Doing Literature without Thinking: Paralogical Devices and the Literary Field

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As can be learned from Władysław Tatarkiewicz's *A History of Six Ideas* (12-15, 21-23, 50, 56-57, 244-45), since antiquity, Western literary art has on the one hand been understood as a skill (*téchne, ars*) that, with the masterly use of the given stock of themes and forms, gives rise to works appropriate to the purpose and the established conventions, while on the other hand, it has been perceived as the work of inspired obsession (*manía, furor poeticus*), consciously replacing skill with a string of ideas of a transcendental origin. Until the renaissance, the conceptual range of the Greek word *téchne* and its Latin counterpart *ars* was both broader and narrower than that suggested in the West by the modern notion of art. Setting in since the mid-eighteenth century, the modern idea of art united literature with visual arts, music, and theater by providing them with common ideological grounds (i.e., the aesthetic concept of beauty), while excluding handicrafts and sciences from its proper domain, which appeared to be gaining autonomy from the rest of society. Referring to the skills derived from a masterly knowledge of the rules deemed necessary for producing a work of art or performing a certain art practice, the pre-modern notion of *ars* embraced not only music, theater, dance, or architecture but also different handicrafts and sciences. On the other hand, however, poetry was for millennia largely excluded from *ars* because it was not regarded as a rational, practical, goal-oriented, and imitative skill but rather as *poíesis*, that is, the production of new entities, as well as a kind of prophecy cognate with philosophical thinking or religious experience.

Tatarkiewicz reiterates his observation that the ancient Greeks regarded poets as divinely inspired prophets and distinguished poetry from the imitative routines of the arts because it represented a higher type of knowledge, moral education, and metaphysical insight, while also embodying the danger of fascinating audiences with mere simulacra (83-85). In his *Phaedrus*, for instance, Plato wrote that poetry origi-

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nates from a sublime frenzy of those possessed by the Muses: "But he who without the divine madness comes to the doors of the Muses, confident that he will be a good poet by art, meets with no success, and the poetry of the sane man vanishes into nothingness before that of the inspired madmen" (*Phaedrus* 245a).[1] However, Tatarkiewicz cautions not to neglect a contrary understanding of literature. Commenting on Plato, he points out: "There is poetry which springs from a poetical frenzy (*manía*), and poetry composed by literary skill (*téchne*)" (99). Indeed, in *The Republic*, Plato also equates poetry with the mimetic principle of the visual arts. Further, Aristotle's *Poetics* sets down the rules for composing tragedies as a high genre of poetic art; and last but not least, the Greeks generally comprehended poetry along incommensurable modes: from the point of view of content, poetry was supposed to transcend other arts as a medium of divine inspiration beyond the poet's control, whereas with regard to its observable form, the poetic verse demanded metrical skills, obeisance to rules, and the imitation of works embodying formal and linguistic perfection (Tatarkiewicz 15, 85-86, 98).

The enduring approach to poetry as an art that can, to a certain degree, be learned and skillfully imitated may be understood as a result of its institutionalization, which was achieved by the teaching of grammar, rhetoric, and poetics from the antiquity to classical modernity (see, e.g. Juvan, *History* 49-56). Compared to the artistic consciousness of the moderns, the Greeks lacked notions of the aesthetic experience, artistic creativity, and originality.[2] As early as the Hellenistic period, poetry conceived as approximate to art was valued for the first time as a rule-free, personalized, and individual spiritual work of imagination (*phantasía*) that may legitimately produce innovation, but it was only in early modernity that poetry finally joined other arts in the realm of "beauty." In the Italian renaissance, "free creative work again advanced to the fore, leaving canons and traditions in the background;…and inspiration assumed greater weight than skill" (Tatarkiewicz 104-09, 113). Towards the late eighteenth century, personal imagination, free creativity, and inspiration developed into the cult of genius, that is, a subject able to create *ex nihilo* and according to laws established by his/her own art. From the nineteenth-century *poètes maudits*, through the symbolists and impressionists, to avant-garde writers, Tatarkiewicz traces the increasing significance of creative freedom and innovation:

> Avant-garde quickly brought about a situation such that freedom became in art not only permissible but *de rigueur*…Difference, too, became its programme...It had been different from conventional art, now it must be different from itself, must ceaselessly be new…changes of forms are constant, almost annual. (43-44)

Post-enlightenment ideologies of art, which—in the name of originality, innovative difference, and the nonconformism of artists—gave priority to the idea of inspiration, called attention to the apparent suspension of conscious thought processes during the act of artistic creation. With the advancement of social modernization towards the end of the nineteenth century, the initially (pseudo)religious, mythologi-

cal, and metaphysical explanations of the transcendental sources of inspiration that had circulated in romanticism gave way to clinical, psychological, psychoanalytical, or anthropological interpretations. Inspiration, which supplanted the intentionality of subjective consciousness during the production of a text, was associated with insanity, dreamlikeness, the unconscious, and a regression to childhood or to precivilizational collective archetypes. Anna Balakian, for example, points out that literary critics (from Remy de Gourmont to Jean-Pierre Soulier) explained away Lautréamont's hallucinatory imagery "as manifestations of neurosis and eventual psychosis" (52), that is, as his mental illness.

I am tempted to coin the oxymoron "the art of mania" to designate strategies of combining the two contradictory but interlaced traditions of thinking about literature that have been discussed thus far: writers tend to practice art as skill (*ars*) that, with its devices within the frameworks of the modern literary field, through a deliberate plan creates the impression that the literary work originates from *manía*, beyond the author's conscious control. In the continuation, I will attempt to demonstrate how "the art of mania" has been reflected in European literatures from romanticism to modernism.

From the perspective of Mark Turner's *The Literary Mind*, an echo of Giambattista Vico's idea of the metaphorical origins of language, it is impossible for art to step outside of thinking because "the literary mind is not separate from everyday life" but rather is "the fundamental mind"—story, metaphorical projection, and parable are not only literary forms but are the root of language and of all cognition (v, 4-12, 168). Leonard Jackson, moreover, demonstrates that "literature as psychotic fantasy" of writers and readers is an evolutionary achievement or a culturally sophisticated form of "spontaneously generated fantasy," which is actually "the basis of the mental life of most higher animals including human beings"; it is essential for behavior in complex situations, characteristic of linguistic-social interaction (4-5, 12-17, *passim*). In the light of "the art of mania," the most relevant conception of thinking is that derived from René Descartes' and John Locke's definition of thought as "reflexive consciousness or self-awareness" (Van Gulick 2): "By the word 'thought' [*pensée*] I understand all that of which we are conscious as operating in us" (Descartes, qtd. in Van Gulick 2). "I do not say there is no soul in man because he is not sensible of it in his sleep. But I do say he cannot think at any time, waking or sleeping, without being sensible of it" (Locke, qtd. in Van Gulick 2). Thinking, therefore, is not to be equated with perceptions, emotions, the unconscious, and other cognitive content in itself, but rather with human mental activity that concerns itself, linguistically-conceptually categorizing its own processes. Only at the meta-level of consciousness does the Cartesian subject directly perceive the basis of its own existence. It is thus necessary to understand thinking that can be interrupted by "not thinking" on the basis of the Cartesian *cogito*. This also implies the current concepts of "self-perspectuality," "reflexive meta-mental self-awareness," or "introspective consciousness," with which the ego, through the perception of its cognitive content, autopoietically organizes

itself in a continuous unit and reflects on the possible scenarios of responding to other subjects and the world (see Van Gulick 4, 9, 11, 22; Armstrong, "What" 605-15). Descartes' methodicalness according to the principle *clare et distincte*, which took its own consciousness as the object on which it ontologically based the ideologeme of the subject, marked prevailing conceptions of thinking, right up to Freud's discovery of the unconscious, with rationality and intentionality. It is precisely these two traits that are crucial not only for self-reflection but also for the subject's ability to establish a conscious relationship towards the world.

In the classical modern and late modern periods, thinking with which the individual perceived him/herself as a subject of consciousness, self-awareness, and freedom of choice coincided with the ambivalence of liberal individualism. In its radical form, the notion of liberal subjectivity facilitated the articulation of revolutionary-emancipatory projects, while, in the form of the ruling ideology, masking class, race, gender, and ethnic conflicts, it enabled the rational self-organization and functional differentiation of modern social subsystems through the interpellation of individuals into subjects of their discourses (to paraphrase Althusser's famous wording). This is also true of the literary field from the eighteenth century onwards. According to Pierre Bourdieu's *The Rules of Art*, the ideology of aesthetic autonomy, which informed the key actors of this field, established the belief that literary art behaves according to its own set of values (beauty, imagination, originality, modernity, perfection or individual style). Artists, groups, the media, and institutions in the literary field capitalized these values in a symbolic way, that is, with the struggle for artistic prestige and social position. Aesthetic ideology neglected the cultural stratification of the old estate system, while at the same time, through the mechanisms of the accumulation of cultural capital, inverting the logic of the thriving economic order of bourgeois capitalism within which literary life was entangled in the cultural market and the public sphere, with the value of artistic production having become contingent on the interests of publishers and the power of individual cliques (see Bourdieu 20-21, 48-68, 81-85). In the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, the literary field, infected by the logic of commodification, expected ceaseless innovation, originality, and extraordinariness from writers. It presupposed creativity that, with its subjective inspiration, surpassed the known repertoire. With its media-institutional and market structure, however, this same field demanded of artists who wanted to succeed that they pay regard to literary conventions and master skills such as acquaintance with domestic and foreign traditions, being constantly well-informed about emerging trends, knowing how to appear in public or negotiate with publishers, and so on.

According to Patrick Colm Hogan, the fissure between the contradictory demands of the artistic field is explained by the cognitivist conception of creativity as the ability of the individual, as a "genius," to produce an original and unpredictable work, while at the same time, as a "maestro," to ensure that his innovation is also acceptable with regard to the established conventions (59-81). It is precisely this friction between the figure of the "genius" and the "master" that from romanticism to late

modernism—especially after Freud's discovery of the unconscious—gave rise to a tendency towards literary creativity "without thinking." Seeking sources of creativeness beyond the frameworks of the intentional thinking of the self-conscious subject was embedded in the discourse of modern rationality. As will be shown below, creating "without thinking" was conceived, executed, given meaning, and introduced to the literary audience in precisely the manner of art (*ars*), with the aid of the intentional, even experimental, use of various devices. Writings that screen their source in the self-reflexive agency entered the literary field as links in a consciously conceived and interpretable chain of utterances, mediated through rational strategies and given meaning metatextually. The essential goal of these devices was to produce notions in writers and other actors in the literary field that, in the classical modern and late modern mindset, renew Platonic and pseudo-Longinian ideas of ecstatic creative *manía* and the sublime. It is a case of the impression that the text is not a product of skilled, consciously controlled writing, but that the paralogical narrative springing forth from inspiration leaves the word to radical otherness, whether this be God, the collective or primitive spirit, dreams, the unconscious, higher reality, animalism, myth, forgotten childhood or chance (see Chao 28-31).

Among the devices that aimed to imaginarily break through modern Western rationality and simulate modes "besides thinking" (e.g., pre-reflexive thought, dreamlike trance, divine inspiration, elementary bodily sensations, or the uncanny), the earliest might be primitivism, mythopoeia, and the grotesque. Ritchie Robertson defines primitivism as the "modern interest in primitive culture and society" in which artworks "employ the primitive as a means of cultural criticism and advocate features of the primitive to alleviate the shortcomings of civilization" (79).[3] Robertson traces primitivism back to the enlightenment self-questioning of rationalism and the entire Western civilizing process and proceeds even further back to Tacitus,[4] but he emphasizes that falling back on primitivism becomes really prominent only in the late nineteenth century because "doubts about the value of civilization recurred more insistently" (80-81). In his *Birth of Tragedy*, Friedrich Nietzsche discovered the primitive "in the midst of [Greek] civilization itself," whereas Sigmund Freud, with his concept of the Oedipus complex, showed that "the mentality of primitives survives in our unconscious" (Robertson 81-86).

Based on Eleazar M. Meletinsky's extensive research of mythologization in European art and literature, I understand mythopoeia as a feigned, aesthetic regression to pre-civilizational, archaic symbolic forms (see Juvan, *Vezi* 251-53; Meletinsky). Mythopoeia is established by the interweaving of the following devices: genre imitation of what André Jolles called "simple forms" (*einfache Formen*); simulating the rituality of speech acts; re-writing myths; imagery from the collector, hunter, agricultural, and nomadic cultures or archaic civilizations; and replication of pre-logical thinking according to the principles of participation and isomorphism between humans, living beings, and the cosmos. With the mythopoetic evocation of the "savage mind" (Lévi-Strauss), the boundary between the human and the

extra-human may dissolve; however, the intertextually processed myths are anthropocentrically filtered through the concepts and images of modern subjectivity. In so doing, the interpretation of the mixing of human and animal oscillates between modern figurativeness and archaic literalness, resulting in the structure of the grotesque often interfering in the mythologization.

Discussing baroque, romantic, and surrealist literary texts in terms of the sublime "aesthetic of excess," Shun-Liang Chao bases his interpretation of the grotesque precisely on the Bakhtinian concept of a hybrid, "interstitial being," "physically in-between or *trans*-formal…body in the act of becoming" (7-8). He thus defines the grotesque as:

> a corporeal, or flesh-made, metaphor which produces within itself (and within the reader/viewer's response) intellectual uncertainty, emotional disharmony, and hermeneutic indeterminacy…grotesque *trans*-formation is an *excessive* pursuit of incompleteness and contradiction: it transgresses the natural order of things and produces within itself a self-contradictory (or in-between) physical structure, one that… displeases classicists. (14, 26)[5]

The grotesque fusion of the gruesome and the comic is derived from the intrusion of the unthinkable otherness, which Chao describes in the concepts of Jacques Lacan and Julia Kristeva: structures of the bodily-instinctive "semiotic" from the unconscious and chaotic trauma of the "real" encroach upon the "symbolic," that is, upon the subject's conscious use of culturally codified signifying practices, causing a transgression of stable systems of knowledge. The *Unheimliche* of the grotesque is evident primarily through "body imagery" that "contains a self-contradictory *physical* structure": the representation of the human body in a state of decomposition, transformation, a mixture of inorganic and organic forms, plant and animal parts.[6] How are mythopoeia and the grotesque reflected in romantic and modernist poetry?

In the "disenchanted world" of the nineteenth century, under the influence of bourgeois revolutions, social mobility, industry, and the early globalization of capitalism, the validity of discourses that, in the *ancien régime*, had ensured the metaphysical certainty of the subject and determined his/her stable position in the political order was lost. Although the literary field, which at that time had gained apparent autonomy throughout Europe as a sphere of the aesthetic and a bearer of national identity, was relatively marginal compared to other social subsystems and the discourse of mass print media, its actors strove to raise the public authority of literature by the fetishization of aesthetic experience and the presentation of poetry writing as the highest expression of national spirit and a contemporary substitute for religion or mythology (see Riede). Only the poet's imagination, comparable with the language of mythologies (see Bohrer; Perkins), was supposed to be accessible to a deeper truth, which lay beyond the reach of public discourse and was unfathomable to intellectual thought.

Alexander S. Pushkin's "The Prophet" of 1828 is a characteristic example of romantic mythopoeia (*Polnoe* 338-39).[7] It allegorizes the withdrawal of the subject of poetry

from everyday social communication and his/her identification with the figure of the prophet. The poem, which implements mythologization only at the level of motives, re-writes the story of Isaiah (Is. 6:1-13), interpreting it from the perspective of a poet who feels humiliated and frustrated by making his living from writing as the tsar's subject. The representation of divine inspiration beyond thought and the self-portrait of the poet as a prophet are clearly part of Pushkin's strategy to establish the public authority of a man of literature. In the imagery of this poem, Boris Gasparov recognizes an allusion to the Russian literary tradition and a tribute to Gavril Derzhavin (242-50). It is therefore also possible to read God's voice at the end of "The Prophet" outside the pseudo-religious framework, as the command of the law of the higher literary tradition, which interpellates the individual into the subject of poetry.

The consecration of the individual to the medium of the transcendental speech of poetry brings a mutilation comparable to Homer's blindness. The poem tells how a seraph appears to a first-person subject wandering in the desert, opening his senses to a superabundant perception of the totality of creation. The wanderer's heart and tongue, the organs of human emotion and verbal social life, are exchanged by the seraph for inorganic and animal foreign bodies: in his chest the seraph presses a burning coal and in his mouth a demonic snake's sting. The appeal of God's voice, which at the end of the poem substitutes the first-person voice, is a declaration of the social and metaphysical mission of modern poetry, but the gruesome grafting of the sacred and demonic foreign bodies into the human body changes Pushkin's mythopoeia to the grotesque.

In "The Prophet," the monstrous and hybrid transhumanity of the grotesque body allegorizes the radical otherness of the poetic that emerges from the social codes of ordinary language. Thus Pushkin's text seems to suit Chao's argument:

> that the grotesque body, as a product of dream-condensation, is the pictorial representation of the poetry or poetic language that…brings to the fore the polysemic function of the signifying practice, i.e. what standard language tends to repress. The grotesque body…deforms and destabilizes—or semioticizes (in Kristeva's terms)—the normal functioning of standard language by fragmenting its body, its "syntax", and foregrounding its metaphorical dimensions. (46)

An even more drastic grotesque response to the romantic mythologization of the poet may be found in the 1961 poem "Lump of Ashes" by Dane Zajc (1929-2005), a prominent poet of Slovenian "dark modernism" (Zajc, *Pesmi* 97; see Juvan, *Vezi* 239 *passim*).[8] The image of the gruesome apparition, such as can emerge with "the art of mania," metaphorically encodes the anxiety of the poet who feels burdened by the Slovenian romantic tradition and its cultural nationalism. Nationalist discourse allied with post-romantic aesthetic liberalism gave rise to the expectation for great writers of the nation (dubbed "national poets") to play the sacralized role of heralding the ideas of liberation, beauty, and the national spirit (see Juvan, *Prešernovska* 295-346). However, the authoritarian system of socialist Yugoslavia, with its rather convoluted regime of indirect control over intellectual life, prevents the poet assum-

ing the posture of a dissident intellectual who, in the modernist mindset, is expected to take over the role of the romantic national poet. "Lump of Ashes" creates a surrealist vision, projecting the actual political distress experienced by the writer onto an uncanny textual world. His self-portrait is grotesquely estranged and deformed. Much like in Pushkin, the determining features of a human being vanish: Zajc's creature has no tongue; instead of words or the prophet's burning coal, only a lump of ashes remains in his mouth. In place of a human body and subjectivity, there appears an enlarged, deformed, and decomposing creature, made up of a collage of inorganic, withering, human, and plant matter. The grotesque metaphors empty out life and mental content from the poet's body, reifying it into a kind of disintegrating building.

This image is not simply a figment of the imagination, driven by an unconscious *Todestrieb*; the poem is also a non-comic parody of Pushkin's "The Prophet" and the Prometheus myth, which literature has adopted since pre-romanticism for the self-interpretation of the poet's mission as a rebellious bearer of freedom. In Zajc, all that remains of Prometheus' fire is smoke and ash, falling back into the decomposing body. The body evoked in Zajc's poem is heir to what Elza Adamowicz describes as surrealist "collage monsters," that is, "the articulation of two or more disparate elements which generates the image of a hybrid creature, whether verbal or visual" (283-85). Abounding in surrealist art, these monsters are products of "ready-made material or of gestating matter…[and] a *bricolage* activity" (286). The grotesque body in Zajc's poem marks a double impasse faced by the writing subject who has been determined by the lyrical discourse of the romantic tradition: on the one hand, it is impossible for him to spell out directly what the contemporary political system prohibits to be said in public; on the other hand, the poetic voice lacks the language that could express the very condition of the late modern subjectivity because the latter resides with, to borrow Chao's phrasing, "the experience of the un-nameable and un-classifiable nature of the *real*" (48). As shown by Thomas Immelmann and Chao, in twentieth-century modernism, the de-centering power of the grotesque becomes a central artistic device because it absorbs important artistic and theoretical impulses: the nihilist sense of disorientation, ambivalence, and loss of textually expressible meaning, the psychoanalytic concept of the unconscious, and the modernist tendency to produce unfinizable and heterogeneous structures that escape bourgeois rationality (see Chao 46-61; Immelmann 166-236).

In their preface to the volume *Modernism and the European Unconscious*, Peter Collier and Judy Davies stress that the characteristic innovations of modernism, such as self-questioning formalism, a fascination with the novelty and dynamism of modern society, and a "sense of rupture with the culture and thinking of the past," stem from "a desire to open up uninvestigated areas of the mind—the whole mind, in its unconscious and irrational aspects, as disclosed by the new forms of depth psychology at the turn of the century" (xiii). In their view, this is the reason why the modernist "revolution in form" converged with "the emergence of new models of mind" (xiv). Sigmund Freud, with his clinical practice, interpretation of dreams,

and psychoanalytic theory, shattered the established notion that the modern subject is grounded in conscious self-observation, instead disclosing how drives and chaotic "lower" instincts, enmeshed in familial interaction and escaping reflexive consciousness and rational control, determine the subject's identity. As documented by Malcolm Bowie, some of Freud's artist contemporaries, such as Robert Musil, Gustav Mahler, and Arnold Schönberg, can also be placed in "the 'low'-'high' antithesis" characteristic of the Viennese culture of *die Moderne* because their works evoke the presence of elemental human desires "in the higher inventions of the mind," showing a structural or thematic affinity with the basic Freudian concept of the unconscious as either the "instantaneous" intrusion of chaotic otherness into everyday perception and behavior, or as the "continuous" deeper basis of all mental acts (7, 13-14).

In the frameworks of twentieth-century modernist and postmodernist poetics, many different devices were invented that correspond to Freudian and other revolutionary models of the mind and memory proposed by dynamic psychology, Bergsonianism, psychoanalysis, and neurosciences: from the stream of consciousness and the narrative telescoping of temporalities, through aleatoric composition, to surrealist imagery (see Nalbantian). In contradistinction to the tendency towards aesthetic organicism and holism ascribed to the romantic tradition, the modernist image—as represented by Zajc's example—"implies…a conflict between different parts of the mind," "accommodates the idea that the mind is split against itself" and "regards and expresses itself as process" (Collier 18, 20).[9] The mind is, according to Collier, represented as conflictual, while the romantic notion of imagination as a "homogenizing faculty" is thought to be replaced in modernism by the Freudian view that "the imagination is driven by desire, not by vision," which results in "an enigmatic, conflictual model of signification," and, finally, the idea that "the artist and the neurotic are essentially similar" (22-23).[10] In his history of nihilism in literature, Thomas Immelmann, discussing the concept of the unconscious, also connects the post-enlightenment sense of a vertiginous loss of meaning with an irreducible difference implied in signification:

> Nihilism as a consciously staged lack of meaning can come about only in the moment when literature clearly recognizes the role of difference in its own linguistic, literary activity and points to the unbearable duplication of meaning…With the discovery of difference, the loss of meaning is permanently present in the text, threatening it with temporalization, fragmentation, and de-centering. (18)

In her discussion of the surrealist image, Anna Balakian writes that "language was to be endowed with a hallucinogenic quality, and…could grant pleasures beyond those induced by narcotics" (144). Indeed, experimenting with drugs with the intention of stepping out of (conscious) thinking and expanding the imagination had been endemic to the bohemian lifestyle at least since Thomas de Quincey's 1821 *Confessions of an English Opium-Eater*, which later enthralled Baudelaire and the surrealists. René Crevel, Robert Desnos, Georges Malkine, and other Parisian artists also consumed drugs (Bandier 152). In his *Narcotics* of 1932, the Polish modernist Stanisław Ignacy

Witkiewicz observes his own mind—in a literary, scientific-descriptive way, and with a journalistic social engagement that functions somehow self-parodically—under the influence of the experimental consumption of nicotine, alcohol, cocaine, and peyote:

> Since by means of "free artistic creativity," i.e., "a little birdie singing on a branch," I have been unable to do anything for society or for the nation, I have decided, after a series of experiments, to share with the public my views on narcotics…I hope to offer at least some small help to the powers of good in the battle against these most frightful enemies of mankind (after war, poverty, and disease). (243)

While not sparing the banality and harmfulness of popular narcotics from harsh verbal criticism, even if they appear to fulfill the human metaphysical "insatiability caused by existence itself" (251) or are consumed by artists as stimuli to their impoverished creativity,[11] as a bohemian who believes in his poetics of "Pure Form" (260), Witkiewicz is captured by the dreamlike and transcendental powers of peyote. This "metaphysical drug" (259) gives him total sensory access to uncanny worlds of fantastic visions, which, with their crude realism, grotesque transformation of objects and bodies, and bizarre randomness of verbal associations, are reminiscent of surrealism, with its dream protocols, automatic writing, and absurd imagery:

> 9:30—various sculpture in sharp relief, tiny faces, feels "weird," but good. Sees rainbow stripes, but incomplete…Desire to forget reality. Huge buildings, the bricks turn into gargoyle faces…Monsters similar to plesiosaurs made out of luminous filaments. The trees turned into ostriches. A corpse's brain, abscesses, sheaves of sparks bursting out of them…On the ceiling, against a red background horned beasts. A gigantic abdomen with a wound—the insides turn into coral at the bottom of the sea. A battle among sea monsters. Dr. Sokołowski turns into a cephalopod. Spatial "distortion." Cross section of the earth. (262)

Like an observer immersed in fantasy, the modern subject allows himself to be overwhelmed by the effects that the brain stimulated by narcotics creates in the Cartesian theater of consciousness. However, as exemplified by the citation above, Witkiewicz continuously rationally observes and records his uncanny psychic states under the influence of narcotics, reconstructing and analyzing them in his text. Paradoxically, his mind is obsessed with analyzing his own states of being out of mind:

> Peyote-induced sensations and the strangest of its visions—some are totally realistic —are as difficult to reconstruct as certain dreams in which it is impossible to tell what it is all about or what is happening and which no comparison can capture…Forming strange tangles, the images interlock with the muscular feelings and sensations of the internal organs and thus there emerges an inextricable whole—of an incredibly subtle overall atmosphere, which defies all analysis and crumbles into indeterminate chaos…. (259)

Notwithstanding their ambivalent moralizing and self-ironic stance, Witkiewicz's introductory words about his wish to contribute a "small help to the powers of good in the battle against these most frightful enemies of mankind" (243) testify to the fact that his *Narcotics* verbally organize his altered states of mind, triggered by inten-

tional experiments, exploiting them as material for his theoretical and metaphysical self-reflection, social and art critique, as well as for genuinely literary devices, that is, modernist imagery. With all of this, Witkiewicz invests his experimental visions in broadening the space of the aesthetic and in maintenance of his author function. Witkiewicz's *Narcotics* is thus a telling example of "the art of mania" that includes paralogical discourse in the utterances and artistic strategies of a conscious actor in the literary field.

The literary strategies employed by French surrealists, although much better known, are comparable to Witkiewicz's contemporaneous prose which scrutinizes the reality of hallucinatory experience under the influence of drugs. Their devices of doing literature "without thinking" range from dream protocols and automatic writing to uncanny poetic imagery and the grotesque. In his sociology of the surrealist movement of the nineteen-twenties, Norbert Bandier, adopting a Bourdieuian approach, suggests that the young literati (then mostly around the age of twenty) of socially and regionally different origins who were gathering in the French capital could successfully start their literary careers only if they were able to overcome the limitations of the dominant structure of power in the existing literary field and make rational use of its emerging opportunities. In the post-WWI period, before the Great Depression of the thirties, mass literature and the realist novel distributed by major publishing houses pertaining to the "commercial pole" proved successful among a wider audience, while smaller publishers, counting on the long-term accumulation of symbolic capital on the "cultural pole," attempted to address book lovers, collectors, and literary professionals with bibliophile editions of the classics and of promising artists (Bandier 14-28). Instead of reproducing the cultural elites of *lettrés*, loyal to the classical tradition and bourgeois aesthetic conventions, the newly reformed French education system, with its orientation towards contemporary knowledge and languages, produced a more socially engaged type of educated people, many of whom began to emerge as controversial public figures dubbed *intellectuels*. Young circles of intellectuals were thus more open to rule-free and innovative modernist poetry, as well as to the transformative social aspects of literary discourse (61-77). Given that traditional poetry, with its metrical and thematic conventions, had been marginalized since the late nineteenth century, while the novel was thriving, it seemed to be difficult to start one's literary career as a poet. However, in addition to the more modern inclination of the younger readership and the proliferation of boutique brochures, several other options appeared that made way for poetry freshmen. Poetry was appealing because its free imagination and modern sensibility was not hampered by the aesthetic conservatism of the commercial publishing pole (74-77). In contradistinction to book editions, literary reviews did not need to depend so much on sales, making them a convenient forum for poetry. Poetry, not least because of its format, was given a prominent place in specialized literary reviews. The post-WWI rise of literary periodicals and the growing ideological-aesthetical differentiation between literary reviews prompted literary intellectuals to form opposing groups,

which competed in producing novel trends (39-57). Apart from literary reviews, the increasingly globalized Paris, with its concentration of artistic institutions, media, publishing, and the impressive immigration of artists and intellectuals, offered many emerging venues for artistic and intellectual sociability: more mundane cafés and libraries were supplanting the exclusive salon culture of the aristocracy and the grand or high bourgeoisie of the pre-WWI times (40-44).

To make Bandier's extensive and well-documented argument short and to the point: the surrealist movement, with its transformative socio-aesthetic utopianism and notoriously "irrational," "dreamlike," and "unconscious" imagination, resulted from a series of rational decisions and even well-calculated strategies of its protagonists. In order to become visible in the literary field, it was rational for beginning authors to join their individual trajectories in a single generational group, to adopt a progressivist pattern of avant-garde, and to establish their own literary review as the main forum for their poetry, their social and aesthetic critique, their provocative attacks on the establishment, and their manifestoes proclaiming ground-breaking aesthetic concepts in alliance with utopian social revolutionism.

Historical accounts of surrealism usually emphasize the fact that automatic writing and dream protocols were considered by André Breton and his surrealist comrades as experiments or innovative literary techniques that constituted the very essence of their avant-garde identity, as well as their personal and social existence (see, e.g., Balakian 125-33; Berger 39-41, 51-57; Bürger 87-90, 150-65).[12] Along with other key devices of surrealist poetics, such as the grotesque and black humor, aleatory composition, absolute metaphor (surrealist image), and collage, automatic writings and dream protocols were thought to break the censorship of rational thinking, freeing the imagination from conscious control, literary conventions, and moral pressures. To that end, the concept and practices of recording psychic automatism were adapted from Freud's *Interpretation of Dreams*, Pierre Janet's psychotherapy, and even Gérard de Nerval's *Aurélia*, the romantic autobiographic narrative of obsession, dreaming, and madness. While Freud interpreted the free associations and manifest dream content of his patients in terms of a rationally decipherable discourse, seeking to cure them of mental disorders, Breton, who had practiced psychotherapy in a military hospital during WWI, made contact with Freud and remained his lifetime admirer, experimenting with the free association technique and dream accounts in order to find his way to the unconsciousness, which, once freed from the repression of Western socio-moral codes, promised to be an inexhaustible transmitter of messages that escape categorization and transgress established signification codes. The French surrealists believed that the unconscious world of dreams would unleash creativity, expand the notion of reality, free the individual from gnoseological, ethical, and aesthetic conventions, and lead to a spiritual and experiential revolution of modern society at large.

In its avant-garde dismantling of mimesis and bourgeois literary culture, French surrealism attempted, in a revolutionary way, to transform society through embed-

ding the unconscious and dream worlds of individuals in the daily realities of literary sociability, the public sphere, and politics. With the devices of automatic writing, group games, and the aleatory combining of words, surrealists produced innovative paralogical discourse, apparently outside their reflexive thinking. Reviving the ancient *furor poeticus*, they saw in this approach and the resulting imagery a sublime "*dictée* magique" (Breton 275; "magical *dictation*"), an ingress to higher reality, but also and more realistically a state of mind comparable to that of being helplessly captured by the hallucinatory power of drugs ("Il en va des images surréalistes comme des images de l'opium que l'homme n'évoque plus, mais qui 's'offrent à lui, spontanément, despotiquement' [Baudelaire]" Breton 337).

However, "un très haut degree *d'absurdité immédiate*" (Breton 327; "a high level of direct absurdity") with which surrealists dissembled the calcified conceptual systems was itself conceptualized in a calculating way, intentionally triggered (with hypnosis, for instance), pseudo-scientifically experimented with, metatextually reflected upon with Freud's psychoanalysis, and explained in manifestos. In the end, contrary to Freud's analysis of traumatic repression, surrealists adopted an aesthetic relationship towards the "dreamlikeness" of their productions, contemplating them on the background of the existing literary imagination; thus they were enthusiastic about the spring of quality images, "*lumière de l'image*," "un pittoresque très spécial," and "une bouffonerie aiguë" (Breton 326, 337; "*light of the image*," "a special picturesqueness," "a biting buffoonery").

It has been stressed that automatic writing does not represent a total break with the symbolic order because the majority of records of free association obeys syntactic rules, transforms well-known clichés or idioms, and structures rather coherent textual words, notwithstanding their—*prima facie*—fantastic absurdity (see Bürger 153-64). Moreover, French surrealism was internally split by a major contradiction from the very beginning (Bandier 115-17; Bürger 31): one part of the group advocated a more existential and socially engaged position according to which automatic writing, dream protocols, collective games, and other experimental practices gained their proper relevance outside literature, as ways of revolutionizing the total experience of life. Other surrealists, however, understood the same devices in terms of a transition zone leading to modernist innovations (preferably in poetry) within the contemporary literary field, and to a productive interaction with social fields of visual arts, film, and politics. All in all, Peter Bürger rightly claims that avant-garde literature, such as surrealism, represents the most radical form of bourgeois protest against bourgeois society (186).

To conclude, the devices of "the art of mania" that I have analyzed in romantic and surrealist texts figure as islands of paralogism in the discourse of the literary field. This demands that literary actors, the media, and institutions produce, distribute, and consume singularities of imaginative texts, evocations of the unspeakable, and the elusiveness of poetic signification by implanting them in chains of conceptions, acts, and texts that—operating rationally and with a great deal of thinking—con-

stantly produce and reproduce the meanings of everything that seems to be created without or beside thinking.

Notes

1. Similar ideas are put forward in Plato's *Ion* and *Laws*: "For a poet is a light and winged and sacred thing, and is unable ever to indite until he has been inspired and put out of his senses, and his mind is no longer in him: every man, whilst he retains possession of that, is powerless to indite a verse or chant an oracle" (*Ion* 534b). "Whenever a poet is seated on the Muses' tripod, he is not in his senses, but resembles a fountain, which gives free course to the upward rush of water…" (*Laws* 4.719c).

2. "They [the Greeks] did not prize originality in art, but solely an integral perfection…Originality was not the aim of the Greek artists, although it appeared in their art, as it were, against their will… every innovation was considered an outrage" (Tatarkiewicz 92).

3. Well-known examples of modernist primitivism are Gauguin's painting inspired by Samoan people or Picasso's references to African tribes (Robertson 79). Modern primitivism is of two kinds. In "chronological primitivism," the primitive "is consigned to the remote past, and it is defined negatively, by lacking the constraints and complications that human life has subsequently acquired," while in its "cultural" variety "primitive life is…seen, not simply as an earlier, rudimentary version of our own, but as qualitatively different,…credited with a highly developed physical consciousness" (80).

4. In the eighteenth century, colonial encounters with "archaic peoples" engendered the figure of the naturally good, noble, and uncorrupted primitive native, who serves as an ideal measure in moral critiques of the vices of European society. Tacitus in *On Germany*, representing the virtues of ancient Germanic tribes, criticized the decadent luxury of Imperial Rome (Robertson 80-81).

5. According to Chao, "…the grotesque blossoms in the aesthetic climates in which transgressing classical rationalism and order is greatly praised" (24).

6. This is characteristic of the ornamental paintings in the large halls (*grotte*) of Nero's *Domus Aurea*, excavated around 1480, from which the grotesque acquired its name (Chao 1, 4-7, 14, 26-27, 45-64).

7. In English translation: I dragged my flesh through desert gloom, / Tormented by the spirit's yearning, / And saw a six-winged Seraph loom / Upon the footpath's barren turning. / And as a dream in slumber lies / So light his finger on my eyes,— / My wizard eyes grew wide and wary: / An eagle's, startled from her eyrie. / He touched my ears, and lo! a sea / Of storming voices burst on me. / I heard the whirling heavens' tremor, / The angels' flight and soaring sweep, / The sea-snakes coiling in the deep, / The sap the vine's green tendrils carry. / And to my lips the Seraph clung / And tore from me my sinful tongue, / My cunning tongue and idle-worded; / The subtle serpent's sting he set / Between my lips—his hand was wet, / His bloody hand my mouth begirded. / And with a sword he cleft my breast / And took the heart with terror turning, / And in my gaping bosom pressed / A coal that throbbed there, black and burning. / Upon the wastes, a lifeless clod, / I lay, and heard the voice of God: / "Arise, oh prophet, watch and hearken, / And with my Will thy soul engird, / Through lands that dim and seas that darken, / Burn thou men's hearts with this, my Word." (Pushkin, "The Prophet")

8. English translation: For a long time you carried fire in your mouth. / For a long time you hid it there. / Behind a bony fence of teeth. / Pressed within the white magic circle of your lips. / You know that no one must catch scent / of the smoke in your mouth. / You remember that black crows will kill a white one. / So you lock your mouth. / And hide the key. / But then you feel a word in your mouth. / It echoes in the cavern of your head. / You begin to search for the key to your mouth. / You search for a long time. / When you find it, you unlock the lichen from your lips. / You unlock the rust from your teeth. / Then you search for your tongue. / But it isn't there. / You want to utter a word. / But your mouth is full of ashes. / And instead of a word / a lump of ashes rolls down / your blackened throat. / So you throw away the rusty key. / And you make a new language from the soil. / A tongue that

speaks with words of clay. (Zajc, *Barren* 39)

9. The Freudian uncanny (*das Unheimliche*) became a prominent trait of modernist imagery in surrealism: suggesting the unrepresentability of the real, the uncanny disrupts the familiar and conscious experience of being by a horrible or grotesque intrusion of the repressed, chaotic materials of the unconscious (see, e.g., Wright).

10. One is tempted to think that foregrounding organicism and the symbol as distinctive features of romantic imagination (see, e.g., Armstrong, *Romantic*) has been put forward especially by New Criticism in its effort to differentiate romantic idealism from modernism. Deconstruction, however, has underlined ruptures and inconclusiveness within romantic writing and called attention to the romantic fragment (see, e.g., Kernev Štrajn). Interpreting imagination in terms of an epiphenomenon of desire actually implies the Freudian critical/secular destruction of both Christian and liberal humanist traditions of understanding human creative faculties. Insofar as the reduction of imagination to unconscious drives has come about as a polemical gesture, it has remained biased and "one-sided" (as any other theorization necessarily is). Even in modernism, imagination does, in fact, have many other sources. It can be mimetic/intertextual (i.e., patterned on existing imagery, also in other arts), conceptual (e.g., imagining a possible world based on a consciously invented set of conditions, as in science fiction), induced by drugs (see on Witkiewicz below), and so on.

11. "In my opinion it [alcohol] should only be authorized, during a limited period, for consumption by artists and men of letters who know with absolute certainty that they can quickly 'play themselves out' and that they would undoubtedly create nothing of value without the aid of alcohol. But given the inessentiality of literature, whose demise is beginning in our lifetime…and the end of art, which it seems, is ceasing to be a myth even for the greatest superoptimists, this problem is also losing its—largely illusory—virulence. Who cares and why should even artists bother to poison themselves with narcotics if their formal death throes are of no use to anyone?" (Witkiewicz 254-55).

12. In his *Surrealist Manifesto*, Breton famously emphasized the centrality of psychic automatism through a pseudo-canonizing gesture of a dictionary entry: "SURRÉALISME, n. m. Automatisme psychique pur par lequel on se propose d'exprimer…le fonctionnement reel de la pensée. Dictée de la pensée, en l'absence de toute contrôle exercé par la raison, en dehors de toute preoccupation esthétique our morale" (328).

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