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'The world of made is not the world of born': America and the Edge of the Continent

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'THE WORLD OF MADE IS NOT THE WORLD OF BORN':

America and the Edge of the Continent

*I gazing at the boundaries of granite and spray, the established
sea-marks, felt behind me
Mountain and plain, the immense breadth of the continent, before
me the mass and doubled stretch of water.
Robinson Jeffers, 'Continent's End'*

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At the beginning of his great 1927 poem *Women at Point Sur*, Robinson Jeffers offers a harsh judgment of the American mind as a producer of a culture of avoidance or evasion. In Jeffers' words, 'You chose to ignore consciousness, incredible how quickly / The American mind short-circuits by ignoring its object. / Something in the gelded air of the country' (Jeffers, 1927: 26). It is a commentary on the conversation that Reverend Barclay has just had with a boy working at a hotel, and whose opinion as to a possible existence of God he is asking. Since there comes no answer to the interrogation, 'Do you think there's a God?', and the young man does not seem to have an opinion at all, these circumstances occasion Reverend Barclay's angry dismissal of America not as incidentally empty of interest in the transcendental but as purposefully choosing such ignorance. America bespeaks double ignorance: 1) it ignores consciousness (which, for Jeffers, stands for the ability to live and investigate life in a most serious manner), and 2) this ignorance leads to the second type of evasion—America, in avoiding all the seriousness of life and developing new strategies of disarming life's seriousness, avoids itself, voids itself, ignores its own object. What is serious

in life, what makes life serious, why life IS serious, has been eliminated from the American life, which therefore presents itself as 'gelded', i.e., deprived of what is essential for life to happen.

Life in what Jeffers refers to as 'America' develops in the aura of a certain vital lack that makes this life almost a parody of existence. Life conceived under the auspices of 'something gelded' is monstrous or phantasmatic, and this spectrality can be documented upon the level of the self ('consciousness'), the state ('America'), and God. Each of these phantasms turns its own existence into a peculiar kind of imprisonment in which what Jeffers repeatedly names 'inexhaustible life, incomparable power, inhuman knowledge' changes into no more than a 'blind adventure' (Jeffers, 1927: 90, 21). In consequence, the solidity of the structure called 'America', its 'wall-ed' streets, and mansions that advertise the present and future prosperity are now revealed to be constructions of spectral urbanity and phantomatic architecture. As Reverend Barclay contends, 'Sticks plastered, cloth, books, what they call a home; / Framed to wall out the wild face of eternity' (Jeffers, 1927: 23). Jeffers avows then that 'America' is a project, the heart of which was the ambition to conquer wilderness (hence the mythology of the frontier and pioneer). The project backfired, or short-circuited, because, while successfully eliminating the natural wild, it has forsaken the existential wild, which must always be kept and preserved as a condition of existence. 'America' grows as the Enlightenment project of the civilizing illumination which compromises itself by 'enlightening' the world to such a degree that it has neglected the necessary 'dark' mysteriousness that is necessary for life to flourish.

America, then, would answer all the conditions which Jan Patočka sets for the politics of the inexorable 'rule of the day' which runs the world more and more profoundly into war. Thus, life has become 'exhausted', power has devolved to become a mere game of comparison and formulating competitive promises, and knowledge has been reduced to the domain of human-all-too-human. Thus, to redeem 'America' one ought to undertake a threefold mission of 1) thinking and living life as 'inexhaustible', 2) reinventing politics in a manner that discloses a possibility

of another organization of social life not outside but within the very social texture (politics which would demonstrate some 'outside', some 'sense as an outside that is opened right in the middle of the world, right in the middle of us and between us as our common sharing out' [Nancy, 2010: 18]), and 3) working upon epistemologies that would reconnect the human with the non-human. Right in the middle of the countercultural turmoil of 1967, Norman O. Brown professed in his Harvard lecture such a vision of the redeemed America: 'My utopia is / an environment that works so well / that we can run wild in it / anarchy in an environment that works' (Brown, 2008: 207). The environment in question is a well-organized network of 'all public utilities' which are fundamental factors in bringing about what Brown calls 'unification', a new type of community, a new type of a social body, 'love's body', which empowers individuals rather than the abstract system. This 'unification' is an ethical-technological-aesthetic project, a work of such teachers in utopian engineering as John Cage and Buckminster Fuller, of which modern or postmodern 'globalization' seems to be an unwieldy caricature.

To undertake this mission of recasting being, acting, and knowing, one has to remain firmly within the world without, at the same time, unreservedly endorsing its rules and constitutions. Such a position makes affirmation of being possible through the practice of the Nietzschean *Ja-sagen*, which, however, has nothing to do with plain general commensurability and acceptance of the state of things. In his 1940 collection *Fifty Poems*, e. e. cummings, having determined a synonymity between knowledge and appropriation ('all knowing's having and have is (you guess) / perhaps the very unkindest way to kill'), puts forward the following claim: 'so we'll/ not have (but i imagine that yes is / the only living thing) and we'll make yes' (cummings, 1991: 528). The affirmation in question is a particular way of making the world that is not reduced to fabricating things and goods and which is closer somehow to un-making of them. 'yes' (a small letter is necessary) is a true making, not mere fabricating or manufacturing. The un-making that we are talking about is far from being a destruction or sheer dismantling. We could approach it as a double process. First, it disturbs and unbalances

our perception of what is, thus destabilizing the object and blurring its identity. Second, it breaks a strong connection that has always existed between knowing and having; knowledge, as it developed in the Western *episteme*, has always imposed a network of proprietary relationships upon reality. If knowledge was the royal way of knowing, then very quickly it energized the complicated and dynamic structure of power and appropriation, which needed sciences to determine possessions, locations, territories, and zones of influence. 'yes', as it perforates this texture, as it turns objects into fuzzy appearances, as it undermines having as a criminal gesture ('the unkindest way to kill'), demonstrates things in their very existential matter not as instrumentally useful objects but as the very manifestation of being ('is the only living thing'). This is a move away from the 'government of men' towards the 'government of things'; we shall soon return to this phrase of Georges Bataille. Or, in cummings's words, it is a recognition that 'a world of born is not a world of made'. What lives is a 'yes' that breaks and opens up an object, affirms it without accepting it, as it is, with a premonition of some 'elsewhere' that a given object makes visible but that also undoes the object. We are very close to what Giorgio Agamben describes as a 'truly singular' fact about human existence, which 'is the silent and impervious intertwining of the two works, the extremely close and yet disjointed proceedings of the prophetic word and the creative word, of the power of the angel (with which we never cease producing and looking ahead) and the power of the prophet (that just as tirelessly retrieves, undoes, and arrests the progress of creation and in this way completes and redeems it)' (Agamben, 2011: 49). cummings's recognition that 'progress is a comfortable disease' seems to endorse this diagnosis, which combines the inevitability of making with the equally exigent force of undoing (cummings, 1991: 554).

In the poem that is a coda to the *50 Poems* volume, the 'yes' (let us never forget—'the only living thing') is quite literally a synonym of living and, at the same time, a basis for a certain new politics of freedom. Liberation is portrayed not in terms of a specific class structure or political struggle, but the way in which it infiltrates and energizes the very life (what the poet

refers to as 'our pure living') of every human individual. Here is e. e. cummings: 'what freedom's not some under's mere above / but breathing yes which fear will never no?' (cummings, 1991: 538). The task of reinventing politics hinges upon the carnalization of freedom; the politics of un-making depends upon freedom which, independent of the law, is first of all guaranteed by the lived experience of the body. Freedom is embodied, otherwise it is a mere token in the political game; it is, as cummings puts it in a later poem, 'freedom: what makes a slave' (cummings, 1991: 834). Thus, freedom cannot be enforced but has to be lived in a fully and literally biological way; it belongs to the protocol of such final bodily functions as breathing. What is more, this kind of freedom, the embodied freedom of 'yes', is not vulnerable to the actions of the apparatus of power, as it lies outside the realm of force and enforcement. It is, as cummings emphasizes, freedom that 'fear will never no'. The phonetic ambiguity is priceless: embodied freedom, the bio-freedom, is beyond the reach of the mental modalities of knowledge ('know') as a means of enforcing a certain (to use Immanuel Wallerstein's concept) 'system world', neither can it be negated ('no') by fear which, as we learn from further lines in the same poem, leaves us within a set of substitutions: 'hate' supersedes 'wisdom', 'doubt blind the brave', 'mask' stands in for 'face'.

To use a category worked out by Jean-Luc Nancy, we could describe such affirmatively un-making 'yes' as 'adoration'. Adoration is an expression of reverence and veneration for the object that functions in the structure of our aims and needs, but this kind of respect owes its unique status and power to the fact that it is, at the same time, a prayerful meditation on what takes this object away from these aims and needs defined by our organization of life. The very process of 'un-making' suggests that the object is never complete and finished, never filled solidly and uninterruptedly with matter, but there open in it some mysterious holes and ruptures which, potentially at least, remove the thing from the realm of human manufacturing. The human is punctured by the non-human; the making of the thing always inherently has within it the power of un-making; thus the thing is never 'made' unless it is open to being permanently un-made.

The particle 'un-' marks the appearance of a certain 'nothing' from which the thing is being constantly created anew. Hence, Nancy is well justified in his claim that 'adoration is addressed to this opening. Adoration consists in holding onto the *nothing*—without reason or origin—of the opening. It is the very fact of this holding on' (Nancy, 2013:15). e. e. cummings turns out to be a great American practitioner of a 'yes' that is the adoration of what makes the human world but refuses to be contained in it and by it. To know what is 'the only living thing', to practice the (un-)making power of 'yes' that is a form of adoration, we have to emancipate ourselves from the modalities of the human, as cummings would put it, from knowing and having. Only then will we be able to contend that 'yes is a pleasant country' (cummings, 1991: 578).

This is a perspective assumed by the poet in the poem we have been reading. Its first line announces, in the critical turn, the whole project of emancipation: human existence ('who we are') and actions ('why we dream', 'how we drink crawl eat walk die fly do') cannot be meaningfully envisioned within the framework of the aforementioned modalities. As we learn from the early section of the poem 'a peopleshaped toomany-ness far too' will never be able to answer the questions that have been relegated by these modalities to the domain of banality or forgetfulness. A 'peopleshaped toomany-ness' reveals the most essential characteristics of our present situation which, for the sake of brevity, can be summarized as a total humanization of the world that has acquired the human 'shape' even in the sphere of natural phenomena. This process has caused a dramatic change in the way that man is situated in the whole project of creation: loneliness has been replaced by crowdedness, the lack and moderation by excess, and too little has become 'too many' which, as its abstract form 'toomany-ness' reveals, presents itself as an overwhelming scheme that Immanuel Wallerstein calls 'system world'. The ultimate consequence of such a situatedness of the human individual is that he/she is being translated into a realm that allows for living without being anchored in existence, a life that blurs the distinction between life and death disfiguring the human connection. As cummings phrases it, 'a notalive undead too-nearishness'.

What the poet formulates in the rhetoric of excess ('toomany-ness', 'too-nearishness') is the world in which everything is 'far too', i.e., a world subjected to human ambition and desire, a world of hasty activism in which un-making has been suppressed and misrepresented as a negative and passively destructive schemer against the interests of making/fabricating. All these insights much later have been taken up by the philosopher claiming that, 'We are now, admittedly, the masters of the Earth and of the world, but our very mastery seems to escape our mastery. We have all things in hand, but we do not control our powers' (Serres, 1995: 171).

To save ourselves, to redeem America and Americans, we have to overcome the regime of 'far too' that eventually leads us, as cummings has it, to the point where 'climbing hope meets most despair' (cummings, 1991: 528). Nancy accentuates that adoration, understood as the way of responding to the openings of nothing within the very texture of living, must reduce the hubristic ambitions of men: 'Adoration therefore carries itself with a certain humility'. This humility, having nothing to do with humiliation, implicates us in the politics of un-making, the model of which is to be found in God's creation of the world *ex nihilo*, i.e., 'of the most humble, of almost nothing, with no regard for what is powerful and remarkable' (Nancy, 2013:15). Such redemptive politics, one has to say right at the very beginning, will always be in the making, will never be complete and consummated, as the force of the particle 'un-' is constantly burrowing within it. Politics of bio-freedom is politics in the un-making. Norman O. Brown makes the link between freedom and unfinishedness explicit: 'Can we liberate instead of repress / Can we find a way of being permanently unstable' (Brown, 2008: 206). A visionary, utopian politics happens at the moment when actual dating falls into the dateless time of the conditional. As cummings was to put it much later, in his last poetic book, 'at the magical hour / when is becomes if' (cummings, 1991: 802). Mocking the precise temporalities of the calendar in the non-time of metamorphosis, what takes place at this particular non-time is a critical collapse of the rule of the regime of 'far too'. For cummings, this crisis of the system world occurring in the non-time of 'if' exposes us

to the mysteriousness of being alive. This comeback of the enigma of living, of living as the enigmatic process, constitutes a deadly threat to the world of 'a peopleshaped toomany-ness'. A clown distributing daisies 'one a winter afternoon' 'on eighth street' is what 'mostpeople fear most: / a mystery(first and last) / mostpeople fear most: / a mystery for which i've / no word except alive /—that is, completely alert / and miraculously whole' (cumplings, 1991: 802).

The phrase 'when is becomes if' is equivocal: it transfers us to some nonthinkable temporality substituting the precisionist 'when' with most ambiguous 'if', but it also problematizes the very fundamental verb we use to name our own being. 'When is becomes if' names also the moment when we tear down the illusion of being, when, as e. e. cumplings says in another poem, we stop taking the mask for the face. But in both cases what is essential is breaking through the standard protocols of perceiving and knowing the world. What has been solid now melts, and the reality usually looking for the expression in the indicative mood is being subversively replaced by the conditional (a move to which cumplings frequently takes recourse), baring the illusory qualities of what we have assumed to be the 'world'. At the same time, it sketches a vision of a world which is not but which should be. The 'if' mode into which e. e. cumplings switches his thinking aims at a peculiar kind of exodus: its mission is to lead us out of the land in which ontological forgetfulness and misconception concerning being alive sanctions the political and social organization. This is the heart of cumplings's diagnosis of what Hegel would call 'the state of the world': under-existence of the human individual is matched by the over-existence of the political machinery. The dramatically weakened sense of living, the impairment of what it means to live, a certain ontological debilitation—all this is grasped in phrases that try to name them as a state of 'a notalive undead' or 'unbeingdead isn't beingalive' (cumplings, 1991: 528, 803). As cumplings phrases it in another poem, this is a situation where 'being pay[s] the rent of seem'. America is the place of an awkward economy of existence in which to 'be' remains in debt to what only 'seems' to be, and as this credit has certainly

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to be paid back America has less and less of the authentic life and more and more of the simulacrum of life. In another poem, cummings turns this life debilitating credit into the very basis of the distorted system world: 'as freedom is a breakfastfood / or truth can live with right and wrong / or molehills are from mountain made /—long enough and just so long / will being pay the rent of seem' (cummings, 1991: 511).

In his final collection, cummings coins yet another lapidary locution that describes this situation. He speaks about a 'sub-human superstate' (cummings, 1991: 803), and the tension between the particles 'sub-' and 'super' is telling. On the one hand, we have everything that is 'below', 'under' or 'slightly' (all associated with 'sub-'); on the other, there are things, attitudes, and features that go 'above', 'beyond' everything that has been added to and is supernumerary with regard to what presents itself as a standard or means. 'America' then is less than human and more than human at the same time: less human because it effected among its population what Tennyson famously called the state of 'lotus-eaters', a forgetfulness of being alive, and more than human because it replaced the merely human with the abstract construction of state violence. It is by far unsatisfactory on the level of 'sense' and excessive on that of economy and political organization. With the economic teachings of John Maynard Keynes in mind, Jean-Luc Nancy helps us to understand that 'subhuman superstate' refers to unconditional preferences for economic thinking in terms of means that have shaped Western thinking and society. Thus, he admonishes us in the way that cummings would certainly approve:

[...] we should not start with economy itself or with its regulations, but with 'ends', or rather 'sense'—let us therefore say simply with metaphysics, or, if one prefers, with the terms *mysticism* or *poetics*. But whichever name one chooses, we must start with the work of thinking through these names, the regime of names, the relation to infinite sense. (Nancy, 2013:83)

This is to be read in conjunction with two aspects of the American line of life. First is a constant suspicion that thinking or metaphysics is not pertinent for modern democracy, which is not nourished by its concerns and dilemmas. The suspicion was

voiced already by Alexis de Tocqueville and more recently by Stanley Cavell, who combines the question of 'why America has never expressed itself philosophically' with a difficulty in classifying the most important American minds as 'philosophers': 'Why has America never expressed itself philosophically? [...] the context of the question implied that I was taking the question of American philosophical expression to be tied up with the question whether Thoreau (and Emerson) are to be recognized as philosophers' (Cavell, 1988: 11). The second line somewhat capitalizes on this difficulty of drawing clear boundaries and connects the political with the aesthetic. In his revision of modern philosophy, Norman O. Brown sees the chances for 'unification' in the degree to which the Dionysian principle overcomes the matter-of-factness of political reason: 'Breaking down the boundaries is breaking down the reality principle / unification lies beyond the reality-principle / the communion is Dionysian'(Brown, 2008: 206). Having asked a question similar to Cavell's 'What kind of language might be helpful?', Brown answers: 'instead of morality, metaphor [...] the language of healing, or making whole is not psychoanalysis, but poetry' (Brown, 2008: 213).

What is at stake, then, is the way in which we are to confront the 'subhuman superstate' that is the organization of social and political life trying to harness the original chaos and fortuitousness of living, the adventure of being alive, with the preordained rules and regulations of the market and political struggle. Political life dominating in the present remains in an awkward position towards man's existential challenge. As cummings puts it succinctly, 'a politician is an arse upon / which everyone has sat except a man' (cummings, 1991: 550). Attempting to investigate reasons for which man has been profoundly betrayed by politics, cummings gives us five precise lessons of what is wrong with the society of 'subhuman superstate'. First is a combination of what he previously termed as 'a peopleshaped toomany-ness' and the language that merely reiterates familiar grammatical constructions reproducing, in turn, equally familiar structures of the world. 'Toomany-ness' needs a discourse operating rigorously predictable constructions that guarantee unquestionable correctness of expression, a correctness that can be easily checked

and, if need be, quickly brought back to order. A conceivable exodus from 'subhuman superstate' must imply a discourse mixing forms, genders, registers, and which, in the Nietzschean mode, cherishes mistake as a figure of truth. The first lesson taught by cummings returns us towards the power of the poetic and reads, '(1) we sans love equals mob / love being youamiare' (cummings, 1991: 803).

The second lesson transports us to the realm of metaphysics and posits a reshuffling of the order and hierarchy of things assumed by the society ('from second to tenth rate'), which alteration brings about a rediscovery of the largely forgotten significance of what T.S. Eliot famously rendered as the 'overwhelming question'. Here is cummings again: '(2) the holy miraculous difference between / firstrate & second implies nonth / inkable enormousness by con / trast with the tiny stumble from second to tenth / rate' (cummings, 1991: 803). What belongs to the rationally organized and enforced order of 'subhuman superstate' is 'tiny' as opposed to the unconcealed mysteriousness of the difference between the created ('firstrate') and the man-made ('second'). One has to realize that, as cummings maintains in another place, 'A world of made / is not a world of born' (cummings, 1991: 554). The difference is called 'holy miraculous' not because it builds a radical distinction between the two, but because it tries to find out how one always works within the other. As Giorgio Agamben says, 'poetry, technology, and art are the inheritors of the angelic work of creation. Through the process of secularization of the religious tradition, however, these disciplines have progressively lost all memory of the relationship that has previously linked them so intimately to one another' (Agamben, 2011: 5). What e. e. cummings points out is the second directive of our exodus from 'subhuman superstate': we will be able to get going only if, aware of the difference between 'firstrate and second' rather than the insignificant distinctions of the hierarchies that organize our social and economic policies, we also change our epistemologies in such a way that knowing will reclaim the lost memory linking the divine and the secular.

Lesson number three retrieves the importance and necessity of the error for being alive, this time transferring it from the linguistic to the theological. Lucidity of thinking is prepared by the sincerity of transgression: '(3) as it was in the begin / ning it is now and always will be or / the onehundredpercentoriginal sin / cerity equals perspicuity' (cumplings, 1991: 803). This clearly dovetails with the postulate to meditate upon the 'nonthinkable enormousness' as the very notion of enormousness (which in another text cumplings refers to as the 'immeasurable is' [cumplings, 1991: 521]). This lesson expropriates the scientific-logical approaches that have always been used in the Western tradition to characterize thinking. The fourth lesson is that of the necessity of independent thinking ('Only the Game Fish Swims Upstream'), while the fifth one resounds the warning signal against a spectral life which the 'subhuman superstate' imposes upon man ('unbeingdead isn't beingalive'). Thus further directives that need to guide us in our exodus are: retrieving a thinking that will problematize the instrumentality of our tele-techno-scientific epistemologies and modes of notation (cumpling's typography prompts us to believe that 'nonthinkable' is also non-inkable) and help to identify and exorcize the spectral element which not only haunts but plainly takes over and dominates our living. The critique of the 'subhuman superstate' thus entails a necessary foray into the domain of what Jacques Derrida called 'hauntology'.

The conditional introduced by 'if' opens a certain non-time, or, perhaps, it would be more accurate to say that it introduces some kind of future different from what we regularly refer to as a future event. That is, the future of the 'if' structure both promises the continuity and denies the calendar sequence. It 'promises' by the very fact that it projects some different state of things. It separates such state in time from what is going on now by moving it to some indescribable moment of time; it denies, as facts taking place within 'if' are merely shadows of real, matter-of-fact occurrences, they exist in such a weak mode that they are mere shadows, figments of wild imagination or a trick of rationality that has all of a sudden lost control of its matter-of-factness. 'If' sends us not so much

to a future understood as what will happen tomorrow, or next year, but to some indescribable futurity bereft of standard measures of dating. If 'future' basically consists in being loyal to the past standards of time, 'futurity' announces a kind of time liberated from such previous loyalties. The 'if' construction of the world implies, as we have noticed after Agamben, a constant action and counteraction of the poetic and the prophetic, of a promise and a denial, of ethical brotherhood on the one hand and the liberty and equality manipulatively involved in the political game on the other. Of such futurity speaks William Blake in a passage from *Vala, or the Four Zoas*:

Why roll thy clouds in sick'ning mists? I can no longer hide
The dismal vision of mine eyes. O love & life & light!
Prophetic dreads urge me to speak: futurity is before me
Like a dark lamp. Eternal death haunts all my expectation.
Rent from Eternal Brotherhood we die & are no more
(Blake, 1797: V, 3, 71-76)

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For David Herbert Lawrence, America posits precisely the problem of futurity which, disentangled from the past, is searching its forms of materialization. If Europe stands for a 'future' understood as a reiteration of the past (of what Lawrence refers to as 'tradition' [Lawrence, 1972: 774]), America faces a 'futurity', i.e., a future that not only cannot be understood in terms of the past ('it is easy enough to be faithful to a tradition') but cannot, in fact, find a form for itself. Futurity of America, unlike future of Europe, is deprived of structures, or at least its structures are unknown and unthinkable. Lawrence speaks of 'an unrevealed future', 'an unborn future', 'as-yet-unknowable American future'—formulations not so much referring to the uncertain character of events to come but, more significantly, accentuating the fact that the very criteria and categorizations that normally allow us to think up and of a future lose all their weight. Thus, not only do we not know what a future will bring about but – a much more dramatic caesura—we have no categories and measures that would allow us to invent and draw a map of such a future. As Lawrence says, what we call futurity of America is 'Not a mob thing, nor a mass thing, nor a class thing, nor a hundred-per-cent thing / But a subtle, struggling little germ struggling

half-unrealised in individual hearts, and nowhere else' (Lawrence, 1972: 775). We should certainly mark the unreadiness of America that looms like a vision rather than a fully articulated project. America is not 'a hundred-per-cent thing', i.e., it cannot be captivated by itself, functioning for two centuries as a destination for generations of migrants, it has to lose itself as a destination point. People have flocked to America to establish their future there, and, paradoxically, to secure this aim America has to disestablish, undo its own future, dismantle the solidity of its metaphysical foundations and the political, economic and social structures erected upon them.

What characterizes the futurity of America is a peculiar situatedness of the human element. The magisterial role of history always presenting itself as a collection of lessons helping men to think up their future has been radically reduced: we learn from Lawrence's text that, 'America will have to find her own way into the future, / the old lights won't show the way' (Lawrence, 1972: 775). If history, which allows for the construction of a future, follows the dictate of the 'old lights', America and its futurity clearly do not belong to this regime (as e. e. cummings puts it, 'all history's a winter sport or three' [cummings, 1991: 579]). Robinson Jeffers is probably most extreme in voicing his violent abdication from human history. Having, in one of his suppressed poems, metaphorized humanity as 'the semi-delirious patient' who has amassed heavy 'lumber' of wars, the poet determines the crucial question as an investigation concerning how much of this human experience will be carried into the future: 'The question is / How much all this amazing lumber the pale convalescent / Staggering back towards life will be able to carry up the / steep gorges that thrid the cliffs of the future?' (Jeffers, 1977: 162). The world needs futurity rather than a 'future', the openness to the non-human rather than a hopeless confinement to the vicious circle of human history in which 'Roosevelt, Hitler and Guy Fawkes / Hanged above the garden walks, / While the happy children cheer, / Without hate, without fear, / And new men plot a new war' (Jeffers, 1977: 156).

A withdrawal from human history and its basic concepts always operating on the large scale such as 'mass', 'mob', 'class'

moves us towards the domain of *bios*, life which does not recognize a difference between the individual and the mass. When Lawrence repeatedly speaks about the 'germ of that future [which] is inside the American people', the germ that is 'little' and 'struggling', he seems to make two important gestures (Lawrence, 1972: 775). The first allows him to reach out towards life that exists in its potential only; life is a germ that gathers within it forces ready to start growing but yet dormant. Thus, futurity of America belongs to a kind of life that has not begun yet; America is a life-to-come, its 'future' is precisely a 'futurity' because we can only know or intuit its potential, never fully realized form. The second gesture amplifies this ambiguity by pointing out that this life-to-come which is futurity of America is a manifestation of the potency for growing and germinating and, at the same time, of a most serious threat against itself. A germ is the strongest promise of life exuberant and, simultaneously, a menacing microorganism, a bacteria, which may at any moment disempower and cancel this promise. Futurity of America is both an invitation and deterrent, hospitality and hostility, futurity of puissance and deadly illness.

The expression 'life-to-come' as the rendition of futurity of America is equivocal in itself. The secret of futurity of America, as Lawrence divulges, consists in reversing the normal sequence of events and also in the undoing of the machinery of 'progress' as conceived by the Enlightenment tradition. In the end, the future of America, its futurity, is, paradoxically, a denial of what is to come. As Lawrence explains, America must free itself from its own image as construed by others, by the world that 'calls upon America to act in a certain way' (Lawrence, 1972: 775). It must never 'acquiesce'; Americans are loyal to their futurity which, however, is not 'to come', but which has to, reading e. e. cummings again, 'undream a dream' of America (cummings, 1991: 556). In a significant passage, D.H. Lawrence juxtaposes various nations that have constituted America and the native Indian population: 'Turn the Poles, the Germans, the English, the Italians, the Russians, / Turn them into hundred-per-cent Americans. / What else have they come to this country for? / But the Indians never came. / It was you who came, Americans'

(Lawrence, 1972: 777). What threatens America and its futurity is it being overwhelmed and dominated by 'hundred-per-cent Americans', by those who 'came' attracted by the dream that now, if America is to redeem itself, has to be 'undreamed'. The risk of America is precisely 'America' itself with its dreams of 'ideal' state and superpower status with their protocols remaining within the regime of knowing characterized by its endless, limitless ambitions (the Snowden affair is a clear demonstration of the hubristic desires of the American state to know absolutely everything regardless of civil rights and political and economic costs). The 'Indian' that Lawrence eulogizes (although, to be fair, he warns us not 'to sentimentalize about him' [Lawrence, 1972: 776]) represents the 'savage' (a word used by Lawrence himself) edge at which the human (with its unstoppable march of 'progress' and the system world built round the notion of equivalence) becomes intertwined with the nonhuman (or what the poet refers to as 'the remnant of the old race' [Lawrence, 1972: 779]). In e. e. cummings's poetic universe, the 'savage' obtains the name of 'love', the role of which is to undo the fabrications of the instrumental mind: 'love's function is to fabricate unknownness' (cummings, 1991: 446). The 'unknownness' in question is not a mere critique of the scientific mind, but a radical undoing of the whole Weltanschauung of the system world as represented by 'America' with its disfigured life, distorted epistemologies, and the dictate of the *hoi polloi*. In cummings's words, 'life's lived wrongsideout, sameness chokes oneness / truth is confused with fact' (cummings, 1991: 446). Both Lawrence and cummings warn us against the conflation of a certain type of apodictic sovereignty of the model state called 'America', a sovereignty jealously assigned to itself and projected as a general model to be imitated and exported.

This warning call derives from the inability to define what is, in fact, 'America'. We have learned so far that 'America' can be seen more as a vision than as an accomplished project, that it has to protect itself from its own completion because only on this condition can it act on behalf of its futurity, which does not belong to the domain of simply what is to come but to what is to be undone. Despite its economic, military,

and technological advancement, America has to rediscover its 'savageness', or the 'Indian', which is a subversive force dismantling and deconstructing the sphere of political and social stability preventing us from taking it at its face value. But also, we should note, that Lawrence and Cummings offer a new interpretation of the human individual subject, a new version of the famous Emersonian principle of self-reliance. The British poet clearly expounds the centrality of the individual subject for the future of America; he speaks about 'a speck, a germ of American future in the heart of every intelligent American' (Lawrence, 1972: 775). But this subject is already being eaten out by a germ that is nourishing him/her: the subject grows only on the condition that it ceases to be self-enclosed, that it is not a 'hundred-per-cent American', i.e., that it be open to the 'savage', or 'love', or thoughtful engagement in the undreaming of a dream. Thus, the community, as Roberto Esposito perceptively notices, 'isn't joined to an addition but to a subtraction of subjectivity', meaning that 'its members are no longer identical with themselves but are constitutively exposed to a propensity that forces them to open their own individual boundaries in order to appear as what is "outside" themselves' (Esposito, 2010: 138). As Esposito professes in the same passage, this also implies a refutation of the 'sameness' which, as Cummings argued, is one of the principal features of the deformed life of 'America', as a certain type of dominating sovereignty: 'If the subject of community is no longer the "same", it will by necessity be an "other"; not another subject but a chain of alterations that cannot ever be fixed in a new identity' (Esposito, 2010: 138).

What is at stake is not an assent towards 'America' but a thoughtful dissent, not acquiescence (D.H. Lawrence's term) but defiance, if not disobedience, towards 'America'. A certain retraction, hesitation, and reservation must be positions taken towards 'America' not by its European or Asian partners but by America itself. This is a Derridean calculation concerning America energized by 'reservations about its internal and foreign policies, about its jealously guarded sovereignty and its apparent disdain for international law and institutions, reservation about America that, as Peggy Kamuf so aptly puts it [...] has become

but “the effective or practical name for the theological-political myth we call sovereignty” (Naas, 2008: 109).

In the concepts developed by Jeffers in the long years of the Second World War, we could say that what America needs to do is to rediscover its tragic mission, or, perhaps more accurately, to conceive of its mission as a disclosure of the tragic which in the contemporary world has been replaced by the ‘pitiful’. In another of his suppressed poems, Robinson Jeffers maintains that the sense of the tragic consists in being able to recognize the ruination of our plans not only as an effect of the processes of human history (like a lost war, for instance) but as an intervention of a force that collapses all human planning and translates human actions from the orderly to the chaotic and fortuitous. The tragic necessarily exposes man to Fate and therefore to the incumbent repulse of ambitions and unavoidable defeat. Hence, the politics of tragedy is an anti-politics: it aims and feeds off failure not success, and its war cry is not ‘glory to the victorious’ but ‘glory to the vanquished’, *Vae Victis* or *Weh den Geistigen*. This is how Jeffers speaks about it in his 1943 poem ‘Tragedy Has Obligations’: ‘This is the essence of tragedy, / To have meant well and made woe, and watch Fate, / All stone, approach’ (Jeffers, 1977: 158). The only success worthy of its name is then a particular manner of being linked with the world. ‘Obligations’ that form the heart of the tragic describe a special binding or, rather, bonding of man and the world, a connection in which man is not a superior power but recedes towards the background so that domination is replaced by togetherness that implies not only a belonging but also caring. We need to unseal the sense of the tragic so as to be bound together with the world again but also to feel obliged (in the meaning of solicitude and gratefulness) and obligated (that is bound to feel responsibility) to it.

The logic of obligation undermines everything that has been constructed and supported by the machinery of the state and the political. Obligation is an earthquake that destabilizes such systems, ends them, without however terminating them; i.e., it ‘ends’ in the sense of radical interrogation after which nothing is the same, whereas it is precisely the ‘same’ that the state and its machinery want to proliferate and defend at all

costs. But it also ‘ends’ in yet another important way: it brings the human with all the luggage of culture, which over centuries was giving in to the machinery and the mechanical, to the very edge where it has to face what defies and obliterates its schemes and structures. The world as we know it disappears not because we have been forgetful about it but just the opposite—because we have discovered our obligations to it. In one of his late texts, Derrida writes:

As soon as I am obliged, from the instant when I am obliged to *you*, owe it *to myself* to carry *you*, as soon as I speak to you and am responsible for you, or before you, there can no longer, essentially, be any world. There is no longer any world to support us, to serve as mediation, ground, earth, foundation, or alibi. Perhaps there is no longer anything but the abyssal altitude of the sky. I am alone in the world there where there is no longer any world. (Derrida, 2005: 158)

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This kind of ‘ending’ certainly bespeaks the end of a certain predetermined identity, always founded upon the stability of tradition, heritage, and law, that guards them against incursions of others, of ‘barbarians’, who are considered to be a deadly threat to the order of the world. The ending in question, the ending of a life that is predictable in its universalizing repetitiveness and summarizes its public aspect in such symbols meant to dogmatically unite all who believe in this particular line of life as, for instance, the flag, is the end of the continent. What happens in such a liminal space, littoral range of continent’s end, is a sudden estrangement of culture from itself, an opening in which a culture begins to seriously interrogate its own identity and priorities. This is a moment when members of a given culture begin to have doubts when it comes to describing themselves as a ‘we’ that is not only different from others but also marked with an indelible stigma of superiority. ‘We’, the ‘we’ that sounds so grand and powerful in the pronouncements and professions of the political world, the ‘we’ that sees itself embedded in the common history, now experiences a bereavement: its history, established history dictating to the ‘we’ its line of life, is effaced, and its script so well-wrought in the memory of the nation becomes obliterated. The history as a process of changes and events is still there, but it has lost its readability,

rubbed it off, and become a cryptic code that cannot be gathered in any central myth. This is what happens in Jasper Johns's famous 1955 painting *The White Flag*, in which the contours of the American symbol are blurred, colors are removed, and exact stories of patriotic feats implied by the rich iconography associated with the flag have been replaced by the illegible excerpts from newspapers and magazines. In a stronger version of the same process, a culture undergoes what we may describe as the Gulliver effect: not only is a given culture diminished, but it is emptied of its glorious content, if not openly ridiculed. Robinson Jeffers makes such a Swiftian maneuver in one his suppressed poems: 'It is quite natural the two-footed beast / That inflicts terror, the cage, enslavement, torment and death on all other animals / Should eat the dough that he mixes and drink the death-cup' (Jeffers, 1977: 136).

To be itself, a culture must 'lose' itself, must see itself as an unfulfilled project, as a promise that has to remain open and vacant and therefore cannot defend itself because, in fact, there is nothing to defend. America thought of this way would then remain a messianic blueprint, the city upon a hill that John Winthrop sermonized about in the middle of the Atlantic in 1630. But the point of such projects is that, if they want to maintain their energy, they must remain a promise, a vision, a prophecy, a poetic design and effort. The ominous fate of America was that at one point it started to believe that the vision has come true, that the city has been built upon a hill for everyone to follow; then followers had to become qualified, approved of, in order to be admitted inside, and those rejected were considered barbarians besieging the town. In 1944, Robinson Jeffers prophetically wrote about it in the following way: 'We have enjoyed fine dreams; we have dreamed of unifying the world; we are unifying it—against us' (Jeffers, 1977: 132). In the same poem, he outlines the evolution of America, which from the city upon a hill has become 'Fortress America' which 'may yet for a long time stand, between the east and the west, like Byzantium' (Jeffers, 1977: 132).

If America, or any other state for that matter, wants to redeem itself, it must disown, disinherit itself without rejecting its own heritage. As Jacques Derrida puts it:

What is proper to a culture is not to be identical to itself. Not to not have an identity, but not to be able to identify itself, to be able to say 'me' or 'we'; to be able to take the form of a subject only in the non-identity to itself or, if you prefer, only in the difference with itself. There is no culture or cultural identity without this difference with itself. (Derrida, 1992: 9)

D.H. Lawrence sounds this warning in yet another way: Americans are, in fact, 'Americans' only to the degree to which they 1) realize that they are not original dwellers and thus have been already received in the land they claim theirs by somebody else who preceded them there, and 2) they are 'Americans' only when they refrain from being 'one hundred-per-cent Americans'. The Americans will turn out worthy of this name only on condition they recognize the fact that their line of life has been preceded by other lines and thus is founded upon something older and more savage than 'America'. Here is D.H. Lawrence again: 'It is your test, Americans. / Can you leave the remnants of the old race on their ground, / To live their own life, fulfil their own ends in their own way?' (Lawrence, 1972: 779).

The very choice of the word 'test' is meaningful with its inherent skeptical questioning of America as *fait accompli*, an already fulfilled project outlined and accomplished by the 'hundred-per-cent Americans'. If we speak of a 'test', we move into the domain of conditionality, of a reality that is to come, a certain, or rather uncertain, futurity which opens in front of us. Nothing could be further from what Theodore Roosevelt professed in 1894 as the doctrine of 'true Americanism', which eulogizes those 'who have thought and worked, and conquered, and lived, and died, purely as Americans' (Roosevelt, 1926: 207–15). One can easily point out that Roosevelt's 'America' is a jealous and despotic monster founded upon the reenactment of the originary sacrifice: not only has one to become 'purely American' ('We must Americanize them [newcomers] in every way' [Roosevelt, 1926: 201]), but one must apostatize from one's own traditions (supposedly those being not 'one hundred-per-cent' traditions)

to assume, more than just passively 'assume'—to wholeheartedly, unreservedly, un skeptically, uncritically welcome what is 'America'. Those coming over to America are not entering a domain of debate and interrogation, but just the opposite—they step upon the land that has already resolved the question of its identity and future. Roosevelt decisively and authoritatively claims that, unlike other countries such as those 'stretching from the Rio Grande to Cape Horn', America has resolved the problem of its national identity (Roosevelt, 1926: 209). As he says, 'politically this question of American nationality has been settled once and for all' (Roosevelt, 1926: 209). Hence, it is only natural that the lot of newcomers, according to Roosevelt, depends upon whether or not 'they throw themselves heartily into our national life, cease to be European, and become Americans like the rest of us' (Roosevelt, 1926: 213). 'America' is then a place of the most general but, at the same time, most superficial metanoia; a territory where a tergiversation of one's loyalties takes place, where one relinquishes once and for all one's previous line of life. But, as we have just said, this apostasy is both radical and guarded by serious sanctions ('whoever does not so believe has no business to bear the name at all, and if he comes from Europe, the sooner he goes back there the better' [Roosevelt, 1926: 213] and superficial; it is based on the total atrophy and blindness to the question of 'what is', for which Jan Patočka excavated a term from Plato: the care of the soul.

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You become an American by the exclusion and erasure of the traces of everything that is not 'America', and it is difficult not to notice that Roosevelt accentuates that this retraction and cultural apostasy ought to take place at the very moment you enter America. It's the 'shores' which constitute natural *cordonne sanitaire* sorting out Americans from those who are not worthy of the name. The fortress America now obtains its variable; a harbor America, a port of call one where strict procedures hold. 'Newcomers to our shores' (Roosevelt's phrase) are received hospitably only on condition of relinquishing who they have been so far: 'We must Americanize them in every way, in speech, in political ideas and principles, and in their way of looking at the relations between Church and State' (Roosevelt, 1926:

211). Only then can they truly enter the interior of the continent. America is an accomplished project, those who call themselves 'Americans' must be such exclusively 'one hundred-per-cent', because, as Roosevelt maintains categorically, 'We welcome the German or the Irishman who becomes an American. We have no use for the German or Irishman who remains such' (Roosevelt, 1926: 211). Thus, if you come to America, you have to do this; in fact, you CAN do it only already as an American, an individual who comes to American shores and is allowed inside America is an American part of a German, Irish, Polish subject. The shore, the edge of the continent, is not a place of welcome but of an ordeal, a sacrifice, an expropriation. America can be a gain but only on condition of a tremendous loss. The human is overcome by being subjected to the rules that pertain to the domain of the 'American'. The most characteristic feature of this realm is that within it a man/woman must sever his/her relationship with other sectors of the world, so that in fact the 'world' gets narrowed down and limited to one and only sphere called 'America'. As Roosevelt pontificates, 'We have no room for any people who do not act and vote simply as Americans' (Roosevelt, 1926: 212). It is remarkable how the general line of life ('act') becomes one with a certain political choice; acting and voting are one because, having reached the American shore, you not only have relinquished your old line of life but also immediately endorsed the whole new system. If you refrain from doing this, you become 'nothing at all' (Roosevelt, 1926: 214). 'America' is then a positively defined, accomplished 'something' outside which you position yourself either as a hopelessly belated member of the 'Old World' or just plain 'nothing'. As Roosevelt constantly reiterates, 'Above all, the immigrant must learn to talk and think and *be* United States' (Roosevelt, 1926: 215). Hence, he continues, Americans are those 'who have nevertheless thought and worked, and conquered, and lived, and died, purely as Americans' (Roosevelt, 1926: 211).

Let us rehearse the sentence again: Americans are those 'who have nevertheless thought and worked, and conquered, and lived, and died, purely as Americans'. It announces that Americans will connect themselves with the world in a way different from the traditions of the Old World. The human individual

is linked with reality through the agency of the apparatus called the United States. He/she will work and think and dictate his/her will to the other ('conquer') as the 'American'; what is more, even life itself is not just that of a man but of the 'American'. Thus, man's life is never 'naked' because it is always, already at the threshold of America, at the shores of America, be they Ellis Island or Kennedy Airport, 'dressed' in the gear of the American line of life. The Biblical reference is never far away: at the shores of America, at the edges of the continent, man and woman, the newcomers to the New World, must lose their nakedness, and acquire a new shining dress, thinking with shame of their previous nudity. What happens at the shore of America is a reiteration, a reenactment of the transfiguration scene described by Mark in the ninth chapter of his Gospel. Christ is transfigured in front of the three apostles, three witnesses, three officials of the world, and 'his raiment became shining, exceeding white as snow; so as no fuller on earth can white them'. Peter's response to Christ 'it is good to be here' is precisely what Roosevelt wants to generate first from the officials receiving the newcomers ('We freely extend the hand of welcome and of good-fellowship to every man' [Roosevelt, 1926: 214]) and then from immigrants themselves ('to bear then name of American is to bear the most honourable of titles' [Roosevelt, 1926: 213]).

Herbert George Wells produces an ironic version of such a transfiguration in his book of reflections on America, titled adequately *The Future in America*. Having commented upon the tension between the spirit of relentless 'commercial competition' that effectuates 'certain emptiness in the resulting wealthy' and the 'dim, large movement of thought towards a change of national method', Wells insistently emphasizes the loss of the native garment, the original 'nakedness' of clothes which somewhat were extensions of the skin (Wells, 1907: 145). Upon arriving on American shores, the 'incomer drops into American clothes, and then he does not catch the careless eye' (Wells, 1907: 149). The immigrant, 'very respectful, very polite', has traded 'some picturesque east-European garb' for 'cheap American clothes, resorted to what naturalists call 'protective mimicry', even perhaps acquired a collar' (Wells, 1907: 149).

The heavy-handed and ominous ambiguity of the very word 'collar' testifies that Wells is referring not only to the sartorial realm but is also making a sociopolitical comment.

One could argue that America never paid much attention to Plato's indictment that what constitutes human being is the care of the soul, the denial of which was a natural consequence of the conviction that 'American' always dominates man. We have seen that 'America' offers life but only on the condition that you relinquish yourself. You enter 'America' not as yourself but already as an 'American'. Thus you become a citizen having previously lost your personal past. Rodolphe Gasché maintains that man and the human soul are synonyms, and it is due to this synonymity that we can know 'about the whole of the world and of life' and consequently that 'the soul, if cared for, is capable of beholding the world in its totality' (Gasché, 2009: 234). If this is the case, then America's accent upon 'Americanism', upon living and dying 'purely as Americans', contests these suppositions. The care for the soul has been replaced by the care for the American, which is, as we already know, 'the most honourable of titles'. If life is conditioned by and depends upon the care for the soul, then all reservations concerning this, all denials and deprecations of this truth, must mean, if not a weakening of life itself, then at least its considerable distortion. Life is now defined not according to the logic of the care for the soul but according to the demands of the laws that determine, protect, and promote the American line of life. Roosevelt speaks about excommunicating anarchy and languages other than English ('We believe that English, and no other language, is that in which all the school exercises should be conducted' [Roosevelt, 1926: 212]) and prohibitions (a ban on anarchy as 'incompatible' with American life [Roosevelt, 1926: 214]). Today America develops biometric means of control and has grown into a gigantic, impersonal machine that wants to know literally everything about everybody. The care of the soul has been supplanted by the care for the data.

Giorgio Agamben speaks about 'the fleeting and almost insolent pleasure of being recognized by a machine without the burden of emotional implications that are inseparable from recognition by another human being', which seems to be a contemporary

equivalent of the joy that Roosevelt expresses over newcomers to the American shores who decide to relinquish their own culture, language, and person (Agamben, 2011: 53). D.H. Lawrence's analysis of Americans emphasizes two crucial elements. First, it attacks and tries to undo the principle of the obligatory transfiguration on behalf of the peculiarity of the exceptional which has veered off the main line of life. Talking about the American Indian, Lawrence maintains that, 'He is a savage with his own peculiar consciousness, his own peculiar customs and observations' (Lawrence, 1972: 776). To save its futurity from a mere, neutral, and empty 'future', America needs to respect the 'peculiar', i.e., it has to demonstrate restraint in its mission as the city upon a hill. Second, and perhaps more importantly, Lawrence's analysis urges America to wield its tremendous power with care and leniency. The futurity of America depends upon the degree to which it shows moderation in using its power, as the true manifestation of power consists in its mitigation. If America has a mission to accomplish, its gist is a powerful mitigation of power. Here is Lawrence again: 'Because he is so *absolutely* in your power, that, / before God, you must be careful' (Lawrence, 1972: 776). The mission of America is to hold back *vis-à-vis* the presence of the savage, and, let us say it openly, America has failed in this mission. As Michel Serres suggests, 'The hominid must learn to hold back, must learn modesty and shame; and his language must learn understatement; his science, reserve' (Serres, 1997: 117). This evolves into a kind of ethics of restraint and holding back, which is an ethics of new gentleness:

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The gentle man holds back. He reserves some strength to retain his strength, refuses in himself and around him the brute power that is propagated. The sage thus disobeys the single law of expansion, does not always persevere in his being and thinks that elevating his own conduct to a universal law is the definition of evil as much as madness. (Serres, 1997: 119)

With this ethics of new gentleness that wants to care for the savage and that is founded upon the principle of holding back, of the un-powered power, we are returning to the logic of the conditional we have spoken about before. The 'if' structure announces a new kind of politics that wants to think democracy

and sovereignty less in terms of power and more as a certain suspension of power. This is the opposite of what, according to Roosevelt, was taking place on the shores of America: what is to be relinquished now is not the particular which gives in to the force of the one general line of life, but just the opposite—it is the apparatus that has construed and monitored this line of life that has to be suspended. Thus, if Roosevelt posits as one of the fundamental conditions of being an American a denial of ‘anarchy’, it is precisely a ‘beautiful anarchist’ whom is welcomed by e. e. cummings (cummings, 1991: 677). In his 1958 collection, he envisages the hope of and for America in a way that anticipates by at least a quarter of a century Peter Sloterdijk’s practice of the cynical reason. Hence on the one hand we have Roosevelt’s true Americanism caricatured by cummings as ‘great pink / superme / diocr i/ ty of / a hyperhypocritical D / mocrac (sing / down with the fascist beast /boom / boom)’ (cummings, 1991: 635); on the other, there stands, or rather incessantly changes, his position in a peculiar and scandalous movement of ‘swimfloatdrifting’, someone whose position and character is impossible to name unequivocally, a ‘trickstervillain / raucous rogue & / vivid Voltaire / you beautiful anarchist / (i salute thee’ (cummings, 1991: 677).

One should never let go unnoticed cummings’s spelling and typographical arrangements, which allow him to unobservedly shuttle from the level of the individual to the level of the public. Having launched his vitriolic attack on American democracy, as a kind of populist ‘democrac(sing down)’, he locates its sources in the egotistic turn that has dominated the life of the human individual. The mediocrity of the mass society is a ‘superME-diocrity’; that is, the public is being shaped by the excessive desires and ambitions of the ego. The ‘subhuman superstate’ (of which we have read in another poem) takes its beginnings in the petrifications and ossifications of the superME. Sub-human super-state serving the interests of super-me would be cummings’s formula for ‘America’ with its system construed of everything which ‘dull all regular righteous comfortable’, a bitter caricature of Roosevelt’s ‘true Americanism’ (1991: 677).

Now the shores of America begin to mean something else. The general line of life called 'true Americanism' ceases to suppress the particular on behalf of one history and one list of virtues. This systematically arranged world called 'America' now is looked upon as if from the edge of yet another continent. America has reached another shore and now its major constitutive elements such as state, patriotism, law, freedom are placed in quotation marks. Hence cummings writes 'quote citizens unquote', 'quote state unquote', and the quotation marks perform a double function: they introduce a distance between ourselves and the notions they surround, the distance which is a space where the 'thief crook cynic' mind of the 'trickstervillain' works and where the concepts subjected to his operations are getting seriously scrutinized and critically worked upon, not merely accepted, as Roosevelt demanded in his creed of true Americanism. When Roosevelt requires, without reservations and provisos, a total apostasis from one's previous identity and acceptance of the new one which is very precisely defined and measured, what happens at these other shores that America has reached, the shores of late- or post-modernity, is the dilution of such identity. For cummings the process of withdrawal of the rigorously determined code of identification implies two movements. First is the recognition and bringing to the center of attention life itself, existence which does not privilege the human, neither does it respect human measures of time or rational explanations of what life is. In fine, what must emerge is life before it was provided with qualifications produced by the human discourse. Thus, we have to become aware of history not as a mere sequence of events shaping the horizon of human existence, but we have to experience 'the gay / great happening illimitably earth' (cummings, 1991: 663). The second movement takes its energy from this illimitably happening earth where the 'illimitably' marks reservations concerning the possibilities of finding expressions for this kind of 'happening' in the human discourse and thinking. cummings's neologism 'illimitably' suggests that we must both try to undertake the effort of naming phenomena of the happening earth and recognize a failure of such an undertaking. As cummings says in another text, this is 'the glow / of a joy which wasn't

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and isn't and won't be words' (cumplings, 1991: 631). This leads to, as we have already seen, a necessary confusion of grammar and its categories and, ultimately, to the undermining of the very foundations of the human subjecthood. It is important to note this mutual entanglement of the human subject and language: cumplings's radicalism in disfiguring and distorting the English grammar certainly is the manner in which his American subject voices his or her uneasiness *vis-à-vis* the illimitably happening earth. If we remember Roosevelt's insistence upon English (supposedly grammatically correct English) as the only linguistic means that ought to be present in American society and education, we will plainly see the difference between the events happening on the American shores. Roosevelt's empowered state becomes the state in quotation marks, and the subjecthood upon whose strictly American contours Roosevelt is so insistent now melts, thus also raising doubts as to the character of American democracy. Let us look at an interesting sequence from e. e. cumplings's *Xaipe* collection: 'are flowers neither why nor how / when is now and which is Who / and i am you are i am we / (pretty twinkle merry bells) / Someone has been born / everyone is noone' (cumplings, 1991: 630). The human subject loses its strongly separate human identity: born as 'someone', he/she enters the life of 'flowers', the effect strengthened by the first line of the poem, which reads 'blossoming are people' (cumplings, 1991: 630). At the same time, we obtain here a critique of the democratic order of *hoi polloi*, as the 'everyone' of the constructed political order becomes 'no one', and the social organization empties itself out to be no more than a network of anonymous, disposable numerical units.

'America' approaches then a condition which Bataille maps out for the future society, a condition certainly utopian, the force of which consists in dislocating the society from the anthropocentric and anthropomorphic pattern that has ultimately dominated its structures. Norman O. Brown in the early 1990s turned towards Bataille to revive the spirit of American politics as 'that utopian promise to replace the 'government of men' with the 'government of things' (Brown, 1991: 192). This has nothing to do with narrowly understood environmental concerns

or the ideology of returning to Nature ('It cannot be the obsolete Nature worship that conservationism is vainly trying to resuscitate' (Brown, 1991: 197); it has all to do with a construction of the society which is profoundly related to life, of which it is an expression. The society as life embodied whose aim can be achieved only when the human subject holds back his rights as the unique and exceptional entity, precisely becoming 'a' subject rather than 'the' subject. Such a move would be tantamount to erasing the quotation marks surrounding and conventionalizing such notions, as cummings has demonstrated, as 'state'. What is at stake is whether or not we can 'grasp the full reality of an embodied life of polymorphous bodily communications, to contradict the spectral world of entertainment, and narcissistic dreams of pleasure without pain' (Brown, 1991: 193). We can look at Lawrence's test for America and cummings's postulates of undoing life, which is, in fact, mere 'undying' as an attempt at construing one body, a Spinozistic life in which 'there is no privileging of the human form or the human species as microcosm' (Brown, 1991: 135). In such polymorphous life there is nothing that could be 'one hundred-per-cent'. Hence, when Lawrence sets his test for Americans in which he wants them, the most civilized and technologically advanced people, to understand the 'savage' and then to admit that they are only guests in a country which is not their 'own' at all, he in fact asks them whether or not they are able to accept life rather than 'undying'. This in turn undermines major principles of the socioeconomic-political order. Such embodied life, as Brown says, 'is not hierarchically organized by functional subordination of part to a principal part, the representative part, the "head" of the body. Consequently, his [Spinoza's] political theory of collective participation in one body has nothing to do with medieval (or Hobbesian) notions of unification through sovereign representative; or with *corpus Christi*, in which Christ is the head of the Church' (Brown, 1991: 133). From this perspective, America presents its shores as the place where Hobbes gives way to Spinoza. What used to pave the way for us to become members of a gigantic machinery of the state and its agencies now withdraws before the power of human individuals communicating among themselves and bracketing

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productions of official ideologies, where the national colors fade till we all gather under the white flag. America welcomes not by binding newcomers to the unconditional loyalty to the flag ('He must revere only our flag; not only must it come first, but no other flag should even come second' [Roosevelt, 1926: 215]) but by opening our eyes so that we see all national loyalties take their beginning in the life embodied, in the life of (as Velvet Underground used to sing) 'white light, white heat'. Jasper Johns's white flag does not try to communicate anything else. This is how Norman O. Brown summarizes this Spinozistic transformation taking place on the edge of the continent: 'it can be seen as setting the historical agenda for us today: to rectify the flaw in modernity; to arrive at one world; to reorganize the gigantic material process of intercommunication released by modernity into a coherent unity; call it Love's Body' (Brown, 1991: 128).

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