

Paradise on Earth as a Motto, the Price of Happiness.

What Happens to the Body in Late Capitalism.

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(Creative Work)

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Abstract:

Isn't it now guaranteed that 'paradise' can be accessible during our lifetime? Haven't you read, heard, or seen this somewhere yet? I have.

Consequently, without thinking, I fully embraced this promise. Paradise is here and there, paradise is this and that, paradise is everything, everywhere. Nonetheless it happens to be a sort of cornucopia eventually resulting in no choice. It is a repetitive and merciless empty promise. Paradise on Earth is a brutal and transformative repetition colonising bodies. Forty thousand and one times the word paradise is written down. Forty thousand and one times is the core of the thesis. It is the thesis, and it forms and materialises brutality. It forms and materialises transformation. It attempts to figure and identify the specific effect of this specific condition on the body while paradoxically trying to give a voice to this same fainting body. Paradise, can you hear, see, touch it or even dream about it? The first image that comes to my mind is comforting. A smile even lifts the corners of my mouth, the object of my desire being almost here. Sadly, paradise on Earth's ubiquity only reminds us of our failures. Up to today it is still haunting. All the way along, repetition happens to be an organ of torture as much as salvation. This research intends to take us through the work of diagnosis, and the embodied entanglement in these conditions under late capitalism.

Key words:

Alienation, Body, Disappearance, Commodification, Late Capitalism, Paradise, Repetition.

Declaration:

I declare that this thesis is my own unaided work. It is submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy at the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg. It has not been submitted before for any other degree or examination at any other university

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to be 'Audrey Salmon', written in a cursive style. The signature is contained within a light gray rectangular box.

Audrey Salmon

On the 25th day of January, 2023



AUDREY SALMON, Ph.D.

**PARADISE ON EARTH AS A MOTTO.
THE PRICE OF HAPPINESS.**

What Happens to the Body in Late Capitalism.

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The Price of Happiness.**

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Audrey Salmon, Ph.D.

- 2022 -

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**Nothing is real except that which concerns
the working of our own mind.**

Kakuzo Okakura, *The Book of Tea*, 1906.

Paradise on Earth as a Motto

Chapter I

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Chapter VIII

Paradies.

Paradise on Earth as a Motto, the Price of Happiness. What Happens to the Body in Late Capitalism.

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Johannesburg, 2022.

A Handbook to It.

To Lou, my daughter.
Art offers nuances and enhances time to think about them.
I hope you will grasp all the potentiality holds by liminality.

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A fable from a true tragedy

Paradise on Earth as a Motto

Etat des lieux / State of Play

Paradise began as a park, an orchard, the garden of Eden, the adobe of the blessed, and unexpectedly grew up into a commodity, into any commodities. As defined in the *Oxford Dictionary*, the historical concept of Paradise personified an ideal future, a perfect beautiful place, a moment of bliss. Today, in our society and in our systems, the concept of *Paradise on Earth* is a crucial tool. Colourful, polymorphous with anthropomorphic features, it is stamped on everything possible. It is the filter that renders everything desirable, everything worthy. It is the denominator, it is the pillar, it is what economic and political system is feeding the population with and this on a daily basis. It is Kaa the snake in *The Jungle Book* and “his hypnotic eyes used to manipulate unsuspecting prey and lure us into his jaws¹”. It is our dreams; it is our hope. It is our tying rope, the whip taming us. It is the carrot and stick policy. It has a million faces, yet it has been summarised into a sort of mono-aesthetic dictating what our desire and knowledge should be on a global scale. It is the guarantee to success, and it guarantees a beautiful, perfect, intense, exceptional, great, fantastic, unbelievable, necessary, amazing, tremendous, mind-blowing... e-v-e-r-y-t-h-i-n-g. Hence this idea of *Paradise on Earth* lurks all around us, endlessly promising happiness. It looks absolutely fabulous, doesn't it? Even so, *Paradise on Earth* is not a trivial nor a harmless idea. It is, in fact, the absolute opposite.

Sliced and chopped, utilised, repeated, designed and curated to form part of everything one could fantasise, *Paradise on Earth* is our desire and at the same time the object that incarnates our desire. It is the brand above all brands. It is the ultimate

1. Wolfgang Reitherman, (dir.) *The Jungle Book*, (Walt Disney Productions, 1967).

brand. It is human and non-human. It is everything, everywhere. It could be amazing. Nevertheless, the potentiality of Paradise's original concept has been reduced to a dangerous tenet driven by consumerism. Paradise used to be the possibility for all possible to be. It had no limit. It was the Utopia above all utopias. Yet today it has shrunk to the size of a monk's cell without space for spiritual concern. It is a commodity pretending to be 'Manufacturing Happy Citizens'². The Elysian Field is now populated with curious worshipped bodies ranging from instant celebrities to myself or yourself as a subject, and myself or yourself as an object alongside the latest pair of sneakers. The contemporary concept of *Paradise on Earth* is striking up the same ongoing and seductive consumerist promise of happiness. Nonetheless – as a matter of fact – it is an undeniably complex mediated body of power, control, and enslavement. More than an ideology, *Paradise on Earth* appears to have the features of a hyperobject³, in the sense that Timothy Morton defines it in his essay *Hyperobjects, Philosophy and Ecology after the End of the World* (2013). Thus, Morton defines hyperobjects as viscous, molten, phased, non-local and interobjective, five characteristics that make them extremely and excessively powerful. Hyperobjects are confusing; they blur boundaries. Morton experiences a rather strange connection with them:

I do not access hyperobjects across a distance, through some transparent medium. Hyperobjects are here, right here in my social and experiential space. Like faces pressed against a window, they leer at me menacingly: their very nearness is what menaces. [...] The more I struggle to understand hyperobjects, the more I discover that I am stuck to them. They are all over

2. Edgar Cabanas, and Eva Illouz, *Manufacturing Happy Citizens*, Polity Press, 2019, p.115. Twenty-first-century capitalism has indeed given birth to a huge and powerful economy of happiness. This is not a figurative expression. Happiness has itself become the fetish commodity of a global and multi-billion industry that emerged and continues to expand around the offer of and demand for a prolific myriad of happiness 'emodities'.

3. Timothy Morton, *Hyperobjects, Philosophy and Ecology after the End of the World*, University of Minnesota Press, 2013, pp. 1, 2. 'Hyperobjects refer to thing that are massively distributed in time and space relative to humans. [...] Hyperobjects have already had a significant impact on human social and psychic space. [...] Hyperobjects are also changing human art experience (the aesthetic dimension). [...] Hyperobjects force us to acknowledge the immanence of thinking physical. But this does not mean that we are "embedded" in a "life world."'

me. They are me. [...] hyperobjects haunt my social and psychic space with an always-already⁴.

Hence, what Morton outlines is a crucial and violent transformation inflicted on our bodies, space, and time. Hyperobjects have the capacity to transform and invade everything. It is precisely in that sense that *Paradise on Earth's* ideology can be considered a hyperobject: for its capacity to infect and transform everything that gets exposed to it. Hyperobjects fill every nook and cranny of our life. They penetrate our skin and infiltrate our pores. As if that were not enough, our contemporary communication tools and customs – in particular the current social obsession and need for continuous representation, paired with advertising's iteration technique – is feeding, enhancing and facilitating the contagion, as well as the 'always-already' aspect/effect mentioned by Morton. Camouflage is *Paradise on Earth's* strategy. Thus, the paradisification of all and everybody strongly contributes to blurring boundaries. Paradise itself has been paradised by itself. Through this vicious circle, the main act that primes and defines the price of happiness and populates our bodies and minds with inexhaustible paradised iconography is repetition.

On average, the modern, connected, urban person is exposed to 4,000 to 10,000 adverts or sponsored messages per day⁵ (in other words, exposed to the ideology of *Paradise on Earth*). These repeated and targeted images, messages, and information are constantly influencing and soliciting our attention, while altering our critical thinking capacity. I am so busy, chopping, recomposing, modifying, editing, resizing, copy-pasting, diffusing, posting, connecting, desiring, liking, consuming, virtually hugging, buying, watching, waiting, seeing, dreaming... Can you hear all those repetitive actions day after day?

A cacophony!

4. Timothy Morton, *Hyperobjects, Philosophy and Ecology after the End of the World*, University of Minnesota Press, 2013, p. 27.

5. Andrew Simms, *The advertising industry is fuelling climate disaster, and it's getting away with it*, *The Guardian*, 11th Oct. 2021.

"Advertising is everywhere, so prevalent as to be invisible but with an effect no less insidious than air pollution. A few years ago, an individual in the US was estimated to be exposed to between 4,000 and 10,000 adverts daily."

<https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2021/oct/11/advertising-industry-fuelling-climate-disaster-consumption>.

Commonly, repetition is a fundamental act of recurrence that can take place on various occasions, for various purposes. It is, for instance, very efficient in the learning process. An artist, athlete, child, or anyone who wants to acquire a new ability, to master a situation, a movement, or to learn something uses a repetition routine for the 'new thing' to be assimilated, digested, and synthesised. In other words, for it to become part of them. Thus, time after time, exposure to repetition can colonise, influence, feed, expand, enhance, reshape conviction, need, critical thinking, vision, and ability. In brief, it modifies us and, of course, either harmlessly or harmfully. Roland Barthes in the preface of *Mythologies* (1957) questions the relationship between things and repetition:

For while I don't know whether, as the saying goes, 'things which are repeated are pleasing', *my belief is that they are significant⁶.

Hence, what Barthes acknowledges is that repetition tweaks the thing subjected to it. Regarding significance, one could consider that significance arises within action. Repetition cannot exist by itself; it needs a second, a third and so on to set a sequence, for repetition to occur. It is between the first and the second iteration that significance arises, and between the third and the fourth that it is gaining weight and starting to vary. Significance grows in every liminal space where repetition itself creates to exist.

Marcel Duchamp's work effortlessly tried to seize liminal spaces. In 1935, he introduced the notion of "infrathin", establishing its crucial importance in motion (as going from A to B) in transformation (as becoming). Duchamp is nonetheless strict and categorical, defining infrathin is impossible, although a few of his notes provide us with some clues. Of the forty-six entries that comprise the infrathin section of Duchamp's posthumous notes the first one reads:

6. Roland Barthes, *Mythologies*, The Noonday Press New York, p.11, 1991. *'Bis repetita placent': a paraphrase in French of Horace's saying: 'Haec decies repetita placebit' (Ars Poetica).

The possible is infrathin.

The possibility for several tubes of colour becoming a Seurat is the concrete “explanation” of the possible as infrathin.

The possible, implying the becoming—the passage from one to other takes place in the infrathin⁷.

Reading Duchamp’s notes, it is undeniable that transformation induced by repetition lies within the infrathin. This sets the power of repetition, and the potential danger implied in its very process. In fact, repeating something is transforming: the thing itself, its meaning, its aesthetic, its aspect, its entire entity. The direct consequence of repetition is the transformation it implies. Repeating, multiplying, becoming numerous from one to several vary the thing. The original no longer exists. Hence imagine the terrible impact repetition has on a body, human or not, when a body is subjected to it at length. Repetition could take on a torturous quality. In our society based on capital, all things we do, see, and desire have been paradised. From a random commodity to purchase, to a status to reach, or a family to nurture, all is meant to allow us to be, to have worth, to exist within the rules set by capital. Paradise, Paradise, Paradise, Paradise, Paradise is distilled everywhere, every day, every hour, every second. Like the Chinese water torture⁸, a drop of Paradise falls constantly one after the other, reminding us of our ultimate goal: being happy, beautiful, successful, young, bankable, visible, connected, famous and so on.... Yet, the water drop torture seems quite soft and easy compared to the pain inflicted by the ideology of *Paradise on Earth*. When a drop of cold water always falls on the same spot, victims might not know when it will fall, but they know nonetheless what sends them insane. They know what causes delusions and hallucinations, and they know why they lose touch with reality. The torture process is responsible. However, in the case of Paradise on Earth’s ideology/hyperobject, the process is invisible.

7. Marcel Duchamp, Marcel Duchamp, Notes, Centre Georges Pompidou, 1980, note 29.

8. Chinese water torture or a "dripping machine" is a mentally painful process in which cold water is slowly dripped onto the scalp, forehead, or face for a prolonged period of time. The process causes fear and mental deterioration in the subject. Wikipedia source: <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chinese_water_torture>.

As Morton argues, it is all over, haunting 'social and psychic space'. Nothing is clearly identified. Repetition is constant but polymorphous; the object varies (leaving with us a feeling of newness) but the subject (Paradise) remains. Moreover, if repetition is significant, in the case of the human body (signifier) and the fact that it is constantly subjected to its paradised version (signified), one can consider that step by step, drop after drop, the body merges with its own avatar, becoming the drone of its own immateriality. Transformation has occurred. Both signified and signifier have merged. Once again, repetition is undoubtedly extremely powerful. It is a tool to perform and achieve radical transformation, alongside being a tool of control. Thus, Deleuze in *Difference and Repetition* (1994) scrutinizing repetition and its mechanism, defines 'the whole apparatus of repetition as a 'terrible power'. Analysing and dismantling its apparatus, he adds that:

[...] there is no bare repetition which may be abstracted or inferred from the disguise itself. [...] The mask is the true subject of repetition. Because repetition differs in kind from representation, the repeated cannot be represented: rather, it must always be signified, masked by what signifies it, itself masking what it signifies⁹.

Hence, the true (vicious) object of repetition is the invisible transformation of the visible subject. The true subject of repetition is the infrathin, where the transformation takes place and where the possibility of repetition arises. Hence, this subtle relationship between visible (representation) and invisible (repetition) allows the ideology of *Paradise on Earth* to populate our minds insidiously, most certainly pleasantly, 'the disguise' being infinite. Nonetheless, regardless of how repetition occurs, it is, beyond doubt, extremely brutal.

9. Gilles Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, Columbia University Press, 1994, pp.10, 17, 18.

Process

Flatten down with your hands,
Slice with your fingertips,
Shake and rub,
Gently press the surface,
Insert a small, sharp knife,
Isn't the juice dripping?

Processing, transforming, cannot be done without a certain amount of handy technique. A recipe needs proper ingredients to appeal to our taste and make our mouths water. Hence, regardless the industry sectors, the concept of *Paradise on Earth*, the aesthetic of *Paradise on Earth*, the dream that constitutes *Paradise on Earth*, became the essential ingredient of many recipes if not all of them. In that respect, everyone can sell, buy, possess and be a crumb of it. Continuously and repeatedly puzzled, edited, formatted, re-formatted, conditioned, re-conditioned, it is used as the main additive to fulfil our lives and provide us a satisfactory feeling of happiness. Since this polymorphic bliss is constantly seducing us, and despite our bulging bellies being stuffed with every ounce of what is supposed to constitute our daily-lifelong-paradisical-ecstatic-state, our insatiable hunger keeps us frantically devouring every crumb of it. Then, addicted, we take tablets to digest faster. Getting ready to pile up again. Like devoted groupies, we yell to ourselves:

I want more, You want more, We want more...

Through an innumerable quantity of media, *Paradise on Earth* is to be found everywhere. Disguised and versatile, it is analogous to the T1000, "a shape shifting

android assassin¹⁰, able to mirror everything, yet surrounding us or not. Thus, the paradised concept of *Paradise on Earth* appears to be capable of an extreme violence gently infusing our imagination while enslaving our critical thinking abilities. Brutality and beauty are embedded in this process. So, weakened, I could not help myself. I watched it over and over again. Repeatedly, trapped, overwhelmed, indoctrinated, and mesmerised, I still don't know what hurt first, my mind or my body? Something is missing, this I know, but I still try to remember.

An Urban Legend has it that if you drop a frog in boiling water, it will jump out immediately. But if you put it in cold water and turn up the heat, it will be boiled alive. Despite the fact that this is not true, numerous experiments have proven its falsity, there is indeed a psychological truth to it – when so many little things change over a period of time, it's hard to notice. We are distracted. We are tired. We were busy. Then it's too late¹¹.

Insidiously and naturally, the repetition, the transformative process was initiated long ago. Nobody realised, and neither did I. I grew up with it. It was only visible in the spark of my child's eyes.

Back to the 80s

Sweet and naive, I have been easily seduced by this controversial figure. Like many other French kids, I was introduced to the notion of Paradise through Bible study. I was young, maybe five or six, and I loved the whole Biblical story. For me, it was no more than another fairy tale with a substantial dose of magic. Jesus was a sort of

10. The T-1000 is a fictional character in the Terminator film franchise. A shape-shifting android assassin, the T-1000 is the main antagonist of Terminator 2: Judgment Day, a 1991 American science fiction action film produced and directed by James Cameron. (Wikipedia source).

11. Francis Sanzaro, Society Elsewhere. Why the Gravest Threat to Humanity Will Come from Within, 2018, Zero Books, John Hunt Publishing Ltd, p.1.

Prince Charming with superpowers. From one 'chapter' to another I was thrilled with suspense, adventure, and a redemptive happy ending: We will all go to Heaven. My mental image was limpid; a great land suspended in between clouds, blue sky, cornucopia, happiness, and most of all love was awaiting us. It was clear and easy, defined. It was one single unique place and concept. Nonetheless, a couple of years later, my established Paradise was suddenly challenged by multiple choices. Paradise was not one anymore; it became several possibilities, not even being a place anymore. TV channels offered so many new options that Jesus became a somewhat outdated superhero. I fell in love with John Wayne. What a man! A cowboy riding wild horses, gunslinging – twirling his pistol around his finger. He was fast, strong, and faithful, an enhanced Jesus Christ who never dies. But, again, I wanted more. Thus, sadly, notwithstanding my sincerity, my ever-lasting feelings did not take long to fade. Instant is also a time figure, and while pursuing my quest for heroes, John Wayne was not doing the job anymore. The very moment Space Sheriff X-Or¹² (a bio-robot man) was launched into the very competitive market that took place in my living room, I fully embraced this new heroic figure. My heart fell (instantly again) for his magic spacesuit combined with unlimited superpowers. The cherry on the cake – as if his incredible outfit were not enough – he was fighting to protect the world against demoniac aliens clearly determined to steal and destroy our *Paradise* (this time surprisingly located) *on Earth*. As predicted, every Wednesday afternoon, X-Or and myself forged a decisive tandem. From my sofa and from his mediated TV space, side by side we fought for our holy land. I was genuinely happy. This alternative Paradise functioned similarly to the previous ones – we were all to reach it after evidence of good behaviour. The shade of palm trees, where neither unfaithful alien nor any kind of evil creature would be around, was ready to embrace us. Thus, throughout my childhood, these multiple images, representations and fragmentations of the world and the body were staging possibilities for alternative and possible ways of being. They gave me the possibility to fall for a cause, to stand by the character I chose and per se made my hero. Thereby, they pre-eminently

12. X-Or, Space Sheriff Gavan in English, is the first of the Metal Hero series. It aired in Japan on TV Asahi from March 5, 1982, through February 25, 1983.

fuelled wonder of what could be possible in the future. However, without knowing nor realising yet, my choices were mediated. My mind was getting set like the storyboards of the movies I was watching. I was already becoming a by-product of the culture industry. Consequently, my malleable young body ceased to exist without being mediated or represented. I was already getting paradised. It is only years later that I will suffer from excessive paradisification. Noam Chomsky in his biography/documentary, *Requiem for The American Dream* (2015), explains clearly how 'manufactured consent' has emerged. He states that in a society built on freedom, the masses cannot be controlled by force anymore. Nonetheless, it is still necessary to control the beliefs and attitudes of the population. For this matter, advertising and entertainment can easily fabricate consumers, presenting them with what a proper happy/paradisical life should look like, this being an efficient way to fuel a whole system of control. Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer in the chapter *The Culture Industry: Enlightenment as Mass Deception* (1944) depicts the mechanism of mass entertainment. The culture industry, they argue, plays a central role and has a crucial influence on its audience, feeding it with ready-made ideology and clichés. Thus, culture itself becomes an ideological medium of domination:

The whole world is passed through the filter of culture industry. The familiar experience of the moviegoer, who perceives the street outside as a continuation of the film he has just left, because the film seeks strictly to reproduce the world of everyday perceptions, has become the guideline of production¹³.

The culture industry, while entertaining us, is predominantly fooling its audience, reversing the process of understanding, and apprehending the real. So is my paradised-self through the mediated representation of my heroes engendering a sort of pleasant, soft, and insidious schizophrenia.

At 10 past 10 I woke up on the mirror of my disillusion.

13. Theodor Adorno, and Max Horkheimer, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*. Stanford University Press, 2002, p. 99.

I found myself walking through an uncanny valley
where everybody is young.

[...]

Post-human condition of hybrid identity.

I try to draw my robot portrait,
persuaded that my body cannot be experienced without images.

[...]

They are all muscly,
coming from our teenage dreams
fainting on the edge of our elder days¹⁴.

Looking at my extended portrait, I was utterly seduced by my new me. I did not realise that Wednesday afternoon became every day. I did not realise that I became the mental clone of myself. I did not realise that I became an image. A sort of mediated chimera, headlining all my imagination. I was young and naïve. The normative paradisification process of myself was setting smoothly.

—

ID-ea drifting away

Image represents, word presents. In a society driven by capital, images come before any word. This gives them the power to convey every idea and feeling, every simple and remote aspect of our lives. They have the power to instantly seduce, in the sense that they deliver a didactic, quick, and easy answer. Even if in fact they only illustrate and per se disable if not entirely cancel nuances in relation to the subject they frame. But this is strategically useful. No active thinking is needed, just passive watching. Hence, if a visual portrait is mostly mediated through an image, a visual representation synthesising the main features of the self, of an object, it could mean

14. @ 10 past 10, short novel, 2016, written by Audrey Salmon in the frame of wasis.today art collective.

that I am – from a very young age – condemned to look endlessly at the restrictive visual representation of myself. In other words, it means that I am condemned to be a two-dimensional thing. A flat representation of myself, totally passive and amputated, since in essence a portrait is usually framed from head to shoulder. Nonetheless, if I am lucky enough, my portrait will be in RGB¹⁵, and if I am brave enough, I will have the courage to smile and per se exhibit another false truism about happiness. Overall, what it means is that I am condemned to contemplate and be my mediated, paradised-self trapped in a virtual space.

Long ago, I might have dreamt of being caught in Foucault's mirror¹⁶. Then, all would have been possible, and my body would have enjoyed both its presence and absence, experiencing the time and space of heterotopias. However, nowadays even the mirror has reshaped and shifted its ability. The poetic dimension of the mirror has now turned into a hyper-nightmare. Hence, forty-six years after Foucault, Morton has observed and experienced the mirror quite differently. "Object in the mirror looks closer than they appear [...] I can see data on the mercury and other toxins in my blood"¹⁷. This is not just a random observation, highlighting the ontological slogan that can be found "on every right-side mirror of every American cars"¹⁸.

On the contrary, Morton is expressing a significant doubt about not knowing, or quite understanding, precisely what is happening. Moreover, he wrote 'the mirror

15. Acronym standing for Red, Green, Blue. The RGB colour model is an additive colour model in which the red, green, and blue primary colours of light are added together in various ways to reproduce a broad array of colours. The name of the model comes from the initials of the three additive primary colours, red, green, and blue. The main purpose of the RGB colour model is for the sensing, representation, and display of images in electronic systems, such as televisions and computers. Source Wikipedia: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/RGB_color_model#:~:text=The%20RGB%20color%20model%20is,red%2C%20green%2C%20and%20blue.

16. Michel Foucault, *Of Other Spaces, Heterotopias*, 1967, internet source: <<https://foucault.info/documents/heterotopia/foucault.heterotopia.en/>>. 'The mirror is, after all, an utopia, since it is a placeless place. In the mirror, I see myself there where I am not, in an unreal, virtual space that opens up behind the surface; I am over there, there where I am not, a sort of shadow that gives my own visibility to myself, that enables me to see myself there where I am absent: such is the utopia of the mirror. But it is also a heterotopia in so far as the mirror does exist in reality, where it exerts a sort of counteraction on the position that I occupy. From the standpoint of the mirror, I discover my absence from the place where I am since I see myself over there. [...] The mirror functions as a heterotopia in this respect: it makes this place that I occupy at the moment when I look at myself in the glass at once absolutely real, connected with all the space that surrounds it, and absolutely unreal, since in order to be perceived it has to pass through this virtual point which is over there.'

17. Timothy Morton, *Hyperobjects, Philosophy and Ecology after the End of the World*, University of Minnesota Press, 2013, pp. 27, 28.

18. *Ibid.*, p.27.

itself has become part of my flesh. Or rather, I have become part of the mirror's flesh reflecting hyperobjects everywhere¹⁹". An utterly disturbing fusion has occurred. Oneself is being dissolved, fused, unless it is a general anthropological transformation that is taking place. Guy Debord in *The Society of The Spectacle* (1971) addresses this 'disturbing fusion' phenomenon. He argues that the representation of the real (what I would call the paradisification of the real) constitutes this major confusion, where no one can separate fiction from reality.

When the real world is transformed into mere images, mere images become real beings – figments that provide the direct motivations for a hypnotic behaviour. Since the spectacle's job is to use various specialized mediations in order to show us a world that can no longer be directly grasped, it naturally elevates the sense of sight to the special pre-eminence once occupied by touch: the most abstract and easily deceived sense is the most readily adaptable to the generalized abstraction of present-day society²⁰.

In fact, this dissolving state is not isolated. Hito Steyerl, in her essay *A Thing Like You and Me* (2010), reflects on the figure of the hero (potentially my childhood heroes) and the relationship it entertains with the state of images. She claims that 'the hero is dead'²¹ – which I have indeed noticed, having already killed a few myself – acknowledging that David Bowie, specifically when he released his single and music video 'Heroes'²² (1977), contributed strongly to a "new era of the hero". Since then, the single and unique figure of the hero no longer exists. 'Heroism is dead.'

19. Ibid., p.27.

20. Guy Debord, *The Society of The Spectacle*, 2014, Rebel Press, 2014, p.11.

21. Hito Steyerl, *A Thing Like You and Me*, e-flux journal#15, April 2010, internet source: <<https://www.e-flux.com/journal/15/61298/a-thing-like-you-and-me/>>

22. Hito Steyerl, *A Thing Like You and Me*, e-flux journal#15, April 2010, internet source: <<https://www.e-flux.com/journal/15/61298/a-thing-like-you-and-me/>> "The clip shows Bowie singing to himself from three simultaneous angles, with layering techniques tripling his image; not only has Bowie's hero been cloned, he has above all become an image that can be reproduced, multiplied, and copied, a riff that travels effortlessly through commercials for almost anything, a fetish that packages Bowie's glamorous and unfazed postgender look as product."

Trotsky, Lenin, and Shakespeare are dead²³. The hero has become an object, an image that can be reproduced, multiplied, copied, resized, cut, edited, and cloned indefinitely. On top of reducing – to almost nothing – the definition of heroism, this is paralysing the body in its fundamental capacity to move, act, will and be free. It is trapping it again in a frame, a glittery jail, constantly repeating and reproducing its paradised version.

Bowie's hero is no longer a larger-than-life human being carrying out exemplary and sensational exploits, and he is not even an icon, but a shiny product endowed with post-human beauty: an image and nothing but an image. This hero's immortality no longer originates in the strength to survive all possible ordeals, but from its ability to be Xeroxed, recycled, and reincarnated²⁴.

In their capacity to be multiplied, to be reproduced, to be repeated endlessly – in other words, in their capacity to be paradised – no flesh or blood is involved anymore. Heroes died and have been substituted by their simulacrum. Following this conclusion, Steyerl goes further by questioning identification's process, reminding us that it is understood that identification starts with an image. Consequently, with whom can one identify him/her/themself if whom is nothing more than an image? Furthermore – not lacking in humour and irony – Steyerl suggests we 'ask anybody whether they'd actually like to be a JPEG file?'.²⁵ De facto, this question seems to open up to a large spectrum of possibilities and consequences. If an image can be modified in endless ways, then, according to Steyerl, 'to participate in an image – rather than merely identify with it – could perhaps abolish this relation²⁶'.

23. Hito Steyerl, A Thing Like You and Me, e-flux journal#15, April 2010, <<https://www.e-flux.com/journal/15/61298/a-thing-like-you-and-me/>>

24. Ibid.

25. Ibid.

26. Ibid.

This would mean participating in the material of the image as well as in the desires and forces it accumulates. [...] – a perfect embodiment of its own conditions of existence? [...] It doesn't represent reality. It is a fragment of the real world. It is a thing just like any other – a thing like you and me²⁷.

In 2010 when Steyerl wrote this essay, online media, including social media, were not as big as they are twelve years later. People were just starting to redefine the boundaries of intimacy. Portraying, staging, paradisising oneself was still very much a celebrity/hero's skill. Selfies had just started to become popular²⁸. Her analysis was utterly prescient in this regard. Nowadays, nobody is afraid of being a jpeg. I guess everyone is a jpeg, mov, tiff, gif, png by default, if not a QR code. Everybody has become a simulacrum of their own self, portrayed by thousands of image file formats. Everybody is indeed participating in “the material of the image as well as the desires and forces it accumulates”. Nonetheless, participating is one aspect. In fact, the desire and forces an image accumulates are exactly what set a dominant-dominated relation of power. We are now defining ourselves through images. We are now fragmented, recomposed, objectified, pixelised, paradised like any other thing. Screening/ceasing our own “realness” appears to be our default solution to reach the fantasised/desired state of happiness. That is induced and forced on us by the images we constantly produce and encounter. We are living in an aesthetic dictatorship, where the mono-aesthetic of capitalism reigns with ease, being constantly distilled by an uncountable quantity of channels. Hence, Klossowski could not be more accurate when he stated in *The Living Currency* (1970) that a simulacrum has substituted the original object, now rendered obsolete.

No one would ever dream of confusing a tool with a simulacrum unless it is only as a simulacrum that an object finds its necessary use²⁹.

27. Ibid.

28. For further information on how selfies became a global phenomenon, read the Guardian article: <https://www.theguardian.com/technology/2013/jul/14/how-selfies-became-a-global-phenomenon>

29. Pierre Klossowski, *The Living Currency*, Bloomsbury Publishing Plc, 2017, p.45.

This confusing transformation/mutation process has been witnessed for decades. However, it seems that it has now reached its climax, its paroxysm. The way we nowadays consume and get consumed by images (still or moving) and stage our own representation through media has accelerated and drastically increased this distortion. Therefore, this process of repetitive representation and the transformation it generates hurts the body and hurts anybody who is subjected to these extreme and violent disfigurements of the real/original self, repetition again being the operating system. Consequently, the new indissociable triangle of subject-object-simulacrum defines oneself as much as a DNA sequence. Such mutation comes with a price, rendering the body subaltern to its own continuance, while engendering human bodies that seem to have almost completely lost their agency, being paradised passively.

Contemporary artists and thinkers are very much concerned about these striking metamorphoses, these crucial and substantial losses. Elmgreen and Dragset (Danish and Norwegian visual artists) have always been interested in objects in their practice, in their settings and the discourse that can emerge when objects are radically re-contextualised and/or transformed. Their last body of work, titled *Useless Bodies?*, allows them to question crucial and alarming body shifts:

[...] our bodies are no longer the main agents of our existence. They don't generate value in our societies' advanced production methods as they did in the industrial era. One could claim our physical selves have even become more of an obstacle than an advantage. In the 19th century, the body was the producer of daily goods, whereas, in the 20th century, the body's role became more that of the consumer. Twenty years into the 21st century the status of the body is now that of the product – with our data gathered and sold by Big Tech³⁰.

30. Elmgreen & Dragset, *Useless Bodies*, Prada Foundation, March to August 2022, <<https://www.fondazioneprada.org/project/useless-bodies/?lang=en>>.

Left with nothing in our hands but our own simulacrum, paired with commodified happiness, eternal entertainment struggles to keep us alive. Again, the elusive idea of *Paradise on Earth* plays a central role in this deterioration process. Being the ultimate currency, the ultimate reference, it is legitimately consuming and exhausting the human body pixel by pixel, cell by cell. Copy-paste. “We can (still) be heroes just for one day, We can be us just for one day, We can be Heroes, for ever and ever³¹”. How much I love to dance to this track, closing my eyes, opening my mouth, shaking my head, clapping my hands, singing loudly on the top of Bowie’s voice, entertaining myself all night long, while hoping again for a better future each time I hear it, is conclusive but not sufficient to constitute a strong enough compensation to my flouted body and mind.

Desperately Seeking Annie

Once upon a time, I would have read a newspaper. Then, eventually, I would have found someone, somewhere in a park, looking for someone else, somewhere else. But today again I picked up the phone only to find an operator, operating on behalf of myself. An operator operating from a call centre without a centre and neither the possibility to ask a question and/or receive an answer. Call centres are a trendy solution to reassure abandoned bodies, offering them the possibility to hear a voice. Where is the voice, where is the body producing the voice, where is the centre? Nobody knows.

Nonetheless, the voice said: “Call centre. Hello, what can I do for you today?”

Remembering John Cage, I said: “It is only irritating to think one would like to be somewhere else. Here we are now³².”

31. David Bowie, *Heroes*, Lyrics, RCA, 1977.

32. J. Cage, *Silence, Lectures and Writings* by John Cage, Wesleyan University Press, 1973, p.184

The voice said: “Thank you for calling, we will put you through to the next available representative. Please hold the line.”

[Unknown music plays]

The voice said: “You are number 7 in the queue; the next representative will be available in about 10 minutes. Please hold the line.”

[More unknown music plays]

While waiting, I am thinking of Ernest Hemingway’s writing technique known as the “Iceberg Theory”, focusing on “surface elements without explicitly discussing underlying themes, nor giving detailed context³³.” Isn’t that something that echoes the great offers that our epoch endlessly advertises, a possible gift of ubiquity for all.

Interrupting my thought process, the voice said: “Call centre. Hello, what can I do for you today?”

I said: “Can I get a medium Jackson Pollock pizza and a large bottle of Andy Warhol tomato juice?”

The voice said: “Sure. Anything else?”

I said: “Nothing, thank you.”

The voice said: “May I get your name, please?”

I said: “Annie Body.”

The voice said: “Alright. Let me check. Please hold the line.”

[Known song is now playing]

I thought: Oh yes, The Pixies!

³³ Source Wikipedia: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Iceberg_theory

With your feet on the air and your head on the ground,
Try this trick and spin it, yeah
Your head will collapse
If there's nothing in it
And you'll ask yourself
Where is my mind?³⁴

The voice said: Thank you for waiting. Sorry for the inconvenience, I am afraid all is discontinued. Since physical reality is no longer available in this contemporary set, nothing and no one can be physically found. Avatar, re-representation of the self, images, pixels still or moving stand for the body, for my body, for your body, for our bodies, for anybody. I wish you were here but...

I said: Nothing.

The voice said: Goodbye.

[4'33"³⁵ is now playing in a loop]

Time of redemption. I love this song. It gives body to some things that are usually left unnoticed. It allows me to think, as much as to listen. It even roots ('racinates') my body in the physicality of the moment. It creates and reveals spaces that are drifting away from pre-owned/ready-made reality. It is about reality, yet to be imagined and interpreted in a personal and peculiar way. It discloses how crucial it is to find spaces that reconcile physicality and time against instantaneity. That reconciles body and mind. It seems that the ideology of capitalism constantly seeks to pretend as if there is no autonomous individual thinking body anymore. Paradise

34 Pixies, Where is My Mind, Track 7 on Album Surfer Rosa, 4AD, 1988, compact disk.

35 John Cage, 4'33", 4'33" (pronounced "four minutes, thirty-three seconds" or just "four thirty-three") is a three-movement composition by American experimental composer John Cage. It was composed in 1952, for any instrument or combination of instruments, and the score instructs performers not to play their instruments during the entire duration of the piece throughout the three movements. The piece consists of the sounds of the environment that the listeners hear while it is performed, although it is commonly perceived as "four minutes thirty-three seconds of silence".

on Earth, this highly entertaining concept, is nothing but a meaningless empty signifier of hope and desire luring a virtual non-promise. A catchy bait, operating and serving the eradication of richness embedded in each and every body, in each and every culture.

Expending on my own body's disappearance being constantly represented, reproduced, decontextualised and per se kept away from any differences and plurality. Kept away from what reality is intrinsically. I realise that this mass-destruction ideology has no racial concern in line with the history of postcolonial thought and/or the current decolonialisation project in relation to western imperialism and white supremacy. What I am stating here is that the real formation of the ideology of capitalism – Paradise on Earth being the slogan of it/being the epitome, the tip of this 'iceberg system'– is systematically and meticulously disembodimenting every body's body, to the point that there is nobody anymore. In other words, it appears that the capitalistic hegemonic promise of Paradise on Earth is in fact all about deracination.

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Systemic Deracination.

To be pastiche(d) or not to be.

While looking closer at the definition of such a verb, obviously looking for some clearance and certitude that 'to deracinate' is the right term to define the main action of such a complex economic and political system, my blood is rushing fast through my streams, my cheeks are blushing, and I feel alive while flaking out.

Hence, the Collins online dictionary gives the following definition:

Verb (used with object), de·rac·i·nat·ed, de·rac·i·nat·ing.

to pull up by the roots; uproot; extirpate; eradicate. To isolate or alienate (a person) from a native or customary culture or environment³⁶.

[Ouch]

The Oxford online dictionary proposes a similar definition:

Deracinate somebody, to force somebody to leave their natural social, cultural or geographical environment³⁷.

Searching for synonyms, the violence escalates:

abolish, **annihilate**, eliminate, **erase**, expunge, **exterminate**, extinguish, stamp out, uproot, weed out, wipe out, **demolish**, displace, eradicate, **overthrow**, overturn, **abate**, efface, extirpate, **liquidate**.

Breathless, images, feelings, stories, references, all sort of sources came through my mind, brushing an even clearer definition: Paradise on Earth is a predatory social, political, economic and eventually authoritarian cultural system that devours nuances and differences resulting in the deracination and disembodiment of every body's body, to the point that there is no-body any more. To the point that there are no autonomous thinking bodies, to the point that there is no other desire than desire(s) imposed by the mono-aesthetic and hegemonic thinking-promise it embeds. This systemic global promise of happiness is orchestrating what Bernard Stiegler calls "the finitization³⁸ of the infinite, that is, the attenuation of desire³⁸." This, according to Stiegler, is a "new form of barbarism³⁹" depriving us of any ability to think, understand, criticise, imagine or dream.

36 Internet source, the online Collins dictionary: <https://www.collinsdictionary.com/dictionary/english/deracinate>

37 Internet source, the online Oxford dictionary: <https://www.oxfordlearnersdictionaries.com/definition/english/deracinate?q=deracinate>

38 B. Stiegler, *The Age of Disruption, Technology and Madness in Computational Capitalism*, Polity Press, 2016, note 134, p.302. [...]

Founded as they are on the calculability of the audience market, and on an economy of attention that destroys this very attention, the culture industries are now being replaced in the age of disruption by the 'data economy', which can only intensify barbarism qua finitization of this infinite [...]

39 Ibid.

All of us, or almost all, are now more or less caught up in objects that constantly solicit us, to such an extent that we no longer pay attention to ourselves, nor to what, within us, requires reflection: we no longer have the time to do so, nor the time to dream. Without respite, we are piloted, if not remotely controlled. As a result, it becomes very difficult to identify our own practices of denial, that is, it becomes very difficult to think. For to think is also and above all, in some way, to overcome a form of denial into which we have settled.⁴⁰

Denial is not voluntary; it is induced and forced on us by the system, and becomes invisible, again deracinating us from us, from the real that we can neither access nor understand nor populate anymore. The system is operating in isolation, through imposed representation constituting it. It is crucial to mention here how time is represented, accepted and idealised in such an ordeal, under the sky of paradise on Earth. It seems to be very close to what Debord names “pseudocyclical time⁴¹”, a “spectacular time⁴²” dedicated to the consumption of images representing the real (mostly ourselves staged into a paradisaical environment) or a commodified time where the past dominates the present. Thus, Debord’s spectacular time hosts the

40 Ibid., pp. 276–277.

41 G. Debord, *The Society of the Spectacle*, Bureau of Public Secrets, 2014, Note 151, p.83. Pseudocyclical time is a time that has been transformed by industry. The time based on commodity production is itself a consumable commodity, one that recombines everything that the disintegration of the old unitary societies had differentiated into private life, economic life, political life. The entire consumable time of modern society ends up being treated as a raw material for various new products put on the market as socially controlled uses of time. "A product that already exists in a form suitable for consumption may nevertheless serve as raw material for some other product". (Capital).

42 Ibid., Note 153, pp. 83–84. Consumable pseudocyclical time is spectacular time, both in the narrow sense as time spent consuming images and in the broader sense as image of the consumption of time. The time spent consuming images (images that in turn serve to publicise all the other commodities) is both the particular terrain where the spectacle’s mechanisms are most fully implemented and the general goal that those mechanisms present, the focus and epitome of all particular consumptions. Thus, the time that modern society is constantly seeking to “save” by increasing transportation speeds or using packaged soups ends up being spent by the American population in watching television three to six hours a day. As for the social image of the consumption of time, it is exclusively dominated by leisure time and vacations – moments portrayed, like all spectacular commodities, at a distance and as desirable by definition. These commodified moments are explicitly presented as moments of real life, whose cyclical return we are supposed to look forward to. But all that is really happening is that the spectacle is displaying and reproducing itself at a higher level of intensity. What is presented as true life turns out to be merely a more truly spectacular life.

vacuity of a system only able to generate what Jameson called “pastiche”, again, deracinating us from any tangibility, originality, or authenticity.

The disappearance of the individual subject, along with its formal consequence, the increasing unavailability of the personal style, engender the well-nigh universal practice today of what may be called pastiche⁴³.

Hence, the individual subject is disappearing while their subjectivity has been hacked, objectified then commodified, engendering a quite uncomfortable position to hold. While by the skin of one tooth, their subconscious struggle to remain autonomous, body and mind are no longer allying. As a result, a tenuous oscillation (visible on a screen only) is there to represent the pain and brutality of their supposed-imposed happiness. Here again a pastiche operates. Laughter has been replaced by the rhythm of a pulse oximeter beeping repeatedly: Paradise, paradise, paradise... Exhausted, invisibly enslaved bodies, while moaning, swallow a pill of serotonin⁴⁴, another prosthesis, another piece of commodified happiness.

43 F. Jameson, *Postmodernism, or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*, Verso Book, 1991, p22.

44 “Serotonin, also known as 5-hydroxytryptamine (5-HT), is a monoamine neurotransmitter. It also acts as a hormone. As a neurotransmitter, serotonin carries messages between nerve cells in your brain (your central nervous system) and throughout your body (your peripheral nervous system). These chemical messages tell your body how to work. Serotonin plays several roles in your body, including influencing learning, memory, happiness as well as regulating body temperature, sleep, sexual behaviour and hunger. Lack of serotonin is thought to play a role in depression, anxiety, mania and other health conditions.” Internet source:

<https://my.clevelandclinic.org/health/articles/22572-serotonin>

The Price of Happiness

In the wake of flouted bodies.

There is a great paradox to be observed in social, political, economic, and entertaining systems. There is always a new something that leads literally to nothing. We seem to make enormous progress. We develop new technologies, think of living a healthy life, cultivate well-being, develop flourishing and fulfilling social lives. Eat and drink better. We seem to nurse our fleshed body and mind. The Western mainstream philosophy – of heart and love, resilience, care, and beauty – of *Paradise on Earth* is distilled through every media. We constantly stumble onto trite but seductive statements such as: “Be yourself, invite yourself to join the ranks of those who feel the joy, warmth and inspiration of a successful and happy life⁴⁵”. At first, of course, we find them appalling, but then we give in, simply because, repeated over and over, this type of tagline makes our distressed imagination believe that our dream is just a step away from becoming true, that you and I will be the next national lottery winners. Hence, these promising slogans are used by tons of literatures, websites, books, seminars, life coaches, PowerPoint presentations, team-building meetings and so forth, and are repeated over and over again, eventually making a profit from despair and gullibility. It seems that there is no space or time for doubting anymore; everything should lead to happiness. This is, once more, another face of *Paradise on Earth*, incarnated in everything surrounding us, taking any shapes to whisper endless promises of happiness. However, this is not as easy as it reads. There are steps/subcategories that must be validated. ‘Success’ is one of the imperative assets one should have in hand to potentially access the ultimate level of joy, although success happens to be another empty promise. Thus, Mark Fisher in *Capitalism Realism, Is there No Alternative?* (2009) underlines a

45. Life coach is a flourishing job that uses the same rhetoric guaranteeing happiness as a reward. Andy Jaffke, *Be Yourself: Your Success Guide for Your Life. Achieve Your Goals. Experience true Happiness, Independently Published*, 2018. More info: <<https://www.topcoach4you.com>>.

relevant example, when reporting the disenchantment that Kurt Cobain (Nirvana's lead singer) experienced regarding his social position as a famous songwriter and singer. Fisher says that "Cobain knew it was just another piece of spectacle", adding that consequently "even success meant failure, since to succeed would only mean that you were the new meat on which the system could feed"⁴⁶. The system loves beautiful fleshy-bloody-body. It is its currency.

Accordingly, the system defines goals and rules for its own benefit. Organised like a militia, sub-systems implemented by the system blur boundaries. Again, clear differentiation between reality and fiction is no longer possible. Everything mirrors everything; reality is multiple and constantly shifting. Virtual spaces are becoming the invisible body of the real, as Nicolas Bourriaud argues in his essay *The Exform* (2016): "the operative system is a fragile installation – a spectacle that ideology has transformed into a reality"⁴⁷. Paradoxically, along the way, along this infinite imposed quest for happiness, bodies get transformed, injured, wounded, suffer, and eventually disappear⁴⁸ even though the blue light invariably shines in their eyes. Through the looking glass we indeed struggle but essentially refuse to see the reality of our atrophied, disregarded, fainting bodies. We must match our simulacrum, whatever the cost. "True life is elsewhere; actual reality is somewhere beyond appearances"⁴⁹, affirms Bourriaud. Nonetheless, the system repeatedly does not allow us to go "beyond appearances".

What for? We are happy, folks! Aren't we?

In reality (if one can say so), even if the system isn't faulty, we are. Alterations occur, entropy operates. Entropy is the enemy of the system since it aims to be endless, like TV series, like the infinite scroll java script plugin, like time, like the poor images,

46. Mark Fisher, *Capitalist Realism, Is There No Alternative?*, Zero Books, 2009.

47. Nicolas Bourriaud, *The Exform*, Verso Futures, 2016, p.36.

48. Kurt Cobain was suffering from depression, and committed suicide in April 1994. Mark Fisher was suffering from depression and committed suicide in January 2017. Fisher discussed his struggles with depression in articles and in his book *Ghosts of My Life*.

According to Simon Reynolds in *The Guardian*, Fisher argued that "the pandemic of mental anguish that afflicts our time cannot be properly understood, or healed, if viewed as a private problem suffered by damaged individuals." Wikipedia source:

<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mark_Fisher>, <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kurt_Cobain>.

49. Nicolas Bourriaud, *The Exform*, Verso Futures, 2016, p.36.

like the Koch snowflake⁵⁰, like the king. The king is dead, long live the King! The system wants to be *The Future* (and) *Lasts Forever*⁵¹. But here again, it ignores its own reality. It ignores what makes it. It ignores the body and its contingency, its bones and flesh, its sensibility, its perishable dimension, its mental fragility. It only represents it without any tender affection. Repetition after repetition, endlessly imposing its paradise ideology, cold and discarnate it is again making it resemble everything but a body. Under those circumstances we slowly forget what we look like and what we are. Detached from our own selves, sad, disoriented, frustrated, and often hopeless and depressed, we faint from our own reality, from our own memory. This is the real price of our imposed quest for happiness.

Payday, Mayday.

So, last payday was peculiar. We did what should be done. Everything was perfectly and highly intense, like the system implies it to be. Like Tristan Garcia describes it in his essay *The Life Intense, a Modern Obsession* (2018):

The reflexive sensation of representation and the ecstatic feeling of perception beyond the self are joined together in a power dynamic. That power dynamic can be imagined like a continuous line, and variations of the degree of intensity of the real can be charted along its length. [...] What we call the real becomes an intensive replenishment of the subject's consciousness. [...] modern life will have been the search for a maximal intensity of reality⁵².

50. The Koch snowflake (also known as the Koch curve, Koch star, or Koch island) is a fractal curve and one of the earliest fractals to have been described. Wikipedia source: < https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Koch_snowflake>

51. Louis Althusser, *The Future Lasts Forever: A Memoir*, New York Press, 1994.

52. Tristan Garcia, *The Life Intense, a Modern Obsession*, Edinburgh University Press Ltd, 2018, p.47.

So, we've been intense. We did what we learnt to do. Mimicking. During our time off, we did what we all do without questioning anything. We had a party. We drank more than humans can actually do. We danced to transcendental states. We took pictures every minute, each time losing ourselves a bit more. Tristan is right, "*Representation wins out over what is represented*⁵³". We filled our mutual online stories, probably to make sure to remember everything. Surely to make sure we look good. Certainly, to make sure we fit in the whole picture. Obviously, to make sure to be seen. Eventually to make sure to remember as we are no longer trained to remember and appreciate things by ourselves. We lost this capability, amongst many others, long ago. Long enough to not even recall when it was. My Personal Assistant Powered by Artificial Intelligence (PAPAI) might do, though. But it does not matter anymore. In short, last night was the last night.

Day001:

When I woke up, they were all gone. (I mean my besties.) When I woke up, I was alone.

(I mean with myself.) Right away, I looked at myself in the mirror, knowing precisely I will look like no-over-thing (I mean, what a night). Meanwhile, the battery ran low. Meanwhile, I looked, I saw nothing. I looked again, I saw nothing, I looked again, I saw nothing. I looked again; I saw nothing. Petrified. Only then, I understood my lack of power was not the reason why I saw nothing. Terrified, I fainted.

Day001#01: I woke up again, finally realising and understanding my life must have been too intense⁵⁴. This intensity was causing only intense distress and damage. As a result, I was

53. Ibid., p.47.

54. Tristan Garcia, *The Life Intense, a Modern Obsession*, Edinburgh University Press Ltd, 2018. 'Our lives today are oppressed by the demand that we live, feel and experience all things with ever greater intensity. We are enticed to try exotic flavours and smells, urged to enjoy a wide range of sexual experiences, and pushed to engage in extreme sports and recreational drugs: all in the name of achieving some new, unheard-of intensity. Tristan Garcia argues that such intensity rarely lives up to its promise. It always comes at a price, one that defines the ethical predicament of contemporary life.'

nothing more than the epitaph of my dead potentiality. I started to panic. I wrongly thought I had a finger in every pie. But now, I know it was a bad idea to play it by ear. I realised there is no sight for sore eyes anymore. You're gone. Off the top of my head, I shout: is there anyone who can get on, then off my back? I promise that I will not give a cold shoulder, nor get cold feet toward anything anymore. Please help; we used to be so bodily involved. Is yours also missing? I am bodiless, can't you see? Please give me my (~~money~~) body back. My blood ran cold. Transparent. I fainted again.

Day001#02: I woke up again, being the epitaph of my dead potentiality. I panicked. Again. What can I do without you? I tried to find the answer through song lyrics.

Omunye

Omunye

Omunye

Omunye Omunye

Omunye phez'komunye⁵⁵

Repetition over and over. Piling up. Excess again. I got even more scared. Reassuringly, my horoscope told me to eat healthily. Hungry, I fainted.

Day001#03: I woke up again, being the epitaph of my dead potentiality. I panicked. Again. Completely disoriented, I could not figure out whether I was in or out. Since “the map precedes the territory⁵⁶”, circulating has been a complex action to achieve. I look left, I look right. But this stupid glitch made me loop for hours. Just thinking of it made my skin crawl. Oh, my skin! Just enough time. I fainted again.

55. Distruction Boyz, Omunye ft Benny Maverick & Dladla Mshunqisi, 2017. English translation from Zulu, Omunye phez'komunye means the other one on top of the other.

56. Jean Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulation*, University of Michigan Press, 1994, p. 1. “It is the generation by models of a real without origin or reality: a hyperreal. The territory no longer precedes the map, nor does it survive it. It is nevertheless the map that precedes the territory—precession of simulacra—that engenders the territory, and if one must return to the fable, today it is the territory whose shreds slowly rot across the extent of the map.”

Day001#04: I woke up again, being the epitaph of my dead potentiality. While exercising and walking *On the Island of Deserted Knowledge*⁵⁷ my death's shadow and I are looking for a body of coherency. Instead, we are seeing *Clotted Bodies in Paradise*⁵⁸. Looking at my mistrusted self. I fainted again.

Day001#05: I woke up again, being the epitaph of my dead potentiality. I read: "Take therefore no thought for the morrow: for the morrow shall take thought for the things of itself. Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof"⁵⁹. Ok. Following the wise, I fainted again.

Day001#06: I woke up again, being the epitaph of my dead potentiality. Surprisingly, this time my mind is coated with blatant colours, which incidentally compose a rather poor chart. Nothing is stopping me from trying to put myself together while gathering my thoughts. But, sick, wounded, and weak, I fainted again.

Day001#07: I woke up again, being the epitaph of my dead potentiality. Today I feel the physical impact it had on me. I measured all of this and it wasn't trivial. It is and it was not a game. Queuing in the slaughtered house. I remembered a movie I saw where the perpetrator, day after day, was begged by the victim to provide the remedy. At the end the medicine happened to be the sickening and killing poison. So, there I am, staggering. Being my own perpetrator. Suffering from a very common disease. "Malady of the Century"⁶⁰ as my mother would say. It is painful to the core, not to be able to cry mum, to be saved. Acknowledging a rupture with my own physicality, I am suffering from NSSS (NarcisSchizophrenicStockholm Syndrome). Addicted to the constant need to entertain myself with myself by myself looking at myself looking at itself fainting again.

57. Audrey Salmon, *On the Island of Deserted Knowledge*, Screen-print, part of Salmon's exhibition *Clotted Bodies in Paradise*, Room Gallery, Johannesburg, 2017.

58. Audrey Salmon, *Clotted Bodies in Paradise*, Solo Show, part of her Ph.D. research presentation, Room Gallery, Johannesburg, 2017.

59. Sermon on the Mount in the Gospel of Matthew chapter 6 — Matthew 6:34, Thomas Curtis (1829), *The London encyclopaedia*, Wikipedia source: <https://en.wiktionary.org/wiki/sufficient_onto_the_day_is_the_evil_thereof>

60. "La maladie du siècle" referring to Alfred de Musset, *The Confession of a Child of the Century*, a novel written in 1836.

Day001#08: I woke up again being the epitaph of my dead potentiality. In a glimpse of lucidity, I heard it and it was red. I saw it and it was green. I touched it and it was blue. I dreamt about it, and it was prismatic⁶¹. Meanwhile, I looked at my blistered-bleeding hands, which can't stop substituting the market to my freewill in hope of living in Paradise. So, in this specific moment I understood that my volitional act resides only in the T&Cs that may apply. Accept all and proceed. Maybe within this repetitive system, within repetition itself, we might be able to discover new spaces. But "*the removal of experience renders the object meaningless*"⁶². Hopeless. I fainted again.

Day001#09: I woke up again being the epitaph of my dead potentiality. However, I was determined to understand how my body had been cancelled. Resistance. I will not faint until I know. Looking over and over I discovered that apparently all happened while I was busy. More specifically, while I was entertained, maybe busy scrolling up and down. Obviously while I was aware, informed, up to date. While I thought my multiple screens were offering me a shield against the current "brutalisme"⁶³. Maybe I got this feeling because my sofa is indecently comfortable. Shameful, I suddenly remembered what Gauz wrote in his novel *Debout-Payé* (2014): "*the biggest fear of Occidental and Americans in particular is not to have a fridge at home anymore*"⁶⁴. I took this as a clue. This is what we have become, emotionally linked to our home appliances. Subjected and alienated to commodities. This is extremely alarming, especially when, researching further, Donald M.Lowe – about the relationship the body entertains with the system – states that "*bodily*

61. I am confused. I forgot if it was "I" or "You", but for sure the work is called RGB Potentiality, a handwritten Tetrptych, 594x841mm, 2022, by Audrey Salmon.

62. Francis Sanzaro, Society Elsewhere. Why the Gravest Threat to Humanity Will Come from Within, 2018, Zero Books, John Hunt Publishing Ltd. p.58. "Apps utilizing automation are in the business of removing an experience from the user. Since meaning is generated in experience, the removal of experience renders the object meaningless. [...] This is the essence of automated commodities."

63. Here, I borrow the word "brutalism" from Achille Mbembe, Brutalisme, La Découverte, 2020. In his essay he uses the notion of brutalism to describe "an era seized by the pathos of demolition and production on a planetary scale." The concept of brutalism being "a twisting and reshaping exercise applied to anything and everything." (Book originally written in French, my own translation).

64. Gauz, *Debout-Payé* (Standing while Being Payed), Le Nouvel Attila, 2014, (my own translation).

*needs are currently the means by which the end of late-capital accumulation is accomplished; bodily needs change for the sake of capital accumulation*⁶⁵”. In other words, for the system, a washing machine has more value than my body, your body, our bodies. Thus, the human body is constantly fashioned, transformed and reshaped for the good of the system to generate profit. This could explain why happiness has gained so much currency. Why happiness is the ultimate state of mind to reach. It seems to have all the traits to be the hyper-bodily need. Its ability to take many faces, shapes, and colours is as impressive as its capacity to generate profit. It then comes as no surprise when W. Davis points out another compelling argument, noting that at the 2014 Davos meeting, happiness was what preoccupied our global elite. *“Happiness in its various guises, [...] has now penetrated the citadel of global economic management*⁶⁶”. Happiness has a price: subjected to the market, it fluctuates as much as the economic system does. Maybe one should rather say that happiness is in fact trading on the stock exchange market. Hand in hand with the ideology of *Paradise on Earth*, they form the perfect combo to tame and control us. Tangible or not, there is not a corpuscle left that has not been monetised. Happiness and bodies are bound tightly. Nauseous, I fainted.

Day001#10: I woke up again – without a doubt – I am the epitaph of my dead potentiality. I cannot get my head around this disturbing idea. Unable to feel happy. My quest for happiness is responsible for my body’s cancellation. For the rest of the day, I tried again and again to understand this paradoxical paradigm. Fortunately, Michel Houellebecq pragmatically made my day when I read *“Don’t be afraid of Happiness – it does not exist*⁶⁷”. I understood the fragility of the promise. Released, I fainted.

65. Donald M. Lowe, *The Body in Late Capitalism, USA*, Duke University Press, 1995, p.174.

66. William Davis, *The Happiness Industry, How the Government and Big Business Sold Us Well-Being*, Verso Book, 2015, 2016, p.3.

67. Michel Houellebecq, *Rester Vivant et autres textes (Staying Alive and other texts)*, Libro Litterature, 1999, p.21. My own translation.

What Happens to the Body in Late Capitalism?

Corporeal corpses

Like a feather, I let my thoughts slumber and float in the air. A ray of sun hit my skull. Shivering, I enjoyed the temperature contrast. Sensation, feeling, I liked it when my body talked to me. Yet, in this obsession for continuous bodily representation of our paradised happy self – again paradox occurs and amongst everything else – we lose touch with ourselves. *Paradise on Earth* disconnects us from us. We find ourselves trapped in a vertiginous *mise en abyme* that feeds a sort of schizophrenic vicious circle. Represented bodies get represented in their turn and so forth. Nonetheless, it seems that we are still looking at ourselves (which is concerning anyway) but now there are uncountable new layers of representation representing the representation that was already representing the original representation of the original. In other words, Narcissus was an amateur, but we've become pro. Nevertheless, it is hard to believe that nuances, details, quality, and accuracy have not been lost and degraded along the way. It's hard to believe that we still have sound mind and body, even if we keep looking for *Paradise on Earth*, even if we are certain to find happiness. Hence, it would be wise and honest to say that nobody precisely knows what image, I, you, he, she, it, we, they look at. The transformation was and still is too drastic. What remains certain is that all this repetitive iconography is contributing to the dilution – if not the total disappearance – of the original. John Berger, in his essay *Ways of Seeing* (1972), analysed how a work of art's reproduction impacts the way it is perceived and understood by the viewer. Thus, he strongly emphasised the crucial importance of the original context, stating that the context directly informs the way of understanding and looking at art. Hence, a thing seen in a different context than its original will take on a different meaning. It will absorb and get contaminated by the new surroundings.

The uniqueness of every painting was once part of the uniqueness of the place where it resided. [...] it could never be seen in two places at the same

time. When the camera reproduces a painting, it destroys the uniqueness of its image. As a result, its meaning changes. Or, more exactly, its meaning multiplies and is fragmented into many meanings. [...] the uniqueness of the original now lies in it being *the original of a reproduction*⁶⁸.

In other words, the original meaning, the original image, the original body, the original thing, the referent no longer exists. At best, distorted and recontextualised representations and reproductions of it remain. Given that we are continuously surrounded by these images, reproductions, representations of everything altered by this process – us included, of course – it seems necessary to understand what those “low category of images” are, and what they imply. The answer appears quite important since one should not forget that they are the most familiar ones. They are the ones we stare at each time we look at our mobile device and, according to the BBC, we do so a third of our waking time per day⁶⁹. Most importantly, one should not forget they are us, they are our paradised-self. Hito Steyerl, in her essay *In Defence of the Poor Image* (2010), has analysed these peculiar images, naming them “poor images”. Hence, throughout her essay she details their features and states that they are usually of bad quality, low resolution, compressed, cut, resized, modified, edited, dislocated, copied, and then pasted to many different channels. Most of the time what remains is barely recognisable when put next to the original. Categorising them as the “wretched of the screen, the debris of audio-visual production, the trash that washes up on the digital economies’ shores⁷⁰”, Steyerl then argues that “poor images” are part of the “vicious cycle of audio-visual capitalism, they are dragged around the globe as commodities⁷¹”.

68. John Berger, *Ways of Seeing*, Penguin Books, 1972, pp.19–21.

69. The average time spent on mobile apps was four hours and 48 minutes, up 30% from 2019, App Annie’s State of Mobile report indicated. This was calculated across ten markets, including India, Turkey, the US, Japan, Mexico, Singapore, and Canada. Users in Brazil, Indonesia and South Korea surpassed five hours per day. Jane Wakefield, *People devote third of waking time to mobile apps*, source BBC.com, 12th January 2022, < <https://www.bbc.com/news/technology-59952557>>.

70. Hito Steyerl, *In Defense of the Poor Image*, e-flux journal, Sternberg Press, 2012, p.32.

71. *Ibid.*, p.33.

Steyerl's statement concerns 'poor images' as a whole; consequently, it also concerns their content. Thus, her statement eventually describes us and describes our body's state in late capitalism. Her description of poor images totally appeals to the way we stage our lives. The way we have to paradise ourselves. The way we exhibit and frame our orchestrated realities. The way we become physically and intellectually poorer. The way we get consumed, bruised, damaged, wounded, amputated, modified, transformed, composed, edited, posted, decontextualised and recontextualised, copied and pasted, to again find ourselves being nothing more than another commodity. Nothing more than another insignificant thing. Overall, being nothing more than another "poor image". Nonetheless, whatever those poor images are, they have implemented something that had no prior existence. Something that has the power to transform and give birth to something almost special as Steyerl claims:

The poor image is no longer about the real thing—the originary original. Instead, it is about its own condition of existence [...] In short: it is about reality⁷².

The ideology of *Paradise on Earth* combined with the current way of communicating through images to convey a reality that does not exist anymore (since it has been transformed and reduced to the size of an image itself) and has magically succeeded in making our original body disappear. But since "it is about reality", we joyfully continue to experience our-non-selves. Hence, while we are busy becoming the low definition of ourselves and consequently populating an extended new paradisaical non-real reality, Jon Rafman (a Canadian visual artist) is browsing and extracting from the internet some key images relating to these striking body mutations. For nearly fifteen years his work has investigated "digital technologies and the communities they create, focussing on the losses, longings and fantasies that shape our technology-infused lives today⁷³". Some of the images he extracted are of

72. Ibid., p.44.

73. <https://spruethmagers.com/artists/jon-rafman/>

teenagers playing with photo filters transforming them into mutant human bodies in fusion with animal parts. These images exhibit the attributes of what could be defined as contemporary chimeras. Visible on Rafman's TikTok⁷⁴ account, these images provide good examples of what 'poor images', whether still or moving, can be, of what we have become. Nonetheless, for Rafman, his collection is essentially 'a testament to the resilience of teenagers⁷⁵'. For me they are the testimony of how deplorable *Paradise on Earth's* ideology paired with technology have rendered us. In fact, since technology is leading our actions, our body and mind constantly need to adapt to new environments. As a teenager, I was playing secretly in my mind, exploring the few possibilities that my mediated heroes were staging, to eventually write my fantasies down in my diary (using words, so presenting rather than representing). Today, teenagers are transforming themselves publicly using peculiar photo filters and other camera tricks making them resemble mutant creatures that are half-human, half-animal, sometimes with limbs, other times simply amputated. This fascination for chopped, assembled, puzzled, wounded bodies mutating into animals isn't a new theme. Chimeras, centaurs, Medusa, the Minotaur, the Sphinx, and mermaids all populated Greek mythology. These eerie creatures all had specific skills and powers. They were all ready to fight and win over a multitude of rather dangerous and violent events. In contrast, Jon Rafman's TikTok collection of teenagers' portraits are absolutely not like this. They thoroughly lack vigour and energy, there is no visible excitement, probably because these teenagers, while staging themselves, watch themselves looking at themselves. Passivity is induced, dialog is non-existent, and is in fact not even triggered. Their first interlocutor is not another person but themselves. Hence, the uncanny moment of the subject becoming the object happens while the subject itself is looking at its own transformation taking place. This puts the outsider/interlocutor/viewer in the position of a voyeur while a narcissistic/fetishistic relationship between the subject/object/simulacrum gets embedded and revealed in the simulacrum ('poor

74. TikTok was the most downloaded app worldwide, with users spending 90% more time there compared to 2020. Jane Wakefield, People devote third of waking time to mobile apps, 12th January 2022, internet source: < <https://www.bbc.com/news/technology-59952557>>.

75. Link to Jon Rafman's TikTok account, <https://www.tiktok.com/@jonrafman>.

image') itself. This process is amazing, intriguing and could be breath-taking. Nonetheless, this layered intimate gaze (though rendered public) is looking into the void. Nothing is happening. It could be a game, but these young chimeras seem to have no belief to fight for. Instead, if there is any battle taking place here, it seems that it could only be against boredom. This somehow reinforces or even asserts an evident lack of agency, exacerbated by a conspicuous lack of creativity. All this is being pre-made, mediated, paradised, by the system. Nowadays the passive violence engendered by the system is constantly exposing our bodies while nursing narcissism. Through our impossible quest for *Paradise on Earth*, the commodities we accumulate, or should I say we have become ourselves, are not holding any of their promises toward happiness. Instead, after stumbling over and over, being disappointed, we gradually slip into an exhausted body that ends up being a monstrously transformed one for us to be either entertained again or wallowing in self-pity. Hacked, we are paralysed, obsessed, and haunted by the spectrum of *Paradise on Earth*. It is maybe there – when all is lost – that creativity is allowed again. One can dare, gamble, and find the strength to act volitionally again. Instead, it seems that, too fatigued, we passively hope that the blue light of our screen will replace the sun, allowing the phoenix to arise from its ashes. Which of course, is not a possibility.

Marianna Simnett (a British-Croatian visual artist) is fascinated by mutant bodies and considers the “body as a site of transformation⁷⁶”. But again the transformation is rather painful, most of the time leading to a tragic ending. Using her own body to perform or stage others, she explores the complex relationship one can entertain with its own corporeality. One of her pieces of writing, *Hold me Closer, Cyberdance*⁷⁷ (2020), is the story of Fatima, who will do everything possible to hold on her life’s dream, which is – as her favourite dancer – to be a dancer herself. Obsessively and repeatedly watching clips of her idol over and over on her computer screen, Fatima is determined. Nothing and no one will stop her, not even her own body. Victim of

76. Extract from Marianna Simnett’s biography: <<https://mariannasimnett.com/>>

77. Marianna Simnett, *Hold me Closer, Cyberdance*, Text, Dazed, Autumn/Winter, Issue 270, *Take me to the Future*, 2020, p.51.

the system, of the ideology of *Paradise on Earth*, her determination to overcome induced passivity will lead her to death:

They will never take me away, I will dance in my sleep if I have to. [...] She prepares her body, fighting each day's toll of inertia, by bandaging her bones into their proper shape. Taking a knife, she slices off the lump growing out the back of her neck and stitches herself back together so she can fit into her costume. She has sewn it herself [...] She has sliced off her ankles down to her bones to remove the flab around her feet. Her smile, oh, her smile, hasn't changed one bit. They can never take that beam from her [...] She feels beautiful costume and skin stitched together as one. [...] On the night of the show [...] Her eviscerated corpse twirls above the horror-stricken heads as she flaps her little wing⁷⁸.

Simnett's allegorical writing again brutally outlines the cruelty of contemporary corporeality's condition; the brutality of this ubiquitous *Paradise on Earth*. Screens are an excellent space to act, enact and re-enact repetition presenting us with multiple versions of Paradise, of capital's imposed collective dream. There is a schizophrenic relationship establishing itself between us and what we see on our multiple screens that can lead to extreme violence. This distortion is depicted in Todd Phillips' movie *Joker* (2019). The lead character, Arthur Fleck (Joaquin Phoenix), is suffering from depression combined with delusional syndrome that leads him, during a live show, to kill (in front of the audience) his TV hero right after having blamed the system for abandoning the downtrodden and psychologically ill. In other words, for abandoning its own production.

What is remarkable in Phillips' scenario is that, while addressing current social issues as well as the danger of constantly being subjugated by media/*Paradise on Earth*'s ideology, Phillips depicts the genealogy of a villain and creates a character that incarnates all features of what I call 'flouted body'. Arthur Fleck/Joker incarnates

78. Ibid., p.51.

at once the subject, the object, and the simulacrum and through his actions become a hero and a martyr. Thus, Arthur Fleck is altogether the subject of his own desperate and difficult life. He is the object of his tough heredity, which – like Baudrillard’s peasant – confers him ‘no aura nor destiny’⁷⁹. Then, holding on to his dream to be a comedian, Fleck mistakes his original self for his own simulacrum (his disguised/paradised Joker avatar), while his delusional life conducts him to be a hero saving vulnerable people. Yet, due to his lack of ability towards discernment, he becomes a murderer and consequently the martyr of his own original condition. In fact, Fleck, like Fatima, sadly embeds the complexity to be in a system led by capital. A system, as Brown depicts it, that “formulates everything, everywhere in terms of capital investment and appreciation, including and especially human themselves⁸⁰”. Both reveal the growing difficulty of keeping oneself balanced in a society/environment where boundaries are blurred, and bodies are disregarded. As an escape, we look for happiness. Fatigued, not mistaking simulacrum for reality has become almost impossible and again generates frustration and despair. The relation between the watched images and us is extremely intimate. Thus, to admit that the representation of ourselves, of the world, of what we see on the screen isn’t the reality is extremely complicated to accept, if not impossible. All the more so, as Steyerl highlights, all of this is “about reality”. More precisely, it is forming part of hyperreality in the sense Jean Baudrillard has defined it. “The real [...] is a hyperreal produced from a radiating synthesis of combinatory models in a hyperspace without atmosphere⁸¹”. As a result, the ideology of *Paradise on Earth* has succeeded, while invading our lives, to not be a dream nor an ideal. It is merely not an ideology anymore. Rather it has become the real. This is how we have lost our agency while hopelessly trying to reach happiness. Hence, we are becoming the steady, tamed version of a human being contemplating its paradised model, which is nothing more than the ‘homo oeconomicus⁸²’ version of itself consuming obediently and

79. Jean Baudrillard, *From Hyperreality to Disappearance*, Uncollected Interviews, Edited by Richard G. Smith and David B. Clarke, Edinburgh University Press, 2015, p.7

80. Wendy Brown, *Undoing the Demos*, Neoliberalism’s Stealth Revolution, Zone Books, 2015, p.176.

68. Jean Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulation*, University of Michigan Press, 1994, p.2.

82. Wendy Brown, *Undoing the Demos*, Neoliberalism’s Stealth Revolution, Zone Books, 2015, p.176.

submissively, in most cases mistaking alienation for freedom while being totally disconnected from anything tangible.

Touch me if you can

Remember? Hands are the tools we have used to encounter the world since birth. We trust them for defining simple feelings and sensations such as cold, too cold, hot, too hot, and so on. We held our mother's hand to take our first steps in the world. Hands are forever the mediator between the world and us. We trust them blindly. Today, what we watch – most of the time – takes place in between our hands. Not your beautiful soft face, smiling at me when I kissed your cheeks and mouth. Rather your cold filtered simulacrum screened on my mobile device. Teatime has been replaced by Facetime. I have not seen you for a very long time, but I see you every day. Like in a parlour, our screens are a liminal space between us and the world. But there is no transition. What we see is a screen. What we touch is nothing more than a screen. What is in between stays in between. Eye and hand are fooled equally. While fantasising the represented, the resembling, the reproduced, I lost the real, I lost you as well. Bernard Stiegler argues that 'In such a purely computational context, individual as well as collective pretensions fade away'⁸³. Hence, becoming no-body busy touching no-thing, I nonetheless have the feeling to access the world, my idle "paradised" time is occupied with no-thing as much as my hand. The system is safe and preserved. In fact, one should not forget, as Darian Leader reminds us, that for centuries 'idle hands were seen as a threat both to the individual and to the social order'⁸⁴. Nonetheless, imagine the Greek Moirai⁸⁵ with a mobile phone in their hands; what would have happened to our destiny?

83. Bernard Stiegler, *The Age of Disruption, Technology and Madness in Late Capitalism*, Polity Press, 2019, p.12.

84. Darian Leader, *Hands, What We Do with Them and Why*, Penguin Books, 2017, p.42.

85. Fate, Greek Moira, plural Moirai, Latin Parca, plural Parcae, in Greek and Roman mythology, any of three goddesses who determined human destinies, and in particular the span of a person's life and his allotment of misery and suffering. Internet source:

<<https://www.britannica.com/topic/Fate-Greek-and-Roman-mythology>>

Our touch sense craves beauty, and contemporary commodities are now specifically thought to fill this desire. Hence, shiny like a gem, holding tones of marketing promises and fun while using it, as well as being able to take the best picture, framing the best moments of your best life, smartphones are handy and have been designed especially for our hands, for our bodies using fingerprints and/or facial recognition to operate. They couldn't be more tightly bound to our body and desire unless the next step is using our bloodstream. More than just a phone, it is, to name only a few functions, our keys, credit card, bank account, mailbox, photo album, calendar, weather forecast, TV, note pad, voice memo, camera, clock, calculator, compass, map, music library, book library, wallet, personal assistant, admin organiser and so on. It contains our passwords and personal information, it knows our family, friends, habits, mood, tastes, cycles, weaknesses, and strengths. It contains all our data, both important and insubstantial⁸⁶. Overall, it allows our life to be summed up by specific algorithms that, again, daily talk to us in the enticingly soft and mellifluous language of *Paradise on Earth*. After all, there is no surprise when a recent study shows that the 'smartphone is now considered by users the place where we live⁸⁷'. Prof Daniel Miller, who led the study with a team of anthropologists of UCL (University College London) adds that "at any point a person we're with can just disappear, having 'gone home' to their smartphone⁸⁸". One should note that again disappearance is a recurrent effect/result. Disappearance of the original, disappearance of the body, disappearance of the real, disappearance of experience⁸⁹. Altogether, on an emotional level, the smartphone is of a crucial importance. It is an extension of our cognitive skills; it even has the capacity to

86. I still remember when in the late 1980s 2-in-1 shampoos/conditioners were first introduced to the market. From 2-in-1 shampoo to smartphones we've come a long way. Nonetheless, even today consumers are still wondering if it is safe/good to use a product with two specifications. There is always a confusion when lines get blurred.

87. Alex Hern, Smartphone is now 'the place where we live', anthropologists say, 10 May 2021, internet source: <<https://www.theguardian.com/technology/2021/may/10/smartphone-is-now-the-place-where-we-live-anthropologists-say>>.

88. Ibid.

89. 'Automation is the first of its kind in a new type of creative object – it is the subtraction of experience, not an intensification of experience. [...] Typical responses to complex environments include stalling, frustration, despondency and helplessness. Ultimately, disengagement arrives and then boredom.' Francis Sanzaro, *Society Elsewhere, Why the Gravest Threat to Humanity Will Come From Within*, Zero Books, 2018, p.129.

replace them. In short, our mobile device is us, the space where our simulacrum can live and enjoy *Paradise on Earth* made real. Once again, having it in our hands is nothing more than watching, looking at another representation of us, through a strange and powerful mirror that has no edges. Screens have become a prosthetic object that follows us everywhere while reflecting who we are. Sometimes it feels that our body is nothing more than a plinth holding the “precious thing” that has become our reason to live. Body and reality, hand in hand, have lost their agency. The over paradised, mediated and digitalised era we are experiencing is utterly responsible for our loss. RIP my dear self. I don’t need you anymore since automated technology has the power to formulate endless rigorous answers and sequences matching the ideology of *Paradise on Earth*, while processing data and anticipating for me the best of what I could and should desire, the best of what *Paradise on Earth* must be. In this regard, Francis Sanzaro is dragging our attention to the still obscure and elusive algorithms. Sanzaro details how they operate, where and how they proceed and, specifically, emphasises their pernicious downside, highlighting that “they live between us and our instincts, between us and our bodies, between one another⁹⁰”. They know it all, about me, about you, about us, and if not yet they do by now. It seems that they lie in liminality. Intercepting everything and orchestrating our life and the turns it should take from there. It could be the description of a nice but slightly too intrusive neighbour who happens to always be behind the entrance door, ready to help. But in fact, it is again *Paradise on Earth*’s ideology operating this time from our own pocket, removing everything but our mobile device from our hands. Of course, it is true that automation is not a new thing; it entered our daily lives long ago. The French movie director Jacques Tati in his movie *My Uncle* (1954) showed the burlesque aspect of an automated house and how the house’s owners got overwhelmed by all these talking, helping, time-saving, problem-solving technologies. Nowadays we are used to home appliances, devices, apps beeping, speaking, ringing, starting and stopping, opening and closing whenever we want. But now they are invisibly next to us, 24/7. They listen quietly, remembering and storing data. The concerning aspect is that they know and remember so much that

90. Francis Sanzaro, *Society Elsewhere, Why the Gravest Threat to Humanity Will Come From Within*, Zero Books, 2018, p.20.

they can make decisions for us. They think ahead of us. This is utterly seductive and makes technology appear simply convenient and handy. Nonetheless, it is as Sanzaro argues a “Janus-faced reality⁹¹” that largely contributes to rendering us ‘useless’ – both in personal and professional spheres – by removing our sense of agency (which atrophies both body and mind), as much as narrowing our fields of action and consequently nurturing boredom (passivity). Sanzaro further adds that:

The most difficult hurdle in technology is not technological, but in figuring out how to shoehorn its creator, us, into its workflow to keep it functioning. Unfortunately, nearly all scenarios about the future, even conservative ones, must contend with wide-scale human uselessness. [...] Automation is the first of its kind in a new type of creative object—it is the subtraction of experience, not an intensification of experience. [...] Our Era is called the Age of Entanglement because no one understands what is really happening with the majority of things we use, and yet complexity is only going to increase. Typical responses to complex environments include stalling, frustration, despondency, and helplessness. Ultimately, disengagement arrives and then boredom⁹².

Hence, the main issue is not technological, rather its usage and content should be emphasised. How we use it, what it contains and through its usage what we become is the question at stake. This obviously concerns the ideology of *Paradise on Earth* as well. In fact, together with technology, they should have initially opened up and stimulate all possibilities that once upon a time were lying in our individual and respective potentiality. But the usage is wrong, it instead slowly leads to complete human cancellation. Already, intellectual impoverishment is observed. Thus, in relation to the current disruption process, Bernard Stiegler⁹³ states that:

91. Francis Sanzaro, *Society Elsewhere, Why the Gravest Threat to Humanity Will Come From Within*, Zero Books, 2018, p.22.

92. *Ibid.*, p.123.

93. Bernard Stiegler, *The Age of Disruption, Technology and Madness in Late Capitalism*, Polity Press, 2019, On page 7, disruption is defined as follow: Automatic and reticulated society thereby becomes the global cause of a colossal social disintegration. The

Desires, expectations, volitions, will and so on: everything that for individuals forms the horizon of their future, constituted by their protentions, is outstripped, overtaken and progressively replaced by automatic protentions that are produced by intensive computing systems operating between one and four million times quicker than the nervous systems of psychic individuals. [...] Disruption renders will, wherever its source, obsolete in advance: it always arrives too late. What is thereby attained is an extreme stage of rationalization, forming a threshold, that is, a limit. What lies beyond this limit remains unknown: it destroys reason not only in the sense that rational knowledge finds itself eliminated by proletarianization, but in the sense that individuals and groups, losing the very possibility of existing (for their existence depends on being able to express their will), losing therefore all reason for living, become literally mad, and tend to despise life – their own and that of others. The result is the risk of a global social explosion consigning humanity to a nameless barbarism⁹⁴.

The dreams and phantasms that have once been incarnated by the promise technology was holding – especially in the hope of reaching happiness by giving us time, freedom that was supposed to allow us to curate our life in relation to our personal and individual way of imagining *Paradise on Earth* – so far has failed. There is an urgent necessity to regain control over it. To find back our capacity to invent the world rather than to suffer it. Frederic Jameson in his essay *Archaeologies of the Future, The Desire Called Utopia and Other Science Fictions* outlines the discrepancy between how Utopia (as a new thing) can be imagined and what happens when it is implemented. As an example, Jameson refers to David Lindsay's novel *Voyage to Arcturus*, in which the author describes a new colour. In response,

automatic power of reticulated disintegration extends across the face of the earth through a process that has recently become known as disruption.

94. Bernard Stiegler, *The Age of Disruption, Technology and Madness in Late Capitalism*, Polity Press, 2019, p.24.

Jameson argues that for a new thing to exist requires new capacities, as we 'have to imagine a new sense organ and a new body that correspond to it'⁹⁵.

This new body should visibly be in control, be active and unchained from passivity. Hence while transitioning, as Sanzaro suggests, it is crucial to find 'response and understanding towards those new complex environment'⁹⁶. Although this may be true, so far, we have no choice or spare time to think of alternatives. The current system constrains us to live our life with great intensity, disposing of things and people as we go. Obsessed by the ideology of *Paradise on Earth*, we consume outrageously to keep ourselves entertained and distracted, and when we cannot do so, we barely have the capacity to dream about anything else anymore. Intensity is another motto; nevertheless, intensity also happens to be a failure, not holding any of its promises or granting any access to *Paradise on Earth* either. Instead, it is also contributing to alter and erode our existence and bodies. Tristan Garcia writes about this sorrowful state in these terms:

When we rely exclusively on intensity to find a reason for living, we end up surrendering both life and thought to the fatigue of existence. Modernity accidentally shook an invincible monster from its slumber, and now we find it here, half hidden within the depths of our feelings⁹⁷.

The literature examples are numerous, which probably asserts that the situation is alarming and frightening. Hence, in the form of a novel *Hell* (2021), Gaspar Koenig (a French writer) gives the perfect embodiment of the damage that intensity as a 'reason for living' can perpetrate. The plot revolves around one small twist the protagonist just died. Life being fair, the ultimate promise of happiness is found, and all dreams will be granted in paradise. But the capitalist's version of a dreamy life is imposed on him, which forces him to constantly be on the move. Hence, having all

95. Fredric Jameson, *Archaeology of the Future, The Desire Called Utopia and Other Science Fictions*, Verso, 2005, p.120.

96. Tristan Garcia, *The Life Intense: a Modern Obsession*, Edinburgh University Press Ltd, 2018, p.34.

97. Tristan Garcia, *The Life Intense: a Modern Obsession*, Edinburgh University Press Ltd, 2018, p.47.

one can wish for, money, sex, clothes, travelling business class, drinking free-flowing champagne all day long rapidly becomes a nightmare, especially when all of this is subjected to strict rules. Looping over and over, there is not a single instant to rest, or to exchange or share anything with anyone. This version of Paradise in fact happens to be hell. The protagonist trapped in this exhausting system will try everything possible to get out, to find the glitch in the system, in order to regain agency and hopefully rest in peace. What Koenig depicts is a rather familiar environment; a twilight zone that is disturbingly similar to what we experience as flouted bodies in late capitalism. The work of Mire Lee (a Korean sculptor) offers another example of wounded bodies. Taking one step further, she presents us with what of our bodies will be left in a near future. Thus, her sculptural work relates to the crucial struggle encountered by the human body to simply operate, in order to simply accomplish its basic maintenance. Hence, Lee's kinetic sculptures operate in a survival mode, suggesting "the tension of states of aliveness", as she defines it herself. Composed of hoses, rods, motors, grease, silicone, clay, and oil, the material she assembles in gigantic mechanic sculptures seems to reveal the work of our internal organs, pumping, extracting, rejecting, absorbing fluids, material, and viscous substances. The immensity of her sculptures swallows the viewer. It could be a metaphor to represent the system that constantly feeds on us. Again, Lee's work presents the body in a state of emergency, lethal, battling to survive a sort of coma. As if Lee's body-like sculptures were attempting – in a last breath – to warn us about our comatose state, silently yelling at us "Wake up". But absorbed by the luminous ray of our screens, by the spectrum of *Paradise on Earth*, blinded and deaf, we remain trapped in their ubiquitous flow.

Where are we

Lost, in need of another escape toward happiness, a friend of mine recently told me: "In the Metaverse, I can be everything I want". I was confused. First, she didn't dissociate herself and her simulacrum. Second, I thought it was the line to define

the democratic American Dream. Or maybe it was the leitmotiv of the life coach of another friend. I forgot. Confused anyway, I thought that since “the map (still) precedes the territory⁹⁸”, maybe the United States of America, the coach, my friends, and the entire planet reside in the Metaverse. Maybe we’ve merged already!? Maybe we have abandoned reality ‘for real’ with no possible return anymore. Maybe I missed an episode. So, to get me totally confused – during my idle time (nursing a hangover), in other words, being in a deeply relaxing (passive, of course) couch mode, I got myself caught scrolling over and over (again) and – I randomly ran into Lady Gaga. She was giving a “Thank You Everyone Speech” at a ‘Planetary Greatest Award Ceremony’. Awarding the greatest simulacrum among simulacrams. (Essentially the ones able to consume their success rather than the ones being consumed by it.) The weak were absent as usual, but Lady Gaga’ speech was for them, me, you, Arthur, Fatima and the others. She (on point) started this way:

If you are at home, and you’re sitting on your couch and you are watching this right now, all I have to say is that this is hard work. I’ve worked hard for a long time, and it’s not about winning. What it’s about is not giving up. If you have a dream, fight for it. It’s about discipline, over passion, and it’s not about how many times you get rejected or you fall down, or you’re beaten up. It’s about how many times you stand up and are brave and keep on going⁹⁹.

Oh wow! *Paradise on Earth* even has a voice, and a body. It breathes, smiles, cries, swallows. And this “incarnation” reconfirms, like a priest, on its behalf, that ultimately we can all be successful and happy. It is just a matter of being brave and strong, of keeping on going; being wounded or not should not interfere. The method is the key: following a scrupulous one, anyone can be whatever they want! *Paradise on Earth* is absolutely everywhere, even in the method. Nonetheless, all of this got me hyper-confused. I first jealously wished I could become an Ambassador of *Paradise on*

98. Jean Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulation*, University of Michigan Press, 1994, p.1.

99. Lady Gaga, Oscars Acceptance Speech, 25th February 2019, Los Angeles, USA.

Earth. Then I wondered for hours, how come Lady Gaga knew where I was? Eventually I realised that my slow nervous system shouldn't even try to answer this question. So, I called my friend asking them if there was a good café in the Metaverse where we could all meet up. Later that day, I realised this confusing event was not totally inconsequential as it reminded me that, in 1906, Kakuzo Okakura also got substantially bewildered. Here is the confusing event he got exposed to:

In Western Houses we are often confronted with what appears to us (Japanese) useless reiteration. We find it trying to talk to a man while his full-length portrait stares at us from behind his back. We wonder which is real, he of the picture or he who talks, and feel a curious conviction that one of them must be a fraud¹⁰⁰.

I am wondering what Okakura would have thought knowing that nowadays pictures talk. Mockery would have probably not been as easy. Fear and pity would have probably overwhelmed him if not horrified. The level of confusion has increased drastically, and the fraud might not be where it used to be expected. We might not be able to consider anything a fraud anymore since the real has expended into multiple dimensions. Nonetheless, Salvador Dalí has a rather appealing answer toward these events: 'The reason some portraits don't look true to life is that some people make no effort to resemble their pictures.' Dalí's quote is rather interesting. One could consider it as an act of resistance. I like to think it is a battle: Surrealism vs. Hyperrealism. This hypothesis, for once, fed me with joy! This pleasant feeling did not last, though. How could it, since, as a matter of fact, my heroes are dead, my amputated body is slowly fainting, and my potentiality is nullified. Slowly, and with no genuine desire, I tried to bury my despair. Not knowing how, I first watched a tutorial. Later that day, only a remnant ersatz of a fantasised reality was nursing the impotent frustration of my cornered disappearing but paradised body and mind. Bodies are endlessly represented, interpreted, formed, and transformed by

100. Kakuzo Okakura, *The Book of Tea*, Penguin Classics, 1906, p.58.

countless media and systems of representation. I gave up trying to decipher the real, it has fooled me too long ago.

—

It, about us

The inescapable ideology of *Paradise on Earth* has some dramatic consequences and effects on our bodies as well as our capacity to situate the real. While disappearance and uselessness can be a consequence of one another, they also seem to accelerate our inherent entropism, as well as feeding violence and fear whenever possible. This entire process is entertaining a terrifying vicious circle. While the ideology of *Paradise on Earth* is imposing its mono-aesthetic dictated by the system on a worldwide scale. Or at least within every country that is subjected to Western capitalism. Endlessly repeating the same model of thinking, seeing, understanding, being, looking, living, it happens to be, so far, the most efficient way to precipitate entire nations and cultures in a blending machine, while making profit. This also seems to be the most efficient way to control, confuse and subjugate people, while in the meantime giving them the illusion that they have all the tools (including freedom) to perform and be who they want to be. All in all, it appears to be the perfect answer to whoever wants to find a way out of their own predicament. Since, in fact, the whole process/apparatus is continuously using one's body as the ultimate reference, enhancing it with multiple prosthetic tools, colours, and ideas that ultimately should lead to a perfect and happy reality. Nevertheless, what *Paradise on Earth's* ideology is offering has some thoroughly concerning similarities with the deal Faust sealed with the devil. Hence, one should not forget that the enticing contract led him to be perpetually enslaved¹⁰¹.

101. Faust is the protagonist of a classic German legend, for one should keep in mind that Faust was bored and depressed with his life, failed his first attempt to commit suicide and finally made a deal with the devil.

Achille Mbembe in his essay *Brutalisme* (2020) meticulously paints the portrait of our current era, which according to him is dominated by “three crucial questions: the calculation in its computational form, the economy in its neurobiological form, the living in prey to a process of carbonization¹⁰²”. Mbembe’s vision is rather radical. Stating that we could have imagined a different scenario, we could have acted differently. Nothing was forcing us to orchestrate our disappearance, to merge with machines, to repeat endlessly the same evil strategies. But sadly, our perverted minds chose otherwise. All the way, Mbembe’s text is painful; it hits the core, but is vain. We are vain. Thus, Mbembe poetically concludes:

There will be no more accidents, no religions, no states, no police forces, no borders, no races, no languages, no erections, no phalluses. Everywhere, prosthetic mechanical tubes, plastic teeth, screws, and chips encrusted within bodies. Everywhere the metamorphosis, the expenditure and pleasure of waste, in the ecstasy pit that the cosmos would have become. Transcending our bodily limits, the last boundary, this has always been our dream. It has cost us the Earth¹⁰³.

The repeated negation of every difference, asperity, and discrepancy forms brutality, forms the deracinating act per se. Negation seeking hegemony is characteristic of *Paradise on Earth’s* ideology and aesthetic. Utterly seductive and soft, it is nonetheless setting a violent, perverse, narcissistic relationship that only unpacks itself gently day after day. *Paradise on Earth* is undoubtedly tremendously brutal, deracinating myself from myself.

Sickened, I need to repeat to myself again and again: “Paradise is not the remedy”.

I need to visualise it, again and again, for myself. I need to imagine it, skinned, colourless. I need to present it rather than represent it. I need to use words against

102. Achille Mbembe, *Brutalisme*, Edition La Découverte, 2020, p.9 (So far Mbembe’s essay has been published in French only, so the translation is my own.)

103. *Ibid.*, p. 232.

images. I need to use almost nothing against everything. I need the void to see the extent of this intensely painful and scary empty promise. To mourn it, I need to do. I remember reading that “Soldiers returning from the Crimean War then the First World War were encouraged to knit and embroider, with the idea that a constant repetitive activity would have calming effects on the nerves¹⁰⁴”. Until now repetition just contributed to annihilate myself, but I am willing to try. Repetition forced onto myself by myself might overcome passive suffered ones. Paradise is a monster; I stated this long ago. I did not know back then it was inevitable. Looking again at the repetition’s process, if repetition is inexhaustible, the process might not be. Sabotage, could be a solution to a form of redemption. Only with a nearly unnoticeable twist, Paradies rather than Paradise, and a new body of potentialities arises.

91. Darian Leader, *Hands, What We Do with Them and Why*, Penguin Books, 2017, p.57.

Rarely images purely trigger imagination, its full potentiality. René Magritte's oil painting *The Magic Mirror* (1929), is a sensational homage to the viewer, a pure act of trust.



René Magritte, *The Magic Mirror* (1929).

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**HERE IS THE LINK TO THE
CREATIVE WORK**

<https://audrey8633.wixsite.com/floutedbodies>

