The following is excerpted from a larger, book length project entitled:

‘DE-CIVILIZATIONAL VIOLENCE: NOTES ON A MODERN ICONOMACHY’.

The included section was written in part for, during, and with an independent study with Wilde scholar Dr. Nicholas Frankel.

Thank you for your consideration.

THE MAKING OF MEANING

The creation of the ‘world’ is first a creation of the mind: a practice of thinking-through-making; fixing and mooring the apparent ‘life’ (things, bodies, scenes, movements) as it is experienced to category and definition as a ‘rational’ synthesis (or chain of meaning) of the mediating spaces of mind, meaning, and embodiment. This movement, or the movement of s(t)imulated sensation to *logos*, is the foundational chain of empiricism [made empire] - which tells of ‘self’-qua-‘world’ as the experienced, and thus as ‘true’ life. The formulation of ‘reality’ as [as an empire of the sensible] is as a regulatory, man-made ecosystem of seeing, being, thinking, and feeling by way of the categorization and ordering of that which is experienced - by ordering, or empiricizing - the sensational (the sense) and supra-sensational (the idea of the sense) to create a systematized, coded reality which stabilizes, or normalizes, itself by way of and through a determined way (or method) of seeing, being, and orienting [the empire of empiricism] - as law as ‘reality’. It is this simultaneously legislated (material) and unspoken (cultural) everyday process of imagining-world which harnesses life and subjects it (consenting or coerced?) to the totems of definition-as-law of ‘life’: the ‘human’, the gendered, the raced, the sexed, the bordered, the bound. The endeavor of civilization (to construct and control the bounds of life; thus, the bounds of the *possible*) is that which both creates and polices the strictures and dictates of ‘life’-as-‘world’ and life as *in world* - that which is called the everyday; the relations therein. These dictates as the stone tablets of ‘humanity’, collectively re-imagined, collectively re-assumed, and collectively re-normalized - become the always already spoken (the normalizing violence that is ‘human history’) and unspoken boundaries of that which is known as ‘human existence’, a political and philosophical concept pregnant with the birth and death of all things as they are, and can be, known.

As of the writing of this document, the civilizational process, globalized with exponential advances to technologies of speed of relation - has become all but written global law, legislated with the absolute immediacy of a functional, practical network of already mediated relations of production, distribution, and consumption of the products of labor; labor itself. Dominant cultures are no longer locally or regionally dominant in their establishment of life-norms by way of local acts of violence, coercion, and propaganda (‘legislation’) - but they are global forces: spreading image, text, meaning, and war virtually and physically (read: the collapsing ‘domestic’ and ‘abroad’ as ‘separate’ spheres of influence; the subject and the shadow) with virulent speed. This process itself, ‘civilization’, might also be called a technology of life; a prosthesis long forgotten as prosthetic by the new modernity - a prosthesis one is now convinced of as being organic, or ‘true’ to and at the level of ‘base reality’ - both theoretically and practically as that which allows for life, and that which creates ‘life’ as a category as opposed to ‘death’, or ‘the end’. By the logic of civilization, the civilizational methods of policing (material) and ordering (ideological) existence are all that stands in the way of an all consuming madness: an unknowing, an unseeing, an unwinding, an undefining - of *being*; furthermore, stand as all that separates the self from a violent death at the hands of the other. This feared ‘all consuming madness’ of de-civilization might be best described as (in following the logic of the empirical binary) the ‘death’ of meaning. Without an ability (or desire) to define the boundaries and borders of self and other, subject and object, body and mind, human and animal, nation and nation as *policed, or violently separate*, the linear, definite distinctions which formulate the civilized ‘reality’ combust like dead wood, abandoned by that which sustains them - the invested life force of belief. It is in this sense that the death of meaning is always already artificial; that meaning is always already interpretive - that meaning and language (like their ‘civilized’ forms, Literature and Culture as categories of life-making) are buoyed and propelled by the *investment* of labor, forced and religiously adherent alike. Upon an analysis of how this ‘meaning’ is generated, it is clear that it is nothing more or less than the life force of the collective, invested as an a priori *currency*, propelling and propping up the always already cold, mediated, ‘existence’ of the ‘real’.

This creeping death of that lifeless thing called ‘meaning’ (or, that which empowers ‘life’ in the world) is at the root of the struggle for a unified reality by way of the establishment of the empire of empiricism, which substitutes itself as the image of ‘life’ in place of life. At this junction of struggle: the lives and worlds of the ‘mad’ (or those divested of and from ‘meaning’) in *volatile multiplicity of meanings* as a mode of being*s* - surveilled, policed, and *settled* as content by the logos controlled consensus s(t)imulation-as-garment of the project of creating a ‘rational’, or ‘sensible’ world, again, produced and re-produced at the level of everyday life. This question (framed by civilization, as it must in order to survive, as an answer) of volatile, multiple modes of existence or ways of being is also a question of knowledge: how knowledge is defined (settled), how knowledge is ordered (made hegemony); ultimately, how knowledge is determined to be true, or known (established as a fundamental, or total, collective, reality). The process of knowledge-making in the civilizational mode is structured in the form of the diacritical argument: ‘to justify the ways of God to man’.

THE DEATH OF IMAGES

Among the scholarly debate on the life and times of Heliogabalus, all but erased from the record of history by the guardians of the Roman Empire, there is one certain consensus - made by Decadents and academics alike. In her infamous reign (does it matter if the stories are true?), Heliogabalus flouted every taboo and disdained near every ritualized law of the Roman Empire - being out as a transgender woman, taking multiple wives, flouting her bisexuality, committing multiple renowned, literary mass murders, hiring and firing men based on the size of their genitalia; desecrating the altar of Jupiter and instituting her sun god, Egabalus, as the ruling deity of empire. The thread of Heliogabalus as myth, history, and archetype for defiance of civilization, even as she ruled - was of great influence to the Decadents of the late 19th century. Picked up on by Joris-Karl Huysmans in his text *Against Nature*, and again by Oscar Wilde in *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (and later, into the 20th century, by Antonin Artaud in his text, *The Crowned Anarchist*, a sort of ‘creative history’) - Heliogabalus has become not only an icon of and for early queer culture, but an icon of cultures of total dissent, refusal of taboo, and mockery of the rule of law. Through her coming into power, Heliogabalus, albeit for a brief period of time, used the permissiveness of power (read: the ability to control space and time) to ridicule tradition and prostitute herself to herself with erotic, and total, soveriegnty.

Here, Heliogabalus is not unlike Wilde’s Gray (the two encounter one another in Gray’s studies) - who thoroughly takes advantage of his acquired supranatural power (not unlike that of an emperor, but instead of mastery of space, Dorian has acquired the mastery of time) to prostitute himself thoroughly to his every desire - ‘descending’ into the ‘satanic’ depravity of murder, carnal sex, manipulation, and (perhaps most importantly) the consumption of knowledge *as* *transgression* - this is to say, as that erotic impulse which swallows the idea of civilization whole in its embodied soul. Dorian permits himself, under the watchful eye of Lord Henry, to enjoy all that life has to offer - before Wilde himself recuperates Dorian at the end of the text (one wonders if this recuperation is ‘truly’ Wilde’s - bringing about, again, the question of the mediating influence of Culture as a mechanism and method itself of surveillance and policing of life made otherwise). The icon of Dorian, depicted by one who loves him (Basil) allows magical transference of Dorian’s life-force to and through the painting - not unlike a ritual sacrifice, where Dorian exchanges ‘life’ (or the image of it, as it were) vis-a-vis his prayer for eternal youth (or so it appears) - a movement which unveils (by way of appearing the disapparent) the refractory, embodied/disembodied complexity of the force of life itself, as a network of relations through which life force flows - through ‘living’ and ‘dead’ ‘things’, alike. This conjuring occurs in and through an externalization, a firm representation or *catching*, of the condition of the disapparent life force; that which animates - as Huysmans’ de Essenientes proclaims - ‘This admirable artistry had long enthralled him, but now he dreamt of collecting another kind of flora: tired of artificial flowers aping real ones, he wanted some natural flowers that would look like fakes,’ (Husymans, 83). This digging into the paradox of the appearance of that which is considered ‘natural’ and ‘unnatural’ at the crucial site of appearance, is referred to by art critic Victor Schlovsky as the process of ‘defamiliarization’: ‘Unlike the realist writer, Wilde does not seek to render a familiar world. He seeks to capture the world’s strangeness - to *defamiliarize* it,’ (Wilde, 25). This property is simultaneously of ‘the world’ but, in its subliminal quality, of it in such a manner that *goes beyond* worldly conception; thus, supersedes definition. This process of ‘defamiliarization’ reaches its peak in the atomic, supra-modern arts and methods of the British painter Francis Bacon and the French polymath Antonin Artaud. Bacon’s creative process, perhaps most emblematic and detailed in the painting *Painting 1946,* is that which connects British aestheticism’s first ‘martyr’, Wilde, with its last, Bacon. Furthermore, ‘Artaud’s problem’, certainly most emblematic in and as Artaud’s obsessed (im)possibility of *embodiment* under the hood of a sexuated society, sutures Artaud inextricably to the first atomized depiction of the underlying psycho-social, psycho-sexual condition of global, civilizational, modernity - Wilde’s carefully rendered, highly theoretical ‘picture’ of Dorian Gray.

If one conceives of ‘human history’ as an arbitrarily (hegemonically) recorded process detailing the rise and fall of societies, civilizations, and empires by way of corruption, disease, plague, invasion, and transgression, one can see just how the life-work of Heliogabalus in and through Roman culture (as a knife, herself) already eulogizes the quickly modernizing (and quickly crumbling) Culture of Empire (for here, the Culture of Empire is nothing less than Empire itself) as empiricism made dead body of law - emblematized by Wilde in the classic character of Dorian as he confronts the strictures of historicized ‘life’(; furthermore, in the eulogizing of Dorian as Heliogabalus over and over again in Bacon’s works): ‘As he looked back upon Man moving through History, he was haunted by a feeling of loss. So much had been surrendered! And to such little purpose! There had been mad wilful rejections, monstrous forms of self-torture and self-denial, whose origin was fear, and whose result was a degradation infinitely more terrible than that fancied degradation from which, in their ignorance, they sought to escape,’ (Wilde, 192). It is in the work of Heliogabalus (; later, of course, the creative and de-creative life-work of Dorian and Wilde) that the farce of civilizational mechanisms of ‘life’-making and life-mediation are laid all too bare - as attempts to control and order that which is always already beyond order and control - the missives of the ineffable, erotic soul.

Without the ability (read: str(i/u)ctures in place (moral, ethical, religious, cultural, and governmental)) to transgress, Dorian *cannot* transgress. This is to say, that the murder of Wilde by the British public - and Wilde’s murder of Dorian - are bookended by a civilizational process that does not, and must not (in a religious and literal sense) allow for difference - or that which transgresses the created civilizational taboo - which in turn, creates, structures, and enforces the legal reality of civilization. This civilizationally structured and ordered ‘difference’ (which is not the poetic difference of many meanings in relation, but the binaristically coded difference of moral order), is itself that which bottlenecks the poetic difference in a choiceless choice, a sieve through which the entirety of the complex neural networks of existence must funnel in order to *make sense*. In *Dorian Gray*, as in *Against Nature*, difference is and becomes the erotic desire to life-make - the desire to live otherwise, to think otherwise, to feel otherwise, to fuck otherwise, to know otherwise, to individuate by way of engagement with; the desire to bring one’s life force into the world. This desire for self-knowledge by way of self-exploration (read: the exploration of the *many myriad* of selves, unsutured by the binaristic code of civilization), is that which must be controlled in order to manufacture the bordered image of a functional, existent, coherent, contained, ‘safe’ society - visible and satirized in the slippery borders of Wilde’s London ‘proper’ and London ‘improper’; exploded in the unbound immediacy of embodied movement in the works and worlds of Francis Bacon. In the case of Heliogabalus (and of Dorian, later in the text), the consequences of willfully discarding the hegemonic garments of civilization are absolute and fatal - whether by the silent, phantom hand of ‘morality’ (read: that which formally ‘does not exist’, created by the legislating body to violently enforce the bounds of ‘existence’), or by the outward, public, social mechanism of law itself. These consequences, themselves too created, serve to illustrate a wall; the impenetrable wall through which nothing passes - or, the end of ‘the world’: ‘it is not possible to transgress these bounds’.

THE WITCHES’ SABBATH

The intersection of paganism and Christianity; ‘the civilized’ and ‘the savage’ as dialectical forces (simultaneously imagined and made quite real) within and without British civilization has been depicted throughout the history of British literature; detailed, notably, in the presence of Bertha and Jane’s allusions to enslavement in *Jane Eyre*, the hauntings of Catherine and Heathcliff, respectively, in *Wuthering Heights*, and the legacy of the land and rape as a method of civilizing in *Tess of the d’Urbervilles*. This dialectical force is the tension of the passage of time through and as that which transforms of space; a process of continued de-creation and creation of the human myth and grounds for the human myth (read: the land upon which the empire is ‘built’) by the ideological order which makes its sovereign claim in, by, and through belief. Consequently, it is that which, at its core and essence, demands its own paganism, or breakage of law (belief as the leap to ‘god’) - that attempts to establish and structure itself as that which is sovereign to life; furthermore, that which is designed to rule; that which is able to discern the word of god in its jurisprudence, a jurisprudence which attempts to mediate life. The fascinating examples of Heliogabalus and Dorian stand as archetypal cases of the ‘jurisprudence of empire’ detonated from the inside - a sort of extravagant, deeply effective camp of ‘history’ - two figures at the cultural and political center of civilizational power appropriating said power to the expression and fulfillment of that which civilization must not allow manifest. This direct and explicit undermining of civilization stands, with myriad historical examples of revolt - as part of a dis-foundational current of *total refusal* of the imposed bound, described best by Fyodor Dostoevsky in his journals: ‘It is clear and intelligible to the point of obviousness that evil lies deeper in human beings than our socialist-physicians suppose; that no social structure will eliminate evil; that the human soul will remain as it has always been; that abnormality and sin arise from that soul itself; and, finally, that the laws of the human soul are still so little known, so obscure to science, so undefined, and so mysterious, that there are not and cannot be either physicians or final judges,’ (Dostoevsky, 424). This archeology of evil (which here is nothing more than the archeology of that which lies beyond the ability to conceive of, or legislate, an order), performed by Wilde, Dostoevsky, Artaud, Bacon, and Heliogabalus alike - is the bringing out of all mad (read: multiple) desire into the open of the ‘definite world’ - for the judges, filled with horror, to truly see.

Bacon’s incarnation of deep, subliminal evil (literally, in meat) in his *Painting 1946*, is a summoning of the black moon of history, or the collective psyche of ‘filthy’, ‘carnal’, and ‘grotesque’ desire, embodied desire - the ‘evil’ which always escapes the civilizational process of ordering the apparent world. Unlike many other attempts to incarnate the destroyed corpse of Dorian in visual form, Bacon succeeds, time and time again, simply in his abandonment of structuring thought: 'I had drawn something totally different and out of this suggestion arose this picture. I had no intention to do this picture; I never thought of it in that way. It was like one continuous accident mounting on top of another’ (Bacon). The accident of *Painting 1946* (which is also the accident of history) leads Bacon directly into the territory, or *channeling*, of bringing about the subconscious (that place which bleeds between the collective): a paradoxical phenomenon and ability which might be described as a supranatural summoning of that which is ‘not there’, through the axis of embodied gesture, into the realm of that which is ‘there’ - much in the manner of Dorian’s wish for life through and with the painting becomes as a medium of and for the conveyance of life to and into ‘life’ (Dorian’s life-force transferred into a mediating relationship with the ‘image’ as fetish object; religious icon). The picture of Dorian, as with Bacon’s works - comes to embody not the ‘decay’ of Dorian’s mortal soul (a superficial, highly religious reading of the text), but a depiction of the life process and like-making as mediated by civilization *as* the archetype of Dorian. In the moment of Dorian’s wish, a transaction occurs, where Dorian, quite literally, loses his life as *his*. ‘His’ life becomes at once incarnated and disincarnated, by and through the painting as a medium which configures and reconfigures his flesh as he engages and disengages with life - in short, Dorian loses his always already imagined individuality. This dialectic (a supranatural encounter with the death of classical liberalism as a politics of representation that refuses to acknowledge that what it represents is only itself; violently depresenting that which is ‘other’ to its conjured image), framed by Wilde (a notorious lover of the visual arts who once wished to be a painter), is too embodied in the figural works of Bacon, who, drawing from the legacy of van Gogh, unleashes his painting as that which cannot be civilized; as that which is beyond, in its conjuring (and theorizing) of life force energy, that which attempts to harness it for the purpose of structuring and ordering ‘reality’ as an order of apparent things. This is to say, that in the works of van Gogh and Bacon, it is revealed to the collective that there is indeed a *deeper*, ‘more true’ reality - a reality which is simultaneously seen and unseen - but, furthermore, a reality which requires a concerted metaphysics of sight; an embodied practice in and through which one might observe the unobservable. It is no mistake that van Gogh’s works are collectively seen as and remarked upon as a firm break in and from the historical current of ‘Painting’ - if not simply in the sense that they represent a sort of beyond-mad reality, a beyond reality only accessible in and through the current of what Artaud calls ‘authentic madness’ - the madness of consciously chosen *abandon*. It is through this abandon - the abandonment of definite ‘life’ (; thus, the abandonment of the ‘empire of empiricism’), that the apparent and disapparent worlds may be resolved and mediated as embodied life-practice.

CATHARSIS

The notion of *catharsis*, as initially elucidated by Aristotle in *The Poetics*, is the guiding conceptual framework for this civilizational process - from Christ and Heliogabalus to the contemporary moment: ‘Tragedy, then, is an imitation of an action that is serious, complete, and of a certain magnitude; in language embellished with each kind of artistic ornament, the several kinds being found in separate parts of the play; in the form of action, not of narrative; through pity and fear effecting the proper purgation [*catharsis*] of these emotions,’ (Aristotle, *The Poetics*). In the now-modern double meaning of the term, both the dramatic letting of emotions, and in the medico-pagan letting of blood, it is Wilde’s Gray and and Wilde himself, along with Artaud’s theoretical texts on the discipline of theatre, which show civilization its own method - the method of purgation of the other by and through the blood of that which is (coded) as opposed to the civil. This process is also how the legacies of those who dissented civilization (; those who were fed, publicly, to its Moloch) are posthumously ordered; it is in this manner that Christ is made iconographic religion, Marx is made iconographic religion, and Wilde’s *Gray* is made a ‘story’, or work of ‘narrative Literature’ - not as life-works which perform acts of deep philosophical incision into the inner workings of civility and its totem created meanings, values, and images - too, created works which found the definite norms of the always political, always productive ‘reality’. Much as Artaud refers to van Gogh as the man suicided by society, so too does Wilde bring about and speak of Dorian, who performs a similar function as *cathartic archetype* in relation to civilization - by embodying and enacting all of the psychological weight of the society, he is at once elevated, scorned, and suicided. The modern pop star performs a similar function - in the sense that the pop star embodies (or ‘acts out’) the classically liberal dream of *total* social, political, and material freedom - they have become *the* *individual* - and thus, the pop star cannot any longer exist as one among; instead elevated into an archetypal role, position; imagistic display of power as a symbol of what modern civilization claims to be possible - which is only, of course, possible for the pop star as representative of and for the excellence of cultural hegemony. This screening of life by way of hegemonically imposed and generated social roles as implicit law of ‘life’ is that which positions modern civilization both as and behind a series of images which serve as organizing principles for the religious caste of meaning, purpose, and power - the very principles which fuel and justify the continued manufacturing of civilization as *the* method of ‘life’.

By way of the ordered sewing of disciplinary culture (that which mediates and generates meaning as a collective ‘state’) into the fabric of everyday life, civilizational catharsis - genocide, murder, war crimes, and other acts deployed by the state - are no longer themselves *actions committed by organs of the state*, subject to judgement and criticism (like all action) but instead, mediated as *necessary* by disciplinary culture (as a ‘skipped step’), they are become always already *necessary* in order for the continued survival of civilization. In short, they are simply part of the process which allows for ‘life’; that which secures the walls of the city from the violent coming of the other. The images which reify and deify its necessity (both of and for civilization itself and its continued enforcement) as symbols of the *absolute power* of civilization by way of conferring meaning onto and into the project of ‘the world’ as known, constructed, and defined - also function to structure ‘life’ of and for the collective under the civilizational axis. These images, as all images are, are shit (to invoke Artaud’s theory of culture); thus, are always already disposable and reside behind the highly religious a priori *belief* that they can represent anything other than that which creates them - namely, here, *the ideological and practical mechanism of civilization*. So it is with the image of representative government. In so many words, the images of the power of civilization (its organs of Culture and political theatres) are become modern icons at the feet of which to desecrate or refuse them is to sin against the mechanism which makes life possible - to go against a displaced, radically secularized god. The culture of civilization proclaims, ‘without civilization, life is not possible’.

Whether or not the painting of Dorian truly contains his soul, or a manifestation of his ‘sins’ is simply irrelevant. It is the process of mediation itself by and through which the ‘invisible’ life becomes, too, ‘visible’ life, or through that magic (known to modernity as the process of making *capital*, or the creation and subsequent filling of the fetish object with value and worth - the currency of life-force as invested into material) which is clearly and completely articulated in Basil’s painting and Dorian’s wish at the incisive hand of Oscar Wilde. The conjuring of the image of Dorian by Basil as a fetish object (created love), imbued by Dorian with the power of religion; the power of aspirational prayer and the spelling of desirous *belief* - elevates the painting to that of an icon which mediates Dorian’s life and conveys judgement by way of imagistic refraction - a refraction which reconfigures and images Dorian’s actions as its own. To gesture to Marx’s Grundrisse: ‘The appropriation of labour by capital confronts the worker in a coarsely sensuous form; capital absorbs labour into itself – ‘as though its body were by love possessed,’ (Marx, 623). Dorian’s works in the world are, quite literally, transferred into and through the painting as the mediating fetish object, prophesying the text itself, and mimicking the creation of ‘the world’ by the imbibing of materiality with life-making as meaning-making. This is to say that Wilde suggests a sort of double mediation: that just as Dorian’s staging is mediated by the painting (he is introduced by way of a collective gazing into and upon the image; he is exited by the intimate rupture of its surface), Dorian’s life-force is mediated by the painting, as a conduit through and to which currencies (as meaning, value, and life-force energy) are conferred. This echo can be seen all too clearly in Dorian’s gazes into the painting, where he gazes into *something*, and *something* gazes back into him. This is no literal mirror, of course, but a meta-realistic image - where the supposed boundaries of individual and collective action, action and consequence, belief and law intersect and combust; where the modern social orders of egotism, linearity, narrative, and logos crumble entirely - to reveal the innate ‘evil’ (as termed by civilization) *against* civilization: the evil of that which is always already also itself; the artifice of its attempt to erase its determined (in its definite assertion of individuated ‘self’) ‘other’. Dorian is confronted by and with this base truth as he thrusts the knife that killed (one of) its maker(s) into the canvas of his mediated reality, and dies along with it.

CONDEMNATION OF MEMORY

Just as Heliogabalus could not be truly erased from history, so too does catharsis (as the tool by and through which civilization lets itself of the taboo) - remain as a constant and continual reminder of what lies on ‘the other side of civilization’; the other side of the body (accurately depicted as rendered shadow by the civilizational efficiency of the atom bomb) - madness, ‘darkness’, death, difference, magic, superstition, fate, prophecy, poetry, and otherwise - as that which must be exiled, or bled, from the logos city of civilization. These forces - which take their form in the lived experience of those deemed a ‘threat’ to the order of civilization, Dorian’s portrait, Bacon’s incarnations, Artaud’s incantations, and in the deeply lived, poetic detonation of totemic meaning - all stand among the ‘other’ history that is damned to reality: the repressed erotic, the suppressed animalia, and that which resides in the blocked, the black, the refused, the disjected. It is no coincidence, then, that Artaud was obsessed with shit, calling it god; likening the very processes of the creation and disjection of waste from the body to the creation of Culture as a synthetic bacterium of idea, belief, and influence - a perpetually imminent movement of constitution and deconstitution of the body. Just as much as civilization produces itself, it disjects itself - its supposed ‘other self’ - as waste, into that which is un-seen and buried like an animal burying its own shit: the genocides erased, the murders quieted, the wars justified, the abuses silenced, the life-makings beaten, the land razed.

This dialectic of the representative and the hidden away (or ‘de-presented’) continues ad infinitum in the cataloguing of the sanctified discourses (as Culture) and Histories of the British, French, and Roman Empires - that which is and has been ordained as the truth of modern life as the everyday; that which has been beheaded and wiped from the record. The multiple editions of Wilde’s *Gray* stand trial, along with myriad other works - to the inability of civilization to confront its own repressive and violent initiatives; the supra-nature of these texts is that which haunts their world as *shadow*. The works of Blake (in the vein of Wilde), as well as the myriad Orientalist texts and texts fetishizing slavery constructed at the hands of white Britons (Aphra Behn’s *Oroonko* and William Beckford’s *Vathek* prominent), attest to this basic inability of the British public (across social and political lines) to confront the violence of empire and colony which powers these works into existence. This is, in no short order, a created collective ritual of denial, mediated by images of progress and punctuated by the cathartic moments which, temporally, breach then suture the screen. *Gray*, as a nuclear de-presentative (read: becoming-in the atomized container; exploded) of the larger British social, political, and literary tradition - puts the very tradition into which it is later canonized on trial for its political theatre of constructed denial; just as Bacon’s paintings mourn that which has already come to pass by way of a normalized culture of repression - which is, by and large, that which situates the entirety of ‘human history’. It is in this sense that after and with the works of Wilde, Bacon, and Artaud as nuclear figures to their respective traditions - there is no canon, as there never was. Just as Bacon willfully (albeit of course, admiringly) satirizes van Gogh and Velasquez, Wilde camps the entirety of the hypocritical British social order (along with the Gothic in his masterful execution of a sublime narrative which, superficially, ‘drives’ the text - unmasked here as theory-work); Artaud, simply, satirizes the very notion of sanity. Each of these figures acts as a nuclear force to the traditions they work within (and ultimately, without) as simulated spaces, or blocs, of hegemonic power - exploding them in their bordered artifice in order to escape life force from them; ultimately, to create a unified living theatre of life as life - disinheriting and dethroning the image as that which arbits the ‘real’ *by way of mediation* - returning the real to itself with the immediacy of embodied life-practice. This is, again, to gesture to Wilde as first and foremost a theorist and philosopher - with Bacon and Artaud too as poetic, aesthetic, and political theorists - in their ability to explode the pseudo-traditions of text, image, and sound both formally and methodically; craft projects which transverse and tear asunder the arbitrary bounds of theory and novel (Wilde), madness and sanity (Artaud), time and space (Bacon), and ultimately, the simulated bounds of the political theatre which constructs and determines ‘reality’ as law.

DRAG

The astonishment felt by the ‘civilized’ as the ‘uncivilized’ (by way of the act of living) transgresses civility and embodies the ‘dark’ life which itself (as imagined other) founds civility from *without* - is the astonishment of those who cannot reconcile the Janus price required by civilization in order to *civilize* - which is to say, the commission and deployment of the very uncivilized acts which found civilization. This is to say that the astonishment of the civil collective at and in viscerally encountering blackness; otherness is the astonishment of the disapparent made apparent. The work of the agent of transgression (that life defined and enforced as ‘against’ the civilized image of ‘life’), then, is the embodied, living proof (however briefly) of the glass bounds of ‘transgression’ themselves; the recollection of the artificial separations of life and death, right and wrong, human and inhuman, the real and the unreal, body and paper, madness and sanity - the very refractive glass through which the civilized collective obtains its imaged view of ‘the other’. This is why it is entirely necessary for civilization and its organs to behead and disappear Heliogabalus, just as it is also necessary for the brutal legacy of civilization (as that which commits the executive acts of conjuring and disappearance) to die under the censor of manufactured culture so civilization may live. The method of civilization (merely a part of the complex, poetic relation of life), so elucidated in the contra-civilizational art-theoretical works of Wilde, Artaud, and Bacon is fundamentally and deeply uncivilized - because it is the work of making ‘the human’ as a category of life by way of punishing, repressing, and disappearing ‘the inhuman’ - replacing the embodied life with the image of ‘life’; the embodied inhuman with the mediated image of the inhuman.

ON RUPTURE & SUICIDE

It is the method of getting-rid-of by way of catharsis as a pseudo ‘disappearing act’ which continually fails the process of civilization; a civilization which cannot rid itself of the blood it has spilled, nor the disreputable Dorian, nor the ‘authentic madness’ of Artaud and van Gogh, nor the perversion of Heliogabalus - simply because these manifestations, as elucidated by Dostoevsky, are fundamentally a part of *life* - beyond the ‘human being’’s willingness and ability to conceive of or ‘image-ine’ ‘humanity’ as life. The failure to see the sur-real condition of incarnation as organs, flesh, feces, meat, the violent consumptive urge, desire, fleeting idea, fleeting body; disincarnation - is that which animates the tale of Dorian Gray. Dorian’s dream of immortality in youth is that selfsame dream of the endless consumptive glory which preoccupies the machine of empire - in short, the eating of without forever; the glory of a shitless existence where all is becoming-in; the bowels are displaced to the continent of out of sight, out of mind. This is the fetishization of a fantasy imaged idea of ‘humanity’ and ‘life’ which comes to grip *life* by the throat - as that which destroys the possibility of life, itself, in the process of forcibly inserting the fetish image into and through its object: the apparent, immediate, always-already-incomplete ‘world’ which it calls ‘reality’. It is by way of the literal and total embodiment of this method that Artaud is haunted unto death by that which he is able to imagine, able to see, able to *know* and that which he is, in fact, able to do and *understand* in and through his body - which is to say, the limitations of incarnate, sensitive life attempting to ‘possess’ or ‘know’ itself. Artaud’s drawings and spells, in particular, are fascinating examples of his conception of the body as perpetually dejected, incomplete and thus exiled; ultimately, standing for and as Artaud’s furious creation of his own body - his attempt to go beyond the body by fashioning the body. This haunted method lies too at the soul of Decadence (in the icon of Heliogabalus); it is also present in Huysmans’ *Against Nature*, where des Esseintes is possessed by his distended and broken body; driven constantly to produce methods of communing with himself ‘beyond’ the body by way of conjuring a ‘true’ manifestation which he cannot embody, only access briefly - through perfumes, memory, literature, the decorative arts, and imagination - by way of prosthetics. This is to speak of the transnegation of life elucidated by Wilde in *Dorian Gray* - the impasse of a created reality as everyday life; a created reality always mediated by a fundamental break, or separation as the mediated image - a symbolic order which structures ‘life’; in the structuring of this ‘life’, too, the impossibility of *life*.

This archetype of tortured, unreachable, unknowable consciousness qua mind qua object of ‘life’ stands at the height of a modernity which is, itself, refracted - a consciousness which already has everything ( as it always already is ‘everything’: des Essientes is always already ‘at home’ - furnished, like Dorian, with all excess) and thus, can do absolutely nothing. It cannot truly die; it cannot truly live - as neither death nor life are anything. In short, the civilizational method which attempts to qualify consciousness trapped, in place and in time, rapidly gaining access to the ‘entirety of the world and knowledge’ by way of a machination of life, as it were, without anything left to chase (as the ‘world’ reaches a mapped conclusion) but itself as *understanding*, without anything to wage war against but its own shadow; without anywhere to go but deeper into the caverns of its own fragmented and feared psyche - the selfsame underworld spaces which it used to convince itself of its ‘reality’. It is just as soon as the world is ‘known’ (possessed by autopsy maps) that the poverty of the soul reaches critical mass; this is precisely the historical moment in and from which Wilde pens *Dorian* and popular psychoanalytics spring forth. The explosion of technological and industrial revolution through Baudelaire and Husymans into Artaud, Bacon, and the contemporary moment only further spells this Cultural anxiety qua detonation of consciousness - the anxiety of a divine right which can no longer justify itself in the face of a collapsing paradigm - its established order.

The coming world of Dorian’s final act - in slashing the painting and ending his life (itself a work of life-making and un-making transposed into and onto Basil’s, a collapsing of Dorian’s imaged ‘life’ and Dorian’s life), this cataclysmic breaking, or shattering, of the dialectical glass which sets the ‘real’ and the ‘unreal’ is Bacon’s historical moment - just as it is the moment of the Absurdists playwrights who follow in the footsteps of Wilde - the moment of nuclear modernity. Bacon does not just do away with representation - he eulogizes the very possibility of it. In a world shattered by the introduction of nuclear time - ‘always-already-now’ ‘always-already-done’ ‘always-already-dead’ - Bacon’s figures and Artaud’s spells populate the underworld of beyond-space and beyond-time, a world of crystallized suffering, eternal madness; a world where the screams of the dead and dying echo on and forever in the screams of the living. Bacon’s figures, in their disfigural dance, eulogize even the possibility of ‘being human’, while Artaud’s works stretch and snap the very concept of the body, saying, ‘this is where I am located, this wound of the body is where I mark the page, puncture the page, murder the page’. As Bacon and Artaud insurrect it, this chaotic, massive, growing, suffering, groaning indiscernibility is the source of and behind even the attempt to conceive of ‘humanity’ and conjure ‘civilization’, the very ‘evil’ Dostoevsky prophesied can never be remedied or controlled; the source of Dorian’s desire, roused by the words of Lord Henry and cultivated by the poisonous book - the ouroboratic legacy of perpetually buffeting force, life drive, death drive, and, indeed, mad violence of histories both told and untold, seen and unseen, professed and denied. Dorian’s study of history, world culture, and the occult in Chapter Nine of the text reveals a telling period of ambiguity between Dorian’s place within civilization and history and his firm break from it by and through the understanding that the history of civilization is equally as infamous, ambiguous, occult, violent, lusty, and thoroughly uncivilized as his own latent desires and motivations to *live*. It is this study which ‘liberates’ Dorian - much in the way des Essientes’ study occults him in *Against Nature*: it is an archetypal study which marks the Decadent Movement, itself - a study of histories, cultures, and methods which reveals the deeply contradictory process of meaning-organization which structures society, and the barely contained violent, erotic essences which frame, color, and animate it. The life-force, as viewed by the civilizational mechanism, is the highly unstable, volatile process (much in the way of nuclear fission itself; the fission of Dorian’s life) which must be stabilized by organizing, ordering forces (in their nature repressive, containing) in order to create and maintain the state of ‘civility’ - or, to establish the state of precarious control of life. In light of the explosion of the structures of civilization-making, the life-works of Artaud, Heliogabalus, Wilde, and Bacon are not just literary, or ‘artistic’ works, but urgent political works of making-life in the face of artificially imposed and enforced impossibility - works which shatter the glass of the cultural hegemony of ‘reality’. The slashes Dorian makes at his transfigured work, once made so consumptively ‘real’ at the loving hand of Basil Hallward, are the same slashes and burns made into and through the incantatory works of Artaud - piercing the image-work of ‘reality’ and puncturing into *life*, into that which lies, always, beneath imagism, screen-work, and the iconographic. It is in this manner that a sort of violent cabal of magick unites the works of Heliogabalus, Dorian, Wilde, Bacon, and Artaud across time - a willingness, desire, and urgent ability to commit acts termed by the religious society about them as ‘violent’, ‘wrong’, ‘satanic’, ‘perverse’, and ‘mad’ - in the name of the beating desire to live, deeply and entirety. Their works as defiant actions of life-making stand as works of anti-civilizational iconomachy, hostile to the process of image mediation which captivates and directs social order; together beckoning further, deeper - to the sight of sight, archetypal vision, and the underworlds of existence.

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