

ABSOLUTE BEGINNINGS.
Detours Towards a Philosophy of the Fragment

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B-Sides & Rarities would seem to be an exhibition with nothing to exhibit. It is about unrealised projects, which means that no final artistic product was ever completed. To create an exhibition with such projects might seem like postmodern silliness or a facile attempt at being clever. It is neither. In drawing our attention to unrealised projects *B-Sides & Rarities* asks what constitutes a work of art, how such works come about and what makes them in any sense 'complete'. These questions in turn tap into a much older story. It is a story that tells of how we came to regard the unrealised and the fragmentary as works of art in themselves. The story touches upon fundamental issues of the way we see ourselves. It is a story about how we see the world and the things and people in it. This essay takes some detours through that story. They are detours because we shall not tell the story in a straightforward way. It is much more interesting to circle around the story and the issues it poses. That way, we are allowed to branch out at will and discover sidetracks and philosophical B-sides that take us off the beaten path of postmodern philosophy. For it would be easy to tell a story of the unrealised, the conceptual and the fragment by drawing on contemporary theory. We shall not do this. On the contrary, we will start our detours more than two centuries back, in the heart of German Romanticism, where the seeds of our postmodern selves were sown.

Introduction: The Unrealised and the Fragmentary

Unrealised projects, as the word itself makes clear, do not exist in any final form or shape. The project was abandoned at some stage of production, maybe even before it got started. What we are left with are fragments, remnants, notes, sketches, attempts, scattered thoughts or sometimes merely a trace of an idea or concept. What was created, was left unfinished. The line between the unrealised, the unfinished and the incomplete is therefore thin. The difference is basically a difference of gradation. What is unfinished or incomplete might be a bit more elaborated than what is really unrealised. And then again, maybe not, for much depends on where one draws the line between the unrealised and the unfinished. Is a preliminary sketch a sketch of something that was never realised or is it a trace of an unfinished project? The really interesting question, however, is how it is possible for us to have an exhibition of such unrealised works. It is odd that unrealised and incomplete or unfinished work should be the subject of an

exhibition. And we must try to see very clearly what this means. A biographer or historian might want to compile a record of abandoned fragments and unrealised projects because they can shed light on an artist's life or on the projects that she did in the end finish. We might call this interest in unrealised projects 'archaeological'. *B-Sides & Rarities* goes a step further and presents these projects as worthwhile in themselves and not as a means to understanding something else. That means that unrealised projects are being treated in exactly the same way that we treat finished works, namely as works that can stand on their own and are worth dealing with as works. Almost *as if* they were finished (and this wink and nudge at the kantian *als ob* is far from incidental).

An unrealised project is a process that was halted. Something was about to be created and then stopped dead in its tracks or allowed to slowly grind to a halt. The remnants we are left with constitute a kind of network of fragments, points of reference, thoughts and debris that together form the traces of a work that never was. But in its incompleteness the unrealised project points ahead to a possible complete work that we, the spectator, have to complete. It is up to our imagination to try and visualise what the final work might have been like, knowing full well that any such speculation is merely that: speculation. The fragment is therefore paradigmatic for works of art conceived of as a *process* that never really reaches its point of completion. It is, in a way, the better side of postmodernity: it is art with a 'conceptual' sensibility that does not wallow in cleverness because there are actual traces of the work (notes, sketches, proposals) that were never meant to remain in their conceptual state. In the twenty-second of his *Athenäums-Fragmente* (1798), Friedrich Schlegel has called projects '*Fragmente aus der Zukunft*' (Schlegel 1988: II, 107) and that is exactly what they are: messengers from a future that never came about and that we have to hypothetically reconstruct from the fragments that remain. In this sense, dealing with unrealised projects is quite similar to the experience of what Immanuel Kant called purposiveness without purpose ('*Zweckmäßigkeit ohne Zweck*'): one is working towards a goal that simply does not exist. In dealing with unrealised projects we *sense* a finality but can find no end. This difference between what we feel and what is objectively the case holds an important clue to the history of our sensibility for the fragment. There is a philosophical tradition that tries to walk the fault-line between that which the mind can grasp (in philosophical reflection) and that which we can only *feel* but can never fathom through reason. This tradition sees the fragment as a symbol of its reflective insufficiency, of the inability of rational thought to go where feeling has sensed before. Fragments refer us back to an infinity inside ourselves.

All this should sound rather familiar. We have been told (and retold, and told yet again) that we are 'fragmented' or 'decentered' subjects. The fragmentary and incomplete are simply the basic elements of what we call the postmodern condition. *Everything* is fragmented, temporary, unfinished or 'open'. Our world is all in pieces, all coherence gone. We might even say that the centre won't hold, but we don't believe in that centre anymore, do we? This supposedly postmodern idea, however, is derived from very modern sources. We did not suddenly become obsessed with the fragment somewhere in the late sixties, when Lacan and Foucault shot to philosophical stardom. It didn't even happen sometime around Nietzsche. The modern roots of our fragmented condition, and of the fragmentary and unrealised or unfinished work of art as a legitimate object in itself, can be traced back to ideas that were common currency in the Renaissance and in the philosophy of Early German Romanticism. This essay will retrace parts of that history to make clear what, historically, has made it possible for us to conceive of the unrealised and the fragmentary as a legitimate work of art. We will start our story in Germany in the last years of the eighteenth century. It is there, in the work of Friedrich Schlegel, that most of what we now see as the 'postmodern' first took philosophical shape. Once this point of reference is firmly established, we will spread out to take in other aspects of this history. If Friedrich Schlegel is the point of departure for our discussion of the philosophical and literary fragment, we will trace this history to the work of an artist who was probably the greatest master of the unrealised and the fragmentary, namely Michelangelo Buonarroti. And we will end our journey with the man who was most consistent in elevating the fragment to the ideal medium for philosophy, Friedrich Nietzsche. Along the way, we will try to open some unexpected doors.

Postkantian Prelude

To understand the Early Romantic context in which the concept of the fragment took shape, we must first sketch what came immediately before it. The big break in German philosophy of the eighteenth century had come with Immanuel Kant (1724-1804). In his three critiques, the *Kritik der reinen Vernunft* (1781), the *Kritik der praktischen Vernunft* (1788) and the *Kritik der Urteilskraft* (1790) Kant had introduced several severe breaks in man's soul. Kant famously stated that our knowledge of the world comes from our own senses and that we have no way of knowing that the actual world itself really is the way we perceive it. This is the split between the world in itself (what Kant called the '*Ding-an-sich*') and our perception. But the duality went further, for Kant also argued that our own soul was split in a cognitive faculty, the faculty of pure reason (*reiner Vernunft*), and the moral faculty that

guides our actions, which he called practical reason (*praktischer Vernunft*). In his third critique Kant set out to provide a bridge between these two faculties. However, already during his lifetime many philosophers felt Kant had failed to provide a convincing bridge. Knowledge and morality, the two pillars of the human soul, seemed to be fundamentally divorced from each other. This inner split created profound philosophical perplexity that was immediately addressed by a new generation of philosophers. They all agreed that there was a great need to find a basic, unifying principle that would give unity to the faculties that had been separated by Kant.

The response to Kant, which we can only sketch here in the broadest of terms, took two basic forms which differed fundamentally. On the one hand, and most famously, we find German Idealism, starting with Johann Gottlieb Fichte's (1762-1814) first *Wissenschaftslehre* (1794/5; it was the first because more than a dozen later versions of the work, mostly unpublished during Fichte's lifetime, have come to us). In his theory of science, which he basically and ambitiously saw as the science of everything, Fichte said that everything starts with the 'I' (*das Ich*) which posits itself. In a second movement this I generates the 'not-I' (*das nicht-Ich*) which is the world. So the world and everything we perceive is really simply a creation of the self. Immediately we find ourselves in an idealistic frame of mind: everything exists only within the mind of the subject. That is the reason why this strand of philosophy was called 'Idealism': the idealists simply do away with the outside world and reduce everything to the mental world of the subject. This radical and revolutionary idea made a great impression when Fichte taught his *Wissenschaftslehre* in Jena in the 1790's. Among his students were Friedrich Hölderlin (1770-1843) and Friedrich von Hardenberg (1772-1801), better known as Novalis. These young men, who would later be known as the Early Romantics, were impressed with Fichte's philosophy, but not convinced by it. They would set out to challenge it. Another student among their ranks was the young Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel (1770-1830). He, on the contrary, would continue the idealistic strand of philosophy and become its greatest proponent, along with Friedrich Wilhelm Joseph Schelling (1775-1854). By some miraculous quirk of history, all these young men, and many other important philosophers and writers of the era, all knew each other and belonged to small groups of tightly-knit friendships, the most famous of which is the so-called circle of Romantics (*Romantikerkreis*) that counted Friedrich Schlegel, Novalis, Friedrich Hölderlin (1770-1843), Ludwig Tieck and Friedrich Schleiermacher (1768-1834) among its most famous members.

If Fichte, Hegel and the later Schelling are the idealistic reaction to Kant, the Romantics chose a more realistic train of

thought. They were inspired by a sceptical tradition in modern philosophy that had also critiqued Kant. This sceptical approach, which is found most clearly in the work of Gottlob Ernst Schulze (1761-1833), who called himself Aenesidemus (after a sceptic from classical philosophy), simply accepted that the world in itself can never be proven to exist. But the sceptics also saw that every attempt to ground the several strands of human reason or consciousness in one basic principle was doomed to end up in an infinite regression. If you say, as Fichte does, that everything is fundamentally unified in the I of the subject that produces it, you are simply begging the question as to what is in turn the foundation of this subject. The search for an ultimate foundation or 'Grundsatz' of everything is a bootless enterprise. Novalis famously compared it to the search for the squaring of the circle or the philosopher's stone: '*Alles suchen nach Einem Princip wäre also ein Versuch die Quadratur des Zirkels zu finden. Perpetuum mobile. Stein des Weisen*' (in UA 497). Every ultimate foundation you find, will always require a further foundation, which in turn requires a foundation, which in turn requires a foundation, and so on to infinity. The Romantics felt the unattainability of the ultimate foundation had to be embraced on principle. If one were to choose a symbolical date of birth for this Romantic philosophy, one might find it in May 1795, when Friedrich Immanuel Niethammer (1766-1848) published the first issue of his *Philosophisches Journal*, which would become one of the most important channels of communication for the *Grundsatzskeptiker*. In the inaugural issue Niethammer himself published an introductory essay titled *Von den Ansprüchen des gemeinen Verstandes an die Philosophie*. In this important piece Niethammer states that, since an ultimate foundation can never be found, all science is always hypothetical and tentative. There is no definite knowledge. Therefore reason should not condescend to the insights of common sense. The universality of reason, one of the great tenets of Enlightenment philosophy, offers no guarantee for its correctness for, as Schleiermacher would later put it in a lecture of 1822, '*auch ein unrichtiges Denken kann gemeinsam werden*' (in UA 504). Therefore we must always be sceptical about all human knowledge. '*Von nun an,*' Niethammer declared in a letter from the same month, '*erkläre ich mich zum unversöhnlichsten Feinde aller sogenannten ersten Grundsätze der Philosophie, und denjenigen, der einen braucht, zu einem Narren*' (in UA 439-440). Many of his contemporaries would follow suit.

Schlegel's Infinite Irony

Friedrich Schlegel (1772-1829) was probably the quintessential Early Romantic philosopher. It is to him that we owe the Romantic

philosophy of the fragment. But rather than simply take the fragment on its own, Schlegel embedded his views in a broader philosophy of irony. Just like the other Romantics, Schlegel believed that the ultimate foundation of everything, which was often called the Absolute, was unattainable. Therefore it became the object of a never-ending search. This search was the essence of philosophy, which Schlegel defines as *'Sehnsucht nach dem Unendlichen'* (in UA 521) or a longing for the infinite. *'Das Denken hat die Eigenheit,'* Schlegel writes in his novel *Lucinde* (1799), *'dass es nächst sich selbst am liebsten über das denkt, worüber es ohne Ende denken kann. Darum ist das Leben des gebildeten und sinnigen Menschen ein stetes Bilden und Sinnen über das schöne Rätsel seiner Bestimmung'* (Schlegel 1985: 124-5). The destination of our longing is forever beyond reach, it remains a mystery. Interestingly, Schlegel did not always hold these Romantic views. He in fact started out as a dedicated follower of Fichte, stating that Fichte had found a *fundamentum inconcussum* for all subsequent philosophy (UA 582). Around the year 1797, however, and surely under the influence of his friend Novalis, Schlegel made a radical turn that is most clearly expressed in his review of Niethammer's *Philosophisches Journal*. It is in that review that Schlegel first formulates what would become the essence of his own philosophy, namely the so-called *'Wechselerweis'* or *'Wechselgrundsatz'*, the principle of to-and-fro that guides all authentic thinking. *'In meinem System,'* he states confidently, *'ist der letzte Grund wirklich ein Wechselerweis. In Fichte's ein Postulat und ein unbedingter Satz'* (in ADI 95). The turn is clear: Schlegel has moved away from foundational thinking and has embraced the Romantic infinite.

In Schlegel's philosophy, man is split. *'Das eigentlich Widersprechende in unsrem Ich ist, dass wir uns zugleich endlich und unendlich fühlen'* (in UA 861). Man is a broken being that feels at once finite and infinite. This double aspect is due to the unattainability of the Absolute: we have an essence, a unity, a foundation, but we cannot attain it. Our most fundamental self remains forever alien to us. We cannot find out what we really are and can therefore never be truly whole. Nevertheless, we *feel* ourselves whole. We feel or sense the Absolute. But every time we try to grasp it, it eludes us. So we are on an infinite quest for insight into the Absolute. During this quest we feel at the same time finite, namely a corporeal being that is limited and cut off from the Absolute, and infinite, namely somehow linked to that elusive Absolute, attracted to it but never able to take hold of it. Our quest is therefore never-ending and is expressed first and foremost in the three temporal dimensions of past, present and future. Time, Schlegel says, is *'in Unordnung gerathene [aus ihre Fugen gebrachte] Ewigkeit'* (in UA 861-2). This means that the loss of Being (or the Absolute) shows itself in our consciousness. The

subject experiences itself as a mere fragment. It experiences a '*Gefühl der Beschränktheit*' or feeling of limitedness that expresses a most distressing truth: '*dass wir nur ein Stück von uns selbst sind*' (in UA 876). The other, missing part is the Absolute. Out of this sense of fragmentary existence the past opens up as remembrance of a golden age in which we were one, part of the Absolute, but which is now irretrievably lost. We have been pulled out of that unity into a fragmentary existence. The future, on the other hand, is our journey out of our fragmentary state towards a new union with the Absolute. We long to return to the blissful unity with the Absolute (and this longing is, of course, our *Sehnsucht*).

This longing for the Absolute which cannot be fulfilled, and cannot be fulfilled *on principle*, is expressed in a dialectic or to-and-fro between the principles of allegory and the joke. The dialectical movement between these two principles is what Schlegel calls irony. Let us first look at allegory, which is what Schlegel calls the tendency towards the Absolute within the finite. This is a rather abstract way of saying that allegories are an attempt to somehow show or capture the Absolute in a finite form. In an allegory we use an image to refer to something else. It is an attempt to capture something elusive or abstract in an image. So an allegory uses an image of something finite to focus on something *beyond* the finite. '*Die Unmöglichkeit, das Höchste durch Reflexion positiv zu erreichen,*' Schlegel writes, '*führt zur Allegorie*' (in EFÄ 135-6). Or put differently: '*Das Höchste kann man eben weil es unaussprechlich ist, nur allegorisch sagen*' (in EFÄ 136; UA 932). It should therefore come as no surprise when Schlegel writes, in fragment 48 of his *Ideen* (1800), that '*wo die Philosophie aufhört, muss die Poesie anfangen*' (in UA 944). Poetry or allegory takes over because philosophical reflection falls short of its intended goal, which is to gain insight into the Absolute. Another alternative is the joke, which is the opposite of allegory. In the joke we actually find a short flash of insight into the Absolute. Where allegory is directed upwards, away from the finite and with the gaze fixed upon the beyond of the Absolute, the joke tries to capture the Absolute firmly within a piece of the finite. The joke is like a flash of insight into the Absolute, like lightning striking into stone (lightning or '*Blitz*' was a preferred image of Schlegel's to characterise the joke). Jokes are funny because they are contradictory, they go against logic and common sense. They turn the usual order upside down. In doing so, they illuminate our inner split. It is in the joke, as a flash of insight into the Absolute, that we find the seeds of a philosophy of the fragment.

The fragment is basically the only kind of unity man can ever attain. The fragment is the expression of our torn inner self, of our bifurcated consciousness. Every fragment creates unity, it is a whole, but this unity is never all-encompassing. Rather, we get a multitude of fragments, a chaotic whirl of units and individual

positions that constantly contradict one another. *'[Alles] widerspricht sich,'* Schlegel writes, and *'die Form des Bewusstseins ist durchaus chaotisch'* (in UA 938; ADI 129). *'Wer Sinn fürs Unendliche hat, [...] sagt, wenn er sich entschieden ausdrückt, lauter Widersprüche'* (in UA 939). A similar sentiment is expressed in a fragment from Novalis' collection *Blüthenstaub* (1798) that was actually written by Schlegel and inserted into Novalis' work: *'Hat man einmal die Liebhaberey fürs Absolute und kann nicht davon lassen: so bleibt einem kein Ausweg, als sich selbst immer zu widersprechen, und entgegengesetzte Extreme zu verbinden'* (in EFÄ 224-5). So the fragment is the most faithful expression of our most inner being. Man is divorced from the Absolute or his own essence. He can never retrieve unity with the Absolute. So man must forever remain a fragment, a butchered self, a partial being that is tragically aware of its lack. Man expresses this tragic knowledge in the fragment that is the mirror of his split soul. Thus, the contradiction that man is at once finite and infinite, living in a constant to-and-fro of the dialectical movement between unity and infinity, between joke and allegory, is the very essence of the subject, of which Schlegel now says that it *'sich eigentlich nicht setzt, sondern sucht'* (in ADI 136), which is a very clear retort to Fichte's idealistic position.

Finally, then, irony is the attitude man has when he confronts the Absolute. Fully aware of his lacking self, man mocks both the finite and the infinite. This mockery is irony. Man mocks the finite because it is always in conflict with itself, a constant chaos of fragments and ever-changing individual positions that never come together in a coherent whole and always remain lacking in relation to the Absolute. But man also mocks the Absolute itself because it is unattainable. To be grasped by human reflection (or philosophy) the Absolute must limit itself (in allegory, in the lightning flash of the joke). But in doing so, the Absolute is simply *not showing* itself. Since the Absolute is infinite (and unattainable) no finite form can ever capture it. In showing itself, the Absolute retreats. So all fragments are in the end revealed to be but failed images of the Absolute that is perennially not showing itself. Irony is the tragic consciousness of one's fragmentary condition. Therefore, no system of philosophy is ever possible; but at the same time we cannot do without a system: *'Wer ein System hat, ist so gut geistig verloren, als wer keins hat. Man muss eben beides verbinden'* (in EFÄ 225). And the only way to at the same time have and not have a system, is to ironically mock every statement, every system or anything one says. Ironic man is forever dancing around a centre that cannot hold because it is not there. *'Es ist ein sehr gutes Zeichen,'* Schlegel concludes, *'wenn die harmonisch Platten gar nicht wissen, wie sie diese stete Selbstparodie zu nehmen haben, immer wieder von neuem glauben und missglauben, bis*

sie schwindlicht werden, den Scherz gerade für Ernst, und den Ernst für Scherz halten' (in ADI 135).

It should be clear that what we have here is an early, and probably the earliest, systematic description of what we have come to call 'postmodern irony'. But there is a difference, and an important one. Postmodern irony can be a very irritating attitude that easily lends itself to smugness. It is often an excuse not to take any position at all. Ironic intellectuals seem to be forever disappearing around corners and only ever speak with their eyes firmly on the emergency exit of ironic subterfuge. Postmodern irony is often quite shallow. It can never be taken to account for anything because it never really says anything or never really stands up for anything. We can see now that this smug irony represents a shift away from Romantic irony. As we have seen, the Early Romantics and Schlegel never denied the existence of the Absolute. They simply believed that it could never be attained. Postmodern irony will usually do away with this belief in the Absolute. Since nothing universally applies, we need not truly commit to anything. So we can and will say anything and then simply deny it. What separates Romantic irony from postmodern irony is a sense of the tragic, of loss, of being bound to something we cannot attain. This sense of the tragic was also very important to Friedrich Nietzsche, as we will soon see. It is therefore odd, and surely a strange quirk of intellectual history, that postmodern ironists should have chosen Nietzsche as their patron saint of relativism only to do away with the very element that made this relativism (and its concomitant irony) intellectually fertile: a sense of tragedy. For postmoderns it no longer seems to be tragic that we lack essence. It has simply become a joke. A shallow and hollow joke and a rather petite sort of lightning. Postmodernity is simply irony made easy.

Fragments on Sensual Display

It is one of the great joys of Romantic philosophy that it has actually been put to use. Most philosophies tend to remain abstract constructions. Schlegel's theories of irony and the fragment, however, have found expression in many literary works. This is interesting because one rarely gets to see philosophers put their money where their minds are. With Romantic philosophy, the proof of the pudding is very much in the eating. More than that: the very philosophy itself was often developed in collections of fragments such as Schlegel's own *Athenäums-Fragmente* (1798) and his *Ideen* (1800), or Novalis' *Blüthenstaub* (1798) and many other collections of his notes, fragments and jottings that were published posthumously by Schlegel and Tieck. It is therefore interesting to make a slight detour to the works in which the philosophy of irony and the fragment was put to literary use. The most exemplary among

these is Schlegel's own novel *Lucinde* (1799). *Lucinde* is not a novel in any classical sense. The ideal of the novel in the late eighteenth century was the *Bildungsroman* exemplified by Goethe's *Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahre* (1795/96): a story in which the psychological development of a main character is told in great detail. Schlegel's novel, on the other hand, is short, uncompleted and is basically a collage of genres. Romantic fragmentation defines the structure of the book, that develops no continuous exposition but consists mainly of letters, short essays, notes, reflections and even an authorial chapter on the '*Lehrjahre der Männlichkeit*' that the main character Julius goes through. Among these fragments many delicious treasures are to be found. There is, for instance, an '*Allegorie von der Frechheit*' and a remarkable '*Charakteristik der kleinen Wilhelmine*' that describes a very young girl rolling on the ground with her legs in the air: '*Und nun sieh! diese liebenswürdige Wilhelmine findet nicht selten ein unassprechliches Vergnügen darin, auf dem Rücken liegend mit den Beinchen in die Höhe zu gestikulieren, unbekümmert um ihren Rock und um das Urteil der Welt. Wenn das Wilhelmine tut, was darf ich nicht tun, da ich doch bei Gott! ein Mann bin, und nicht zarter zu sein brauche wie das zarteste weibliche Wesen? O beneidenswürdige Freiheit von Vorurteilen! Wirf auch du sie von dir, liebe Freundin, alle die Reste von falscher Scham, wie ich oft die fatalen Kleider von dir riss und in schöner Anarchie umherstreute. Und sollte dir ja diese kleine Roman meines Lebens zu wild scheinen: so denke dir, dass er ein Kind sei und ertrage seinen unschuldigen Mutwillen mit mütterlicher Langmut und lass dich von ihm Liebkosen*' (Schlegel 1985: 27-28).

We find many interesting elements in this short extract. To begin with, it is a rallying-call to libertinism, which is the moral philosophy expressed in the novel. Julius is asking Lucinde, the '*liebe Freundin*' he is addressing, to leave behind all feelings of false shame and be like Wilhelmine, spontaneous and luscious. Interestingly, Julius also speaks of the beautiful anarchy he created by tearing off Lucinde's clothes and throwing them about in the room. Again, this is a Romantic topic: the beauty of anarchy is in essence an anti-classical beauty, a beauty without system. This libertinism is explicitly linked in the novel to the tragic character of Lisette, a woman of sexual licence who eventually commits suicide among the exquisite and exotic luxuries with which she has dressed up her home. Lisette loves a delicate and decadent art: '*Doch schätzte sie an Statuen und an Zeichnungen nur die lebendige Kraft, und an Gemälden nur den Zauber der Farben, die Wahrheit des Fleisches und allenfalls die Täuschung des Lichtes. Sprach ihr jemand von Regeln, vom Ideal und von der sogenannten Zeichnung, so lachte sie oder hörte nicht zu*' (l.c. 74). What we find here is really the groundworks for an aesthetic of decadence and fetishism, where sensual detail and the rapture of chaotic delight are preferred over the classic order of Classicism, which was the aesthetic philosophy

of the generation before the Romantics: Winckelmann, Goethe and Kant. Schlegel's sensual philosophy of erotic abandon culminates in a delightful apology of laziness in the *'Idylle über den Müßiggang'* in which Schlegel describes how man should really strive towards a life of inaction and sleep. *'Mit dem äussersten Unwillen dachte ich nun an die schlechten Menschen, welche den Schlaf vom Leben subtrahieren wollen. Sie haben wahrscheinlich nie geschlafen, und auch nie gelebt. [...] Nur mit Gelassenheit und Sanftmut, in der heiligen Stille der echten Passivität kann man sich an sein ganzes Ich erinnern, und die Welt und das Leben anschauen. Wie geschieht alles Denken und Dichten, als dass man sich der Einwirkung irgend eines Genius ganz überlässt und hingibt? Und doch ist das Sprechen und Bilden nur Nebensache in allen Künsten und Wissenschaften, das Wesentliche ist das Denken und Dichten, und das ist nur durch Passivität möglich [...] In der Tat man sollte das Studium des Müßiggangs nicht so sträflich vernachlässigen, sondern es zur Kunst und Wissenschaft, ja zur Religion bilden! Um alles in Eins zu fassen: je göttlicher ein Mensch oder ein Werk des Menschen ist, je ähnlicher werden sie der Pflanze; diese ist unter allen Formen der Natur die sittlichste, und die schönste. Und also wäre ja das höchste vollendetste Leben nichts als ein reines Vegetieren'* (l.c. 46-48).

Again, in this passage, much is happening at once. First, Schlegel launches a full scale moral attack on modern capitalism, which feels that only action, and action resulting in financial gain at that, is legitimate. Combined with the libertine thought of the novel, this makes for a radical attack on bourgeois culture. But Schlegel goes farther still. He states that the only way we might possibly attain some knowledge of the Absolute is through utter and total passivity, which amounts to a philosophy of contemplation that has more than a trace of Platonicism. But never one to take his tongue out of his cheek, Schlegel boosts up his quasi-Platonic provocation by declaring vegetation the noblest, most moral form of life. It was of course a central tenet of both catholicism and Enlightenment that *mankind*, God's greatest creation, was the seat of morality. Morals were linked to free actions, as discussed in Kant's second critique. Schlegel simply overturns the old world order and declares that instead of making the world more spiritual, man must become like the plant and vegetate. Only through such luxurious laziness can he hope to achieve the Absolute. Indeed, Schlegel explicitly states that man becomes more divine as he becomes more like a plant. This is terrific irony and a terrific provocation, which made *Lucinde* a scandalous novel hated by all except Friedrich Schleiermacher, who attempted a defence of the work in his *Vertraute Briefe über Friedrich Schlegels Lucinde* (1801). To the postmodern mind, *Lucinde* reads like a delightful send-up of morality, but infused with great wit and wisdom. It is, in fact, a novel that seems to have been written two centuries before its time.

Inventing the Human

If *Lucinde* shows us how our own supposedly 'postmodern' way of being takes shape through its many diverse fragments, the making of the modern human can be seen even more lucidly in the work of Ludwig Tieck (1773-1853), who fully subscribed to Romantic philosophy and produced one of the great masterpieces of Romantic literature: the *Phantastus* (1812/16), a collage of stories and plays framed by discussions based on the debates in the circle of Romantic philosophers. *'Einer der widerstrebendsten Gedanken ist für mich der des Zusammenhanges,'* Tieck once wrote. *'Sind wir denn wirklich im Stande ihn überall zu erkennen? Ist es nicht frömmere, menschlich edler und aufrichtiger, einfach zu bekennen, das wir ihn nicht wahrzunehmen vermögen, dass unsere Erkenntnis sich nur auf Einzelnes bezieht, und das man sich resigniere?'* (in EFÄ 298). *'Ich muss nur Lachen,'* he remarks elsewhere, *'wenn ich Leute so grosse Anstalten machen sehe, um ein Leben zu führen. Das Leben ist dahin, ehe sie mit den Vorbereitungen fertig sind'* (ibid.). What Tieck states here amounts to the rejection of any kind of system and the negation of the possibility of a rational life such as might be portrayed in a *Bildungsroman*, where a life might indeed unfold as planned and prepared. But even before he became acquainted with the Romantic philosophy of irony Tieck had sensed it in the works of William Shakespeare. *'Der Gedanke der Ironie hat sich bei mir erst später vollständig entwickelt, besonders seit ich mit [the philosopher Wilhelm Ferdinand Solger, 1780-1819] in nähern Verkehr getreten war. Vorher ahnte ich mehr die Notwendigkeit eines solchen Gedankens für den Dichter, als dass er mir zur klaren Überzeugung geworden wäre. Diese dunklen Ahnungen hatte ich namentlich bei dem Studium Shakespeares; ich fühlte heraus, das sei es, was ihn zum grössten Dichter mache, und von so vielen bedeutenden, höchst trefflichen Talenten unterscheide'* (in EFÄ 370).

Let's follow Tieck's road to Shakespeare. Romantic irony, as we know by now, is not the everyday irony we use to distance ourselves from people or ideals. Neither is it the famous Socratic irony that feigns ignorance only to entrap an antagonist in debate. Romantic irony is a higher form of irony that is not even necessarily funny. To Tieck, it is a spirit that penetrates a complete work of literature and both destroys and holds together everything in it. Tieck himself has called this spirit an *'Äthergeist, der [...] über dem Ganzen schwebt'* (in EFÄ 371). This means that irony is not an element in the plot of a novel or play. It is not even an attitude of the characters. It might be those things, but it is essentially more. It pervades the entire work and must therefore be ingrained in its very fabric. And that means that irony must be found *in language itself*. Both Schlegel and Novalis have spoken of a *'Transzendentalpoesie'* in this context, analogous to Kant's concept of a *'Transzendentalphilosophie'*. This is a philosophy that does not

seek to describe what we know but *how* we know. This was the project of Kant's first critique: to analyse how we gain knowledge of the world and describe that epistemological mechanism. Similarly, transcendental poetry would be a poetry that reflects on itself as poetry while it is being written. It is a text that announces itself as text. '*Transzendentalpoesie*,' Schlegel writes, '[stellt] in jeder ihrer Darstellungen sich selbst mit dar' and is '*überall zugleich Poesie und Poesie der Poesie*' (in EFÄ 364). This self-reflexivity means that poetry loses its unequivocality and becomes all-encompassing in its meanings. No single word has one single meaning anymore.

So Romantic irony for Tieck is a *stylistic* irony. Robert Minder has called it '*la grâce tieckienne*' (EFÄ 371). It is to be found in the way Tieck treats his language and can be gleaned only indirectly, in the lightness of phrasing, in the inconsistent way characters are developed and in the loose way in which drama is motivated. Negatively put, this means that Tieck's irony can be seen in the fact that there is something light and ephemeral in his phrasing, that his characters act in inconsistent and implausible ways and that there is no firm causal relation between dramatic events, so that these events might at some times seem somewhat absurd or bizarre. '*Die Ironie, von der ich spreche*,' Tieck writes, '*ist ja nicht Hohn, Spott, Persiflage, oder was man sonst der Art gewöhnlich darunter zu verstehen pflegt, es ist vielmehr der tiefste Ernst, der zugleich mit Scherz und wahrer Heiterkeit verbunden ist. Sie ist nicht bloss negativ, sondern etwas durchaus Positives. Sie ist die Kraft, die dem Dichter die Herrschaft über den Stoff erhält; er soll sich an nichts verlieren, sondern über ihm stehen. So bewahrt ihn die Ironie vor Einsichtigkeiten und leerem Idealisieren*' (in EFÄ 372). To be sure, Tieck's work, and that of Early Romanticism in general, has come under criticism (notably from Hegel) because of the perceived inconsistencies that flow from this theory. The credibility of both the characters and the dramatic events is undermined when these are structured too loosely and with too little consistency. But this very criticism was to Tieck the strength of irony. The Romantics believed that this lack of consistency, this freedom of solid character, was in fact the true freedom of human nature. Why should man have substance? What if the real freedom of man lies in the fact that he does not have substance? This insight, which reads thoroughly postmodern to our eyes, was neatly expressed by Schelling in a 1820/21 lecture where he describes human subjectivity as a '*durch alles gehen und nichts sein, nämlich nicht so sein, dass es nicht auch anders sein könnte*' (in EFÄ 372). In man, nothing is determined and all is possible.

Tieck has described this concept of irony in his early essay on *Shakespeares Behandlung des Wunderbaren* (1793), in which he asks the question how Shakespeare gets us to suspend disbelief in the face of the many wondrous and surreal things that happen in his plays. According to Tieck, Shakespeare succeeds by making

sure that the attention of the spectator can never stay completely focused on one element. He constantly shifts from humour to terror, from horror to drama and back to comedy, piling up stylistic and dramatic contrasts in such a way that the mind is overwhelmed by the onslaught of emotion. There is such a clash of opposites, and it is sustained at such a level and for such a long time, that the mind simply starts to feel exhausted and is no longer able to find any reason or rationality in the proceedings. This leaves the mind with only one option: to sit back and surrender wholly to the illusion of the play. To put it unkindly, and profoundly unjustly, Shakespeare might be said to beat his audience into submission by the sheer power of his mercurial imagination shooting all over the place. The illusion of the wonderful is created by ensuring '*dass der Zuschauer nie auf irgend einen Gegenstand einen festen und bleibenden Blick heftet, dass der Dichter die Aufmerksamkeit beständig zerstreut und die Phantasie in einer gewissen Verwirrung erhält, damit seine Phantome nicht zu viele Körperliche Consistenz erhalten und dadurch unwahrscheinlich werden*' (in EFÄ 381). So Shakespeare maintains an '*In-Verwirrung-Halten der Phantasie*' through which the mind '*in eine Art Schwindel versetzt [wird], in welchem sie sich am Ende gezwungen der Täuschung überlässt, da sie alle Kennzeichen der Wahrheit oder des Irrtums verloren hat*' (in EFÄ 374). Interestingly, Shakespeare can do this because the human mind itself is very susceptible to this method. '*Es gehört dies [...] zur unbegreiflich schnellen Beweglichkeit der Imagination, die in zwei aufeinander folgenden Momenten ganz verschiedene Ideen an einen und denselben Gegenstand knüpfen, und jetzt Lachen, und gleich darauf Entsetzen erregen kann*' (in EFÄ 373-4).

The mind of man is nimble. It has no essence and is therefore plastic. What we have here, is the un-essentialist Romantic view of the subject that we found in Schelling's statement. For man, all is possible. So man is also receptive to a poetry (which stands *pars pro toto* for all the arts) in which everything is possible, even the wondrous and supernatural. Romantic irony, in the sense of Tieck, but also in the sense of Schlegel, expresses human nature through its agile to-and-fro between extremes of emotion and experience without ever attaining an essence or an end. Of Tieck's characters Manfred Frank has written that they are driven by an '*inneren Nichts*' (EFÄ 386). This is the essence of Romantic subjectivity. If one writes for the stage, this subjectivity is expressed through sheer inconsistency. This was also the view held by Novalis, who demanded '*Mannigfaltigkeit in der Darstellung von Menschen*' and especially '*nur keine Puppen, keine sogenannten Charaktere – lebendige, bizarre, inkonsequente, bunte Welt. Je bunteres Leben, je besser*' (ibid.). For '*jeder Mensch ist ohne Maass veränderlich*' (in Frank 1985: 23). This mercurial man, leaping from either extreme of the emotional gamut to the other and responsive to sudden

violent swings in mood and perception, was indeed invented by William Shakespeare, as Tieck clearly sensed and Harold Bloom has recently made explicit in a magisterial study of Shakespeare's work. Modern man, ironic and sceptical, forever torn by the question whether to act or not to act, is Hamlet, Prince of Denmark. 'Even at its darkest,' Bloom writes, 'Hamlet's grief has something tentative in it. "Hesitant mourning" is almost an oxymoron; still, Hamlet's quintessence is never to be wholly committed to any stance or attitude, any mission, or indeed to anything at all. His language reveals this throughout, no other character in all of literature changes his verbal decorum so rapidly. He has no center: [...] Hamlet is too intelligent to be at one with any role, and intelligence in itself is decentered when allied with the prince's ultimate disinterestedness. Categorizing Hamlet is virtually impossible [...]. One aspect of Hamlet is free, and entertains itself with bitter wit and bitterly intended play, but other aspects are bound, and we cannot find the balance' (SH 406). Hamlet's character is 'a dance of contraries' (SH 407). To him, 'the self is an abyss, the chaos of virtual nothingness' (SH 5). In this, Hamlet is thoroughly modern.

Bloom argues that Shakespeare, in inventing Hamlet, 'invented the human as we continue to know it' (SH xx). But the argument should not be limited to the gloomy prince of dark and doomed Elsinore. All of Shakespeare's great characters are constructed from 'seeming contradictions' that give them a 'naturalistic unreality' (SH 12). As Bloom points out, 'the reading of character appears infinite in Shakespeare' (WC 53) and 'no other writer, before or since Shakespeare, has accomplished so well the virtual miracle of creating utterly different yet self-consistent voices for his more than one hundred major characters and many hundreds of highly distinctive minor personages' (SH xix). Shakespeare achieved this through a unique mode of psychological representation that Bloom calls 'a psychology of mutability' that 'originates the depiction of self-change on the basis of self-overhearing [...]. We all of us go around now talking to ourselves endlessly, overhearing what we say, then pondering and acting upon what we have learned. This is not so much the dialogue of the mind with itself, or even a reflection of civil war in the psyche, as it is life's reaction to what literature has necessarily become. Shakespeare, from Falstaff on, adds to the function of imaginative writing, which was instruction in how to speak to others, the now dominant if more melancholy lesson of poetry: how to speak to ourselves' (WC 48-49). Through self-discovery through speech Shakespeare's characters develop to a point beyond our grasp. They create themselves through the art of speech and become larger than ordinary life. 'Hamlet baffles us by altering with nearly every phrase he utters' (SH 410). In a similar way, all of Shakespeare's characters 'become free artists of

themselves, which means that they are free to write themselves, to will changes in the self. Overhearing their own speeches and pondering those expressions, they change and go on to contemplate an otherness in the self, or the possibility of such otherness' (WC 70).

This is the expansiveness of Shakespearean character that makes the Bard, in Bloom's view, the author of modern man. 'Shakespeare so opens his characters to multiple perspectives that they become analytical instruments for judging you. If you are a moralist, Falstaff outrages you; if you are rancid, Rosalind exposes you; if you are dogmatic, Hamlet evades you forever. And if you are an explainer, the great Shakespearean villains will cause you to despair. Iago, Edmund, and MacBeth are not motiveless; they overflow with motives, most of which they invent or imagine for themselves. [...] The most bewildering of Shakespearean achievements is to have suggested more contexts for explaining us than we are capable of supplying for explaining his characters' (WC 64). "Great havoc makes he of our originalities" was Emerson's remark about Plato' (WC 56), but it is Shakespeare who most definitively robs us of the possibility to think ourselves original in our concept of our self. Shakespeare, as Camille Paglia has pointed out, 'is the first to reflect upon the fluid nature of modern gender and identity' (SP 197) and many of his comedies evolve around mistaken identities and characters dressing up as persons of the opposite sex. This fluidity, blurring the lines of fixed personality, spills over into Shakespeare's language, teeming with mercurial metaphors. 'Metaphors are the key to character, the imaginative center of every speech. They spill from line to line, abundant, florid, illogical. They are Shakespeare's dream-vehicle of Dionysian metamorphosis. [...] Shakespeare's metaphors, like his sexual personae, flicker through a rolling stream of development and process. Nothing in Shakespeare stays the same for long. [...] Shakespeare is an alchemist. In his treatment of sex and personality, Shakespeare is a shape-shifter and master of transformations' (SP 197-198).

The constant change in self, Hamlet's 'metamorphic nature' (SH 430), makes it 'very difficult to generalize about Hamlet, because every observation will have to admit its opposite. He is the paradigm of grief, yet he expresses mourning by an extraordinary verve, and his continuous wit gives the pragmatic effect of making him seem endlessly high-spirited, even as he mourns' (SH 409). This, it would seem, has something of the to-and-fro that marks the infinite Romantic consciousness that Schelling described as anti-essentialist openness. This becomes especially clear if we look at Bloom's remark that 'Hamlet's players hold the mirror up to nature, but Shakespeare's is a mirror within a mirror, and both are mirrors with many voices' (SH 15). The imagery of mirrors Bloom borrows from Shakespeare can

serve as a direct link to Novalis' rather opaque philosophy of human reflection in his *Fichte-Studien* (1795/96). Novalis (1772-1801) asks the question how knowledge of the elusive Absolute, and of our truest self, is possible. As starting point he takes the notion of 'reflection' and takes it literally to mean a mirror image. If we look in a mirror, we see everything reversed: left becomes right and everything is turned. But we also think of our self-consciousness as reflection, namely as self-reflection, a reflection upon our own thoughts and actions. So Novalis asks if a similar reversal of images also applies there. And it does. If we try to fathom the Absolute (or ourselves) through reflection, and this obviously means through the activity of philosophy, we constantly feel that we are missing the Absolute. It eludes us and cannot be attained. We have a feeling ('*Gefühl*') of what the Absolute might be, but when we try to capture this feeling in (discursive) thought, '*der Geist des Gefühls ist da heraus*' (in UA 817). As Nietzsche would later write, '*Gedanken sind die Schatten unserer Empfindungen, – immer dunkler, leerer, einfacher, als diese*' (KSA 3: 502).

Thus far, Novalis' reasoning is in line with the general trend of Romantic philosophy that we found earlier. But now Novalis makes a brilliant move. If rational reflection indeed results in a reflection, namely a reversal of the true image, then reflection must also have the ability to reflect this reflection, to turn it again and put it right. This would be a double reflection that might be called self-reflection, namely a reflection upon and of the reflection that happens in reflection. The inverted image in a mirror is reverted again when reflected in another mirror. If we seem to lose track of the Absolute in reflection, because we only get an inverted and therefore unreal image of it, then the reflection of reflection might put the authentic image of the Absolute right again. If reflection is a movement away from the Absolute towards a false image, then double reflection can be experienced as a movement of the Absolute towards us, opening and presenting itself in its true form. But this play of reflections is too easy an answer to our predicament. It would border on sophistry to make things look so easy. Novalis is aware of this and therefore denies that double reflection can give us insight into the Absolute. What the double reflection *does* do, however, is make us acutely aware of the falseness of the image captured in reflection (in thought, in philosophy). Our perceived knowledge attained through reflection is unmasked as false knowledge. So double reflection does not lead to insight in the Absolute, but to a knowing-of-not-knowing, a *docta ignorantia*! This is the spirit of Romanticism: there is something within us that is beyond our comprehension and that can only be traced, as Schlegel would say, through fragments. The Absolute is larger than we could ever be. It is the same expansiveness of the human soul that makes

Shakespeare's characters so much larger than us, but at the same time so close to us. It is in Shakespeare that we first find this infinity within that the Romantics described as the source of our infinite *Sehnsucht*.

Sans Everything: A Walk Through Ancient Ruins

The Romantic gap between the fragment and the Absolute seems to have been poignantly captured in Henry Fuseli's famous work *The Artist Overwhelmed by the Grandeur of Antique Ruins* (1778-79). In this work we see the sketched form of an artist sitting amongst ancient ruins. He rests his head in his left hand, as if in despair, while his right hand rests on the foot of what probably once was a colossal statue of a Roman emperor (or maybe Shelley's Ozymandias). Above the foot, there is a second fragment of the colossus: a hand with pointing finger. But the hand is tilted, resting on the wrist, so that the finger points upwards. It is very tempting to see in this picture an allegory of our fragmented condition as described by Schlegel: lost among imperfect fragments, man longs for higher unity with the Absolute. Of course, a much more prosaic explanation might be offered, namely that the hand in the image was tilted because that was the only way it could be put up without falling over. But nothing in art is ever coincidental, so I am going to stick to my allegorical reading of Fuseli's image for the moment and try to show that it is not as far-fetched as it might seem. Fuseli's image takes us to the roots of Romanticism. All through the Middle Ages, ancient ruins and fragments of ancient sculpture had been present in the Italian landscape and in cities. This legacy was not unknown to medieval man, it simply did not seem to have the cultural import it gained in the Renaissance. With the revival of ancient culture in the early Renaissance, ancient ruins were beginning to be excavated and great classical masterpieces were brought to light. Famously, on the fourteenth of January 1506, the *Laocoön* was discovered and readily identified from literary sources.

It is here, in the context of the Renaissance, that we find a second important source for our concept of the fragment as an artistically relevant object. Kenneth Clark puts it most clearly in his wonderful study of the nude as an ideal art form: 'Antique art has come down to us in a fragmentary condition, and we have virtuously adapted our taste to this necessity. Almost all our favourite specimens of Greek sculpture, from the 6th century onwards, were originally parts of compositions, and if we were faced with the complete group in which the Charioteer of Delphi was once a subsidiary figure, we might well experience a moment of revulsion. We have come to think of the fragment as more vivid, more concentrated and more authentic' (Clark 1956: 219). In a more recent book, Leonard Barkan has suggested that we might compare the role of the fragment in art to the role of relics in

religion. 'The sacred potential of a saint's bone is not proportional to its size, even though churches may struggle to obtain a complete set. It consists in some invisible qualities that are all-in-all. To be sure, no facile equation should be made between the miraculous afterlife of a saint and the transmission of aesthetic or cultural power from a classical fragment to a modern viewer; yet in both cases there is an immaterial essence contained in the part, and it becomes a whole through the acts of beholding and contemplation' (UP 122). In this passage, Barkan makes many fruitful suggestions all at once. First, we here again find the element of imaginative completion: as with all unrealised or fragmentary works, the viewer must complete the work in his mind. But Barkan also suggests a link with fetishism, especially sexual fetishism, where individual objects or body-parts are carriers of a much larger sexual and emotional meaning. This triggers memories of flailing legs and luxuriously fetishistic suicides in Schlegel's *Lucinde*. Finally, by making the comparison with religious relics, Barkan also points to the Neo-Platonic context that was at work in the Renaissance. We should try to unravel these elements and see their interconnectedness more clearly.

Let us begin by moving even further into the past. Art has always been fragmentary. Ever since he engaged in warfare, man has looted. And the spoils of war have always contained religious relics and works of art brought from foreign countries to the homeland. There, these fragments were often integrated in new wholes that had no link with the original context of the fragment. A religious work of art or a relic from Egypt might become an embellishment on a triumphal arch, where it was put up next to spoils from Germanic countries. Especially in ancient Rome, much public art was compiled along such lines of collage. This means that Roman art had an element of displacement. It contained many elements that had been made elsewhere, had been looted and brought back to Rome, and of which the original meaning was often unclear. Works from different cultures were brought together on monuments or gates. Also, they were randomly listed in inventories of the spoils of war or of private art collections. In any case, random combinations of diverse works from diverse cultures were created. The Greek scholar Manuel Chrysoloras visited Rome around 1411 and noted this eclectic approach to art, calling it 'not a history so much as an exhibition' (in UP 130-131). A most telling example of this approach to art objects are the so-called *Trophies of Marius*, two public sculptures that were created to commemorate a first-century victory under the emperor Domitian. 'Each is a fifteen-foot-high display of the spoils of war – shields, armor, prisoners – piled up anthropomorphically so that it appears to be a giant triumphator decked out in all the victorious trappings but lacking a body inside' (UP 134-135). The

disembodied sculptures inspired several drawings, notably by Jacopo Ripanda, and could be compared to a popular theme in gothic ghost stories, where the harness of a medieval soldier suddenly comes to life and begins to move although the shell is empty. Another analogy points towards Giuseppe Arcimboldo's (1527-1593) famous paintings of human faces compiled from fruits and vegetables. In all these cases, we have a kind of anthropomorphous collage.

One of the most striking examples of such archaeological collage comes in the guise of a book. The *Hypnerotomachia Poliphili* by the Dominican monk Francesco Colonna (1433-1527) was first published in Venice in 1499 and tells a dream about the wanderings of the lover Poliphilus. However, the main point of interest of the book are not Poliphilus' loves but the extensive descriptions of the often very eccentric buildings he encounters on his way. The book has in fact become most famous for these descriptions and for the many engravings illustrating them. The buildings Colonna invents are a collage of elements that are both medieval and classical, and when they are classical, they derive both from Greek and Roman and from Egyptian sources. The buildings also carry inscriptions in hieroglyphics that were widely believed to hold mysteries of alchemy, especially in sixteenth- and seventeenth-century France, where the book was very popular, particularly in a translation by Jean Martin first published in 1546 and later in a new translation by Béroalde de Verville published in 1600 (Blunt 1937: 118, 124). '*Vous povez croire, Messeigneurs,*' Martin wrote in the introduction to his translation, '*que dessoubz ceste fiction il y a beaucoup de bonnes choses cachées, qu'il n'est licite reveler*' (in l.c. 123). Such meanings were almost certainly not intended by Colonna, who simply wanted to create a dreamlike atmosphere he felt to be classical, filled with fantastic and irrational architecture. He has little concern for the historical accuracy of the buildings he evokes and 'wishes only to take from antiquity those elements which will help him build up a dream' (ATI 40).

One of Colonna's most fantastic inventions is a huge monument, pyramidal in structure and crowned with a huge obelisk, loosely modelled on ancient descriptions of the Mausoleum at Halicarnassus (ATI 41). On the very top of the obelisk is a bronze statue of Occasio that makes a terrific noise when it turns in the wind. 'There is in this description something of the fear which men of the Middle Ages felt before the vast ruins of Roman times; but it is combined with an intense desire to recreate their glories, though only in the imagination' (ATI 42). Many of the buildings Colonna describes are in ruins, very much in the way ancient Rome lay in ruins during the Middle Ages. We must not forget that Rome was something of a ghost town for most of the millennium. After the sack of Rome in 476 AD, whole neighbourhoods were abandoned and became virtual urban

deserts haunted by criminals and other shady figures. To humanists like Alberti, it seemed important to restore or recreate (if only in the mind) the original shape and form of ancient buildings because these would have to set an example for contemporary architecture. Unlike Alberti, 'Colonna takes an actual delight in the fact that they are ruins and not complete buildings. He describes their decay with real feeling, and he makes them an excuse for reflections on the frailty of human life and love, and on the destructive passage of time. [...] Colonna is in fact here indulging in that sentimental and melancholy delight in ruins as symbols of the impermanence of things which became so fashionable at a later date, particularly in the eighteenth century' (ibid.). If we consider the fact that Colonna's buildings, and the woodcarvings depicting them, were long thought to hold alchemical secrets, we have a clear case of fragments being looked at for meaning in themselves, independent from the complete structures to which they once belonged.

It is interesting that the elements contained in such collage often lost their original meaning. This was certainly true of the *Hypnerotomachia Poliphili*, where the suspicion of alchemical meanings could only arise through lack of knowledge about the original meanings of the hieroglyphics in the image, but it is equally the case in sculptures such as the *Trophies of Marius* or even many of the classical sculptures of human figures. A statue of a Greek or Egyptian goddess might in Rome simply be a statue of a woman, or come to be used as a statue of a Roman goddess. Similarly, Renaissance scholars were often unsure about the identity of the figures in the sculptures they found in the soil. There was much debate whether a given fragment or sculpture might be Hercules or someone else. Such questions were important if one wanted to try and restore the sculpture or try to link it to literary sources. In the case of the *Laocoön*, which was preserved virtually intact, identification was made within hours after the find, thanks to Giuliano da Sangallo's knowledge of a (rather rudimentary) description of the piece in Pliny's *Natural History*. Both Da Sangallo's son Francesco and Francesco's friend Michelangelo Buonarroti were present when the identification was made (UP 3-5). But many other fragments remained enigmatic. And nothing has fuelled human imagination more than what is probably the most celebrated fragment in the history of art: the *Torso Belvedere*. Unlike most other fragments, however, nobody has ever tried to restore the *Torso Belvedere*. The work has become famous *as a fragment*. 'But how does this particular fragment acquire such unique status? To a modern viewer that may appear self-evident. We cannot fail to see the *Torso* as a magnificent piece of heroic art: tense, muscular, a kind of emblem for all the tragic power that the Greek aesthetic could claim for itself. It is almost too obvious to point out that the work attains this kind of power

not *despite* but *because* of its fragmentary condition' (UP 189). So we are here again confronted with the question we asked at the beginning: what made it possible for the fragment, and specifically the *Torso Belvedere*, to attain such artistic import in itself?

Upward Mobility: Michelangelo and the Fragment

It would seem that Michelangelo Buonarroti (1475-1564) had something to do with it. The *Torso Belvedere* and the *Laocoön* are undoubtedly the two classical sculptures that made the most profound impression on him. One can find echoes of these sculptures in many of Michelangelo's works, in his sculptures as well as in his fresco paintings and drawings. The torso is echoed, amongst others, in the torsion of the marble *Victory* (ca. 1527-30) and in both the Christ and Saint Bartholomew of the *Last Judgement* fresco in the Sistine Chapel (UP 198). The influence of both works on Michelangelo was crucial in assuring their reputation. In fact, it has been suggested that no one ever attempted to 'reconstruct' the *Torso Belvedere* because Michelangelo held the fragment in such high esteem. In the *Trinity College Cambridge Sketchbook*, dated around 1550, there is a drawing of the torso with the caption: 'This pees doth michelangel exstem above all the anttickes in belle fidere' (in UP 197). Michelangelo's admiration for the *Torso Belvedere* became such an article of faith among artists and critics of the sixteenth century that it created a special aura around the torso itself. So Michelangelo's admiration for the *Torso Belvedere* apparently helped assure that the piece was regarded as a masterpiece as is, without any need for restoration or reconstruction. The fragment itself was felt to be sufficiently powerful to be a self-contained work of art, and a work of genius at that. This, however, still leaves open the question why Michelangelo felt that way about the torso to begin with. What attracted him to it?

Kenneth Clark has suggested that Michelangelo's work was influenced chiefly by two kinds of ancient works. On the one hand, there were the classical gems and cameos that showed him the sensual flowing line of the human body. On the other hand, there were the magnificent fragmentary sculptures found amongst the ruins of Rome. It is the sculptures that would have the most profound effect on the artist. Michelangelo was moved by 'the battered fragments, the fallen giants half buried in the weeds and rubbish of the Campo Vaccino. In these the eye could comprehend the large lines of movement and then come to rest at those places sufficiently intact to provide it with a nucleus of form' (Clark 1956: 238). It is these 'nuclei of form' that interest us. Clark suggests that Michelangelo's 'contemplation of half-obliterated antiquities sanctioned a practice which he had followed in his earliest drawings: the concentration on certain passages of modelling, which were by themselves so expressive that the rest of the figure

needed no more than an indication'. Such passages would be 'certain closely knit sequences of the body, the muscle-landscape of the torso, or the knot of muscles round the shoulder and on the knee. [...] Michelangelo [...] fastened upon these nuclei and made them the focal points of his drawings; and when he came to use the body chiefly as an instrument of pathos, he developed an extraordinary power of communicating his feelings through knots of muscles, often presented to us almost without a context' (l.c. 239).

So Michelangelo's enthusiasm for the fragmentary representation of the body could have been fuelled by his insight in the formidable expressive power of certain elements of the human body, especially tight knots of muscles. This would help explain one of the most perplexing aspects of Michelangelo's work: the principle of *non-finito*. Most of Michelangelo's most famous works have come to us in an unfinished form, a form that was often deliberately left unfinished by the artist. We know that the *non-finito* was partly influenced by the example of classical fragments. Several anecdotes from Michelangelo's youth attest this. For example, when the artist had sculpted a faun's head, Lorenzo de' Medici said that old people almost always lose their teeth, so Michelangelo cut out one of the faun's teeth to make it more imperfect. Even more clear is the example of a sculpture of a sleeping Cupid which he defaced to make it look as if it had been buried underground; that is: to make it look antique and therefore more valuable. The most famous example is the *Bacchus* (ca. 1497/98) holding a wine-cup. At some point in the early 1530's, Michelangelo chopped off the hand holding the cup to make the work look like an antique. This was done with the clear intent of fooling collectors and proving that a modern artist could achieve the same quality of work as an ancient master. The hand holding the cup was later restored to the sculpture, which is now one of Michelangelo's most popular works. However, a drawing by Maerten van Heemskerck made in this period documents the sculpture with the mutilated arm as it was set up in banker Jacopo Galli's garden along with classical fragments, made to look like an antique among antiques (UP 201-203; Murray 1980: 32).

But there is also another source. As we know, Michelangelo was profoundly influenced by Neo-Platonism, even as a young artist, when he experienced this philosophy firsthand while he was living at the Medicean court. Leonard Barkan has suggested that Michelangelo's work shows us a Platonic 'philosophy of artistic creation' (UP 207) in which the abstract inspiration underlying a work of art is considered to be of greater perfection than even the most perfect and polished execution of the actual work. Hence, to conceive of a work of art is more important than to create it, let alone to *complete* it. The artist, restlessly driven by his higher Platonic yearnings, moves from abandoned work to

abandoned work, leaving all imperfect fragments behind him in an endless search for something he can never attain: insight in divine wisdom. This would mean that Michelangelo's many *non-finito* works are not, or not solely, the product of some tortured genius but also the expression of an aesthetic sensibility: 'the non finito is not a mere romantic anachronism but a real expression of early modern artistic culture' (UP 207) that finds its roots both in the discovery of fragments of ancient sculpture and the revival of Platonic philosophy. In Michelangelo's work this element of *non-finito* is used most expressively in works of tremendous pathos. This is no doubt due to the Neo-Platonic influence that puts the physical world in a decidedly inferior relation to the world of celestial insight. 'The body can no longer triumph in its physical perfection, but feels itself vanquished by some divine power. And in the post-Christian world this power is no longer the external agency of a jealous God, but comes from within. The body is the victim of the soul. But, as Michelangelo's work develops, it is truer to put this position in reverse and say that the soul is the victim of the body, which drags it down and prevents its union with God' (Clark 1956: 235).

We must take a closer look at Michelangelo's Neo-Platonic inspiration. It is an influence that increased gradually during his life. In the early period of his work, that runs till about 1530, Michelangelo's Neo-Platonism was heavily influenced by the teachings of Girolamo Savonarola (1452-1498), who is often presented as a virulent enemy of the painted image. But Savonarola also saw a positive side to images, if they were the right kind of images. It would seem that Michelangelo was very much in agreement with Savonarola about this. Especially Savonarola's concept of beauty was important to the artist. Obviously, Savonarola felt that the spiritual was superior to the material and that perfect beauty could be found only in God. Below Him, there were various degrees of beauty, the highest being the beauty of saints, then the beauty of the human soul and finally the beauty of the human body. Since all material things proceed from God (which is the essence of Neo-Platonic thought as developed by Plotinus), all material things are a reflection of the divine. They differ, however, in their degree of perfection. These teachings inspired in Michelangelo a belief in the beauty of the visible universe and the human body, as can be read in one of his poems: 'Nowhere does God, in his grace, reveal himself to me more clearly than in some lovely human form, which I love solely because it is a mirrored image of Himself' (in ATI 69). But Michelangelo was not an adherent of exact imitation (as the more scientifically orientated Leonardo da Vinci was). Michelangelo felt that the artist must attain a beauty greater than that of nature through his imagination. This *idea* of beauty, which is found in the mind, is infused into the mind by God and is superior to all

material beauty. It is most brilliantly achieved in the ceiling frescoes for the Sistine Chapel.

After 1530 a shift takes place in Michelangelo's sensibility that was caused by historical events. The Reformation split the church. The sack of Rome in 1527 undermined the very culture of humanism that Michelangelo and his contemporaries had lived in. The world the humanists knew seemed to be swept away by these traumatic events. Michelangelo belonged to a group of intellectuals around Gasparo Contarini (1483-1542) who sought a new and spiritualised Catholicism through moderate reform, without touching the fundamentals of the church. This spiritual shift can be seen in the fresco of the *Last Judgement* in the Sistine Chapel. The bodies in this work are no longer idealised but 'heavy and lumpish, with thick limbs, lacking in grace' (ATI 65). Michelangelo is clearly no longer interested in beauty for its own sake. The body is now being used to reveal a spiritual state, so that the ideals of classical beauty no longer apply. Physical beauty is now seen as transient and therefore something that will drag down the mind. 'But this element of bitterness and gloom is balanced by a more optimistic Neoplatonic belief. Love of physical beauty is a cheat, but the true love, that of spiritual beauty, gives perfect satisfaction, does not fade with time, and elevates the mind to the contemplation of the divine. This feeling is expressed most clearly in the poems to Tommaso de' Cavalieri, who dominates Michelangelo's emotional life from 1532 onwards. The artist was evidently overwhelmed by the physical beauty of the young man, but he regarded it as an outward sign of spiritual and mental beauty' (ATI 67). So beauty is still relevant because it leads man more easily to contemplation of the divine, which is very much the idea put forward in Plato's *Symposium*, where Socrates' love for the beautiful Alcibiades remains chastely spiritual. It is the spiritual that matters, but the spirit is stirred through the eye, as Michelangelo states in one of his poems: 'The heart is slow to love what the eye cannot see' (in ATI 68).

So for Michelangelo painting is not about the imitation of nature but about the expression of mental images. 'The idea in the mind of the artist is more beautiful than the final work, which is only a feeble reflection of it. According to Condivi Michelangelo "has a most powerful imagination, whence it comes, chiefly, that he is little contented with his works and has always underrated them, his hand not appearing to carry out the ideas he has conceived in his mind"' (ATI 72). It is not difficult to see how one might go from here to the principle of *non-finito* in art. Michelangelo believed that the image in his mind was potentially also present in the block of marble he was about to carve. All he had to do, was bring it out in its greatest possible perfection. He says this literally in one of his poems: 'The greatest artist has no conception which a single block of marble does not potentially

contain within its mass, but only a hand obedient to the mind can penetrate to this image' (in ATI 73). So 'an unfinished figure [...] gives the impression that it is all in the block and that one could just knock off the superfluous marble and reveal the complete statue' (ATI 74). It would indeed no longer be strictly necessary to finish such a work, because an unfinished work already shows the perfect idea emerging from matter. Or a work might be abandoned when one feels that it could never be finished to the degree of perfection required to make it stand comparison with divine ideas of beauty. In either case the unfinished aspect becomes central to the work of art and gains deep spiritual meanings.

This Neo-Platonic reading of Michelangelo's work has clear parallels with Schlegel's view of human self-consciousness: for Schlegel the fragment is the tragic reminder of the fact that man can never attain his deepest essence, which is the eluding Absolute. Such analogies are always risky, but there is a biographical element in Schlegel's life that adds a specific flavour to the story. When Schlegel began to develop his ideas on allegory, the joke and irony around 1797 he was a confirmed atheist. Gradually, however, he made a turn to religion that resulted in his baptism in the cathedral of Cologne on the sixteenth of April 1808. This gradual shift can be seen in his writings, where his views on the Absolute are gradually being infused with a religious dimension that might at first go unnoticed because it is so very much in line with all possible talk about the Absolute (which can never really shake the mystical element it conjures up). *'Die Philosophie lehrte uns,'* Schlegel writes at some point, *'dass alles Göttliche sich nur andeuten, nur mit Wahrscheinlichkeit voraussetzen lasse, und dass wir daher die Offenbarung für die höchste Wahrheit annehmen müssen. Die Offenbarung ist aber eine für den sinnlichen Menschen zu erhabene Erkenntnis, und so tritt die Kunst sehr gut ins Mittel, um durch sinnliche Darstellung und Deutlichkeit dem Menschen die Gegenstände der Offenbarung vor Augen zu stellen'* (in UA 930). Translated to what we saw about Schlegel's philosophy of art, this would simply mean that allegory always refers to the Absolute in a religious or divine sense. When a friend scolded him for his flight into the arms of the catholic church, Schlegel put his views with aphoristic clarity, and not without his customary irony, in a letter from 1806: *'Katholisch werden ist nicht Religion verändern, sondern überhaupt nur, sie anerkennen'* (ibid.; cfr. ADI 123). To be Romantic is to be catholic. The infinite approach of the Absolute is but an infinite journey to God in heaven.

A Dance to the Music of Rhyme

In *Die Geburt der Tragödie* (1872) Friedrich Nietzsche (1844-1900) famously introduced the duality of the Apollonian and the Dionysian to explain the emergence of Attic tragedy. But this pair

of conflicting gods would come to signify much more. They live at the heart of Nietzsche's thought and are among the basic principles on which his philosophy turns. The Apollonian is named after Apollo, the god of light and reason. He stands for the principles of truth, beauty, clarity and sharply delineated form. He is, in Nietzsche's words, *'das herrliche Götterbild des principii individuationis'* (KSA 1: 28). Apollo is the god of identity and individuality, a unit that is clearly circumscribed and separated from its surroundings. He is the principle of western personality, *'a male line drawn against the dehumanizing magnitude of female nature'* (SP 28). Dionysus, on the other hand, stands for the implosion of individuation. Dionysus was the god of ecstasy and of wine, later to become the Roman god Bacchus. If man is individuated through Apollonian reason, which tries to control and manage Nature through science, the Dionysian plunges man back into a primordial unity with the murky morass of elemental Nature. To be Dionysian is to return to the earth. Dionysus is *'chthonian, which means "from the earth" – but the earth's bowels, not its surface. [...] It is the dehumanizing brutality of biology and geology'* (SP 5) or *'liquid nature, a miasmatic swamp whose prototype is the still pond of the womb'* (SP 12). This renewed union with Nature is celebrated in the cult of Dionysus. *'Unter dem Zauber des Dionysischen schliesst sich nicht nur der Bund zwischen Mensch und Mensch wieder zusammen: auch die entfremdete, feindliche oder unterjochte Natur feiert wieder ihr Versöhnungsfest mit ihrem verlorenen Sohne, dem Menschen'* (KSA 1: 29). *'Im dionysischen Rausche,'* Nietzsche writes elsewhere, *'im ungestümen Durchrasen aller Seelen-Tonleitern bei narkotischen Erregungen oder in der Entfesselung der Frühlingstriebe äussert sich die Natur in ihrer höchsten Kraft: sie schliesst die Einzelwesen wieder aneinander und lässt sie sich als eins empfinden'* (KSA 1: 557).

As Nietzsche puts it in *Götzen-Dämmerung* (1888), the Apollonian is the order of the eye whereas the Dionysian is the order of the affect. One is permanence, the other is change. *'Der apollinische Rausch hält vor allem das Auge erregt, so dass es die Kraft der Vision bekommt. Der Maler, der Plastiker, der Epiker sind Visionäre par excellence. Im dionysischen Zustande ist dagegen das gesammte Affekt-System erregt und gesteigert: so dass es alle seine Mittel des Ausdrucks mit einem Male entladet [...]. Das Wesentliche bleibt die Leichtigkeit der Metamorphose, die Unfähigkeit, nicht zu reagiren [...] Es ist dem dionysischen Menschen unmöglich, irgend eine Suggestion nicht zu verstehen, er übersieht kein Zeichen des Affekts, er hat den höchsten Grad des verstehenden und errathenden Instinkts, wie er den höchsten Grad von Mittheilungs-Kunst besitzt. Er geht in jede Haut, in jeden Affekt ein: er verwandelt sich beständig'* (KSA 6: 117-118). This means that the Apollonian and the Dionysian are locked in a constant struggle that is never resolved. It is never lost, never won. But at some points there is a kind of harmony between them, a point

where they are at one. This point is Attic tragedy, where both principles come together. This can only be understood by gaining insight into the function of tragedy, which was to give the ungovernable principles of Nature and Fate a governable place in the life of man. The Greeks tried to come to terms with the indifferent violence that Nature and Fate could exert over man. They did this by trying to represent these shapeless and mysterious forces in some clear Apollonian form that the mind could comprehend. These forms are the Olympian gods. *'Der Grieche kannte und empfand die Schrecken und Entsetzlichkeiten des Daseins: um überhaupt leben zu können, musste er vor sie hin die glänzende Traumgeburt der Olympischen stellen. Jenes ungeheure Misstrauen gegen die titanischen Mächte der Natur, jene über allen Erkenntnissen erbarmungslos thronende Moira, [...] wurde von den Griechen durch jene künstlerische Mittelwelt der Olympier fortwährend von Neuem überwunden, jedenfalls verhüllt und dem Anblick entzogen. Um leben zu können, mussten die Griechen diese Götter, aus tiefster Nöthigung, schaffen'* (KSA 1: 35-36).

So the Apollonian is really a *mask* or front that is created to hide something deeper, more profound. It makes controllable the uncontrollable, or at least gives it the semblance of being manageable. The clear-cut facade of the heroic Olympian shields us from the raging violence of the Dionysian, of cruel Nature and merciless Fate. This also means that all reason, clarity, order and form rest upon a foundation of shapeless violence. The Apollonian order makes this violence visible in a way that we can look at it without being destroyed by it. This is in essence the way tragedy works. The tragedy of Oedipus, for example, tells the story of man who is unable to escape his destiny, no matter how hard he tries to get away from it. Merciless Fate hounds us forever in an unequal battle we cannot win. By presenting the cruel workings of Fate in the shape of a story, with beginning, middle and end, the tragedy of Oedipus helps us to cope with this violence. So the Apollonian is a defence against the Dionysian. Tragedy shows us Dionysus in an Apollonian guise, which means that Dionysus is never really shown; he is always masked, cloaked in the guise of Apollo. If one were to put this in a more abstract way, there is once again something that is shown in tragedy but that at the same time takes its leave. It is shown, but not really shown. It can only be represented, symbolised or allegorised. So the mechanism that Nietzsche sees at work in ancient tragedy is quite similar to the way Schlegel saw the Absolute disappear at the very moment it was being shown in allegory or in the joke. Similarly, Novalis knew that the spirit or essence of the Absolute would vanish the very moment it allowed itself to be reflected. And no amount of doubled reflection could ever retrieve what had taken its leave. It simply makes clear to us our own fundamental un-knowingness.

But Nietzsche also wants to find the origins of tragedy. These lie in music. To explain this, Nietzsche takes his cue from Friedrich Schiller, who once said that poetry never comes to him in clear-cut images. Rather, poetic inspiration first presents itself as a kind of musical mood: *'Eine gewisse musikalische Gemüthsstimmung geht vorher, und auf diese folgt bei mir erst die poetische Idee'* (in KSA 1: 43). Schiller's statement leads Nietzsche to consider the Greek idea that the poet and the musician were really the same person. To the Greek mind, music is the most immediate expression of the dark Dionysian undercurrent of life. If poetry is an Apollonian construct that masks the Dionysian, then the dynamic source out of which poetry arises, namely that inspirational musical mood, must be the hum of Dionysus inspiring the poet to make masks of Apollonian clarity in the shape of rhyme. The poet starts with a Dionysian music and then puts words to it, thus domesticating it and making it into poetry or, by extension, images that are *'eine Wiederholung der Welt und eine zweite Abguss derselben'* (KSA 1: 44). The Apollonian image repeats the world, like a bronze cast from a live model. But this means that Nietzsche actually presents us with a double reflection along the lines of (but not identical to) the one we found in Novalis: the Apollonian is a reflection of the music that reflects the rhythms and dynamics of Dionysian Nature that is the essence of all being. This play of reflections implies that we never really get to see the true face of Nature. The whole of human life is a masquerade, an Apollonian construct, sheer artifice. We are subjects of the Dionysian realm, which authors us, and we create the Apollonian illusion of self-control to comfort ourselves. Personality is artifice, and we are merely players on the stage of the world, with our exits and our entrances, strutting and fretting our hours upon the stage, which leads Nietzsche to conclude that the world is only justified as an aesthetic phenomenon: *'nur als aesthetisches Phänomen ist das Dasein und die Welt ewig gerechtfertigt'*. We are mere puppets in that image-world with no more sense of ourselves than a painted image of a soldier has awareness of the battle-field on which he is depicted (KSA 1: 47).

Nietzsche further illustrates the musical origins of poetry with the example of folk-songs. The fact that folk-songs are universal seems to prove that there is indeed a universal Dionysian principle that sings in all of mankind and simply finds expression in different tunes and words. The undercurrent of all this singing, however, is essentially the same. The *Volkslied* is *'das perpetuum vestigium einer Vereinigung des Apollinischen und des Dionysischen; seine ungeheure, über alle Völker sich erstreckende und in immer neuen Geburten sich steigende Verbreitung ist uns ein Zeugniß dafür, wie stark jener künstlerische Doppeltrieb der Natur ist: [...] Die Melodie ist also das Erste und Allgemeine, das deshalb auch mehrere Objectivationen, in mehreren Texten, an sich erleiden kann. [...] Die*

*Melodie gebiert die Dichtung aus sich und zwar immer wieder von Neuem; nichts Anderes will uns die Strophenform des Volksliedes sagen: [...] wie die fortwährend gebärende Melodie Bilderfunken um sich aussprüht: die in ihrer Buntheit, ihrem jähen Wechsel, ja ihrem tollen Sichüberstürzen eine dem epischen Scheine und seinem ruhigen Fortströmen wildfremde Kraft offenbaren. [...] In der Dichtung des Volksliedes sehen wir also die Sprache auf das Stärkste angespannt, die Musik nachzuahmen' (KSA 1: 48-49). So poetry is simply 'die nachahmende Effulguration der Musik in Bildern und Begriffen' (KSA 1: 50). Nietzsche applies a similar analysis to language and science: they are simply Apollonian devices that help us to uphold a semblance of control over Nature. But our laws and words are nothing to Nature. The Dionysian is infinitely mutable, in constant change, so no word, image or scientific paradigm can ever capture it adequately (very much in the way the Absolute cannot be captured in any fragment or reflection). Language creates the illusion of a steady and firm world. But in doing so, language is a liar. The world is not as language speaks it. 'Die Natur ist der Zufall. Das Studium "nach der Natur" scheint mir ein schlechtes Zeichen: es verräth Unterwerfung, Schwäche, Fatalismus' (KSA 6: 115). The knowledge of science is illusion and reason is 'ein grobes Fetischwesen' (KSA 6: 77) and 'eine alte betrügerische Weibsperson! Ich fürchte, wir werden Gott nicht los, weil wir noch an die Grammatik glauben' (KSA 6: 78). That is why, in *Götzen-Dämmerung* (1888), Nietzsche famously says that there is contempt in the act of speech: 'Wofür wir Worte haben, darüber sind wir auch schon hinaus. In allem Reden liegt ein Gran Verachtung' (KSA 6: 128). To put words to Nature is to betray her. And in a remarkable echo of Niethammer's declaration of war against all *Grundsatz-Philosophen* Nietzsche declares: 'Ich misstrauere allen Systematikern und gehe ihnen aus dem Weg. Der Wille zum System ist ein Mangel an Rechtschaffenheit' (KSA 6: 63).*

This brings us full circle back to Hamlet. 'What we have called Romanticism was engendered by Hamlet, though it required two centuries before the prince's self-consciousness became universally prevalent, and almost a third century before Nietzsche insisted that Hamlet possessed "true knowledge, an insight into the horrible truth," which is the abyss between mundane reality and the Dionysian rapture of an endlessly ongoing consciousness. [...] "Let be" has become Hamlet's refrain, and has a quietistic force uncanny in its suggestiveness. He will not unpack his heart with words, since only his thoughts, not their ends, are his own. And yet there is something far from dead in his heart, something ready or willing, strong beyond the weakness of flesh. [...] For Hamlet there is nothing but the readiness, which translates as a willingness to let everything be, not out of trust in Yahweh but through a confidence in a final consciousness' (SH 421-22). Nietzsche has pointed out that there is a lethargy at the

heart of the Dionysian. When we return from the forgetfulness of Dionysian rapture to the blandness of ordinary existence, we experience revulsion, and *'eine asketische, willenverneinende Stimmung ist die Frucht jener Zustände. In diesem Sinne hat der dionysische Mensch Aehnlichkeit mit Hamlet: beide haben einmal einen wahren Blick in das Wesen der Dinge gethan, sie haben erkannt, und es ekelt sie zu handeln; denn ihre Handlung kann nichts am ewigen Wesen der Dinge ändern, sie empfinden es als lächerlich und schmachvoll, dass ihnen zugemuthet wird, die Welt, die aus den Fugen ist, wieder einzurichten. Die Erkenntnis tödtet das Handeln, zum Handeln gehört das Umschleiertsein durch die Illusion – das ist die Hamletlehre, nicht jene wohlfeile Weisheit von Hans dem Träumer, der aus zu viel Reflexion, gleichsam aus einem Ueberschuss von Möglichkeiten nicht zum Handeln kommt; nicht das Reflectiren, nein! – die wahre Erkenntnis, der Einblick in die grauenhafte Wahrheit überwiegt jedes zum Handeln antreibende Motiv, bei Hamlet sowohl als bei dem dionysischen Menschen'* (KSA 1: 56-57). Hamlet's inability to decide whether 'to be or not to be', to act or not to act, is not a sign of immaturity or doubt. It is not even indecisiveness. It is revulsion at the banality of the world. Why put right a world that is fundamentally out of joint? We have no power over the Dionysian and cannot change the order of things. So all we can do is "let be". There is something in this of the morality of vegetation: to retreat from the world of action and allow it only to appear as artifice, an illusion, a play or counterfeit of reality. *'Die Menschen und was sie wollen und tun, erschienen mir, wenn ich mich daran erinnerte, wie aschgraue Figuren ohne Bewegung: aber in der heiligen Einsamkeit um mich her war alles Licht und Farbe und ein frischer warmer Hauch von Leben und Liebe wehte mich an'*: this is not Nietzsche, but the reflections of Julius in the opening lines of Schlegel's *Lucinde* (Schlegel 1985: 13).

Homo Viator

If we appear to have come full circle with Nietzsche's hammer-blows against reason, it seems fitting to return to art. In 1865 the young sculptor Auguste Rodin (1840-1917) presented a *Mask of the Man with the Broken Nose* (1863-64) at the Salon, but his work was rejected. The sculpted head was a portrait of a worker called Bibi who had a broken nose. It became a mask through coincidence. Rodin was living in great poverty and could not afford to heat his studio. The freezing temperatures caused the back of the plaster head to fall off and Rodin simply left the work like that, changing it from a head to a mask and presenting it as such. In 1872 he presented a revised version of Bibi's likeness in Brussels, calling it a *Portrait of M.B.* with the initials referring to Monsieur Bibi. But the initials could also be taken to mean Michelangelo Buonarroti, who is one of the most famous broken-nosed men in history. This wink at Michelangelo could hardly be coincidence since Rodin's

portrait of Bibi has remarkable similarities to known portraits of Michelangelo. The original mask could even be seen as an attempt to rival his employer at the time, Albert-Ernest Carrier-Belleuse (1824-1887), who had himself executed a rather classical *Bust of Michelangelo* (1855) a decade earlier. When Rodin's portrait of Bibi was again exhibited in the Salon of 1878, critics remarked on its similarities with a bronze *Portrait of Michelangelo* (1564-66) by Daniele da Volterra (ca. 1509-1566) which was at the same time on display elsewhere in Paris in the *Exposition Universelle* (Riopelle and Lamberti 1997: 86 and 154-9). The portrait of Bibi is therefore a wonderful point of departure to discuss Michelangelo's influence on Rodin, who made a visit to Italy in early 1876 and was forever changed through his experience of Michelangelo's work. There is much of Michelangelo in Rodin's work. They share an impressive pathos, an immense sensuality and both are fascinated by the expressiveness of knots of muscles and the landscape of the body. Most remarkably, however, both artists have elevated the *non-finito* to an artistic principle: Rodin's greatest work, the famed *Gates of Hell*, was never completed.

Traces of Michelangelo's work are in evidence in many of Rodin's works. Sometimes they are vague and teasing. *The Age of Bronze* (1875-76) seems to owe something to Michelangelo's *Dying Slave* (1513) although we have no direct proof of this (l.c. 167). But in other cases, the references would seem to be quite clear. As Christopher Riopelle points out, *The Thinker* (1880), Rodin's most famous fragment from the *Gates of Hell*, ultimately derives from the *Torso Belvedere*, which influenced so many of Michelangelo's figures, but takes its cue for the head resting on the hand from Michelangelo's *Jeremiah* (ca. 1510) on the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel and from the similarly pensive posture of *Lorenzo de' Medici* (1520-34) in the Medici Chapel (l.c. 120). But Rodin also created many fragments. Not just preparatory studies for larger pieces, but fragmentary works that were meant to stand alone. To name but a few, there is the *Torso of "The Centauress"* (ca. 1884), the *Triton and Nereid* (ca. 1893) and a remarkable small assemblage of heads and hands from the *Burghers of Calais* surmounted by a winged figure (ca. 1900; Crone and Salzmann 1997: 28). But there is one particular fragment that is truly exceptional and that I would like to offer as an emblem for the fragmentary philosophical peripatetics of this essay. In 1911 the French government set up its Italian embassy in the Palazzo Farnese in Rome, which was designed by Michelangelo. In the courtyard one of Rodin's sculptures was installed and would remain there until 1923. The work in question was the *Walking Man*. This work was in fact two works. It consists of a torso without limbs or head executed between 1876 and 1878. Much later, around 1900, Rodin added a pair of legs (Riopelle and Lamberti 1997: 35 and 49). So the *Walking Man* remained armless and headless and stood, like a

Torso Belvedere in motion, in the courtyard of Michelangelo's Palazzo. It must have been a wonderful intersection of artistic histories to see a fragment by Michelangelo's greatest heir stride through the space that Michelangelo himself had created. Even more so since the *Walking Man* was incomplete, a truly michelangelesque fusion of two fragments. If anything, he symbolizes *homo viator*, man on his infinite journey towards completeness. He is, from an Early Romantic point of view, philosophy: the infinite endeavour to reach the Absolute. To all intents and purposes, we are that *Walking Man*, the maimed and crippled children of Shakespeare's greatest invention: the human.

Sources of Our Self

To conclude our detours I will take us back to *B-Sides & Rarities*, the bounds of which this essay has far exceeded, but hopefully also illuminated. We have attempted to find what allows us to see the unrealised, the incomplete, the unfinished and the fragmentary as valuable in their own right. This search took us back through five centuries of western philosophy. But there was a *leitmotiv* at work which became central to western philosophy in the work of the Early Romantics. This *leitmotiv* is the seed of the postmodern and says that there is something eerie and inaccessible in the world. There is something impenetrable, a dark backward and abysm that cannot be unlocked by discursive thought. It can only be sensed through art, in the fragment. We found this view in Schlegel's philosophy of irony and saw that it was based on a view of man that is anti-essentialist. We followed Tieck and Harold Bloom in tracing this view of the human back to Shakespeare, who is the author of modern man. Our psychology, contrary to popular belief, is not freudian, it is shakespearean. There is nothing (or not much: we should avoid hyperbole) in Freud that Vienna's foremost psychoanalyst didn't find (or could not have found) in the Bard. We then started a second thread of thought that took us to the Renaissance, the time when fragments of Antiquity started to resurface. These fragments changed our way of looking at art, especially through the work of Michelangelo. All these threads were then brought together in the work of Nietzsche, who is the unwitting father of a most unworthy bastard child that likes to call itself postmodernity and trades in the dry navel-gazing of high-concept Theory, all ablaze with the fires of empty rhetoric.

The view of man that emerges from this fragmentary stroll through the history of our most inner selves is a melancholy one. We are incomplete beings, cut off from what defines us most. Today, this would be called 'decenteredness'. But the word has been tainted with so much dry theorising that one should like to avoid it altogether and simply say that we are out of joint, like the times we live in. We are *homo viator*, eternally suspended between

what we know we do not and cannot know and our desire to know it nevertheless. There is a work, a mere fragment, in *B-Sides & Rarities* that seems to capture all of this with supreme clarity. It is Marijn van Kreij's *A thing that is so visible that it is not necessary to see it* (2009). His installation is of remarkable simplicity. The words of the title were written on a small piece of paper and then attached to the glass plate of a birdcage in a small enclosed public garden in the old centre of Breda. The piece is so small and inconspicuous that it is very easy to miss. Most likely, unsuspecting passers-by will happen upon it, read the note and maybe stop for a moment to think about it. However small the actual work may be, its impact is considerable. It forces one to look at the environment with fresh eyes. It is a truth universally acknowledged that we no longer 'see' our daily environment. It is simply there and we take no notice of it. Reading Van Kreij's work puts this everyday environment into relief. Suddenly the park, the shrubbery, the benches and the buildings around us seem unusually near and present. It is as if everything is thrown into sudden relief. A fascinating to-and-fro is put into motion. The small piece of paper that was first so unremarkable as to almost go unnoticed now becomes the focus of our attention. Our eye is irresistably drawn to it, only to jump away from it again and look at the surroundings. The effect is disconcerting and quietly moving. It makes us aware of how much beauty there is in the everyday, and of how much of that beauty we are systematically not seeing.

On a different level this to-and-fro is of course our final variation on the *leitmotiv* I have been forcing upon you in these pages. The movement of the eye set in motion by *A thing that is so visible that it is not necessary to see it* is similar to the infinite to-and-fro that marks our deepest self. The work shows us, and shows us with great clarity, that our world is suspended. It is continually going in and out of focus, very much in the way that our eye moves from the surroundings to the piece of paper and back again. In the end a sense of vertigo emerges, the feeling that we ourselves are somehow suspended between reality and irreality. By throwing the world into relief, *A thing that is so visible that it is not necessary to see it* actually throws us. It is we who are made to feel suspended. The world has been made to look different than usual and now we are no longer fully at home in it. Something has changed and it is a change that cannot be undone. The thing so visible that it is not necessary to see it, namely the world, has now become something we could not possibly not see. But to try to really see it while you're seeing it is to miss it, to not be able to pin it down. And so we set out to find new ground to stand on, knowing full well that the old dream of the *Grundsatz-Philosophen* is lost to us. We are mere wanderers in this world. Our only hope, and our only relief, is to revel in beauty and to try and love a little

on our journey. We should not exert ourselves too much for the sake of capitalism. Indeed, it would be best to become like the plant and luxuriate in sensual oneness with the world. I know an excellent place to start. There is a small courtyard in Breda, with some shrubbery, some benches to sit on and a birdcage. Someone has posted a sign there. If you go there and read the sign, you are likely to sit there for a while. You will be suspended in inaction. It might feel a little strange and, well, decentering at first. But believe me when I say that all of this is really just the experience of your true and inmost self. You'll get to like in a while. So let it be. Enjoy your suspension.

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