

# Repetition: Kierkegaard, Artaud, Pollock and the theatre of the image.

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## *I. The Coming-going of theatricality*

TS: What is it for an image to come into being? Or, to put it another way, what is it to perform an image, to make it happen? These are the themes of Walter Benjamin's famous essay "The Work of Art in the Age of its Technical Reproducibility" as Samuel Weber retranslates its title for us.<sup>1</sup> They are also the subject of Sam's 1992 Mari Kuttna lecture *Mass Mediauras*, which we published last year. Included in that volume is a very interesting essay entitled "The Unraveling of Form".<sup>2</sup> In the central section of the essay Sam talks about the way in which Immanuel Kant and others explore the question of how forms turn into figures, how form becomes figure. This is the issue we want to get to in the second session through an exploration of works by Pollock, Artaud and others. But, in line with Sam's very original thinking about theatricality I thought we might begin with a particular text of Kierkegaard, his book called *Repetition, An Essay in Experimental Psychology* from 1843.<sup>3</sup> Our overall aim is to sketch out a theoretical ground around the question: what kind of forces force form into figure? First, we will do it in relation to the ground of the theatrical performance, then in relation to the visual imaginary.

SW: It might seem odd to go to a text on repetition when discussing questions of the image. However, as soon as you start to realise that the image is not something inert, something once and for all, that, on the contrary, it implies some type of temporal process in its production, reception, and circulation, then a temporal category such as repetition is not in principle as alien or as strange to it as it might seem were you to regard an image as something absolutely self-contained, instantaneous, as purely spatial. If you are at all interested in questions of contemporary theory or of theory in general, there is no concept or category that leads more directly into what is specific about contemporary theory - or certain aspects of it - than repetition. There is a genealogy of questioning that can be traced back at least to Kierkegaard, which is to say, to the immediate aftermath of Hegel, following the culmination of philosophical idealism. You can follow this question of repetition at work for example in Nietzsche's thought of the Eternal Return, in Freud's speculations on the repetition compulsion and the Death Drive, in Heidegger, in Derrida's idea of iterability, and in Deleuze's *Repetition and Difference*. The question of repetition imposes itself once the idealistic system of thought exhausts its resources, finds itself "blocked". In the wake of such a blockage, repetition can no longer be taken for granted as a mechanical, self-evident and subsidiary phenomenon.

At the same time, this resurgence of interest in repetition is accompanied by a renewed concern with theatricality. Theatricality is not quite the same as theatre, it doesn't have to be identified with actual theatrical productions and institutions. So from the point of view of the history of art, we might ask what the rethinking of *theatricality* has to do with the reinterpreting of *images*. Terry Smith was good enough to give me one of his texts, the introduction to the book *In Visible Touch*, and it struck me that many of the issues he addresses - for example, questions of representation, mimesis, of the relation of spectator to the painter - also touch on the issue of

theatricality.<sup>4</sup> One of the things that theatricality and painting have in common is that both deal with images *for* a spectator, *for* someone else who is not part of the work itself. It is much harder to speak of a self-contained work of theatre than of almost any other artistic genre, including painting. You can describe *Hamlet*, for example, as a work but as soon as you consider its staging, its work-character is no longer closed and self-contained since it necessarily depends upon the temporal/spatial dimension of the spectator. Of course, consideration of the spectator has become more and more important in all the arts - not just for painting, but for literature, music and so on. In theatre, however, it is given from the very beginning. That may be one reason why the last two hundred years has witnessed a growing interest in theatricality. What I would like to do now is to cite one very suggestive instance of that interest: the opening lines of Kierkegaard's *Repetition*. I hope that this discussion might incite some of you to go back and read this text. It is extremely difficult in the way Kafka is difficult. That is, you understand each individual sentence but you don't necessarily grasp how one follows the other. And until you accomplish this, you cannot be certain whether the text is nonsense, or where there is some sort of design governing it. Kierkegaard begins:

When the Eleatics denied motion, Diogenes, as everyone knows, came forward as an opponent. He literally did come forward because he didn't say a word, he merely paced back and forward a few times, thereby assuming that he had sufficiently refuted them. (*Repetition*, 131).

The Eleatics were the school of early pre-Socratic philosophers, Parmenides being the most famous; they had a conception of being as being essentially unchanging. Whatever really was, he claimed, was not susceptible to change. Whatever changed was really a kind of non-being. The Eleatics basically denied the ontological importance of movement and of change. So Diogenes simply moved -- in front of everybody. In the history of philosophy there are a whole series of exchanges like this, the most famous being Bishop George Berkeley's response to such a refutation: "The tree in the quad was put there by God." You will note, by the way, that this play between metaphysical presupposition and physical immediacy already sets a scene. It is more like a description or a sketch, one which will again and again border on farce, on a kind of low comedy. In the midst of what appears to be a very esoteric discussion on whether being is changeable or not, Diogenes just steps up, and walks up and down, wordlessly saying: "Here is the answer." A Woody Allen touch.

Then suddenly Kierkegaard's text shifts gears, or rather, tone:

When I was occupied for some time, at least on occasion, with the question of repetition, whether or not it is possible, what importance it has, whether something gains or loses in being repeated, I suddenly had the thought, you can after all take a trip to Berlin, you've been there lots before, and now you can prove to yourself whether a repetition is possible and what importance it has. (131)

I mentioned earlier that when you first read this kind of passage you don't know what is going on but, as you read further on and come back to it, you see that it is deliberately farcical. What could it possibly mean to ask, "Is repetition possible?" It's as if I would say: "I've been to Sydney before, they have invited me back so I'll go and see if it's possible to repeat the experience." Does it make sense to ask the question in this way? It seems as if one is asking about something called "repetition", considered as a self-contained entity or object. But conceived of this way, no action or fact is going to provide any sort of answer. And so we have to ask ourselves, whether the text ("Kierkegaard") is naïve, or whether we are naïve in simply taking the question at its word. Perhaps the focus of the question is not merely "repetition", but what it might mean for something called *repetition* to be "possible". And also: what does it mean that the question is being asked at all? Perhaps this is why the "narrator" suddenly, abruptly, shifts gears, as it were, stops speaking simply about abstract issues and starts talking about

the situation in which the question arose, saying: "At home I was practically immobilised by this question."

Suddenly it is the "I" that steps forward, describing a situation of distress. From the very general, "historical" anecdote about the Eleatics and Diogenes, we are suddenly confronted with a far more modest but no less urgent problem, affecting not a generalized or anonymous subject but a very singular "I": "Here I am, sitting at home," he tells us in effect, "completely blocked." From what, we don't know, yet. But it is this blockage that "sets the stage" for the emergence of the question of repetition. Having thus indicated a situation, which, if sketchy, is nevertheless both highly charged and highly singular, the narrator once again jumps back, or ahead, to a more general, more historical perspective: "Say what you will, this question will play a very important role in modern philosophy; for repetition is a crucial expression for what recollection was to the Greeks." (131)

Recollection here refers to the famous Platonic theory of *anamnesis* elaborated in the *Phaedo*. According to this theory, knowledge is only possible as re-cognition: things are recognizable to us only because we have known them elsewhere, in some other existence. We can only know something because we have a faint memory of already having known it. From this, Constantin proceeds to make a remarkable prediction:

Just as they taught that all knowing is a recollecting, modern philosophy will teach that all life is a repetition. The only modern philosopher who had intimation of this was Leibniz. Repetition and recollection are the same movement except in opposite directions; for what is recollected has been, is repeated backwards, whereas genuine repetition is recollected forward. Repetition, therefore, if it is possible, makes a person happy, whereas recollection makes him unhappy - assuming, of course, that he gives himself time to live and does not promptly, at birth, find an excuse to sneak out of life again, for example, under the pretext that he has forgotten something. (131)

Although this passage starts out in what seems to be a fairly straightforward manner, it becomes increasingly enigmatic as it proceeds. What Constantin says about recollection may seem roughly comprehensible, but what he then goes on to say about repetition defies understanding. I remember that when I first read this, I wondered, "Why should repetition make anyone happy?" When one thinks about repetition, at least today, one is more liable to think of it as boring or monotonous, or perhaps even as demonic, but probably not as a source of happiness. The enigmatic self-evidence of the assertion, however, in this text continued to provoke me, and at a certain point I picked up a Danish dictionary to see if that might help. In Danish, as in German, the word "repetition" exists, but as a foreign word that is not employed very often. Kierkegaard could have used it, but he didn't. Indeed, early on in this text, Constantin remarks that "repetition is a good Danish word" whereas "'Mediation' is a foreign word" and he even "congratulate[s] the Danish language on a philosophical term." (149) All of this is a bit of persiflage directed against Hegel, who vaunted the uniquely "speculative" quality of the German language and whose dialectical notion of *Vermittlung*, mediation, provides Constantin with the philosophical reference *against* which the question of "repetition" is demarcated and elaborated. Danish shares with German the ability to form technical concepts by combining widely used non-technical words. "Gjen-tagelse", the Danish word for repetition, is formed from two words "gjen" and "tagelse". Since we know English we can recognise certain affinities: "Gjen" resembles "begin" and "tagelse" recalls "take". The "good Danish word" commonly translated into English as "repetition", taken more literally signifies: "take again". It is this connotation, which disappears in English, that begins to explain why *Gjentagelse* should suggest to Constantin the possibility of being happy as opposed to recollection which, he says, makes you sad. The good Danish word for repetition suggests not merely that something recurs but also the possibility that it can be "taken again". Recollection makes you sad because it confirms the loss or absence of what can only be recollected, represented. *Gjentagelse*, by contrast, makes one happy because it suggests the possibility of recovering what has been lost, of overcoming the transience of time

and ultimately, finitude. The good Danish word holds out the promise, at least for Constantin Constantius, of overcoming mortality.

TS: What is the sense of the expression "Stealing out of life"? It seems to make the whole philosophical distinction between recollecting and repeating - itself already fragile - radically provisional. Could it be one of his existential absurdities?

SW: I wouldn't rush to call it "Existentialist" because that puts it too neatly in a category. He takes an every day trivial expression, such as "Hold on a second, I've forgotten something, I'd better go back and get it." What could be more common, more banal: A slight inadvertence, "wait a minute, I'll be right back". It reminds me of the eternal litany of American television, which interrupts its programs every few minutes with the admonition: "Stay with us, we'll be right back after this message". Only here, in Kierkegaard's text, the "message" is that we may *not* be right back, not even if we buy everything that Kierkegaard-Constantin is selling. To "steal out of life" under the pretext that you've forgotten something, far from "staying with us," signifies the preference for a kind of suicide rather than to affront the sense of incompleteness, of lack occurring as a loss of conscious control. This is not so unfamiliar today: indeed, it may very well be at the heart of what we call "consumerism". But more generally, this sense that the most trivial details may be the tip of an iceberg consisting of a mass of things that we would prefer to ignore -- this is also one of the leitmotifs of Freudian psychoanalysis.

Part of the irony of this passage, which is also very characteristic of Kierkegaard's writing more generally and which gives it its "farical" dimension, derives from the juxtaposition of domains that are normally kept wide apart. To take a banal and common verbal gesture such as "I forgot something, wait a moment on while I go get it," and to resituate it as a question of life and death is as incongruous as it is unexpected and indeed, uncanny. The incongruity here is that between the irreducibly singular perspective of finite existence, on the one hand, and the more common, more reassuring, more general horizon of our everyday comportment, on the other. Constantin, like Kierkegaard, is marked by the thought of Hegel, which is to say by an intellectual atmosphere in which the highest and most profound reality is understood to be the concept thinking itself through its mediations and totalising itself in the process. But this perspective, it seems as if Kierkegaard is saying, forgets one small thing: it forgets what it means to forget, to forgo. "We'll be back in a moment," it tells us as an apparent afterthought. But who is this "we" and in what sense am *I* part of it? It's only by pretending to ignore the disjunction of I and We, and by therefore "forgetting" the finitude of "life" that we can hope to avoid the problem by "sneaking" or "tiptoeing out" of life *once again* (*til at liste sig ud igjen af Livet*). Again (*igjen*)? Have I done this before? Is repetition, *Gjentagelse*, already at work here, in this casual *afterthought*? What's going on here, anyway? Further on in this text, Constantin will describe a very different kind of way of coming and going, a different kind of *gait*. We have a chance to come back to that later.

Robyn Cooper: Is there not a strong connection between recollection and repetition in the sense that there has to be a recollection before there is a repetition?

SW: Surely. Or at the very least, a repetition cannot be *recognized* as such without there being some sort of recollection. So, to the extent that repetition entails its recognition as such, the two cannot be separated or simply opposed to one another. In the text, however, this gets us into a very complex issue. For we must remember that the opening gambit, like the rest of the first part of the text, emanates from a narrator who is clearly involved in what he is recounting. He is therefore partial, and everything he says, including his attitude towards repetition, must be related to a more complex situation that we as readers have to infer and interpret. In this text, "Kierkegaard" never speaks for himself directly. And indeed, perhaps it is not possible for any *self* to speak

reliably or truthfully about repetition. In any case, what Kierkegaard does, quite deliberately, is to "*experiment* in figures," as he puts it elsewhere (in *The Corsair Affair*, see: *Repetition*, 359, note), by confiding discourse to voices and characters who are themselves very much involved in what they are talking about. In this, they resemble literary figures. The narrator here has a name, more or less "proper", more or less "generic": he is called Constantin Constantius. Everything he says bounces back as qualifying him. What one gets in the first half of *Repetition* is a discussion of the relation between recollection and repetition, as if they could be opposed to each other. Your point is well taken: they cannot simply be treated as alternatives since each implies and requires the other. The paradox here is that although the text does emphasise the importance of the individual, singular existence as opposed to the universalising logic of the concept, this emphasis can never be actually instantiated by a single individual. To allow anyone to speak in the name of the (universal validity of the) Singular is, paradoxically, to obliterate the possibility of singularity which by definition, as it were, can never speak in its own name. Kierkegaard is well aware that as soon as you speak, as soon as you think, you are moving in a domain that can never be that of pure singularity: in this he remains true to the heritage of his teacher, Hegel. Like Hegel, therefore, he emphasizes the necessity of a "leap": not that of the dialectic, however, but that, far more uncertain, of paradox and of a certain "faith". Or perhaps, of a certain madness.

TS: The other guide to this odd idea of "leaving life" is Artaud, who made much, in his biographical writing, of being dead before he was born. 5

SW: For both Artaud and Kierkegaard - despite their immense differences - the paradoxical notion of dying before you were born - of dying, perhaps, in order to be born - requires a theatrical staging to be articulated rather than a monologue. The dead-born individual becomes a staging area for different tendencies and forces which themselves cannot be unified in any one individual and which therefore cannot speak properly in their own name. Therefore, any one set of statements will always call for others that displace it. The impossibility of speaking or writing in one's own name is always at the bottom of what I would call the theatrics of writing. People talk about Kierkegaard's style, they remark how "literary" or "poetic" it is, and this is clearly not wrong, but it is still far too vague. Kierkegaard's writing is not literary in the sense of a novelist, he is not writing epics, nor is he writing poetry in any strong sense of the term. Rather, he is doing something similar to creating a scenario. Deleuze, who was more attuned than most to Kierkegaard's theatricality, described his writing as that of a "director", a *realisateur*. By contrast, I would emphasize rather its *dramaturgical* quality. The relative autonomy of his "figures" suggests that the position of the *writer* is not so much that of *directing* or *realizing*, but rather of *setting things into motion*, a motion that no author or director can fully anticipate or control. What is distinctive about a scenario or staging is that there is no one voice or perspective that dominates the whole. Perhaps this is why, in languages other than English, the instantiation of theater is designated not as a "work" but as a "piece": *pièce* in French, *Stück* in German. A "play" consists of a number of roles that are both fragmentary and interdependent: the "role" of an actor is constituted not only by lines, but also by "cues", pauses and other points of interaction, not just with other actors, but also with properties, with the stage and with the audience. Theatricality, in this sense, may well require a certain *consistency*, but not necessarily *unity*. Central perspective, if you will, is there primarily to be broken up and disrupted. Such breaks mark Kierkegaard's writing no less than that of Artaud, and as with many poets, such interruptive structuring effects the very unity of words. The most significant words break down into different and often incongruous multiple meanings. And there is no one voice, no proper name that can gather them into a single unity. Instead, there is a complex interplay of multiple possibilities: the kind of practice to which Derrida called attention in his recent lecture on "Artaud le MOMA", where he refers to Artaud's word-plays with his own name, with other words and with articulated language generally. 6 Kierkegaard may not do this quite as flamboyantly as Artaud, but he certainly does play very important games with single words, like *Gjentagelse*.

TS: Let us turn to a core part of the text, the passage beginning "I am rather well satisfied with the composition of the cast at the Königstädter Theater" (163). I will describe what occurs between the opening passages and this point. The persona/narrator has gone to Berlin, to a theatre that he regularly attends, one in which farce is the main kind of performance. He describes the theatre in wonderful detail, particularly the different types of people who sit in the various levels of the theatre. And, as Gay Macauley pointed out to me, this is a place where spectators are obviously as much a part of the spectacle as that which is happening on stage. The spectators get to see each other while the performance is going on, with the boxes on various levels and everyone looking at each other. Kierkegaard then compares a couple of famous actors, Grobecker and Beckmann.

SW: Just a brief comment about the spectators, and about the difference between this type of theatre and ordinary, respectable theatre. This is not a theatre that shows established, canonic tragedy or comedy: it is popular theatre. Most of the audience is not from the respectable middle class: they are working class or even lower. Constantin notes that the cheers and shrieks of laughter in the second balcony and gallery are entirely different from the applause of a refined and critical audience. Such cries nevertheless provide the actors with an accompaniment without which farce could simply not be performed. Beckmann, one of the two leading figures in the Königstädter Theater, is described as "unquestionably a comic genius who does not distinguish himself by character portrayal but by excesses of spirit. He is not great in the commensurables of the artistic but is admirable in the incommensurables of the individual." (163) Here we find a motif that recurs frequently with Artaud: the necessity for an actor to exceed the bounds of character as written and previously portrayed. This is a major reason why farce, as it is described here, defies and exceeds all traditional aesthetic categories. For *farce*, *Posse*, is precisely not *art* in any traditional sense, and perhaps not in any sense at all. To find out what it is, we must follow closely Constantin's description of Beckmann's theatrical excess:

He does not need the support of interaction, of scenery and staging, precisely because he is in an ebullient mood. He himself carries everything along. At the same time that he is being inordinately funny, he himself is painting his own scenery (SW: notice the metaphor) as well as though he were a set painter. What Baggesen says of Sara Nickels (SW: this gesture is frequent; its subtext is: "all of this exists, these are real characters and actors of the time, etc." Elsewhere Constantin tells his readers which are the best seats in the various balconies. Such gossip serves to remind us of the irreducible contingency that marks the relation of any reader to any text.), that she comes rushing on stage with a rustic scene attached to her, is true of Beckmann in a positive sense, except that he comes walking. In an art theatre proper one rarely sees an actor who can really walk and stand. (SW: notice how crucial *movement* is here; it is not simply representational movement, locomotion: it is performative movement). As a matter of fact, I have seen only one who can walk and stand, but what Beckmann is able to do I have not seen before. He is not only able to walk but he is able to *come walking*. To come walking is something very distinctive and by means of this genius he also improvises the whole scenic setting. He is able not only to portray an itinerant craftsman; he is also able to come walking like one and in such a way that one experiences everything (SW: note that the reader is now confronted by a series of images that don't exist, totally imaginary images that are carried along by Beckmann as he comes walking), one surveys the smiling hamlet from the dusty highway, hears its quiet noise, sees the footpath that goes down by the village pond when one turns off there by the blacksmith - all this when one sees Beckmann walking along with his little bundle on his back, walking stick in his hand, untroubled and undaunted. He comes walking onto the stage followed by street urchins whom one does not see. Mr. Beckmann is a sheer economy for theatre, because when it has him it needs neither street urchins nor stage scenery. (163-164)

TS: This is a very interesting instance of an equivalent in theatre to an image coming into form in a drawing, to what it might mean for an image to come into shape in the process of painting. What comes to mind is Chaplin as

he would have appeared to audiences who saw him before they (and he) reduced his gait to something that was a signature Chaplin image, that is, his way of walking before it became stylistic. He presents as someone - a nobody - who walked differently from others, who appeared in a space differently from others because his gait, stance, gestures came from a different, perhaps lower class setting. The distinctiveness is that this kind of walking would be natural if all the other implied things were around him, but it isn't natural without them. To evoke them it needs to exaggerate their absence. But he provokes recollection by evoking sounds, conjuring spaces, and whole milieus.

There is another level of gesture here, one that is neither depictive nor mimetic in its forms, although it is in its effects. It is something to do with exaggeration, stylisation, with the familiarity of an oft-repeated set of gestures, the happiness that they cause in an audience very familiar with them because they have seen them so often. Chaplin's waddle became such a performance. They know - squeal with delighted anticipation - that when Beckmann makes a certain sound off-stage, he will come on the stage in a certain, much loved way. There is an eagerness for repetition of this sort in much popular culture (rock n' roll is built around it). A favourite actor might double the delight (after causing consternation) of an audience by not coming on stage in the expected way, by singing one line, even a phrase, differently. This is the calculated geometry of a certain type of performance: the pleasures provoked by, say, Marelene Dietrich or Frank Sinatra, owe much to this play of complicity in altering the familiar, signalling a deliberate tampering with a persona by an actor whose persona is herself enacting a persona which all know is a unique mixture of a simplification of self and a parody of stereotype. A sharing with the audience of the secret of simulation. Such an actor may achieve this by abruptly modifying the "still" of the persona: by gestures of a strange angularity, for example, or by a shift into another register of movement, say, incredible speed conveyed by exaggerated slowness - the six million-dollar man/Peckinpah's *Wild Bunch* trick. The visual art parallel here is when an artist recycles an already-known image, even an iconic figure, but twists it into a different register of meaning by displacing it, or, in the case of Warhol, manifesting its recycled character overtly.

These thoughts were triggered for me by a comment you made when you first discussed this idea with me. *Gegangen* is the past participle of *gehen*, with the general meaning of to leave, or go away. But a literal rendering might be the odd "to come-go". In other words, this person has come into space in such a way that he appears to be going at the same time. Is this a version of "slow-mo"?

SW: Let me try out an interpretation of that. First of all, the verb for "walk" in German, as in Danish, is like our word to "go", as in to "go out". To *walk* and to *go* does mean he *comes walking*, but there is something else. What, after all, does it mean to *come walking*? It is very important that Constantin immediately follows up this description by insisting that "this is not a character sketch." In other words, you are not getting someone who comes on as portraying a typical character, not even the character of the actor "himself". What you have here is something different: something that does not pretend to any sort of self-contained reality. You can say Beckmann brings a *world* with him when he "comes walking" onto the stage and, at the same time, this world is doubled by the singular figure who is actually moving. But in moving, this figure is moving away from any kind of fixation as -- or on -- a strict *individual* to become a kind of *cipher* that brings this whole world into being *in its wake*. Somewhat different from Chaplin, I suspect, although Beckmann, carrying a small bundle on his shoulder, certainly anticipates Chaplin. But in contrast to Chaplin, perhaps, Beckmann goes down a path from which there is, in a sense, no return. His figure progressively loses its contours in a movement it no longer controls, finally dissolving, together with the audience, in a wildly spasmodic acid bath of laughter.

Alan Cholodenko: Is that what a stroke of genius is? Precisely to move from the singular to the universal?

SW: Perhaps not so much to move "from" "to" as to reveal the singular as already lurking within the universal. Derrida, in his presentation the other night during the Artaud Conference, asked, "What is a stroke? What is a *coup* ?" The French have an expression, *coup de théâtre*. Like the expression, *coup d'état*, *coup de théâtre* is used not primarily to designate events in the theater, but rather events that come as a sudden shock: that are entirely unforeseen, although the term can also imply deliberate planning, of a more or less secretive, conspiratorial kind. In any case, a *coup* in this sense interrupts or breaks expectations of some sort of *continuity* or identity. Beckmann's walk, by which he "comes walking", gradually turns into a dance that in turn moves towards increasing self-abandonment. What is described is how Beckmann, after bringing this whole world with him in his coming and going, is progressively carried away with his movements, by his movements, which get funnier, wilder, more and more "incommensurate" until he is utterly beside himself. And not just Beckmann: for the spectators in the audience are similarly beside themselves, absolutely wild with laughter. Completely stretched out, spaced out, oblivious to everything going on around them, whether on the stage or in the audience. This moment of ecstasy or of excess is, paradoxically perhaps, also one of great isolation and solitude, not at all one of mystical union. The French have an expression for this - *fou rire* - which designates what we might call, more clinically, "hysterical laughter". But the English expression that is closer is to "die laughing". For indeed, a kind of death, a relation to death, is very much at stake in this theatrical excess...

TS: Kierkegaard describes just this, on page 166:

Thus did I lie in my theater box, discarded like a swimmer's clothing, stretched out by the stream of laughter and unrestraint and applause that ceaselessly foamed by me. I could see nothing but the expanse of theater, hear nothing but the noise in which I resided. Only at intervals did I rise up, look at Beckmann, and laugh so hard that I sank back again in exhaustion alongside the foaming stream. (166)

SW: The idea of repetition is itself being spaced out and discarded, in a certain sense. Losing the feeling of being together, in an ecstatically pleasurable, but also painful, way -- being out of control. The way it is described - you become your own cast aside - instead of being inside your body, protected by clothes, you *have become* the clothes that have been put aside. An idea, curiously, of a certain loss of self, yet by no means in an entirely negative sense.

TS: Does this raise again the question of existentialism, in reverse? The sense of existence coming before essence - or, at least, the sense of casting away essence so "one" is at least open to the possibility of existence?

SW: Kierkegaard does talk about this kind of inwardness, an internal experience, elsewhere, but what you have here seems quite different. It is *being spaced out*, losing one's sense of self as the contour that holds everything together and in place; instead, it entails the sense of moving somewhere else, or rather, of being so *moved* that you are no longer simply within your usual physical and mental parameters. I think that this is one of the decisive aspects of what it means to be a singular individual, for Kierkegaard at least. I would say that this is one of the aspects involved in what Heidegger would call "being to Death." It isn't just anxiety and fear but rather a sense of being as a *possibility so intense* that no *figuration* can fully encompass or represent it. That's why what this movement is ushered in by a disintegration of the image or the figure. Yet precisely at this very moment, where figuration seems hopelessly inadequate to cope with the situation, it is conjured back by the narrator: "This by itself is blissful and yet I lacked something. Then in the wilderness surrounding me, I saw a figure that cheered me more than Friday cheered Robinson Crusoe." (166) What he sees, like Dante and Petrarch before him, is nothing other than a beautiful young woman. Only this time, the young woman is seated in a balcony precisely opposite.

That girl links up with the whole problem of repetition, she is described as giving Constantin a point of anchorage,



an image to hold on to. "I could return to myself again", he says, "She sat composed in the midst of it all, quietly smiling in childlike wonder". (167) This is the memory he has of that theatre, this is what he hopes he can go back to; the *same* theatre, the *same* performance, the *same* girl. But guess what? This time, the girl isn't there any more, or if she is there, he doesn't see her; the performance is awful, and to make a long story short, Constantin Constantius is obliged to conclude that there is no repetition, but only the sadness of recollection.

What, then, is repetition? Repetition, for Constantin, turns out to involve the desire to indulge the possibilities of expansion, but only in order ultimately to be able to pull it all back together again by means of an *image*. Constantin, in short, expects repetition to be true to its name: to allow for the possibility of taking everything back again. And when he discovers that *in this sense* there is no repetition, he concludes that repetition as such is impossible. It is, he remarks bitterly, "as if my great words, which I now would not repeat at any price, were only a dream from which I awoke to have life unremittingly and treacherously *retake* everything it had given without providing a *repetition*." (172) Constantin here is reduced to playing with the components of that good Danish word, *Gjentagelse*: *taking* and *retaking*. He went back to Berlin in search of a repetition that would make him happy by giving him back the past as the present. But instead of this "present", what he found was a swindle: life takes back, it takes again, and it re-takes: but it does not *give back*. Not a whit. The experience of losing oneself, the intense, pleasurable experience of losing oneself, is not, as it were, reappropriable; it can't be assuaged through an image that would allow him to have a consolation for this loss of self.

Two further points, if I may. In German and in Danish the word for "farce" that Constantin uses is *posse*. In Latin, this word is a verb: "to be able". It designates a faculty, a capacity, an ability. In short: a *possibility*. In this text, theatre is above all the space of possibility. For example, Constantin notes that the special attraction that theater holds for young people is related to its ability to play out possibilities, without having to reconcile them with reality. In theatre, possibilities can be explored that young people still keep open for themselves before "maturity" closes them down in the name of realism.

Surely there is no young man with any imagination who has not at one time been captivated by the enchantment of the theatre, and desired to be himself carried away into the midst of that fictitious reality in order to see and hear himself as an *alter ego*, to disperse himself among the innumerable possibilities which diverge from himself, and yet in such a way that every diversity is in turn a single self. Of course, it is only at a very early age such a desire can express itself. (154)

Theatre sets the scene of possibility. But *posse* entails a possibility that can never be fully realised. It is a possibility that is not realised in an heroic figure, a greater self. It cannot be measured in terms of the self, for it involves the dissolution of the self. To be sure, in Danish as in German, *posse* signifies farce and has nothing to do etymologically or lexically with possibility. It derives from the word that designates a *dent*, for example, a dent in the car. In German and Danish, such a dent is called a *bosse* or a "bump". Anything that breaks the continuous contour of a figure, either as a bump or a dent, is a *bosse*. Farce has to do precisely with deformation, deformity, with the disruption of the continuous contours of the self. Form and Figure come and go as *Posse*: and with them, art as well. This coming and going open the space of desire, ecstasy, but also of fear, remorse and regret. At the end of the first section of *Repetition*, Constantin quotes a popular German Folk Song, which I want to recite here, just so that you don't get the idea that the relation of coming and going to love and death is my invention:

Das Nönnlein kam gegangen The little nun came walking (going)

In einem schneeweissen Kleid; In a dress as white as snow;

Ihr Här'l war abgeschnitten, Her hair was cut in pieces,  
 Ihr roter Mund war bleich. Her mouth was red and pale.  
 Der Knab, er setzt sich nieder, The boy set himself down,  
 Er sass auf einem Stein; He sat upon a stone,  
 Er weint die hellen Tränen, He wept glistening tears,  
 Brach ihm sein Herz entzwei. His heart broke in two.

This poem, related by Constantin in German, condenses much of the unhappy love that provides the backdrop to this staging of "repetition". In the context of our discussion, however, it makes explicit the convergence of "gegangen" as both "walked" and "gone". In coming the little nun was leaving. Her arrival coincides with her departure. And what she leaves behind are tears and a broken heart. That, at least, is what she leaves behind for Constantin. But Beckmann, who also comes-going, leaves behind a different story. He leaves behind not just anxiety and mournful recollection, but an ecstatic experience of singularity. That is a perspective that cannot simply be forgotten or eliminated from the text of *Gjentagelse*. But it is a perspective: not simply an image. In traditional aesthetics, the image serves as a defense against the intensity of that which arrives too overwhelmingly, as well as against that which has disappeared.

#### Notes (TO BE COMPLETED)

1. "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction", in Walter Benjamin, *Illuminations*, London: Fontana, 1973
2. Samuel Weber, *Mass Mediauras: Form, Technics, Media*, Sydney: Power Publications, 1996, 15-30.
3. Søren Kierkegaard, *Repetition, A Venture in Experimental Psychology*, Edited and translated by Howard V. and Edna H. Hong, in: *Kierkegaard's Writings*, vol. 6, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983.
4. "Intensity: Modernism's Phallic Aesthetics", in Terry Smith ed., *Invisible Touch: Modernism and Masculinity*, Sydney: Power Publications, 1997, Chicago: University of Chicago, 1997.
5. Antonin Artaud, *The Theater and its Double*,
6. Jacques Derrida, *Artaud le MOMA* (forthcoming).
7. Antonin Artaud, Drawings
8. Edward Scheer, "Des esquisses du jet/Sketches of the jet: Artaud's abreaction of the system of fine arts", paper to Artaud conference, Sydney, 1996 (TS to get publication details)
9. Pollock references
10. Antonin Artaud, *The Theater and its Double*,
11. Jacques Derrida, Artaud le MOMA text, as presented at the Artaud Conference, Sydney, 1996.

12. Walter Benjamin, *The Origin of German Tragic Drama*, translated by John Osborne, London: Verso Books, 1977.

13. Jean Arp

14. Imants Tillers

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