

UDK 78.01 Busoni

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C Major or E Flat Minor? No, Thanks! Busoni's *Faust-Allegorie* C-dur ali Es-mol? Ne hvala! *Faustova alegorija* F. Busonija

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IZVLEČEK

ABSTRACT

Busonijev *Doktor Faust* je melanholična *žaloigra*, ki sega nazaj v tradicijo *lutkovnih iger*. Busonijeva nedokončana partitura je rezultat lastnega ustvarjalnega zastoja ne pa zunanjega naključja. Dvoumnost v zvezi z mladim fantom, ki se ob koncu pojavi kot reinkarnacija Faustove *volje* pri Busoniju še ni bila raziskana.

Busoni's *Doktor Faust* is a melancholic *Trauerspiel* that returns to the tradition of *Puppenspiele*. Busoni's unfinished score is the result of an inherent creative deadlock rather than an external accident. The ambiguity of the young boy who appears at the end as a reincarnation of Faust's *Wille* remains unexplored in Busoni.

Adorno begins his *Drei Studien zu Hegel* with a rebuttal of the traditional question about Hegel: what is dead and what is still alive in Hegel's thought? Such a question presupposes an arrogant position of ourselves as judges of the past; when we are dealing with a truly great philosopher, the question to be raised is not what can this philosopher still tell us, what does he mean to us, but the opposite one, what are WE, our contemporary situation, in his eyes, how would our epoch appear to his thought. And the same should be done with Faust: our question should not be what does the Faust myth still tell us, but how does our own predicament appear when it is seen through the lenses of the Faust myth. This is what Busoni does: his *Faust* provides a diagnosis of a certain historical moment, his as well as ours.

Busoni takes as his premise the irreducible gap between singing and action that characterizes conventional opera: the absurdity of people singing on stage while pretending to be engaged in ordinary human actions. But the conclusion he draws from it is the opposite of the expected one—not that music should adapt to the reality of action, but that the action on stage should adapt to music by way of being pointedly artificial, improbable, magical, untrue:

The sung word on the stage will always remain a convention and an obstacle to the genuine affect of opera. In order to emerge with honor from this conflict, a plot in which characters sing while acting will, from the beginning, have to be gauged to the incredible, the untrue, and the improbable. In thus mutually supporting each other, the two impossibilities become possible and acceptable.

The fact that we experience the stage singing as a convention which prevents genuine affect is in itself a sign of the change in historical sensibility: the ‘objective spirit’ of Busoni’s time made another romantic-realist Faust in the line of Gounod impossible. This is why Busoni returned to the Renaissance, a return already discernible in the dramatic construction of his *Faust*: he wrote a ‘foreshortened’ libretto which lacks continuity, i.e., which does not aim at telling the whole story, but offers only a succession of selected cross-sections—his unit is a *Bild*, the image of a decisive segment, not an *Akt*, the organic unity of action. As if to make this point clear, he left out the best known and dramatically most effective episode (Gretchen’s seduction), referring to it only *in absentia*, in a brief Intermezzo where Gretchen’s brother searches for Faust to kill him in revenge for his ruining her. No wonder such a procedure evokes Brechtian echoes—like Brecht, Busoni also emphasized the need for *Entfremdung*: ‘Just as the artist, if he wants to move others, must not let himself be moved (if he is not to lose control over his means at the crucial moment), the audience, if it wants to savor the theatrical effect, must not confuse it with reality. Otherwise, the aesthetic pleasure deteriorates into human compassion.’ In exactly the same way as in the case of the tension between music and action, the two impossibilities—the artist’s impossibility of being directly identified with, moved by, his work, and the audience’s impossibility of confusing stage with reality—mutually cancel themselves.

Busoni’s return to the Renaissance is more complex than it may appear: he doesn’t simply ignore Goethe—quite the contrary, what he ignores are all previous operatic versions of Faust (Berlioz, Gounod, Boito—the last undoubtedly the best) which intervene between Goethe and him. Busoni enters directly in a dialogue with the great Genius himself: in the Prologue *Vor dem Vorhang*, to be spoken by the poet to the spectators, he evokes Goethe as the supreme version of Faust, and, admitting his limitations, modestly withdraws to *Puppenspiele*:

Doch was vermächt’, gen Zauberer, ein Meister!
Des Menschen Lied am Göttlichen verschallt:
Also belehrt erkannt’ ich meine Ziele
Und wandte mich zurück – zum Puppenspiele.

There is, of course, an element of fakery in this modesty—his step back is, to put it with Lenin, a step backwards aimed at enabling two steps forward. In Benjaminian terms,

what Busoni does is go back from symbol to allegory: from organic dramatic unity to *parataxis*, to the succession of *tableaux vivants*. This formal change brings about the change in the basic attitude of the work from tragic mourning to melancholy. In a famous passage from his letter to Schiller from August 16/17, 1797, Goethe reports on an experience of his which made him perceive a piece of ruined reality as a symbol:

My grandfather's house, its courtyard and its gardens had been transformed from the parochial-patrician home of an old Frankfurt elder into the most useful trading and market place by wisely enterprising people. Curious coincidence during the bombardment conspired to see the structure perish, but even today, reduced, for the most part, to a pile of rubble, it is still worth twice as much as the current owners paid my family for it 11 years ago. Conceivably, the whole thing may, in the future, be bought and restored by yet another entrepreneur, and you can easily see that it would, in more than one sense, stand as a symbol of thousands of other instances, in this industrious city and in particular in my own eyes.¹

The contrast between allegory and symbol is crucial here. Allegory is melancholic: as Freud pointed out, a melancholic treats an object which is still here as already lost, i.e., melancholy is a pre-emptive mourning. So, in an allegorical approach, one looks at a busy market-place house and already sees in it the future ruins it will turn into—ruins are the ‘truth’ of the proud house we see. Recall the old Catholic strategy of guarding men against the temptations of the flesh: when you see a voluptuous feminine body in front of you, imagine how it will look in a couple of decades—the dried skin, sagging breasts . . . (Or, even better, imagine what already lurks now beneath the skin: raw flesh and bones, inner fluids, half-digested food and excrement . . .) This is melancholy at its purest—no wonder that one of the fashions among the rich in the Romantic era was to build new houses directly as ruins, with parts of the walls missing, etc.

Goethe, however, does the exact opposite: he sees (the potential for) the future prosperity in the present pile of rubble. (In a somewhat pathetic way, one could say the same about the ruins of 9/11: a melancholic would see in them the ‘truth’ of the arrogant dreams of US grandeur, i.e., he would already see in the Twin Towers themselves the ruins that lie ahead, while a Goethean optimist would see in the ruins of 9/11 a symbol of the enterprising spirit of that other ‘industrious city’ who will soon replace the ruins with new buildings.) Crucial here is the rise of the symbol from ruin and repetition: Goethe’s grandfather’s house was not a symbol for its first generation dwellers—as Heidegger would have put it, for them, it was just a *zuhandenes* object, part of their environs with which they were engaged. It was only its destruction, the reduction to a pile of rubble, that made it appear as a symbol. (There is a temporal ambiguity in Goethe’s last sentence: will the house become a symbol when it will be renovated, or is it a symbol already now, for the one who is able to see in it the future of its renewal?) Meaning—allegorical or symbolic—arises only through destruction, through an out-of-joint experience, through a cut which interrupts the object’s direct functioning in our environs.

¹ Johann Wolfgang Goethe, ‘Brief an Friedrich Schiller, 16./17. August 1797,’ in *Sämtliche Werke, Briefe, Tagebücher und Gespräche*, sec. 2, vol. 4 *Goethe mit Schiller: Briefe, Tagebücher und Gespräche vom 24. Juni 1794 bis zum 9. Mai 1805*, ed. Volker C. Dörr and Norbert Oellers, Part 1: Vom 24. Juni 1794 bis zum 31. Dezember 1799, Frankfurt: Deutscher Klassiker Verlag 1998, p. 390.

So if Goethe's *Faust* is one big Symbol, if Faust's failures themselves are so to speak premature successes, complications of the ongoing process of *Bildung* which point towards their future redemption, Busoni's *Faust* is an allegory in which the ongoing triumphs are already accompanied by the shadow of the final defeat. If Goethe's *Faust* is an optimistic tragedy, Busoni's is a melancholic *Trauerspiel* in which the highest act, the only successful one, is to fully accept one's failure. A puppet is a figure of such melancholy. That is to say, what does a puppet (more precisely: a marionette) stand for as a subjective stance? One should turn here to Heinrich von Kleist's essay *Über das Marionettentheater* from 1810², which is crucial with regard to his relationship to Kant's philosophy (we know that the reading of Kant threw Kleist into a shattering spiritual crisis - this reading was THE traumatic encounter of his life). Where, in Kant, do we find the term 'Marionette'? In a mysterious subchapter of his *Critique of Practical Reason* entitled 'Of the Wise Adaptation of Man's Cognitive Faculties to His Practical Vocation,' in which he endeavours to answer the question of what would happen to us if we were to gain access to the noumenal domain, to the *Ding an sich*:

/.../instead of the conflict which now the moral disposition has to wage with inclinations and in which, after some defeats, moral strength of mind may be gradually won, God and eternity in their awful majesty would stand unceasingly before our eyes./.../Thus most actions conforming to the law would be done from fear, few would be done from hope, none from duty. The moral worth of actions, on which alone the worth of the person and even of the world depends in the eyes of supreme wisdom, would not exist at all. The conduct of man, so long as his nature remained as it is now, would be changed into mere mechanism, where, as in a puppet show, everything would gesticulate well but no life would be found in the figures.³

So, for Kant, the direct access to the noumenal domain would deprive us of the very 'spontaneity' which forms the kernel of transcendental freedom: it would turn us into lifeless automata, or, to put it in today's terms, into 'thinking machines...'.—What Kleist does is to present the *obverse* of this horror: the bliss and grace of marionettes, the creatures who have direct access to the noumenal divine dimension, who are *directly* guided by it. For Kleist, marionettes display the perfection of spontaneous, unconscious movements: they have only one center of gravity, their movements are controlled from only one point. The puppeteer has control only of this point, and as he moves it in a simple straight line, the limbs of the marionettes follow inevitably and naturally because the figure of the marionette is completely coordinated. Was it not already Heiner Müller who, in his Bayreuth staging of *Tristan*, read it as a *Puppenspiel*, emphasizing the mechanical movement of characters in a geometric space? *Puppenspiel* and passion are far from opposed: when I am wholly in the thrall of a passion, I am no longer the agent of my activity, it is the impersonal passion which acts through me.

Marionettes thus symbolize beings of innocent, pristine nature: they respond naturally and gracefully to divine guidance, in contrast to ordinary humans who have to struggle constantly with their ineradicable propensity to Evil, which is the price

² Reprinted in vol. 5 of *Heinrich von Kleist. Gesamtausgabe*, München: dtv 1969.

³ Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Practical Reason*, New York: Macmillan 1956, p. 152-153.

they have to pay for their freedom. This grace of the marionettes is underscored by their apparent weightlessness: they hardly touch the floor—they are not bound to the earth, for they are drawn up from above. They represent a state of grace, a paradise lost to man, whose willful ‘free’ self-assertions make him self-conscious. The dancer exemplifies this fallen state of man: he is not upheld from above, but, rather, feels himself bound to the earth, and yet must appear weightless in order to perform his feats with apparent ease. He must try consciously to attain grace, which is why the effect of his dance is affectation rather than grace. Therein resides the paradox of man: he is neither an animal wholly immersed in the earthly surroundings, nor the angelic marionette gracefully floating in the air, but a free being who, due to his very freedom, feels the unbearable pressure that attracts and ties him to the earth where he ultimately does *not* belong.

It is from this tragic split that one should read figures like Käthchen von Heilbronn from Kleist’s play of the same name, this fairy-tale figure of a woman who wanders through life with angelic equanimity: like a marionette, she is guided from above and fulfills her glorious destiny by merely following the spontaneous assertions of her heart. What Kleist is not able to confront is not only the fact that such an angelic position is impossible due to human finitude, but also the more disturbing fact that, if this position were to be realized, it would amount to its opposite, to a horrible, lifeless machine. The very metaphor Kleist uses (marionette) is tell-tale: in order for it to function, Kleist has to exclude the machine-like aspect of it so strongly present in E.T.A. von Hoffman’s *Sandmann*.

How does Busoni’s Faust fit these coordinates? As with every great mythic figure, each epoch invents its own Faust. Today, Faust is predominantly read in a Heideggerian way, as the symbol of the hubris of subjectivity, of a nihilistic pact with the devil the subject concludes in order to gain unlimited power. The lesson of this Faust is best rendered by the vulgar proverb ‘you cannot urinate against the wind’: a plea for moderation, for the proper measure. This Faust perfectly fits the postmodern celebration of human finitude: his failure can stand for the ‘Dialektik der Aufklärung,’ for the failure of all big modern projects, from the political totalitarianism into which the Communist dream of a fully self-transparent society degenerated to ecological catastrophies as the consequence of the dream of the human domination over nature. Although, in Goethe, things appear much more ambiguous—at the end, Faust not only finds peace, but finds it without renouncing his activity—he dies happy, in the middle of colonizing/reforming activity—the basic coordinates remain the same.

With Busoni, however, we enter a totally different field: his Faust is not a ‘Faustian’ larger-than-life heroic figure who pays the price for his hubris; he is, to put it in Nietzsche’s terms, *a slave pretending to be a master but not ready to pay the price for it*. When Mephistopheles’s voice tempts him to conclude the pact, Faust is aware that he is exposing himself to danger: ‘Welchem Wahn gab ich mich hin!/Arbeit,/heilende Weile./in dir bade ich mich rein.’ However, he quickly succumbs to the temptations and abandons the *heilende Weile* of true knowledge. Faust does not stand for the hard work of science—*science avec patience*, as Arthur Rimbaud put it—but for the cheap trickery of magic; he is not ready to heroically assume his Will, but wants others to do

it for him. He is not a figure of unconditional Will, but a figure of the betrayal of the truly autonomous Will.

This is Busoni's implicit diagnosis of our predicament. On today's market, we find a whole series of products deprived of their malignant properties: coffee without caffeine, cream without fat, beer without alcohol And the list goes on: what about virtual sex as sex without sex, the Colin Powell doctrine of warfare with no casualties (on our side, of course) as warfare without warfare, the contemporary redefinition of politics as the art of expert administration as politics without politics, up to today's tolerant liberal multiculturalism as an experience of Other deprived of its Otherness (the idealized Other who dances fascinating dances and has an ecologically sound holistic approach to reality, while features like wife beating remain out of sight . . .)? Virtual Reality simply generalizes this procedure of offering a product deprived of its substance: it provides reality itself deprived of its substance, of the resisting hard kernel of the Real—in the same way decaffeinated coffee smells and tastes like the real coffee without being the real one, Virtual Reality is experienced as reality without being one.

Is this not the attitude of the hedonistic Last Man? Everything is permitted, you can enjoy everything, BUT deprived of its substance which makes it dangerous. Today's hedonism combines pleasure with constraint—it is no longer the old notion of the 'right measure' between pleasure and constraint, but a kind of pseudo-Hegelian immediate coincidence of opposites: action and reaction should coincide, the very thing which causes damage should already be the medicine. The ultimate example of it is arguably a *chocolate laxative*, available in the US, with the paradoxical injunction 'Do you have constipation? Eat more of this chocolate!', i.e., of the very thing which causes constipation. Do we not find here a weird version of Wagner's famous 'Only the spear which caused the wound can heal it' from *Parsifal*? And is not a negative proof of the hegemony of this stance the fact that true unconstrained consumption (in all its main forms: drugs, free sex, smoking . . .) is emerging as the main danger? The fight against these dangers is one of the main investments of today's 'biopolitics.' Solutions are here desperately sought which would reproduce the paradox of the chocolate laxative. The main contender is 'safe sex'—a term which makes one appreciative of the truth of the old saying 'Is having sex with a condom not like taking a shower with a raincoat on?' The ultimate goal would be here, along the lines of decaf coffee, to invent 'opium without opium': no wonder marijuana is so popular among liberals who want to legalize it—it already IS a kind of 'opium without opium'.

And the same holds for belief: we want others (our children, more primitive people) to believe for us, instead of us. Therein resides the stake of today's reference to 'culture,' of 'culture' emerging as the central life-world category: we today no longer 'really believe,' we just follow (some of the) religious rituals and mores as part of the respect for the 'life-style' of the community to which we belong (non-believing Jews obeying kosher rules 'out of respect for tradition,' etc.). 'I do not really believe in it, it is just part of my culture' effectively seems to be the predominant mode of the disavowed/displaced belief characteristic of our times. What is a cultural life-style, if not the fact that, although we do not believe in Santa Claus, there is a Christmas tree in every house and even in public places every December? Perhaps, then, the 'non-fundamentalist' notion

of 'culture' as distinguished from 'real' religion, art, etc., IS in its very core the name for the field of disowned/impersonal beliefs—'culture' is the name for all those things we practice without really believing in them, without 'taking them seriously.' Is this not also the reason why science is not part of this notion of culture—it is all too real? And is this also not why we dismiss fundamentalist believers as 'barbarians,' as anti-cultural, as a threat to culture—they dare to *take seriously* their beliefs? Today, we ultimately perceive as a threat to culture those who immediately live their culture, those who lack a distance towards it. Recall the outrage when, two years ago, the Taliban forces in Afghanistan destroyed the ancient Buddhist statues at Bamiyan: although none of us enlightened Westerners believed in the divinity of Buddha, we were so outraged because the Taliban Muslims did not show the appropriate respect for the 'cultural heritage' of their own country and of all humanity. Instead of believing through the other like all people of culture, they really believed in their own religion and thus had no great sensitivity for the cultural value of the monuments of other religions—for them, the Buddha statues were just fake idols, not 'cultural treasures.'

A reference to Goethe's *Faust* can be of some help here: after they consummate their love in the intimacy of sexual act, Gretchen asks Faust the other intimate question, the famous 'Nun sag, wie hast du's mit der Religion?'—and Faust's long-winded answer is a case of what Harry Frankfurt called *bullshitting* if there ever was one. He goes through all possible excuses and phrases to avoid a direct answer: (1) let's forget about religion, we are now in the thrall of love; (2) I respect those who believe; (3) who can really say 'I believe?'; (4) it is not that I don't believe, but religion should be a matter of an ineffable deep feeling, not of confession, of words—'Gefühl ist alles; Name ist Schall und Rauch'. . . . But it is not that Faust simply doesn't believe: in a way he is sincere in his hypocrisy. This hypocrisy is rendered much more directly in Busoni, where Faust twice takes off his girdle, makes a circle on the ground with it, and then himself enters it.

In his wonderful essay on fetishist *Verleugnung* 'Je sais bien, mais quand même...'⁴, Octave Mannoni refers to an anecdote from Casanova's memoirs in order to explain the difference between the standard symbolic transferred belief and cynical (dis)belief. This anecdote also concerns the topic of entering a magic circle: Casanova reports how, in order to seduce a young uneducated peasant girl, he pretended to be a magician, marked on the ground a magic circle and claimed that this circle offers protection from all danger (his intention was, of course, to seduce the poor girl within this circle where she should have felt safe from danger). But then an unexpected thing happened: by pure accident, a wild storm suddenly broke out, and, struck by fear, Casanova quickly steps into his own magic circle to escape the danger. He knew very well that there is no magic here, that the magic power of the circle is his nonsense talk to cheat the girl—but nonetheless, once the real danger struck, he as it were got caught into his own illusion, he fell into his own trap—exactly like Busoni's Faust who, at the opera's end, when he accepts his fate, again makes the magic circle and steps into it—finally, he also gets caught into his own trap.

The distance of the cynical manipulator towards belief is not the same one as the 'normal' distance towards what one says: when we greet an acquaintance with 'How are

⁴ In Octave Mannoni, *Clefs pour l'imaginaire*, Paris: Editions du Seuil 1968, p. 5-33.

you? Nice to see you!’ both of us also know very well that we did not mean it literally, that we just said it out of politeness. When we give Christmas presents to our children, neither we nor (probably) our children really believe that Santa Claus brought them, we just play the sincere game of pretending This is not what Faust is doing: he plays the same game with his Will as with his belief. He wants to believe without being engaged in it, he wants *glauben, doch jede Verantwortung dafür refüsieren—er will seine Hände rein wahren, er sucht ein Andres* to believe for him. The price he pays for his inauthenticity, for his cynical manipulation of belief is that he ends up stepping into his own circle.

Let us take a closer look at what kind of entity Faust is after he forfeits his autonomous Will in the contract with Mephistopheles. When the magic book is promised to Faust, he explodes in joy:

/ . . . /o, ihr Menschen, die ihr mich
gepeinigt, hütet euch vor Faust!
In seine Hand die Macht gegeben, heimliche
Gewalt ihm zu Gebot/. . . /

One should bear in mind here the literal meaning of ‘Faust’—there is a long tradition in popular culture of an ‘undead’ spectral organ starting to function on its own, independently of the body to which it belongs, like the hand from early surrealist films up to David Fincher’s superb *Fight Club*. The truth, however, doesn’t fit this joyful image—in the nice scene in the first *Bild* which takes place in the *Herzog’s* park, Faust conjures three couples in order to amuse the noble public: Solomon and Sheba; Samson and Delilah; John the Baptist and Salome with the Baptist’s executioner. These scenes are, of course, fully contextual (or, rather, indexical): they are intended as allegories of the ongoing love affair between Faust himself and *die Herzogin*. This scene renders clear the core of Faust’s ‘magic’: he conjures mythical scenarios which stage (provide the coordinates of) the desires of the affected subjects—it is through this scene that the love-triangle is constituted and the *Herzogin* formulates her love for Faust. One should be very precise here: the conjured vision doesn’t only represent the growing desire of Faust and the *Herzogin*, it literally gives rise to it.

In the deal with Faust, Mephistopheles promises to serve him till his death, while Faust should serve him *after* his death, for all eternity. The paradox here is that Faust is horrified by this prospect, although he perceives his deal with Mephistopheles as the renunciation of all (Christian) Beyond:

Es gibt kein Erbarmen. Es gibt keine Seligkeit,
keine Vergeltung, den Miel nicht und nicht
die Höllenschrecken: dem Jenseits trotz’ ich!

There is no contradiction here: Faust doesn’t deny that there is a Beyond, he wants to live in defiance (or ignorance) of it, of the Afterlife—and he will have to pay the price for it *in the afterlife*. (Mephistopheles of course cheats here: as Faust realizes towards the end, he already paid the price fully in this life.) This Beyond is not so much the literal beyond of afterlife, but more what Jacques Lacan called the ‘big Other’: the ideal

agency which decides on the ultimate meaning of our acts, the agency to which we are responsible, which passes Judgment on our life, which settles the accounts of our life. (In this sense, even—and especially—the Stalinist Communists believed in a Beyond: the Beyond of History which decides about the true meaning of our acts.) For Faust, the bargain with Mephistopheles is precisely that there is *keine Rechnung*: he wants to ‘have his cake and eat it too,’ to have one’s wish without paying the price for it, as Mephistopheles’s first service to Faust makes it clear. Faust wants the soldier, Gretchen’s brother, liquidated:

‘F: Räum ihn aus dem Wege. M: Auf deine Rechnung. F: Nein, ich will meine Hände rein wahren. Such ein Andres.’

And Mephistopheles does it: he finds a patrol of soldiers to do it. Faust is here the opposite of the *Herzog’s Zeremonienmeister*, who states his position when ordered by the *Herzog* to introduce Faust:

Wenn ihr befiehlt, so will ich ihn präsentieren,
introduzieren, doch jede Verantwortung
refüsieren.

Faust, on the contrary, *will befehlen, doch jede Verantwortung refüsieren*. He wants to be master-servant: *il n’y est pour rien*. The price he pays is that he does not lead a full life, but is a lifeless shadow. The standard idealist question ‘Is there (eternal) life after death?’ should be countered by the materialist question: ‘Is there life before death?’ This is the question Wolf Biermann asked in one of his songs—what bothers a materialist is: Am I really alive here and now, or am I just vegetating, as a mere human animal bent on survival? This is also the Faust question, as Goethe knew—when, after the spectre of Helen whom he tries to embrace vanishes, Faust states in a resigned way:

Ich weiser Narr,
ich Säumer, ich Verschwender!
Nichts ist getan,
alles zu beginnen;

the point is precisely that he did not really live his life, but missed it. Faust confronts his defeat in the *Zweites Bild*, when Helen appears to him: ‘Was ich sehnte,/was ich waehnte;/höchsten Wunsches/Rätsel-formen.’ When he tries to embrace her, enthusiastically exclaiming ‘Nur Faust berührte je das Ideal!’, the vision disintegrates into nothing, and he accepts the bitter lesson: ‘Der Mensch ist der Volkommenen nicht gewachsen.’ (His conclusion is wrong: the lesson is rather that Helen is like rainbow, a pure appearance, something that is only visible from a proper distance.) At this moment, he knows that the game is over, that nothing was really done.

One should read these lines in their contrast to Goethe: what Faust here brutally experiences is that *LA Femme n’existe pas*—THE Woman, the substantial protecting Ground of the hero’s existence, not a particular woman but *das Ewig-Weibliche welches zieht uns hinan*, mentioned in the *Chorus Mysticus* which concludes *Faust II* (and was set to music in the second part of Mahler’s 8th Symphony, the exemplary late-Romantic

kitsch). These lines suggest the ineffable spiritual dimension of femininity which inspires men to realize their highest potential—an anti-feminist piece of wisdom, if there ever was one. That is to say, it is worth remembering here how Goethe’s *Faust* concludes: the aged Faust has satisfied a dream of activity and economic progress, he has reclaimed the land from the sea, peopled it, and given it prosperity. But his pleasure and pride are not complete: a freehold enclave held by an old couple, Philemon and Baucis, disturbs the unity of his estate. He asks Mephisto to remove them, and the consequence is the burning-down of their house and their murder. Delighted with the growth of his project, Faust, now one hundred years old, speaks a phrase of satisfaction,

Im Vorgefühl von solchem hohen Glück
Genieß’ ich jetzt den höchsten Augenblick,

and falls back dead. Thereupon Mephisto steps in, claiming his own. Heavenly spirits, however, intervene, drive off Mephisto, and reclaim Faust. In the final mystical scene, Faust’s soul is conveyed in a progress towards Heaven, amidst the intercessions of Gretchen and other women What one should not miss is the colonialist-imperialist aspect of Faust’s last years—Faust ends his life as a defiant capitalist, brutally disposing of the last obstacle, the owners of a free enclave *This is how das Ewig-Weibliche zieht ihn hinan!*

‘Im Vorgefühl von solchem hohen Glück/Genieß’ ich jetzt den höchsten Augenblick’—does this not also hold for Busoni’s Faust’s last moment? The *Glück* here is in his awareness of how, through the highest act of transposing his Will onto the child, he ‘stell ich mich/über die Regel/umfass in Einem/die Epochen/und vermenge mich/den letzten Geschlechtern:/ich, Faust/ein ewiger Wille.’ This is an existential lie, a false exit, which is why it is a sign of Busoni’s artistic authenticity that he wasn’t able to compose these lines. Which, then, is the precise character of this *Wille*?

When Busoni stages a series of transformations—of a child into Christ, of Christ into Helen of Troy, etc.—, what we should focus on is the mysterious stuff which lends itself to such transformations, the proverbial ‘stuff the dreams are made of.’ Lacan’s name for this stuff is *objet petit a*, the object-cause of desire. One should imagine this object as a weird organ which is magically autonomized, surviving without a body whose organ it should have been, like a hand that wonders around alone in early Surrealist films, or like the smile in *Alice in Wonderland* that persists alone, even when the Cheshire cat’s body is no longer present; it is an entity of *pure surface*, without the density of a substance, an *infinitely plastic* object that can not only incessantly change its form, but can even transpose itself from one to another medium: imagine a ‘something’ that is first heard as a shrilling sound, and then pops up as a monstrously distorted body. It is *indivisible, indestructible, and immortal*—more precisely, *undead* in the sense this term has in horror fiction: not the sublime spiritual immortality, but the obscene immortality of the ‘living dead’ who, after every annihilation, re-compose themselves and clumsily go on. It does not exist, it *insists*: it is unreal, an entity of pure semblance, a multiplicity of appearances which seem to envelop a central void—its status is purely *fantasmatic*. This blind indestructible insistence of the libido is what Freud called ‘death drive,’ and one should bear in mind that ‘death drive’ is, paradoxically, the Freudian name for its

very opposite, for the way *immortality* appears within psychoanalysis: for an uncanny excess of life, for an 'undead' urge which persist beyond the (biological) cycle of life and death, of generation and corruption. This is why Freud equates death drive with *Wiederholungszwang*, the uncanny urge to repeat painful past experiences which seems to outgrow the natural limitations of the organism affected by it and to insist even beyond the organism's death—again, like the living dead in a horror film who just go on. This excess inscribes itself into the human body in the guise of a wound which makes the subject 'undead,' depriving him of the capacity to die (like the wound on the ill boy's belly from Kafka's 'A Country Doctor'): when this wound is healed, the hero can die in peace. For any avid cinema-goer, it is difficult to avoid the feeling that he has already seen all this in Ridley Scott's *Alien*: the monster appears indestructible; if one cuts it into pieces, it merely multiplies; it is something extra-flat that all of a sudden flies off and envelops your face; with infinite plasticity, it can morph itself into a multitude of shapes; in it, pure evil animality overlaps with machinic blind insistence. The 'alien' is effectively libido as pure life, indestructible and immortal—this is what Busoni refers to as eternal Will. Where, then, does the plasticity of this object come? Lacan's solution is that all the figures of *objet a* are figures of the void, of nothingness. Human desire does not have a determinate object: every object is already metonymic, a place-holder of Nothing, when we get hold of it, our experience is the one of *ce n'est pas ça*, 'this is not *that* (what I really wanted),' no given object can satisfy my desire, its true object is the lost maternal Thing which is always missing, and *objet a* gives body to this void.

Perhaps the best way to describe the status of this inhuman drive is with reference to Kant's philosophy. In his *Critique of Pure Reason*, Kant introduced a key distinction between negative and indefinite judgment: the positive statement 'the soul is mortal' can be negated in two ways. We can either deny a predicate ('the soul is not mortal'), or affirm a non-predicate ('the soul is non-mortal'). The difference is exactly the same as the one, known to every reader of Stephen King, between 'he is not dead' and 'he is undead.' The indefinite judgment opens up a third domain which undermines the distinction between dead and non-dead (alive): the 'undead' are neither alive nor dead, they are precisely the monstrous 'living dead.' And the same goes for 'inhuman': 'he is not human' is not the same as 'he is inhuman.' 'He is not human' means simply that he is external to humanity, animal or divine, while 'he is inhuman' means something thoroughly different, namely the fact that he is neither human nor inhuman, but marked by a terrifying excess which, although it negates what we understand as humanity, is inherent to being-human. And, perhaps, one should risk the hypothesis that this is what changes with the Kantian philosophical revolution: in the pre-Kantian universe, humans were simply humans, beings of reason, fighting the excesses of animal lusts and divine madness, while with Kant, the excess to be fought is immanent and concerns the very core of subjectivity itself. (Which is why, in German Idealism, the metaphor for the core of subjectivity is Night, the 'Night of the World', in contrast to the Enlightenment notion of the Light of Reason fighting the darkness around.)

A look at the Wagnerian heroes can be of some help here: from their first paradigmatic case, the Flying Dutchman, they are possessed by the unconditional passion for dying, for finding ultimate peace and redemption in death. Their predicament is that,

some time in the past, they have committed some unspeakable evil deed, so that they are condemned to pay the price for it not by death, but by being condemned to a life of eternal suffering, of helplessly wandering around, unable to fulfill their symbolic function. This gives us a clue to the exemplary Wagnerian song, which, precisely, is the *Klage* of the hero, displaying his horror at being condemned to a life of eternal suffering, to err around or dwell as the 'undead' monster, longing for peace in death (from its first example, Dutchman's great introductory monologue, to the lament of the dying Tristan and the two great complaints of the suffering Amfortas). Brünnhilde's final farewell to him—'Ruhe, ruhe, du Gott!'—points in the same direction: when the gold is returned to the Rhine, Wotan is finally allowed to die peacefully.

Wagner's solution to Freud's antagonism of Eros and Thanatos is thus the identity of the two poles: love itself culminates in death, its true object is death, the longing for the beloved is the longing for death. Is, then, this urge which haunts the Wagnerian hero what Freud called the 'death drive/Todestrieb'? It is precisely the reference to Wagner which enables us to see how the Freudian death drive has nothing whatsoever to do with the craving for self-annihilation, for the return to the inorganic absence of any life-tension. Death drive does *not* reside in Wagner's heroes' longing to die, to find peace in death: it is, on the contrary, the very opposite of dying—a name for the 'undead' eternal life itself, for the horrible fate of being caught in the endless repetitive cycle of wandering around in guilt and pain. The final passing-away of the Wagnerian hero (the death of the Dutchman, Wotan, Tristan, Amfortas) is therefore the moment of their liberation from the clutches of the death drive. Tristan in Act III is not desperate because of his fear of dying: what makes him desperate is that, without Isolde, he cannot die and is condemned to eternal longing—he anxiously awaits her arrival so as to be able to die. The prospect he dreads is not that of dying without Isolde (the standard complaint of a lover), but rather that of an endless life without her.

This weird 'undead' drive is not the same as the Schopenhauerian *Wille*—it is the gap that separates them which thwarts the planned triumphant conclusion of Busoni's *Faust*. When, at the very end, *Gnade* and *Versöhnung* are denied to him, Faust fully accepts his destiny and does *das höchste Tun* of assuming death and transfiguration: he reappears (is reborn) as a naked half-grown youth with a flowering branch, into which his death child changes. How are we to read this ending? Mephistopheles's line which closes the opera—'Sollte dieser Mann etwa verunglückt sein?'—is not rhetorical, but literally a question, a dilemma. It is not principally the question of illusion or reality (is the young naked boy only the dying Faust's hallucination, a mere illusion, or is he real?), i.e., it is too easy to say that for cynical realists there is no boy, just the miserable dead body of Faust, while those who believe in it see it. The question is a more radical one: real or not, is the appearance of the young boy an authentic vision or a fake way out?

And is this dilemma not reflected in the opera's two endings? Busoni left the ending uncomposed, and the opera was first performed in 1925 with Phillip Jarnach's ending, which makes no use of detailed musical instructions left by the dying Busoni (it is worth remembering that Busoni also left Helen's appearance uncomposed). Anthony Beaumont's later spacious final scene (first performed in 1984), realizing manuscript sketches as well as other original material from 1923 and 1924, is much more Busoni

making the opera's final image Nietzschean: a naked youth rises from the ruined body of Faust, shucking off old and constraining superstitions. That white innocence, symbolic of Busoni's yearning for a newborn classicism in the aftermath of World War I, is best expressed in the radiant key of C major, whereas Jarnach perversely forces it down to E flat minor, the blackest of all keys. This is the dilemma: C major or E flat minor?

But this dilemma was already that of Busoni himself—it is clear that the unfinished score of *Faust* is not just an external accident due to the composer's illness and premature death, but the result of an inherent creative deadlock. *Faust* belongs to the great unfinished operas from the same epoch, from Puccini's *Turandot* to Schoenberg's *Moses und Aaron* and Berg's *Lulu*—as Sergio Sablich put it: 'The fact remains that Busoni didn't compose this Finale because he didn't succeed in finding the adequate musical solution.' Something in him—his authentic artistic sense—resisted a triumphant finale in the style of the Wagnerian *Verklärung* which concludes *Tristan*. Musically, the declared triumph of the eternal Will remains a dead letter:

/.../so stell' ich mich/über die Regel/umfass in Einem/die Epochen/und vermenge mich/den letzten Geschlechtern:/ich, Faust/ein ewiger Wille.

Busoni wrote: 'I hope that *Faust's* fear can be discerned, the fear that makes him collapse unconscious at the end.' But did he not himself shirk back from this fear in this concluding triumphant assertion of the Will?

So which version is better, Jarnach's or Beaumont's? One cannot but recall here Stalin's famous quip from 1928, when he was asked which deviation is worst, the Rightist or the Leftist: 'They are both worse!' The same holds here: Jarnach's 'Rightist' version (which emphasizes the catastrophe of the ending) and Beaumont's 'Leftist' version (which emphasizes the optimism of the Will) are *both worse*: they both miss the truth contained in the very fact that *Faust* remained incomplete. Our answer should thus be the obverse of the legendary Englishman's reply to the offer 'Coffee or tea?': 'Yes, please!' This is why the decision to stage *Faust* the way it was left by Busoni, with the last sung words 'Ich will wie ehemals aufschauen zu dir' (addressed to Christ, just before his figure changes into that of Helen), is a profoundly correct one. In Jarnach's standard version, Mephistopheles's last line in *spoken*, like King Herod's last line from Strauss' *Salome* 'Man töte dieses Weib.' If one performs as a spoken word everything that comes after 'Ich will wie ehemals aufschauen zu dir,' one does not just show respect to the Master—one does something much more radical: one turns around the Schopenhauerian eternal Will, Busoni's point of reference.

It was Schopenhauer who claimed that music brings us in contact with the *Ding an sich*: it renders directly the drive of the life-substance that words can only signify. For that reason, music 'seizes' the subject in the real of his/her being, bypassing the detour of meaning: in music, we hear what we cannot see, the vibrating life-force beneath the flow of *Vorstellungen*. Recall the remarkable scene at the beginning of Sergio Leone's *Once Upon a Time in America*, in which we see a phone ringing loudly, and, when a hand picks up the receiver, the ringing goes on—as if the musical life-force of the sound is too strong to be contained by reality and persists beyond its limitations. (Or recall a similar scene from David Lynch's *Mulholland Drive*, in which a singer on stage sings

Roy Orbison's »Crying«, and when she collapses unconscious, the song goes on.) What happens, however, when this flux of life-substance itself is suspended, discontinued? Georges Balanchine staged a short orchestral piece by Webern (they are all short) so that, after the music is over, the dancers continue to dance for some time in complete silence, as if they had not noticed that the music that provides the substance for their dance is already over—like the cat in a cartoon who simply continues to walk over the edge of the precipice, ignoring that she has no longer ground under her feet The dancers who continue to dance after the music is over are like the living dead who dwell in an interstice of empty time: their movements, which lack vocal support, allow us to see not only the voice but silence itself.

And something of the same kind happens when singers stop singing and start to perform like actors: we are confronted with mere words, deprived of their libidinal substance provided by music. What we hear are effectively *dead words*—words which we fully understand, but which nonetheless lack the proper subjective resonance. This reference to Balanchine also enables us to locate Busoni's philosophical mistake: what he refers to as the eternal *Wille*, the immortal drive which persists through all its transformations, is not really Schopenhauerian *Wille*; it is rather *a persistence which goes on even when Wille disappears*.

This, however, does not mean that such a staging only confronts us with Busoni's failure: the musical deadlock should also be understood as a direct call to us, spectators, to provide the missing music—the choice is ours. In such a reading, the Christian dimension is still present: it is implicit in the fact that the God who rejects Faust's redemption is explicitly designated by the Chorus as *Gott 'der Rache, der Vergeltung und der Strafe,' nicht Gott 'der Milde und der Gnade'*—Faust turns towards *ewiger Wille* after the crucified morphs into Helen—it is to her apparition that he exclaims: 'Verdammnis! Gibt es keine Gnade? Bust du unversöhnbar?' Faust is thus abandoned by the God of *Rache und Vergeltung*—one can well imagine a devil passing by the dead Christ on the cross and making the same cynical remark: 'Sollte dieser Mann etwa verunglückt sein?' Is this misfortune all that there is to it, or is there a resurrection—the choice is ours, because Christ is not resurrected as a particular individual, but as the Holy Spirit, the collective of those who believe. The resurrected Christ is not an X which exists independently of our belief, he is nothing but our belief in him: the resurrected Christ is the bond of love which unites his followers.

Is then the reborn child nonetheless a figure of the resurrected Christ? One should ask here a naïve but pertinent question: if Busoni wanted to return to the tradition of *Puppenspiele*, is there, in the narrative itself, a figure which stands for a puppet? This figure is, of course, the young boy who appears at the very end as the re-incarnation of Faust's *Wille*. The motif of the innocent/asexual boy confronted by an 'overripe' sexualized mature woman has a long prehistory which reaches back to the *fin-de-siècle* emergence of the (self)destructive *femme fatale*. Of special interest here is 'Language in the Poem,' Heidegger's seminal essay on Georg Trakl's poetry, the only place where he approaches the topic of sexual difference:

A human cast, cast in one mold and cast away into this cast, is called a *Geschlecht*. The word refers to mankind as a whole as well as to kinship in the sense of race,

tribe, family—all of these in turn cast in the duality of the sexes. The cast of man's 'decomposed form' is what the poet calls the 'decomposing' kind. It is the generation that has been removed from its kind of essential being, and this is why it is the 'displaced' kind.

What curse has struck this humankind? The curse of the decomposing kind is that the old human kinship has been struck apart by discord of *Geschlechter*. Each of the *Geschlechter* strives to escape from that discord into the unleashed turmoil of the always isolated and sheer wildness of the wild game. Not duality as such, the discord is the curse. Out of the turmoil of blind wildness it carries each kind into an irreconcilable plot, and so casts it into unbridled isolation. The 'fallen *Geschlecht*,' so cleft in two, can on its own no longer find its proper cast. Its proper cast is only with that kind whose duality leaves discord behind and leads the way, as 'something strange,' into the gentleness of simple twofoldness following in the stranger's footsteps.⁵

The undead pale-faced ethereal boy Elis ('Elis in wonderland,' one is tempted to add) stands for the gentle Sex, for the harmonious duality of the sexes, not their discord. The first thing to do here (and which is not done by Heidegger) is to situate this figure of a presexual boy into its context, whose first references are Edvard Munch's paintings: is this 'unborn' fragile boy not the very terrified asexual figure of *The Scream*, or the figure squeezed between the two frames in his *Madonna*, the same foetus-like asexual figure floating among the droplets of sperm? The horror of this figure is not the Heideggerian *Angst*, but the suffocating *Schrecken* pure and simple. Perhaps the outstanding example of this confrontation of the asexual boy with the Woman are the famous shots, from the beginning of Ingmar Bergman's *Persona*, of a preadolescent boy with large glasses, examining with a perplexed gaze the giant unfocused screen-image of a feminine face; this image gradually shifts to the close-up of what seems to be another woman who closely resembles the first one—yet another exemplary case of the subject confronted with the fantasmatic interface-screen.

In short, what Heidegger's reading does not take into account is how the very opposition between the asexual boy and the discordant *Geschlecht* is sexualized: the discordant *Geschlecht* is not neutral, but feminine, and the very apparent gender-neutrality of Elis makes him a boy. So when Heidegger claims that 'the boyishness in the figure of the boy Elis does not consist in the opposite of girlishness. His boyishness is the appearance of his stiller childhood. That childhood shelters and stores within it the gentle two-fold of sex, the youth and the 'golden figure of the maiden','⁶ he misses the key fact that sexual difference does not designate the two sexes of the human stock/species, but, in this case, the very difference between the asexual and the sexual: the external difference (between the sexual and the asexual) is mapped onto the internal difference between the two sexes. Furthermore, what Heidegger (and Trakl) already hint at is that, precisely as pre-sexual, this innocent 'undead' child confronted with the overripe and overblown feminine body is properly monstrous, one of the figures of the Evil itself:

⁵ Martin Heidegger, "Language in the Poem," *On the Way to Language*, New York: Harper & Row 1982, p. 170-171.

⁶ Op.cit., p. 174.

Spirit or ghost understood in this way has its being in the possibility of both gentleness and destructiveness. Gentleness in no way dampens the ecstasy of the inflammatory, but holds it gathered in the peace of friendship. Destructiveness comes from unbridled license, which consumes itself in its own revolt and thus is active evil. Evil is always the evil of a ghostly spirit.⁷

Perhaps, one should insert the figure of the resurrected boy from Busoni's *Faust* into the series of similar figures from the horror stories *à la* Stephen King to Trakl's Elis: the 'undead,' white, pale, ethereal monstrous asexual child returning to haunt the adults. This ambiguity of the asexual boy, oscillating between angelic and demonic—the ambiguity which reproduces the ambiguity of a puppet between Kleist and Hoffmann, between angelic and mechanically-possessed, is what remains open and unexplored in Busoni.

And, perhaps, we can surmise that, if, at *Faust's* end, the young boy were to utter a sound, it would have been something like the sound of the scream of the homunculus depicted in Munch's most famous painting.

POVZETEK

Busoni ignorira vse prejšnje operne verzije Fausta in vstopa v dialog s samim Goethejem, ki ga ima za najvišjo različico Fausta. S tem ko se vrača k tradiciji *lutkovnih iger*, gre Busoni nazaj od simbola k alagoriji, od organske dramske enovitosti k sosledju *tableaux vivants*. Busonijev *Faust*

je mlanholična *žaloigra*, pri kateri posamične zmage že spremlja senca končnega poraza. Busonijeva nedokončana partitura je rezultat lastnega ustvarjalnega zastoja ne pa zunanje naključje zavoljo skladateljeve zgodnje smrti. Dvoumnost v zvezi z mladim fantom, ki se ob koncu pojavi kot reinkarnacija Faustove *volje* pri Busoniju še ni bila reziskana.

⁷ Op.cit., p. 179.