personal path strives to lay on the becoming of the plane of immanence, enjoying bungee-jumping into the chaotic void, while conserving memories of sacred

² Deleuze, Gilles, and Félix Guattari. 1991. What Is Philosophy? London: Verso. 2011.

³ Heidegger, Martin. Being and Time. 1927. Albany, N.Y.: State University of New York Press. 2010.



Jihadists burning passports
Somewhere between Iraq and Syria,
2014



Swastika found in Brazilian swimming pool
Brazil, 2014

rituals. My artistic practice feeds me with intuitions, which allows my movements to intensify. From my artist statement I quote: “I daily obsessively observe reality around me, conscious that whatever I write or produce will materialize the moment and stop the vandalic flux of vainness.”⁴

But what happens when instead one is “bored”, or can’t stand this lack of sense in his life and all of the sudden decides to flee off, and join an extremist ideological movement such as today the Islamic State fighters – ready to die as martyr, they say, but mainly, probably, to gain a sense of belonging? Where does this boredom then come from? Is the search to belong a symptom of metaphysical nostalgia? Does one always need to give an order to chaos?

My second study case goes to what I consider to be an opposite extreme in contemporary society: as previously mentioned, I want to concentrate on the jihadists, mostly the ones that come from Western nations. Apparently they have histories similar to mine, but they somehow felt this urge to prove their faith for good. I have never had the chance to meet any of these people personally, so I am just roughly documenting myself on daily newspapers and magazines, mainly from online sources. In this sense, it is also interesting to critically consider the prevailing role of the media, as necessary and omniscient filter of my research.

Hence either religiously or politically, ideology becomes relevant in this discourse, as the object that apparently fills this void, orders the chaos, landmarks a plane. The slovenian philosopher and cultural critic Slavoj Žižek (1945), in his *The Sublime Object of Ideology*⁵, helps me grasp contemporary ideological phenomena, such as cynicism, “totalitarianism”, and the fragile status of democracy, trying to demolish the illusion that we live in a “post-ideological” condition.⁶ By approaching the subject through fundamental authors such as Hegel, Lacan, Marx, and Benjamin, Žižek describes ideology as a symptom, that is to say a formation whose very consistency implies a certain non-knowledge on the part of the subject, who can enjoy the symptom only in so far as its logic escapes him.⁷ In fact, as soon as one tries to compass the existing social order as a rational totality, sooner or later he/she will encounter a paradoxical element which functions as its symptom. Again, a different approach but within the same field: in his *The Malaise of Modernity*⁸, the philosopher Charles Taylor (1931) dives into issues such as individualism and authenticity, and analyses how these deeply influence moral ideals. With their help I will try to answer my question: What is the absolute/particular object that fills the void? Can this void be filled at all?

⁴ 2012

⁵ Žižek, Slavoj. 1989. *The Sublime Object of Ideology*. London: Verso. 2009.

⁶ Ibid. Introduction, p. XXXI

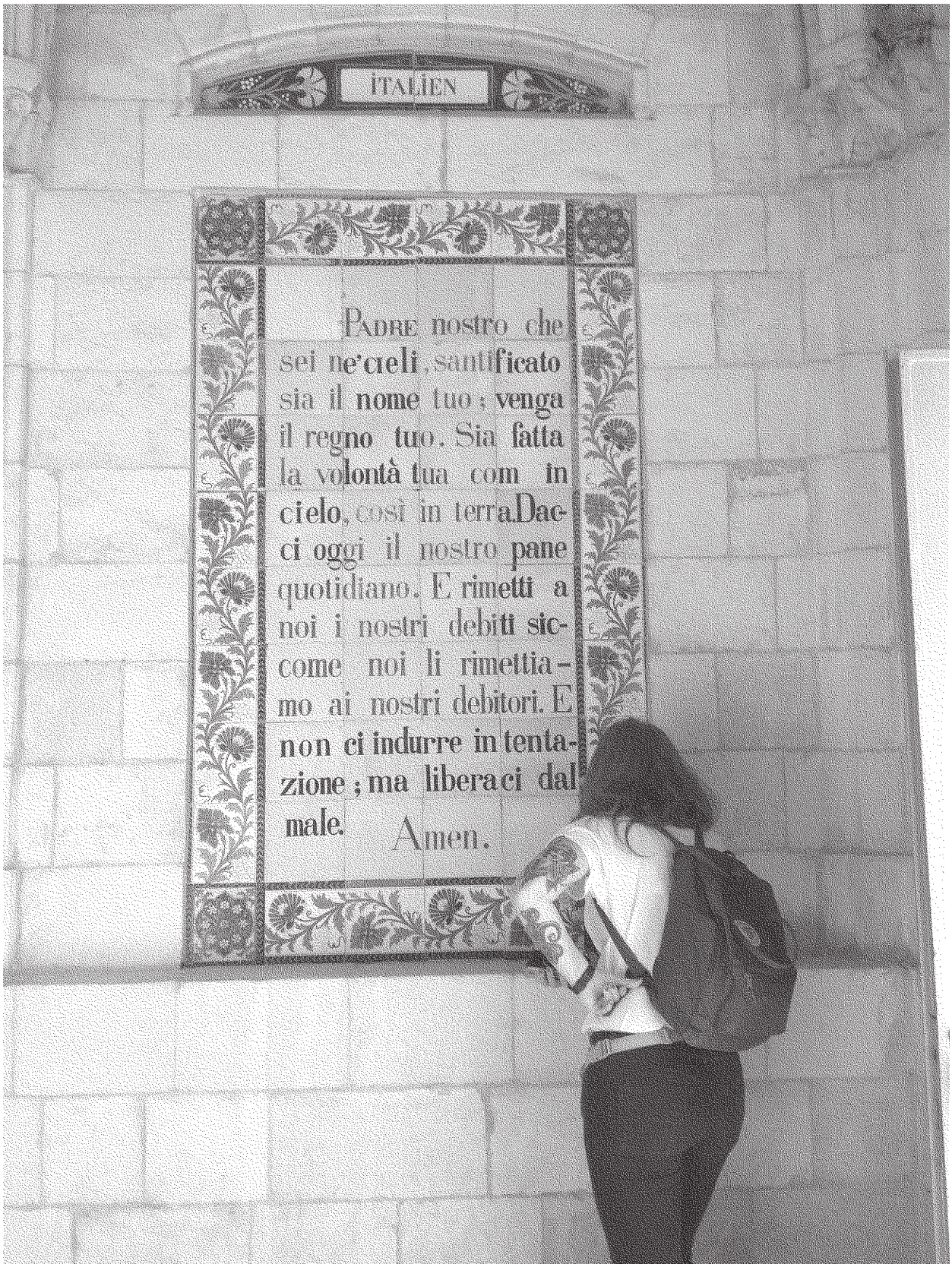
⁷ Ibid. p.16

⁸ Taylor, Charles. 1991.

Charles Taylor and Canadian Broadcasting Corporation. *Il Disagio della Modernità*. Roma; Bari: Laterza. trans. G. Ferrara degli Uberti. 1999.

I believe I need to try to understand how, and why somebody of my age can decide to embrace everything that I rejected, being ready to die for such a cause.

My research might seem very ephemeral, attached to the metaphysical sphere – it is in some way – but still attempts to access a fundamental matter from the very material entity of the fetish, as physical object, because eventually it is physical objects I am making, and it is physicality that we all deal with everyday. Although my conclusion will remain in the domain of speculation, my inquiry will after all nourish my practice.



Giulia in Jerusalem #5 (Pater Noster)



Giulia in Jerusalem #1
(The Stone of Anointing)



Giulia in Jerusalem #2
(The Rock of Calvary)



Giulia in Jerusalem #4
(The Rock of Ascension)

Chapter 1

Study Case #1

Dogmas • Here let me introduce you shortly my religious youth, in an attempt to somehow contextualize it. I grew up in a small provincial town, in the centre of Italy: there catholicism goes strong as hell, as one hundred years ago, and the Vatican still has a strong influence upon folks. Of course I was baptised as soon as I was born and taught to commit to my catholic duties as soon as it was time for them. So here goes the drill: when one starts with elementary school, by the age of 5/6, one coming from a religious family must attend catechism too, that is to say a regular weekly class of about one hour, either on Friday or Saturday afternoon. Just to make it clear, in my town, there were around fifty kids of my age in total. Only one was from an atheist family: later on I understood that she was coming from a left wing family, obviously against any kind of religious doctrine, but at the time, at the age of 7, it was kind of difficult for me and others to grasp why she would not take part in our activities. Mostly it was unbelievable that she would not believe.

I remember the parson joining our catechism class, and while looking at us straight in our eyes, pointing his finger alternatively up and towards us, he would tell us: God, our Lord is a dogma, and so it is anything that comes with it. A dogma is in itself a doctrine, prescribed as unquestionably true. Now imagine, what this kind of statement can suggest to a six year old kid, as he/she gets to know that the counterpart of good is evil: as questioning is sinning, the punishment for it would be burning in hell, tickled forever by Satan's demons. What a beautiful, reassuring imaginary to dwell in! We all know that we are going to die, but hey, after a life of struggle, at least let us rest in peace. So, I always thought, it was better to follow my duties.

In Christianity, the God is not there to merely represent an explanation to some natural events, but he is the creator, the maker, responsible for the given reality. As such he has the power to write down dogmas and laws, and enforce them on his folks.⁹ Moreover he is also The Judge. Better please him, follow his rules, obey. Here enters the self-renunciation: (quoting Foucault) "the duty is to accept a set of obligations, to hold certain books as permanent truth, to accept authoritarian decisions in matter of truth, not only to believe certain things but to show that one believes, and

⁹ Foucault, Michel, Luther H. Martin, Huck Gutman, and Patrick H. Hutton. Technologies of the Self: A Seminar with Michel Foucault. Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press. 1988.

to accept institutional authority.”¹⁰ So basically knowing oneself is “to try to know what is happening inside him, to acknowledge faults, to recognise temptations, to locate desire; and everyone is obliged to disclose these things either to God or to others in the community and to bear public or private witness against oneself.”¹¹ The disclosed self is not inner anymore. It is strictly and constantly related to something else.

In the introduction of *Psychology and Alchemy*¹² Carl Gustav Jung analyzes the effect that Christianity and his *imitatio Christi* (imitation of Christ)¹³ had in Western society. Christ is intended indeed as the embodiment of this one God. Christ is one of the paradigmatic, hierarchical figures projected on the plane of immanence (Deleuze, Guattari), whereas transcendence invades the absolute and monotheism replaces unity. Jung makes an interesting point by saying that even if the intention is to follow the example and seek to become like Christ, for developing and exalting the inner man, this remains indeed an ideal, an “external object of worship”.¹⁴ Christ as the divine mediator becomes a peripheral image, embodying a set of values, that is placed outside the inner self. For instance the Kingdom of God is “among you” rather than “within you”.¹⁵ Furthermore as Christ took upon himself the sins of the world, the individual is basically freed from his deepest responsibilities. Although this is contrary to the spirit of Christianity, it is part of the many paradoxes this religion is based upon. “If the supreme value [(Christ)] and the supreme negation [(sin)] are outside, then the soul is void: its highest and lowest are missing, (...) with the Western man the value of the self sinks to zero.” The immortality of the soul is something to be conquered following dogmas, which are constantly confronting the mortal man to face the supernatural. The projected image regrets the psyche, which stays unconscious and undeveloped, as pagan and archaic as ever: “Everything has to be found outside – in image and in word, in Church and Bible – but never inside.”¹⁶ Jung continues by asserting that the Self is a term which is both definite enough to express the core of human wholeness and indefinite enough to verbalize the indescribable nature of this wholeness.¹⁷ This limitless range of the Self is redeemed by the definiteness of a religious figure, in this case Christ, who is combining uniqueness with eternity and individual with universal, again human with supernatural qualities, embodying the good, and creating a model to follow. Eventually the problem of good and evil becomes a world problem, that is to say ethics, which is apparently and superficially solved

¹⁰ Ibid. p.40

¹¹ Ibid. p.40

¹² Jung, C. G. 1953. *Psychology and Alchemy*. 2nd Edition. London: Routledge. 2010.

¹³ Ibid. *Introduction to the religious and psychological problems of Alchemy*, p.7

¹⁴ Ibid., p.7

¹⁵ Ibid., p.8

¹⁶ Ibid., p.8

¹⁷ Ibid., p.18

by dogmas. However, the case of Christ incorporates a model of suffering and renouncing, which would be unbearable to most of mankind. As a consequence this example is either ideally followed or not at all. Therefore, the inner self is relieved of its duty.

At the time I didn't know any of this, and blindly believing was the safest, most natural and comfortable thing to do: be in the love of the Lord, effortless leaving the Self gorging on ready-made products.



Hologram Christ

On how I met Nietzsche • I will not prolong myself in narrating the whole story, which is quite usual and boring, on how I practiced my faith as a child, and how, and when, and why I slowly started to doubt and see the paradox. I wish to tell though, how philosophy entered my life, and gave words to my thoughts. My favourite high school philosophy teacher's name was/is Galileo (like Galilei) Di Battista. He had a long beard, thick glasses, he was bald but had long hair held in a pony tail. He

was funny looking but nice and kind, and most of all able to break through the chaotic heads of confused teenagers with heavy ontological matters: I still have my notebook, where I used to write every word he said. He introduced me to Nietzsche. By then, I was already fed up with doctrines and I was not attending church so often anymore, and my disbeliefs were only waiting for words to be expressed, thus justified and solved. I lingered over Nietzsche violent critic of the existent moral code, his active pessimism and Dionysiac tendency. I wrote my end exam paper on the will to power.

In *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*¹⁸, Nietzsche reintroduces the fundamental concept of the death of God (*Gott ist tot*):¹⁹ men killed god, by substituting it with other fundamental references. The new divinity is thus mankind, which is still weak and submissive to the frightening, and to the negative idea of death. When god is no longer there, anything else is lost. *Nihilism* can be passive, cause suffering and disorientation, or active, as a chance to build a new life where one can become the god of himself. The only certain thing will eventually be death. "Man is a rope stretched between the animal and the Overman - a rope over an abyss":²⁰ the Overman is not above, but beyond, overcomes reality itself, able to desire and thus affirm himself, freed from any moral constriction and time as we know it. The Overman lives the present, realizing himself in the very moment, every moment, celebrating the eternal recurrence of all things. Hence the *amor fati*²¹ (love of fate), as acceptance of reality *per se*. I now recognize that Nietzsche might fit better in the domain of poetry, rather than mere philosophy (I naturally have to think about romantic poets, as for Keats negative capability, and Rilke's quote of his letters "love the questions themselves, live them, live everything now"²²) still I can not help but loving it, and "what is done out of love, always takes places beyond good and evil".²³ The very last sentence written on my high school notebook says: "an absolutely free, pure and innocent condition." I still remember the shivers while writing it down, and will go so far as to say I embraced it.

Still accepting the paradoxes of the circumstances, and therefore the limitations of language, I have found relevant to somehow fill the *nihil* with further speculations. Philosophically speaking, I relate to the way Martin Heidegger accesses the human condition, with the notion of *Dasein*:²⁴ the essence of *Dasein* lies in its existence and therefore is in an essential relationship with the world; as being-in-the-world, *Dasein* and the world are an embod-

¹⁸ Nietzsche, Friedrich Wilhelm, Kathleen M. Higgins, Robert C. Solomon. 1883-1885. Thus spoke Zarathustra. Trans. Clancy Martin. New York: Barnes & Noble Classics. 2005.

¹⁹ Ibid. Zarathustra's prologue, p.9

²⁰ Ibid. p.11

²¹ Nietzsche, Friedrich Wilhelm. 1882. The Gay Science: With a Prelude in Rhymes and an Appendix of Songs. Trans. Walter Kaufmann. Knopf Doubleday Publishing Group. 2010. Section 276

²² Rilke, Rainer Maria. 1923. Letters to a young Poet. New York : Vintage Books. Trans. Stephen Mitchell. 1987. "Be patient toward all that is unsolved in your heart and try to love the questions themselves, like locked rooms and like books that are now written in a very foreign tongue. Do not now seek the answers, which cannot be given you because you would not be able to live them. And the point is, to live everything. Live the questions now. Perhaps you will then gradually, without noticing it, live along some distant day into the answer."

²³ Nietzsche, Friedrich Wilhelm. 1886. Beyond Good and Evil. London: Penguin Classics. 2003.

²⁴ Heidegger, Being and Time. 2010.

ied state. Being thrown in the world, Dasein immediately gets confronted with nature, as being there. By interpreting nature, Dasein takes care of its being and its existence, by addressing and discussing it. By doing this, Dasein defines it and makes it present, in fact makes it objective/universal. As this interpretation of the world becomes an objective expression, it can thus be maintained and preserved. This arguably allows the creation of a world; the “world” consisting of a formal, thus human aspect, grounded in the material aspect, which Heidegger calls the “earth”: the world grounds itself on the earth, while the earth exists through the world. This necessary interacting duality of the “earth” and a “world” allows meaning to take place recurrently, within the horizon of the subjective and collective historical consciousness. However, Dasein is situated in the paradox of living in relationship with the other humans while being ultimately alone with him/herself.

I can also connect with Gilles Deleuze’s and Félix Guattari’s attempt to break out the transcendental view, as instead a very practical visualization of a pre philosophical plane of immanence, as a “sieve stretched over chaos”,²⁵ laid by conceptual personae, on which concepts are created and all together become. As chaos is nature, in the Heideggerian sense of earth, the necessity to interpret it, by addressing it and defining it, coincide with the effort to give order to this chaos. “Thus philosophy lives in a permanent crisis: the plane takes effect through shocks, concepts proceed in bursts, and personae in spasms.”²⁶ The earth brings together all these elements and the thinking process is what stretches out the plane of immanence, that absorbs eventually the earth. Religion is a manifestation of an invasion of the transcendence, which projected on the plane paves it and populates it with figures, which are paradigmatic, hierarchical and referential. In the becoming of the plane of immanence, “chaos is defined not so much by its disorder as by the infinite speed with which every form taking shape in it vanishes, [(...)] and the void is the virtual.”²⁷

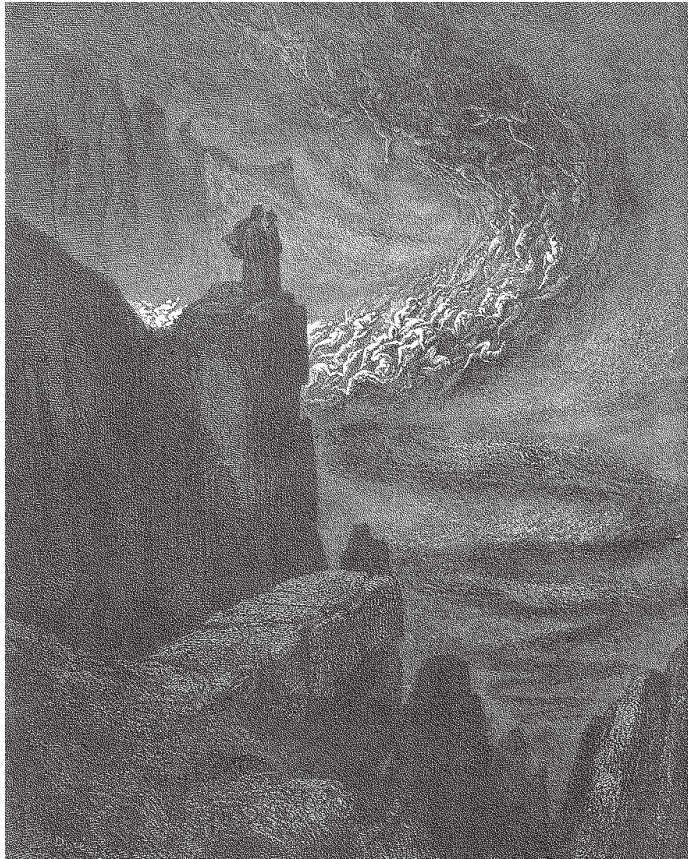
In the conclusion of *What is Philosophy?*, Deleuze and Guattari state that “we just require a little order to protect us from chaos.”²⁸ What is this chaos then? Why do we actually need to protect ourselves from it? And again, going back to my main question of this survey, can I consider chaos and void as synonyms? The next section tries to unfold this issue.

²⁵ Deleuze, Guattari. *What is Philosophy?*. p.42

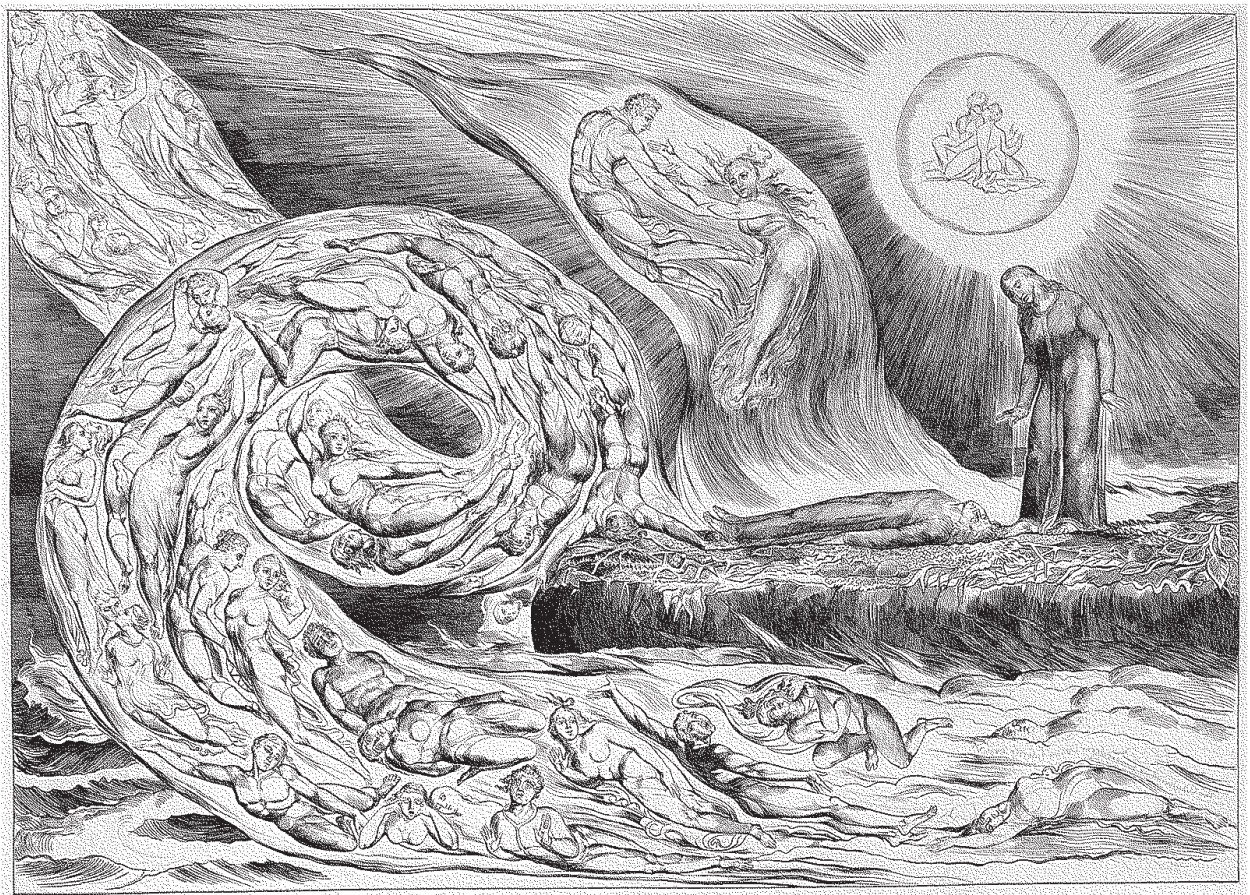
²⁶ Ibid. p.82

²⁷ Ibid. p.118

²⁸ Ibid. p.201



The Lustful (The infernal hurricane that never rests).
Gustave Doré, 1861–68



The Circle of the Lustful, Francesca Da Rimini. William Blake, 1827

Chaosmogony • I quote from the online etymology dictionary: the word chaos comes from late 14th century, “gaping void,” from Old French *chaos* (14c.) or directly from Latin *chaos*, from Greek *khaos* “abyss, that which gapes wide open, is vast and empty,” from **khnwos*, from PIE root **gheu-* “to gape, yawn” (cognates: Greek *khaino* “I yawn,” Old English *ginian*, Old Norse *ginnunga-gap*; Meaning “utter confusion” (c.1600) is extended from theological use of *chaos* for “the void at the beginning of creation” in Vulgate version of Genesis (1530s in English). The Greek for “disorder” was *tarakhe*, however the use of *chaos* here was rooted in Hesiod (*Theogony*), who describes *khaos* as the primeval emptiness of the Universe, begetter of Erebus and Nyx (“Night”), and in Ovid (*Metamorphoses*), who opposes *Khaos* to *Kosmos*, “the ordered Universe.” Meaning “orderless confusion” in human affairs is from c.1600.²⁹

Indeed we could straight away compare this wide open, vast and empty abyss with the void, as the term void from 1610s, stands for “unfilled space, gap,” from void (adj.: c.1300, “unoccupied, vacant,” from Anglo-French and Old French *voide*, *viude* “empty, vast, wide, hollow, waste, uncultivated, fallow,” as a noun, “opening, hole; loss,” from Latin *vacivus* “unoccupied, vacant,” related to *vacuus* “empty”. Meaning “lacking or wanting” (something) is recorded from early 15c. Meaning “legally invalid, without legal efficacy” is attested from mid-15c.). Meaning “absolute empty space, vacuum” is from 1727.³⁰ Now this lacking or wanting easily links the immediate necessity or desire to attain the ontological opposite of the word itself, that is to say to fill this void. Is the void “inside” or “outside”? Is it a decision or a condition or a contingency?

In his book *The Sacred and the Profane*, the historian of religion Mircea Eliade introduces the theme of the Sacred as a realm of a different order from “natural” realities, as when confronted with this profound nothingness, man finds himself unable to properly express what goes beyond his experience.³¹ Now, this relates back to the Dasein’s definition of the world, which allows the preservation of it. But again the occurrence of being-thrown-in-the-world is still in the domain of the unexplainable, as depending on causes of force majeure. The conception of the world in Eliade, as in Ovid and other traditional societies, is of a cosmos which opposes itself to the chaos. Indeed the sacred and the profane are two different modes of living the cosmos: “the nonreligious man refuses transcendence, accepts the relativity of reality and may even come to doubt

²⁹ <http://www.etymonline.com/index.php?term=chaos>

³⁰ http://www.etymonline.com/index.php?term=void&allowed_in_frame=0

³¹ Eliade, Mircea. 1959. *The sacred and the Profane, the Nature of Religion*. New York: Harcourt, Brace. Trans. Willard R. Trask. 1987. p.10

³² Ibid. p.203

the meaning of existence.”³² In fact Eliade claims that the profane life style is a rather recent discovery in the history of the human spirit, in a sense that religion and mythology are “eclipsed” in the darkness of the collective unconscious, but still retained in memories, camouflaged myths and degenerated rituals. Eliade clearly states that human beings cannot live in chaos: as the sacred brings meaning, revealing the absolute reality, it founds the world by establishing its limits and its order, thus making orientation possible. The religious sign implies a *cosmogony*,³³ namely the origin of the world.

Contrarily Deleuze’s and Guattari’s view overcomes the transcendental, thus religious and vertical model in favour of the plane of immanence, that is to say a pre philosophical, horizontal, infinite, and dynamic milieu, which in itself is void. Concepts are intensive ordinates of the movements in this absolute dimension, and they must be created by conceptual personae: the conceptual personae and plane of immanence presuppose each others, in the act of creation. As Deleuze and Guattari state that we constantly lose our ideas in the instant (of undefined duration), we need to hang on fixed opinions, which conventionally unifies our ideas in an orderly fashion: the image suggested is the one of an umbrella, that protects us from chaos. The plane of immanence though has three daughters, namely philosophy, art and science, which are in fact opposite to religion: rather than invoking manifestations of the sacred, in order to “paint a firmament on the umbrella,”³⁴ philosophy, art and science want to tear open the firmament and plunge into chaos. Deleuze and Guattari name these three disciplines *Chaoïds*, as forms of thought or creation.

Indeed by some fatal coincidences, I ended up in an art academy and since I am now graduating, I am probably going to make art my future profession. Anything that happened in between is absorbed by duration. Now, I am theoretically and practically moving on the plane of immanence trying to find the axis that moves from my past to my present, and introduce you to my work and approach. To further use Deleuze’s and Guattari’s words, the philosopher brings back from chaos variations, the scientist variables, the artist brings back varieties, visions that shortly illuminate the chaos, provoking Sensation, the being of the sensory, which is able to re-establish the infinite. It is indeed a struggle with chaos, legitimate by the fact that eventually the aim is to defy opinion and cliché, paraphrasing the chaos into sensitivity. Joyce speaks about *chaosmos*,³⁵ or composed chaos, but I would like to talk about *Chaos-*

³³ Ibid. p.31

³⁴ Deleuze, Guattari. What is Philosophy?. p. 202

³⁵ Ibid. p.204

mogony, as creation of chaos. The “dream of capturing a bit of chaos”³⁶ is more of a necessity, in opposition to the dream of the unifying laws offered by both opinion and religion. In fact my work is still deeply influenced by religion, actually stressing its paradoxes more than its values. The symbolism that characterised its language for centuries, in order to render it universal, still fascinates me deeply, as it is mainly figurative. I mostly make objects, using different media, enjoying language play, both written and visual, in narrative and allegories. My graduation project will be a revisitation of the cabinet of curiosities or wunderkammer format, as a rich collection of artefacts, that will redundantly fill the void of a space. I, myself have become the maker, and the curator, and the owner of this emptiness: by making use of it, I give body to my aspirations and obsessions. An anthology of images, generated by my fantasy: according to Lacan fantasy is a construction whose function is to hide the nothingness of the void. I intend to appropriate the space and fill it with signifiers, plunge into the chaos and bring back visions. My process, though, resembles a digestion rather than a creation: as creation implies total nothingness, digestion implies feeding and consequent evacuation. In Žižek’s preface of *The Sublime Object of Ideology* I have found again a confirmation of this vision of mine, coming from Hegel: “If I eat an apple, I destroy its organic self-identity and assimilate it to myself.”³⁷ Through this assimilation I grab and grasp from the milieu, then conceive, through digestion I process it and return it to the world with a different consistency. Deleuze would call it deterritorialization: as any animal has its territory, it would make its boundaries clear by chanting, assuming specific postures or noises. This in itself resembles the birth of art, although there is no territory without a vector that exits this territory, and there is no deterritorialization with no effort of re-territorialization elsewhere. As art is a reaction on the shame of being a man, and art is creation, thus creation is resistance.³⁸ I do not feel a mission has been bestowed upon myself, but the freedom, and the inner hyper-conscience of the becoming attract and move me, at different speed and intensity.

³⁶ Ibid. p.200

³⁷ Hegel, Georg Wilhelm Friedrich. Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion III. 1987. p.127 in Žižek. The sublime Object of Ideology. 2009. Preface, xii

³⁸ Deleuze, Gilles, David Lapoujade, Claire Parnet, and Pierre-André Boutang. 2004. Editions montparnasse. Abecedario di Gilles Deleuze. Roma: DeriveApprodi. Subt. Ilaria Bussoni. 2005.



The Man of Sorrows in the arms of the Virgin. Hans Memling, 1475 (details)



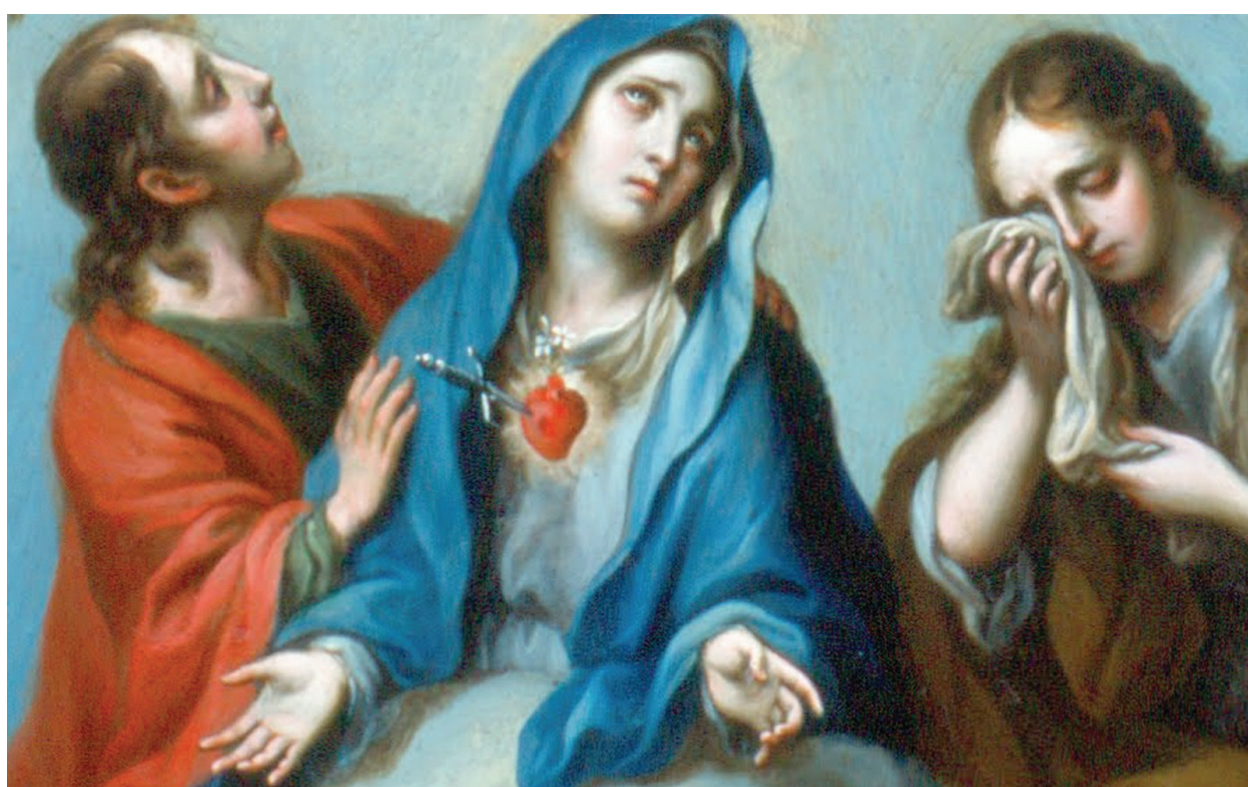
















II – III

Izabella Demavlys, Raffat for the serie *Without a Face*, 2013.

Source http://izabellademavlys.com/?attachment_id=663

Beeldemstorm (Damaged relief statues in the Cathedral of Saint Martin, Utrecht), 1566. Source <http://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/c/ce/UtrechtIconoclasm.jpg>

IV – V

Peter Kassing *Beheading*. Somewhere between Iraq and Syria, 2014. Source <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/middle-east/peter-kassing-death-a-new-isis-video--but-a-different-ending-what-could-it-mean-9864162.html>

Masaccio, *Martirio di San Giovanni Battista*, 1426.

Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, Berlin.

Source http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Masaccio_martirio_di_san_giovanni_battista.jpg

VI – VII

Dutch-Iraqi ISIS terrorist cannibal butcher and behead five Al Qaeda terrorists beheaders. Somewhere between Iraq and Syria, 2014. Source http://www.liveleak.com/view?i=652_1397727681

Lucas Cranach the Elder, *Salome with the Head of John the Baptist*, circa 1509-10, Museu Nacional de Arte Antiga, Lisbon. Source <https://www.flickr.com/photos/rdhobbet/7178537782/>

VIII – IX

Jordanian Pilot Burned Alive. Somewhere between Iraq and Syria, 2015. Source <http://leaksource.info/2015/02/04/jordanian-pilot-kaseasbeh-burned-alive-by-islamic-state-jordan-executes-is-requested-prisoner-rishawi-in-response/>

Virgil Master and his atelier, Detail of a miniature of the burning of the Grand Master of the Templars and another Templar. From the *Chroniques de France ou de St Denis*, after 1380. British Library, London. Source <http://www.bl.uk/catalogues/illuminatedmanuscripts/record.asp?MSID=8466>

X – XI

Aqsa Mahamood's parents interviewed by CNN.

Glasgow, 2014. Source <http://edition.cnn.com/2014/09/05/world/europe/isis-bride-glasgow-scotland/index.html?sr=fb090514isisbride11aVODtopLink>

Juan Patricio Morlete Ruiz, *The Heart of Jesus* 1759.

San Diego Viceregal Painting Gallery, San Diego. Source <https://www.google.com/culturalinstitute/asset-viewer/the-heart-of-mary/TAFCx9ThkUZqHw?hl=nl&projectId=art-project>

Chapter 2

Study Case #2

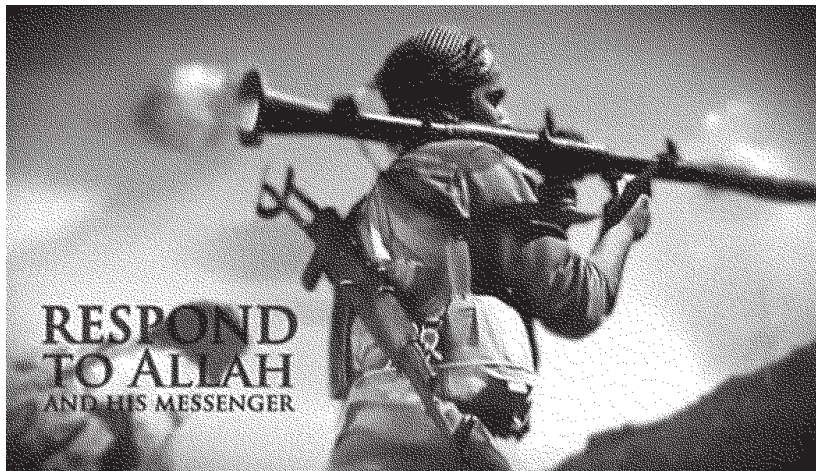
Paradoxes, Boredom & Martyrdom ♦ It is difficult to live without God; in a way, it is also annoying not to know where you are heading to. Ok, it is certainly reassuring to not have to deal with hell in the afterlife, but to know that your fight will not eventually lead you to a shiny paradise ain't pleasant either. What you are basically left with is now, yourself, your time and the limited surface of the world to move on, unless you are an astronaut. Last but not least an entangled list of paradoxes, so stubbornly irresolvable that one could compare them to Dante's *Inferno* of eternal punishments. One of the many is the above mentioned Heideggerian paradox of living with other humans while being ultimately alone with oneself (*Mitda-sein*). In being-in-the-world, others are encountered as being-there-too: as if they have a different nature from tools and things but belong to the same context of objective presence, and the world of things is what I share with the others. "Being-with existentially determines Dasein even when an other is not factually present or perceived."³⁹ As being-alone is still being-with, vice versa when I am surrounded by human beings I can still be alone. The taking care of becomes a mode of concern: we can take care of each other, and take care of things together. We are a society: being-with is in fact an essential existential characteristic of being.

³⁹ Heidegger. *Being and Time*. p. 113

Provided with that, what kind of society do we live in? How does the individual live in modernity? Let me use Charles Taylor, to try and grasp where we are at. In his book *The Malaise of Modernity* he starts by affirming that although our society is developing fast, mankind is perceiving as loss or decline some of its traits. This bewilderment is caused by three main reasons, which Taylor calls the three *dis-eases*:

- ♦ The triumph of individualism, as self-determination and overcoming of old sacred orders and values, such as religion and family. In this sense, Taylor agrees with Eliade, who states that mankind used to always belong to a wider cosmic cause, as society used to be strictly hierarchical and life marked by rituals and universal laws. Now-a-days, freedom gave us the chance to choose, in the name of authenticity and narcissism

- The supremacy of instrumental reason, that is to say the tendency to go for the best results with minimum effort: when universal laws are discarded, God's will dismissed, any one is legitimised to make his/her own choice. This goes hand in hand with economic change and technological progress, as well as the propensity of going for determined, circumscribed advantages
- A consequence of these two reasons is eventually a weaker participation in political life, that is to say, a growing alienation from the public sphere and a resultant loss of control, which might lead into new forms of despotisms



⁴⁰ Taylor. *The Malaise of Modernity*. p.6

⁴¹ Ackerman, Spencer. 2014. "Foreign Jihadists Flocking to Iraq and Syria on 'Unprecedented Scale' – UN." *The Guardian*. October 30, sec. World news. <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/oct/30/foreign-jihadist-iraq-syria-unprecedented-un-isis>.

⁴² "The World's 10 Richest Terrorist Organizations." 2015. *Forbes*. Accessed January 19. <http://www.forbes.com/sites/forbesinternational/2014/12/12/the-worlds-10-richest-terrorist-organizations/>.

Isis Recruitment Campaign

So yes, basically, there seems to be a lack in life of a heroic dimension, as man lost this sense of a superior purpose, something worth dying for.⁴⁰ This is precisely the point I wanted to get to, as I comfortably live in my decadent old safe existentialist Europe, sitting and writing on my shiny laptop, meanwhile some coetaneous of mine are leaving to join the Islamic State plea. I read in *The Guardian* that the United Nations has warned that foreign jihadists are enrolling in "an unprecedented scale" and from countries that had not previously contributed combatants to global terrorism.⁴¹ Indeed in Western countries the ISIL/ISIS (Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant, also translated as Islamic State of Iraq and Syria) is considered to be one of the major terroristic movements of today, for sure the wealthiest according to Forbes: their main funding sources are oil trade, kidnapping and ransom, collection of protection and taxes, bank robberies and looting. Their official goal is to establish an Islamic State in Iraq, Syria, Jordan, Lebanon and Palestine, leading the Muslim holy war against the infidels, Crusaders (i.e. Christians) and the Jews,⁴² and Western sinful societies, namely the Jihad. Also it is one of the first extrem-

ist movement that makes a wide use of social networks to win support, and considering the results (more than 15,000 people have travelled to Syria to fight alongside each other) they are extremely successful. On the other side, young Westerners that are fleeing off to ISIS, are claiming that they to want to become martyrs, that is to say somebody who suffers persecution and/or death for advocating, renouncing, refusing to renounce, and/or refusing to advocate a belief or cause of either a religious or secular nature. One of them is Aqsa Mahamood, who left her family in Glasgow one year ago without notice, only to inform them four days later that she was in Syria and she would see them again in the day of judgement.⁴³

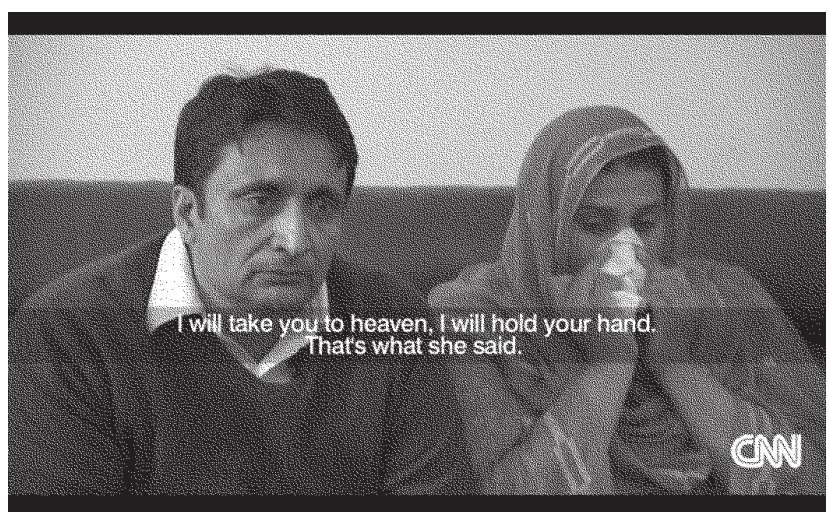
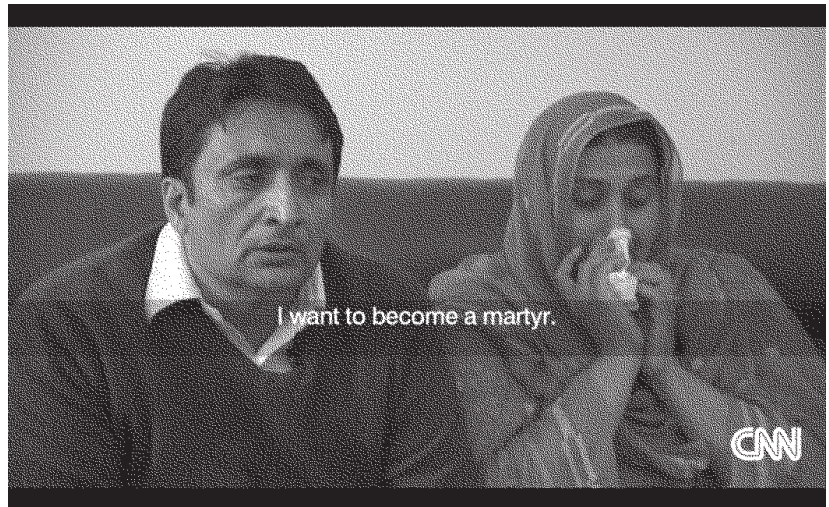
Next, I am going to tell you Aqsa's and others' stories, just reporting them from informations that was released by Western newspapers.



⁴³ Shubert, Atika, and Naik Bharati. 2014. "CNN Exclusive: From Glasgow Girl to "Bedroom Radical" and ISIS Bride - CNN. com." *CNN*. September 5. <http://www.cnn.com/2014/09/05/world/europe/isis-bride-glasgow-scotland/index.html>.

Aqsa Mahamood before
and after joining the Isis

Aqsa Mahammod and other stories ♦ Aqsa Mahamood is 19-year-old, listens to Coldplay, reads Harry Potter and went to the best private school in Glasgow. Her parents says she is the best daughter one could ever had: she is bringing her mother tea, and massaging her feet when she is tired, but also assisting her ill grandma. When she watches the news and sees violence bursting out in Syria, she somehow gets more serious, starts to read the Quran and prays more. She watches sermons online and gets in contact with people of similar sentiment through social media who help planning her take off. Nobody at home suspects anything. One day she just leaves and does not come back. Four days later she calls from Turkey, as she is at the point of crossing the border to Syria: her family unanimously asks her to come back but she just says "I will see you in the day of judgement, I will take you to heaven, I will take your hand". Since then she has been very active on social media, promoting ISIS beliefs, and calling for attacks to be carried



Aqsa Mahamood's parents interviewed by CNN, 2014

out in Western countries. She posts photos of AK47 and celebrates executions. Her parents insist on the fact that there have never been signs nor reasons of concealing any extremist seed, and if it happened to her, it could have happened to anyone. They seem to be quite surprised also because, they say, she has never been so courageous in her life.⁴⁴

A similar story applies to Abdullah Elmir, a 17-year-old from Sydney who has gone “fishing” and calls from Turkey, where he is about to cross the border. His parents claim the boy have been brainwashed. He later appears in a video, brandishing an AK47, addressing warnings to Western presidents: “We will not put down our weapons until we reach your lands and until we take the head of every tyrant and until the black flag is flying high in every single land, until we put the black flag on top of Buckingham Palace, until we put the black flag on top of the White House. We will not stop and we will keep on fighting. And we will fight you and we will defeat you.”⁴⁵

Then there are the three Denver girls, between 15 and 17, who skip school to get to Syria, by stealing 2,000\$ cash from home. Somehow the father of one of them manages to call the FBI, and are able to stop them in Germany. Luckily, he suspects something, as he finds the missing passports and money, but still, he alleges that they always have been “good girls”. How they managed to plan such trip, nobody knows.⁴⁶ I also played truant several times, the day of my eighteenth birthday for instance, when I went to get my first tattoo: indeed a very modest act of rebellion compared to this.

My favourite though is Jihadi John, probably a rapper previously known as L Jinny, aka Abdel-Majed Abdel-Bary, a 24-year-old from London. He already owns a couple of Wikipedia pages⁴⁷, one with his real name, one with his fighter name: so far L Jinny is only suspected of having become a jihadist, as his face is always almost completely covered in videos. Nevertheless the speculations arisen until now are worth some attention, as Jihadi John isn’t simply a fighter: he is an executioner, and “the protagonist of two real-life snuff movies as he kills James Foley and Steven Sotloff, American journalists.”⁴⁸ He claims to do what he does in the name of God. He became the symbol of the horrors committed by the Islamic State, and proclaimed by *Vice News* magazine the Monster of the Year (2014).⁴⁹ We have already seen him posing online holding a severed head, captioning: “Chillin’ with my homie, or what’s left of him”.

⁴⁴ Shubert, Atika, and Naik Bharati. 2014. “CNN Exclusive: From Glasgow Girl to “Bedroom Radical” and ISIS Bride - CNN.com.” *CNN*. September 5. <http://www.cnn.com/2014/09/05/world/europe/isis-bride-glasgow-scotland/index.html>.

⁴⁵ Strange, Hannah. 2014. “Bring Everything You Want to Us: Australian Teen Runaway Reemerges in Online ISIS Video.” *VICE News*. October 21. <https://news.vice.com/article/bring-everything-you-want-to-us-australian-teen-runaway-reemerges-in-online-isis-video>.

⁴⁶ Hayden, Sally. 2014. “Three Denver Girls Skipped School and Flew Off to Join the Islamic State.” *VICE News*. October 22. <https://news.vice.com/article/three-denver-girls-skipped-school-and-flew-off-to-join-the-islamic-state>.

⁴⁷ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Abdel-Majed_Abel_Bary/
http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jihadi_John.

⁴⁸ Spencer, Richard. 2014. “A Journey into the Mind of ‘Jihadi John’” *The Telegraph*. September 4, sec. World. <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/middleeast/11072723/A-journey-into-the-mind-of-Jihadi-John.html>.

⁴⁹ Bryant, Ben. 2014. “2014 VICE News Awards: Monster of the Year — Jihadi John.” *VICE News*. December 29. <https://news.vice.com/article/2014-vice-news-awards-monster-of-the-year-jihadi-john>.



Jihadi John. Somewhere between Iraq and Syria, 2015

Two years before, back in Britain, he used to rap:
 “I’m trying to change my ways but there’s blood on my hands
 and I can’t change my ways until there’s funds in the bank.
 I can’t differentiate the angels from the demons, my heart’s
 disintegrating. I ain’t got normal feelings.”⁵⁰ If Jihadi John
 is really L Jinny, then his case is different from the above
 mentioned, as newspapers say he had a pretty alienated
 childhood: his father got arrested for being an Islamist,
 his mother never really integrated into the London lifestyle,
 while he grew up in the streets, among crime and truancy.
 But *The Telegraph’s* article telling this story claims that
 it is indeed alienation that implants moral confusion rather
 than the genes. Where does this alienation come from then?
 And how come it is so radical to lead anyone to take such
 radical measures? How does something so extremist and
 so violent becomes such a magnet for so many weak souls?

⁵⁰ Spencer, Richard. 2014. “A Journey into the Mind of ‘Jihadi John,’” *The Telegraph*. September 4, sec. World. <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/middleeast/11072723/A-journey-into-the-mind-of-Jihadi-John.html>.



Executions posted on Facebook. Somewhere between Iraq and Syria, 2014

Smartphones and Scimitars • A remarkable picture that first caught my attention was one of the many that have been circulating lately of a beheading: the executioner was brandishing a long knife over somebody's head, and the rest of the militants around him, in the background, were holding smartphones, to immortalize the moment. Obviously, the aim was not just to have an intimate souvenir of that bloody moment, rather to have proofs and make it public. Indeed, the ISIS battlefield as well as the recruitment office are not just merely physical: the extremist group campaign is virtually extended via the internet, through intensive activities and calls for global support on all the major social networks. *The Guardian* headlines "Hi-tech media jihad":⁵¹ I find it very interesting to consider how Western weapons are used to fight the West itself. The propaganda war adopts a specific language deliberately taken from Hollywood movies, mainstream video games, and news channels we all grew up with in the West. Furthermore ISIS is present and zealous on Facebook, Twitter, Youtube, Instagram, Tumblr and other social media. Pictures and videos are uploaded daily, and recruitment crusades are carried forward by appropriating and reversing the Western communicative system both to provoke enemies and attract new forces, in and from the West. On the videos we mostly see masked militants branding the black and white flag, with handwritten text and the seal of Mohammed, which gives historical authenticity to ISIS' mission and meaning.⁵² The image they embody is one that wants to prove something and has nothing to lose. As a matter of fact, ISIS is considered to be 'the coolest' and most seductive outfit right now to young people, as they have understood the value of having a strong brand, a sort of corporate identity that people can engage with."⁵³

The war is fought online, as the call of duty is broadcasted in different languages, along with a specifically designed Twitter application ('The Dawn of Glad Tidings')⁵⁴ one can download for free, a feature-length movie called *Flames of War*, and a broadcaster clearly intended for non-Arabic speakers (Al-Hayāt Media Center)⁵⁵: all unanimously intended to promote the perfect jihadist lifestyle, in happiness and glory. This makes me think of the link drawn by Deleuze and Guattari between philosophy and the industry of advertisement; new *ideas men*, owning the concept and making it collide with the event, through the enterprise of marketing: as the concept becomes in fact the display of a product, that promotes a certain desire. This is how we finally get to the Lacanian *objet petit a*, as an object of fantasy that materializes the void of the

⁵¹ Rose, Steve. 2014. "The Isis Propaganda War: A Hi-Tech Media Jihad." *The Guardian*. October 7, sec. World news. <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/oct/07/isis-media-machine-propaganda-war>.

⁵² Thompson, Mark. 2014. "Taking the Crisis Out of ISIS." *Time*. December 19. <http://time.com/3641742/isis-pentagon-isis-daesh-kurds-iraq-syria/>.

⁵³ Shiraz Maher, King College London, 2014. Presenter, With Liam Dutton C4 Weather. 2015. "#Jihad: How Isis Is Using Social Media to Win Support." *Channel 4 News*. Accessed January 19. <http://www.channel4.com/news/isis-iraq-social-media-jihad-billion-campaign-recruit-video>.

⁵⁴ Berger, J. M. 2014. "How ISIS Games Twitter." *The Atlantic*. June 16. <http://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2014/06/isis-iraq-twitter-social-media-strategy/372856/>.

⁵⁵ "Al-Hayāt Media Center | JIHADOLOGY." 2014. Accessed December 15, 2014. <http://jihadology.net/category/al-%E1%B8%A5ayat-media-center/>.

desire itself. The happiness and glory promoted by the ISIS headlines and movies are practically transforming what is in fact a war zone into a *Miracle Meadow*, which attracts viewers, followers and militants. The psychological weapon astutely touches sore points, promising adventures for the bored, and belonging for the alienated: as “all the social processes are in the final analysis expressions of the class struggle”,⁵⁶ we might try to understand what the causes of this radical enrolment are. In an article for *Vice News*, terrorist psychology researcher John Horgan explains that he has been trying to understand it for a couple of decades at least, by interviewing victims and forepersons, spent hours on their social networks, analysing their statements. He suggests to rather ask how people effectively join the Islamic State, rather than why, as he himself could not come up with a convincing conclusion: “even the terrorist themselves,” he says, “don’t really know.”⁵⁷ As a confirmation of this, Paris-based attorney Martin Pradel affirms that for most of those people the choice to go was in fact “a spur of the moment decision. We’re talking about radical conversions, followed by an immediate departure. It isn’t planned, or even well thought out” and they are not “necessarily troubled young people,” Pradel says of the recruits: “They don’t come from troubled backgrounds.”⁵⁸ What is it then? Is seriously religious ideology the engine of this motions?



⁵⁶ Žižek. *The Sublime Object of Ideology*. p.184

⁵⁷ Horgan, John. 2014. “Don’t Ask Why People Join the Islamic State — Ask How.” *VICE News*. September 10. <https://news.vice.com/article/dont-ask-why-people-join-the-islamic-state-ask-how>.

⁵⁸ Rouillon, Etienne. 2014. “French Islamic State Recruits Say They Would Like to Come Home Now, Please.” *VICE News*. December 2. <https://news.vice.com/article/french-islamic-state-recruits-say-they-would-like-to-come-home-now-please>.

Meet Jonathan Edwards – applied for UCAS too late and wasn’t accepted in any university, so he joined the Islamic state

Chapter #3 Between and Beyond

Me • What am I? I found myself being-thrown-in-the-world. As my upbringing was lined with religious landmarks, I did not have to force interpretation that much. My significance was embedded in universal laws, as a well-behaved moral life would have allowed me to get closer to the gods. My destiny was depending on judgement. My space was limited, well-defined, and protected; my time punctuated by rites, circular and repetitive. The predominant, and spontaneous idea of identification used to be that of imitating models, ideals and image-makers.⁵⁹ My Real/reality (in the Lacanian sense)⁶⁰ was studded with myths, and insofar as I can see now, I was living the life of the fool, that is to say somebody who believes in his immediate identity with himself, in a paradoxical status of believer before belief: by following an external custom, I believed essentially without knowing.⁶¹ In the becoming, scepticism and philosophy pushed me to move: deterritorialization from the transcendental, and reterritorialization on the plane of immanence. Funny enough, from being a fool, I became an idiot, that is to say in the Deleuzian sense, a conceptual persona:⁶² as I started thinking for myself, stretching out a plane, that slowly absorbs the earth. The connections started to win over projections, flat surfaces over orders and hierarchies. Universal reason and history were abandoned in favour of contingency: *Amor fati*.

Now I am retroactively able to see the way in which my past still influences my present and my choices. That is maybe what Eliade means when he states that I can possibly live a profane life, no matter how hard I try to purify myself from superstitions. I will keep on being haunted by the realities I refuse and deny. I simply can not deny my extreme fascination for collective symbols, rituals and beliefs, insofar as I recognize their paradoxical limits: I believe that this paper indeed provides enough proof of that. Furthermore I still carry a constant feeling of guilt with me, failure, and weakness as a result of the unavoidable gap created by the failure in objectification: I, as subject, can not unveil myself as an object of my fantasy, as if I would, I would find nothing behind it. That is why I rather go on creating external objects to fill my room of wonders. Through creation, I communicate, thus I resist; to put it in

⁵⁹ Žižek. The sublime Object of Ideology. p.117

⁶⁰ The Lacanian Real has a paradoxical character: "It is usually concerned as a hard kernel resisting symbolization, dialecticization, persisting in its place, always returning to it. (...) The real is an entity that must be constructed afterwards so that we can account for the distortions of the symbolic structure. (...) The Real par excellence is jouissance" Ibid. p.181, 182, 184

⁶¹ Ibid. p.39

⁶² Deleuze, Guattari. What is Philosophy?. p.62

Heideggerian words: I address, I define, so I preserve. So I make a world out of the earth. I free myself, as for Deleuze, freedom is not a matter of human liberty but of liberation from humanity.

From here I step into Taylor's thought, as I am still a product of contemporary society: I am an individual who cultivates myths such as individualism, thus authenticity. In fact I am a narcissistic being who wants to decide for herself, and I feel called to do what I think is good for myself, in order to "fulfill" myself; this self-realization ideal is inevitably egocentric, as well as radically self-liberating, and empowering. The notion that I have my own original way of being entails that I need to discover what it actually means to be myself. The revelation manifests itself through expression, thus through creation. In practice, my self-discovery demands making, that is to say a *poiesis*. All the actual objects of the present though are not "ontologically" complete without a virtual absolute past, which gives continuity, as it also contains things which are still present. The past stays as transcendental condition of my acts, as my acts create a new reality, while retroactively changing this very condition. This allows me to live and (ful)fill the void.



Amor Fati, Giulia Crispiani, 2013

Media • What do the stories I have told trigger in me? What I find extremely fascinating is the forking between the end results of both cases: creation vs destruction. Although probably the final intention of ISIS recruits is to build something rather than to destroy, it is difficult to see much beyond the immediate ruinous extremist effect of the campaign. Nevertheless I believe me and some of the jihadists and I come from a similar background, and for different reasons, in diverse circumstances we shared the same sort of malaise after all. We chose extremely divergent ways out, or rather ways through (the void).

The starting point of my reflection was the fact that as I strive to conquer my identity, I co-exist with others, who struggle for the same reason, as being-in-the-world means being-with others.⁶³ Not only the act of addressing (enclosed in the interpretation of the world), therefore the act of defining, implies an agreement with the other, but also the authentic being of oneself is not exceptionally based on a state of the subject, as it is a condition of being with others, and must be understood as objective presence, still distinguished from others. To put it simple, only by confronting the others, I make my self objective in some way. And language is, of course, the very medium of this encounter. We become human agents in the full sense of the term, able to understand ourselves, thus define our identity, only by acquiring a rich expressive language.⁶⁴ The genesis of the human mind is not monological, that is to say something that one develops alone, but dialogical. We always define our identity in dialogue; sometimes fighting against other identities that some significant others are casting upon us. Although we are free to choose our own identity, in the name of both individualism, as well as authenticity, and dignity (as fundamental values of modern Western society), this very identity always needs an external recognition. This recognition used to be universal, and given *a priori*, as identity was derived by hierarchies, and genre, and roles were taken for granted. Now-a-days we need to conquer this recognition through this dialogical exchange, which could yet easily fail: a rejection could carelessly harm those who are denied. Projecting a degraded or disheartening image can have a serious effect of distortion and oppression on somebody else, insofar this image gets internalized.⁶⁵ Here then follows, the gap between imaginary and symbolic identification: the former is the image in which we appear likeable to ourselves and reflects what we would like to be, while instead the latter is the place from where we are being watched, from where we look at ourselves worthy of love, from ourselves and from others. We live in a society where love and equity are both essential principles, although this implies the recognition of racial and sexual differences and a strong notion of common wealth, thus the paradox immediately arise: how can difference be a fundament for the value of equality and common interest?

At this point, according to Žižek, a misrecognition to somehow solve this oddity is necessary: the fantasy-object, with its appealing presence, is a construction which can hide this lack. In this case ISIS offers a social fantasy to many people, a mission that simultaneously embodies and denies

⁶³ Heidegger. *Being and Time*. p.112

⁶⁴ Taylor. *The Malaise of Modernity*. p.39

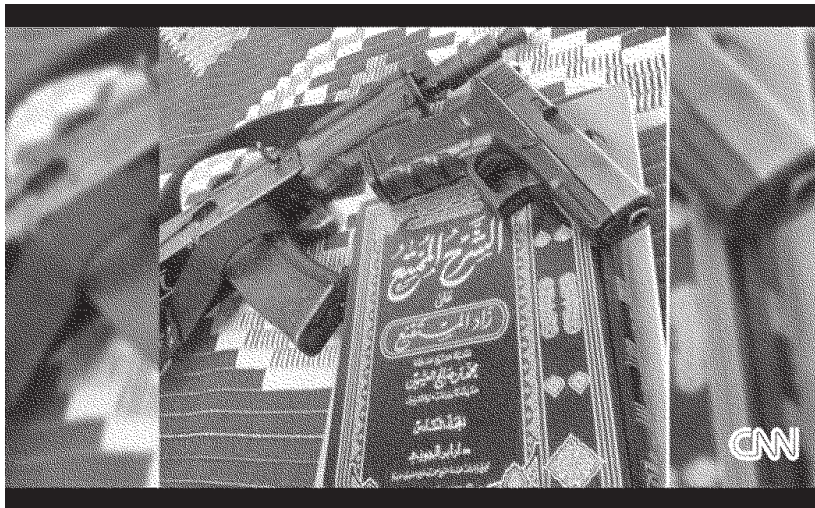
⁶⁵ *Ibid.* p.59

the structural impossibility of “Society” itself.⁶⁶ Let us take a look at Jihadi John for instance: he can be compared to the figure of the saint, occupying the place of *objet petit a*, of a pure object, somebody undergoing radical subjective destitution, as he became what we all recognize as an archetypal villain, a fetish perfectly constructed to be recognizable worldwide, and to give voice to the spectre of fanaticism. Come and join us and we will entertain you, despite entertainment means destruction and war, come and belong, although belonging means self-annihilation (especially in the case of women). Enjoyment constitutes the support of the ideological effect, and thus the framework of fantasy structures our satisfaction. The West is the symptom which embodies social antagonism; in fact by analysing the symptom, ISIS could recognize in their excesses, which they attribute to the West, some truth about themselves, and I think – also this works the other way around – we can consider also these extreme cases symptoms of our own malaise.

In the fantasy scene the desire is not satisfied, but constructed, as through fantasy we learn how to desire: it functions as a construction, an imaginary scenario filling out the void, a mandate which to identify with.⁶⁷ As the subject is alienated and empty, the appearance is essential: we must maintain the appearance. What is hysteria if not an articulation of the incapacity of the subject to assume fully and without restrain the symbolic mandate, that is to say, be recognized and accepted by others?

⁶⁶ Žižek. The Sublime Object of Ideology. p.142

⁶⁷ Ibid. p.128



AK47 and Koran
(Aqsa Mahamood post on Facebook)

Method • The problem seems irresolvable after all: the subject and the real are in fact void, as the essence itself consists in this series of external determinations.⁶⁸ “For Deleuze, there are no definitive solutions to problems, solutions are just repeated attempts to deal with the problem, with its impossible-real. Problems themselves, not solutions, are true or false.”⁶⁹ In fact problems are universal, while solutions and answers are particular. We are different individuals, living the same planet, confronting, and sometimes fighting each other. In the name of the ideal of authenticity, defining our identity means to unfold it and articulate it, this involves the use of an adequate language, although we eventually need to say something for which no right words exist. The structure of reality itself is problematic if we consider that actual reality can only be grasped as the sum of answers to virtual universal problems. In *Difference and Repetition*, Deleuze compares answers to signs, which are opposed to representations: the former are direct and arbitrary, while the latter are mediate and various.⁷⁰

In fact all the philosophical literary sources I have used to write this paper eventually end up in the realm of art, as it constitutes a valid example, or even an exception in the making of a language, as creative *praxis*. Žižek, Deleuze and Guattari, Taylor and Heidegger refer to it regarding fundamental matters. As art used to aim to a mere *mimesis* of nature, it rather became the expression of articulated sensibility: authenticity won over reproduction, particular over universal. The development of modern art offers us a good example of the fact that the process of discovering and articulating our identity can concern either the manner or the matter; that is to say, the way we embrace any kind of tendency, and the very content of the tendency itself, which does not necessarily has to be self-referential, as one can find contentment with any external cause.⁷¹ The language of art used to be made of a cosmic syntax of the public domain, while today it is trying to transcend it.

In the practice of making, meaning is researched, while identity is in its deepest becoming: “an actual thing must change, become something different, in order to express something. Whereas, the expressed virtual thing does not change, only its relation to other virtual things, other intensities and Ideas changes.”⁷² Here I find a parallel with religion, as Eliade states that as the sacred irrupts, “any object becomes something else, yet it continues to remain itself, for it continues to participate to its cosmic milieu.”⁷³ These switches are related to very different contexts, but still

⁶⁸ Ibid. p.242

⁶⁹ Žižek. *Deleuze's Platonism: Ideas as Real*. 2007. Accessed December 26, 2014. <http://www.lacan.com/zizplato.htm>

⁷⁰ Williams, James. *Gilles Deleuze's Difference and Repetition: a Critical Introduction and Guide*, in Žižek, *Deleuze's Platonism: Ideas as Real*. <http://www.lacan.com/zizplato.htm>

⁷¹ Taylor. *The Malaise of Modernity*. p.96

⁷² Williams, James. *Gilles Deleuze's Difference and Repetition: a Critical Introduction and Guide*, in Žižek, *Deleuze's Platonism: Ideas as Real*. <http://www.lacan.com/zizplato.htm>

⁷³ Eliade. *The Sacred and the Profane*. p.12

aim to solve the same problem. At this point I want to quote the Icelandic artist Sigurdur Gudmundsson, who states in an interview that the artist is a spiritual junky:⁷⁴ “we can only try to be what we are, to become the one we are, but we need to feed our spiritual needs”.⁷⁵

Indeed there are a million ways to bear an empty existence, as determined space can be filled with finite actual things. Nevertheless we need to take the alienation proper to language as such into consideration, as we tend to discuss universal truths, we should be aware of the social bond that influences our convictions, its performative function rather than its effective sincerity.

⁷⁴ Idea Parade - Sigurdur Gudmundsson, 2013. <http://vimeo.com/81495672>.

⁷⁵ Book Launch: Dancing Horizon, The Photo Works of Sigurdur Gudmundsson 1970-1982 - 04-10-2014, 2014. <http://vimeo.com/108206904>.

Conclusion

So what is this object that fills this void? Why does it always have to be about everything and never about nothing? How come that us human beings naturally tend to the universal, and find it so difficult to cope with the particular? Is it really so?

I understood that the void is something that wants to be filled, and synonymous with chaos. That man is unable to live in chaos, so tries to make a cosmos out of it. Also, that the void is a condition inherent to the subject, so it is existential and not contingent. Well, this tendency that we have to aim for the bigger picture, I suspect it deals with the need of recognition and belonging. As we are not isolated figures, we define our meaning according to what we see around us. Since we live together, we look after universal solutions for universal problems. For my case, I prefer not to bend to any given status, but I understand how for others, embracing something with all their strength and energy can be as important. I accept the fact that I do not have an immediate access to answers, and live with the idea that I might or might not have them one day, and I see the magic of the unknown in both cases. Still, now I see how longing for a promised paradise can give you a reason to fight, going for an exciting life rather than one of a mere survival; die for a cause, rather than bear the existence, follow to become an example, rather than feeling alienated. I wonder if this cause will ever have the chance to be less bloodthirsty and more constructive, if we will ever learn to cultivate diversity without being so terrified by it.

Nevertheless we are all going to die, while the timeline we designed for ourselves will keep on running, history will keep on being written by others posthumously. What we attempt at any case is to break this space-time matrix that we made for ourselves, and yet again get in contact with eternity somehow: as we perceive that we are limited experiences, the only way to preserve us is to maintain the status of things, that is to say the appearance of things from change and time, as unfolding diversity costs time and effort. That might be the reason why we are indeed so reluctant to this diversity. Both in art and in ideology, we need to mirror ourselves as spiritual beings, elevated above the vicissitudes of chance and change, because we are conscious of the fact that we do transform and finally decay. Establishing limits then, becomes an act of perpetuation; a container made

for illusory fact becomes the primary fact itself. So, I can finally conclude that the void is not something that needs to be filled, but rather be contained. It is the container itself that defines its content, in accordance to its context; hence it is a choice of the involucre, whether to look inside or outside in order to find a title apt to define it.

I finish by stating that this paper never aimed to find a solution for the fundamental problem it has aimed to address, nor to solve any other kind of struggle (hate, war, religion, ideology or whatsoever), but helped me eventually to define more clearly what I am and why I am doing what I do.

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Many thanks to Roberto Arista, mum, dad, bro, and the rest of the family, Luca Carboni, Sonia Kazovsky, Kim Forni, Deborah Schrijvers, Maia Wolf, Anastasija Pandilovska, Lukas Wolzak, Denise Rijnen, Bert Taken, Anton Reijnders, Gijs Assman, Paula Albuquerque, Lucas Lenglet, Eylem Aladogan, Nina Glockner, Helen Frik, Rietveld's concierge and canteen's team, Rietveld Studium Generale, and all my beloved friends and comrades

