A Politics of Disease: The Fantastic Trope and the Dismemberment of Reality

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> fabulous repetition can, through a crossing of chance and necessity, produce the new of an event
> — Jacques Derrida

The question of a politics of the fantastic trope tends to organize itself into two opposed camps. On the one hand, the fantastic discourse is perceived as simple escapism, that is, as a negation of political. On the other, it is considered as somehow inherently revolutionary, and thus articulating the political question *par excellence*. Exploring this apparent dichotomy, the following paper analyses the potential, if any, of the fantastic trope to disrupt the structuring metonymies upon which power founds and conserves its 'natural' authority, given that it is inescapably dependent upon those legitimizing metonymies for its countersignature of recognition, and thus condemned to the foreclosure of the economy of the same.[1] As a result, the question centres upon whether the fantastic trope represents only the leading edge of what is available for appropriation by power whilst at once marking an unsurpassable limit; or whether, through a combination of chance and necessity, the fantastic trope in

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[1] 'By inventing the possible on the basis of the possible, we relate the new […] to a set of present possibilities, to the present time and state of the order of the possibility that provides for the new the conditions of its status. This statutory economy of public invention does not break the *psyché*, does not pass beyond the mirror' (Derrida 2007, pp.43-4). In common with invention, as will be demonstrated, the fantastic trope always requires as its condition of its possibility a countersignature of recognition, and thus its 'statutory economy' inescapably encloses us within the economy of the same.

its radical singularity retains the uncanny potential to crack the mirror that shows us only ourselves.

Provisionally, we define the fantastic as an 'improper' trope signifying that which is outside of, *if not necessarily contrary to*, that which is commonly understood as possible according to a generalized perception of what constitutes the real at a particular time and place. In contrast, the 'proper' trope (what Derrida defines as the Aristotelian 'good metaphor' (Derrida 1984, p.237) is that which claims to mirror a unified sense that is both independent of, and identical with, its articulation, and thus, in denying discursive mediation by suggesting the possible identification of tenor and vehicle, 'stresses the possible recuperation of a stable meaning or set of meanings' (Man 1979, p.46). Meaning, however, can always go astray, can always—no matter what determined univocity is attributed to the metaphorical function—'venture forth alone, unloosed from the very thing it aims at [...] from the truth which attunes it to its referent' (Derrida 1984, p.241). This is because the trope is, by definition, a supplement for—and thus the mark of—an original absence, an absence that necessarily remarks its syntactical supplement as nontruth. The presupposed truth of the proper is thus always already lost, multiplied and disseminated through interpretations that are always therefore '*improper*'—all tropes are, in other words, 'bad metaphors' already at risk of being carried away. Moreover, given that *every* signifiying act is, in a strict sense, constituted as metaphor, *every* such act can therefore always become 'unloosed' from its 'proper' sense. The fantastic trope, as a vehicle without a tenor and thus *explicitly* lacking any *claim* to represent an extratextual reality/truth, is therefore a signifier that articulates the hidden absence at the root of *every* metaphor. That this claim is

lacking, however, is not to say that it cannot or will not be *read* in reference to a reality outside of the text—as allegory, hyperbole, etc. Indeed, given that the referential function of language is always irreducibly there, it is in fact impossible to avoid such a reading.

In that it is only possible to articulate the discursive specificity of the fantastic trope by positioning it against a 'ground' of empirical experience (variously and necessarily determined, and thus delimited, by cultural factors), it thus becomes necessary to embark upon a brief detour in order to establish as far as is possible what is designated here by the phrase 'empirical experience'; and further, given the ubiquity of 'bad metaphor' as the condition of possibility for language, if it is ever actually possible to rigorously separate the fantastic (as grounded) from experience itself (as that which grounds). That *all* language in its broadest sense—*and, therefore, as discursively-constructed subjects, all human existence*—'is' metaphorical thus posits, and is posited by, the nonidentical fantasticity that 'is' articulated being (being articulated).[2] Hence Nietzsche's assertion that we must all view ourselves as that most fantastic of beings, 'the truly nonexistent, i.e., as a constant becoming in time, space, and causality, or, in other words, as empirical reality' (Nietzsche c.1872, cited in Man 1979, p.91). Thus, not only is all *narrative* necessarily implicated in the fantastic, 'but the event itself is already a representation, *because all empirical experience is in essence fantastic*' (Man 1979, p.91; my emphasis). It is therefore necessary, if one wishes to avoid arriving 'at an empiricist reduction of knowledge and a fantastic ideology of truth,' to follow Derrida's advice and 'substitute another articulation

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[2] The severe syntactical strain of this sentence is symptomatic. All this, however, is not to say that 'is' nothing other than language: as Christopher Fynsk remarks, '[t]here "is" an other of language, but it is given to us in its alterity only insofar as it is written' (Fynsk 1991, p.xxv). The phrase 'articulated being (being articulated)' is Jean-Luc Nancy's.

for the (maintained or erased) classical opposition of metaphor and concept' (1984, pp.262-3). As beings without ontological grounding, rather only the bottomless chessboard of *différance*, of *trace*, our experience in the dissemination of 'bad metaphor' *constitutes* reality. This is not, however, to submit to nihilism: the destruction of the suprasensible world (essence, truth) simultaneously abolishes the negated world of mere appearance—in its place, life alone in all its fantasticity is affirmed. Only this experience opens up being to the differential affirmation of transfiguration.

Given this essential fantasticity of all experience, it nevertheless remains necessary for our purposes to differentiate the specific fantastic trope from all other (similarly metaphorical) instances of signification, only that this can no longer be thought in terms of ground and grounded. What we are calling the specific fantastic trope is but one figure amid a world of figures. Indeed, it is precisely *because* of its essential fantasticity that empirical experience, in a strict sense, ceases to be a trope, 'for it cannot be closed off or replaced by the knowledge of its reduced condition' (Man 1996, p.116). Put another way, experience ceases to be fantastic in the generally-understood ('proper') sense of the term: 'its quotation or repetition of a previously established semiosis' is '[l]ike a stutter, […] it makes what it keeps repeating [here, its fantasticity] worthless and meaningless' (Man 1996, p.116). Thus the fantasticity of existence always already petrifies into the 'proper' and the 'natural', such tropes having become 'naturalized' (to a greater or lesser degree) in that their rhetoricity (or fantasticity) has been effaced. Thus, rather than ground and grounded, the relationship of empirical experience to the fantastic is one of concealment to display. It is precisely because of this, as will be shown, that the singular manifestation of the fantastic

trope, in its *explicit* denial of extratextual reference as that which is not in what is or may be, retains the potential to disorient and displace by articulating the impropriety and unnaturalness of that which is perceived as the most proper and natural.

In *The Flowers of Tarbes Or, Terror in Literature* (1941), literary critic Jean Paulhan offers a conventional definition of the 'trope of the unexpected'—one that incorporates, and is exemplified by, the fantastic trope—as a kind of synecdochic, or metonymic, abuse:

> [i]n order for an image to appear to us as unexpected, the two objects it brings together still have to be familiar. We can be moved by the sight of a flying horse, because we already have a familiar, almost commonplace, idea of a horse and of wings. If the horse itself were astonishing to us in every respect, we would be no more surprised to see it fly than run (2006, p.86).

According to Paulhan's exemplary definition, the fantastic trope is thus not (and can never be) a 'pure' invention in the strict sense of the radically other, but rather is a species of *chimaera*, that mythical monster with the head of a lion, the tail of a snake and the body of a goat specifically referred to by Socrates in the one dialogue concerned primarily with *rhetoric* (Plato 1973, §229).[3] To further clarify this definition, it is useful to turn to Paul de Man who, in 'The Epistemology of Metaphor' (1978), writes of a trope—

> capable of inventing the most fantastic entities by dint of the *positional power* inherent in language. [It] can *dismember* the texture of reality and *reassemble* it in the most capricious of ways (1996, p.42; my emphasis).

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[3] A *chimaera*, it should be remembered throughout, can never be subsumed to a hybrid third-term, as it permits no reconciliation or dialectical resolution—the *chimaera* remains always multiple.

The name he attributes to this disarticulating, positing trope is *catachresis*, generally described as either an implied or extravagant metaphor, and traditionally defined in handbooks of rhetoric as an abuse and/or a misuse. Defined, in other words, as *improper usage*, de Man's catachresis coincides with 'bad metaphor' in that the force of its (re)positional power—its material inscription—lies in its potential for the contiguous resituating of displaced elements generally considered incommensurable. As such, and like Socrates' *chimaera*, de Man's definition of *catachresis* rests upon its *improper metonymy*. It is in terms of this improper metonymy, and of the relation between *invention* and *use* and, in particular, *improper* usage, that we will begin to delineate a politics of the fantastic trope, one which situates it both within and, potentially at least, violently against the foreclosure of the economy of the same.

The fantastic—trope or genre, text or invention—understood as an improper metonymic reconstruction requires first of all that 'metonymy' be understood not only as a *spatial* trope but also as both *temporal* and *conceptual* contiguity (this is not, however, to suggest that such distinctions can ever be absolutely maintained.)[4] Improper spatial metonymy, for example, structures the political photomontages of John Heartfield, whereas improper temporal metonymy structures the fabulous narrative, as when a man awakes to discover himself transformed into a beetle. Finally, and coextensive with both of the above, improper conceptual metonymy organizes so-called 'invention' itself, be it of concepts, commodities,

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[4] These three forms, it is important to note, do not exist necessarily, or indeed ever, in isolation: the apparently 'pure' spatiality of collage always retains at least the potential for constructing a temporal narrative; the 'pure' metonymic relations of cause and effect are inevitably 'determined by conceptually bonded contiguity rather than by the more obvious, spatial or temporal proximity' (Miller 1992, p. 66); and 'pure' conceptual contiguity depends upon both temporal and spatial positioning in order to be comprehensible.

or stories. Thus, the *chimaera* of a Hitler-moth in Heartfield's *German Natural History: Metamorphosis* (1934) unites in the metonymically tied concepts of 'fascism' and 'death'; similarly, Kafka's 'lowly commercial traveller' (2005, p.89) is tied to the insignificance of an insect through the contiguous concept of 'capitalism'. Inventiveness, as Derrida demonstrates, requires a prevailing code against which the radical discontinuity of the 'new' can be *recognized*, and yet which thus denies the very possibility of that discontinuity by which the 'new' defines itself. It is this necessary *countersignature* of recognized value, one that should in fact deny its status as an authentic invention, which guarantees its positioning within the economy of the same. In precisely the same way, the fantastic trope too forms an incongruity that, positioned against the necessarily prevailing code, thus speaks of that incongruity. The fantastic is necessarily invention, invention is necessarily fantastic, and the improper, non-dialectical metonymy of their shared construction always already ensures the impossibility of an authentic invention of the fantastical other. In the West there are, argues Derrida, only two major types of *authorized* examples for invention: people *may* invent stories, and they *may* invent machines. He then offers two examples which—'since the politics of invention […] is always at one and the same time a politics of culture and a politics of war'—are not just any examples: *printing* and *nuclear weaponry* (2007, p.10). Thus the economy of the same in its totality—

> guarantees both the irrefutable power and the closure of the classical concept of invention, its politics, its technoscience, its institutions. These are not to be rejected, criticized, or combated, far from it—and all the less so since *the economic circle of invention is only a movement for reappropriating exactly what it sets in motion, the differance of the other*. And that movement cannot be recast

as meaning, existence, or truth (2007, p.46; my emphasis).

It is metonymy that structures the economy of the same, and improper metonymy that opens a space *within* that statutory economy. For a simple demonstration of this, we need only to refer to Donald Miller's *The Reason of Metaphor* (1992), in which he cites the difficulties encountered by researchers in their attempt to invent a synthetic fibre paintbrush equal in performance to its natural antecedent: the initial attempt to *mimic* a natural bristle having proved unsuccessful, it was only by their coming to 'see' the brush incongrously as a pump (and thus viewing the spaces between the bristle as channels through which paint is to be sucked or pushed) that they were able to conceive of an 'inventive' solution. Here one might object that, rather than an example of improper metonymy, the solution was the result of *substitution*—commonly defined as *metaphor*. This is, however, to ignore the fact that the solution was the result of *reposit(ion)ing* in both spatial and conceptual contiguity two usually discrete elements in order to perceive similarity and ignore difference. It is just this tropological tendency towards overlap that leads Miller, in defining his own typology of the metaphor, to argue that the distinction between metaphor and metonymy can never be rigorously sustained. Although Miller divides metaphor into seven modes—relation and classification, analogous **r**epetition, translation, exchange (metaphorical equivalences of value), synecdoche, opposition, and contiguity (metonymy)—he is careful to make it clear that none of these modes are absolutely distinct from any other, that their 'embankments are so porous' (1992, p.67) that every example of one mode can be 're-thought' as any of the others: 'any metaphor (proper), for example, can be re-thought as an

homology, a synecdoche or as a metonym' (1992, p.59). What is unclear, however, is to what *extent*, through how many intermediate stages, Miller is prepared to allow for such a re-thinking—re-thinking that is the translation of translation, the substitution of metaphor, and so on, in infinite regress with all the profit and loss each movement necessarily involves. Better, perhaps, would be to say that any mode can, *in most cases*, be read—interpreted, translated, reiterated—as any other.[5]

It follows from this extensive correspondance of modes that the 'properness' (obviousness, truth, right) of contiguous relationships is, like that of the 'naturalized' or 'dead' metaphor, constituted by an accumulation of *use* (institutionalization) which 'wears away' or *effaces* their rhetoricity; an accumulation of use retroactively legitimized through the instituting of 'proper' interpretative models that give legitimacy to 'the interpretative model in question, that is, the discourse of its self-legitimation' (Derrida 1992, p.36). In this way, normative metonymies are formed through the violent exclusion of difference, effacing nonmasterable dissemination in order to produce the *illusion* of the proper, one which transforms acts of governing into 'natural' laws of the social order—the process of distribution and legitimation that Jacques Rancière terms *policing*.[6] It is precisely this illusion of order as natural that the fantastic trope both exploits and haunts.

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[5] It would, for example, be more difficult to (re)think the metaphoric substitution of a natural scene, such as a tempest, for a state of mind as a metonymical relationship.

[6] 'The police is thus first an order of bodies that defines the allocation of ways of doing, ways of being, and ways of saying, and sees that those bodies are assigned by name to a particular place and task; it is an order of the visible and the sayable that sees that a particular activity is visible and another is not, that this speech is understood as discourse and another as noise' (Rancière 1999, p.29).

In Freud's famous description of the uncanny (*das Unheimlich*, 'unhomely') as that which is produced 'when the distinction between imagination and reality is effaced, as when something that we have hitherto regarded as imaginary appears before us in reality' (1955, p.244), we can readily perceive this as an improper repositioning—as the inventive within the economy of the same that disrupts 'naturalized' proximity, causing *dis-orientation*. Regarding uncanny literature, Freud writes,

> [w]e react to [the author's] *inventions* as we would have reacted to *real experiences* […] [and thus] [w]e retain a feeling of dissatisfaction, a kind of grudge against the attempted deceit (1955, pp.250-1; my emphasis).

This haunting dissatisfaction, this grudge, this *dis-ease*, could it not be *the resented glimpse of the invented-ness of all our reality*? In this surprising, dis-orientating glimpse of being, we should recall Heidegger's assertion that Dasein's surprise at the fact of being—and thus of its abandonment—may be experienced in the form of the uncanny, that same uncanny that marks the emptiness left by the loss of faith in divine images. Such uncanny dis-ease is a finding-out-of-place, an interval of homelessness—*dislocation*—in the ease of *one's self* in *one's place*.

> This uncanny is in reality nothing new or alien, but something which is familiar and old-established in the mind and *which has become alienated from it only through the process of repression* (Freud 1955, p.244; my emphasis).

The fantastic haunts our received truths, our commonsense illusion of being at home: the uncanny, the fantastic, makes our home strange and unwelcome, the familiar becomes unfamiliar. *A secret is revealed*. But this secret is not the revelation (*alētheia*) of a hidden

truth and thus a reinscription within the familiar essence/appearance dichotomy: such essential truth is always already denied. Its revelation is rather a revaluation—the revealing of a fundamental artifice by means of another, *other* artifice. In this way we can accept the conventional definition of the metaphorical vehicle as a borrowed dwelling, but—and this is the secret that the fantastic disturbs—only so long as we *affirm* that reality *tout court* is metaphorical, that the vehicle is rather a borrowing of another, always anterior borrowing. Its non-exclusive (improper) repositioning can be read as the ghost that haunts Plato's representation of *khо̄ra*: 'hardly real', it is apprehended by an always inadequate 'dreamlike sense' (i.e. non-sense) only 'when all sense is absent' (that is, when what has once been naturalized as 'true' is no longer apprehended as such) … such are our fantastic, dis-locating dreams of flying, of living returns of the dead—of vertiginous drops into the abyss that 'provides a home for all created [or posited] things' (1977, §52*b-c*).

Dislocation and dis-ease mark the fantastic trope's potential—which is not to state that this potential is *necessarily* actualized—to open up codified thinking by deconstructing the constative-performative (proper-improper) dichotomy upon which it rests: to delegitimize by denaturalizing, by making visible what is 'normally' (i.e. normatively) effaced. We thus propose to call the *inventive-fantastic* trope that which, conforming to our initial definition, (re)produces the singular event of *potential* interruption within the structuring metonymies upon which power depends by reinscribing—as non-necessary and non-natural—the constructedness

that has been effaced in and by power's normative discursive structures.[7]

The question remains, however, as to how can such inventive-fantastic repositioning, given that it must remain within the framework of comprehension, ever *actually* constitute a political challenge to those legitimizing metonymies when it must always depend upon them for its countersignature? Is it not in fact more likely that the non-sense of the fantastic, *once recognized* (for example, evaluated as 'literary' and/or 'useful'), represents rather only the leading edge of what is available for assimilation by power, *as well as* marking out the coordinates of a boundary beyond which power dictates one should not trespass? We thus arrive at our central question. A clown, writes the Hungarian dissident George Konrád,

> reveals the circus director's philosophy for taming animals and keeping order under the Big Top. Meanwhile he realizes that he also happens to belong to the troupe (1989, p.xii).

Inevitably, in its *use*, the *chimaeric* impropriety of the fantastic trope can, in common with every figure, always and rapidly become 'worn away'—*use* here used in the double sense of *useful* and *overuse*. The useful all too soon becomes a commonplace commodity, whereas a trope that through overuse becomes thoroughly conventional is one which—for that moment at least—has ceased to haunt the propriety of our effaced metonymies, in its acceptability or ease of use the ghost having apparently being laid to rest. But what then of those other uses—uses that are neither useful nor overused—

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[7] The inventive-fantastic trope thus accords with Rancière's precise definition of the *political* as a singular event opposed to policing: 'Political activity is *whatever shifts a body from the place assigned to it or changes a place's destination*. It makes visible what had no business being seen […] it makes understood as discourse what was once only heard as noise' (Rancière 1999, p.30).

of the specific fantastic trope whose appearance causes not even the slightest tremor? The contemporary mainstream genre of fantasy in the West, for example, would seem to offer no such challenge to the metonymies of power.

The inventive-fantastic, we have argued, disorientates and undermines when it reveals the arbitrary constructedness of the legitimizing metaphorico-metonymies, and yet it similarly cannot escape from the foreclosure of the economy of the same. This paradox is the reason why the fantastic does not, as Rosemary Jackson suggests,[8] everywhere and always constitute a challenge to (and subversion of) authority: within the fantastic trope resides the potential *both* to disorient *and* to conserve existing power structures, it is neither and both subversive and conservative. Most often, it functions *within*, rather than *at*, the boundaries of the dominant economy of the same, that is, within the overarching proper metonymic framework and thus, despite its apparent incongruity, it does not disrupt the naturalizations of power. Whether it polices or politicizes, whether it (re)produces the same or posits a monstrous dis-memberment, is rather determined by the structuring metonymies of the sociohistorical context within which each is singularly repositioned. One result of this is that overused—and thus used-up—tropes can be improperly recontextualized: in a fairytale the image of an unassisted human defying gravity does not appear incongruous (its metonymical impropriety effaced, 'used-up' by generic convention), yet the reiteration of such an image within a

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[8] '[F]antastic literature points to or suggests the basis upon which cultural order rests, for it opens up, for a brief moment, on to disorder, on to illegality, on to that which lies outside the law, that which is outside dominant value systems. The fantastic traces the unsaid and the unseen of culture: that which has been silenced, made invisible, covered over and made 'absent'' (Jackson 1981, p.4). We agree that the fantastic trope *can*, indeed, do all of those things, but not that this is inevitably, or even often, the case.

narrative which had until that moment seemed tightly bound by the conventions of realism (thus creating a horizon of expectation) is likely to demand a response in its disrupting of 'proper' temporal metonymy by making visible the impropriety of its discursive constructedness. Such a fantastic event can, however, disorientate for more than this disruption of generic conventions: imagine, for example, just such a text appearing within a power structure that depends for its conservation-legitimation on precisely that naturalized temporal metonymy of conventional realist narrative. In this way one can perceive the dis-orientating potential of the scene within Milan Kundera's *The Book of Laughter and Forgetting* (1978) in which a ring of communists dance up into the Czechoslovak sky through the smoke of their cremated comrades—disorientation far exceeding the delimitations of 'literary' estrangement. Reading such words at such a time and place, one may, in that instant, feel them impact upon the language of one's body; may, just for a moment and in common with the narrator of this scene, experience at once the *limits* and the *limitations* of one's discursive world, its gravity that forces one relentlessly to the ground.

Returning to de Man's elaboration of catachresis, we can now better understand his claim that even the most innocent of catachreses hides within it a monstrous, a fantastical *chimaeric* potential:

> when one speaks of the legs of the table or the face of the mountain, catachresis is already turning into prosopopeia, and one begins to perceive a world of *potential ghosts and monsters* (1996, p.42; my emphasis).

Despite 'the face of a mountain' having become a conventional—used-up—metonym, its *remains remain*: it is still haunted by the

incongruity of its founding, and by its potential for monstrous reposit(ion)ing-recontextualization. Furthermore, as 'a purely empty, positional act' (Man 1996, p.173), the proper narrative of the self is thus itself a conserving or normalizing fantastic trope: we too are monstrous, chimaerical narratives always interrupted by the irony that constitutes us; narratives that are remarked as such by the uncanny dis-location of dis-ease.

Given that that which conserves at one place can disorient when *translated* (with all its inevitable differential violence) into another, and similarly, that which disrupts at one moment may come to conserve in another as the economy of the same adapts to reappropriate it, the fantastic trope therefore has a *historicity*. And yet, how can the fantastic—the inventive—have a *past*? We have reached an aporia: the radically *untimely* that carries along its own *historicity*— and in this is made visible the workings, the machinery of the economy of the same. This can be perceived most readily with the useful invention, but also in the gradual reappropriation by the mainstream of what was once the shocking avant-garde.[9]   As Nietzsche writes, this drive to expropriate is fuelled by the desire to alleviate fearful dis-ease, to neutralize *dread* (*das Entsetzen*):

> [t]hus there is sought not only some kind of explanation
> as cause, but a *selected* and *preferred* kind of explanation,
> the kind by means of which the feeling of the strange,
> new, unexperienced is most speedily and most frequently
> abolished – the *most common* explanations (1968, p.51).

In this abolishment through reappropriation by and to the same (those easy illusions of petrified 'truths') we thus discover that

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[9] Inventions that are useless to capital are always dismissed as 'fantastical', as *noise*; whereas the useful invention—requiring as a condition of its productiveness to capital a labour-force to be exploited—is rapidly dispossessed of its fantasticity by appropriation to the statutory economy.

familiar mistaking of consequence for cause which Nietzsche calls the corruption of reason. In this way the subversive disorientation of the inventive-fantastic is necessarily contiguous with—and most often overlaps—the leading edge of what is available for reappropriation or commodification within the economy of the same (an expropriation that is also necessarily a translation) and from which we can never escape. Thus, it is the very impossibility of the inventive-fantastic that impels its challenge to our structuring metaphorico-metonymies —that is, to conceive the illegitimate, to think the unthinkable, to be *untimely*—impossible given that we, as discursively-constituted subjects, are unavoidably constructed within the Foucauldian 'regime of truth.' Their time—and their space—'is' not ours. The invention of the other is impossible, hence it is the only possible invention. As Derrida remarks, the writing of the other—

> works at not letting itself be enclosed or dominated by
> this economy of the same in its totality […] The coming
> of invention cannot make itself foreign to repetition and
> memory. For the other is not the new (2007, p.46).

Impossible, the fantastic trope occupies no one position, is rather ex-position, always-already nomadic: a monstrous *chimaera*, it shifts and is shifted according to the equally metonymic configurations of power. Necessarily violent, the inventive-fantastic thus seeks, in its radical singularity, to destabilize the violent suppression of difference that structures the economy of the same.

In this way its impropriety functions in the manner of disease in the Hegelian system, rupturing any concept of totality in that as one part moves to isolate itself as a singularity, the 'all-pervading process of [totality] is thus obstructed' and further, is put at risk as the particular disease (or dis-ease) threatens the dominant, legitimizing

discourse in its entirety: violence that threatens its exposure in the exposition of its singularity (Hegel 1970, §371).[10] This is not, however, to overestimate the inventive-fantastic trope: each impossible (in that it cannot be determined) singularity 'is' indeed a 'mere' instance, a gadfly barely noticed about the altar of power at once both radically (re)positioned upon (material) appearance and subject always to shifting and drifting. However, as singular *event*—and *advent*—of dis-ease, it nevertheless retains the affirmative potential to contaminate the defining myths of power's legitimacy. Such fantastic reposit(ion)ing always exceeds, and thus ex-poses, its categories—in conforming to no preordained model it is undecidable, a position without supposition, an opening up to the risk of infection. The term 'dis-ease' thus allies at this point with both the Freudian uncanny and Nietzschean dread—recalling too that *entsetzen*, in addition to 'dread' and 'fright(en)', also carries the meanings to *dismiss* and to *relieve from a position*. In other words, such dread is that of being dis-placed from a 'proper' position, the 'unrest in Dasein […] as awakening and vigilance' (Heidegger 1991, I, p. 104). Dis-ease and *entsetzen*, unrest and *unheimlich*—the glimmerings of ghosts and monsters—all signify the body's response to *untimely* trans*figuration*: an uncanny shudder of dread in refuting via vigilant awakening the petrification of/as 'truth' in exposure to multiplicity.

To perceive the limit of the proper is to be torn away whilst remaining inescapably within the economy of the same, and it is thus, as singlar manifestation of *chance* and *necessity* which improperly constitutes the *metonymic* machine, that the inventive-fantastic trope has the potential to posit an a-signifying rupture of/in the economy

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[10] The inventive-fantastic trope is not, however, a placed and recognized body-part such as Hegel's cancerous 'organ', rather it acts more like a viral infection—in its exposing the body becomes monstrous.

of the same by/in *offering* (to) it(self) this affirmative possibility of Nietzschean *entsetzen*, of *creative* repetition. Chance *is* the necessity of creative repetition. Undeterminable, the inventive-fantastic singularity interrogates the fixated boundaries of the proper that the conserving-fantastic reinforces by reiteration (these two points can, of course, be the 'same' trope iterated across spacetime). Similarly, it thus *offers a possibility* of transfiguring the 'self' in its being-toward, of momentarily recognizing in/of the 'self' a fantastic being not *necessarily* condemned to the monotony of the proper. In this inheres its heterological political force, interrupting normative *identification* in both its 'internal' repositioning-reiterating and its 'external' translation-recontextuality: or in, to use Derrida's term, its iterability (cf. 1988).

It is for this reason, as we trace very briefly below, that Soviet power, in seeking to legitimize and conserve its authority in the years after the Revolution, attempts to systematically exclude the fantastic trope in the hope of eradicating any such risk of dis-ease from the social body properly conceived—one requiring a prescriptive therapy in order to efface its contaminating impropriety.

The valorization in the Soviet Union of the proper temporal metonymy of linear narrative in socialist realism must be understood according to the normative myth of *nonreversibility*, that is, of *historical progress*, which functions to legitimize the power of the vanguard Party. Inevitably, however, as Roland Barthes noted long ago, *every* type of structuring myth—i.e. the narrative constituted by normative metonymies—*is inevitably opposed to revolution*, that there is—

> only one language which is not mythical, it is the language of man as a producer: whenever man speaks in

order to transform reality and no longer preserve it as an
image (1993, p.146).

Such creative transformation is precisely the destruction of the claim
of the One to explicate universal right, and thus it is creative
transformation which ultimately must be prohibited at all costs as the
postrevolutionary state seeks to legitimize-conserve its authority.
Moreover, given that within the Soviet system the Party, as the
condition of its *legitimacy*, must not only define but also navigate the
continuum of history towards its preordained narrative conclusion, it
must therefore, in order to *conserve* its power, prohibit precisely its
being shocked by the new.[11] It thus becomes clear why the fantastic
trope in particular would find itself both implicitly and explicitly
targeted for exclusion by the Party's normative structuring, in that its
undermining of proper temporal metonymy by its non-effacing
positioning necessarily cuts across any 'rational' models that seek to
organize the future from the past. Kafka's texts are exemplary in this
regard: despite an initially positive Soviet response, they were
subsequently and inevitably condemned precisely because of their
incommensurability with the *telos* of the State system. As Georges
Bataille writes, that the aim 'is postponed in time and time is limited:
this alone leads Kafka to regard the goal in itself as a lure' (1985, pp.
152-3). Indeed, what must be excluded are just such Kafkan
interruptions, chimaerical improprieties that undermine the
structuring myth of the (forever displaced and deferred) goal.

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[11] Thus, as the *time* of revolution is transformed into *stasis*, it becomes clear why
the threat of improper metonymy—of inventive repositioning—continues to
constitute the strategy of class struggle *only beyond* its borders: 'the terrain of class
war, as civil war, is *spatial confusion*' (Buck-Morss 2000, p.23; my emphasis).

A similar paradox exists within the spatial metonymy of expansionism that
structures nation-states, in that upon the failure of the 'bold advance' of democracy
towards its *telos*, it inevitably finds itself replaced by 'pure faith in the powers of
time' (Rancière 2007, p.34).

Nevertheless, the years immediately following the October Revolution witnessed the continuation and proliferation of a huge variety of Russian avant-garde practices, practices which, as Jean-Luc Nancy affirms, communicated with the 'extremity of play […] in fulgurating bursts' (1991, p.7). Among this 'turbulent movement' and 'rapid shift in forms' (Malevich 1919, cited in Buck-Morss 2000, p.122), the fantastic discourse played a central role, leading the socialist writer and head of the Serapion Brotherhood Yevgeny Zamyatin to proclaim in 1923 the fantastic as the trope most closely allied with revolution itself:[12]

> [i]n this new projection, the best-known formulas and objects become displaced, fantastic, familiar-unfamiliar. This is why it is so logical for literature today to be drawn to the fantastic plot, or to the amalgam of reality and fantasy (Zamyatin 1923, cited in Ginsburg 1972, p.viii).

Paradoxically, however, and as one factor among others, at this stage it was the structuring metonymies that actually *permitted* rather than *prohibited* the flowering of the avant-garde. According to Leninist reflection theory the arts are an epiphenomenon directly determined by the economic base, and thus, given that history's utopian conclusion has already been guaranteed by the *parousia* of the Party, all art would thus inevitably become 'proper' Communist Art irrespective of short-term developments. Hence, two years after the Revolution, Kazimir Malevich could still proclaim creation to be 'a question of constructing a device to *overcome our endless progress*' (Malevich 1919, cited in Groys 1992, p.15).

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[12] Transliteration conventions of Russian names vary. While I have tried to adhere to one standard throughout, the names of cited authors appear as printed in those sources.

It was, however, possible even then to perceive the foregleam of socialist realist homogenisation. Even as it rejected *proletkult*'s attempt to establish a 'proper' artistic hegemony, in 1920 the Party nevertheless passed a resolution declaring its intention to direct the arts towards the further construction of socialism. More explicit is the address made the following year by Anatolii Lunacharskii, Commissar of Enlightenment and guardian of the avant-garde, in which he declared:

> the *natural* form of [the masses'] art will be the traditional and classical one, clear to the point of *transparency*, resting […] on *healthy convincing realism* and on eloquent, transparent symbolism in decorative and monumental forms (Lunacharskii 1921, cited in Cooke 1993, p.89; my emphasis).

Conversely, concern regarding reappropriation by and to the same is already evident in the 1923 manifestoes of the *Lef* group—which included both Vladimir Mayakovsky and Boris Arvatov—in which the fear of immobilization is manifest in their desire to purge 'those who elevate separate stages of our struggle into a new canon and model', and again in their final sloganeering rejection of 'all those frozen in time'. The direction from which the perceived threat emanated is made clear in their bemoaning of Proletart's partial degeneration 'into official writers, oppressed by bureaucratic language and the repetition of political ABC's' (Mayakovsky 1923).

Following Lenin's death, inter-Party struggles resulted in an increasing focus on the arts, and in a 1925 resolution ('On Party Policy in the Field of Literature') the Central Committee affirmed the inevitability of the Party's 'capture of the leading positions in the realm of literature' (cited in Rhüle 1969, p.134). From this point on, the avant-garde was rapidly annexed to the socialist and realist and,

contemporaneously, the undecidable, the polysemic, necessarily excluded from the heroically proper temporal metonymy of The Plan as orchestrated by the Party. This can clearly be seen in the changed attitude of the *Lef* group, which throughout the mid-to-late-1920s came to increasingly view art as an auxiliary to the Party. Writing in 1926 of the need for artists to work alongside scholars, engineers, and administrators, Arvatov thus marks the midway point in the expropriation of the fantastic by the *telos* of socialist realism:

> [f]igurative art as an art of fantasy can be considered justified when for its creators and for society as a whole it serves as a *preliminary* step in the *transformation* of all society (Arvatov 1926, cited in Groys 1992, pp.25-7; my emphasis).

In other words, with society *already* transformed, the fantastic interruption of homelessness could no longer be justified.

By the end of the decade, avant-garde projects were permitted only so long as they functioned within the proper metonymical framework, and the policing of the inventive-fantastic trope, despite the 1928 staging of Mayakovsky's fantastical tale *The Bedbug*, was now almost complete; awaiting only its 'proper' reinscription within the normative economy as the 'revolutionary romanticism' appropriate to socialist realism—as the curing of physical debilities by sheer will-power, for example, or as the Stakhanovite body or the superhuman victories over bourgeois wreckers. Zamyatin was branded a traitor in the press, 'repeatedly attacked as a "bourgeois intellectual," *out of tune* with the revolution. […] the object of a frenzied campaign of vilification' (Ginsburg 1972, pp.ix-x). A campaign that Zamyatin claims was a 'manhunt […] unprecedented in Soviet literature' (1972, p.xvi). The fate of Zamyatin in fact

embodies that of the 'revolutionary' trope he championed, in that he was presented by the state with only two choices: self-critique (and reinscription within revolutionary romanticism), or total expulsion.

Inaugurated in 1934 and defined as demanding of the artist 'the truthful, historically complete *representation of reality* […] linked with the task of *ideological transformation and education* of workers in the spirit of socialism' (cited in Weissbort 1974, p.13; emphasis mine), socialist realism is thus marked at its inception by a paradox: requiring simultaneously a 'truthful' representation of what already *is* (*alētheia*, *mimēsis*) *and* a 'transformative' represention of what *will be* (ideology, pedagogy). As a result, and with varying degrees of (self)consciousness, socialist realism must always already contradict both basic premises at once: for if the reality is anterior to the text that is only its imitation (*mimēsis*) and not a construction of the text itself, not only would there be no pleasure in the perception of resemblance, but any didacticism would therefore be redundant. It is, however, a double movement that serves a precise and essential function: the two sides of socialist realism, the *mimetic* and the *didactic*, are specular manifestations of the *purge* in what are conceived of as the discontinuous domains of text and world—a repressive–idealist operation that excludes as improper all that which cannot be assimilated within the discursive structures of power.

It is this reinscription within the illusory dichotomy of proper/ improper that demands the Party deem it *socially* necessary to valorize the *transparency* of socialist realism alongside its transformative social function. The 'proper' identification of tenor and vehicle having, as Jean Baudrillard writes,

> the advantage over many other possible codes (the moral,
> the aesthetic, etc.) of appearing *rational*, while the others

seem like mere rationalizations of more or less "ideological" purposes (1981, p.158).

Thus we can see how the apparent objectivity (properness) of socialist realism is the necessary device by which a putative absence of discursive mediation—the effacing of rhetoricity—serves to conceal its function within the processes of distribution and legitimation.

In short, socialist realism, in endeavouring to construct the world through its proleptic claim to reflect it, paradoxically aims at *producing* the very condition it *requires* as its condition. Not an effect or reflection of reality, socialist realism, in the service of power, thus aids in the legitimation-conservation of its structuring metonymy— the myth of the ideal and imminent communist society—and employs the normative fiction *par excellence*, the myth of literature as a transparent and 'truthful, historically complete representation of reality', in order to do so. Erich Auerbach notes the same tendency in the didactic 'tyranny' of the Old Testament:

> its claim to absolute authority […] seeks to overcome our reality: we are to fit our own life into its world [its text], feel ourselves to be elements in its structure of universal history (1953, p.15).

This convergence within the religious sphere is not accidental: the much-simplified dialectical-materialism of Stalinism, as the Bohemian writer Ivan Klíma points out, 'offered salvation. And it worshiped a trinity: the Working Class, the Great Plan, Science' (Liehm 1971, p.367). It is this mythological dimension that results in the paradoxical shifting of socialist realism—with its desire to represent an utopian dreamworld as real—into the domain of (conserving) fantasy.

Developments in the arts of the Soviet Union in the years 1917-1934 thus serve to illustrate how legitimization-conservation processes attempt, in order to 'naturalize' an arbitrary social order, to exclude the improper metonymy of the multiplicious *chimaera* that interrupts precisely that claim to 'natural' authority. In addition, 'revolutionary romanticism' exemplifies the functioning of the conserving fantastic trope as a negation of the political. As a result, and corresponding with the bureaucratic stasis of the Stalinist period, artistic practice in the Soviet Union could no longer—

> challenge the temporality of the political revolution which, as the locomotive of history's progress, invested the party with the sovereign power to force mass compliance in history's name. […] [Art thus becomes] the servant of a political vanguard that had a monopoly over time's meaning, a cosmological understanding of history that *legitimated the use of violence against all opposing visions of social transformation* (Buck-Morss 2000, p.60; my emphasis).

However, as we have attempted to show, it is precisely because of the inherent impropriety of all signifying acts that the potential of language to posit an improper, monstrous dismemberment of the texture of reality can never be excluded—its always ex-position the chance and necessity of chimaerical caprice. Repositioned at the limits of the same, the inventive-fantastic trope necessarily remarks a threshold, and thus an ex-posing to that which is other to the proper —an exposing remarked by a singular manifestation of contaminating dis-ease. In the *face* of power, the chance and the necessity of creative repetition, of positing a ghostly hairline crack in the mirror, *remains*.

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