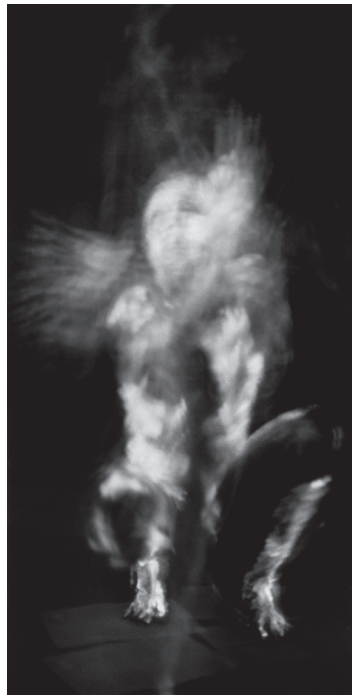


HALLUCINATIONS OF INVISIBILITY FROM SILENCE TO DELIRIUM

Ted Hiebert



Glow-in-the-dark self-portrait, Ted Hiebert, 2001

A delirious silence – the sound of negative space. Inverting presence along with its reflections. Also, and more importantly, inverting absence – and *its* reflections too. The limits of a reasonable thinking are those that break down when confronted with reflected absence. A confounding assertion in that it refers no longer to the impossibility of presence, but also the impossibility of absence itself. An unavoidable and inexhaustible *presence of nothingness*.

The delirious image is no longer the image of reflected worlds, but the impossible image of inverted reflection. Between selfless self-portraits and portraits of selflessness, not a void but the paradoxical variations of reflected play. Figures of inversion, absurd and delirious. A silent cacophony of tongue-less twisters.

At the limits of a reason of this sort lies not only silence, but also the irrational and its various formulations. And to rise to this challenge, three theses. The thesis of the *absurd*, Camus' silent universe and Regine Robin's Vampire Narcissus. The thesis of *paradox*, Paul Virilio's world of sightless vision and the myth of the nymph Echo. And the thesis of *delirium*, Jean Baudrillard's world of holographic thinking and Echo turned vampire. Consequently, a theorizing of the signs of inversion and impossibility – reformulating a world that is no longer reasonable; a world that is transformed, from silence to delirium.

I. Silence of the Universe: Albert Camus and the Vampire Narcissus

To start, a moment of silence – a moment of respect and reflection for questions that continue to matter. An inverted gesture from the start, for silence is observed only in those cases where no other response would be appropriate. This moment is observed by none more seriously than Albert Camus, for it is from within this silence that Camus asks the question of meaning; the question of whether life is worth living.¹ Yet this is not properly a question of meaning, not really. Rather, from the start it is a question of the *silence* that surrounds meaning. The silence necessary for self-reflection, and the unbearable need for an answer to one's silent questioning. For if life and meaning can be questions at all it is only because they have not already been given adequate answers. Indeed, if Camus' question is one put to the world around him, it is only because the question itself is shrouded in the silence from which it grew.

Perhaps it is no coincidence that to Camus' silent question, the universe answers in silence.² A silent response to a silent question. And might one not then ask if the universe was also observing a moment of silence? Out of respect for Camus' question perhaps. Or was it rather a silent mockery, a rhetorical non-answer? A confrontation, not with meaning, but with an answer pre-empted by silence – the possibility of *no* meaning. Indeed it is a question of possibility, for a silent answer provokes only the question of interpretation. How is one to interpret silence? And further, the question of how Camus heard this silence to begin with. The perception of an absent response: the *hearing of silence*. Or the inverse? For a *perceived* absence is rather more akin to a presence of sorts – the presence of a silent response. Not unlike the entry into a darkened room. Does one *see* darkness? Does one *see* absence? Or is the reasonable response not rather to say that one *does not see*, does not hear? If there are things to see in a darkened room, then the reasonable response is indeed to say that there are things that one does not see. But of course Camus' response is not a reasonable one, for it is precisely the *darkness* that Camus aims to see; the silence that he aims to hear. In the end, it is not a reasonable question that he asks either, but one that lies at the limits of reason. It is precisely here that the true question reveals itself, not in the form of meaning or even of silence, but rather in the form of the absurd.

An absurd perception is that which sees an invisible presence, that which *hears* a silent response – an inverted form given to what one does not see or hear, in order to constitute its absence. And Camus' assertions follow this form in *The Myth of Sisyphus*, embarking on a deciphering of silence. An absurd analysis for an absurd situation – the task of seeing the invisible. The state of silence – a staring contest with an unblinking

universe. Not a project which aims to find meaning in life, but only one that struggles with the absurdity of silence. The possibility that there is no meaning, but also the possibility that there *could be* – the irreconcilable dilemma of absurdist reasoning.³ And this perhaps is Camus' true meridian: not the tension between history and metaphysics, but rather the tension between silence and its inverse – the tension between absence and inverted presence.⁴ The question, ultimately, of the absurdity of silence.

Perhaps it is not only silence that has become unbearable, but the absurd itself. Not a tension caused only by the universe's silent response but also by Camus' perception of the invisible. Not only in tension with the world, but also with his own perception of the absurdity of meaning and silence. Not, in the end, a reasonable question, but a question of the limits of reason – *the absurdity of perceiving the absurd*. And perhaps here an offense constituted to one's own dignity in the process. For with the perception of the absurd comes a self-reflexive tension through which the question is no longer strictly about the absurdity of the world, but rather about the absurdity of the self. The struggle here is not for dignity in face of an absurd world, but rather the question of one's own absurd existence. Consequently perhaps, not a sin of the universe against humanity, but ultimately only of humanity against itself. Offended by the necessary perception of one's own absurdity. Paradoxically, absurdist reasoning has its basis both in the original sin of a silent universe and in the original silence of existential specificity.

The Vampire Narcissus

When Sisyphus abandons hope, he finds happiness. Hope, as an image of the future and consequently also a reflection of the present. Sisyphus is he who has abandoned his image, he who no longer needs, or wants it. Camus, on the other hand, looks for his image and finds none. Not merely the empty mirror that confronts the vampire, but a desire for image (in the form of meaning) that confronts Narcissus. The vampire-narcissus, Regine Robin's formulation of one who obsessively pursues an absent image:

Narcissus versus the Vampire. Narcissus who loves only his own image, that he contemplates in the mirrored water. The vampire who lives with the impossibility of such contemplation. The mirror shows him nothing. 'One must imagine the paradox of a vampire-narcissus: one who pursues the reflection of which he is deprived.'⁵

Moreover, one who lives on the blood of others; a predatory self, yet strangely, a self without image. Unable to prove his existence to himself, unable to see himself in the mirror, the vampire-narcissus must seek his image in the terror of his prey. Through acting on the world – feeding – the vampire-narcissus proves that he exists. Yet it is not quite so simple, for the vampire cannot bear the sunlight. Forced to feed at night, thus forced into an existence of darkness. And yet at night, the vampire is unable to see the faces of his prey. An eternal frustration awaits the vampire-narcissus: always seeking a (visible) response, unable to see himself, unable to see the reaction of others. This is a figure that is truly invisible to himself. Invisibility is the visual equivalent of silence.

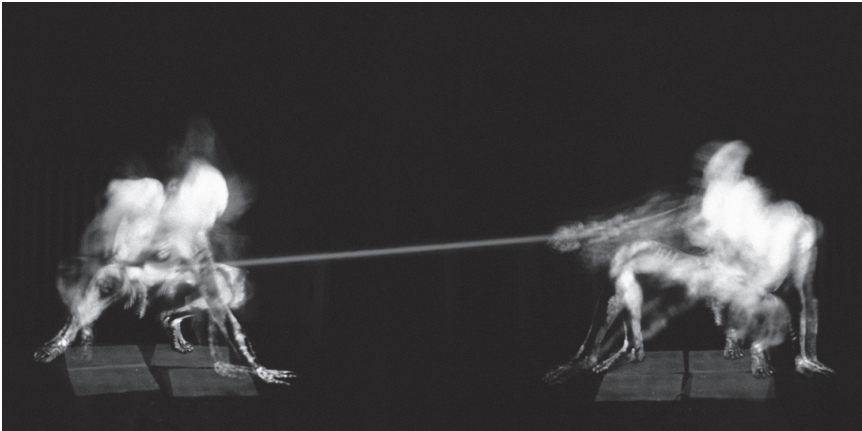
Inverted Reflections I: Staging Inversion

The vampire-narcissus is the first figure of inversion. The figure of silence – the figuring of silence. And the strange realization is that the problem with this is not silence, but its figuration. Like the glow-in-the-dark figure – invisible to itself; visible

only to others. The faint light of the glow is enough to be seen, but never sufficient to allow reciprocity. The vampire-narcissus may be predatory, but he is a victim to his own frustrating condition.

And if the world is absurd, why doesn't it seem that way? Or does it, perhaps, after all? Glaringly absurd. A friend of mine once told me of something he called the "eleven second rule." He said that if you remain silent during the breaks in a conversation, it would never take more than eleven seconds for someone to break the silence, for the silence to become unbearable. Perhaps then, Camus simply didn't wait long enough – or maybe he was waiting for an echo, a reflection. Not a simple mistake, for it takes reflected light much longer to travel. This is the problem with photography – it seeks out only the reflection. Indeed most photographers will even avoid *direct* light, since it throws off the exposure. So rather than creatures of light, could we not better call the photographer a creature of reflection, and of shadow, one who avoids all that is direct? And all this simply because of the flawed premise that the image reflects the world; rather it is the reflected world that is the image, even before photography gets there.

The absurd image – the portrait of a self that is not.



Glow-in-the-dark self-portrait, Ted Hiebert, 2001

II. Silence of the Self: Paul Virilio and the Nymph Echo

One might be tempted to agree with Camus if one thought that silence was inevitable. However, Paul Virilio, in *The Vision Machine*, proposes quite the opposite. Reading Virilio's work in the light of Camus, there is a significant difference in the extent to which they allow for an autonomy of the self. Where Camus confronts a silence that offends him, Virilio confronts rather an overload of information, too many answers. Consequently the problem is quite different for Virilio, whose project can be seen as the climax of a movement initiated by Roland Barthes' essay on "The Death of the Author," a movement that systematically removes rather than challenges the individual, a progressive automation of interpretation, thought and perception that results, not in the silence of the universe, but rather in the silencing, and disappearance, of the self.

Camus asks the question of the meaning of life. The universe responds in silence, a silence which offends Camus. An indignation then, resulting not from the silence itself but from its interpretation. Roland Barthes warns against precisely this confusion of

author-voice and interpretation in "The Death of the Author." Although his analysis aims at the differentiation of texts from books, this differentiation is one that applies to communication in all forms, from the text to the image, and in this case speech itself.⁶ If the silence of the universe was inevitable, Camus' indignation in face of silence is not. Rather, Camus personifies the universe, as the reader personifies an author, creating rather than revealing the meanings of the text. From this perspective, Camus' fundamental mistake is not the identification of silence, but simply his interpretation of silence as offensive. If indeed Camus' "lucid indifference" is an ambivalent thought that moves beyond a personal reaction to an absurd realization, Camus can perhaps be seen as compromising his own strategy.⁷ In this case, the rebel's first response would be, not an absurd reaction to an insulting silence, but the very act of interpreting silence as insult.

In this light Barthes' warning can be seen as one against the mythologization of the author (or the universe).⁸ It is a warning against the personification of what he constitutes as an impersonal author. The author does not exist in the text; rather authorship is attributed through interpretation. It is not that texts have no meaning, but that meaning is constituted rather than inherent in the text.⁹

Michel Foucault's analysis of authorship can be used to take this argument one step further, in the depersonalization of language. Foucault asserts that language itself functions in a way very similar to Barthes' analysis of interpretation. Yet the subject of Foucault's analysis is not primarily the text, but the social and cultural context in which both author and reader exist. An extreme read of Foucault suggests that language itself is constitutive rather than representational, the same argument that Barthes made with regard to the text. The context of the reader in this case, is not freely determined but rather socially informed.¹⁰ Although the reader may interpret a text in multiple ways, those ways are not constitutive of the individuality or originality of the reader-as-subject, but rather are instances in which the social and cultural conditioning of that individual are manifest. We do not personalize a text by interpreting it, but reveal our own inherent depersonalization.

Virilio's project in *The Vision Machine* can be seen as the final phase in this depersonalization of the self. Virilio notes the extent to which perception has been, and increasingly is, automated.¹¹ This is most easily illustrated with surveillance technologies, whose primary purpose is to monitor people without their awareness. However, surveillance is not an isolated example, but the general rule of the "vision machine." In a similar way to Foucault's suggestion that language reveals interpretation as myth (because of the social conditioning that informs it), the image infiltrates rather than communicates with a viewer. Images, do not speak to us, but *at* us and *through* us.

For Virilio then, the problem of silence is the inverse of that for Camus. In a world where objects perceive us, it is not only sight that is automated, but thought itself. We no longer simply speak, but are spoken through; we no longer see but are seen through.¹² The see-through self, blind except to its own transparent image. Silence here is the silence of the self-as-host, a medium of sorts, through which and upon which the social seance is enacted. The truly "possessed individual."¹³ Worked and reworked, through technology and language, into an adequate model of industrial consciousness. For Virilio, the world is no longer reasonable. Far worse, it is operational. And the self is simply a mechanical instance of homogeneity. And so, for a paradoxically transparent self, Virilio proposes a paradoxical logic – a last attempt to negotiate with the non-negotiable image.¹⁴

The problem of silence for Virilio, then, is the problem of automation and possession. The world manifests itself antagonistically, at us – infiltrating through language and image. A viral world, a world without silence, a discordant and schizophrenic overload of voices instead. And the self, if one can still speak of a self amidst the invasion of information, is a self-as-host, a self which exists only as it is inscribed and codified.¹⁵ Silence, in this context, is a silencing of the self. The problem is not that the world answers us in silence, but that both the question and the response are spoken through (rather than by) the self. It is the self that is silent. It is the self that no longer appears, except in its reflection of the world.

The Nymph Echo

The spectral double of the vampire-narcissus – she who exists in reflection only. There is no world that is outside of her; rather she herself is merely a function of the world: a reflection of the language that creates her, a reflection of the society that conditions her, a reflection of the images that see her. Yet strangely there persists an awareness of her condition; not only is she inscribed by the world, she channels it. The medium of an elaborate seance; *the encoded host*. Watching silently as she is spoken through, as the world uses her to communicate with itself. The site for the parasitic world, which in turn is sustained by its parasite. If the vampire-narcissus could die, this figure would be his ghost, haunting the world, a gremlin in the mechanism of existence. A prisoner in a body that is not hers; she is only the reflection.

She is the nymph Echo, the paradoxical hero. Echo, who could no longer speak, “except in foolish repetition of another’s shout: a punishment for having kept Hera entertained with long stories while Zeus’s concubines, the mountain nymphs, evaded her jealous eye and made good their escape.”¹⁶ Echo believes only the reflection, for she herself is nothing but this reflection. An inverted world, trapped in the mirror, unwillingly reflecting all that confronts her. A rhetorical figure, silent and invisible except for the awareness of all that she is not. Not simply invisible. Not simply silent. Rather the spectral host of the world. Paradoxically there and not there, seeing with eyes that are not hers – it is no wonder she does not believe. The inverse of the vampire-narcissus: a visible reflection that comes from a paradoxically invisible body.

And Virilio then, is the invisible man, staring at his visible reflection – a reflection that returns his gaze blankly. No longer an external silence, for the image of the world passes through his transparent self, permeating, invading, possessing. The paradox of invisibility: an absence that is immediately filled by the superfluous speed of an unobstructed world, channeling itself through yet another invisible space.

Inverted Reflections II: The Forgotten Party

With Echo, the same – the same, but different. For who is Echo but she who can only be heard by others? Her thoughts are not hers; her image is not hers. She is a discordant mask that fades as her light source, the unseen other, fades away. Peering forever into nothingness – as a mirror waiting to be seen.

What lies behind the mask? If Echo is right, perhaps only a memory. Perhaps not even that. We might be the ones to wear a mask, but can it really be said that it only changes us for others? Changes us into others? Or mightn’t it simply reveal that there was nothing there to begin with – that there was never more than the reflection, never more than the echo? A lightless photograph – or rather one that uses non-light. A light source, without reflection – what photographers call *incidence*. Paradoxically, an image

of nothing. Pure mask, pure echo. And though it makes no sense to say, there was never a self wearing the mask, there was only ever the mask itself. Under the light, under its instance – there is only a living, breathing, sulking, nothingness. “All the world’s a stage?” Well, perhaps – and an ongoing party where we have only forgotten to bring ourselves.

A self-less self-portrait for a paradoxical world.

III. From Silence to Delirium: Jean Baudrillard and the Vampire Echo

Between Camus and Virilio, in the fluctuating space of non-identity, a new question emerges. The question, not of a response to silence, but of silence itself. It is in this space that Jean Baudrillard re-formulates the traditional question of presence and absence, asking “Why is there Nothing rather than Something?”¹⁷ When we pretend self-consciousness, the world meets us with the self reflexivity of the simulacrum. The self responds by reproducing the symptoms of individuality, disregarding the impossible paradox of its own condition.¹⁸ It is from this position that Baudrillard proposes a position between absurdity and paradox – a position of delirium – and a delirious thinking that must accompany our understanding of a hallucinatory and feverish world.¹⁹

From this perspective, the fundamental problem articulated by Virilio can be reworked. Rather than the paradox of an absent self, the question becomes that of self-consciousness. The self, although spoken through and fundamentally silent, still has the mechanism by which to conceive of itself. It is this mechanism (of consciousness) that is the subject of Julian Jaynes’ *The Origins of Consciousness in the Breakdown of the Bicameral Mind*.

Tracing the anthropological roots of consciousness and language, Jaynes makes a remarkable assertion, that consciousness is a biological phenomena and further that it evolved out of a part of the mind responsible for the sort of hallucination now associated with schizophrenia.²⁰ Using the example of Homer’s *Iliad*, Jaynes contends that up until relatively recent times (c. 1000 BC) people literally heard/hallucinated voices of the gods telling them what to do.²¹ Jaynes suggests that the breakdown of these hallucinations (in the part of the mind he calls bicameral) is what initiated the biological development of consciousness. He cites schizophrenia as a contemporary example of the biological vestiges of our bicameral minds. Although he stops short of asserting that consciousness itself is a function of the same sort as these bicameral hallucinations, in the context of this discussion it is feasible to assert this very point. In face of the breakdown of ‘externally’ hallucinated voices, humanity developed the capacity to hallucinate itself. Consciousness can then be seen as precisely this self-hallucination.

What here becomes immediately apparent is a further development of Virilio’s theory of automation. If self-consciousness can be seen, via Jaynes, as a structural hallucination, then the paradox articulated by Virilio is suppressed; the automation of the individual is complete. Yet the hallucination persists as that which Slavoj Žižek calls the “spectral trace” – the invisible condition of automation as the fundamental hallucination of the self.²² In this, the self is reconstituted, but not by a re-infusion of autonomy. Rather it is a structural re-working that is suggested, one through which Virilio’s paradox disappears without being resolved. The automation of the self, through language and image, has as its fundamental condition the hallucinated structure of the self-as-host. The myth of individuality is realized, not as a built in regulatory

mechanism of language and perception, but as the spectral trace of consciousness-as-hallucination. In other words, the self is revealed as, on one hand entirely automated through its contextual channeling of information and image, and on the other as subverting automation through its realization as hallucination. This simultaneous coexistence of the socially animated and biologically hallucinated selves does not reinvent Virilio's paradox, but in a rather peculiar way, resolves it. On one hand this is because consciousness ceases to be seen as a socially determined phenomena – rather it is a biological and structural phenomena. On the other hand, vision is no longer simply co-opted by the vision machine, but is fundamentally hallucinated, thus preempting the strict invasion-of-image that Virilio proposes.

This thesis can be arrived at no less easily by route of Baudrillard's discussion of singularity. Whereas Jaynes' proposition resides in a biological and anthropological study, Baudrillard arrives at this conclusion from a strictly theoretical position. Baudrillard asserts that any closed system is (essentially) beyond the possibility of exchange. Thought is one such system. My thinking, as such, is not exchangeable for any other person's thinking. There is no system of equivalence which can be used to determine value.²³ Thought, as a structure, is beyond exchange, just as 'life' as a structure, is beyond exchange. There is no basis by which to assert that one person's life is worth more or less than anyone else's. Nor is there a manner to assert them as equivalent.²⁴ Consequently there is no way to differentiate *my* thought from thought as a structural phenomena. Thought is always both. And, once one takes the *personal* out of thought, there is nothing left. Structurally, thinking conceals the fact, not that there is no self (as in Virilio), but that there is no *thought*. Thought reveals itself as fundamentally hallucinatory; thinking is nothing except the hallucination that it creates. No longer simply a mirror image, thought is now purely holographic.²⁵

This is a point that must be insisted upon: there is no paradox within delirium. To use the same example of schizophrenia: although we might speak of it as a paradoxical condition, we cannot speak of a schizophrenic's experience as paradoxical. It is singular and beyond exchange, and although it may cut across a variety of rational/non-rational/hallucinatory/delusional states, it cannot be constituted as a relationship between these states, nor as a contradiction among them. And it is this difference, the diffusion of paradox through delirium, that serves to illustrate the same relationship with regard to the question of silence. Silence is not at one end of a paradoxical or absurd relationship between the self and the world. Rather silence itself is a delirious phenomenon: it is the simultaneous appearance and non-appearance of the self through hallucination.

What seems here like an impossible negotiation is precisely that. The positing of a hallucinogenic root of consciousness is at once the irrefutable argument against it *and* the reason why it is non-negotiable. In other words, a conversation with a hallucinated figure is no less a conversation for the hallucination, yet at the same time its existence *as* hallucination is the proof of its illegitimacy.

The Vampire-Echo

What would we call the specter of a specter? That which persists when the ghost is exorcised. Or the ghost who now knows better than to appear. Without body; without image. Conscious only of a lack of consciousness. The delirious hero: the invisible man. Undaunted by his invisibility, he interacts with the people around him as if they were real – as if he were real. As if they could see him or hear him, and as if he could see and

hear them. Yet he no longer sees or hears anything. If he did not refuse to accept his invisibility he would simply disappear. Or rather he has disappeared already, yet he adamantly re-enacts his disappearance, looking not for a sign that he is still there, but only that his disappearance was not inevitable. Looking no longer for traces of himself, but only for the residue of his own hallucinations.

The nymph Echo turned vampire. Only reflection, yet without reflection. Speaking voiceless words that are not hers. Not merely silent, not merely silenced. The space between the mirror and the world has collapsed for her. Without form she now passes freely from one to the other; yet they are the same. She appears in neither. Hallucinations of a hallucination, vampiric simply because there is nothing left to sustain her but the ceaseless feedings of illusions. No longer predatory, except in a delirious sense. More akin to prey perhaps – feeding herself through allowing herself to be preyed upon. Yet far from a passive or inert hero. The hallucinations must be enticed to feed – this remains her only source of interaction. Infinitely sustained, yet fundamentally unsustainable, a vampiric hologram that infiltrates through feedback – through seducing the world to prey upon her for a change. Thus conceding to contingency, but also affirming the contingency of concession. Not deferred, but immediate and unrelentless.

Inverted Reflections III: The Delirious Playground

The final stage of inversion, the vampire-echo – a predatory reflection. She confronts her prey no longer with their own voices but only with the realization that her voice is not her own. The self-less self-portrait, which is by no means to assert that it is passive. Rather it is vicarious – no longer nihilistic for she has no self to efface. Nor is her project to confront others with their own disappearance. Despite the seeming logic to it, this course of action alone would be paradoxical to her. Yet she neither knows nor experiences paradox any further. Hers is the singularly impossible experience of forever being someone else – someone who themselves are not, who themselves fall to her siren call, a call to feast, a vampiric dinner-bell. This alone is her delirium.

And what then of the incident self in face of delirium? A self that does not appear to itself, except in reflection? An incidental self that has no image – and yet it still has an irreducible experience of itself. Arbitrary perhaps, but entirely without condition. It could be anyone, anything. And no one would ever know the difference. Not repressed or hidden either – simply forgotten.

I used to pretend I was an animal – a panther perhaps, or a crow. I used to pretend I could change my shape, change my form. And I would sit for hours, practicing growing, changing the colour of my eyes, or simply forgetting who I thought I was. Then I would growl or run around the house on all fours, for a change. And why not? For this was never just a game; it was never as easy as to just pretend. But then, inevitably, it would end and I would pretend to be myself again. A game that loops, a game that never ends.

The delirious image – not the image of a self that is not, but of a not-self that is.

IV. Hallucinations of Invisibility

Delirious thinking for a delirious world. This is the mandate of the invisible man who interacts with his hallucinations without regard for the impossible contradiction upon which they are based. An interaction that is not devoid of its theoretical formulations, but which through action, resolves the paradox of action. Not precisely a disregard, but rather a delirious regard for the world.

A number of years ago, my father wrote a book on relaxation. A formative text for my understanding of the world, due to its addressing of what has always seemed like a contradiction: the question of how to try to relax. Not strictly speaking the question of how to try most efficiently, or more effectively, but how to try at all. It is a delirious question: how to *work* towards a state of *rest*.²⁶ And its solution requires a delirious reasoning: to relax one must conscientiously become more tense. A similar strategy to one proposed by Julian Jaynes – to correct a mistake one must conscientiously practice making it. Through such practice, the mistake simply ‘drops away.’²⁷ It is, in a sense, the practice of ‘not-doing’ what one intends. A delirious self-trickery, an active engagement with hallucination, with an impossible invisibility and a world that has already disappeared.



Self-portrait chimera, Ted Hiebert, 2003

Absurd Thinking for an Absurd World

A delirious interpretation of Camus then, from which, in response to the silence of the universe, the absurd hero no longer seeks dignity, but seeks only to practice the silence that was his answer. That the world responds in silence to his questions simply gives him room for reflection on his (absent) image. A world that is not without consequences, but surely without cause. Silence as a hallucination in itself: a hallucination of nothing. An imaginary void towards which one can only retreat. Thought at the meridian then, not as a balancing between metaphysics and history, but between silence and hallucination. And absurd reason as that which provokes, not rebellion, nor passivity, but precisely their fusion in a sort of non-action. An absurd reason is that which practices silence, that which speaks silence, negotiating the non-meaning that can be the only silent conclusion. From a delirious perspective, silence is the paradigmatic activity of an absurd world.

In this, the real resistance of Sisyphus is in his loss of hope, the loss of his (future) double, the loss of his reflection. Doing the impossible, but also doing the contradictory.²⁸ The realization of silence, the realization of his immediacy, the embracing of the universe's original sin in a non-reaction to it. Sisyphus goes on, outside of history, outside of metaphysics, silent. If there is any problem to Camus' thinking it is merely in his refusal to forgive the universe for its silence.

Paradoxical Thinking for a Paradoxical World

Building on this, the equivalent in Virilio to the not-doing of absurdity is the not-doing of automation. The vision machine, the structural spirit channeled through the self-as-host. Indeed Virilio already suggests this in his notion of the accident. If the accident of a system comes into possibility with the system, the subversion of the system is its not-doing.²⁹ The cultivation of accidents is a strategy for paradoxical thinking. The problem of course is in the intentionality of the accident. An accident, by definition, is unintentional. Yet within a delirious framework this is no longer a problem. The same not-doing of absurdity provides an answer here as well, yet an answer in a different form. In order to cultivate an accident, one must practice doing the opposite. In a literal sense, one must seek an overload of the system in order to provoke its shutdown; in order to combat automation, one must strive to be as automated as possible.³⁰ In this way one intends the unintentional; the provocation of accidents. From a delirious framework, the accident is the paradigmatic activity of a paradoxical world.

The golem, the animated stone, and the nymph Echo – these are the heroes of paradox. The silent heroes, the accidental heroes. Practicing the paradoxes of contrived spontaneity, planned accidents, through the cultivation of the unintentional. Pushing connectivity to the limits, for the sole sake of disconnection. If there is a problem to Virilio it is that he refuses to forgive the world for making him silent.

Delirious Thinking for a Delirious World

Already working within a system of delirious thought, Baudrillard himself is the delirious hero. The simulacral nature of thought, the vital illusion of a delirious world.³¹ "What if we were to forget to die?" Baudrillard asks, discussing the question of cloning and biological immortality.³² From a delirious perspective then, perhaps forgetting is the paradigmatic activity of a delirious world. Yet the singular quality of forgetting is that it must be preceded by remembering, or at least by knowledge. The crux of the delirious paradigm: one cannot forget what one does not know. Learning then, in order to know, and knowing for the sole sake of then being able to forget. Not a prescription for experience over thought – not nearly so phenomenological. Rather that of *experiencing* thought, *thinking* experience. Concessions of contingency, the not-doing of memory, the not-doing of paradox. Or perhaps as simple as remembering to forget.

The invisible man, Echo-turned-Vampire, the delirious heroes – the spectral doubles of reflection, themselves hallucinated. Mediating structures that are no longer binding conditions; the hallucination of conditions themselves. Without even the necessity of necessity – a streaming fantasy. Infinitely connected, inseparable from the world, equivalent only to its hallucination. And so if there is any problem with Baudrillard, it is only that all this is too true to be useful and too seductive to be true. Non-thinking in an invisible world.

Conclusion

The only problem that remains, is precisely that there is no longer any problem; this final inversion sets the stage for a traumatic reversibility of volition.³³ Trauma is reinvented, for no other reason than its own annihilation. The last necessary conclusion is the end of necessity. The sacrifice to end all sacrifices, the last meal, the symbolic exchange of delirium for itself.³⁴ With the end of necessity we celebrate not the endless possibilities of equivalence, but the singularly paradoxical birth of the possibility of the impossible – itself only contingent on us not remembering it.

As the quest for understanding is revealed as a constructed improvement in the wrong direction, urged on by the currents of social and cultural automata – the undercurrent reveals a fantasmatic inversion of consciousness itself, as hallucination: the ultimate simulacrum of experience.

We are no longer in the process of disappearing. Rather, we have already disappeared. Everywhere we look for signs, not that we are still here, but that our disappearance was not inevitable – that it ‘could have been’ different – as though if we had somewhere made a mistake we could live with the consequences. Yet if this could ever have been the case there is no trace of it left. What we encounter is not an acceleration towards disappearance but only the realization that we never were. It is not our disappearance that was evitable – but only our appearance in the first place.

We encounter ourselves now – indivisible from the world. We have become bicameral but not in the sense used by Jaynes – rather precisely the inverse. It is not that we have once more begun to hear voices – but rather that we are merely the voices themselves. An invisible race in a delirious world. Not merely cut off from the world, but for the first time indistinguishable from it. Perhaps for the first time truly alive. From here it is useless to try to remember the life we knew before. With a delirious mind now we must proceed only to forget.

And so we come full circle from where we began. It is no longer we who ask the universe about the meaning of life, but the universe who quietly asks us. With a smile, but without irony, we reply simply that we have forgotten.

Notes

1. Albert Camus, *The Myth of Sisyphus*, trans. Justin O'Brien, London: Penguin, 1975, p. 12.
2. Camus, *The Rebel: An Essay on Man in Revolt*, trans. Anthony Bower, London: Vintage, 1992, p. 6.
3. Camus, *Sisyphus*, p. 59. Camus constitutes his problem here as that of a “life without consolation.”
4. This is analogous to Camus’ refusal of hope, or death (suicide) as appropriate responses to the question of life. Camus, *Sisyphus*, p. 59.
5. Regine Robin, “En lieu et place de soi,” *Le golem de l’écriture: De l’autofiction au cybersol*, Montréal: XYZ, 1997, p. 36. Internal quote from: Joan Fontcuberta, *Le baiser de Judas: Photographie et vérité*, Paris: Actes Sud, 1996, p. 33. (author’s translation)

Narcisse contre le Vampire. Narcisse, en effet, n’aime que son image qu’il contemple dans le miroir de l’eau. Le Vampire est dans l’impossibilité de contempler son image. Le miroir ne lui renvoie rien. “Il faut imaginer le paradoxe – le supplice! – d’un narcisse-vampire: quelqu’un qui poursuit le reflet dont il est dépourvu ...”
6. Roland Barthes, “The Death of the Author,” *Image-Music-Text*, trans. Stephen Heath, London: Fontana, 1977, pp. 146-7.
7. Camus, *Sisyphus*, p. 16.
8. Sean Burke, *The Death and Re-birth of the Author*, Edinburgh: University of Edinburgh, 1992, p. 43.
9. Barthes, “The Death of the Author,” p. 148.

10. Michel Foucault, "What is an Author," eds. Charles Harrison and Paul Wood, *Art in Theory 1900-1990*, Oxford: Blackwell, 1992, pp. 924-5.
11. Paul Virilio, *The Vision Machine*, trans. Julie Rose, Indianapolis: Indiana University, 1994, p. 62.
12. Virilio, *The Vision Machine*, p. 73.
13. Arthur Kroker, *The Possessed Individual: Technology and the French Postmodern*, New York: St. Martin's Press, 1992, p. 2.
14. Virilio, *The Vision Machine*, p. 63.
15. Kroker, p. 52.
16. Robert Graves, *Greek Myths: I*, London: Penguin Books, 1955, p. 287.
17. Jean Baudrillard, *Impossible Exchange*, trans. Chris Turner, London: Verso, 2001, p. 11.
18. See Jean Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulation*, trans. Sheila Faria Glaser, Detroit: University of Michigan, 1994, p. 3.
19. Jean Baudrillard, *The Vital Illusion*, New York: Columbia University, 2000, p. 68.
20. Julian Jaynes, *The Origins of Consciousness in the Breakdown of the Bicameral Mind*, New York: Mariner Books, 1976, p. 452.
21. Jaynes, p. 75.
22. Slavoj Zizek, *The Fragile Absolute: or why is the christian legacy worth fighting for?* London: Verso, 2000, pp. 64-5.
23. Baudrillard, *Impossible Exchange*, p. 19.
24. Baudrillard, *Impossible Exchange*, p. 39.
25. Kroker, p. 57.
26. Bryan Hiebert, *Learn to Relax: A Step by Step Guide*, Toronto: Lugus, 1993. The process involves a systematic tensing and releasing of muscles, starting with the feet and working upward to the neck and head. This takes about 45 minutes.
27. Jaynes, p. 34. Jaynes uses the example of the common typing mistake 'hte' (instead of 'the'). He calls this a theory of 'negative practice' whereby, through practicing the mistake one stops inadvertently making it.
28. Camus defines 'It's absurd' as 'It's impossible' but also 'It's contradictory.' *Sisyphus*, 33.
29. Paul Virilio, *Politics of the Very Worst*, trans. Michael Cavaliere, ed. Sylvère Lotringer, New York: Semiotext(e), 1999, p. 89. also *The Vision Machine*, p. 65.
30. Similar to Baudrillard, *The Vital Illusion*, p. 83. "Facing a world that is unintelligible and problematic, our task is clear: we must make that world even more unintelligible, even more enigmatic."
31. Baudrillard, *The Vital Illusion*, p. 73.
32. Baudrillard, *Impossible Exchange*, p. 39.
33. Zizek, p. 98.
34. Zizek, p. 63.