

Mapping the forbidden

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Mapping the forbidden is in itself forbidden. And in my understanding the most forbidden of everything forbidden is that which refuses to be categorized, that which is neither this nor that, ungraspable forces which do not sit still but hop capriciously about. Aristotle consequently knew what he did, when he between the two concepts of identity and difference inserted a third position called “the excluded middle”, a non-bridgeable gap which in the same figure unites and separates, liberates and imprisons; an unruly space located beyond the realm of conventional reason; a no man’s land of liminality which the well behaved must never enter. But Aristotle also argued that what one cannot do perfectly, one must do as well as one can.

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One reason why the forbidden remains forbidden is that it is one with the taboo, a concept which is etymologically connected not merely with the terms “under prohibition” and “not allowed”, but with the words “sacred” and “holy” as well. What is taboo is consequently doubly tied first to the forbidden itself then to the strongest form of the taken-for-granted, i.e. to those aspects of the unconscious which are crucial enough to be blessed by the gods themselves, by definition beyond reach. As one siren sings COME, another blares DANGER. But why should I devote my professional life to issues which are not important enough to be taboo? How could I possibly stop wondering about how I understand how I understand?

These are the questions with which I grappled also in my latest, perhaps last, book, a minimalist piece called *Abysmal: A Critique of Cartographic Reason* (Olsson 2007). And let it now be known that that title was carefully chosen, for the noun “abyss” is synonymous with the terms “deep gorge” or “bottomless chasm”, the rift which cuts through the landscape of understanding, one set of categories placed here, another set there. As in the book itself I would now like first to descend into this canyon and then ascend again from the depths with a map of what I have found. A dangerous expedition indeed, because the abyss is not merely one with Aristotle’s excluded middle but the very

home of POWER itself. And so strong are the socialization forces built into ordinary language that the adjective “abysmal” tells the potential trespassers how they should feel if they try to break into that palace off limits: Abysmal! Horribly bad!

For these reasons of power and socialization I am once again reminded of *Enuma elish*, the Babylonian tale of how the god Marduk gained and retained his elevated position as the Lord of lords. The premise of this oldest creation epic extant is that in the beginning of the beginning nothing has yet been formed, because in the beginning of the beginning nothing has yet been named. All that there is are the spatial coordinates of above and below, cardinal positions waiting to be inundated by the fluids of masculine Apsu and feminine Tiamat, the former sweet, the latter bitter. And as if to underline the spatiality of its own structure, the term *apsu* literally means “abyss” and “outermost limit”, by linguistic coincidence connected also to “the great deep”, “the primal chaos”, “the bowels of earth”, “the infernal pit”. A perfect example of proper name and definite description merged into one.

Eventually there is a tremendous power struggle and sweet Apsu is killed by Ea, the most outstanding of his offspring. On top of the corpse, i.e. *across the abyss*, Ea then builds a splendid palace

for himself and his wife Damkina. There, in the Chamber of Destinies, their son Marduk is conceived, the most awesome being ever to be (Dalley 1989: 235):

*Impossible to understand, too difficult to perceive.
Four were his eyes, four were his ears;
When his lips moved, fire blazed forth.
The four ears were enormous.
And likewise his eyes; they perceived everything.*

Marduk's weapons are numerous, but most decisive is the magic net in which he goes to capture the recalcitrant Tiamat and the four winds by which he eventually blows her up. When it is finally over, Marduk, great lord of the universe, "crossed the sky to survey the infinite distance; he stationed himself in the apsu, that apsu built by [Ea] over the old abyss which he now surveyed, *measuring out and marking in*" (Sandars 1971: 92, emphasis by the author). No longer dressed in the warrior's coat of mail but in the uniform of a land surveyor, he then proceeds first to the construction of a celestial globe and finally to the creation of a primeval man, the prototype of you and me, a creature explicitly designed to serve as slaves of the ruler's vassals, three hundred stationed as watchers of Heaven, an equal number as guardians of the Earth. Not an invention formed in the image of the Almighty, though, but a savaged concoction stirred together from the blood of the slaughtered Kingu, Tiamat's lover and commander in chief. Mankind a dish of *Boudins à la Mésopotamie*. Nothing like a perfect copy of the perfect original, merely a black sausage. And as a way of guarding his ambiguity he gave to himself a total of fifty names.

Throughout these events the abyss remains the power center par excellence, the broken clay tablets of *Enuma elish* the ultimate proof of the Babylonians' insights into the secret workings of human thought-and-action. And therein lies in my mind the real reason for keeping the abysmal gap between categories taboo, for it is in the ontological transformations of the excluded middle that the magicians of power are performing their tricks. Hence it is only by entering that forbidden space of imagination that the analyst can ever hope to understand how the absent is made present, the present made absent.

The connections between presence and absence are vividly expressed also by the figure of Janus, my own favorite among gods. What intrigues me

with this pivotal symbol of gate-keeping is less that he is equipped with a body that makes him see in opposite directions at the same time, more that he has a mind which allows him to merge seemingly contradictory categories into one meaningful whole. From his watchtower at the middle of the bridge he is consequently in a position to keep both sides of the abyss under constant surveillance, in the same glance catching a glimpse of the pasts that once were and of the futures that have yet to come.

Given the Greek fear of the void – itself well expressed by the concept of the excluded middle – it is not surprising that Janus was invented in Rome and not in Athens. In the lands surrounding the *Mare nostrum*, though, he was everywhere to be seen, for not only was his image stamped on practically every coin, but in religious prayers this janitor of janitors was the first to be mentioned and in cultural rituals this son of January was equated with the beginning of all beginnings. Diana was his godly consort, a connection which explains why the doors of his temple stayed open in times of war and why they were shut in times of peace. Like ordinary lovers, gods need their privacy too.

Janus's main concerns were one with my own: creativity, power, socialization. Defiantly I therefore pray again (Olsson 1991: 16):

Oh Janus! Help me become a sinner. Let me understand how you break definitions and thereby create. Show me how you erase what others see as irresolvable paradoxes. Teach me the equation of that third lens inside your head whereby contradictory images are transformed into coherent wholes. Speak memory, speak! SPREACH, Janus, SPREACH! And Babel's walls come mumbling down.

Accordingly, and throughout my scholarly and artistic life, I have been searching for a place inside Janus's head. From that zero-point of the excluded middle I have then tried to grapple with the taboos of limits, the sins of trespassing, the braiding of epistemology and ontology, the challenge of writing in such a way that the resulting text actually *is* what it is about. With the aim of understanding how Janus stayed sane while ordinary people in similar situations of double bind go crazy, I have therefore tried to place him on the operation table, cut his skull open, lay his brain bare, investigate how his mind is wired. Why and how, for instance, did the Romans elevate this categorical juggler to godly status, when we, their descendants, diagnose his counterparts as schizophrenic madmen?

Why did they afford him a special place in their pantheon, while we isolate his likes in the sound-proofed cells of the asylum?

Perhaps the reason is that without distinctions our thoughts-and-actions would have nothing to stick to, our lives nothing to share. Such vacuities are in fact the norm in the Realm of Psychosis, that literally unthinkable province where there are no initiation rites, no scars, no individuals, hence no society either. And this emptiness may well explain why the deeply psychotic is so frightening, because the deeply psychotic lives outside the laws of thought, an inhabitant of the excluded middle, an alien beyond both identity and difference. A non-mappable world without fix-points, scales and projection screens – a cartographer's nightmare.

Lest it be thought that my understanding of the void is too closely tied to the Abrahamic world, I now recall a stunning visit to the city of Kandy, once capital of the Sinhalese kingdom which in 1815 was annexed by the British and made a part of colonial Ceylon¹. There the high priest of the temple – the shrine which among other relics houses the tooth of Buddha, historically *the* national symbol – granted me and my wife a rare audience. Not just any audience, though, but a visit to the holiest of the holy, a small room on the upper floor with an altar bestrewn with jasmine flowers and the sacred tooth enshrined in a casket of gold. Before entering this forbidden place, we were most carefully instructed how to behave, especially *not to step on the threshold*, the barrier that separates the commoners in an antechamber and the higher classes in a middle room, on the one side, from the inner sanctum with the king, his closest ministers and the water-increasing official, on the other. A wonderful illustration of how the excluded middle can be materialized in an un-touchable janitor.

The mind boggles as it encounters the walls of Babel, Kreml and Berlin in yet another setting, the hierarchical structure of the three chambers of the temple highly reminiscent of the narthex, nave and sanctuary of the orthodox church, the Kandy-an threshold effectively serving the same exclusionary functions as the Russian iconostasis. Most revealing is nevertheless the story that before King Vimaladharmasuriya I in 1592 entered the same room as we did in December 2007, he kneeled and put his forehead on the polished threshold. The stamp of power in the place of power, the

mark of Cain in a Buddhist context, a clear warning that anyone who sets foot on the threshold is trampling not on a material object but on power itself. This circumstance, rather than the Greek fear of the void, is in my analysis the real reason why the excluded middle is excluded. And as a way of protecting his own holiness from possible usurpers, the Jewish LORD put a mark on the restless wanderer so that no one who found him would kill him. In the same breath a blessing and a curse, yet another indication that it is in the nature of absolute power to violate every rule of behavior, to do exactly as it pleases. The reason is, of course, that in a norm system where both *a* and *not-a* are valid at the same time, everything is permitted.

No wonder, therefore, that it is from a position in the excluded middle that the Almighty rules, his words-and-deeds predictably unpredictable, his palace surrounded by a non-penetrable defense system, his propaganda machine everywhere to be heard and nowhere to be evaded. Yet everything codified in the constitutional law of Mose's first stone tablet, in my heretic (hopefully not blasphemous) interpretation the most penetrating show of power and submission ever formulated. It is hard to imagine a more power-filled statement.

The first stone tablet is nothing less than a socialization instrument that no one can escape, hated whip and enjoyable carrot in the same document. A rhetorical masterpiece firmly rooted in the concept of trust, a social glue which under the label *pistis* was foundational to Aristotle as well; the common point is, of course, that without *pistis* there can be no communication and that holds regardless of whether the chosen language is that of money, poetry, logic, geometry or anything else. This in turn led Aristotle to the insight that dialectics and rhetoric are the twin sisters of each other, just as it later led Nietzsche to the conclusion that the two activities of logic and geometry are forms of rhetoric which after long use have become so credible that they have changed names and turned into categories of their own. It cannot be said more clearly: reasoning is a persuasive activity grounded in the tension between personal trust and social verification.

In a very general sense it is this question of how we find our way in the unknown that lies at the heart of European culture, perhaps of all cultures. In Erich Auerbach's influential analysis of mimesis it is located exactly in the taboo-ridden interface

between the certainties of Odysseus's scar and the ambiguities of Abraham's fear, you and I dangling in the abyss in-between (Auerbach 1953). Two modes of understanding, two modes of being, two ways of living which over the centuries have been condensed, purified and eventually codified, one in Aristotle's Laws of Thought, the other in the biblical formulation of the commandments, the latter not merely the ten that can be counted on the fingers (The Holy Bible, Exod. 20: 3–17, Deut. 5: 6–21), but a staggering total of six-hundred-and-thirteen. The interpretations vary accordingly, even though it is generally agreed that the ten words of the Decalogue may be divided into two groups such that the first three or four govern the relations between God and man (the Constitutional Law) and the rest regulate the relations between man and man (the Civil and Criminal Law).

In times of crisis it is the first tablet that tells the ruler how to rule and the subjects how to submit, and that is regardless of whether the potentate happens to be a Machiavellian Prince, a dictatorial Führer, an elected Prime Minister, a concerned parent. It is hard to imagine a more power-filled statement, not the least because it is there that YHWH for the first time reveals his own name, an expression so closely related to the Hebrew word for "to be", *hvh/hjh*, that it is often translated as "The Being". As a way of further stressing its importance, it was this invisible entity itself, not one of its usual emissaries, who in the prologue let his subjects know that *it was I who liberated you, I who let you out of the land of Egypt, I who cut your chains*. The implication is, of course, that since I have proven myself to be such an outstanding leader in the past, you are wise to trust me also in the future; accordingly, every incumbent assures the voters that they never had it so good, that they should read his lips and scrutinize his record. Although you should prepare yourself for blood, sweat and tears, at the end of day there will be milk and honey.

Thus I decree, because I am who I am. Such are the self-referential words of the Law's prologue. Immediately following that naked piece of rhetoric comes the first paragraph of the Constitutional Law, a proposition as stunning now as when it was first uttered: *I shall be your dictator!* Wherever this Almighty happens to be – and by definition he is at the same time everywhere and nowhere – he shall rule over everyone and everything, like the surveying Marduk measuring in and marking out, show-

ing mercy to those who love him and killing those who hate him.

The unknown genius who was the first to coin the phrase that there must be no power before (or according to some translations, "beside") me, was certainly wise enough to realize that whoever declares that he shall be my supreme ruler leads a dangerous life. For that reason he proceeded to erect around the apsu palace a two-tier defense system consisting of both a wall and a moat, the former constructed as a ban on the (mis)use of metaphor, the latter as a rule against the creative associations of metonymy. The purpose of the second paragraph is consequently to ensure that the weapons gathered in the rhetorical arsenal will not fall into enemy hands, rephrased that any critique must be silenced before it is uttered. In that mood the jealous LORD now declares that you shall for ever know your place, never commit the sins of trespassing, never question his authority. In particular *you shall not possess the means for making of me a graven image, picture, statue or any other caricature, never use my name in vain or tie it to a definite description*.

The recent debacle about the Danish Mohammed pictures in its proper light (Olsson 2006), for the graven image has always been the master key to idolatry and thereby to the doors of competing ideologies and potential usurpers. In the present context it is especially noteworthy that the Hebrew term for "image" refers more to the dwelling place of the divine than to the pictorial representation of its invisible being (Stamm & Andrew 1967: 82). It follows that if you tell me *where* you are, I shall tell you *what* you are. Yet, as soon as I attempt to make the invisible visible, I run the risk of falling into the trap of misplaced concreteness, of deifying the reified. But by outlawing the *as-if*, the Untouchable guarantees that no news will ever issue from his subjects but exclusively from himself.

It cannot be said more clearly: the second paragraph amounts to a devastating auto-da-fé, a combined prohibition against picture-making and story-telling, the two primary modes of translation, understanding and reasoned critique. Even so, the declaration that I shall be your dictator is so outrageous that no censor will ever be strong enough to get it generally accepted. Other socialization techniques must therefore be mobilized as well and that is indeed the purpose and function of the third paragraph. With that goal firmly in mind, the lawmaker therefore once again reminds the congregation that it was he who took them out of the land

of bondage, he who gave them the freedom that he himself is now set to take back. Therefore, after all these ordeals, I hereby declare that you deserve a rest. However, this precious time you must not spend alone but always in the company of your likes. In the synagogue and the church, at the playgroup and the faculty meetings, the confirmations, funerals and family dinners – it is at these gatherings that my officials will instruct you how to think-and-act. The Kantian thesis about the necessary unity of consciousness in another form, for you must always remember that *you are nothing but a cog in my machinery. I am the spiritualized embodiment of your unconsciously taken-for-granted, the pivot of the world.* And provided you honor your father and mother I shall grant you a long lease on the land that I give you. Like the drip drip drip of the raindrops, when the summer shower's through, so a voice within me keeps repeating you, you, you.

And so it is that I read the commandment to keep the sabbath holy as the most crucial paragraph of the Constitutional Law, the ultimate guarantee that the power structure of monotheism will survive. And so it also is that Aristotle's Laws of Thought and Mose's Laws of Submission may be read as alternative maps of power, two codifications with the shared purpose of showing how in the same breath you can both tell the truth and be believed when you do so. It is difficult to imagine two formulations of greater historical significance, layers of meaning deeply embedded in the taken-for-granted, a palimpsest of the already but not yet.

Every map is a palimpsest, a product of imagination, that uniquely human faculty which assigns to the semiotic animal the privilege of making the absent present and the present absent. Simalabim and the vistas from elsewhere lie open in front of us, the image of a reality never seen before, a utopian no-where miraculously changed into an existing now-here, a shade of blue turned into an ocean, a line into a road, a dot into a city. By all accounts a most remarkable version of the incantation "Let there be and there is," an outstanding case of rhetoric performed on the high wire.

No wonder, therefore, that in absolute regimes even the most innocuous map tends to be treated as a state secret, for just as no magician wants his tricks to be revealed, so every ruler guards his palace and masks his face. And that in turn explains why the biblical redactors let the LORD say to Moses (The Holy Bible, Exod. 33: 19–23):

"I will cause all my goodness to pass in front of you, and I will proclaim my name, my LORD, in your presence. I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion. But", he said, "you cannot see my face, for no one may see me and live." Then the LORD said, "There is a place near me where you may stand on a rock. When my glory passes by, I will put you in a cleft in the rock and cover you with my hand until I have passed by. Then I will remove my hand and you will see my back; but my face must not be seen."

What a remarkable passage, nothing less than an exhibition of power undressed, an image viewed from an abysmal cleft, a name spoken in an utterance of self-reference. Even more remarkably, I here detect an allusion to the second paragraph of the Constitutional Law with its double ban on picture and story, the two modes of representation that lie at the heart of cartographic reason. No wonder that the surveyor of power leads such a dangerous life, for how can his analyses be trusted when the faceless phenomenon he sets out to capture is itself steeped in distrust. The liar's paradox in a different context, for you can never tell in advance who in the early hours might be knocking on your door.

And therein lies the profound difference between the social ethics of the first and the second stone tablet. For even though the concept of pistis permeates both documents, the form of trust which ties you and me together is mutual, the trust between the ruler and his subjects is at best (or is it at worst) one-sided; since the Absolute is by definition self-referential, his name (if a name it is) cannot be translated into a definite description. It is highly fitting that the sign of the covenant that the LORD makes with Noah is a rainbow, a palette of fleeting colors in the clouds rather than a material object on the ground.

Even so, the doubters refuse to be silenced and that explains why Abraham took the LORD to task for not keeping his promises of many children and why Job sued him for slandering, a court case never to be forgotten. In between is the story of Jacob, one of the greatest crooks ever born, yet one of the richest rewarded (see Miles 1995; Olsson 2007, chapters "Abr(ah)am" and "Peniel") . Of the latter much can be said, but nothing more important than the fact that in the chronicles it was he who was the first to claim that he had seen God's face and survived; in the eyes of the Almighty the blasphemy of blasphemies, to the present analyst a propaganda trick of gigantic proportions. It may in

fact be instructive to approach the first third of the Hebrew Bible as the story about a power struggle so violent that the self-proclaimed LORD is eventually forced to withdraw. Thus, after the Book of Job he never speaks again. And as if to continue the assault, the New Testament contains many references to the commandments of the second stone tablet but makes no explicit mention of the first. Fascinating glimpses of the interface between the knowledge of power and the power of knowledge.

In the interface between knowledge and power lies the art of mapping. And just as no map can be a perfect map, so any account of power and knowledge depends on the three primitives of map-making: 1) the chosen fix-points; 2) the scales through which the points are translated into connecting lines; and 3) the projection screen or *mappa*, the taken-for-granted plane onto which the pictures and travel stories are cast and preserved. It is tempting to associate the fix-points with the first paragraph of the Constitutional Law, the scales with the second, the mappa with the third.

Fix-points first. For have I not already noted that in the Realm of Power nothing sits still, that its jealous ruler never sleeps in the same bed two nights in a row. Since the earliest accounts his palace has been variously located in the abyss between categories, in the untouchable threshold between this and that, in the face which must not be seen, i.e. always *in the cleft of the excluded middle*. In addition, the LORD's name is in most creation myths given as a tautology, by definition true but not informative. Ungraspable is the ungraspable, who for that reason is free to do whatever it pleases. Predictably unpredictable, inherently untrustable. Always there to see never to be seen, Bentham's panopticon in advance of itself. For what my eyes happen to catch depends both on where my body stands and on how my mind has been molded.

Then the scale, by definition the translation function that enables me to claim that this is this and that that is that. Yet I have repeatedly stressed that in the dialectical Realm of Power everyone and everything hops capriciously about, sometimes appearing as a this sometimes as a that. To put it bluntly, God (a term which to me functions as a pseudonym of power) does not operate according to the laws of logic. And therein lies in my understanding the reason why the social sciences in comparison with the hard sciences have accumulated so little knowledge. If it is true, which I be-

lieve it is, that human action is structured like a tragedy – everything beautifully right in the beginning; everything horribly wrong in the end; no one to blame in between – then the social sciences are faced with a tremendous challenge, easier to state than to do anything about. But if human action actually *is* structured as a tragedy, how can we then rely on the principle of truth preservation for tying our premises and conclusions together? Surely the most common purpose of human action is to topple truth, not to preserve it, to falsify rather than retain what is presently the case. Less a matter of formal logic more an instance of creative imagination. This to me is the problem of trust and verification, the real issue that the mapmaker's scale is addressing.

Finally the mappa, the formation of the taken-for-granted, the painter preparing the canvas to ensure that the paint will not run off and the surface not crack, the glazier polishing the tain of the mirror. This is in effect what the unconsciously adopted socialization techniques are designed to do, making you and me obedient and predictable in the process. Everything hidden in the mandatory meetings of the sabbath.

As might be expected a similar form of cartographic reason guided the thoughts-and-actions of the Greeks as well. Nowhere is this more evident than in Plato's *Republic* with its three figures of the *Sun*, which together with the concept of goodness functions as the analyst's fix-point par excellence; the *Divided Line*, which embodies the scale through which abstract ideas are turned into concrete things, degrees of truth corresponding to degrees of being; and the *Cave Wall*, the mappa of the surveyor's projection screen, the taken-for-granted background without which there would be no shadows to observe, hence no maps to hide and seek. That screen, though, is not an innocent *tabula rasa*, but a receptor covered in layers of social gesso. And just as the painter's first task is to prepare the canvas, so the mind-surveyor knows that he too casts his figures onto a *charta* with similar characteristics; paraphrasing him who loved the Academy and hated the poets, not every thing can be seen and not every idea can be thought.

Being believed when I tell the truth is essentially a question of the cartographer's *mappa*, the projection screen onto which the fixing points and scaling lines are leaving their traces. Most stunningly it now seems that the early development of

Greek mathematics and geometry, including the theory and practice of triangulation, grew out of a mode of thought which in itself may be understood as an instance of cartographic reason. The trailblazer in that remarkable adventure of cognitive history is Reviel Netz, brilliant classicist presently at Stanford (Netz 1999, 2004). While Netz's overarching interest is in the birth of deduction (Athens, roughly 440 BCE), his real focus is on the intellectual technologies through which a small group of people were sharing their convictions. Extraordinarily difficult, especially as the paradoxical proposition " a equals b " is exactly what mathematics is about.

Although both the old *epidictics* and the new *apodictics* are acts of persuasion, the difference is that in the former the truth of a proposition is merely asserted, while in the latter it is demonstrated; here it should be remembered that since the Athenian culture was highly polemical, there was a strong need for greater clarity in the arguments, a demand for certainty which the Greek mathematicians were determined to meet. It was in fact to that end that they invented an entirely novel type of rhetoric, an approach which set them aside from all other intellectuals, the endlessly debating philosophers in particular. As a way of reaching their goal, they focused on the *form* rather than the content of the argument, on the *how* rather than the *what* of whatever they did.

The reasoning tools they developed were surprisingly simple and essentially two: the diagram and the ordinary language, the latter highly formulaic and with a minimal vocabulary of only 100 to 200 words. And in spite of (indeed *because of*) the fact that the constructed figures were imperfectly drawn, the reasoner could always tell exactly where on the road from the particular to the general he was. What kept him on track was the practice of carefully lettering (*i.e.* baptizing) the intersections of the drawings. And for that reason there are obvious connections between the mathematician's diagram, on the one hand, and the land-surveyor's map, on the other.

This family resemblance between mathematics and cartography is further heightened by the circumstance that just as the letters of the diagrams do not stand *for* objects but *on* objects, so the main fix-point in the landscape map is not the parish church understood as a social symbol but the spire interpreted as a Peircean index, by definition a position which can be seen, pointed to and talked about. It follows that whereas modern sci-

ence is a science of equations, the ancient science was a science of diagrams. So dominant was in effect this bodily mode of thought that for the Greek mathematicians the diagram became a substitute for ontology. The proofs were consequently drawn rather than spoken, a drama in which the eye, the index finger and the tongue were the lead actors. Indeed it was the simplicity in form that generated the complexity in meaning, the non-exactness of the particular drawing that led to the necessity of the general conclusion.

If Netz is correct, then it was the dual practice of finger-tracing and story-telling that generated what is presently called deductive reason. The term "shaping" in the title of his masterpiece should therefore be taken literally, itself a parallel to the fact that the most crucial proofs in Euclid's *Elements* were blessed with the approval stamp of *Quod Erat Faciendum* rather than with the better known *Quod Erat Demonstrandum*; "which was to be shown" rather than "which was to be demonstrated". Playing in the same league of legitimation is the perfect passive imperative, a verb form which in English may be rendered as "let it come about", "let it have been cut", a syntactic device which in both the speaker and the listener creates the feeling that everything has been settled beforehand. As Ludwig Wittgenstein used to put it, to follow a rule is to follow it blindly. Rephrased, the core of every proposition lies in the diagram, in the eyes of the unaware a visual illustration, in the mind of the initiate a schematic (re)presentation. Once again the Orthodox icon comes to mind, for like the icon the diagram is in actuality a picture which is not a picture.

Stunning connections! Even so, the most remarkable aspect of the Netzian reconstruction is the fact that when it was first introduced there were no diagrams of antiquity extant, and that is despite the fact that the preserved texts often refer to them. Yet he was convinced that without the picture of the lettered diagram (perhaps drawn in sand or on a dusted surface) the explorers would never have found their way in the unknown, never been able to translate their insights into a story that could be shared with others. Subsequent events have nevertheless bore him out, for not only has a palimpsest with an erased copy of a copy of the Archimedes Codex actually been found, but this treasure contains a set of lettered diagrams of exactly the type that he had envisioned (Netz & Noell 2007). What for centuries had been absent has consequently now become present again, not only

in the imagination of a dedicated scholar, but in the material world as well. Glorious achievement of erasing the eraser, because what we are now beginning to understand is how we are believed when we say that something is something else. When push comes to shove, even the most theoretical physicist shows himself to be a practicing geographer.

In tentative conclusion: Like the body that projects it, every meaning is asymmetric, every map a palimpsest, every palimpsest an epistemological travel story. And since in that world of self-reference no ground is solid, no translation perfect, no projection screen untainted, I have but the faintest idea of what will happen next. No wonder that people get frightened, for how can anyone find the way in a world in which the fix-points are unfixed, the scales twisted, the *mappae* crumpled.

Such is nevertheless life in the taboo-laden in-between. And in my experience that holds regardless of whether you are an apprentice or a full-fledged poet, a young graduate student or an aging emeritus. The difference is nevertheless profound, for whereas the former keeps asking whether it will ever happen again, the latter struggles with the challenge of *not* letting it happen again, of not imitating himself, of not doing once more what he has already done so many times before.

But, who knows, perhaps all of physics, poetry, mathematics and cartographic reason are nothing but the work of mirror neurons in the brain, chemical reactions triggered by the likeness of this and that, life itself a mimetic desire that can never be satisfied. But if that is the case, what are then the relations between creativity and self-plagiarism, the metaphoric pictures of the earth and the metonymic travels of the mind?

NOTES

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