Thinking, Evaluating, Enjoying
On the Aesthetic Materiality of Thought

Soumyabrata Choudhury

Introducing a Heideggerian Resonance: Thinking at the Place of the Unthinkable

Anyone familiar with Martin Heidegger's works will hear the resonance of one of his well-known titles in that of the present essay. "Thinking, Evaluating, Enjoying" will no doubt remind the reader of the German philosopher's text "Building Dwelling Thinking". Let me spend a little time on Heidegger's 1951 lecture to enrich and amplify the resonance if not for any other more substantive reason.

Heidegger presented "Building Dwelling Thinking" in 1951 as part of a colloquium on the theme of "Man and Space". This was apparently a forum to discuss the scope of architectural thought. But Heidegger's own contribution goes in a somewhat different direction. A preoccupation that he had since the days of his seminal essay "The Origin of the Work of Art" and going beyond the 1950s to the late Heideggerian investigation of the question of technology; the philosopher, in his 1951 lecture, looks at the status of "the Thing" as other than an instrumental or manipulable entity. This includes the status of the "architectural thing". So instead of treating the so-called architectural entity, which is the building, as something to be constructed and utilized, Heidegger already grounds the essence of such an architectural project in something more primordial that he calls "dwelling". The technological project of constructing a house, a bridge or any other unit of public space must already strive to belong to the idea of dwelling. Clearly, at the level of conceptual thinking, this order of

ideas is unusual if not counter-intuitive because according to this direction of thought, the very purpose of constructing or "building" which is to dwell, is already presupposed to have been realised in the thought of the architectural project: there is always already dwelling. So, strictly speaking, according to the demands of thinking causally, the idea of "dwelling" is *unthinkable*. But what is even more interesting in Heidegger's presentation is that this reversal of the direction of thought is not expressed in the slightest philosophical jargon. In fact, the entire lecture is delivered with a certain sense of being very close to the movement of *common language*, that is to say, the speaker addresses his listeners with an attitude of sharing the experience of language at its most non-specialized and secular usage. Yet, no one will deny that Heidegger's own use of language is strikingly – and sometimes disconcertingly – original and uncommon. The question that arises then is: how is this uncommon effect produced out of an apparently common and shared material? The answer to this is no doubt provided by Heidegger himself in several of his lectures and essays, particularly the ones dealing with language, art and technology: the most uncommon effect produced by language in its universal common movement takes place in *poetry*. And it is the poetic reconfiguration of common language instead of philosophical jargon that makes a presentation like "Building Dwelling Thinking" so public and so singular.

In the text itself, we read the emergence of the German words for building and thinking, as more and more defamiliarized from their accepted architectural and spatial senses. I will not enter into the actual deepening of the roots of these German words – that in any case is not within my competence – but even at the level of a translated text, this so-called etymological movement does not at all enable an interpretative or philological consolidation of the institution of meaning. It is not that we merely get to know deeper meanings of the common words that building and dwelling are; we are, instead, invited to *listen* to these words in a kind of self-dilating movement.[1]

1 For this exercise in deepening and dilating the German words *bauen* and *wohnen* (in German for building and dwelling respectively) in their intertwinings, see Heidegger 1993, 348–49.

Like in poetry, the displacement of words is not towards new meanings but towards a certain unexpected *appearance* of the word itself – even though the latter is totally familiar to everyone and no one expects anything new from it. It is in this sense that Heidegger lets "building" and "dwelling" appear in a way that is so unthinkable according to their referential or conceptual orders that the effect is one of being present to language itself in a new way.

Heidegger says that dwelling is not, in its primordial self-movement, being housed in a building. Dwelling is to dwell on earth. To that extent, the word is coextensive not with the architectural enclosure of space but with the existential co-dwelling with mortals as they exist on the earth (Heidegger 1993, 350). The architectural project of building can only respond to the call of this primordial sense of dwelling. Hence, Heidegger says, building must belong to dwelling (ibid., 362). And the only so-called demonstration of this reversal of the order of the architectural proposition is the poetic self-movement of language. However, in presenting this self-movement in its most singular, unexpected turn of appearance, Heidegger also pronounces a kind of historical verdict on the language of the present, the very language he uses and reconfigures. His verdict is that the originary meaning of words today has been forgotten. This is enormously and curiously significant because exactly when Heidegger himself lets language appear in a new way, in that very act he announces the forgetting of language's primordial power to appear.

A logical path to take in the wake of Heidegger's verdict would be the historical one. One could then enquire that when was it that, or in which historical epoch, the originary light of language fell into "oblivion".[2] In the several Heidegger texts that pertain to this question, we will never find a univocal historical answer because in Heidegger's view, the very horizon of history opens with this forgetting. Even the great Greek opening to what Heidegger calls the "history of metaphysics" takes place with a split in the world of Greek thought; divided between its historical calculus or technology of propositional thought and its immemorial presence to language's

2 "The proper sense of bauen, namely dwelling, falls into oblivion." (Ibid., 350)

proximity to things.[3] In this sense, it is difficult to distinguish between the originary Greek forgetting and the contemporary German oblivion. But the paradox is that Heidegger himself speaks in and through the present whereby he makes language enact new unforeseen effects. This then leads to the extraordinary result – that the most singular poetic effects of language felt in the present are in the service of the forgetting of language's originary poetic essence. More exactly, Heidegger wants to announce this forgetting but he must do so in the punctual historical present of his own times and he can do this only with the abstract authority of a specialized philosopher. This is the shattering paradox of the Heideggerian act of language.

If I may be so bold as to say, this is also a kind of "symptom" of Heidegger's "forgetting of history". Let me try to substantiate this point. In Heidegger's text, there is a very interesting ambiguity about the relationship of language and temporality. At every moment of the text Heidegger speaks of the paradoxical presence of the originary forgetting that language carries up to the present of its usage. At the same time, as a philosopher, he is able to subject to thought this very moment when all of the "history of metaphysics" comes to a threshold of self-exposure or even end – which Heidegger calls the threshold of an "end of philosophy". So, Heidegger's voice is placed at that delicate threshold from where the history of forgetting must both be recalled *and* returned to its place of the originary split. So, the split itself is redoubled at every moment of the history of metaphysics continuing up to the point where Heidegger's own philosophical authority is located. It is for this reason that Heidegger himself must perform the delicate task of deauthorizing philosophy in a philosophical voice; while the very propositional and prosaic "sound" of philosophy must now be recomposed or even re-sung as the call for a poetic ear to lend itself to philosophy's newfound but equivocal resonance. Now, at the level of the common experience of language at its most universal amplitude, one would trace this call to the innermost capacities

3 "As a form of truth technology is grounded in the history of metaphysics, which is itself a distinctive and up to now the only perceptible phase of the history of Being." 'Letter On Humanis'. (Ibid. 244)

of a "common", a "people" – but it is not certain that Heidegger does not return the capacity for a poetic ear to the exceptional attunement of the philosopher, even now at the limits of the institution of philosophy.[4]

Towards the end of 'Building Dwelling Thinking', Heidegger says that man's homelessness today in its attendant misery should not be reduced to the difficulties of modern-day housing projects that genuinely plague the working population (ibid., 362–63). Man's homelessness is the very unconcealment of the originary forgetting of the meaning of dwelling on earth that finds some of its most acute manifestations in contingent historical situations. But the situation itself must not be confused with the essence of the truth of "homelessness". Peculiarly, this warning by the philosopher gives the effect of alerting us not to confuse the truth of homelessness with the situation of the homeless. Instead, echoing his extraordinary analysis of 'The Peasant Shoes' in Vincent Van Gogh's paintings in "The Origin of the work of art", Heidegger here again asks us to lend ourselves to the *sensation* of rural peasant "dwelling", somewhat removed from the corrosion of industrial life. Even within the history of forgetting, there is as if a neighbourhood or even a sensation of enjoyment that peasant life unconsciously disposes itself towards in still being able to truly dwell, that is to say towards the thinking of the truth of dwelling.[5] It is by this hierarchical evaluation of historical sites within the *same* conjuncture that according to my argument, Heidegger disavows the task of thinking the truth of modern industrial capitalist life at its most uninhabitable and unthinkable place.

---

4 Though I cannot perform the task here, it's interesting to speculate how Heidegger's poetic rarefaction of common language compares with Franz Kafka's dictum "literature is an affair of the people."

5 See 'The Origin of the work of art' Ibid. 139–212. also see 361–362. Also see in this context the brief editorial introduction to the English translation of this text in which it's pointed out that one of the associated earnings of the German words *wohnen* for dwelling invokes the sense of "delight", a reconciled and harmonious type of *enjoyment* (ibid., 345).

The Sensation of Thought and a Trace of the Unthinkable

There will be occasion to come back to the "symptom" surfacing out of the Heideggerian resonance of this essay and to recuperate its disavowed historicity. But before that, it is crucial to clarify that Heidegger is far from being a theoreticist or positivist anti-historical thinker. It is in this context that one might consult Jacques Derrida's 1976–77 lectures at École Normale Supérieure given in the wake of the tremendous impact of Louis Althusser's thesis on the epistemological break in Marx's writings, between a historicist, humanist phase and the construction of a true scientific object. Interestingly these lectures are published under the title *Theory & Practice*. Derrida interposes Heidegger and Aristotle, among other figures from the history of philosophy (particularly Kant) in the mainstream Marxist intellectual sequences starting from Marx himself up to Althusser. The chief motivation in this exercise is Derrida's desire to displace and complicate the classical division and hierarchy between what is called "theory" and "practice". The larger conclusion that comes out of these heterodox investigations is that both theory and practice are already part of the widest generality one confers upon the word Reason. This is also the absolutely essential reference to Kant but in this essay, I will not render it explicitly. But how does Derrida arrive at this conclusion – which instead of closing the relationship of theory and practice, opens it up towards new directions?

One of the key Heidegger texts that Derrida analyzes is 'The Question Concerning Technology'. The expected correlation between a theory of science and the epoch of technological domination is precisely where Heidegger makes his philosophical intervention. The classical understanding of "theory" being the knowledge of objective reality is, in Heidegger's singular move of a kind of linguistic recollection, refers to the Greek origins of the word "theory". Heidegger dilates the solid sense of the word "theory" into its Greek construction as a combination of verbs. One of these verbs itself has its roots in the Greek word *theia* – which means in the exact theatrical sense,

the appearance of the aspect of something that is rendered present.[6] Derrida shows that here Heidegger is already dismantling the abstraction of theoretical knowledge towards an *existential* emphasis on the theoretical relation being one that arises out of a "concern" with things. But what is the concern? Here Derrida's own marginal notes suggest a fascinating series of associations that ally concern with value or dignity or even to intensify this style of thinking, a kind of "attachment" (with all its unconscious and even libidinal connotations that Derrida himself does not mention).

In other words, the theoretical moment of science or knowledge is already an existential involvement with what Heidegger has repeatedly called "things". Things are not the same as the objects of knowledge; they are, as already shown in "Building Dwelling Thinking", the sites for the *experience* of thinking that the poet responds to with a more delicate and attuned ear than the specialised philosopher. So, at this existential level, poetry is not the opposite of theory or more generally of knowledge; it is its primordial site of attachment or a kind of "concernful" attachment.

During this discussion arising from Heidegger's text, Derrida notes a little reference to Aristotle's Nicomachean Ethics which the German philosopher doesn't elaborate. Derrida himself, in this particular lecture, spends some time on this marginal reference, specifically the Book 6 of Aristotle's text. Here Aristotle is speaking of the domain of what in Greek is called logos – commonly translated as Discourse or even Reason. But in this enquiry Aristotle is not merely concerned with the intellectual capture of what he calls invariable things which do not allow for the thought of change. Instead of this rigidly scientific domain for the logos, Aristotle speaks of the ethical mobilisation that logos allows for in the pursuit of virtue (arate). This is interesting because the ethical search for virtue must itself be constituted out of the intellectual faculties that otherwise are imagined

6 For Derrida's investigation into these Heideggerian deconstructions of Greek philosophy see particularly the fifth lecture in Derrida, 2019, 80–83. My own discussion to follow from here is based on the material which Derrida cites and analyses in these three critical pages. This material consists of texts from Heidegger, Aristotle as well as marginal references to Plato and Kant.

to be dominated by the stakes of purely scientific research. Derrida outlines the process of this logistical mobilisation of reason (logistikos) that again proceeds from an existential concern with "things".

The point is that these things are nothing if not *historical* and woven from the fabric of contingency. Before I conclude this section with making a remark or two on the aspect of this contingency let me recapitulate Derrida's own outline of Aristotle's text.

The real interest of Aristotle's ethical system is the traversal from something like the most granulated trace of the sensible encounter of the human animal with things – to the threshold of a properly humanised question of choice (prohairesis), which synthesises the sensible experience of things with the thought of the thing when mediated by the properly human event of a "desiring choice". This is the expansive work of the logos in the history of society or historical societies (logos echon). Nevertheless, the question will have to be asked whether the stage of desiring choice completely assimilates the sensation of thought – which Aristotle calls aesthesis and at the strict level of its meaning as an animal encounter of the human being is unthinkable? This is the precarity of contingent or deliberative rationality that I am also calling the historicity of thought. On the one hand there is, this point onwards, a great anthropological project that western philosophy rationalises leading up to the doctrine of faculties and a general formula of Man = Sensation + Desire + Reason. On the other hand, the entire movement of thought between Heidegger and Derrida is the dismantling interrogation of this doctrine of anthropological metaphysics. In Heidegger's own trajectory, particularly in his late works the signs of such dismantling are most vividly seen in poetic fragments whether belonging to poetry or Heidegger's own philosophical prose. Derrida himself raises the issue of Heidegger's relationship to Marx through the text of 'The Question Concerning Technology'. Evidently to Heidegger, Marx despite his strong anti-theoreticist rejection of philosophy (particularly in his Thesis on Feuerbach) still belongs to the history of metaphysics or the anthropological dogma. In Derrida's lectures this relationship of the two thinkers with their respective announcements of "the end of philosophy", is rendered productively indeterminate. The Aristotelian perspective in fact permits the more fundamental

question that if the Greek thinker instituted "man" as the principle or the measure of the flickering values that arise in historical and contingent situations – which are as much temporal as spatial – and this very institution is shown to be an anthropological metaphysics, then what effect does such a dismantling or decentering have? One of the effects is already evident in Heidegger's extraordinary extractions from poetry and other works of art as the very liminal signs of an end of metaphysics with their residual "saving power" in the absence of the arrival of any "gods".[7] But at the end of this section, I would like to indicate a second regime of effects, briefly drawing it out of another Aristotelian text.

In the Book 8 of his Politics Aristotle uses the Greek term katharsis for a kind of degraded, even animal enjoyment that the "labouring classes" experience in the theatre which is to be distinguished from the more cultivated delights of the upper social strata when enjoying the art of music in their leisure.[8] The criterion for this distinction is that the cathartic enjoyment, strictly speaking is unthinkable – if thought is to be understood as a logos which institutes measures and principles by which the proper works of human society are to be evaluated. In his lecture, Derrida has already pointed out that Aristotle is concerned with the work (ergon) proper to each stage of man's traversal of the logos: the aesthetic, the intellectual, the desiring. By the argument of the Book 8 of his Politics the aesthetic-cathartic enjoyment still does not lend itself to a proper anthropological capture of measure or principle (arche). This is the crux of the matter: at every stage of the traversal of thought or logos, there is a precarity and divisibility because no stage quite escapes the living memory of the unthinkable animal or aesthetic experience of the cathartic stage. At the same time, Aristotle in Politics says the cathartic experience is not the exclusive degraded potential of those literally treated as animals in human society – slaves, women, immigrants comprising the

7 For Heidegger's extraction of Hölderlin's original phrase "saving power" as inscribed in his *Patmos* see 'The Question Concerning Technology' (Heidegger 1993, 333).

8 For the relevant citation from *Politics* Book 8, see Ford 1995, and my own earlier essay on this question: "Ambedkar Contra Aristotle. On a Possible Contention about who is Capable of Politics" (Choudhury 2018, 199–231).

"labouring classes". The cultivated classes are equally capable of this enjoyment that constitutively falls outside the "scene" of value – in that sense is not constituteable as a form, hence is unthinkable. But precisely because everyone including the upper classes are in danger of falling below the level of anthropological institutions of value and "thinkability", everyone must be governed. So, Aristotle instructs the continuous monitoring and vigilance of the upper classes particularly its youth, so that the work proper to these classes does not get irredeemably corrupted by the animal-aesthetic habit (hexis).[9] This is the shattering paradox at the heart of Aristotle's philosophy which institutes the measure of all thinkability according to principles from which follows the evaluation of works proper to man and this very act of institution, at every moment, carries the hazard of falling into a sub-institutional or anti-institutional scene of cathartic enjoyment – in that sense im-proper ob-scene enjoyment. In political terms this implies the Aristotelian instruction towards the continuous government of an ungovernable human habit. Would it be a scandal to suggest that this kind of enjoyment which carries the oblivion of thought as principle and measure of value at its heart, resonates with Heidegger's favour for an immemorial enjoyment of "dwelling"? Conversely, one could ask the speculative-historical question that will there ever have been a thought of enjoyment? What will have been its historicity?

---

9 This Greek word *hexis* is a complex ensemble of meanings. On the one hand it means something like aptitude or capability which can be externalised into *ergon* or work. This is only possible with education, cultivation and eventually socialisation of the human animal. But as "habit" hexis connotes something automatic and unthinking. If *katharsis* in the basic Greek sense means physical relief from pathogens or toxins (or a virus, why not, speaking from within the thick of the time I'm speaking), then the analogy of purgation applied to aesthetic enjoyment reduces the latter to a repeatable form of response to the medicinal-artistic stimulant. In this sense the aesthetic material of a repeatable *hexis*/habit is indispensable for the thought of art as form and deliberate construction but does not qualify *as* thought which is the constitutive power of hexis understood as aptitude.

Is There a Thought of Enjoyment?

Earlier we saw Heidegger opening the scene of history along the contour of a split or a division – between forgetting and the history of the disclosedness of that very forgetting. This is the same as the history of philosophy determined as metaphysics. While even in Heidegger there is a keen awareness of the anthropological support of this metaphysics, the primary site of the mode of human existence where this metaphysics and the history of forgetting that resides at its heart is played out, is *language*. At the same time, language is also the site of the redoubling of the split that opens the scene of history. In that sense language is never univocal and propositional; it is equivocal and poetic where the very manifestation of an inapparent forgetting is also the act of the disclosure of this truth of forgetting. Poetry ceaselessly exchanges the passivity of an effect of language arising out of an inapparent oblivion with the felicity or delight of something like a surplus possibility which language projects into the future. To this extent Heidegger's use of the word "oblivion" (or "forgetting") is essentially an extraction from language just as the salvational name "God" is the futural promise of language itself. The Heideggerian "symptom" of language is precisely that while it contains in its depths the several contingent associations and displacements of meaning, it also insists in the present, of its application on the essential necessity of a metaphysical determination. Heidegger distributes the symptom between the ambiguous poetic effect of the immemorial presence of truth (which Heidegger calls "dwelling" in the essay discussed above) and the propositional reference to a historical society (technology as the overwhelming empirical reality of industrial society evaluated by Heidegger's thought as a metaphysics).

What is interesting in Aristotle's position within the history of philosophy is that while he provides the inaugural paradigm for a scientific and theoriticist thinking he also opens up the *logos* to a logistical or contingent intellectual challenge. In that sense he is also the first thinker of *historical* societies insofar as history is the domain of a kind of precarity or divisibility that logos must constantly deal with; bringing into play not just theoretical reasoning but also sub-

jective faculties like sensibility and desire. Nevertheless, Aristotle's own "symptom" is seen to be the equivocity between a hierarchical division of capacities and faculties articulating the animal, the slave, and the human proper to society, and the anthropological universalism of man as the measure or principle of all social and civic value. So, with reference to the corporeal meaning of the word *katharsis* in Greek which indicates the physical relief of being freed of the body's illnesses (*pathe*) implying a purely negative sense of "enjoyment", being also articulated with an aesthetics of higher cultivated civic delights (*diagoge*, cultivated leisure) Aristotle commits nothing if not an *anthropological inconsistency*. If Heidegger's site of philosophical equivocity is language, the site of Aristotle's anthropological inconsistency is the *body*. He, on the one hand institutes the doctrine of property or propriety with regard to what the human being must externalize at each stage of his process of thinking (*logos*) as the work (*ergon*) proper to that stage, and on the other hand, every stage is threatened by the unthinkable cathartic enjoyment: the threat being political insofar as the social and civic value of work is threatened by a negative and cathartic enjoyment unworking the very anthropological measure of all values and producing a trace of *ungovernable* obscurity (or even stupidity usually associated with any form of life reduced to the brute body of the organism) in every constituted and transparent form of thought. That is why Aristotle's *Politics* at this level is neither a political theory nor an organized praxis; it is a continuous government of contingency and precarity prescribing ceaseless vigilance towards this trace of anthropological inconsistency at the very dawn of the civic and political Man. Alternatively expressed, this "symptom" is the contradiction plaguing the thought of philosophy in a class society where class is the point of obscurity or unthinkability staining the transparent glass of theory and practice, which Derrida pointed out were on the same side of philosophical history. Curiously, this point of contamination which class and stratified society condenses in itself is also a point of enjoyment. Thus, insofar as the history of philosophy is as much a history of symptoms thought is accompanied by an obscure enjoyment, which itself is constitutively unthinkable. To which the question follows: is there a possible thought of enjoyment within not so much the his-

tory of philosophy as the larger space of a history of society? We could also call this Marx's question heard in several texts including in *The German Ideology*. And waiting in hope for a certain affirmative thought of enjoyment in Marx one must further wonder – what will be the site of such an affirmation given that the site of obscurity or inconsistency in the chronicles of great philosophers makes for either a certain melancholic triumphalism of the past or a skeptical government of the present?

In January 2016, at a public forum in Berlin, Alain Badiou and Jean-Luc Nancy carried out what was eventually inscribed as a text with the title *Dialogue on German Philosophy*. In the course of the conversation, the two French maestros arrived at the name "Marx". Both agreed that Marx can't be said to quite belong to the history of philosophy and that he does not confirm to the universal figure of "the philosopher". In fact, Badiou sets up a kind of test for what a true philosophical sequence in history might be: is a philosophy able to extract a universal value from the contingent historicity of a situation? (Badiou and Nancy 2018, 25) If so, how is it possible?

Though not responding directly to this test, Nancy actually suggests that Marx does offer a new value to be subjected to the universalizing thinking process in the concrete situation of the middle 19th century. According to Nancy, paradoxically this universal value is the value of "enjoyment". Nancy recalls Marx's texts in which the author, when advocating the abolition of private property, asserts that with such an abolition, the form of collective property, or property *as such* would also be abolished. This double abolition would be the event for the thinking of a new form of individuality. So, Nancy wonders, what would such an individuality consist of? Again he remembers a part of Marx's *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844*, where the author speaks of the workers' "enjoyment" as it is revealed to be an essential stake of his/her production. The worker enjoys himself/herself in the very act of production in the mode of a certain recognition or dignity (or even attachment). In this sense, the production of value and the event of a kind of self-enjoyment are indiscernible. Now Nancy of course uses the French word "jouissance" as a translation of Marx's own German word(s) for "enjoyment" in the 1844 text (ibid.,

27).[10] I don't want to elaborate on the issue of *jouissance* – again it is not in my competence as I am not a speaker of French – but a short parenthesis on the equivocity and possibility of this word is in order.

In so far as jouissance refers to sexual pleasure, it brings up the perspective of an experience which is both intense and finite. To this extent, the linguistic challenge is to think in the word jouissance any kind of universal value to the extent that its primary reference is to the particularity of the sexual act. What is interesting in this discussion is that often in the general imagination of an infinite enjoyment, whether conceived of in the sphere of aesthetic or religio-mystical enjoyment, the measure of such an infinite experience still remains the irreducible real of sex. This of course leads to a logical impasse because the very measure is incommensurate with an infinite horizon of experience. This impasse is also reproduced in the relationship of the commodity with the consumer in capitalism. On the one hand the commodity is the object of "enjoyment" sought to be infinitely reproducible and on the other, by virtue of being an ephemeral object of utility, the jouissance of the commodity must always end. Capitalism's challenge is not dissimilar to the challenge of art or religion insofar as it seeks to measure an infinite circuit of enjoyment by the real of an irreducible but finite – or even more precisely instantaneous – pleasure/jouissance. That is to say, the commodity is relentlessly sexualized in the capitalist projection into the consumer's imaginary. Nancy's invitation is to think of a universal value of jouissance beyond and against this series of logical impasses that in his own words actually foreshadow the death of jouissance (ibid., 27).[11]

---

10 The implication of the workers' relationship to his/her production as enjoyment is surely the very ground on which the real historical analysis of workers' alienation in industrial capitalism can be carried out. After all, alienation is either the deprivation of an original capacity for enjoyment or even more disturbingly a perversion of the generic capacity for enjoyment into a specific form of *alienated enjoyment*.

11 Which is not to say that there are no significant differences between the spheres of aesthetic enjoyment, religious epiphany and the so-called consumer satisfaction in relation to the measure of sexual pleasure. It seems to me that religio-mystical experience has an ambiguous attitude

Historically speaking Marx is indicating something which is in the order of a kind of philosophical future. And as Nancy and Badiou separately refer to, this future is most vividly imagined in scenes of a society to come where the human being would work in the morning, fish in the afternoon and play the violin after sundown.[12] The philosophical infinity of this imagination consists not anymore in the image of an exceptional but banal "natural" experience (that is to say the sexual experience) but in a reconfiguration of the very ground on which human beings constitute their common forms of life. So, the form of life of a communist future here seems to be imagined as a zone of indiscernibility between labour and leisure, value and enjoyment. But we must note that while on the utopian side, this scene referred to by the French philosophers from Marx's *German Ideology* is an index for what Badiou called a future "Marxist anthropology", such utopia is strictly based on a critique of both the anthropological universalism of Man as the measure of what is the proper of individual human externalization into work/value (*ergon*) as well as of political economy which takes individual men as units of ownership of property both as objects of value and enjoyment (ibid., 29).

Two questions follow from the above analysis: firstly, how is the transition or change from the critical side to the utopian side to be thought? What is the *principle* of this thinking that itself cannot be

---

towards imagining itself in sexual terms. In religious narratives mystical transformations are often depicted through erotic imagery even while the eros itself is turned into a spiritual affair. Artistic thinkers in the modern times have often refused the analogy of their jouissance with sex. For instance, the theatre thinker Antonin Artaud violently rejects the hypothesis that the animating force of art can in any way be reduced or compared to the automatism of a sexual energetics. It seems to me capitalism is the most receptive entity to being sexualised. That is why Nancy's pronouncement of the death of the jouissance of value in capitalism is so significant. Also, for a reference I will not explain see: Jacques Lacan's verdict "capitalism, that was its starting point: getting rid of sex" (Lacan 1990, 30).

12 This shared invocation of the scene of the future from *The German Ideology*, among other things, leads Badiou to wryly remark that he and Nancy are finally agreed on one subject: Marx. Wouldn't this agreement also constitute a "symptom"? (Badiou and Nancy 2018, 27)

completely materialized by the historicity of the critical present nor be totally left to the clouds of the imagination? Secondly, what will be the political form of such a possible change from critique to affirmation? What will be its organized temporal strategy? These two questions in a way cover the greatest amplitude of Marx's project and the Marxist practices to come. However, the rudiments of this massive history are to be found in a text which is as brief as it could be from a year after the 1844 *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts*. This is Marx's text called *Theses on Feuerbach* from 1845. In conclusion I will make a few notes on this text but before that let me close this section by reminding ourselves that in the 1845 work Marx explicitly raises the question of the philosophical institution. Badiou and Nancy are of course keenly concerned with what will be Marx's position, given that he is not interested in an abstract philosophical counter system to the established philosophical institution(s), but what is also of great interest is that the explicit object of Marx's thinking in the *Theses on Feuerbach* is not determined by the conceptual terminology of political economy that he is otherwise so preoccupied with. He does not ever mention the word "labour" in this text but poses the general problem of *practice*. It is this general level of enquiry that one had already seen in the 1844 text with the thinking of the form of what Marx calls "generic humanity" as opposed to the work of producing specific or specialized values through labour (ibid., 27). If in the 1844 text, generic humanity is not the description of either an anthropological or a politico-economic form of activity but a principle or even an *axiom*, then in the 1845 *Theses on Feuerbach*, does Marx have any further accompanying axioms to wager? And if to wager an axiom is a philosophical act par excellence, then what is Marx's "position" when he speaks of "human sensuous activity" in the 1845 text? Is it an anthropological or a political position – or a philosophical one?

Concluding after Marx's Eleventh Thesis on Feuerbach: The Transvaluation of Human Sensuous Activity as the Materiality of Thought

In the first thesis on Feuerbach, Marx reproaches Ludwig Feuerbach, the firebrand atheist Left-Hegelian, with not being able to think of "human sensuous activity" as itself an object of thinking. Feuerbach is only able to think of the products of human sensuous activity in the form of the external "object" or "reality" or even "thing". He is not able to think the thing that is human sensuous activity. He is not able to *think things*.[13] In this respect, Marx is tantalizingly close to Heidegger and both these thinkers, in their respective times and contexts, take a resolute distance from philosophy as merely conceptual representation. It's a different matter that Heidegger in *The Question Concerning Technology* himself reproaches Marx for falling back on a metaphysics and anthropologism of "labour". My intervention at this point remains that Marx does not paraphrase "human sensuous activity" as labour in the 1845 text. He does not even oppose theoreticist or scientific thinking of external reality with practical-historical thinking. He asks the question *in principle*, as the very materiality of all possible thinking – isn't the thought of human sensuous activity the inescapable self-reflexive dimension of all practice? To that extent, the pertinent problem is not whether thinking is practical or theoretical but rather that isn't all practice that is to say human sensuous activity internal to the very "act" of thinking. Marx distinguishes between Feuerbach's contemplative materialism from what he himself espouses to be an active materialist practice but this practice is not the same as the labour which produces external works and values; it is the "subjective" (Marx's word in the Thesis I) attachment to the very thing that triggers thought and from which the materiality of thinking cannot be distinguished.

So, a precise and bewildering problem arises that if human sensuous activity is to be taken in its subjective existential upsurge and not evaluated as the "object" produced by this activity, then by what

13 See the first thesis in 'Theses on Feuerbach' (Marx and Engels 1969, 13–15).

material reality – the real, as it were – will this subjective activity be measured. In the first thesis, Marx gives a somewhat idiosyncratic if problematical indication of what is at stake: he asks his addressees to desist from taking human sensuous activity in its "dirty-Jewish form of appearance" (Thesis 1). It seems to me that Marx is alluding to a precise historical situation where the "dirty-Jewish form" is dominantly received by society as a dirty-Jewish *enjoyment* (with all the overdetermined meanings that the French word jouissance has with its transgressive and surplus sexual connotation). The 19th century majoritarian anti-semetic Europe was constantly posing the anxious question: what is the Jew doing in his "dirty" corner? What secret enjoyment does he take in his hole (with all the animal connotations of a rat's hiding place as well as the subhuman ghetto)?[14] Marx, in his polemical figure, alludes to a very particular reality or real of his own historical situation that the name "Jew" both condenses as a point of blockage or obscurity of social rationality; and as also the point through which a vertiginous series of imagined enjoyments pass. They pass as "appearances" as do shadows in a theatrical play of light and darkness with only the audiences thrilled stupefaction to vouch for its ephemeral reality.

In the theses that follows, Marx does not at all abstract the so-called enjoyment of human sensuous activity into a new theoretical object of thought. He seeks to think this activity at the level of its subjective enjoyment – if enjoyment is to be taken as attachment or recognition not just by the other but as self-evaluation within the practice – towards a critical-analytical horizon as well as an affirmative-revolutionary one. Underlying both these horizons is a concrete materialist question: who enjoys the human sensuous activity as its subject? Who is the subject of enjoyment? The critical analytical refutation of Feuerbach is that the subject is not the isolated natural-anthropological individual, who according to Feuerbach is the victim of religious delusion or alienation. One could also call this

14 This anxiety with appearance or dissimulation today applies to the figure of the muslim on a global scale. Again its as if the question whispered deafeningly lingers in the air: what is the muslim doing? What secret *terrorist* enjoyment is s/he taking in her Islamic corner/ghetto/Nation?

Marx's refutation of Feuerbach's theory of religious enjoyment. For Marx the alienated consolation of religion is itself the product of a contradiction that is internal to human sensuous activity at the level of society or "social relations". So social relations are determined by their specific historicity rather than being the sum total of the institutions governing the activities of natural individuals. The subject of enjoyment is already a self-divided subject insofar as society is the battleground of contradictory enjoyments. In the tenth thesis, Marx calls this the battleground of "civil society". From the standpoint of civil society, the natural attitude of treating the social space as a test case of the secular demystification of religious delusions ultimately puts every individual to this scientific or theoreticist test at his/her own isolated level. From this standpoint, one is not able to see that even delusional enjoyment is an affair of social circulation and not an object of individual therapeutics. This is Marx's exhortation to the passive materialism of Feuerbach to self-politicise itself, that is to say, to risk a certain new political enjoyment.

However, if this exhortation is not towards any kind of adventurism (anarchist terrorism) or sensationalism (aestheticization of politics), then even this new enjoyment must base itself on a critique of class-and social politics. Feuerbach only sees individuals who belong to the two objective "worlds" – the delusional religious and the scientific secular. He is unable to see these two worlds/objects/values-systems as themselves involved in a contradictory social relationship lived out by the sensuous activities of "human" society. It is this new standpoint of a human society in opposition to civil society that Marx affirms as the possible ground of a "new philosophy". This is the crux of the matter: even while human society is, in Marx's historical present, a contradictory battleground of civil society – as well as the State, something I will not deal with here – as a new generic standpoint, it already promises a future. But the crucial prescription at this point is that for such a future to be realized, the present has to be changed in practice, which is impossible without the human sensuous practice of thinking this change, here and now.

Who will think this change? Or, how is it possible to think "change" itself as a universal value when the only material sign of change is a certain enjoyment or enthusiasm for the thought of change in a con-

tradictory present?[15] In his eleventh thesis on Feuerbach, Marx dismisses the "philosopher" as the possible agent of thinking the thing called "change". The thesis reads "The philosophers have only *interpreted* the world in various ways; the point is to *change* it." (Marx and Engels 1969, 15). What is to be noted in these two momentous lines is that there is nothing in the second sentence as following from the first one which implies that the philosopher is obliged to change the world. At the same time the thesis delivers the imperative of change as an undisavowable philosophical blow. So, it is clear that Marx does not enjoin the philosopher to change the world. He simply rejects the office of old philosophy as passive and scholastic. The revolutionary force of change is a matter of historical contingency and precarity – which becomes the object of Marxist strategies of organization. But the universal newness of change or revolution as a value and enjoyment is the affirmation at the site of a new philosophy without any need for the old philosopher. Marx doesn't seem particularly interested in whether the vehicle of this new philosophy is the political militant or the poet of the future. He is not interested in replacing or extending the severe authority of the philosopher with the warm tones of a poetic voice or the terse injunctions of an organisational discourse. Something more this-worldly, non-specialised and rare is at stake with the thought of change: a new *capacity* for thinking, evaluating, enjoying is born and exactly at this birth, when the mirror of philosophy is cracked beyond repair, Marx utters the word philosophy as part of common language but with a new and uncommon

15 While enthusiasm reminds one of Immanuel Kant's choice of affect that the thought of the French Revolution produces in his text 'The conflict of faculties', we must remember Kant still thinks of this affect as arising in a kind of spectatorial imagination (see Kant 1979). The spectator is an abstract theatrical figure who sees as if the revolutionary events appear and pass through his/her "mind" as an objective neutral presentation rather than a historical sequence with divided and partisan subjective stakes. For Kant no partisan universalism is possible in real history. For Marx only a partisan universalisation of values and enjoyments arising in history can vindicate the truth and force of a materialist philosophy. The epic question for the future that Marx does not give the slightest trace of an answer to is: *Who will be the philosopher of this new philosophy?*

effect. Would it be archaic, or in bad taste, or an invitation to a secret, almost obscene enjoyment – or would it be an act of universal, public solitude today – to call this effect "communist"?

Literature

Badiou, Alain, and Jean-Luc Nancy. 2018. *German Philosophy. A Dialogue*. Edited by Jan Völker, translated by Richard Lambert. Cambridge MA: The MIT Press.

Choudhury, Soumyabrata. 2018. *Ambedkar and Other Immortals. An Untouchable Research Programme*. New Delhi: Navayana.

Derrida, Jacques. 2019. *Heidegger: The Question of Being and History*. Edited by Geoffrey Bennington. Chicago/London: University of Chicago Press.

Ford, Andrew. 1995. "Katharsis. The Ancient Problem." In *Performativity and Performance*, edited by Andrew Parker and Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, 109–132. London: Routledge.

Heidegger, Martin. 1993. *Basic Writings*. Edited by David Farrell Krell. New York: HarperCollins.

Kant, Immanuel. 1979. *The Conflict of Faculties*. Translated by M. J. Gregor. Abaris Books.

Lacan, Jacques. 1990. *Television. A Challenge to the Establishment*. Translated by Denis Hollier, Rosalind Krauss, and Annette Michelson. New York: W. W. Norton & Company.

Marx, Karl and Friedrich Engels. 1969. *Marx/Engels Selected Works, Volume One*. Moscow: Progress Publishers.