

Not-I/Thou

Not-I/Thou:
The Other Subject of Art and Architecture

By

Gavin Keeney

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For Br. Patrick Henigan, OFM . . .

Moreover, it happens fairly often that essence dies in a man while his personality and his body are still alive. A considerable percentage of the people we meet in the streets of a great town are people who are empty inside, that is, they are actually *already dead* It is fortunate for us that we do not see and do not know it. If we knew what a number of people are actually dead and what a number of these dead people govern our lives, we should go mad with horror.

—P.D. Ouspensky

I am a force of the Past . . . I come from ruins . . . I am looking for the brothers who are no more.

—Pier Paolo Pasolini

True *collaboration in philosophy* then is a common movement toward a beloved world – whereby we relieve each other in the most advanced outpost, a movement that demands the greatest effort against the resisting element within which we are flying.

—Novalis

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PREFACE

ART *AS* THE GOOD

I. Parallax and Privileges

They felt in their midst, with terror, with gladness, the invisible presence. For a long time they could not utter a word. What would they have said? To whom should they turn? To whom speak? They saw no-one. And yet, never had anybody seemed to them so real, so palpable, as this invisible presence which, putting on a humble human form, was there in the midst of them.¹

—Nikos Kazantzakis

The first half of this book of essays was written as a commentary *upon* (and a critique *of*) certain discursive academic disciplines of the early twenty-first century that are more or less broken and require recalibration and renewal. Foremost amongst these are those that pretend to be objective while doing nothing more than perpetuating the divisions of labor within academic scholarship *as* circular commentary. For this reason, and as antidote, the second portion of the collection of essays addresses scholarship as work of art, but also attempts to answer the question, What is Franciscan ontology? It is the rather severe and unforgiving aspect of Giorgio Agamben's recent book, *The Highest Poverty* (2013), that defines what is here privileged as "Franciscan" ontology, arguably a reserve aspect of the multiple arts in service to the Good (the Most High One, as privileged by the thirteenth-century "troubadour," troublemaker, and mystic, Francis of Assisi).

Agamben's *The Highest Poverty* ends with the provocative suggestion that "Franciscanism" might be best redeployed, today, in a context *other*

¹ Nikos Kazantzakis, *Christ Recrucified*, trans. Jonathan Griffin (Oxford: Bruno Cassirer, 1954), p. 253. Written in Antibes, in 1948. First published, in English, as *The Greek Passion*, trans. Jonathan Griffin (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1953). First Greek edition, *Ο Χριστός ξανασταυρώνεται* (Athens: Difros, 1954).

*than religion.*² This suggestion is, however, provisional, and the mere presence of it also portends a definitive struggle with what acts to preserve the divisions of labor within the production of knowledge of the Good, here considered the entire purpose of the pursuit of knowledge (philosophy, theology, etc., plus the arts and sciences). Notably, both philosophy and theology purport to produce nothing, claiming to merely describe or theorize (problematize) the very act of knowing anything at all regarding the universal good underwriting thought as word.

The pseudo-objective disciplines tackled in the first half of this book, therefore, involve forms of cultural production that are based on an obviously false distance from the very subject of study. When weighing the merits or virtues of, for example, sociology, cultural history, or art history and art criticism, there is no proper distance, either from *outside* of or from *within* such disciplines, that does not also invoke subjective agency and its decidedly (Derridean) spectral operations in service to one end or another. The now-established discourse on paradigm shifts (Thomas S. Kuhn et al.) addresses this strange requirement that to alter the terms of engagement with worlds also involves stepping outside of those worlds, at least momentarily, to examine the ghosts in the machinery of thought. Nonetheless, Antonio Negri's bleak assessment, in *The Porcelain Workshop* (2008), that there is no longer any "outside" to capitalism, requires questioning. These avowed hauntings of culture proceed notoriously by way of the existential-metaphysical constraints of abject subjectivity (or, self-engendered neutrality), but in dialectical tension with the impossibility of a "pure outside" (an objective or empirical realm devoid of consciousness and often connoted as reality), the result being a

² "It is the problem of the essential connection between use and form of life that is becoming undeferrable at this point. How can use – that is, a relation to the world insofar as it is inappropriate – be translated into an ethos and a form of life? The attempt to respond to these questions will necessarily demand a confrontation with the operative ontological paradigm into whose mold liturgy, by means of secular process, has ended up forcing the ethics and politics of the West. Use and form of life are the two apparatuses through which the Franciscans tried, certainly in an insufficient way, to break this mold and confront that paradigm. But it is clear that only by taking up the confrontation again from a new perspective will we perhaps be able to decide whether and to what extent . . . the extreme form of life of the Christian West has any meaning for it – or whether, on the contrary, the planetary dominion of the paradigm of operativity demands that the decisive confrontation be shifted to another terrain." Giorgio Agamben, *The Highest Poverty: Monastic Rules and Form-of-Life*, trans. Adam Kotsko (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2013), pp. 144-45. First published *Altissima povertà: Regole monastiche e forma di vita* (Vicenza: Neri Pozza, 2011).

discordant harmony that makes cultural criticism a hotly contested sphere; for the true address of the production of knowledge for knowledge's sake *is*, after all, one form or another of incipient ideology – repressive or liberatory, but never neutral. In many respects, then, these essays are post-structuralist exercises in the dismantling of regimes of power and privilege (inclusive of poststructuralist relativism) – academic privileges, certainly, but also the attendant political justifications for the wholesale theft of knowledge by neo-liberal capitalism in the late-modern period and its conversion to marketable information, data, and media. Indeed, academia has become the *de facto* target in the twenty-first century for the fashioning of new means of exploiting labor – albeit intellectual labor in the case of universities, which must also conform to the edicts of Capital or relinquish all remaining privileges (financial support, the right to admit and exploit foreign students, accreditation, etc.).

It is the initial survey, here, of various cultural systems and forms of scholarship, leading to the present-day emphasis on a critique of forms of cognitive capitalism, that establishes the rationale for the subsequent turn into Franciscan ontology, which primarily concerns a disavowal of rote personal rights and privileges in favor of higher collective rights, responsibilities, and privileges – yet privileges only insofar as they concern the last dignities of a proto-transcendental subject caught in-between two worlds. In the essays of the second half of this book, plus the Appendix (comprised of short reviews of exhibitions and events that embody the contemporary obsession with circling the issue of the Good in relation to the arts without ever quite addressing it head on), formal means toward no particular end are presented through the figure of universalizing precepts that inhabit the arts as such, and which are never reducible to the highly suspect modernist project of eviscerating history in service to a vague and never-realized utopia. The very idea of utopia, which is always already ahistorical and/or futural, and always already denoted, in the extreme, *as idea*, also raises the specter of so-called Big History (or, authorized meta-history). Big History, in turn, connotes the presence of an authorized historical project that shifts nevertheless as one walks around and/or through it. This resultant “parallax” is the suspect ground (or, the pseudo-objective pretensions) of meta-history *as* project – such parallax proving that the entire game is, essentially, ideological posturing on behalf of power (Negri's point). Needless to say, meta-history *as* project has collapsed repeatedly, and what emerges from the ruins is always the same something always repressed by such apparently totalizing projects – that is, the Immemorial (or, the “other subject” of subjective agency itself *as* immemorial Good).

The immemorial Good is the secret lining of history (Jacques Derrida's "secret kept secret," in *Archive Fever*), and the justifications for acknowledging it are synonymous with the *justification* of the Good – for, this secret must always be renewed and/or rediscovered. It is, without question, the concept of the multiple arts (including scholarship as work of art) that best approaches the immemorial import of the recondite and shadowy world of subjective agency in the process of becoming unraveled (becoming other than itself) – that is to say, Kantian reflexion *plus* its apotheosis.³ One can always detect in works of art of the highest speculative form the shadow of this shadowy world. It exists in Marcel Duchamp's very early "last paintings," c.1918, and it crossed over to his subsequent experimental projects in the form of an inquisition into the representational values of visual art (painting having been left behind as the apparatuses of other "painterly" arts emerged). Strangely, perhaps, in Duchamp's penchant for chess, which served as his favored means for avoiding art as such (or, for his self-conscious temporizing in the face of art as such), we find the equivalent of the bleak knight errant from Ingmar Bergman's *The Seventh Seal* (1957) playing chess with the unknowing figure of Death – Death as mask or messenger for the Immemorial, yet this figure of Death also admitting, in Bergman's film, that he knows nothing of the Good (God). As *memento mori*, then, the work of art that addresses the Other of art (as other *subject* of art) will also act as death mask. Such, too, is a logical conclusion or "last word" in a critique worthy of the most succinct pretensions of pseudo-empirical and pseudo-imperial forms of knowledge of merely temporal worlds.

In the last half of the twentieth century, with the emergence of New Media, and with the eclipse of film and photography by video and installation art, the exact same stakes were simply amplified and dispersed across multiple platforms that permit the agenda of questioning the suzerainty of the word, to provoke, in turn, the necessary corrective – the undermining and demotion or demolition of the image as death mask. This critical aspect of placing the truth-telling values of the image on view in the production of images may be said to have emerged as part of the post-WWII deconstruction of modernist hegemony, and it is present today in renascent cinema, photography, and allied disciplines that favor non-

³ Jean-François Lyotard speaks of the fusion of reflective thought with its other in Jean-François Lyotard, *Lessons on the Analytic of the Sublime*, trans. Elizabeth Rottenberg (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1994), pp. 19-26. First published *Leçons sur l'Analytique du sublime* (Paris: Éditions Galilée, 1991). "The sublime speaks to a few of another unity, much less complete, ruined in a sense, and more 'noble.'" Jean-François Lyotard, "Aesthetic Reflection," pp. 1-49, in *ibid.*, p. 25.

discursive knowledge over discursive knowledge, while the irrepressible and decidedly *historical* discursive agenda simply recedes into the background or is re-loaded in the art-critical (or art-historical) writings that support and purport to sustain the art world – as text, as catalogue, as book.

The implicit, yet unavoidable agenda embedded in a critique of forms of scholarship and the allied visual arts is to find a way to preserve and restore an elective “logomachy” of the Good, yet by returning the word to the role of poeticized image of thought. Both ethics and theology are the more obvious disciplines that are often raided in order to provide adequate firepower to scholarly and artistic projects that have lost touch with the immemorial precepts of their own being – their own justifications as figures of thought. Such also is the justification for doing so here, in a series of essays that survey and mark out fallow ground for a new assault on hegemony as ultimately constructive of what Fredric Jameson long ago called the prison-houses of language. The great failed, tutelary saint in this regard remains Antonin Artaud, *as lost soul*, and as martyr to the cause of fighting a losing battle against the false premises of a debauched logomachy rooted nonetheless in his own personal psyche but derived from the cultural sphere in which his own works and his own life were intractably submerged. For this reason, it was possible for both André Breton and Jacques Derrida to pay homage to Artaud, *as tortured soul*. While much of Artaud’s suffering was self-inflicted, such too is the immemorial path of the martyr charged with the complications and contradictions of living against one’s own time. (As such, all unwritten hagiographies of failed saints are possible documents for *all times*.)

Therefore, *Not-I/Thou*, utilized as figure of speech and thought, is intended to function not as rhetorical and/or metaphysical knot, but as singular thing – a singularity that, in turn, invokes the elective (ethical and moral) fusion of self and other (all the while accomplishing the demolition of philosophical or historical-materialist dialectics). One of the more bizarre outcomes for such a refusal of the dialectical machinery of thought is the production of tautologies and their analogues. As a result, it is suggested here, by way of surveying the wreckage of present-day disciplines, that the irrepressible morphological *jouissance* (or mediatic *frisson*) of the multiple arts, always working toward the production of the singular artwork as tautology,⁴ hides something more severe and

⁴ Lyotard’s neologism, “tautegory,” is of the same provenance. The tautegory is the result of “the remarkable disposition of reflection” that “designates the identity of form and content, of ‘law’ and ‘object,’ in pure reflective judgment as it is given to us in the aesthetic.” Ibid., p. 13. The “tautegorical” would seem to invoke a

something more forbidding than does the four-dimensional “game of chess” with Death, as noted above. What this renowned exuberance and irrepressible spirit of the arts hides, arguably, is Spirit (the Good) – or, something utterly unmarketable and useless to Big Capital, other than through its repression and/or conversion to morally bankrupt forms of ideology (age-old prison-houses of Spirit). The production of knowledge of the Good requires, then, the return of scholarship *as* work of art, and the return of the work of art *as* scholarship.

In present-day terms, the great bogeyman in the battle for the salvation of subjects is finance capitalism (the financialization of life), while to focus on the same is to miss the fact that finance capitalism is merely the most obvious outrider of the emergent hegemony of securing the very founts for the production of knowledge – that is to say, human spirit – for the few, over and against the many. This last frontier is a long-sought prize for forms of sovereign power; for souls have often been held captive, temporally, while Spirit proper has always managed to evade past attempts at total imprisonment. The required maneuvers to avoid the clutches of such an aggressive agenda include actions to forestall and prevent the collapse of the production of knowledge of the Good (Spirit) in the face of the global apparatuses of socio-political power, which now include maximum control of subjects (bio-political regimes of late-modernist states), maximum control of the generation and dissemination of what passes as received truth, and – foremost – maximum control and suppression of any alternatives to this model for the final subjection of subjects to Capital *as* power. The *five*-dimensional game of chess required, then, necessitates safeguarding the founts of knowledge of the Good – a battle nonetheless, and one that will be played out historically, even if its secret coordinates are *atemporal* and *ahistorical*, in the extreme.

II. Postscript

In the fourth essay, “The Semi-divine Economy of Art,” the subject of the magico-religious is addressed, directly, through the work of Aby Warburg. This archaic economy of image and elemental psycho-social practices is, arguably, present in all present-day games of power and privilege, inclusive of academic games and disciplinary games, yet

higher, privileged form of formalism, something that may be mapped back onto various disciplines to, in effect, discipline them (that is, to *discipline* disciplines). See Lyotard’s comments, for example, on the deferred exemplar, “universal voice,” in *ibid.*, pp. 17-18.

foremost in socio-political games associated with neo-liberal capitalism. In terms of the psycho-social practices that produce captive subjects, it is possible to see Franciscanism as yet another attempt (historical and ahistorical, at once) to circumvent the essentially destructive nature of these complexes by reducing the same to their origin in the conceptual (yet neither rhetorical nor metaphysical) knot, *Not-I/Thou*.⁵

—January 20, 2014

⁵ The Christian liturgy is, indeed, a form of magico-religious practice, containing the precise elements of the ancient practices yet, arguably, purifying them of their role in the abject enslavement of subjects. The elemental substrate of all such practices is, effectively, and irreducibly, psycho-sexual – however transfigured, transformed, or transmuted. For a powerful portrait of these archaic forces operating within the claustrophobic confines of a single family, see Andrew Birkin's film, *The Cement Garden* (Constantin Film, 1993), based on a 1978 novel of the same name by Ian McEwan. For the same forces embedded in Christian iconographic themes of Renaissance painting, etc., see Leo Steinberg, *The Sexuality of Christ in Renaissance Art and in Modern Oblivion* (New York: Pantheon, 1983).

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CRITICAL INTRODUCTION

NERVOUS SYSTEMS

I. The Christic

All art is against lived experience . . .¹
—“Caravaggio”

Art has this right, . . . not only the right but the duty to subject everything
to the essence.²
—Nikos Kazantzakis

In the production of knowledge of the Good, as an immemorial and timeless project, “Christic” aspects are as unavoidable as they are irreducible. While anything nominally termed *Christian* is also automatically suspect today, as it is considered contaminated by the history of Christianity and the Church, the Christic proper is impossibly extraterritorial and explicitly *transhistorical* in essence, the spectacle of essentialism effectively frightening multiple and various disciplines given to relativizing anything theologically grounded, or anything that even begins to suggest the real presence of the Good (otherwise known as God).

It is axiomatic that to speak of morality, in any age, is to provoke the wrath of all manner of nonbelievers and skeptics. Additionally, to place the figure of Christ in relation to meta-history is to induce either delirium or hysteria – foremost in the hallowed halls of received knowledge (academic disciplines, most especially). The dynamic figure of Christ is, forever, the figure of the outsider (rebel scourge *to* authority), and, as radical trope for

¹ “Caravaggio” (Nigel Terry), in Derek Jarman, *Caravaggio* (BFI et al., 1986). See Derek Jarman, Gerald Incandela, *Derek Jarman’s Caravaggio: The Complete Film Script and Commentaries* (London: Thames & Hudson, 1986).

² Nikos Kazantzakis, “Prologue,” p. 7, in *God’s Pauper: St. Francis of Assisi*, trans. P.A. Bien (London: Faber & Faber, 1975), p. 7. Written in Antibes, in 1953. First published (serialized) in the newspaper, *Eleftheria*, 1954, and, in book form, *Ο φτωχούλης του Θεού* (Athens: Difros, 1955). First English translation, by P.A. Bien, published Bruno Cassirer, 1962.

the production of knowledge of the Good, the likely outcome for all who might invoke this other power to orthodoxy is to be accused of sedition, heresy, blasphemy, or insanity. Christ apparently does not belong to the land of the so-called living, nor does he belong to discursive regimes of thought in service to “illicit” power. Neither does one invoke the Christic or Christological aspects of culture and the arts without offending all who live outside of this utterly clandestine body of knowledge that does, indeed, eclipse utilitarian and managerial models for rationalizing lived experience.

The analogues for failure are dizzying: for example, the apparent inability of high-flying theology to address the here-and-now, effectively demoting such abstract theological speculation to fantasy; or, the collapse of religion in the face of science as the supposed historical moment of truth for all *other*-worldly predilections and/or *this*-worldly misgivings. All such forms of disposing of the knowledge of the transcendental Good are clearly measures toward disposing of life as nothing more than a passing flirtation with ideality – “ideality” reduced to the unconsummated love of misbegotten dreams. Accordingly, anything or any project that purports to acknowledge authorized worlds as constructed fictions is met with the predictable excuse that life is what you make of it. The obvious reply that life is defined just as history is defined, by the victor, is always already intentionally lost on the progenitors of received wisdom, the Derridean “always already” intimately related to the dynamic, oscillating pulse that history represents *for* subjects.

Life often proceeds, therefore, in the margins of acceptable behavior and acceptable practices. Yet, it is the unorthodox precepts of a life lived against the grain that threatens illegitimate power most effectively. To live outside the law is the mark of the criminal, the madman, or the saint – and, in the case of the saint, it is also to live against power *while an apparent captive subject*. The Christic is exactly this, and always has been (foremost as defined by Saint Paul). The Christic, in this manner, is the hyper-non-denominational (unnamed) surplus affect of cultural systems writ large.

Operative criticism in the arts has often, without controversy, incorporated the concept of the immemorial or universal Good (the Christic) through the buried, often-blurred proto-Romantic signature of the work (the confrontational aspects of the work in the historicizing context of its very production). The gauzy beauty of such measures is often to be found in the fact that the work hides *as* a work produced in/for itself, such being the outcome of a form of productive formalism that conceals its larger coordinates through elision and, often, an elective poverty of signifying agency. The imposing *gravitas* of such works – whether in

literature, poetry, philosophy, or what have you – is breathtaking. Artworks of this order are “valedictory” or “proto-symphonic”³ *études* sliding toward validating the same for a possible scholarship of the irreal – the irreal being the most likely means of exiting the utilitarian and empirical ravages of pseudo-science (and the social sciences) for the more austere ground of speculative engagement with the Immemorial itself.

If the Christic is the Immemorial, and the visual arts and allied intellectual endeavors may safely incorporate flights of unimaginable beauty, and, in doing so, contact with the Good, it is also likely that the perpetual discord between word and image might be overcome through the arts, as it has been overcome in the past most notably in the icon (nonetheless endlessly problematized through art-historical treatises demoting iconography in favor of iconology). The arts under the spell of *ideality* (the irreal) need not succumb to *ideology*. They may, in fact, fall consciously within the orbit of Grace. One needs only to define upward the terms of engagement for the arts as moral arts. For the discursive regimes of both modern and contemporary scholarship and criticism, “non-fiction” in its broadest sense, the concurrent task is to raise the stakes such that the critical text becomes the equivalent of the work of art. A long-standing goal, it is also possible that the discursive apparatuses of cultural production, when re-aligned with the transcendental Good, might produce a type of renaissance across disciplines as diverse as politics, economics, historiography, philosophy, art criticism, the visual arts, and architecture. Far from resurrecting the mostly failed project of modernism (and structuralism), such might, instead, prove to alter the very terms of engagement for such disciplines. Curiously, the subsequent failed project

³ “Valedictory” in the sense of Thoreau’s *Walden*, and “proto-symphonic” in the sense of Johannes Brahms’ works immediately preceding his symphonies, Symphony No. 1 completed in 1876, at the age of 43, yet written over the course of fourteen years. “Many a new significant talent has appeared on the scene; a new force in music seemed imminent, as witnessed by many aspiring artists of recent times, even though their work is known to a rather narrow circle only. I felt that in following the progress of these select ones with the keenest of interest, that one day there must suddenly emerge the one who would be chosen to express the most exalted spirit of the times in an ideal manner, one who would not bring us mastery in gradual stages but who, like Minerva, would spring fully armed from the head of Jove. And he has arrived – a youth at whose cradle the graces and heroes of old stood guard. His name is Johannes Brahms.” Robert Schumann (c.1853), cited in Jennifer Glagov, “September 2013 Romantic Masters Program Notes,” *New Bedford Symphony Orchestra*, September 2013, <http://www.nbsymphony.org/434.html>. Brahms’ first symphony (Symphony No. 1 in C Minor) is often called “Beethoven’s Tenth.” Ibid.

of post-modernism (inclusive of post-structuralism) suggests that what was missing from both was the paradigmatic resources of cultural praxis aligned with the Highest Good – the other subject of normative subjectivity.

The greatest stumbling block for the resurrection of visual-textual arts, as essentially moral arts (for example, in the manner of the Seven Liberal Arts⁴ of the Middle Ages), as above, remains almost always the recourse to re-incorporation of such works into regimes of quotidian servitude – or, what often passes as ethics today. Ultimately, any such renaissance in service to the Most High of Francis of Assisi (the Good as the immemorial impress of the Christic) requires the founding, protection, and preservation of the right to the unmediated life of Spirit that serves as foundation stone for any knowledge worthy of illuminating and ennobling life.

II. Lives of Artists and Saints

In many respects the lives of artists and scholars are the functional equivalent of the lives of failed saints, just as the lives of saints are often the functional equivalent of the lives of failed artists and scholars. One set of operative principles seems to de-justify the other, while making the two cohere is, indeed, rare. Historiography famously caves in when the existential mire of individual lives is addressed, the categorical imperative of lived experience trumping the abstraction and/or outright distortion of facts on the ground. Friedrich Nietzsche and Walter Benjamin, both kept nominally “alive” through either orthodox and extreme exegetical works extolling or appropriating their respective virtues, are examples of failed saints who just happened to also become, belatedly, philosophers. Somewhere in this mythmaking machinery of the lives of actual saints dwells the moment when the individual was transfigured by a confrontation with the irreal precepts of the work at hand. The fact that saints might also be considered *failed* artists (as artists might be considered failed saints), but in the unorthodox or radical-orthodox sense of the term, is telltale insofar as the outcome of their own confrontations with the irreal of the work at hand brought to play a refusal to tell tales.⁵

In the present order of things, and as further justification for this proposed parallelism of lives lived outside the law (yet leading in apparently conflicting directions), it is likely that hidden within the

⁴ The Seven Liberal Arts of the Middle Ages were Grammar, Rhetoric, Logic, Arithmetic, Geometry, Music, and Astronomy.

⁵ Works of art as versions of tall tales.

passing flirtation in contemporary art and scholarship with impersonal agency (derived from the writings of Gilbert Simondon, Michel Foucault, Gilles Deleuze et al.) there exists a possible common thread or ground for the return of art and scholarship to the higher ground evacuated when modernity turned its collective back on subjects per se and embraced abstract machines – for example, ideologies of state, politicized pictorial regimes (cinema, photography, etc.), de-natured histories of art and architecture (formal aesthetics as supposedly neutral ground), architectures of immaterial force (the various prison-houses of civil society, commerce, and higher education), and economies of generative anomie (the production of wealth for the few). Regardless of origin, in terms of the historical or interpersonal processes brought to bear on the fabric of lived experience, the outcome for placing the real in unholy alliance with the unreal (forcing two wholly different worlds to collude and, thereby, collide) is the politico-economic regime of present-day neo-liberalism. There is clearly a link between placing the other-worldly in service to the this-worldly and the concurrent, supposed collapse of all political and economic alternatives to neo-liberalism. In forcing the immemorial unreal to underwrite the real of illicit power, and in fabricating or falsifying the justifications for the same, both the very structure of knowledge of the Good and its temporal instantiations in the arts and sciences have become a paradoxical and fictional state, valorizing the incorporeal nature of ideality (its uselessness) while delimiting or neutralizing its ahistorical, insurrectionary plenitude (its usefulness).

The necessary revolt will always come from within the machinery, versus from the wildernesses of repressed sociality, and the probable cause of the failure of neo-liberalism will be what it has permitted itself to swallow, without the ability to digest or assimilate it. In incorporating into itself the various antecedents to its own bankrupt self-justifications, neo-liberalism (as world-system) resembles the de-personalized, self-willed subject (ego) corporatized, a figure always living at the edge of the real and in denial of the unreal – caught, thereby, in a nether region (or a version of nowhere) in-between two worlds. It is by way of the plenitude of what has been swallowed (the unreal) that the captive neo-liberal subject might find the approximate means for unraveling the fabric of this false form of being, imposed from within or from without. Yet, it is axiomatic that the recognition of the requisite means be prompted, the victim alerted, and the remedy prepared and administered.

The lives of failed saints have generally provided the antidote to perpetual imprisonment in false being. It is perhaps no coincidence that both Nietzsche and Benjamin wrote books that more or less guaranteed

their at-first marginal existences would continue until death – the two books being, Nietzsche’s *The Birth of Tragedy* (1872), and Benjamin’s *The Origin of German Tragic Drama* (1925). That Benjamin’s book echoed Nietzsche’s is no coincidence – nor is the fact that both books deal directly or indirectly with the analysis and deconstruction of arbitrary power. Such works are the chief determinants of the lives. What remains to be found, today, is the way for the same dynamic critique of power to find its way into the annals of critical discourse without alarming the authorities. The performative apparatuses of writing have been perfected to such a degree that it is, in fact, hard to see where such works might arrive from or take hold in an age when everything is permissible as long as it might also be pigeonholed – or, the uncomfortable made comfortable. The likely venue for the truly alarming work that might awaken the neo-liberal subject is, therefore, the unpublishable and/or anonymous work of art as scholarship and scholarship as work of art. Scholarship and commerce must again be separated, as art and the art world must again be separated. If, as the colloquial expression has it, coincidence is God’s preferred way of remaining anonymous, the anonymous work of art is the artist’s preferred way of playing God (playing to the immemorial Good). The common ground is in the word *coincidence*, in its semantic ambiguity and nascent polysemy⁶ – that is to say, in its conflation of divergent agency, or, in its two-fold sense of origin. Works of art that affect such critical and literary powers are (and will be) the equivalent of the unwritten lives of failed saints. They will also be, out of necessity, auto-hagiographical works.

Privileging Franciscanism, then, becomes one way of instilling the possible elective austerities required for the resurrection of the transcendental Good in service to the arts and sciences. Notably, the arts and sciences will never become the Good in/for itself, but the vehicle for its historical conception and transmission – arguably what the secret history of art and science would divulge, were such ever made legible. Giorgio Agamben’s recent suggestive rhetorical question regarding whether or not it might be best to transfer the principled precepts of Franciscanism to another realm other than religion seems tantamount to the hoped-for revolt that might serve to decisively counter the rampant excesses of the neo-liberal machine, a machine now heading straight for the last frontier – the lived production of knowledge of worlds. The

⁶ Coincidence: “Occupation of the same portion of space”; “A notable concurrence of events or circumstances *without apparent causal connection*” . . . Lesley Brown, ed., *The New Shorter Oxford English Dictionary*, Vol. 1 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993), p. 436; italics added.

discursive swerve is telling – for, in altering the site from which Franciscanism now operates, or in shifting its merits to the production of works in service to the immemorial Other, the originary ground for this very real and historically determined encounter with the Good is restored.

III. Coda: Nervous Systems

Bonaventure's *The Life of St. Francis* is a searing account of the life of a saint.⁷ What transpires in this book, commissioned by the Franciscan Order in 1250 (Francis died in 1226), is nothing other than an account of the transfiguration of the life of Francis of Assisi through a series of encounters with Spirit – or, that which annuls the normative (nominally “given”) life of Francis Bernardone, privileged son of an Assisi merchant, toward wholly other ends. What those ends amount to, after all, is a matter of opinion (or faith/conscience as informed opinion) versus mere fact.

Bonaventure's account was reportedly vetted against the testimonials of surviving Franciscans from the early days (actual brethren of Francis), and, if the tales told are to be taken at face value, what is obvious is that Francis experienced an escalating series of encounters with the numinous Other that haunts all experience of the world as such, here denoted the “other subject” of Art (meta-art) and Architecture (meta-architecture).⁸ The miracles, the illnesses, the temptations, the Stigmata, the death, etc., were all milestones on the path to an apotheosis that *is* (and remains) utterly spellbinding. The apocalyptic sense of this series of encounters is appropriately underscored by Bonaventure when he states that Francis more or less *had no choice* in the matter – as he was chosen by Spirit for this role. Such suggests the incommensurable measures of ahistorical/historical time-space (the paradox of teleological and eschatological time-space colliding), and such also expresses the inexorable partition between lives lived in service to the world and lives lived in service to the divine Other – or, the Immemorial One (the Good). The very same measures (or measure) obtain (or obtains) within the annals of the multiple arts, for better or worse. There are more than enough martyrs to the cause of meta-art than may be counted, or that

⁷ Bonaventure, *The Life of St. Francis*, ed. Emilie Griffin, trans. Ewert H. Cousins (New York: HarperOne, 2005). This translation first published by the Paulist Press, 1978. *Legenda maior S. Francisci* was written between 1260 and 1263. After the General Chapter of the order in 1266, *Legenda maior* became the official biography of St. Francis for Franciscans. Bonaventure also wrote *Legenda minor S. Francisci*, in 1260. The latter was intended for use in the Divine Office.

⁸ For a recent attempt at resurrecting the mostly dormant discourse of meta-architecture, see *Log* 11 (Winter 2008).

may be simply attributed to unreason, passion, extravagance, ego, etc. These auspices are both semi-divine and divine insofar as they are also relative to the works involved. Great art does exist . . . Yet it is Grace that accounts for lives chosen in advance for the divine rites that the life of Saint Francis illustrates. His nervous system becomes, in Bonaventure's account, the map upon which is written the conquest of worlds by Spirit.⁹ Conversely, it becomes possible, therefore, to speak of the nervous system of disciplines, and (as with Massimo Cacciari) the nervous system of cities.¹⁰ Hence, too, the incessant critique of logocentric systems by deconstructivist agendas (and of logomachy, generally, in the late-modern period).

Francis' ultimate sacrifice was his death, following on the immense mystery of whatever transpired on Mount Alverno. This immemorial event completely altered the prospects for Francis, the mere mortal; and, if Bonaventure can be believed, more than enough people poked their fingers into his wounds, *after his death*, to counter suspicions that the event of the Stigmata was invented.¹¹ In conferring, then, the status of "soul" upon the

⁹ See also the discussion of nervous system as "seismograph," vis-à-vis Aby Warburg, Friedrich Nietzsche, and Jacob Burckhardt, in "The Semi-divine Economy of Art," the fourth essay of the present study.

¹⁰ See Massimo Cacciari, "Nomads in Prison," *Casabella* 705 (2002): pp. 4-7 (English summary, pp. 104-106). Cacciari uses the term *nervensleben* to describe the nerve network of the contemporary city and its various means of control that more or less radiate out from the center. This critique of "logocentrism" in urban planning follows upon his exceptional *Architecture and Nihilism: On the Philosophy of Modern Architecture*, trans. Stephen Sartarelli (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1993).

¹¹ It is the encounter with the six-winged seraph on Mount Alverno that remains the central event in the life of Francis of Assisi, as it was also the beginning of the end (his death). Bonaventure writes: "He saw a Seraph with six fiery and shining wings descend from the height of heaven. And when in swift flight the Seraph had reached a spot in the air near the man of God, there appeared between the wings the figure of a man crucified, with his hands and feet extended in the form of a cross and fastened to a cross. Two of the wings were lifted above his head, two were extended for flight and two covered his whole body." Bonaventure, *The Life of St. Francis*, p. 140. In terms of the stresses endured through the austerities of holy poverty, the central tenet of the Franciscan rule, this event also opens on to the central mystery of the transfiguration of experience under the auspices of an elective poverty, with the analogue for scholarly and artistic disciplines more than self-evident. Additionally, Bonaventure states: "We should believe, then, that those things he had been told by that Seraph who had miraculously appeared to him on the cross were so secret that 'men are not permitted to speak of them.'" Ibid., p. 142. G.K. Chesterton describes this same event in, appropriately, far more

nervous system, vast critical opportunities arise for an essential meta-critique of the arts as perpetually deferred (or sublimated) passion. Novalis (curiously acclaimed by Gaston Bachelard to have specialized in “dialectical” sublimation versus “continual” sublimation) and all other princely Romantics come to mind, with André Breton’s sweeping statement, vis-à-vis Surrealism, in *Free Rein (La clé des champs)*, regarding Novalis, Ludwig Achim von Arnim, Gérard de Nerval, Antonin Artaud et al., summarizing the perils of this quintessential quest for fire.¹²

excoriating form, invoking, as well, ancient magico-religious practices: “It would seem that St. Francis beheld the heavens above him occupied by a vast winged being like a seraph spread out like a cross. There seems some mystery about whether the winged figure was itself crucified or in a posture of crucifixion, or whether it merely enclosed in its frame of wings some colossal crucifix. But it seems clear that there was some question of the former impression; for St. Bonaventure distinctly says that St. Francis doubted how a seraph could be crucified, since those awful and ancient principalities were without the infirmity of the Passion. . . . St. Francis saw above him, filling the whole heavens, some vast immemorial unthinkable power, ancient like the Ancient of Days, whose calm men had conceived under the form of winged bulls or monstrous cherubim, and all that winged wonder was in pain like a wounded bird. This seraphic suffering, it is said, pierced his soul with a sword of grief and pity; it may be inferred that some sort of mounting agony accompanies the ecstasy. Finally after some fashion the apocalypse faded from the sky and the agony within subsided; and the silence and the natural air filled the morning twilight and settled slowly in the purple chasms and cleft abysses of the Apennines.” G.K. Chesterton, *Saint Francis of Assisi* (New York: Image Books, 2001), pp. 121-22. First published 1923. The sublime paradox represented by the six-winged seraph, and noted by Bonaventure, or, the incommensurability of the Passion (fragility) and the splendor (strength) of the angel, suggests the very same compression of forces present in the production of knowledge of the Good, while also denoting the limits given to the work of art as scholarship and the artwork as form of scholarship. The ethical and moral imperative of such arts also, and always, requires the additional measure of a certain silence (or, proscription). This silence, in turn, will confer upon works of art as scholarship, and scholarship as artwork, the double bind of ahistorical and historical measures. The ahistorical aspect is the timely horizon (contingent expression) of the work of art as it comes up against the timeless horizon (transcendental implications) of the immemorial and universal impress that all such works index. See the section “The Silence,” pp. 130-31, in “Universal ‘Night,’” pp. 101-31, in Gavin Keeney, *Art as “Night”: An Art-theological Treatise* (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2010).

¹² Novalis’ reputation as a progenitor of the modern penchant for “no ideas without things” (attributed to poet William Carlos Williams) is telltale. Novalis’ inordinate respect for the given world (before its conversion to commodity) is sacrosanct. André Breton: “Each time I happen to recall – nostalgically – the surrealist

rebellion as expressed in its original purity and intransigence, it is the personality of Antonin Artaud that stands out in dark magnificence, it is a certain intonation in his voice that injects specks of gold into his whispering voice . . . / I know that Antonin Artaud *saw*, the way Rimbaud, as well as Novalis and Arnim before him, had spoken of *seeing*. It is of little consequence, ever since the publication of [Nerval's] *Aurélia* [1855], that what was *seen* this way does not coincide with what is *objectively visible*. The real tragedy is that the society to which we are less and less honored to belong persists in making it an inexcusable crime to have gone over to the *other side of the looking glass*." André Breton, "A Tribute to Antonin Artaud," pp. 77-79, ellipses in original, in *Free Rein*, trans. Michel Parmentier, Jacqueline d'Amboise (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1995), first published *La clé des champs* (Paris: Éditions du Sagittaire, 1953); cited in Jacques Derrida, Paule Thévenin, *The Secret Art of Antonin Artaud*, trans. Mary Anne Caws (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1998), p. v. It goes without saying that this sensibility rarely crosses over from the multiple arts (literature, cinema, music, etc.) to so-called *proper* discursive systems of knowledge. Perhaps here is a belated justification for Cultural Studies? The importation of such presentiments into critical exegesis, while not unheard of, spells the end of so-called objectivity. See, for example, Gavin Keeney, "Affective Regimes," pp. 205-208, in Gavin Keeney, *"Else-where": Essays in Art, Architecture, and Cultural Production 2002-2011* (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2011). For this irrepressible spirit in the multiple arts, *see* any of Theo Angelopoulos' films (and *hear* the music of Eleni Karaindrou), most especially *The Weeping Meadow* (New Yorker Films et al., 2004). For a curious moment in the academic career of Jean-François Lyotard, vis-à-vis Cultural Studies in the 1970s, in France, and before his definitive turn toward the Sublime, see Christopher Fynsk, "A Pedagogy on the Verge of Disaster," pp. 37-47, in Vincent W.J. van Gerven Oei, Adam Staley Groves, Nico Jenkins, eds., *Pedagogies of Disaster* (Tirana: Department of Eagles; Brooklyn, NY: Punctum Books, 2013); proceedings of a conference of the same name, Tirana, Albania, June 6-8, 2013. Suffice to say that Lyotard was headed, at this point, "for the hills," and "the hills" constituted a proverbial elsewhere that became synonymous with his meditations on the analytic of the Sublime (a shift influenced, according to Fynsk, by Maurice Blanchot and Jean-Luc Nancy). Thus was a sort of late-modernist, dark optimism (or, light pessimism) associated with 1970s' and 1980s' post-Marxism – the apophatic (proto-nihilist) path later taken up in post-phenomenology's obsession with philosophical and theological aesthetics. Fynsk writes, finally: "The notion of a pedagogy of disaster" (that is, escaping the disaster of Capital), "to be worthy of this name, . . . must be truly exilic." Additionally, *its only truth* "will inhere in its eternally repeated passage outside, toward what Lyotard obscurely designated with the minimal term 'there.'" The word *truth* in this passage, as paraphrased above, was placed in inverted commas by Fynsk. "Eternally repeated" is notably a classic post-structuralist maneuver to escape presence. Fynsk then concludes: "I believe we must be uncompromising on this point and resist the temptation to smuggle back some political comfort." *Ibid.*, p. 46. This Lyotardian "there" (a version of Levinas' "il y

How all of this may be returned to the arts and to scholarship, not as metaphor but as actually existing paradigm, is the great conundrum embedded in the perhaps-unanswerable question, What is Franciscan ontology? For, the innumerable antecedents and innumerable subsequent accounts of the very same processes at play in the lives of artists and scholars suggest that the nerve network of the saint is very close to that of the inquisitive and critical spirit of humanist studies proper, now seriously imperiled by technocratic, post-humanist, neo-liberal capitalism. What else inhabits the soul of artists and poets other than this imperiled bias? Yet, what remains the primary problem, for humanist endeavors, is that the quest for authenticity and truth in the multiple arts is caught in the double bind of purely speculative inquiry versus objective or analytical science, a conflictual field that only ever circles truth. Such, too, was and is the curse of post-modernism, with its endlessly deferred prospects for anything resembling presence. Endless examples of avant-garde attempts to bridge the two perspectives suggest that such endeavors will always falter on the precipice of lived experience – that is, lived experience as the *sine qua non* for truth in process (the Derridean *l'avenir*). In concert with the production of knowledge, lived experience is productive of tautologies and paradoxes (or, the end of/for rationalist dialectics and the essential undoing of logic masquerading as law).

If nervous systems are also synonymous with souls, souls are perishable. The exceedingly raw data of Francis of Assisi's life suggests that the soul is not quite the issue, though it is demoted by the exceptional event of his life. What becomes the issue is that the soul, in concert with (struggling for *or* against) Spirit, is transfigured or demolished in the process. In this regard, G.W.F. Hegel's grand project of the *Phenomenology of Spirit* (1807) begins to make sense, even if it failed, as did Martin Heidegger's *Being and Time* (1927). The failure of both projects supports, perversely, a retrospective grand inquisition, in/for itself, into totalizing schematics that play only on the field of historical inquiry. Utopia never quite arrives because the world is flawed (flat), "from the Fall forward,"

a") is, arguably, the post-Marxist sublime of Lyotard, Nancy et al., or the spectral, late presence of the Marxist version of the Immemorial, later exposed in Derrida's *Specters of Marx*. See Jacques Derrida, *Specters of Marx: The State of the Debt, the Work of Mourning, and the New International*, trans. Peggy Kamuf, intro. Bernd Magnus, Stephen Cullenberg (New York: Routledge, 1994). First published *Spectres de Marx: L'état de la dette, le travail du deuil et la nouvelle Internationale* (Paris: Éditions Galilée, 1993), with additions and emendations in the English edition.

and all forms of Pelagianism are embarrassments to the human spirit. Becoming acorn-eaters will not make the world whole (round) again.¹³

What informed the life of Francis of Assisi is available for all lives. This is clear. Yet “all lives” means lives lived on the edge of the precipice – an elective engagement with the existential-metaphysical coordinates of life proper. The austerities of Francis’ life were simply the outer lining of what transpired within him (hyper-personally). The most perplexing issue, when reading Bonaventure’s account, is to understand the spiraling calamity of these self-imposed austerities. Yet they were only a calamity in terms of Late Medieval life as early bourgeois life. It is utterly inescapable, in simple historical terms, to *not* see the appearance of Francis of Assisi in association with the first gestures of post-feudal, capitalist economies. Francis’ entire operational agenda was against all of that. His appearance in history might be read, in retrospect, as a return of the unreal spirit of the Immemorial at the moment when the great Capitalist machine began its rampage in the West.

What this meant for the production of knowledge, *at that time*, was a reversal of the stultifying exercises of Medieval scholasticism. Franciscans dodged that bullet by ducking and taking cover in lived experience, refusing the alleged supremacy of dialectics and/or logic. As a result, there can be no “Franciscan-inspired” scholarship today that is not grounded in lived experience. And, such scholarship is only valid when and if it resides at the explicit existential-metaphysical crossroads of life in service to the immemorial Other – that is, today, the Levinasian intersubjective, transindividual, and ethical imperative that is generally mocked or forced to the fringes of acceptable exegetical exercises.¹⁴ Franciscanism applied to the

¹³ This is not to say that the polemical use of Arcadia is not without merit. See, for example, the garden-architectural works of Ian Hamilton Finlay. Notably, these works, which emerged from Finlay’s experiments with concrete poetry in the 1960s, required the exegetical intervention of both Stephen Bann and John Dixon Hunt to properly situate them within post-modernist art scholarship. Finlay’s garden-architectural projects effectively re-naturalized the more austere or abstract practices of concrete poetry. On the problem of Pelagianism, see Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, *The Divine Milieu: An Essay on the Interior Life* (New York: Harper & Row, 1965). First published *Le milieu divin: Essai de vie intérieure* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1957). Written in 1926-27.

¹⁴ Notably, Emmanuel Levinas’ late book, *Entre nous: Essais sur le penser-à-l’autre* (Paris: Bernard Grasset, 1991), appears in the Jean-Luc Godard film, *Notre musique* (Avventura Films, 2004), a somewhat safe place for an essentially explosive text to be noted in passing. Levinas turns up here (in the form of visual and textual references to *Entre nous*) implicated in the philosophical quagmire of the film, an exquisite *étude* that circles the nature of doubling. One, indeed, divides into two in the sublunary world. The main protagonist, Olga (Nade Dieu),