

A PAIXÃO SEGUNDO G.H.
Clarice Lispector

1.

«§83. Manners are characteristic edges.»

— FRIEDRICH SCHLEGEL. *PHILOSOPHICAL FRAGMENTS* (1797)

«You must accept the faults in your own style.
Almost like the blemishes in your own face.»

— WITTGENSTEIN. *CULTURE AND VALUE* (1948) MS 137 106b: 23.11.1948

«*This book is written for such men as are in sympathy with its spirit. (...) I would like to say ‘This book is written to the glory of God’, but nowadays that would be chicanery, that is, it would not be rightly understood. It means the book is written in good will, and in so far as it is not so written, but out of vanity, etc., the author would wish to see it condemned. He cannot free it of these impurities further than he himself is free of them.*»

— WITTGENSTEIN. PREFACE TO *PHILOSOPHICAL REMARKS* (1930).

XV

*As quatro canções que seguem
Separam-se de tudo o que eu penso,
Mentem a tudo o que eu sinto,
São do contrário do que eu sou...*

*Escrevi-as estando doente
E por isso elas são naturais
E concordam com aquilo que sinto,
Concordam com aquilo com que não concordam...
Estando doente devo pensar o contrário
Do que penso quando estou são.
(Senão não estaria doente),
Devo sentir o contrário do que sinto
Quando sou eu na saúde,
Devo mentir à minha natureza
De criatura que sente de certa maneira...
Devo ser todo doente — ideias e tudo.
Quando estou doente, não estou doente para outra coisa.*

*Por isso essas canções que me renegam
Não são capazes de me renegar
E são a paisagem da minha alma de noite,
A mesma ao contrário...*

A diferença substancial entre o paganismo e os sistemas índios e cristista repercute-se, manifesta-se, como na metafísica e na ética, na estética também.

Um sistema religioso, como o cristista, em que tomam /sobrado/ relevo os sentimentos íntimos de cada indivíduo, em que o interesse do espírito se concentra em seus próprios movimentos, não devia ter outra acção estética — pelo menos fundamentalmente — *que não fosse a da expressão dos sentimentos íntimos, que não fosse a confissão da alma. O artista cristão busca, acima de tudo, exprimir o que sente. Nisto reside a substância da sua doutrina estética.* Ela sofreu, é certo, em certos períodos, e mormente em o chamado Renascença, um correctivo pagão. Mas a pura estética cristista não é a estética pagã, cujo sentido em breve veremos; é a da *expressão*, substancialmente.



24:12 to 26:40

“Harry,” said Basil Hallward, looking him straight in the face, “every portrait that is painted with feeling is a portrait of the artist, not of the sitter. The sitter is merely the accident, the occasion. *It is not he who is revealed by the painter; it is rather the painter who, on the coloured canvas, reveals himself.* The reason I will not exhibit this picture is that I am afraid that I have shown in it the secret of my own soul.”

— OSCAR WILDE. *THE PICTURE OF DORIAN GRAY*, CHAPTER I.

A perda da «montagem humana» *vs*
a construção de uma individualidade

“this relationship between writing and death is also manifested in the effacement of the writing subject’s individual characteristics. Using all the contrivances that he sets up between himself and what he writes, *the writing subject cancels out the signs of his particular individuality. As a result, the mark of the writer is reduced to nothing more than the singularity of his absence.*”

— MICHEL FOUCAULT. *WHAT IS AN AUTHOR?* (1969)

A forma enquanto projecto narcísico, sustentando no primado político da soberania (da liberdade individual) *vs* a perda da, ou a resistência à, forma individual

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«E que eu tenha a grande coragem de
resistir à tentação de inventar uma forma.»

— Lispector. *A Paixão Segundo G.H.*

NE: What is the intention of the work, for *Black and Blur* in relationship to *Stolen Life* and *The Universal Machine*?

FM: There's a project that I want to be a part of that is structured in such a way that it puts one in a position of having to call into question the very terms within which I would express that desire. See what I mean? Like *I* and *part*, all of those things. And I'm totally committed to trying my best to think as rigorously as possible, in a way that does call those terms into question; but that doesn't deviate from the depth and extension of the project. But just talking amongst ourselves, what I would say is, yeah, there's a project, it's a social project, it's the project of what Amiri Baraka used to call "social development." And that project is an abolitionist project. It's a project that isn't just engaged in the abolition of slavery, which is still an ongoing project, of which the abolition of prisons is an extension.

It's not just the abolition of slavery, it's also in a certain sense the abolition of freedom, insofar as freedom and slavery are so bound up with one another. Insofar as the abjection of the figure of the slave is inseparable from the exaltation of the figure of the master, or the figure of sovereignty. So, it's an abolition of sovereignty. It's an abolition of a certain horrible and brutal individuated notion of freedom. And it's an abolition of the world that is constructed on that conceptual framework. And if you want to put it in positive rather than negative terms, then it is the project of saving the earth.

Or, as the great poet Ed Roberson would say, "the project of seeing the Earth before the end of the world."

2.

«E que eu tenha a grande coragem de
resistir à tentação de inventar uma forma.»

— Lispector. *A Paixão Segundo G.H.*

pp. 9-10:

Perda da «*minha* montagem humana» enquanto perda de uma «terceira perna», tripé que estabiliza mas impeditivo de uma certa autenticidade (uma deslocação de um eu falsificado para um eu que já não sabe o que é um eu).

Perda que não acontece sem uma indefinição de género e sem oscilações de pessoa gramatical; entrega à opacidade (à «desorientação») como uma forma de coragem.

2.1

Montagem humana enquanto «gaiola»:
(Kafka, Nabokov, Baldwin, Blanchot —
a família intelectual de Lispector).

«[Para] os seres humanos, a vida natural é uma vida humana. Mas os homens nem sempre o percebem. Recusam-se a percebê-lo [por medo da liberdade e da responsabilidade] ... preferem esconder-se atrás das grades da prisão que constroem em torno de si mesmos. (...) só se pode construir sistemas que são gaiolas para si mesmo. Os filósofos não passam de Papagenos vestidos de cores garridas com suas próprias diferentes gaiolas.»

— JANOUCH, CONVERSAS COM FRANZ KAFKA

«The human mind is a box with no tangible lid, sides, or bottom, and still it is a box, and there is no earthly method of getting out of it and remaining in it at the same time.»

— NABOKOV, *SPEAK, THINK, WRITE* (p.xxvi)

«Tanto quanto me lembro, o calafrio inicial de inspiração foi de certo modo provocado pela história que um jornal publicou acerca de um macaco do Jardin des Plantes que, após meses de treino por um cientista, foi autor do primeiro desenho jamais feito por um animal: o esboço que representava as grades da jaula do pobre bicho.»

— NABOKOV s/ *LOLITA* (353-354).

«Trata-se de um fenómeno mais oculto do que no tempo da escravidão, mas nem por isso menos implacável. Hoje, como então, encontramos-nos presos, primeiro exteriormente, depois no íntimo, pela natureza da nossa categorização. E a fuga não se alcança através de uma amarga indignação contra esta armadilha; é como se este mesmo esforço fosse o único movimento necessário para se cair nela. É verdade que é dentro dessa gaiola de realidade que nos foi legada à nascença que adquirimos a nossa forma; e, no entanto, é precisamente através da nossa dependência desta realidade que somos mais interminavelmente traídos. Mantém-se a sociedade unida pela nossa necessidade» (...)

(...) «mantemo-la unida através da lenda, do mito, da coerção, temendo que sem ela sejamos atirados para o vazio, dentro do qual, tal como a terra antes de a Palavra ser pronunciada, se escondem os alicerces da própria sociedade. A sociedade tem a função de nos proteger deste vazio que somos nós próprios; mas é apenas este vazio — o nosso eu desconhecido a exigir para sempre um novo acto de criação — que nos pode salvar ‘do mal que há no mundo’. É por isto que lutamos incessantemente, com o mesmo movimento e ao mesmo tempo, mas é também disto que queremos incessantemente escapar.»

— JAMES BALDWIN, O ROMANCE DE PROTESTO DE TODOS (43).

(...) «Foi assim que a gaiola nos traiu a todos (...) A tragédia de Bigger [protagonista de *Native Son*, de Richard Wright, é] o facto de ter aceiteado uma teologia que lhe nega a vida, de admitir a possibilidade de ser sub-humano e de se sentir obrigado a lutar pela sua humanidade segundo os critérios brutais que lhe foram legados à nascença. Mas a nossa humanidade é o nosso fardo, a nossa vida; não precisamos de lutar por ela; precisamos apenas de fazer o que é infinitamente mais difícil, aceitá-la. O fracasso do romance de protesto reside na sua rejeição da vida, do ser humano, da negação da sua beleza, do seu pavor, do seu poder, na sua insistência em que apenas a sua categorização é real e não se pode transcender.»

— JAMES BALDWIN, O ROMANCE DE PROTESTO DE TODOS (45-46).

Maurice Blanchot, ‘Kafka e a exigência da obra’
(ler para a última aula)

às leis próprias do seu movimento, mais o seu caminho ascende, alegremente, escapando a todos os cálculos" (27 de janeiro de 1922). Aqui, a literatura anuncia-se como o poder que emancipa, a força que afasta a opressão do mundo, esse mundo "onde todas as coisas sentem a garganta apertada", é a passagem libertadora do "Eu" ao "Ele", da auto-observação que foi o tormento de Kafka para uma observação mais alta, elevando-se acima de uma realidade mortal, na direção do outro mundo, o da liberdade.

Por que a arte é, não é justificada

Por que essa confiança? Pode-se perguntar. E pode-se responder pensando que Kafka pertence a uma tradição em que o que existe de mais elevado se exprime num livro que é escritura por excelência,⁵ tradição em que experiências de êxtase foram conduzidas a partir da combinação e manipulação de letras, em que se diz que o mundo das letras, as do alfabeto, é o verdadeiro mundo da beatitude.⁶ Escrever é conjurar os espíritos, é talvez libertá-los contra nós, mas esse perigo pertence à própria essência do poder que liberta.⁷

Entretanto Kafka não era um espírito "supersticioso", havia nele uma lucidez fria que o fazia dizer a Brod, ao sair de celebrações hassídicas: "Na verdade, é mais ou menos como

⁵ Kafka disse a Janouch que "a tarefa do poeta é uma tarefa profética: a palavra justa conduz; a palavra que não é justa seduz; não é por acaso que a Bíblia se chama Escritura".

⁶ Daí também a condenação implacável (que o atinge também a ele) por Kafka dos escritores judeus que se servem da língua alemã.

⁷ "Mas em que consiste o próprio fato de ser poeta? Esse ato de escrever é um dom, um dom silencioso e misterioso. Mas o seu preço? À noite, a resposta reflete sempre a meus olhos com uma nitidez ofuscante: é o salário recebido das potências diabólicas a que se serviu. Esse abandono às forças obscuras, esse desencadear de potências habitualmente mantidas sob controle, essas ligações opressivas e impuras, e tudo o mais que se passa nas profundezas, saber-se-á ainda algo a seu respeito, no alto, quando se escrevem histórias em plena luz, em pleno sol?... A superfície conservará disso algum vestígio? Talvez exista ainda uma outra maneira de escrever? Quanto a mim, só conheço esta, nessas noites em que a angústia me atormenta à beira do sono." (Citado por Brod.)

uma tribo negra, uma porção de superstições grosseiras."⁸ Portanto, não se deveria esperar meras explicações, talvez corretas, mas que, pelo menos, não nos deixam compreender por que, tão sensível ao extravio que cada uma de suas iniciativas constitui, Kafka abandona-se com tanta fé a esse erro essencial que é a literatura. Sobre esse ponto, não seria suficiente recordar que, desde sua adolescência, sofreu a influência extraordinária de artistas como Goethe e Flaubert, que ele freqüentemente se dispunha a colocar acima de todos, porque ambos colocavam sua arte acima de tudo. Dessa concepção, Kafka, sem dúvida, nunca se separou interiormente de todo, mas se a paixão da arte foi desde o começo tão forte e pareceu-lhe por tanto tempo salutar, foi porque, desde o começo e por "culpa do pai", ele viu-se jogado fora do mundo, condenado a uma solidão da qual, portanto, não tinha que responsabilizar a literatura mas, antes, estar-lhe grato por ter iluminado essa solidão, por tê-la fecundado e propiciado uma abertura para um outro mundo.

Pode-se dizer que o seu debate com o pai voltou a lançar na sombra, para ele, a face negativa da experiência literária. Mesmo quando vê que o seu trabalho exige que ele se consuma, mesmo quando, mais gravemente, vê a oposição entre seu trabalho e seu casamento, Kafka não conclui, em absoluto, que existe no trabalho uma potência mortal, uma fala que pronuncia o "banimento" e condena ao deserto. Não o conclui porque, desde o início, o mundo perdeu-se para ele, a existência real foi-lhe retirada, ou nunca lhe foi dada, e quando fala de novo do seu exílio, da impossibilidade de se lhe furtar, dirá: "Tenho a impressão de não ter vindo aqui mas já, criança pequena, ter sido empurrado e depois preso com correntes lá embaixo" (24 de janeiro de 1922). A arte não lhe deu esse infortúnio, nem mesmo ajudou a isso mas, pelo contrário, esclareceu-o, foi "a consciência da infelicidade", a sua nova dimensão.

A arte é, em primeiro lugar, a consciência da infelicidade, não a sua compensação. O rigor de Kafka, sua fidelidade à exigência da obra, sua fidelidade à exigência do infortúnio, pouparam-lhe esse paraíso das ficções onde se comprazem tantos artistas fracos a quem a vida decepcionou. A arte não tem

⁸ Mas, subseqüentemente, Kafka parece ter-se tornado cada vez mais atento a essa forma de devoção. Dóra Dymant pertencia a "uma família judia hassídica respeitada". E Martin Buber talvez o tenha influenciado.

por objeto os devaneios nem as “construções”. Mas ele tampouco descreve a verdade: a verdade não tem que ser conhecida nem descrita, ela não pode sequer conhecer-se a si mesma, do mesmo modo que a salvação terrena exige ser cumprida, não interrogada nem figurada. Nesse sentido, não existe lugar algum para a arte: o monismo rigoroso exclui todos os ídolos. Mas, nesse mesmo sentido, se a arte não está justificada em geral, pelo menos está para Kafka, porquanto a arte está vinculada, precisamente como Kafka, ao que se situa “fora” do mundo e exprime a profundidade desse “fora” sem intimidade e sem repouso, o que surge quando, mesmo conosco, mesmo com a nossa morte, deixamos de ter quaisquer relações de possibilidade. A arte é a consciência de “esse infortúnio”. Descreve a situação daquele que se perdeu, que já não pode dizer “eu”, que no mesmo movimento perdeu o mundo, a verdade do mundo, que pertence ao exílio, a esse *tempo de desamparo* em que, como disse Hölderlin, os deuses já partiram ou ainda não chegaram. Isso não significa que a arte afirma um outro mundo, embora seja verdade que ela tem sua origem, não num outro mundo mas no outro de todo o mundo (é sobre este ponto que vemos — mais nas notas que traduzem sua experiência religiosa do que em sua obra — Kafka executar ou estar prestes a executar o salto que a arte não autoriza).⁹

Kafka oscila pateticamente. Ora parece disposto a fazer tudo para se criar uma permanência entre os homens, “cujo poder de atração é monstruoso”. Procura noivar, fazer jardinagem, exercitar-se em trabalhos manuais, pensa na Palestina, busca alojamento em Praga a fim de conquistar não só a solidão mas a independência de um homem maduro e vivo. Nesse plano, o debate com o pai é essencial e todas as notas novas do *Diário* o confirmam, mostram que Kafka nada dissimula do que a psicanálise poderia desvendar-lhe. A dependência dele em relação à família não só o tornou fraco, estranho às tarefas viris (como ele afirmaria), mas como essa dependência lhe causa horror, torna-lhe também insuportável todas as formas de dependência — e, para começar, o casamento, que lhe recorda

⁹ Kafka não deixa de denunciar o que há de tentador, de facilidade tentadora, na distinção excessivamente determinada desses dois mundos: “De ordinário, a divisão (desses dois mundos) parece-me excessivamente determinada, perigosa em sua determinação, triste e dominadora demais.” (30 de janeiro de 1922.)

com repugnância o de seus pais,¹⁰ a vida de família de que ele queria desligar-se mas na qual desejava também envolver-se, pois aí está o cumprimento da lei, a verdade, a do pai, que tanto o atrai quanto o repele, de sorte que “realmente mantenho-me de pé diante da minha família e, em seu círculo, ergo incessantemente facas para feri-la ao mesmo tempo que para defendê-la.” “Isso por uma parte.”

Mas, por outra parte, ele vê sempre mais, e a doença, naturalmente, ajuda-o a ver que pertence à outra margem, que, banido, não deve usar de astúcias com esse banimento nem permanecer passivo, como que esmagado contra as suas fronteiras, de olhos voltados para uma realidade de que se sente excluído e onde nem mesmo jamais se situou, porquanto ainda não nasceu. Essa nova perspectiva poderia ser somente a do desespero absoluto, a do niilismo que se lhe atribui com excessiva facilidade. Que o infortúnio irremediável seja o seu elemento, como negá-lo? É sua morada e seu “tempo”. Mas esse infortúnio nunca é sem esperança; essa esperança é apenas, com frequência, o tormento do desamparo, não o que dá a esperança mas o que impede que não se sacie no próprio desespero, o que faz com que, “condenado a acabar nele, esteja também condenado a defender-se dele até ao fim” e, talvez, então, com a promessa de inverter a condenação em liberdade. Nessa nova perspectiva, a do desamparo, o essencial é não se voltar na direção de Canaã. A migração tem por objetivo o deserto e é a aproximação do deserto que constitui agora a verdadeira Terra Prometida. “É para lá que me conduzes?” Sim, é para lá. Mas

¹⁰ Cumpre citar, pelo menos, esta passagem de um rascunho de carta para a sua noiva, onde ele define com extrema lucidez suas relações com a família: “Mas eu provenho de meus pais, estou ligado a eles, assim como às minhas irmãs, pelo sangue; na vida corrente e porque me devoto aos meus próprios objetivos, não o sinto; mas, no fundo, isso tem para mim mais valor do que lhe atribuo. Ora persigo isso também com o meu ódio: a vista do leito conjugal, das roupas de cama que serviram, das camisas de noite cuidadosamente estendidas, dão-me vontade de vomitar, reviram as minhas entranhas; é como se eu não tivesse nascido definitivamente, como se viesse uma e outra vez ao mundo fora desta vida obscura neste quarto escuro, como se precisasse sempre de buscar de novo a confirmação de mim próprio, como se estivesse, pelo menos numa certa medida, indissolivelmente ligado a essas coisas repugnantes; isso entrava ainda os meus pés que gostariam de correr, estes ainda estão metidos no informe caldo original.” (18 de outubro de 1916.)

onde é lá? Nunca está à vista, o deserto é ainda menos seguro que o mundo, nunca passa de ser tão-só a aproximação do deserto e, nesta terra de erro, nunca se está “aqui”, mas sempre “longe daqui”. Entretanto, nessa região onde faltam as condições para uma verdadeira permanência, onde tem que se viver numa separação incompreensível, numa exclusão da qual, de alguma forma, se está excluído como se está excluído de si mesmo, nessa região que é a do erro porque nada mais se faz senão errar sem fim, subsiste uma tensão, a própria possibilidade de errar, de ir até ao fim do erro, de se aproximar do seu limite, de transformar o que é um caminho sem objetivo na certeza de um objetivo sem caminho.

A postura fora do verdadeiro: o topógrafo

Sabemos que, dessa postura, a história do topógrafo representa-nos a imagem mais impressionante. Desde o começo, esse herói da obstinação inflexível é descrito como tendo renunciado para sempre ao seu mundo, à sua terra natal, à vida onde tem mulher e filhos. Desde o começo, ele está, portanto, fora do alcance da salvação, pertence ao exílio, esse lugar onde não só não está em sua casa mas está fora de si, no lado de fora que é uma região totalmente privada de intimidade, onde os seres parecem ausentes, onde tudo o que se crê aprender se esquivava à apreensão. A dificuldade trágica da iniciativa é que, nesse mundo da exclusão e da separação radical, tudo é falso e inautêntico desde que aí se pare, tudo falta desde que aí se busque apoio mas que, entretanto, o fundo dessa ausência é sempre dado de novo como uma presença indubitável, absoluta, e a palavra absoluta está aqui em seu lugar, que significa separado, como se a separação, experimentada em todo o seu rigor, pudesse inverter-se no absolutamente separado, o absolutamente absoluto.

Cumprir ser preciso: Kafka, espírito sempre justo e nada satisfeito com o dilema do tudo ou nada que ele, no entanto, concebe com maior intransigência do que qualquer outro, deixa pressentir que, nessa postura fora do verdadeiro, existem certas regras, talvez contraditórias e insustentáveis, mas que autorizam ainda uma espécie de possibilidade. A primeira é dada no próprio erro: é preciso errar e não ser negligente, como Joseph K. de *O Processo*, que imagina que as coisas vão continuar e

que ele ainda está no mundo, quando, desde a primeira frase, foi repellido dele. A culpa de Joseph, como aquela que, sem dúvida, Kafka se recriminava na época em que escrevia esse livro, consiste em querer ganhar o seu processo no próprio mundo, ao qual ainda acreditava pertencer, mas onde seu coração frio, vazio, sua existência de celibatário e de burocrata, sua indiferença pela família — tudo traços de caráter que Kafka reencontra em si mesmo — já o impedem de manter-se. É certo que sua indiferença cede pouco a pouco, mas é o fruto do processo, do mesmo modo que a beleza que ilumina os acusados e os torna agradáveis às mulheres é o reflexo de sua própria dissolução, da morte que avança neles, como uma luz mais verdadeira.

O processo, o banimento, é sem dúvida um grande infortúnio, talvez seja uma injustiça incompreensível ou uma punição inexorável, mas também é — somente numa certa medida, é verdade, eis a desculpa do herói, a armadilha onde se deixa prender — também é um dado que não basta recusar invocando nos discursos ociosos uma justiça mais alta, do qual se deve, pelo contrário, tirar partido, segundo a regra que Kafka fizera sua: “Cumprir limitarmo-nos ao que ainda se possui.” *O Processo* tem, pelo menos, essa vantagem, a de fazer saber a K. o que ele realmente é, de dissipar a ilusão, as consolações enganadoras que, por ter um bom emprego e alguns prazeres indiferentes, o levam a crer em sua existência, em sua existência de homem do mundo. Mas o processo nem por isso é a verdade, é, pelo contrário, um processo de erro, como tudo o que está ligado ao lado de fora, a essas trevas “exteriores” onde se é lançado pela força do banimento, processo em que, se resta uma esperança, é aquela que avança, não em contracorrente, por uma oposição estéril, mas no mesmo sentido do erro.

A culpa essencial

O topógrafo está quase inteiramente desligado dos defeitos de Joseph K. Não procura retornar à terra natal: a vida perdida em Canaã; apagada a verdade deste mundo; mal se recorda dela em breves instantes patéticos. Não é mais negligente mas está sempre em movimento, nunca se detendo, quase nunca se desencorajando, indo de fracasso em fracasso, por um movimento incansável que evoca a inquietação fria do tempo sem

3.

2.2

«pensava que latejar era ser uma pessoa» e o «medo do mau gosto» (20) que o constitui, a terceira perna enquanto identidade

3.

«O apartamento me reflecte»:
design, self-design, anti-design

pp. 24-26

Analogia possível entre retrato de
Dorian Gray e o apartamento de G.H.,
a partir de observações de Boris Groys

The Obligation to Self-Design

3.1

Secularização da forma humana. De
Nietzsche a Loos.

Design, as we know it today, is a twentieth-century phenomenon. Admittedly, concern for the appearance of things is not new. All cultures have been concerned with making clothes, everyday objects, interiors of various spaces, whether sacred spaces, spaces of power, or private spaces, "beautiful and impressive."

The history of the applied arts is indeed long. Yet modern design emerged precisely from the revolt against the tradition of the applied arts. Even more so than the transition from traditional art to modernist art, the transition from the traditional applied arts to modern design marked a break with tradition, a radical paradigm shift. This paradigm shift is, however, usually overlooked. The function of design has often enough been described using the old metaphysical opposition between appearance and essence. Design, in this view, is responsible only for the appearance of things, and thus it seems predestined to conceal the essence of things, to deceive the viewer's understanding of the true nature of reality. Thus design has been repeatedly interpreted as an epiphany of the omnipresent market, of exchange value, of fetishism of the commodity, of the society of the spectacle—as the creation of a seductive surface behind which things themselves not only become invisible, but disappear entirely.

Modern design, as it emerged at the beginning of the twentieth century, internalized this critique aimed at the traditional applied arts and set itself the task of revealing the hidden essence of things rather than designing their surfaces. Avant-garde design sought to eliminate and purify all that had accumulated on the surface of things through the practice of the applied arts over centuries in order to expose the true, undesigned nature of things.

Modern design thus did not see its task as creating the surface, but rather as eliminating it—as negative design, antidesign. Genuine modern design is reductionist; it does not add, it subtracts. It is no longer about simply designing individual things to be offered to the gaze of viewers and consumers in order to seduce them. Rather, design seeks to shape the gaze of viewers in such a way that they become capable of discovering things themselves. A central feature of the paradigm shift from traditional applied arts to modern design was just this extension of the will to design from the world of things to that of human beings themselves—understood as one thing among many. The rise of modern design is profoundly linked to the project of redesigning the old man into the New Man. This project, which emerged at the beginning of the twentieth century and is often dismissed today as utopian, has never really been abandoned de facto. In a modified, commercialized form, this project continues to have an effect, and its initial utopian potential has been updated repeatedly. The design of things that present themselves to the gaze of the viewing subject is critical to an understanding of design. The ultimate form of design is, however, the design of the subject. The problems of design are only adequately addressed if the subject is asked how it wants to manifest itself, what form it wants to give itself, and how it wants to present itself to the gaze of the Other.

This question was first raised with appropriate acuity in the early twentieth century—after Nietzsche diagnosed God's death. As long as God was alive, the design of the soul was more important to people than the design of the body. The human body, along with its environment, was understood from the perspective of faith as an outer shell that

conceals the soul. God was thought to be the only viewer of the soul. To him the ethically correct, righteous soul was supposed to look beautiful—that is, simple, transparent, well constructed, proportional, and not disfigured by any vices or marked by any worldly passion. It is often overlooked that in the Christian tradition ethics has always been subordinated to aesthetics—that is, to the design of the soul. Ethical rules, like the rules of spiritual asceticism—of spiritual exercises, spiritual training—serve above all the objective of designing the soul in such a way that it would be acceptable in God's eyes, so that He would allow it into paradise.

The design of one's own soul under God's gaze is a persistent theme of theological treatises, and its rules can be visualized with the help of medieval depictions of the soul waiting for the Last Judgment. The design of the soul, which was destined for God's eyes, was clearly distinct from the worldly applied arts: whereas the applied arts sought richness of materials, complex ornamentation, and outward radiance, the design of the soul focused on the essential, the plain, the natural, the reduced, and even the ascetic. The revolution in design that took place at the start of the twentieth century can best be characterized as the application of the rules for the design of the soul to the design of worldly objects.

The death of God signified the disappearance of the viewer of the soul, for whom its design was practiced for centuries. Thus the site of the design of the soul shifted. The soul became the sum of the relationships into which the human body in the world entered. Previously, the body was the prison of the soul; now the soul became the clothing of the body—its social, political, and aesthetic appearance. Suddenly the only possible manifestation of

the soul became the look of the clothes in which human beings appeared, the everyday things with which they surrounded themselves, the spaces they inhabited. With the death of God, design became the medium of the soul, the revelation of the subject hidden inside the human body. Thus design took on an ethical dimension it had not had previously. In design, ethics became aesthetics; it became form. Where religion once was, design has emerged. The modern subject now has a new obligation: the obligation to self-design, an aesthetic presentation as ethical subject. The ethically motivated polemic against design, launched repeatedly over the course of the twentieth century and formulated in ethical and political terms, can only be understood on the basis of this new definition of design; such a polemic would be entirely incongruous if directed at the traditional applied arts. Adolf Loos' famous essay "Ornament and Crime" is an early example of this turn.

From the outset, Loos postulated in his essay a unity between the aesthetic and the ethical. Loos condemned every decoration, every ornament, as a sign of depravity, of vices. Loos judged a person's appearance, to the extent it represented a consciously designed exterior, to be an immediate expression of his or her ethical stance. For example, he believed he had demonstrated that only criminals, primitives, heathens, or degenerates ornament themselves by tattooing their skin. Ornament was thus an expression either of amorality or of crime: "The Papuan covers his skin with tattoos, his boat, his oars, in short everything he can lay his hands on. He is no criminal. The modern person who tattoos himself is either a criminal or a degenerate."¹ Particularly striking in this quotation is the fact that Loos makes no distinction between

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Loos, Ornamento e Crime. A vocação apocalíptica do design. A configuração burguesa dessa vocação em Loos.

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tattooing one's own skin and decorating a boat or an oar. Just as the modern human being is expected to present him or herself to the gaze of the Other as an honest, plain, unornamented, "undesigned" object, so should all the other things with which this person has to deal be presented as honest, plain, unornamented, undesigned things. Only then do they demonstrate that the soul of the person using them is pure, virtuous, and unspoiled. According to Loos, the function of design is not to pack, decorate, and ornament things differently each time, that is, to constantly design a supplementary outside so that an inside, the true nature of things, remains hidden. Rather, the real function of modern design is to prevent people from wanting to design things at all. Thus Loos describes his attempts to convince a shoemaker from whom he had ordered shoes not to ornament them.² For Loos, it was enough that the shoemaker use the best materials and work them with care. The quality of the material and the honesty and precision of the work, and not their external appearance, determine the quality of the shoes. The criminal thing about ornamenting shoes is that this ornament does not reveal the shoemaker's honesty, that is, the ethical dimension of the shoes. The ethically dissatisfactory aspects of the product are concealed by ornament and the ethically impeccable are made unrecognizable by it. For Loos, true design is the struggle against design—against the criminal will to conceal the ethical essence of things behind their aesthetic surface. Yet paradoxically, only the creation of another, revelatory layer of ornament—that is, of design—guarantees the unity of the ethical and the aesthetic that Loos sought.

The messianic, apocalyptic features of the struggle against applied art that Loos was engaged in are unmistakable. For example, Loos wrote: "Do

not weep. Do you not see the greatness of our age resides in our very inability to create new ornament? We have gone beyond ornament, we have achieved plain, undecorated simplicity. Behold, the time is at hand, fulfillment awaits us. Soon the streets of the cities will shine like white walls! Like Zion, the Holy City, Heaven's capital. Then fulfillment will be ours."³ The struggle against the applied arts is the final struggle before the arrival of God's Kingdom on Earth. Loos wanted to bring heaven down to earth; he wanted to see things as they are, without ornament. Thus Loos wanted to appropriate the divine gaze. But not only that, he wanted to make everyone else capable of seeing the things as they are revealed in God's gaze. Modern design wants the apocalypse now, the apocalypse that unveils things, strips them of their ornament, and causes them to be seen as they truly are. Without this claim that design manifests the truth of things, it would be impossible to understand many of the discussions among designers, artists, and art theorists over the course of the twentieth century. Such artists and designers as Donald Judd or architects such as Herzog & de Meuron, to name only a few, do not argue aesthetically when they want to justify their artistic practices but rather ethically, and in doing so they appeal to the truth of things as such. The modern designer does not wait for the apocalypse to remove the external shell of things and show them to people as they are. The designer wants here and now the apocalyptic vision that makes everyone New Men. The body takes on the form of the soul. The soul becomes the body. All things become heavenly. Heaven becomes earthly, material. Modernism becomes absolute.

Loos' essay is, famously, not an isolated phenomenon. Rather, it reflects the mood of the entire

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O construtivismo russo. A ideia de design proletário, funcional. A eliminação do ornamento em nome da explicitação de uma ideologia.

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artistic avant-garde of the twentieth century, which sought a synthesis of art and life. This synthesis was supposed to be achieved by removing the things that looked too arty both from art and from life. Both were supposed to reach the zero point of the artistic in order to achieve a unity. The conventionally artistic was understood to be the "human, all too human" that obstructed the gaze from perceiving the true inner form of things. Hence traditional painting was seen as something that prevents the gaze of a spectator from recognizing it as a combination of shapes and colors on canvas. And shoes made in the traditional way were understood to be a thing that prevented the gaze of a consumer from recognizing the essence, function, and true composition of the shoe. The gaze of the New Man had to be freed of all such obstructions by the force of (anti)design.

Whereas Loos still formulated his argument in rather bourgeois terms and wanted to reveal the value of certain materials, craftsmanship, and individual honesty, the will to absolute design reached its climax in Russian Constructivism, with its "proletarian" ideal of the collective soul, which is manifested in industrially organized work. For the Russian Constructivists, the path to virtuous, genuinely proletarian objects also passed through the elimination of everything that was merely artistic. The Russian Constructivists called for the objects of everyday communist life to show themselves as what they are: as functional things whose forms serve only to make their ethics visible. Ethics, as understood here, was given an additional political dimension, since the collective soul had to be organized politically in order to act properly in accordance with ethical terms. The collective soul was manifested in the political organization that embraced both people and things. The function

of "proletarian" design—at the time, admittedly, people spoke rather of "proletarian art"—must therefore be to make this total political organization visible. The experience of the October Revolution of 1917 was crucial for the Russian Constructivists. They understood the revolution to be a radical act of purifying society of every form of ornament: the finest example of modern design, which eliminates all traditional social customs, rituals, conventions, and forms of representation in order for the essence of the political organization to emerge. Thus the Russian Constructivists called for the abolition of all autonomous art. Art should rather be placed entirely at the service of the design of utilitarian objects. In essence, it was a call to completely subsume art to design.

At the same time, the project of Russian Constructivism was a total project: it wanted to design life as a whole. Only for that reason—and only at that price—was Russian Constructivism prepared to exchange autonomous art for utilitarian art: just as the traditional artist designed the whole of the artwork, so the Constructivist artist wanted to design the whole of society. In a certain sense, the Soviet artists had no choice at the time other than to advance such a total claim. The market, including the art market, was eliminated by the Communists. Artists were no longer faced with private consumers and their private interests and aesthetic preferences, but with the state as a whole. Necessarily, it was all or nothing for artists. This situation is clearly reflected in the manifestos of Russian Constructivism. For example, in his programmatic text entitled "Constructivism," Alexei Gan wrote: "Not to reflect, not to represent and not to interpret reality, but to really build and express the systematic tasks of the new class, the proletariat... Especially now, when

3.2 Metanoia

the proletarian revolution has been victorious, and its destructive, creative movement is progressing along the iron rails into culture, which is organized according to a grand plan of social production, everyone—the master of color and line, the builder of space-volume forms and the organizer of mass productions—must all become constructors in the general work of the arming and moving of the many-millions human masses.”⁴ For Gan, the goal of Constructivist design was not to impose a new form on everyday life under socialism, but rather to remain loyal to radical, revolutionary reduction and to avoid making new ornaments for new things. Hence Nikolai Tarabukin asserted in his then-famous essay “From the Easel to the Machine” that the Constructivist artist could not play a formative role in the process of actual social production. His role was rather that of a propagandist who defends and praises the beauty of industrial production and opens the public’s eyes to this beauty.⁵ The artist, as described by Tarabukin, is someone who looks at the entirety of socialist production as a ready-made—a kind of socialist Duchamp who exhibits socialist industry as a whole as something good and beautiful.

The modern designer, whether bourgeois or proletarian, calls for the other, divine vision: for the metanoia that enables people to see the true form of things. In the Platonic and Christian traditions, undergoing a metanoia means making the transition from a worldly perspective to an otherworldly perspective, from a perspective of the mortal body to a perspective of the immortal soul. Since the death of God, of course, we can no longer believe that there is something like the soul that is distinguished from the body in the sense that it is made independent of the body and can be separated from it. However,

that does not by any means suggest that a metanoia is no longer possible. Modern design is the attempt to bring about such a metanoia—an effort to see one’s own body and one’s own surroundings as purified of everything earthly, arbitrary, and subjected to a particular aesthetic taste. In a sense, it could be said that modernism substituted the design of the corpse for the design of the soul.

This funeral aspect of modern design was recognized by Loos even before he wrote “Ornament and Crime.” In his text “The Poor Little Rich Man,” Loos tells of the imagined fate of a rich Viennese man who decided to have his entire house designed by an artist. This man totally subjected his everyday life to the dictates of the designer (Loos speaks, admittedly, of the architect), for as soon as his thoroughly designed house is finished, the man can no longer change anything in it without the designer’s permission. Everything that this man would later buy and do must fit into the overall design of the house, not just literally but also aesthetically. In a world of total design, the man himself has become a designed thing, a kind of museum object, a mummy, a publicly exhibited corpse. Loos concludes his description of the fate of the poor rich man as follows: “He was shut out of future life and its strivings, its developments, and its desires. He felt: Now is the time to learn to walk about with one’s own corpse. Indeed! He is finished! He is complete!”⁶ In his essay “Design and Crime,” whose title was inspired by Loos’, Hal Foster interpreted this passage as an implicit call for “running room,” for breaking out of the prison of total design.⁷ It is obvious, however, that Loos’ text should not be understood as a protest against the total dominance of design. Loos protests against design as ornament in the name of another, “true” design, in the name of an antidesign



Adolf Loos' wife Lina's bedroom, published in *Kunst*, 1903, no. 1. © Albertina Archive, Vienna.

that frees the consumer from dependence on the taste of the professional designer. As the aforementioned example of the shoes demonstrates, under the regime of avant-garde antidesign, consumers take responsibility for their own appearance and for the design of their daily lives. Consumers do so by asserting their own, modern taste, which tolerates no ornament and hence no additional artistic or craft labor. By taking ethical and aesthetic responsibility for the image they offer the outside world, however, consumers become prisoners of total design to a much larger degree than ever before, inasmuch as they can no longer delegate their aesthetic decisions to others. Modern consumers present the world the image of their own personality—purified of all outside influence and ornamentation. But this purification of their own image is potentially just as infinite a process as the purification of the soul before God. In the white city, in the heavenly Zion, as Loos imagines it, design is truly total for the first time. Nothing can be changed there either: nothing colorful, no ornament can be smuggled in. The difference is simply that in the white city of the future, everyone is the author of his own corpse—everyone becomes an artist-designer who has ethical, political, and aesthetic responsibility for his or her environment.

One can claim, of course, that the original pathos of avant-garde antidesign has long since faded, that avant-garde design has become a certain designer style among other possible styles. That is why many people view our entire society today—the society of commercial design, of the spectacle—as a game with simulacra behind which there is only a void. That is indeed how this society presents itself, but only if one takes a purely contemplative position, sitting in the lodge and

watching the spectacle of society. But this position overlooks the fact that design today has become total—and hence it no longer admits of a contemplative position from the perspective of an outsider. The turn that Loos announced in his day has proven to be irreversible: every citizen of the contemporary world still has to take ethical, aesthetic, and political responsibility for his or her self-design. In a society in which design has taken over the function of religion, self-design becomes a creed. By designing one's self and one's environment in a certain way, one declares one's faith in certain values, attitudes, programs, and ideologies. In accordance with this creed, one is judged by society, and this judgment can certainly be negative and even threaten the life and well-being of the person concerned.

Hence modern design belongs not so much in an economic context as in a political one. Modern design has transformed the whole of social space into an exhibition space for an absent divine visitor, in which individuals appear both as artists and as self-produced works of art. In the gaze of the modern viewer, however, the aesthetic composition of artworks inevitably betrays the political convictions of their authors—and it is primarily on that basis that they are judged. The debate over headscarves demonstrates the political force of design. In order to understand that this is primarily a debate about design, it suffices to imagine that Prada or Gucci has begun to design headscarves. In such a case, deciding between the headscarf as a symbol of Islamic convictions and the headscarf as a commercial brand becomes an extremely difficult aesthetic and political task. Design cannot therefore be analyzed exclusively within the context of the economy of commodities. One could just as soon speak of suicide design—for example, in the case of

suicide attacks, which are well known to be staged according to strict aesthetic rules. One can speak about the design of power but also about the design of resistance or the design of alternative political movements. In these instances design is practiced as a production of differences—differences that often take on political semantics at the same time. We often hear laments that politics today is concerned only with a superficial image—and that so-called content loses its relevance in the process. This is thought to be the fundamental malaise of politics today. More and more, there are calls to turn away from political design and image making and return to content. Such laments ignore the fact that under the regime of modern design, it is precisely the visual positioning of politicians in the field of the mass media that makes the crucial statement concerning their politics—or even constitutes their politics. Content, by contrast, is completely irrelevant, because it changes constantly. Hence the general public is by no means wrong to judge its politicians according to their appearance—that is, according to their basic aesthetic and political creed, and not according to arbitrarily changing programs and contents that they support or formulate.

Thus modern design evades Kant's famous distinction between disinterested aesthetic contemplation and the use of things guided by interests. For a long time after Kant, disinterested contemplation was considered superior to a practical attitude: a higher, if not the highest, manifestation of the human spirit. But already by the end of the nineteenth century, a reevaluation of values had taken place: the *vita contemplativa* was thoroughly discredited, and the *vita activa* was elevated to the true task of humankind. Hence today design is accused of seducing people into weakening their

activity, vitality, and energy—of making them passive consumers who lack will, who are manipulated by omnipresent advertising and thus become victims of capital. The apparent cure for this lulling into sleep by the society of the spectacle is a shock-like encounter with the “real” that is supposed to rescue people from their contemplative passivity and move them to action, which is the only thing that promises an experience of truth as living intensity. The debate now is only over the question whether such an encounter with the real is still possible or whether the real has definitively disappeared behind its designed surface.

Now, however, we can no longer speak of disinterested contemplation when it is a matter of self-manifestation, self-design, and self-positioning in the aesthetic field, since the subject of such self-contemplation clearly has a vital interest in the image he or she offers to the outside world. Once people had an interest in how their souls appeared to God; today they have an interest in how their bodies appear to their political surroundings. This interest certainly points to the real. The real, however, emerges here not as a shock-like interruption of the designed surface but as a question of the technique and practice of self-design—a question no one can escape anymore. In his day, Beuys said that everyone had the right to see him- or herself as an artist. What was then understood as a right has now become an obligation. In the meantime, we have been condemned to being the designers of our selves.

1

Adolf Loos, “Ornament and Crime” (1908), in *Ornament and Crime: Selected Essays*, ed. Adolf Opel, trans. Michael Mitchell (Riverside, CA: Ariadne Press, 1998), 167.

2

Ibid., 174.

3

Ibid., 168.

4

Alexei Gan, “From Constructivism,” in *Art in Theory, 1900–1990: An Anthology of Changing Ideas*, ed. Charles Harrison and Paul Wood (Oxford, UK: Blackwell, 1993), 320 (translation modified).

5

Nikolai Tarabukin, “From the Easel to the Machine,” in *Modern Art and Modernism: A Critical Anthology*, ed. Francis Frascina and Charles Harrison (New York: Harper and Row, 1982), 135–42.

6

Adolf Loos, “The Poor Little Rich Man,” in *August Sarnitz, Adolf Loos, 1870–1933: Architect, Cultural Critic, Dandy*, trans. Latido (Cologne: Taschen, 2003), 21.

7

Hal Foster, “Design and Crime,” in *Design and Crime (and Other Diatribes)* (London: Verso, 2002), 17.

De passagem, comparar com o apartamento de
Bernardo Soares

Ele mutilaia - e' impermissivel que
nao fôr a' custa de algumas cousas
essenciaes - com um certo approxi-
mado luxo os seus dois quartos.
Cuidaria especialmente das
cabeceiras - de lençol, fundos,
muller - , dos repentes e do
tapetes. Dizia elle que osseu
se curaria um interior "para
manter a dignidade do te-
dio". No quarto a' moda da
o tedio torna-se desconforto,
mappa physica.



Nada o dirigira nunca a
fazer nada. Era apenas
pensar e labutar. Lem-
brar que nunca poderia
por um bom offiamente.
Nunca frequentaria um curso.
Nao pertencia nunca a uma
multidao. Dera-se com elle
o mundo phisico mesmo que

«Elle mobilara — é impossível que não fôsse à custa de algumas cousas essenciaes — com um certo e approximado luxo os seus dois quartos. Cuidára especialmente das cadeiras — de braços, fundas, molles —, dos reposteiros e dos tapetes. Dizia elle que *assim se creára um interior “para manter a dignidade do tédio”. No quarto á moderna o tédio torna-se desconforto, magoa physica.*»

Do Prefácio ao L. do D.

«Vejo-me célebre? ... O aplauso chega ao quarto andar onde moro e *colide com a mobília tosca do meu quarto barato, com o reles que me rodeia*, e me amesquinha desde a cozinha ao sonho»

L. do D. Z54

«*Não são as paredes reles do meu quarto vulgar, nem as secretárias velhas do escritório alheio, nem a pobreza das ruas intermédias da Baixa usual, tantas vezes por mim percorridas que já me parecem ter usurpado a fixidez da irreparabilidade, que formam no meu espírito a náusea, que nele é frequente, da quotidianidade enxovalhante da vida. São as pessoas que habitualmente me cercam, são as almas que, desconhecendo-me, todos os dias me conhecem com o convívio e a fala, que me põem na garganta do espírito o nó salivar do desgosto físico. É a sordidez monótona da sua vida, paralela à exterioridade da minha, é a sua consciência íntima de serem meus semelhantes, que me veste o traje de forçado, me dá a cela de penitenciário, me faz apócrifo e mendigo.*» (...)

L. do D. Z36

