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Genève CCC

THESIS REVIEW BY EXTERNAL READER, JUNE 2018

CCC FACULTY : ÇAĞLA AYKAÇ, KODWO ESHUN, PIERRE HAZAN, DOREEN MENDE, ANNE-JULIE RACCOURSIER, GENE RAY. ASSISTANTS : CAMILLA PAOLINO, JULIA PECHEUR.

Thesis: Constructive Alienation – An Epistemological Revolution

Graduating student: Yael Wicki

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It's been a pleasure to review Yael Wicki's Master Thesis from my perspective as a curator and educator concerned with similar questions as we find her exquisite writing. In 2015 I curated a group exhibition in Beirut based on much of the same theory that Yael uses for the development of her conceptual terrain and that exhibition was titled 'What Hope Looks Like After Hope (On Constructive Alienation)'. So, I was expecting an exercise akin to the refreshing of one's memory in relation to texts by thinkers such as Brassier, Negarestani, Haraway and Patricia Reed. What I was not expecting was the ingenious synthesis of the core notions in the work of such thinkers with an attempt to understand, live with, and make the very best out of being diagnosed with the mental health condition known as Borderline Personality Disorder (BPD). The Thesis uses Reza Negarestani's essay 'Where is the Concept? (localization, ramification, navigation)' as a gateway into key notions that Yael uses to develop an intricate plan that would allow her not only to sustain a life with BPD but to rethink her condition as an affordance, an enabling event rather than a disability.

Yael has achieved an impressive articulation of complex thoughts, that lays an excellent ground for continuing an important synthesis between mental illness as an enabling creative condition and neo-rationalist philosophy, i.e., two strands that one would hardly think of associating or putting into conversation with each other. The Thesis anticipates a full-fledged hypothesis, a philosophical contribution so to speak, with an original and profound gesture. Following points might help Yael to contextualize the project further: Reza Negarestani and Ray Brassier are both intellectually indebted to the 20th Century American philosopher Wilfrid Sellars and have both played a key role in reintroducing his work to a European readership. I mention this because for Sellars the ideal aim of philosophizing is to 'become reflectively at home in the full complexity of the multi-dimensional conceptual system in terms of which we suffer, think, and act. [...] This alienation, this gap between oneself and one's world, can only be resolved by eating the apple to the core; for after the first bite there is no return to innocence. There are many anodynes, but only one cure. We may philosophize well or well, but we must philosophize.' (Sellars, *The Structure of Knowledge*, 1975) And, one can say that through her Thesis Yael has achieved this becoming 'reflectively at home in the complexity of the conceptual system' she suffers, thinks, and acts in, through, and with.

In fact, one can say that Sellars' work is also centered around two key notions that Yael uses with great precision in her essay, dis-order and alienation. His famous formulation of why science is rational is exemplary of how one can think of disorder as the very process through which new orders are constructed, to this end Sellars states that '...science, is rational, not because it has a foundation but because it is a self-correcting enterprise which can put any claim in jeopardy, though not all at once.' (Sellars, *Empiricism and the Philosophy of Mind*, 1997, p. xi) This putting into jeopardy or disorder (as the first step in a reordering of the world) is what the notion of constructive alienation is all about and the medicine that some contemporary thinkers have taken to as a way out of the ecological, political, and techno-social impasses of our times. Painting a picture of what we can call a moment of intellectual transformation or becoming, Yael points out that living 'with an emotional unstable personality disorder is getting to know my Self in a completely new

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and more precise way. The 'dis- order' lays itself over the personality known to my Self like a parasite, a filter, ...'. But, this psychological disorder caused by a malfunctioning, or a phyco-machinic failure is also a cut into the normative fabric of the world, a reordering of the presumed epistemological givens we have been accustomed to perceiving as givens since 'in those moments, the moments of system failure, when we get to ask ourselves why something doesn't work anymore and what has changed that triggered this failure. Being radically honest towards my Self I had to admit to my Self, that every system fails eventually if it doesn't calculate in the unpredictable, the unknown, the outside, that what is not or not yet perceivable; we can only grow our understanding of a system, of knowledge through approaching the unknown, the invisible ...'. So, psychological disorder is put into a concept-building relation with an epistemological reordering, or reconstruction of the world in an unusual but powerful synthesis. From now on, the emotional subject is tethered to the intellectual subject and there can be no separation of these subjectivities in a project of emotio-rationality that thinks in terms of composites, complex objects, constructive horizons and unknown X's that are only constructed to be fixed temporarily and then put into in jeopardy by others as they also attempt to navigate the world. Navigation here takes the route of local to global as it attempts to forge a universal horizon that emerges from self-understanding and heads toward a new complex subjectivity that thinks the universal through the conditions of its own possibility. As philosopher and sinologist Francois Jullien has noted the universal cannot accurately be described as something immediately given to us. Rather, we ought to understand its function as 'a horizon — a "regulative idea" in the Kantian sense that it is never completely reached or known — that creates demand for the work of understanding'. And, it is this demand for the work of understanding oneself and one's global horizon that Yael has managed to manufacture a tailor-made intellectual scaffolding for, this despite of and in face of adversity. She invites us to use this scaffold of sorts, a scaffold we can call constructive alienation.

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