

R. D. Dufour
The Reciprocal Creation

"With every tool man is perfecting his own organs, whether motor or sensory, or is removing the limits to their functioning (...). Man has, as it were, become a kind of prosthetic God. When he puts on all his auxiliary organs he is truly magnificent; but those organs have not grown on to him and they still give him much trouble at times. Nevertheless, he is entitled to console himself with the thought that this development will not come to an end precisely with the year 1930 A.D.. Future ages will bring with them new and probably unimaginably great advances in this field of civilization and will increase man's likeness to God still more. But in the interests of our investigations, we will not forget that present-day man does not feel happy in his Godlike character." This incurable suffering was none other than the subject of Freud's Civilization and Its Discontents.

In 1929 Freud sketched the crossing of air and water authorized by the "gigantic" forces of motors, the overcoming of the narrow limits of vision thanks to microscopes and telescopes, the materialization of the abstract faculty of remembrance made possible by the camera and the gramophone...

Between the thirties and our nineties, in six decades, the "prosthetic god" has perfected its organs and enlarged the limits of its powers in proportions that are at least equivalent to, if not greater than, those of the preceding six centuries: it inhabits space, it gains access to the first formulas of its genetic patrimony, it commands extremely powerful decision-making technologies and means of calculation. It knows how to master titanic forces....But the old Freudian refrain has lost none of its currency: "Man today does not feel happy" – perhaps even less than in 1930.

So that it might be useful to explore the novel relationship between the technical and scientific states of civilization and the constantly renewed forms of human suffering.

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Thus, on one side, civilization, the human world, and on the other, the subject. Let us posit the existence of a tangled relationship between the two: the subject creates the world which, in turn, creates the subject. And, it is without hesitation that we will leave it to others to address the question of how it all began.

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Let us examine the first relationship: the human world is the fruit of a continuous creation carried out by a succession of actualizing symbolic nominations. "With each scientific revolution, the world changes," says a contemporary epistemologist. This continuous creation of the world is interrupted by profound temporal variations: long pauses followed by brutal accelerations.

The great scissions of the modern era are well known: the quattrocento, the turn of the century. Not that everything happened in a few days in Florence or Vienna, but in these places everything became suddenly visible. There, visual space submitted to the organization of perspective; this world became disenchanted and was reorganized according to mathematical laws; the vengeful and cruel God became a great architect; the physical world was reconstituted as a continuum. And here, at the turn of our century, the basis of all knowledge, mathematics itself, was called into question before the great wave of deconstruction undermined all certainties be they physical, mental, perceptual, musical or visual – everything had to be reinvented, including time itself.

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Of the second relationship, the creation of the subject by the world, the outlines are known: the Renaissance instituted man as the measure of all things, and as such circumscribed by boundary figures,

those of the primitive, the witch and the madman. Then it was this man, already suffering from the narcissistic wounds inflicted by Copernicus and Darwin who, in Vienna at the turn of the century was driven from the last preserve of his imaginary mastery: wildness and madness were not external, they were part and parcel of his condition.

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We do not have much choice: it is upon these two subjects, mutually exclusive and yet concomitantly necessary, the one sure of its reason, the other divided object of its fantasies, the one constantly denying the other, that we must base our inquiry in order to encompass the sense of this adventure.

It is ultimately these two subjects who must be invited to debate and conjecture the new man yet to emerge from the world to come.

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To think through, today, the new alliance which is being woven between the world and the subject involves sizing up current prosthetic activity. It is intense, proliferating; the current era has fallen under the spell of an uncontrollable burst of prosthetic creation.

We invent sensory prosthesis. The evidence of the senses, the being present to oneself and others, is thereby profoundly altered. Henceforth, man lives in an environment where he is free to immediately disperse himself to the four corners of the universe while every fragment of the world can immediately be projected upon him. The absent can become instantly present and the present can bear the mark of absence. If man can henceforth sample the possibility of consisting in space and subsisting in time in the mode of telepresence, then he also exists in a new temporality, a kind of dilated, polychronic present and a new, videospheric and ubiquitous spatiality. The consequence is that man today inhabits a world in which the illusion of a single reality has notably lost some of its grip in favor of mobile series of "possible worlds" where one may camp, or even jump from one to the other, or rather "surf".

We know how to insert mental calculation technologies in prostheses, which are able to connect in real time enormous chains of consequences right up to the irreversible moment of decision.

We live in the age of assisted procreation which alters familiar generational markers and modifies previously necessary arrangements among men and women.

We create biotechnological prostheses. Because we have recognized the letters which make up the alphabet of life and endeavor to read the writing of which we are the expression, we are beginning to intervene in the course of the evolution of species, to change their destination and even mix them together.

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But the multiplication of prostheses will not make man happier, anymore than it will encourage him to desist. The race may be exhausting, but it is unlikely that man will meekly return to the shelter of ancient idols to devote himself joyfully to his own unhappiness. Indeed, the more the equipment is developed, the more the essential – what is missing – will appear important and more people will be summoned to work to create the essential prosthesis.

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How then to define this intense prosthetic creation? Is it related to sublimation as, for example, esthetic creation may be? It does allow death to be usefully adjourned by redirecting to an ostensibly superior cause drives which would otherwise come back to haunt the subject. Here, esthetic creation and prosthetic creation both partake of the phenomenon of sublimation which is, as it were, the crowning achievement of

a process wherein the subject is compelled to abandon an imaginary omnipotence in order to come into existence as such; has to accept the horizon of his own death; in a word has to be constituted by his own limits to the extent that this integration takes on the force of law. Here, we are at the heart of the symbolic function. But esthetic creation is an act destined to remain in the domain of ideas, whereas prosthetic creation returns to the physical and even real places where the limits to omnipotence had been placed. It returns to work materially on the terms of this acceptance.

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It is sometimes said that the effects of prosthetic creation on the future of civilization must be studied without delay. Perhaps. But not before having noticed that prosthetic creation being, like esthetic creation, as old as mankind, the alarm should have been sounded long ago.

If there is cause to worry, about what should it be, exactly? The fact that man imagined placing a bit in the horse's mouth, that he invented eyeglasses, the laptop computer or the space shuttle? For one, all the limits are never simultaneously called into question; for the other, those that are, are not, for the most part, the least intangible ones – why indeed put up with a sickness if the cure can be invented, or hunger if more viable edible species can be conceived? So, at what point does prosthetic creation cross the line? We are all the less well placed to know and all the more worried because the current intense era of prosthetic creation places us in a routine of permanent displacement of our points of reference and of permanently shifting landscape apt to be haunted by the transgressive images of literature and esthetic activity: Gilles de Rais, the Sadien hero, Nietzsche's Zarathoustra, Frankenstein...(1).

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The resources of ethics are increasingly called upon to aid the legislator who grapples with the daunting task of deciding what should be authorized and what should be repressed. But, since the field of ethics is still being composed, it risks discovering, mass democracy oblige, only majority rule as a basis (2), which corresponds more or less exactly to the dominant fantasies in a period of prosthetic creation, most notably the claim that one day everything will be possible thanks to science. Should we therefore, in order to avoid making a mistake, ring the alarm as soon as the least prosthesis changes the subject-world relationship in the least, thereby closing ranks with the modern obscurantist and millinarist batallions who await their time while champing at the bit?

What to do? Indecision can also be seen among psychoanalysts. They are caught, it seems, between the desire to intervene, faced, as they are, with the increase of certain threats to personal ties secreted by our world, and their constitutional obligation of reserve which is hardened by the idea that the symbolic will always find a way.

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Let us accept as a known fact that the fate of our civilization can be grasped through two concomitant phenomena: on the one hand the spectacular and systematic disappearance of any tertiary space (Death of God, reduction of the role of the Father in industrial societies, legal autonomization of the subject, dualization of relationships); on the other, the increasingly blind yielding to the technological benefits flowing from binary logic (3).

These two types of simultaneous phenomema lead to not insignificant, though different, consequences as far as the position of psychoanalysis in the century is concerned. Faced with the first historical tendency, it seems a given that the disappearance of any viable form of third party can only lead to, among other effects produced on the social bond, the ever increasing demand placed on psychoanalysis to occupy this position and become a substitute for the tertiary function. To yield to this demand would partake of what Serge Leclair calls, without mincing words, a "major perversion" or "abuse" whereas, he stresses, "it is the psychoanalyst's duty, through the method he employs, and for each person who seeks him out, to firmly keep open the possibility of recognizing and identifying secondary and tertiary voices whose distinction is

the necessary precondition for him to be able to truly speak in the first person." (4)

In other words, this opening to a tertiary space, as fundamental as it is to the analytic relationship, nevertheless excludes any straying from the "secular" bounds within which the psychoanalyst generally remains, that is to say any right or qualification to occupy the tertiary position.

As for participation in the social order, when the psychoanalyst is, for instance, consulted as an expert or consultant to help create new official frameworks for people's care, government or education, it cannot rely directly upon analytic practice without partaking in what might be called, relative to the "major perversion", a "minor perversion" attributable to the psychoanalyst's self-indulgence regarding one of the famous impossible tasks identified by Freud.

What can be said now about the second phenomenon, the increasing yielding of our civilization to the technological benefits stemming from binary logic? Should it involve the same constitutional reserve on the part of psychoanalysts? A priori, no, because it seems that psychoanalysts have, at least since 1929, a certain duty to investigate the discontent in civilization (5), in part because the discovery, in the form of bad news, that there is discontent because there is civilization belongs to Freud, and because their position is unmatched when it comes to hearing the multiple forms of the incessant renewal of this discontent and of the death drive's realization in history.

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Psychoanalysts, beginning with the first among them, proved well situated to testify at the hearing of civilization's discontents – from its origins (lost, and expressed only through myth) to its most recent versions. The reason for this interest is surely linked to its heuristic effects in clinical practice since it is true that every subject is an expression of this discontent. In turn, the capacity to relate any personal history, through the structure of the compound space in which it is inscribed, to a dimension where it appears as a reply to the History of the world, is at the origin of the eminent position psychoanalysis occupies in culture.

The question of this position is all the more timely because we are entitled to wonder when these discontents will have reached the point of no return: when does the continuous process of world creation risk becoming a process of subject destruction? Psychoanalysts are certainly busy with the clinical aspects of this question, but it is not impossible to imagine that, in this instance, the Asses [* translator's note: "les Anes (-a-liste, comme on sait)" – reference to a well known pun on the first syllable of analyst in French] agree to play the role of the (Capitoline) Geese to warn the rest about the gang of spectaculars, but also and especially about the insidious progress of a brand new barbarism. The scene of an encounter among all those involved in movements of civilization needs to be constructed so that, from their debates, a problematic of prosthetic invention as it relates to the symbolic universe can be worked out. It would be a three-way encounter, such that each would occupy a position irreducible to the other two, occurring among the protagonists of the prosthetic advance of the world (the scientists), those who are in the best position to listen to its effects on personal ties and those who seek to determine its impact on the social bond. This scene, which does not yet exist, cannot be conceived as a simple exchange of information which leaves each one trapped in his or her discourse. It must be open to interruption, to surprise, and to the impromptu, in order to reveal, outside of any immediate legal, ethical or political utilitarianism, a novel and somewhat monstrous object: a thought of places and moments where the great technologies of today (those of assisted procreation, information and artificial intelligence, sensory prostheses, genetic biotechnology) dare to cross the very boundaries which make up the symbolic order. All of which might add up to none other than the latest episode in the relationship between desire and the law.

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New maps must be drawn up that show the new locations of discontent. Places where new forms of "suffering" as well as new forms of "jouissance" [*translator's note: "jouissance" is doubly untranslatable. In standard French it signifies enjoyment and orgasm. Dufour's use of the term is closer to the Lacanian,

psychoanalytical sense] are generated, since it is so often said that new paradises await these prostheses.

Some zones are better known than others – it is thus no surprise that psychoanalysts, whose attention to the fate of the Name-of-the-Father is well known, have been particularly interested in procreation (6) and the disruptions created in filiation and the generational cycle by new technologies. But there are other sectors of suffering that are little known, sensory prostheses for example, whose effects on the symbolic function we would be better off knowing.

Sensory prostheses give access, in effect, to new jouissances as well as new sufferings in the sense that they use the subject's inclination to play with (or be played with by) the symbolic categories of the here (and hence the elsewhere), the now (and hence the before and the after) which constitute him. By "jouissance" I mean the "vertigo" produced by transporting a visual or auditory here elsewhere or by bringing an elsewhere here.... These technologies give the subject new dimensions which may be ludic but which are certainly dizzying to the extent that they put into play, in the fullest sense of the term, the symbolic points of reference where the subject's self evidence is constructed ("I" at the intersection of a "here" and a "now").

Where these points of reference have been fixed by the work of language and the use of speech thanks to the venerable personal encounter, a "technology" as archaic and "natural" as the tongue with which language shares a name, constitutive of humanity as such, one can wager that the subject is in a position to use with impunity all the other imaginable technologies, artificial this time, and to use sensory prostheses, whether they involve sound over distance (be it drumming, the telephone, the intercom, the megaphone, the tape recorder, the Walkman...); writing (parchment, books, the Minitel, the fax, hypertext...); the deferred use of the image which inserts an elsewhere into the subject's here (a narrative elsewhere through the icon, the statue, film, television, a physical elsewhere through the microscope, the telescope...); telepresence which transports the subject's here into the elsewhere of a virtual space....

But whereas, as it may be, the symbolic points of reference (of time, space and persons) are lame (by reason of eventual breakdowns in the archaic technology), the use of these prostheses risks removing the subject even more from these categories and pulling him deeper into a process of psychoticization. The multiplicity of the dimensions offered may indeed become one more obstacle blocking access to the basic symbolic categories, a kind of additional screen scrambling their perception and adding to symbolic confusion and delirious outbreaks. The contribution of sensory prostheses to social psychoticization will sooner or later have to be evaluated.

In short, while these new prostheses can permit the development of new aptitudes for jouissance, they are also well suited, and for the same reasons, to become the privileged medium for the expression of new suffering. Telephone pathologies are well known; those of the minitel (7) and the computer are now appearing; soon we will discover those of virtual space (8).

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But these joys and sorrows, most of which are soon to be released, are ultimately of small magnitude compared to the "over-jouissance" as well as the total misery linked to a crossing of the boundaries that constitute the symbolic order and within which desire is contained. What would happen to a prosthetic activity that had arrived at its point of inversion, able to transform man himself into a super prosthesis – temptation of a "jouissance" all the more intense since this paroxystic calamity would definitively put an end to all other forms of misfortune? By crossing the symbolic boundaries I mean: to give life solo, to escape filiation. to reduce the other to the same.... What should we think, for example, of a process for transmitting life which could escape filiation and engender itself laterally? Would this not be tantamount to obtaining something like an ancestor/brother where there would be a realization through a novel path of what the incest taboo, the foundation so far as I know of all social bonds, proscribed?

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It appears that the different types of prosthetic activity are deeply congruent. In their center there is something like a digitization of the world. Of the world and the subject: the deciphering of the number of which man is the expression is probably one of the key points of this harmony.

After this rendezvous between man and his destiny, only another step would be needed for the deciphering of the genome to lead to the eternal young man....

If the dawn of such a day arose, it is probable that humanity, in an ultimate mirror stage would wake up in the skin of a civilizational Dorian Gray, lost at the very moment of finding itself.

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Footnotes:

(1). Monette Vacquin successfully studied and drew out the image of Frankenstein in a fine book *Frankenstein ou les delires de la raison*, ed. F. Bourin, Paris 1989.

(2). See the article by Marcel Czermak and Henry Frignet in *Liberation* November 17, 1993, "Quel sexe voulez-vous?" The authors analyze the possible effects of the decision rendered December 11, 1992, by the Court of Appeals: by giving the subject the free choice of legal and anatomical sex, this decision can only "incite the subject to abandon his symbolic points of reference in favor of the imaginary ones dictated by majority rule".

(3). See my essay on the long struggle for influence between tertiary and binary thought *les Mysteres de la Trinite*, Bib. des Sc. Humaines, Gallimard, Paris, 1990.

(4). Serge Leclair, "Demeures de l'ailleurs" in *Topique*, special number devoted to Francois Perrier, Paris 1993.

(5). The investigation of the discontent in civilization obviously goes back to Freud's first analyses on the nature of the social bond, the founding works of Freudian anthropology among which are *Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego* (1909), and *Totem and Taboo* (1912). - - - (6). A good recent example is Marie-Magdeleine Chatel's book, *Malaise dans la Procreation*, Albin Michel, Paris, 1993.

(7). Due to undergo a renewal as soon as the visiophone which allows you to see your interlocutor goes on the market in the very near future.

(8). I have attempted to treat this topic in an article for the journal *Mscope*, "Protheses sensorielles et fonctions symboliques", No. 5, Sept. 1993.