



Time and Eternity of the Body

The Temporality of Commercial Pictures as a Narrative Category

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It is obvious, that the most impenetrable thing is what is always already present in the very act of perception. It is impossible to grasp the site of being-in-the-world by objectivation and thematization, because it is the empty basis, the abyss in the core of human existence, and the place indicating the radical discontinuity of being. Yet, in spite of the inevitable failure of every attempt to symbolize this unnameable, it is tried over and over again with frantic insistence and anxiety. This endless syntagmatic replacement of signifiers is the story – or the symptom – that I intend to approach in my analysis of commercial pictures and that can be seen as setting in motion the desiring machine (see Deleuze & Guattari 2007) of the free market and its spectacular economies.

The “blind spot” of the symbolic field is marked by an unstable multiplicity of signifiers with loose and shifting articulations. So perhaps the commercial picture, this surface of multiple picture facets projected on the voracious desire of the dark irrational masses, is where we may get a glimpse of what is going on in this desiring machine. However, the ineffability of the machine’s traumatic core is not just the absence of a (sufficient) signifier. This is why it may, perhaps, be approached following the idea of Jean-Luc Nancy in *Corpus* (1996). That is, through the most evident, impossible, useless and excessive concept in human language: the body. The body is the ultimate *a priori* that is already made manifest in every utterance, thought and act. Since it is this site or opening where being-in-the-world takes place (cf. Heidegger 2000, 122-151 & *passim*), it must itself remain beyond the symbolic order of things. It is not a thing, but it

is not “nothing” either. It can be said to name the empty center or the ground/abyss (*Grund/Abgrund*; *ibid.* 306-326 & *passim*) that organizes every system of meaning, every economy of desire – exactly because it is the void whose irrationality is always covered by the production of meanings. (Nancy 1996, 23-25 & *passim*.)

This symptomatic production, its elements, dynamics and its organization is what I’m attempting to analyze in the discourse of commercial pictures. I am not referring to any specific set, since I am attempting to analyze one of the general patterns and dynamics that are at work in the discourse. Although my final arguments cannot be unproblematically generalized and applied to every existant picture or even every type of pictures, I nonetheless hope to be able to point out something that is central and symptomatic to the functioning of commercial pictures.⁹ First I will consider their mode of narrativity and temporality, then I will go on to analyzing their most basic elements and dynamics and thus try to approach the organization of desire that is at work in commercial pictures, and finally I will consider the symptomatic production as revealing the same trauma that it covers (cf. Freud 1954).

Time and imperative cover stories

The narrativity of commercial pictures in general is far from being evident. In spite of much that has been said for or against narrativity in pictorial representations, I would claim that commercial pictures are essentially without time. Yet their relation with time is a fundamental category defining their narrativity, as I claim in my subtitle, since this negative category does not occur on the same level as the numerous typologies of temporal representation in pictures: the category is for the pictures that fall outside questions of time. This is exactly what happens to

⁹ To be at least a little less abstract and to illustrate my arguments, I have chosen an extremely arbitrary group of exemplary images. These are probably not the best ones to be found, but the aleatory nature of this set should help to convince of the applicability of the analysis.

[1] http://img.dailymail.co.uk/i/pix/2007/08_01/keiraChanel120807_468x627.jpg

[2] http://www.madeinitaly-e.com/sunglassesdolce&qabbana/landing_page_dolce_&qabbana_2.jpg

[3] <http://blogger.qssupplies.co.uk/images/handm.jpg>

[4] <http://www.kibitzhomme.com/wp-content/uploads/2008/05/dolce-gabbana.jpg>

[5] <http://www.makeupminute.com/wp-content/uploads/2007/03/maybellinedefinealash-1.jpg>

[6] <http://frillr.com/files/images/Prada%20%20Spring-Summer%202008%20Womens%20Ad%20Campaign2.preview.jpg>

[7] http://www.phonearea.net/wp-content/themes/default/pictures/lq/2007/q3/lq_prada_gold.jpg

[8] http://www.luxurylaunches.com/entry_images/1106/07/chanel.jpg

[9] <http://www.italian-fashion-watch.com/wp-content/uploads/2008/03/dolce-gabbana.jpg>

commercial pictures as they dismiss time, attempting to impose a universal imperative of desire that would go for every consumer irrespective of all the contingent (temporal) circumstances of their lives. In the idea of the absolute (brand, product, style, etc.) the pictures strive to reach eternity, but fall short of it and end up in an empty category without time *and* without eternity. The fantasy of 'timeless style' is *utopian*, because it has no time or ground. Its coming is announced from above, from the place of no place – the meta-level or a possible world of desire (cf. Grishakova 2006, 279) – as a messianic promise that can never be fulfilled in the time of this world. But this position in a meta-level outside temporal contingency is the *a priori* of commercial pictures: their functioning depends on its unconscious assertion in the "unmediated" perception of the consumers. Thus the category does not seem to have any specific structural features that would indicate the lack of temporality: it is always already supposed in their way of signifying.

Does the lack of time not also mean the lack of narrativity, though? At first it would seem so. What is presented in the pictures is, in fact, not that this thing is happening, but some causal or associative meaning for the representation, that is, a reduction to some signifier (see picture [4]). So when commercial pictures do contain classical narrative elements, they are framed there only to be commented, and the actual thing happens on the level of commentary. Commercial picture is a mediator of desire, and thus it always functions on the meta-level in relation to any presented or real event, like announcements in department stores or voice-over in films. But any means of communication cannot be used without its revealing something of the world in which it is used – it is the language that ultimately does the speaking, as Heidegger says. And what is said in the discourse of commercial pictures is not outside time any more, since it is repeated and varied in the production of these pictures.

So although there are also the types of pictures that use the formal means of representing time (indicating simultaneity of happening, duration, temporal organization, causality etc.) by visual means, this is not what I mean by the narrativity of commercial pictures. The narrative I look for is not a random story about some or other incident or product, but, basically, the story that many of the pictures have in common. That is, either the "temporal", hypothetical imperative: "This product is so X (fashionable, pretty, cool, interesting...) that when you have it, you will X (be this popular, look like this, have all these things, be able to do all this...)" (see picture [5]) or, the more radical version, the "eternal", categorical imperative: "This brand is absolute, and this product is its incarnation". Obviously, the right to impose the categorical imperative is what brands and products strive to claim in these pictures, even if they

always have to depend on the hypothetical version as well. This is a basic feature of the desiring machine of spectacular economies – the attempted shift from want to *desire* (in the strict Lacanian sense; see e.g. Lacan 2006, 645-668 and Žižek 2003, 49).

The system articulates itself in its every moment, and commercial pictures are moments of free market economy that strive towards organizing desire, that is, towards posing the categorical imperative. But how is it possible for it to achieve the hegemony on the autonomous, irrational and, in a way, detached field of desire? The functioning of the hypothetical imperative is easy to understand, since it only channels the already existing want for a given set of basic (cultural) things. The attempted categorical imperatives work in less obvious but nonetheless distinctively structured ways, as can already be read in the *Mythologies* of Barthes (1993). The strategic point here is idealising the product, that is, producing its absolute nature or quintessentially “investing” the surplus value (pleasure) in it (cf. Bowlby 1993, 14-16 & *passim*). This process is generating ideal consumption, as Marina Grishakova writes: “The experience of pleasure is presented as self-sufficient and limitless, overshadowing the object’s practical purposefulness, its limitations or finitude. The object is idealized as a perfect object of desire.” (2006, 276).

The pictures stating the categorical imperative of ideal consumption often use the negative moment to put in motion the search for the missing and thereby elevated mystical element (cf. De Certeau 1995, 79-86. The use of the negative moment also resembles the sublation or “operation margarine” of Barthes (1973, 45-47 & *passim*). Thus the pictures can seemingly risk misinterpretation and leave off the product or the beautiful woman; dress her, make her up or make her pose so that she looks weird, unhuman, unpleasant – “the way none of us would *really* want to look” (this might be perceived in picture [6] or [9]) – or they can show the product being fouled or scorned or destroyed. In the modelling world, beauty is not even recommendable: as Tyra Banks continuously puts it in her “America’s next top model”, they are supposed to look “interesting”¹⁰, not just pretty. It is exactly in this obverse logic that the object/product is sublimated to an absolute incarnation of the Brand: Since every physical quality of the product can be taken away from it, it is not any attribute that makes the Product absolute (cf. Barthes 1973, 92). So it must be that mystical, hidden or missing element, that is indicated by the negativity in the picture. In the search of the missing element that is supposed to cause this turn, every strategic thing in the picture is raised to the value of the absolute, that is,

¹⁰ Interesting as if there was always something “more”, some hidden *agalma* or surplus value in them.

exposed in an epiphany to always already have been so. Using this structure the desiring machine produces the empty frame around which desire is organized.

Once I showed my fellow student an H&M ad (picture [3]), in which Kylie Minogue is posing in water wearing a swimsuit, stretching elegantly and smiling, of course. I asked him what he saw in the picture, and he said, ironically: "She seems to be happy because she has a new swimsuit." So what is insufficient this answer? Basically, that he mistakes the categorical for the hypothetical. The consumers are not expected to be like Pavlov's dogs. She isn't smiling her satisfied smile because she has a swimsuit (or any other objective thing), but because she has *It*, the absolute Product. The categorical imperative of the picture functions simply by providing the frame and setting up the empty screen, the position of the absolute Product abstracted from its contingent qualities that can be occupied by any particular product. The woman of the picture has It (and is It) irrespective of whether it is a swimsuit, a sun lotion or a vitamin pill. From the point of view of the system, it does not matter what the product is – what is produced, in the end, is a field on which desire can be maintained. The hegemony of organizing desire is a means of survival, since, without the maintenance of desire, the system (all systems) would break down in a thanatic depression and fatal lethargy as in Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four*: the stability of the totalizing power structures is maintained by the production of some dialectics of desire – as a (virtual) relation of violence or possession – between the homogenous (us, the subject) and the heterogenous (them, the object).

A mechanism of sacred

There seem to be certain repeatedly, if unconsciously or instinctively, used elements in producing the frame. The structure most often repeated in the pictures of for example clothes, perfumes, accessories or technology, seems to be a disposition of some index of the brand and/or a (usually beautiful female) face or body and/or the product that is either worn by the woman or represented separately. These elements can either all be present (as in most of the pictures, most typically in [1] and [2]), or occur in pairs that indicate the third, absent one (picture [7] and probably [9]), or, finally, one of them may appear separately (picture [8]) representing the totality of the three (cf. De Certeau 1985, 83-84). Here we have a concise form of the elements at work in the commercial pictures: the Body, the Product and the Brand. In fact, the dynamic

relations between these three elements can strangely be associated with the Trinitarian doctrine of the Father, the Son and the Holy Ghost (see also Augustine 2003, 504-506).

The Brand, as the Father, is the divined source and ultimate ground of all signification in its world. The Brand is absolute: one can imagine a model or a celebrity wearing badly a dress of the Brand, but the Brand is outside the possibility of error, because it is the very thing that determines the standards. It is also beyond time and matter, and its temporal materializations incarnate it only partially, as indices towards its abstract essence. A particular product can go out of vogue, but the Brand – even if it does have some temporal and material existence as a corporation – is considered something ineffable that is above its products and only works in its mysterious ways through them. In commercial pictures, the Brand is the most highly symbolic and least visual element (a word or a logo) that nonetheless determines the “meaning” of the picture, like a signature. Since the symbol of the Brand is a signifier, the Brand itself is not actually “there”, yet everything in the picture is considered to have been created by it.¹¹

The Body, as the Son, is following the mysterious plans of the Brand, and incarnates its will. This Body is manifest only in commercial pictures, where it is recognized as nothing but the Body of the Brand, *Weib ohne Eigenschaften*¹², carrying the Product according to the Brand’s will. In commercial pictures, the body is as if sacrificed – its flesh is mortified, completely and infinitely exposed to light and gaze, flayed; reduced to this surface without a remainder, completely detached of its self; beyond suffering and completely submitted to the will of the higher force. A specific person wearing Brand Products never achieves this state of mortification, resignation, perfect obedience and unity (consubstantiality) with the Brand. A “person” always has features and an inner self (that is, a person is always fallen from the innocence of the undivided object that has nothing except its submission). But this, nevertheless, is what is always tried in the imaginary identification (cf. Bowlby 1993; 16, 92) of every body that is articulating itself with a Brand’s Product. The consumer resembles a Christian at the communion, eating the body of Christ, and thus both consuming Him and identifying with Him. In fact, is not the commercial picture a guide one has to follow and imitate, even if perfect resemblance to it can never be achieved? Is this not an obvious variation of the mediaeval monastery practice of *imitatio Christi*, in which the transcendent God is reached by imitating its immanent manifestation in Christ? The imitation of commercial pictures functions like *The*

¹¹ Again, this is very similar to the ontological dynamics of the Trinity in Augustine 2003, 408-409 & *passim*.

¹² The woman without qualities, adapting Robert Musil’s novel *Mann ohne Eigenschaften*: Christ is without qualities as far as he is the Son of God.

imitation of Christ of Thomas à Kempis, where the way is expressed in terms of immanent sets of counsels and practical rules to be followed in life, and through completely submitting to them, one will take part in God as the supervenient mystical essence (or the absolute elegance and surplus value of the Brand).

Finally, the Product as the Holy Ghost is the Brand's medium, its way to work in the world and its means to make itself known, loved and believed in. In the pictures it is the mediating factor between the Brand and the Body, like the dove that descends on Christ's head. In accordance to the *filioque*, it is also the result of the unanimous relationship between the Brand and the Body (as consumers): via the Product, the Brand wants to be one with the Body, and the Body (as consumers) wants to fulfill the Brand's will. As the appearance of the supervenient element (the consumers) indicates, the Product also shares the strategic ecclesiastic position of the Holy Ghost. It descends from the glory of the Brand to be – at least in theory – possessed by anyone who will receive it, although (financial) sacrifices and renunciations have to be made, of course. It is also the medium to the *imitatio Christi* of the commercial pictures: to be like the woman in the picture we have to purchase this Product. Having this, we will not only have the Product, but also what is more in it than itself – that is, a way towards unity with the Body and, finally, the Brand.

The Product may seem to be more material than spiritual, since it is just this object that can be bought and worn. In fact I would claim that this is a critical point of the spectacular economy, and also the point that makes it fall into its neverending syntagmatic movement from one object to another. The Product of the picture is what the consumer buys and perhaps wears, but what he gets and uses is just some piece of matter, in the end. In a more radical sense, the Product itself is abstract. It descends in quantities, pure numbers; codes, locations, prices, sizes and accessibilities. One partakes in this unearthly excess of mass production. Even when the products are advertised as unique, their uniqueness itself is an abstract idea into which the product is reduced as representing the pure essence of the absolute Thing – since it is the only particular of its universal, the "materiality" of the unique product coincides with and is sublimated to its ideality. For that reason, the Product is seen as a life size map of itself (cf. Žižek 2003, 142-143).

But we must think further, following the mediaeval mystic theologian, Meister Eckhart (e.g. in 1936). Just as the Father is only an image or a name that is mistaken for the ineffable, unnameable godhead (*Gottheit*), the Brand is an image of the totality of capital,

unperceivable in itself – the Brand is a face or a form in which it is manifested. So the Absolute that is at work in this trinitarian dynamics is in fact the capital: in the Brand it is given a name, in the Body it is incarnated, and it is made manifest by the Product. This is also the “invisible hand” of Adam Smith that guides the flows of supply, bodies, products, brands, demand. Commercial picture is its constantly produced self-portrait, where it looks at itself through the gaze of the desiring consumers; in the neurotical repetition of production and consumption (of spectacles), the invisible hand is masturbating in front of its externalized representation of itself to itself. But outside the system of capital there is nothing – the nothing as the outer darkness of wretchedness that is being rejected and repressed in the frantic action on the inside. The process follows Hegelian logics, where being is shattered to the multiple things or subjects of the totality, and the expelled remainder that is without any positive essence. It is only through the multiple gaze of subjects in the process of free market economy (or history in general), that capital (or the Hegelian Spirit) can come to contemplate itself and identify with itself as itself. This may be the relevant function of the commercial pictures: the narrative repeated in them is the history and topology of capital represented to itself in its distorted, unbalanced, fragmented body of partial identifications and objects. Through the mediation of consumers becoming conscious of these spectacular narratives, capital first truly *becomes* the shattered unity of body and being that it always already is.

The system of falling apart

The threefold of the Brand, the Body and the Product, and their unity as the totality of capital are the elements that are constantly organized and reorganized to keep the desiring machine going towards the promise of eternity. But also two basic axes or storylines can be distinguished to found a system of coordination. In this formulation the axes define the directions and functions through which desire is channeled on the field of capital. The axes, which I name unimaginatively syntagmatic and paradigmatic, can also be associated with the two imperatives of commercial pictures. The syntagmatic movement is that of metonymy, in which one object or name is replaced by another. This is obviously the logics of the hypothetical imperative, where one thing is worth desiring only as far as it provides the access to some other thing. The paradigmatic movement, here associated with the categorical imperative, is that of metaphor, in which one thing represents another. It can be divided in two basic mechanisms: in one,

euphemisms are generated to cover the first, traumatic experience or signifier, and in the other, a “deeper meaning” is sought under the surface of the apparent, supposedly deceptive one.

The imperatives imposed by commercial pictures should gradually provide an absolute point of reference where values and meanings are secured and that can justify the existence of the system. What is it, then, that sets this endlessly organizing, signifying, replacing and interpreting regression in motion? Why does the body of commercial pictures fall out of time and short of eternity? If we are told to get the “more” of the surplus value and gain access to the Absolute via these products, why does there have to be such an excess of these pictorial proclamations instead of everybody being satisfied with the absolute Product they have bought? Why is the claim repeated and varied infinitely? The only possible answer is that the categorical imperative in the pictures fails in its asserted autonomy. And this is because it cannot be distinguished from the hypothetical, and is continuously interpreted in its terms, and the other way round. This is ultimately the same as time and eternity of the body being replaced by “things happening” as representations put in causal or associative lines. Thus the Absolute is sought in ever-increasing quantities and the layers and revelations are mass produced as objects. The qualitative and the quantitative of Kierkegaard (e.g. 1964) are being mixed up with each other. This confusion results in a drifting movement that can be interpreted as two falls that are defined by the syntagmatic and paradigmatic axes mentioned above.

The first fall is the syntagmatic fall, in which the narrative in commercial pictures is a fairytale about the accessibility of the final absolute object. It is seen as the messianic Product that is to redeem the subject from its abasement, but it results in the endless quest for the pure incarnation of the surplus value presented only in the pictures. Instead of just the product, the consumers desire the spectacular Product of commercial pictures – they want the transcendent relic from the mystical body of Capital. This is also where the discourse falls short of eternity as never having enough (and, supposedly, thus not reaching the real thing; cf, Bowlby 1993, 110). In the mystical theology this is contemplated in the excess of cataphasis, and in the free market economy it makes the consumers buy always the new thing that might be It, and leaf through the magazines like Mary of Magdalene in search of Christ’s body. Without the revelation of the angelic messenger (eternity is already present in resurrected Christ), she would be endlessly looking for Him among the dead, among the people who have become strangers to her in not being Him.

The paradigmatic fall of the spectacle is the alienating quest for the "hidden truth". This is also analogous to the fall out of time, where the picture is always exiled to the meta-level of representing or interpreting itself. In the discourse of commercial pictures this generates one of the most obvious disturbing features. These pictures are everywhere, and so even the most obvious and most discomforting basic features in them very easily become imperceptible to us. One of them is the fading out of everything in them that would remind of corporeality. The supposedly abstract allegorical figures of Renaissance or Romantic art are by far more corporeal than the tall and thin women with flawless plastic skins and resigned, closed faces, inverted blank eyes and smiles referring to nothing, extremely expressive of inexpression (that is, of some insight they hide behind this façade). First the bodies are reduced to as little as possible except for the abstract form – the structure of the bones and the surface of the skin – like an ascetic in his denial of the flesh, or a starved prisoner. Then, this remainder is covered in layers of makeup and so the body is actually painted to resemble a picture. Then comes the camera objective that reduces the body to nothing but a flayed skin that is exposed to light (and the nothing inside it). Then, finally, come the technological layers, when the picture is retouched so that it may not even resemble the original photograph, and here the representation of the body becomes an ornament in the design. These pictures are then mass produced and spread all over the magazines and cities in quantities. In the excess of commercial pictures, the body is shown adrift, without a footing, as a quantity or as information in the totality of the spectacular system. There is no place (*utopos*) for the body in the spectacle. The signifiers of the body have been elevated to the shine of the flashlight, to the objective truth of the camera.

Complementary to the sublimated glory of the timeless spectacular plastic bodies, there is the tabloid discourse of "revelation". In an embittered move, the too plastic surface of the mirage of eternal body must be broken, and the constant iconoclasm of tabloids reveals either that there is some disgraceful secret behind the façade or that even the elevated are normal people, "just like you and me". The petty, stupid thing inside that is just like you and me (the subject), is functionally the totally useless plastic toy inside the Kinder egg in Žižek's interpretation (2003, 144-171). Nevertheless, the chocolate egg is always enthusiastically, even violently broken in order to get to it, to the sameness inserted in everything. The same fall is also in the desperate attempt to hasten the redemption – to fulfill the messianic promise of the surplus value by making a material product that, in spite of its quantitative quality, cannot be recognized as It, and this is where the layers step in. This is the hysterical process of forced identification: the subject is desperately trying to destroy its spectacular externalized

representation that reveals the failure of its unity, and shatter the mirror that divides its essence in two (for, when we *see* It, we are already separated from It by a spatial and ontological distance). Having forced the surplus value (human dignity) to incarnate as *something* by producing the incarnation ourselves, we cannot identify with it any more, and thus are forced to move on to the next product or next level of revelation.

The paradigmatic axis of commercial picture and tabloid revelation is thoroughly ambivalent: on one hand, it literally mass produces idols, on the other it frantically tears them down. The binary process is also noted by Barthes: "Signs ought to present themselves only in two extreme forms: either openly intellectual and so remote that they are reduced to an algebra, (...) or (...) invented, so to speak, on each occasion, revealing an internal, a hidden facet (...)." (1973, 29).

This complementarity of discourses is a concise example of the Lacanian idea of the superego and its obscene underside (e.g. Žižek 2003, 93-121). The neurotic subject is caught in between them, repeating over and over again the traumatizing, incompatible and unreasonable demands of both sides. The subject is caught in the pseudo-dialectics of surface and depth, and the resulting fall on this axis is like opening or reassembling a Russian doll, with the exception that the fall is infinite in both directions.

What remains outside narratives

But what do the structures of these elements on these axes tell about? Basically, I would claim that they tell of the three aspects of being in the world of the post-capitalist society: the body, the subject and the bourgeois consumer. The endless production and consumption of possible objects is an exemplar of the psychoanalytic notion of the compulsive repetition, where the traumatic core is repeated in a mediated form. The aspect of the consumer appears on the social level, where, according to Guy Debord (2005, 30-43), relationships are turned into things and things are turned into spectacles, and where the consumer is plunged into the fall of always treacherous products, unsatisfying idols and never fully revealed meanings. The bourgeois consumer can be seen in these pictures as the rootlessness of the presented flat, inexpressive figures and of the mass produced pictures themselves. And it can also be seen in the neverending reproduction of the pictures and the interminability of possible objects of desire presented in them. Thus the bourgeois consumer is shown to be caught between all absolute identities, that is,

in the state of nihilism. For the modern consumer God is dead, and so he cannot identify with the All; but he always has some status or possessions inside the system, and so he cannot identify with the Nothing as the abjected remainder of society, either. The bourgeoisie consumer has no absolute identity but he is not really wanting it, either, and so he must try to *be* (identification) through *having*. Now he is inevitably caught in the fall of mediated existence, identifying with himself by possessing attributes like names, positions, qualities or, of course, things.

The commercial picture mirrors the abasement of the subject as well. Even though it seems that the voyeuristic gaze of the subject is in control of everything, it is, more precisely, what remains outside everything (cf. Žižek 2005, 167-172). The subject is (almost) nothing: it is voided of all contingent qualities so that it is nothing but an empty form behind perception, without any roots in space or time. It is thrown outside every possible object, exactly when it tires to reach it by "having" it. Thus the infinitely empty subject is bound to dwell in the irrevocable division of Being, in its neverending chase of another object to touch. But any "other" it touches is turned into an object, a mere structural supplement that remains untouched in its objectivity as well as in its otherness. The subject is forever caught in the quest for a Thing that would bridge the ontological gap, so it obtains objects one after another, like Žižek's Kinder eggs, expecting to find in every one of them the redeeming mystery that is in them more than themselves. This fall is a basic movement of the subject. The people in commercial pictures look back at the consumer in their subjection to the objective. The subject is mirrored by the object, because the assertion of the one always presumes the assertion of the other.

In the middle of this mechanema of structures, there remains the dark area of corporeality that is constantly being attacked by this massive simulacrum of illuminated spectacular bodies loaded with meanings. The body is what always remains hidden in the commercial pictures, in spite of the fact that an excess of nearly-naked human forms is exhibited. The paradox in this idea is merely formal. In fact, the utter invisibility of the body – the transsubstantiation of the "reality" in corporeality into the symbolic representation – is an inevitable process according to the logic of the spectacle (e.g. in Debord 2005). The complete reduction of corporeality into the symbolic is achieved in a dialectical movement of hiding by revealing the thing that is to be hidden, so that it is perceived as a representation of itself. So when we claim to live in a society free of metaphysical illusions and restrictions of corporeality, we are, in fact, most deeply immersed in them.

The problematic point in the commercial pictures is not that they are too "materialist" and show too much of the forbidden thing, but that they are thoroughly idealist, metaphysical, and, ultimately, make the body imperceptible behind all its meanings. What happens to the body under the hegemony of the spectacle is a loss of symmetry between the symbolic and the real: the body is submitted to the signifier and thus annihilated, dead; but in the real, it is alive and straying without a solid footing (cf. Žižek 2003, 121). It ought not to be a surprise, looking at them, that the body in commercial pictures is a living dead. And this is not happening only in the pictures, since every visible body itself is (understood as) being replaced by its spectacular representation, so that whenever we act or wear clothes or take them off or touch something, we are making a statement and caught in a speech act. The basic silence of "unspeakable" suffering or desire or death or "love" or ethics is completely covered or filled by the transparency of saying – exchange value. In fact it is like King Midas, turning things into exchangeable symbols of themselves and then left alone and starving in the middle of excess because unable to touch instead of symbolizing. In fact *nothing* is destroyed when every object becomes possessible. It is just as Lacan claimed: when God is dead, everything is forbidden; everything is meaningless when nothing (more) is wanted. Thus, when God is dead, nothing is forbidden and everything is in our reach, the empty frame that organizes desire is destroyed, as in nihilism (the lack of nothing), or distorted as in capitalism. That is why there has to be something more to life, to make it bearable, and thus surplus value is inserted where there was nothing, that is, the nothing of corporeality or of the sacred.

Adrift, caught in the inevitability of these falls, one is trapped in the obscure area of "something". The subject is not everything, since it is separated from the object in its fall of being conscious, but it is not nothing either. This "something" is falling out of (being, having) nothing, and falling short of (having, being) everything. This is another form of the bourgeois tragedy, and nowadays in the West, bourgeois expands to almost everything. The tragedy of the between is already presumed in the Marxist idea of proletariat as "the nothing that is to become all" (and its unstated complement of the dead God or the bereft sovereign – the all that is to become nothing). The bourgeois, placeless in the dialectics of "nothing" and "all", is drifting in the quantitative space of "something" and "more". Thus even the Marxist revolution is, perhaps, not meant to be a simple erasure of the bourgeoisie, but the origin of the system of coordinates that will set the two drifting movements in relation with each other. The "revolution" might even be understood as the empty point between totality (of something) and infinity (of nothing and all), and so the ultimate, radical mediation may thus prove to be the

Levinasian unmediated encounter of the other, where the falls are momentarily reconciled and the footing is regained.

Blindness and insight – the return of the repressed

In the age of the realizable and already realized mass destruction (in the mass production of incarnate death), body is the traumatic core covered by endless narratives. Commercial picture is a supplement to journalistic picture, where a starved (or wounded) African (or Jewish) child's (or woman's) gaze opens up a void in the symbolic field, as the ineffable is represented. The other formulation of the mass destruction of meaning is the mass *production* of meaning, an excess of noise to cover up the failure of any means of signification. The desiring machine has to pay for its blindness by having an insight of the exploitation and suffering inside its own system. The means of covering the abyss are exposed in the form of commercial picture discourse. On the syntagmatic axis, one is urged to "move on", to "carry on with one's life" and travel so fast that nothing radically insistent may appear, and mask the failure of reaching eternity in never having enough time. For this, there has to be an infinite amount of ends to be pursued and every one of them must be pursued in frantic blindness, as if it were the Absolute. This is how it is possible to walk by the injured, suffering, disregarded people on the streets and ignore the continuous news about human disaster. On the paradigmatic axis, one glorifies and sublimates the impossible reality of suffering in the "timeless" pictures and phrases that have made pain, war and horrible death into clichés – these are the covering layers of the Russian doll. And, on the other hand, one surpasses the idea of radical evil by insisting that "there is a good, compassionate human being inside every one of us". This is how the hegemonical sameness inevitable to the systems of passive democracy can be maintained even when everyone is conscious of the disasters.

But the same discourse that covers the abyss will also betray it. According to the basic theses of psychoanalysis, the repressed will always return in the form of a symptom, and what else could the compulsive repetition of the acts of production and destruction (consumption) mean? The repressed paradox of the eternal temporal body (the acting, suffering, desiring, dying, ethical body) is returning in the form of destitute, timeless spectacle. Yet the plasticity of the spectacle is the product of Capital from itself to itself, to cover the gap and dissension internal to every totality, including the subject, its ontology, its theology, its ethics and sociology; and in this symptomatic wasteland the body is lost among and exiled from the

simulacrum of its flawless pictures. To go back to the system of coordinates: The problem is that the axes cannot be told from each other, they are adrift and in no relation to each other, so that no point of this system can identify with itself. What is, in fact, sought in the quest for incarnated surplus value, is the nothing, the *remainder*, a footing. Following Žižek's Hegelian logics, the redemption is to be recognized in the fall itself, that is, by identifying with the symptom (2003, 86). As was noted above, the body (the spectacular plastic body) is the symptom as well as the original abyss, the traumatizing sign of the imperfection and failure internal to Being (God, capital) itself. By reading the story of commercial pictures as our own biography, we identify with this body – this shattered, suffering, desiring, exiled, spectacular *corpus* is what we are in this world.

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