

Statement about current work (2011) for Hangjun Lee, on the occasion of the ExiS retrospective in Seoul

SEQ CHAPTER \h \r 1For Renewing Energy

In the absence of the sense of the One that binds pages of the universe into a single volume, phenomena have become impoverished, eroded by desacralization. We live in a realm where nothing is higher and nothing is lower. Exchange value has all but consumed Be-ing

The Logos was the common framework that integrated all, that all brought all beings together. Now we find ourselves enclosed within a broken space that lacks transcendence. Only the brutality of Power can accomplish anything in the way of organizing the fragments. Nothing from above brings order, and lacking any reference what is above, we cannot even make contact with our deeper selves.

The Logos, in encompassing all, gave all meaning. The spectacle has reduced this unity to a series of fragments which it interrelates through the pseudo-connections of a thinned-out rationality whose characteristic form, as Bergson pointed out, is the series of linear succession. This denatured reason constructs a life-world that depends upon an abstract temporality that assigns us positions according to the co-ordinates of power. Such a thinned-out, eroded rationality is what puts the spectacle, a feeble organization of appearance, on display. At the same time, the spectacle has colonized every area of modern experiences, and has subjected all phenomena to the iron law that no real change is possible—that only insignificant changes to fragmentary aspects of the system will be allowed. All we are left with is an enfeebled, eroded awareness of our role the spectacle.

Immersion in the phantasmagoria of a delirium-inducing ocean of sights and sounds is the condition that culture industries has imposed upon; they have even established that state of semi-consciousness as normative. A most dire facet of this new regime is that the very ontology of our image culture increasingly includes its participants and has incorporated their perspectives within the constitutive mechanism of representation. Subjects are no longer the absolute centre of seeing – subjects, we are now convinced, are simply nodes of network of vision/visuality that operates beyond their control as phantasmic centres, by facilitating currents that course through the network, affecting the peripheral nodes by engendering a distorted replica of desire. This, to be sure, entails that vision has its blindspots

But Reality has not vanished—nor will it. It simply mutates, and this process of mutation is incessant. Reality is ever re-produced, for reality is never anything more than the product of the technique of a given epoch (remembering, of course, that technique is form in which the dispensations of Be-ing occur.) Be-ing arises only within the whole that is the form of the dispatch (the *Geschick*, as Heidegger puts it); and the dispatch is historical (the *Geschick* is always *geschichtlich*). Be-ing appears only through the activity of transmission (*Überlieferung*). Reality is always being re-invented: humans transform themselves and nature through activity – this is something that always has been, is, and always will be.

Subtending the belief in the precession of the simulacrum is the tendency to regard information as an autonomous form from Beyond, a magic form of being without roots in the realm of concrete particulars, and therefore beyond our control. Is it really surprising if that which we exempt from the condition of being a product of labour, and from being subject to transformation by labour, should be accorded a spiritualized form

of existence? Yet, in reality, both the realm of the simulacral and the technology which is used to produce it are expressions of the social relationships between real humans. It is human activity which is objectified in machines and information. And remembering that fact should remind us of the importance of the now unfashionable questions about how are the rewards of this labour should be allocated to the different groups involved in the production of machines and information.

We must ask how to counter the effects of the delirium that the culture industries have induced, and how to rediscover our groundedness. At the most profound level, Heidegger was right to have asserted that carrying out the task is not within our powers, that “only a god can save us now.” But the gods have flown. Still, we must do what we can to recall the gods from their flight. And we must do what we can to prepare ourselves for their return.

The Renaissance fostered the impulses that drained the arts of their integrative function. The bardic function of the artist, no longer possible in an all-too-rational society, was abandoned. The frustrations of being refused this crucial role drove the artist first into open rebellion, and then into silence and exile. What is needed is to re-enfranchise art’s power to create an integral order of intimacy, and this can be accomplished only through the combined power of art and magic. Art does have the means to effect moral and spiritual change in the real world.

How can we rescue ourselves from immersion in the phantasmagoric? The phantasmagoric operates by creating the impression that it is a seamless unity. Our art must overcome that impression. This demands that art become physical – that we must acknowledge that artworks are machines for affecting the bodies of those whom they address. Immersion in the phantasmagoria of sounds and images has reduced our capacity for direct sensory—and sensuous—experience. We must emphasize the physicality of the making and the reception of artwork. That is to say, we must emphasize the body’s role in making and experiencing art. Art—*ars*, making—should teach us about the body’s way of knowing. The body learns first through activity, not through concepts. Recall that the unity of thought and practice that was central to the concept of *techne*—acknowledging the unity of thought and practice is a key to countering the pernicious notion that human beings are information processing systems, an error that traced back to the Platonic form of idealism (which also disparaged the senses and maintained the unreality of the physical world and the superiority of a “hyperreality”). Our art must distort and fragment all with which it comes into contact: it must do all that it can to damage the wholeness of a work of art, to tear apart the seamless unity that is that staple form of the entertainment “arts,” that seamless form that absorbs our being and leaves inert and unproductive. Further, it must make the mediation of the apparatus explicit, for the occultation of the apparatus figures among the phenomena that has led to erroneous thinking about the disappearance of reality.

More, we must use every extreme means for restoring our connection to our bodies. The first step towards this is end is to make the body palpable. Artworks must be physical, and intense beyond all measure. Arabic and Sanskrit poetry often was set to music and chanted, to alter consciousness through its corporeal effects. The drumming and dance of the Ewe and Yoruba peoples of West Africa, the Santeria drumming and dancing of Cuba, Voudun drumming and dancing of Haiti can engender weeping, dancing, and fits. These are all intense, physical response to art. “Re-connect poetry to the body”—that must be our slogan.

The spectacle depends upon a certain torpor of the subject, which is countered by confronting the spectator’s passivity. Erotica, when it does not go over into the

spectacle, teaches us that artwork is a magical engine operating on the body. Erotica is physical – it operates by elevating the corporeal unconscious to consciousness in sexual arousal. It reveals, and revels in, unacknowledged desire. Erotica plumps for the liberation of desire. Erotica shows the way for art to become a desiring machine that operates by induction to shape liberatory energies. Erotica demonstrates that the marvelous inhabits the everyday, that the physical bodies around us constitute the dreamworld and that the true dreamworld is made up of real physical bodies. Of course, most pornography conveys only body-hatred, but that should not lead us to the erroneous conclusion that erotica has no potential for the enhancement of bliss-consciousness. If ours is a culture mad for death, erotica has a role in transforming it into one mad for love—into one blessed with *amour fou*.

Furthermore, the truly erotic reaffirms joy—even a joyfulness of “repetition” that acknowledges that there is no such thing as exact repetition. But there is no reason why we should accept Baudrillard’s despairing claim that melancholy is the fundamental tonality of functional systems, that is, of the grindingly repetitive systems of simulation, programming and information. There is no reason to believe that, by implosion, history has collapsed into inertia, into the endless repetition of the same—the same dead forms organized again and into new permutations and combinations.

Reconnecting art to the body and the body to physical reality—these are our goals. They demand that we eschew narrative. For making our bodies palpable requires us to sense our presence in the immediate here-and-now. To do that, we must avoid all retrospection, and all narratives are retrospective. We must intensify the image to the point that it takes effects on our bodies. Vaneigem commented on the importance of the intensification of lived experience in *The Revolution of Everyday Life*.

Which leaves the hopeless cases - those who reject all roles and those who develop a theory and practice of this refusal. From such maladjustment to spectacular society a new poetry of real experience and a reinvention of life are bound to spring. The deflation of roles precipitates the decompression of spectacular time in favour of lived space-time. What is living intensely if not the mobilization and redirection of the current of time, so long arrested and lost in appearances? Are not the happiest moments of our lives glimpses of an expanded present that rejects Power’s accelerated time which dribbles away year after year, for as long as it takes to grow old?

Intensification of the image requires desublimation. We are familiar with the orthodox psychiatric view on the matter of desublimation: “Identification with an imago (which in its re-projected form is what Vaneigem calls a “role”) leads the individual to expend his sexual drives on cultural goals, and this is the best way for him to defend himself against these drives.” It is the counsel of the despair, for it turns the individual against him or her self; the reified projection of desire becomes an object of identification, the aim of which is to absorb vital energies and to reduce the energy of erotic desire through sublimation. Erotic reality is transferred from the body to the spectacle. These projections ensure orgasmic impotence.

But the converse is also true: true pleasure, true *jouissance*, true *joie de vivre*, true orgasmic potency return erotic reality to the body. The pleasure accomplishes desublimation. When individuals stop seeing the world through the eyes of the re-projected imago, and look at it from within their own pleased bodies, when they

reclaim the erotic energy as their own, they will see through these claims about the erosion of reality. If, as Debord claims, the era of the spectacle is the era when all that was once directly lived has become spectacle, the response is the return those energies invested in identification with the projected image to lived experience—to intensify life, and to intensify it brutally if necessary.

The more we have denied the body corporeal pleasure, the more we have allowed life to be sacrificed, the more we have allowed ourselves to be seized by its double, the mere spectacle of life. And the more daily life is thus impoverished, the greater the spectacle's attraction. Thus, the spectacle has dislodged us from the core of our lives, as the simulacrum conspired to make lived reality seem trivial by comparison, and eventually the idealized projection obscured the importance of the reality of actual bodily pleasure. We have allowed identification with the re-externalized *imago* to compensate for the life energies we sacrificed to the projection. The first goal of the intensification of life is to dissolve the subjugated consciousness that feels itself impotent.

Intensity makes us feel our belongingness-to-others. The recognition that social relations are between real, embodied human beings is a key to overcoming that fetishism that generates the sensation that autonomous relations between simulacra has become the core reality for present-day metaphysics. It is important to remember the psychological conditions that allow relations between things, or between images, is a certain measure of *anomie*. The antidote to that *anomie* is intensity.

A cinema of radical perception must take the place of the cinema of ideas (which, analytically, includes all narrative films) because only such a cinema can be truly spontaneous. The idea inevitably compromises with Power. I believe fervently that the artists of the future will make immediacy their most radical demand. Only spontaneous attunement to the gift of the given, the immediate consciousness of lived experience can overcome the sense that the dialectic of identification is one that inevitably involves strife. In extemporaneous creative attunement to the gift of the given, we discover that self-denial is the assumption of the true self, that by abandoning our limited selves, we become more truly ourselves, that we become what we behold. This way of getting out of oneself occurs through the discovery of oneself as dispersed through all that is.

More important yet is to forego imposing conceptual order upon experience. Terry Eagleton points out that “the thing must not be grasped as a mere instantiation of some universal essence, instead, thought must deploy a whole cluster of stubbornly specific concepts which in Cubist style refract the object in myriad directions or penetrate it from a range of diffuse angles. In this way, the phenomenal sphere is itself persuaded to yield up a kind of noumenal truth, as the microscopic gaze estranges the everyday into the remarkable.” This is just what I referred to in “The Cinema We Need” by a cinema of experiences, not a cinema of ideas— that it would eschew concepts that serve as laws that govern images.

We intensify the image by steering it towards immediate perception. Immediate perception, too, is attentive to what is, to the gift of the given. Thus, it combats the devaluation of the everyday realm. A cinema of immediate perception is opposed to the world of the spectacle, to the devaluation of the real world of actual, everyday pleasure through the spectacle.

Spontaneity, too, intensifies the image. Spontaneity blasts open the prison-house of false-consciousness, the alienated *méconnaissance* of the society of the spectacle, consciousness which turns the subject against his or her real interests. It blasts apart the sedimentation of the self in the petrified projections of the spectacle, and carries us

away in the *dérive*.

Attunement to the rhythm of what unfolds beyond us— a rhythm that is flexible and ever changing, has the strength to release us from the tyranny of an abstract, rationalized temporality. Awareness of rhythm, because rhythm is experienced corporeally, also undoes the effects of the rationalization of space into a wholly abstract form. Contemporary virtual existence has rendered space wholly abstract. The etiology of that form of space can be readily charted, beginning with the geometric optics of the Renaissance. The development of geometric optics and camera obscura led to the rationalization of vision around an axis consisting of the fiction of a single, fixed vantage point outside the depicted scene, at a place established by the vertex of a pyramid, whose base is the surface of the painting and the slope of whose sides is arbitrary. Thus, the body was removed from the scene of vision. But in the nineteenth century representation took on a different character: the space of a drawing, especially those drawings whose primary purpose is to provide information about reality, came to be understood as a Cartesian plane, and the relations between elements in the drawing were to be determined not through appearance, as projective geometry had attempted to do, but rather through measurements, which were then transposed orthogonally to the drawing surface. If the body had been excluded in the system of Renaissance perspective, the subject was excluded in the representational regime that developed in the nineteenth century. When the subject is given no place, the drawing surface itself becomes utopian. That utopic space is the predecessor of the utopia of cyber-nonreality — a non-place where “there is no there there,” and, above all, no place for the body. Paul Virilio points out that cyberspace constitutes a new space without the usual space-time coordinates; as a result, cyberspace engenders a disorienting and disembodied form of experience in which communication and interaction takes place instantaneously in a new global time, overcoming boundaries of time and space. It is a disembodied space without fixed coordinates, a space in which one loses connection with one’s body, with nature, and with one’s community. It is a dematerialized and abstract realm in which cybernauts can become lost in space and divorced from their bodies and social world. To counter the abstraction of space and time, we insist on working methods that, in their intensity, leave the trace of the body all over them.

That the illusory object world is taken to arise from an unreal (because divided) ground that accounts for the widespread sense that the object world has ephemerized. We need to rediscover the reality of the Absolute. The Seventeenth Century saw reason awaken to powers to dominate reality, both theoretically and practically. It could do so only by repudiating the proposition that God is the beginning and the end of all knowledge. The end of knowledge became understanding of the rational constitution of reality. Furthermore, a new epistemology developed on which, not contemplation and prayer, but mathematical reason and the experimental method were the means that provided the knowledge of true constitution of reality. The Seventeenth Century and the Enlightenment promoted the conviction that a mathematical and physical explanation of reality could be a thorough and exhaustive account of nature (that mathematical and physical sciences could give an account of *phusis*, while the concept of *energeia* was not required to understand the nature of beings). And the purpose of knowledge was not longer to vouchsafe intimations of the character of the Divine, nor even to cultivate the soul through the contemplation of eternal truths but to extend human’s power over nature. Thus, Galileo proposed, science leads not to an qualitative but to a quantitative understanding of nature— not of the quiddity of beings,

their inner reality or essence, but of their external physical characteristics that can be measured and described in fixed laws. Pre-moderns had understood objects and events as outward manifestations of occult inner causes. With the rise of modern science, this understanding of nature was repudiated. The purpose of knowledge was to control nature, for human benefit. Thus Francis Bacon, one of the earliest advocates of the modern of nature maintained that the goal of knowledge was “to extend more widely the limits of power and greatness of man, [to command natural forces for] the relief of man’s estate.”

To counter all that—intensify, intensify!

For and Against Digital Cinema

For the past several years I have been working in digital cinema—that is, cinema that incorporates digital images. To be able to do this, I went back to night-school and, I suppose, did the equivalent of a degree in applied mathematics and computer science—and devoted much of research efforts to writing computer programs for processing images in ways that conform to my aesthetic ideas. There is, I believe, a radical breach between the classic, photographically-based cinema and new, digital cinema. Of a photograph, it is always reasonable to ask: “Who created the photograph, the photographer or nature?” The question cannot be answered, but one must acknowledge that an aspect of the beauty of a photograph, is that a photograph, as André Bazin pointed out long ago, strikes us as a phenomenon of nature. Thus, making photographs, or photographically-based films, seemed to me a way of cherishing the gift of what reality—actually, of what is more accurately described as *natura naturans*—makes for us. Photography, I concluded, succeeds when the photographer transcends wilfulness and learns to cherish the gifts given him or her. That the will of the human “maker” should have no place in the creation of the image is the most radical implication of photography, its most profound rupture with the traditional image-making. Photography even allows the imagination to be circumvented, and by this, it reveals our being-with-the-world

Digital cinema is another matter entirely—digital cinema gives the subject back its traditional role—or, rather, something close to its traditional role. The imagination resumes its traditional function in image-making: digital images once again require that we step back from the world and enter into the space of subjectivity. And all the usual ontological and epistemological problems that tradition has with images—both philosophical tradition that descends from Plato and the theological tradition that developed out the Judaic religion—reassert themselves with digital images: one can ask whether what one sees in the image is an object; the image allows for contradictory interpretations, and so exposes the knowledge we gain through them to doubt; images mediate between the subjective and the objective world (and so, in a process that Baudrillard’s writings expose, take precedence over the objects they purport to represent and, finally, block access to those objects).

The digital image does offer something that changes the tradition of image-making: it makes it possible to realize the Pythagorean dream of producing images/reality through number and through calculations of a complexity that Pythagoreans could never have conceived them rather than through the depictions of facts (pictures as Wittgenstein understood them—arrangements of elements that mirror states of affairs).

This is a whole new possibility for the imagination, and, though I have dabbled with it, I have not been able to come to terms with it.

Insisting on the role of subjectivity and imagination in the production of digital images of course raises the question of the subject, and issues around the subject are vexed. One can see the appeal of the idea that the subject is something that can be detached from one body and transplanted. For let's admit that the term "I," as it is ordinarily used in intellectual discourse, is hopelessly troubled—its meaning all but indiscernible, inasmuch as it is surrounded by a thick fog of philosophical, theological and psychological confusions. The new technologies, and the new media they have produced, promise to help render this traditional confusions obsolete, for they propose a new definition of the subject: "I" am a complex system of electromagnetic and chemical brain processes. This new start on the description of the subject at least promises to clarify what this reality that we refer as "I" really is.

But it also proposes the hope that the "I" might be transplanted—already the brains (or parts of brains) of rats can be transplanted from dying bodies to fetuses. In this sense, the immortality of "I," through the repeated transfer of brain parts, has become a theoretical possibility that the new technology will undoubtedly strive to realize.

Despite all the confusions that have surrounded the traditional concept of the subject, and potential of the new conception to sweep away that fog of confusions, I find the whole idea really pernicious. It denies the important role of the particular body that each of us has in establishing his or her identity— thus, because our identities are so crucial, it devalues the body. All my recent work— and much of the work that I have done earlier (though I didn't realize it at the time)— has been devoted to enhancing the sensation of flesh (and flesh's belonging to the world). I think the topic of the body is the most important topic one can devote oneself to in this contemporary climate, where "despisers of the body" are so prevalent. If I were starting out now (or, rather, if I were young enough) I would surely be doing very "in your face" performance pieces that dealt with the body. They would be "in your face" pieces not so as to be transgressive— the idea of transgressive art strikes me as among cultural theory's most boring ideas— but because body art can so bring to our attention the importance of rapture. By "rapture" I mean any intense experience (because of its extreme intensity, such experience is sometimes felt as displeasure) that deranges focussed, analytical consciousness— experience so intense that it leaves conventional ways of thinking in ruin (at whatever cost). This sort of experience invariably makes us sense the body's role of experience: we feel at once acute anxiety (one can even feel a some measure of nausea) and acute pleasure as every nerve ending seems to tingle and we feel waves of bliss surge through the body, from head to toe and from toe to head. One experiences this when the energy of the body rises up and imposes itself on us, as occurs in love-making, or when we find ourselves intensely aroused and intensely embarrassed at the same time—I sometimes experienced it when my assistant photographed me for films we made together (as she did many times), and it was primarily those occasions that taught me the crucial importance of this sort of experience. I am sure that making performance art would allow me to focus much more directly and clearly on that sort of experience, which I believe is so important.

The most important thing that the body teaches us through experience of this sort is that we are "owned"—first by the divine, that fills flesh with desire, and then, through the divine, by all other people. Thus flesh teaches us we owe deep allegiance to one another. It teaches us that the obligation that any other person imposes on me, just by being human, is absolute and unconditional; and we have even more profound

obligations to those who fall into the circle of our love. I have no choice but to care for others around me, and seek to a life in which I care profoundly for a number of friends whom I love deeply. Through the divine, they own me; and I am not free to choose what I wish to do—I belong to them and must act out of my concern for them.

Art should reveal areas of experience that we cannot reveal to others except by making art—forms of imagining that we cannot reveal in any other way. By doing this, art gives us a more profound sense of what human being is—it acknowledges that we think in ways other than the analytic/instrumental/propositional forms that have dominated us (in the West) at least from the time of the Enlightenment (and possibly earlier).

Propositional thinking, thinking that can be modelled by rewriting of one string of symbols into another according to an established rule (thinking of the sort that computer scientists are prone to think of as the sole form of thinking available to us), is “deranged” by the intense feelings surge through the body as it responds to the field of energy that lies “beyond us.” I believe it is important to tell one another that we possess the capacity for rapture, too—and for all those sorts of experience that are close to rapture (such as mad love or the states that strong, repetitive rhythms induce, a state akin to trance and prayer). To do this, art has to acknowledge the less seemly contents of our thoughts.

The fundamental responsibility that artists have to is to make contact that beneficent field of energy that lies around us and to enter into that energy. When one does this, it takes control. Then one’s responsibility is to obey its commands; in this, there is no “freedom of imagination.” One takes orders—an image flashes into your mind and you have to make it, no matter how wrong-headed or embarrassing or unaesthetic or humiliating it might be. One cannot be allow considerations of audience/reception to intrude upon this; such concerns make one less willing to go to the extremes to which one might be commanded to go—one might get to thinking “What will people think?!?” When one becomes disobedient, one breaks with the source of one’s imaginings. This is why the Muses were frequently thought to be very jealous.

I am concerned to reject assertions like those of Arthur Kroker that the new media (cyberspace and virtual reality) will lead us into a better future—a future that will undo all the devastations of the centuries since the Enlightenment have wreaked on us, a future that will be heaven-on-earth. One hysterical comment from Kroker, formulated on the model of neo-Platonic philosophers Robert Grosseteste’s metaphysical light proposes “So begins our violent descent into the electronic cage of virtual reality. Down we go into the floating world of liquid media where the body is daily downloaded into the floating world of the net, where data is the real, and where high technology can fulfill its destiny of an out-of-body experience.” Gibson opines that soon we be shuffled off into “bodiless exultation.” And Microsoft asks “*Where do you want to go today?*” as we sit in front of the screen of our monitor. Eric Voegelin, in his *The New Science of Politics* identifies the historical shift that generated these hysterical, and body-despising, comments: in the 13th Century, Joachim of Flora (or Fiore) broke with the Augustinian notion of a de-divinized “Civitas Dei” by resurrecting the Gnostic notion of heaven-on-earth. Joachim was nominally a Cisterian monk in Calabria but actually a Gnostic. One of Joachim’s contribution to the history of millenarianism was the notion that history should be divided into three periods that correspond to the three persons of the Trinity. The Second Age of the Son was coming to a close, Joachim professed, and the glorious Third Age of the Spirit was about to dawn.

Later Utopian movements adopted this formula for dividing history into three periods. Ivan IV forced Constantinople to recognize Moscow as the Third Rome in 1589—an early painting of the Theosophist/Gnostic painter Wassily Kandinsky in fact

depicted the dream that Moscow would be the Third Rome. The historical fantasy that was the Third Reich incorporated possessed the same mythological structure. The later example, especially, imposes on new media thinkers who adopt the gnostic metaphysics—and they are many—the responsibility of considering with whom else (besides the Urantians, Tim Learyian reprogrammers, and other extravagant cult-adherents who have played a role in formulating the received “metaphysics of digital reality”) they are associating themselves

According to one prevalent conception of the metaphysics of digital reality, the convergence of the media (of text, image, moving image, and sound, all “interactively” available) promises to unite non-corporeal information and non-corporeal individuals in the same electronic medium, in which everything and everybody are co-extensive. This total co-extensivity is the basis for the “total awareness” my new media students keep telling me is dawning (or rather, I understand, their classes inform them is dawning). This idea of the non-corporeal self, of the self that is identical with information, is a modern version of the soteriological dream of transcendence through the emptying out of the self. The appeal that the idea of dematerialization has to new media theorists is that it supposedly exposes that nothing possesses an internal principle that accounts for its growth—that the self, to take it as an instance, is wholly and completely malleable, and can—and is—constantly made and remade by changes in the conditions of the system of representation that shape it. The Gnosticism of this conception is evident: our world is a wrong world not only because it is a bad world, but also because it offers the illusion of corporeality (that things have a nature by virtue of their constitution). According to the soteriological principles of these new media theorists, why it is so important to see through the illusion of the self—why it is so important to understand that we possess no internal principle but are subject to endless remaking—is that the new non-corporeal world can come under our complete control, because we know how we made it and how to reproduce it. In the end, we would act as a new Creator—this is the dream that fuels those who proclaim that the new media offer unlimited creative freedom, that we might usurp the place of the Divine. We are unshackled from all moral limitations of our world as it is, and nothing outside of us limits our capacity to impose on the world.

The great Canadian philosopher George Grant critiqued this very position in such stunning books as *Technology and Empire* and *Technology and Justice*. Grant showed that the belief that the Good is not inherent in the order of nature underpins that belief, essential to the regime of technique in which we exist and through which we conceive the world, that humans are free to remake the world. Grant pointed out the notion of technique is central to modern civilization—so much so that the progress of techniques has now become the horizon for those who seek to understand the Good. Moderns have lost the ability to understand the standards of goodness by which particular techniques may be judged. The conviction that human knowledge has the purpose of mastering human and non-human nature is central to moderns’ ideas about the nature of human being. The idea that new media theorists expound, that human being possesses no inherent nature has the purpose of justifying the proposition that humans can be made and remade at will—that nothing in the nature of human being limits society’s/ideology’s/the artist’s freedom to refashion them. And that conception, in its turn, belongs to a discourse on value and freedom that is associated with the will to technique—indeed it is part and parcel of the modern belief that nature, since it is objectively devoid of value, can be remade at will.

What more than anything impresses me about what the propositions issued as the metaphysics of digital reality is their tendency towards imperial aggrandizement. The

consequence of this, I fear, may well be tyranny. I mean “tyranny” here in the Straussian sense, as it arose within a remarkable exchange between Leo Strauss, the renowned conservative political philosopher, and Alexandre Kojève, France’s great interpreter of Hegel. A key topic of the debate was Kojève’s affirmation that “that the universal and homogeneous state is the best social order, and that mankind advances to the establishment of such an order.” Kojève pointed out that the final stage of civilization, the establishment of the universal and homogeneous state, comes into being as the secularization of the political ideal of the Christian community, which proposed that all humans could transcend their given differences through their faith, and be made one in the body of Christ’s church—I hope everyone noted that this claim resonates in the beliefs of the new media communarians. Behind this lies the assumption (not unlike that of soteriological assumptions that undergird the metaphysics of digital media), that thought (and specifically, for the ancients, philosophy) takes its bearings not from an ahistorical eternal order, but from eternity as the totality of all historical epochs (the sum of all knowledge that our new hypertextual “koran” represents).

Strauss argued, against Kojève, that the goal of Hegel’s state, universal happiness, is unachievable—and what is worse, that it will end in tyranny. I don’t find myself in agreement with much in Strauss’s political outlook, but on this matter I think he absolutely right—his thesis turned out, in fact, to be prophetic. Strauss’ argument was founded in the classical belief that humans find their fulfilment in that thinking which leads to wisdom—a premise the Hegel had rejected for the premise that humans find adequate fulfilment in that form of recognition that is available to all. Hegel’s gambit, Strauss argued, had effectively lowered the goal of political action, for his idea of universal recognition as the basis of community and state cannot recognize the inevitable differences among humans, and conceives of communities as nexûs of undifferentiated humans. When we must all be the same, no person will be a true thinker. Philosophy will disappear in such state, through the wedding of technology and ideology (a process that probably is now too far advanced to be reversed). The ideas of a totalization of truth and of total awareness (acquired through the complete co-extensivity of the decorporealized mind and the decorporealized text) that cyberspace promises will surely eventuate in tyranny.

It is time to put away this myth of decorporealization, of the totalization of knowledge that will bring history to end. Because it is grounded in the myth of total identity, total transparency, the prevalent metaphysics of digital reality neglects the actual condition of knowledge: it arises from the Gnostic belief in the possibility of immanentizing of the *eschaton*, a belief that goes hand in hand with the idea that the future can be foreseen and planned. The prevalent metaphysics of digital reality is simply the “dream world” of Gnostic lore, where the structure of reality is disregarded, the facts ignored, and the openness of history replaced by a revolutionary step into the New Age. To replace this myth, may I suggest that we return to where all true understanding starts—with the real body, not the amalgam of metal and flesh that is the cyborg nor the data body of Kroker’s Gnostic dream, but the real body of flesh.

Attunement to the rhythm of what unfolds beyond us—a rhythm that is flexible and ever changing, has the strength to release us from the tyranny of an abstract, rationalized temporality. Awareness of rhythm, because rhythm is experienced corporeally, also undoes the effects of the rationalization of space into a wholly abstract form. Contemporary virtual existence has rendered space wholly abstract. The etiology of that form of space can be readily charted, beginning with the geometric optics of the Renaissance. The development of geometric optics and camera obscura led to the

rationalization of vision around an axis consisting of the fiction of a single, fixed vantage point outside the depicted scene, at a place established by the vertex of a pyramid, whose base is the surface of the painting and the slope of whose sides is arbitrary. Thus, the body was removed from the scene of vision. But in the nineteenth century representation took on a different character: the space of a drawing, especially those drawings whose primary purpose is to provide information about reality, came to be understood as a Cartesian plane, and the relations between elements in the drawing were to be determined not through appearance, as projective geometry had attempted to do, but rather through measurements, which were then transposed orthogonally to the drawing surface. If the body had been excluded in the system of Renaissance perspective, the subject was excluded in the representational regime that developed in the nineteenth century. When the subject is given no place, the drawing surface itself becomes utopian. That utopic space is the predecessor of the utopia of cyber-nonreality—a non-place where “there is no there there,” and, above all, no place for the body. Paul Virilio points out that cyberspace constitutes a new space without the usual space-time coordinates; as a result, cyberspace engenders a disorienting and disembodied form of experience in which communication and interaction takes place instantaneously in a new global time, overcoming boundaries of time and space. It is a disembodied space without fixed coordinates, a space in which one loses connection with one’s body, with nature, and with one’s community. It is a dematerialized and abstract realm in which cyborgs can become lost in space and divorced from their bodies and social world. To counter the abstraction of space and time, we insist on working methods that, in their intensity, leave the trace of the body all over them.

.“Melancholy is the quality inherent in the mode of disappearance of meaning, in the mode of volatilisation of meaning in operational systems.” Jean Baudrillard, “On Nihilism” *On the Beach*, 6, p. 39.

. For a shocking statement of these beliefs, v. Jean Baudrillard, “The Year 2000 Has Already Happened” in Arthur and Marilouise Kroker, eds., *Body Invaders: Panic Sex in America*. Montréal: New World Perspectives, 1988), pp. 37ff.

. From chapter fifteen of *The Revolution of Everyday Life*, by Raoul Vaneigem. First published as *Traité de savoir-vivre a l'usage des jeunes générations*, Paris: Gallimand, 1967. Translated by John Fullerton and Paul Sieveking, London: Rising Free Collective, 1979, and Donald Nicholson-Smith, Left Bank Books/Rebel Press, 1983.

. Terry Eagleton, *The Ideology of the Aesthetic*. (London: Blackwell Publishers, 1990), pg. 328.

. There is another reason why Benjamin refused to subsume the particular under the universal: he recognized the relation between the two was not an analytical one (as Plato would have us believe). Thus he wrote in early study, “The time of history is infinite in every direction and unfulfilled in every moment. This means that no single empirical event is thinkable that would stand in a necessary relationship to the particular historical situation in which it occurs.” Benjamin *Gesammelte Schriften* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1991) vol. II, p 134.

. Baudrillard acknowledges that importance of this new, non-perspectival space.

We are witnessing the end of perspective and panoptic space (which remains a moral hypothesis bound up with every classical analysis of the “objective” analysis of power) and hence [in an inference I found very open to question] the very abolition of the spectacle. . . . We are no longer in the society of the spectacle which the Situations talked about, nor in the specific types of alienation and representation which this implied [this last comment probably a reference to the theories of Lefebvre].
(Baudrillard, *Simulations*. (New York: Semiotext(e), 1983), p.56.

. Of course, philosophers, such as G.W.F. Hegel proclaimed that human’s coming to understand the rational constitution of nature was simply a realization of a larger process by which Reason comes to self-understanding. And it is well known that Hegel’s Reason possessed attributes of the Christian deity as well as attributes of the heterodox Absolute. Thus, in describing the process by which Reason evolves towards self-understanding, Hegel is describing the process by which the divine principle comes into coincidence with its own be-ing.

Viewed in this way, Hegel’s philosophy was a massive effort to reconcile the Enlightenment’s valorization of Reason with the Christian (including heterodox Christian) belief that the Divine is the beginning and the end of knowledge.

But the synthesis could not be made to hold. In the end, the Enlightenment’s valorization of reason completed what the Seventeenth Century’s abstracting nature into abstract forms began, *viz.*, replacing the teleological foundations of knowledge and the belief in understanding nature we come to understanding of how God works out his plans for be-ings.

