

"In a truly complete psychology, imagination is primarily a spiritual mobility of the greatest, liveliest, and most exhilarating kind."

- Gaston Bachelard, *Air and Dreams*, 1943.

"Thusly the image reigns: it imposes a regime of discontinuity and unlimitedness capable of abolishing the subject by multiplying its powers, returning later, or at the same time, as a psychic image, a plastic invention, a nihilation."

- Nicole Brenez, *On the Figure in General and the Body in Particular*, 1998.

### CRITICAL FANTASY, CONVEX DESIRE

The library loomed high in the city, reaching greater heights than any structure on its bustling block. Its depths were equally profound.

If public space had all but evaporated, with capital spreading over the surface in all directions, and now vertically into the sky, one might find at least its lack below. Deep in the lofty library's sub-sub basement the scholar claimed a cell of her own. She admired the underground city of Derinkuyu in Cappadocia, where 8th century gnostics decided to opt out of history altogether, and built their cooperative modernism in joint seclusion.

In her submerged, sour-smelling, windowless cube, with shelf, desk, light, electricity, offline, she pursued an aneconomy equally extreme, promising wealth that inversely correlated with the limited space. Her pursuit was vast and extraordinary.

The title of Bob Dylan's 1976 "Desire," was one of the factors that contributed to that #1 album's extraordinary and career-defining success. Years ago, when she stumbled upon the record in her brother's collection, the title stirred her sense of poetry. To her delight, the album's songs had no direct interest in that theme, and thus reflected the concept back onto herself, or onto song-writing in general. The record named the moving streetcar from which art could never disembark: *Desire*.

This matched up with how she felt that art was continually destroying and replicating the world. Like the transporter in *Star Trek* it had to kill every molecule it gained. Desire represented reflection, an external force extremely intertwined with the inner, a semblance of imbalance emanating back and forth like a pulse. The self and the craved object joined in imagination then broke, then joined, then broke....

And today when the turn to art, to poetry, even to music was presumed to depend either upon the most naive or the most cynical of resolutions, the scholar's sense of a force that pushed against the capitalist/colonialist unconscious pressure all the time from every other possible direction. It was this force in her own mind she could see, access and keep alive in her cube.

Outside, images of before-the-image were already abroad, glutting and blocking the way by presenting themselves as irrevocable modernisms. Soon enough the only futurity she could

imagine was an archaic revival. One must image a new world out of a past, and not all pasts are equally imaginary. It was from the memory of the image's own failure to provide for its undoing that she accidentally looked away at the image of the image in general. And to her surprise it was not the abstract husk she expected, not even a container, but the ground of an entire new world outside.

An image could hold its own time. So she looked into the history of the image. She recognized what she was seeking in herself exactly as she read it in the book in which it was written. She looked upon Chapter XIII of S. T. Coleridge's *Biographia Literaria* (1817) as if she were gazing through a mirror.

Quite abruptly, and without forewarning, Coleridge dropped his distinctions like mercury *Schlucke* in zero gravity.

The *primary Imagination* I hold to be the living power and prime agent of all human perception, and as a repetition in the finite mind of the eternal act of creation in the infinite I AM.

Archaic, personal, super-modern -- a chrome sphere as big as her own head reflected all the actual world it received, synthesizing all visual difference into its swirl.

Though it reflected the hues of the real in every pixel it was always clearly silver. And there she was herself surfacing the adynaton, awash in the pellucid clarity of dreams. She could do little more than tip her head. But from that motion alone of the rolling I AM, she might join an ever changing world progression. On its slipping surface the ground would leap and lay, alive; the sky wink indigo and gold. Ethereal creatures roamed freely, changing and shedding forms into the invisible river Aleph.

A vain and ridiculous sorcerer materialized. His flowing robes billowed with the color of every thought imaginable, but he wore blue and red glasses so he only saw two.

He put a finger to his lean, mustachioed lip. "Do not question the limits. Be content with exploring the membrane between illusion and desire."

"No illusion," she said. "Creation." Already bored with such talk, Fancy flew away easily. There was little he couldn't do with air alone.

Meanwhile our scholar focused on the other glittering orb, the one he'd landed upon.

The *secondary Imagination* I consider as an echo of the former, co-existing with the conscious will, yet still as identical with the primary in the kind of its agency, and differing only in degree, and in the mode of its operation. It dissolves, diffuses, dissipates, in order to recreate: or where this process is rendered impossible, yet still at all events it struggles to idealize and to unify. It is essentially vital...

This art applied by consciousness to the world, always threatened to cohere. Always images began to proliferate. But how easy she might dissolve, diffuse, dissipate them. For this sphere

was itself a mirror, it mirrored the mirror that mirrored it. That is to say her own first quarry was right there imaged before her. There between all the dancing letters lurked the pellucid glamor of dream-as-dream. That gleam she would not let go of was the skin of the living beast she hunted.

When psychoanalysis partook of the hunt it ritually slew the clever fox, the burrowed rabbit, the roused and bounding, yet elusive hart. But during the Ice Age, the Mastadon, the living leviathan of the land, sustained. The scholar knew that the hunt her grandmothers performed depended upon collaboration, logic, and cross-species imagination.

The scholar stopped, mid-meadow. Meadow!

Down further, where the forest was fed by the sacred river, a spectral figure beckoned, awaiting the scholar's arrival. That figure draped in formlessness seemed a close acquaintance, but it was impossible for the scholar to say who, or why in that distance. Were they greeting, or was that a challenge? The figure raised an object that flashed silver into her eye.

It wasn't a blade the figure held. It was perhaps once a blade. It was nevertheless glossed enough now to serve as a mirror, and indeed looking towards and into it, the scholar saw two eyes looking out at her from a dark basement room.

Bells were ringing.

It was exactly closing time. She shut the image up in the Coleridge, and took it with her. She had brought forth a rendering of that enigmatic being that existed beyond the realm of imagery itself. Today she would bring her to the surface. She locked the cell door with her private key. Emotions she refused to name kept her from waiting with the others at the elevator. From deep in the sub-sub basement, she hurried up the four flights of emergency stairs.

Her heart was beating rapidly. The excitement would be presumed to be a result of the climb. She followed the smart-path that lit up for her across that wide tiled floor, and passed the book and her body through the holographic scanning station. She set off no alarms. Of course they already knew exactly where and when she was going. She actually had to hurry so the smartdoors didn't push her out into the barroom night.

And still she saw those eyes.

Mark von Schlegell