

The ghosts in my mind

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———— One mind's *attractors* ————

I have begun writing this text with a thought experiment related to mental contents and words: what would happen if we exchanged the words '*think*' and '*feel*' in every sentence that we formulate? How do you *feel* it would *think*? I did not really rest on this question, leaving it for later. In fact, why do we say '*it feels like*' and not '*it thinks like*'? After all we often passively adopt thoughts as well as we do with feelings; hence we should sometimes attribute the cause of thoughts - maybe agency - to '*something in me*' rather than 'me'. I think that, in contrast with this reality, the habit that we have to say '*I think*' might be a residue remaining in the language - and regularly reactivated - of the collective pride created by the reflection upon the idea that we have historically overcome our animal origin. After forgetting that thoughts are only echoes of the *world's voice*, we have become blind to the world qua whole, and subsequently losing mental rest - as we believe that we *have to* make it complete. This reminds me of the myth of *Prometheus*: after he had stolen fire from the gods and that the gods discovered it, they punished him by tying him to a rock and having an eagle pecking his liver every following day - as it heals again afterwards. The fire may represent the creative power of the intellect, the gods could be thought of as referring to abstract '*forces*' which rule the world, and the liver as a symbol of equilibrium - as it is an organ of regulative function. With this correspondence in mind, we could think of the myth as having the role of a reference to the phenomenon I described above. After this I changed again the direction of my thoughts and decided to search in my memory for moments when I observed passively thoughts appearing in my mind - without actively '*thinking*' them, without effort from me to make them *exist*. I found this: for a couple of weeks the word '*epitome*' occupied my mind, for no manifest reason, for periods of time so short that these events did not provoke in me, by themselves, any later conscious reflection. Furthermore, I had no idea of what this word meant, or if it actually had some meaning. I checked on Wikipedia and found that it actually means the following: "*An epitome (Greek: ἐπιτομή, from ἐπιτέμνειν epitemnein meaning "to cut short") is a summary or miniature form, or an instance that represents a larger reality, also used as a synonym for embodiment.*". Why this word? Perhaps I have read it in a context in which I did not need to have a precise definition of this term in order to grasp the meaning of text, inferring from the context some uncertain meaning for it. From this circumstantial construction, only the memory of the word itself and the way it sounds remained. Still, the question remains: why did this word appear to my mind at the particular times it did, and why so repeatedly? This question reminds me of another '*mental event*' which happens repeatedly to me. Sometimes I imagine, without *actively* creating this mental content in me, that I am a well-known writer answering questions (that I 'chose', as they are determined by the current contents of my mind) of a journalist about who I am, or what I think about what is currently happening out there in the world. When I considered this event immediately after occurring - consideration that I was able to do for I formulated a question related to it before the event's occurrence - I found that whatever I answer to the journalist *feels* meaningful and right. Probably this is because I feel heard, even if the journalist is not a real person: as a matter of fact the feeling derives mechanistically from the mental event of projection

of attention onto the image of a person, for which the person's 'reality' is not essential. Besides, it might be this kind of projections which, early in our lives, creates in us the desire of becoming a well-known *someone*.

Overall I like to search for mental events that we rarely notice: it makes me feel like the world is a lot larger than the image of it that progressively got sedimented in my mind along my past exploration of it; each time I notice another type of these mental events, it feels like following a butterfly into some unsuspected clearing in the forest of my mind, before discovering a whole butterfly swarm. At the time of writing this text, I was reading Virginia Wolf's novel *The waves*, and I was surprised and somehow envious of her manifest ability to let her mind flow freely. Sometimes I am able to do so, and find rest in letting my mind go in directions not determined by purpose (whether it is related to work or a personal project to understand better how my mind works); but soon after the purpose takes over again - it is how my mind is *formed*. Now that I have considered this, I think that anyone who is able to let one mind flow is someone who can change on will the form of his or her mind, not by design but exposing his or her unformed mind to the world qua whole. I would like to travel in my mind in order to feel its infinity - for freedom is rooted in this infinity - as when looking at the ocean for the first time, letting the mental contents that it triggers occupy my mind for an indefinite amount of time, only acknowledging what is there to see - not as a substance to transform, but simply as what *there is*, a presence.

For a long time I have made the metaphysical mistake of equating freedom with the absence of rules of conduct for thoughts and with the indefinite expansion of the mind's extension which I assumed to result from this absence of rules. In practice I have seen whatever mode of relation with the world I would think of as one to embrace in order to integrate in my very being the alternative point of view on the world that it relates to, for ultimately all the angles through which I could look at the world would sum up and offer me a deeper understanding of it. At some point I also thought that it is the very notion of mode of relation with the world that I should let go of. In particular, I used for my own ends the position of social isolation I happened to be in, for the reason that it was in principle favorable to observation and subsequent conceptualization of social *situations*. At this time the manifest emotional cost of social *experimentation* was for me only a temporary barrier to overcome. I did not foresee the consequences, mainly for a reason which only comes with an experience of longer time: (i) first the inability of human beings to 'pile up' the reasons why they took decisions at all time in order to be able to track back these reasons at a later time; (ii) second, that emotional events have consequences *across time* and not only on the moment they happen, even if they seem to disappear out of abstraction.

Freedom does not lie in the addition of contents of points of view, but in embracing the wholeness of the world, however unknown the content of the point of view adopted is. Without this the mind may confuse the world with the point of view that, with time, it happens to be attracted and stabilized in, as unexpected and often unnoticed consequence of a particular event. What separates me from this freedom is an irresistible attraction of certain regions of my mind that I shall call *attractors* - borrowing this term from mathematical dynamical systems theory. If found that searching for the means to free my mind from these attractors (which in particular disturb my attention while reading) constitute a *transcendental problem* - in fact probably the most critical one I have - in the sense of these terms defined I defined in *Why I write ?* In order to answer this problem I have to understand the nature of these attractors, characterize the attracting force and its domain. If we think of the mind as a house in which \mathcal{I} inhabits, I need to clean it, bringing some order to the arrangement of things inside it ; this may lead me to remember things which have been covered by other things and which subsequently I forgot were there, such as a years-old bag of potatoes filled with spiders and other crawling bugs. I need to construct systematically a graspable representation of what is in the house and where,

in order for any irregularity in the arrangement of things to be identified as soon as it happens and rectified then (relatively to that it would be interesting to be able to characterize what kind of mental patterns can appear to my mind, independently of time - is it possible ?).

————— **Thoughts on the meaning of ghosts symbolism** —————

I think that most of - if not all - mythological symbols we know were 'originally' intended as *tools* made in order to understand the mind; and that we have lost the grip, in the contemporary world, not only on what particular symbols mean but also on the process itself of mind symbolization. When I think about this, I like to consider language constructions such as the french "*au jour d'aujourd'hui*". In this expression the word '*hui*' is borrowed from latin (it is the contraction of '*hoc die*') and means *today*, however '*aujourd'hui*' is used more often and can be literally translated into *the day which today is*. In the end, "*au jour d'aujourd'hui*" can be translated into *the day which is the day which today is*. Although it is more rarely used than '*aujourd'hui*', it is still encountered. For some time I just found this expression a bit annoying to my ears, but recently I found some interest in analysing how these distortions of the language happen. I am guessing that the expression *aujourd'hui* was first used in order to grant a solemn tone to the designation *hui*: *the day that today is* makes the practical designation *today* into a more abstract one, which considers *this day* in regard to all the other days, and the discourse which follows the derived designation is marked by its character. I am also guessing that this subtlety was added in an implicit way, in order to titillate the mind of the discourse's recipients who are used to this kind of language tweaks. However the explicit trace of the designation does only contain the meaning of the designation *hui* with a the solemn aspect which may be associated with the context of the discourse; as the designation propagates in the language, used as a misplaced distortion of the language having a humorous effect, the tweaked designation comes, by the same movement, to be reduced in meaning to the old one and replace it in the daily use of language. One can find other instances of this phenomenon in other languages: consider for instance the expression "*thanks, but no thanks*" in English.

The reason why I am writing these lines is that one may apply a similar reasoning to the way we conceive pictorial symbols (such as ghosts for instance) in order to make conceivable that these symbols had originally a more subtle meaning than the one we usually attribute them - exciting the imagination rather than designating an aspect of the reality of the mind-, for we can conceive how this meaning disappeared. For short, I see two stages in the process of this disappearance: **(i)** first the projection, on all instantiation of the designation, of a perceptible reality of the world rather than the mind; and the progressive sedimentation in the language of this interpretation; **(ii)** the sense of meaninglessness from the designation and its subsequent inadequacy; which results in the denial of meaning to all symbolism.

As a matter of fact I can recognize myself immediately in this second stage, for I am used to despise several social conventions which annoy me, particularly when I from my point of view these conventions are followed by persons who follow them for no other reason than the fact that they are conventions. I came recently to recognize, however, that what made social conventions exist in the first place may always a meaning that has been commonly lost with time, as it is hidden by the ones who follow them blindly to the ones who do not understand them. In the past I recognized this phenomenon in religious practice, but not in my own daily life. In my defense, *meaning denial* is a self-reinforced attitude: the more someone stays away from conventions, the less someone is likely to perceive their meaning.

For quite some time I have played the game of searching for the actual meaning of some of symbols; in particular I was fascinated by the psychological interpretation of alchemical symbols by C.G.Jung in his book *Psychology and Alchemy*, and later by J.K.Rowling. I aspired rooting them in a more stable form of language than pictorial one. I found the occasion to follow this

project on the symbolism of ghosts here, because of the resemblance between this symbolism and the notion of attractor of the mind that I defined above. In the western world, ghosts are described in words as the '*spirits*' of dead persons which appear in the material realm; the pictorial representation of ghosts often let them appear as a translucent residual form of a person which whose purpose is to '*haunt*' the living ones, following them with the intention of provoking fear in a form of revenge.

From where we stand right now, the designation '*ghost*' is only present in the language as a cultural artefact which is only used in stories. Still, if the existence of the designation could be explained only by this use, why isn't the form of '*dreadful creatures*' described in stories more random ? It is possible that the designation that we are considering is the end result of the process of meaning loss that I have described above.

In order to make sense of this symbolism, one has to think first about what the term *spirit* really means. I think it should become clearer if we think of it in relation with an understanding of the term *body*: intuitively, the body of a person is the designatable part of this person, a multisensorial *pattern* which appears to my senses when the person is present and may disappear temporarily, or definitively with death.

Digression: *This triggers a question: why do we think that different occurrences of the same pattern are apparitions of the same object ? There is probably a cognitive mechanism which constitutes this judgement. However then, what if the same pattern reappears later in the same exact way , when I am no longer part of this world, should I think that it is the apparition of the same object by extrapolating the functioning of this mechanism - for instance imagining an entity living longer than me connecting effectively the occurrences of the same pattern - or that it is the apparition of a different object, the object disappearing with the mechanism which creates it, out of the integration of occurrences of the same pattern ? I think this may trigger interesting thoughts about the concept of reincarnation, but this is not my point here.*

On the other hand, the *spirit* is the conceptualisation that I construct of the object's interaction with its world (including me), and which, contrarily to the body, stays in my mind across encounters with the object, as well as when the object disappears from the world.

In the symbolism of ghosts, what we designate as the *material world* is what imposes itself on my mind, which exists independently of me; on the other hand the world of the deads belongs to memory, in which the relation with *objects* is different from the ones in the material world: in principle, in my memory, I can pick the objects, dispose of them, forget and later find them back. Ghosts differ, like ideas and purely mental objects, from objects fully present to senses: this may be why they are represented as translucent, formless (for the sense of sight) and that they do not oppose motor resistance (for the sense of touch); they inhabit my mind against my will and in this sense they belong to the '*material*' realm of the mind. Furthermore they can be thought as what remains of the spirit of persons in the sense that they act on my relation with the world in a coherent manner as '*real*' persons would do.

In several representations of ghosts, the spirit is the one of a person who died in a brutal way and is searching for revenge; in some, they do because of lack of funeral ritual. In both case I think that one can find the reason of this return of the dead in the materiel real of the mind in the persistence of an emotional conflict between the dead and the living: in the first case, because the dead person carry with her while disappearing a negative emotion which is attached with her memory in the mind of the living; in the second, because although the person did not disappear brutally, some long lasting emotional conflicts (often between members of the same family) are also carried away. Funeral rituals may in fact consist in a time allocated to focusing on the relation with the dead person during her life time, and for the living person to resolve

this conflict by focusing on the memory of the dead person. I think that this characterization of the consequences of a person's death for the living may be generalized in order to define a wider class of 'death' events, in particular the sudden erasure of another person from one's own life, the relationship with whom is marked with strong emotions - where the notion of death takes the meaning it has in the English expression "*you are dead to me*" - or the amputation of a limb due to a trauma (war for instance) - which makes sense of the denomination "*ghost limb syndrom*": in fact, as I think of them here, ghosts *are* a form of "*ghost memory syndrom*".

Digression: *Death thought this way is more fundamental to life than actual death (from the first person perspective), for the former is the one we experience all along our life, under the form of rupture, while the later is never actually present. The fear of death is the one of rupture, that we project on actual death. Furthermore, and somehow paradoxically, it is death which provides life with movement, which makes our life 'alive'.*

I doubt of the possibility to find the '*right*' interpretation for any singular mythical construction; I can only attempt making a map between elements of symbols or certain aspects of symbols with '*elementary*' mental states (in a psychological hermeneutic framework) in a way that makes the mythological constructions represent more complex mental states. In doing so, I can expect to use this mapping in order to construct for myself a language allowing me to describe the complex mental states that I find in me.

While preparing this text, I found some mythological fragments related to ghosts which I could try to make sense of. In the swedish tale *The bird grip* for instance, the traveler meets a fox which guides him through his quest and reveals in the end to be the spirit of a dead person he encountered on his way (all ghosts are not malevolent..). We could think of the dead's spirit as the memory of a striking event for the traveler's mind, directing his decisions to the right way; the spirit takes the form of a fox for this animal may represent intelligence; furthermore, when the spirit reveals its nature, this might simply refer to the recognition by the traveler of the importance this memory had on his actions. I think that this kind of revelation separates ghosts - or spirits - from other kinds of living memories. In the New Testament for instance, in *Luke 24:37-39*, after his resurrection, Jesus had to persuade his disciples that he was not a ghost - as well the followers, for they believed he was one when seeing him walking on the water. I take from my wife June the interpretation that the terms 'walking' and 'water' may refer respectively to a form of interaction with the world or the mind (the ground referring to a robust cognitive basis, and walking is what evolving on this basis is) and a dynamical property of what is encountered in the mind (fluidity, chaoticity). In this sense, '*walking on the water*' is grasping meaning where it is usually thought not to exist. The followers believed that he was a ghost because they believed it was not possible (symbolically again) to walk on the water this way, as they only have experienced this to reveal in the end to be an illusion. On the contrary, Jesus proved them, as they could touch him, that he was real in the sense that his living memory had an impact on the material realm of the mind - including the bodily part of the mind, meaning the emotional one - and that he was present at this moment in his bare nature. I also found that the term *vampir* bears the meaning of ghost in serbian, which makes me think that some attributes of vampires, such as drinking blood, may be also attributed to malevolent ghosts: if life is represented by the blood that runs in the body of the living, ghosts, by appearing recurrently in the mind, empty it from joy, and thus life - the ghost thus sucks out blood out of the bodily mind.

————— **On the way memories are made into recurrent negative ones** —————

In this text I will use the term '*ghost*' for malevolent ghosts, which I think could be characterized as recurrent (living) memories of a dead person which bear with them negative emotions,

enclosing progressively the mind into them (removing life from the subject). Instead of composing the meaning of this definition from the meaning of death, I see the definition as the only constraint on the meaning of death: from the point of view of a subject of memory, physical death is only a particular form of death, which may be formulated abstractly as the disappearance from the world of the subject can be another form - hence the term *ghosting*, I am guessing. Even after disappearing, the person still acts on the mind of the subject via the trace that this person has left in it, a trace which is kept alive (for instance Jesus is kept alive in the mind of christians, although as the essence of his personality and not the material part of him, which matters less in the end).

Furthermore, recurrent (emotionally) negative memories may be thought without involving another person. This kind of abstraction is useful in order to make possible the exploration on a larger class of mental dynamics some questions which can be formulated on 'ghosts' such as: **(i)** how do memories become recurrent negative memories? **(ii)** why do certain of these memories come back with more frequency or more vividly than others?

A short response to the question **(i)** would be that with time we tend to replace the trace of an experience with the emotional content, extracted and isolated from it (does this mean that emotions are more easily retained in memory?). When an experienced situation or a pattern in it resembles the past original one, it is recalled but also immediately replaced in the mind with its emotional content, as if although this emotional content has been separated and isolated in the memory from its apparition context, it is still identified as a part of it.

I think that this separation is actually the cause of the later memory's recurrence: as it is recalled, the subject becomes more vulnerable to the corresponding type of emotion (this is particularly true when the emotion is related to doubts about oneself); this means more occasions of recall, and as a consequence, its presence as resulting from the extraction from its initial context is self-reinforced. In order to resolve this, one should begin with re-anchoring the emotional content with its original context, for instance by explaining to oneself the reason why one felt this way.

A short response to question **(ii)** would be that one important factor for the creation of regrets (which form a particular class of examples of recurrent negative memory) related to an important past decision is that I can not picture clearly in the present what could have happened if I took another decision. When this happens, my imagination, which is subjected to distortion under the action of deep emotional memory (whether it is negative or positive), takes over, triggering an emotional tension then isolated from its context. As a consequence of this isolation, I do not remember some of the factors which have determined it when I remember this decision - this is particularly true when they do not consist in events, but rather in former dispositions of mind. The larger the causal impact of a decision, the larger the unknown, the stronger the regrets.

I think I should, as a preventive measure, avoid situations in which I have to take this kind of decision; and when it is not possible, I should immediately remove any unknown. I used to not care about making this effort, explaining my indolence with the idea that an absence of control over my relation with the world serves a better understanding of it (for by this I am led, against my natural will, to adopt other points of view than the one I currently hold). Let me notice another thing: saying 'yes' to the world - accepting an opportunity to enter into the unknown despite the fear - brings always less regrets than saying 'no': the reason of this difference is the component of imagination, for although the eventual pain justifies *a posteriori* the initial fear, it reduces the unknown. In this case, it seems that imagination is the cause of me detaching mentally the emotional content of the memory from its context, as I project it in the past's hereafter. Since recurrent negative memories seem to originate in the interaction I have with

them when they appear, they participate to the form of relation I have with the world, and it is this relation which makes them possible. Of course the question of interest is: *how can I forget about them* ?. By forgetting I mean here inhibit the impact they have on my relation with the world (and not necessarily erasing them from memory). In general, I think that this should derive from an understanding of the impact of mental actions over these memories when they appear.

————— **Some (partial) typology of my own recurrent negative memories** —————

In order to have a better intuition on recurrent negative memories, consequently respond more deeply to natural questions about them, and thus understand this phenomenon better, I need to construct a proto-classification of the recurrent negative memories I hold. I identified three types thus far.

(i) Situations of misunderstanding. — From several situations of the past (even after years), I feel frustrated when remembering a conversation during which I misexpressed some thought I had at this moment, even if they were trivial, in particular when the other person seemed to judge me for this, even mildly; the outcome of this misexpression is of course non-understanding from others with whom I was conversing at this time. What that makes the memories of this type recurrent is that they are attached with the feeling of being judged, whether it is visible in the reaction of others or only imagined. For this reason I feel afterwards a thirst for explaining more clearly and deeply the reason why I thought the way I did and how this explains the things I said or did. Then I simulate in my mind - without necessarily any intention to do so and without thinking about it - another conversation in which I do provide an explanation to the person I was talking to. I do it in such a way that it says more or less "*See, how much you misunderstood what I said* ?". When doing so I unconsciously expect that the real person would say "*That's true, I feel ashamed*". This makes it a sort of thirst for emotional revenge. Because the memory of the conversation appears again later without the context of the 'real' emotional conflict (which may exist only in my mind), it only triggers the feeling of being judged, which subsequently makes the memory more frequently present in my mind, and so on.

Remark *One may think that it is possible to collapse the category of mental event that I called "recurrent negative memories" to what we commonly call "regrets"; however this can work as a counter-example: if we define regrets as the memory of a decision that we should have made differently for this decision had manifest negative consequences, situations of misunderstanding differ in the sense that I can not identify a particular sentence I said and any consequences that it had.*

In this case a way out may begin with understanding what misunderstanding is, independently from me or any situation I was in. I identified two factors (which may actually be causally related): **(1)** misunderstanding may come from a misconception of the person; the person who was listening to me talking can hold a conception of who I am, what I think without saying and why I think this way, a conception that I can sense and which is different from how I conceive myself. During the conversation, this conception is instantiated in my mind and I perceive it as an interpretation, a distortion, a judgement on what I said (such a perception may not depend at all on how this person interacted with me from her own first-person perspective). When I remember this kind of conversations, I feel an irresistible desire to rectify the conception of me that I sense in the other.

(2) Often times there is misunderstanding when what one participant of the conversation says is affected by some internal factors unknown to the others, which may be moral or behavioral principles or simply a certain sensibility relative to the conversation subject or even a conception

of the nature and function of the social interaction the person is currently in. I am thinking of one example in this direction. I have a feminist friend who once told me that she felt frustrated because she could not discuss feminism with her current friends, although she had tried - simply for they were not interested in the subject. She told me that she did not understand why things were like this: after all, feminism is an important matter (behavioral principles) and if they were her friends she should be able to express herself during conversations (function and nature of social interactions). I think the misunderstanding in this situation may be explained by the fact that the friends may not be as sensible to the subject as she is, and subsequently the conversation subject entered in contradiction with their own conception of the nature and function of social interactions they had. Perhaps this suggests a way to create resolve the problem: create sensibility on the subject, which independently of the persons, is a necessary exercise in order to spread ideas.

I have to admit that for a long time I liked to create misunderstanding, saying something clearly absurd while keeping a serious face. Sometimes I did this as a way of making jokes (it creates an impression of maladjustment that is funny when the intention of humor is caught) or probing the way some persons really think, in particular in relation to *social convention* (does she only follow the convention or does she have a deeper reason for thinking the way she does?). For instance if someone made a judgment about *beauty in A.Rimbaud's poetry*, I would have liked to know if this person had really found some beauty in it that she may convey with her own words or if she says that uniquely because the education system taught her that there is. For this purpose I liked to say "*No really, A.Rimbaud is full of shit*". Often people did not understand this (I don't blame them, although I did at this time). I did this because the absence of reactions to my provocations confirmed me into thinking that persons who were supposed to be more intelligent than me in a conventional sense were not really. Somehow I transformed this manipulation of my social interactions into a habit, and I forgot why I was doing this. At some point the thought occurred to me that an absence of reaction to a provocation may only mean that the other person has, because of it, internal doubts about herself and her opinion, that that this takes time to process on the moment.

This has been only one aspect in the history of my relationship with misunderstanding. I also felt that my personality was misunderstood; for instance I have been quiet in conversations with groups of friends. I have observed that I would say nothing unless it was valuable to the conversation, because it could not happen in and by the conversation flow for it demanded a deep reflection. Because I was not involved in the conversations, I usually occupied myself by listening and observing, analyzing and conceptualizing the social interactions that others had. For some time I thought that my friends cared about me participating to the conversations when they queried: *why are you not talking ?* Perhaps it was also by curiosity. After some time I thought: perhaps they were driven by a natural fear that occur when someone who is present is not really present, for they don't know what I thought - what I thought of them, what I might have been planning to do to them. This idea that I had to conceptualize the social interactions I was observing in others became a routine; in fact I liked to think of myself as an intellectual who observes the others without them knowing what was going on in my mind. This was compensating the feeling of non-belonging triggered by the question: *why are you not talking ?* subtended *why are you not like us ?* Misunderstanding is a snake. What if the others only wanted me to be present ? - contributing to the cognitive '*bonfire*' that the group conversation is, as long as everyone maintains by throwing in it his or her little piece of wood. Then I inhibited completely the expression of my mind's flow; everything I thought, I would say it. If this interpretation was correct, I thought, say would not judge me, whatever I say. If it is

that, whatever I say they would not judge me. In fact they should not judge me, they have no right; plus it would be self-contradictory. If they did I would have said: "*I tried to communicate, but you misunderstood*". For me it has been simpler to use this reasoning in situations where I had to speak in public though, because of the implicit distance between the speaker and the audience: I thought that they would feel some sort of shame if they threw rocks at me for saying something wrong.

The way we usually tend to deal with ghosts is rather simple: we run away, hoping that the ghost will loose trail. In other words, we shake the head in order to reject the memory, hoping that we will forget about it. Counterintuitively though, we should invite the ghost in to take a cup of tea, speak with it, understand it. Suddenly then, it disappears. It is the same counter-intuition which we should adopt when some children ring the bell and then run away: in this case don't get angry, this is what makes the children come back later, in a larger and larger group.

One way out of misunderstanding ghosts is to understand misunderstanding; for instance, considering situations of apparent misunderstanding which do not make recurrent negative memories occur. I have one such situation in my memory: one day I was speaking with a friend of a friend about religion, when I said something which resembles "*Things were better before*", to which he had a reaction such as "*You're a piece of shit for thinking that! Do you forget about Inquisition ? How can you say that*", etc (he kept going like this for a couple of minutes). Curiously enough I have never held any grudge against him; when I think about it though, the reason is pretty clear. I could in fact see quite well the distance between what I intended to mean - the idea that because of the evolution of language, we lost grasp on what the sacred texts really meant and overall misinterpret them - and his over-reaction, which I believe may have come from several interactions with other persons in the past that he projected on our discussion. In more subtle situations of misunderstanding, we conflate what we mean with what the other person is reacting to (which happens in this person's mind); this is why the reaction hurts. Hold in mind the psychological schema of the clear situation of misunderstanding, and you naturally make this distinction in more subtle ones by answering the question: "*What may this person have in mind when reacting this (such and such) way ? What do I have in mind ?*".

(ii) Stealing the fire, or the light? — For me social interactions in a group meant *constraint*, the world of intellectuals and thinkers, writers (which I found in books) meant *freedom*. I think that I chose to make it mine because of my isolation: if I had to belong somewhere, it was there. I begun with mathematics, then I learned to like using other tools in order to analyze the world. The more I felt joy and freedom belonging to this world (although it was only through the acts of reading and thinking, I did not belong to any actual community), and pride as well, the more I rejected who I was before; I wanted to be solely the one I chose to become.

In some traditions it is said that persons who died without fulfilling their dreams and desires while they were alive may re-enter the world as a consequence of a thirst of revenge - this is the case for instance of the *Phi tai hong* in Thai oral tradition. Drawing a parallel with the above psychological pattern I found in myself, I am making the hypothesis that these persons who re-enter the world may be in fact a *part* of the person to which they appear. Such a part may be defined as a set of reactions to events of the world that \mathcal{I} used to have, driven by certain (emotional) expectations. This part may even have been the whole *me* at some point, before another part emerged and I decided to be this part. As a consequence of this decision, I repressed the kind of reactions to events of the world I used to have, sometimes by avoiding situations in

which this other part of me would take over again. I might have thought that it was not there anymore, but if some event a reaction to which may have fulfilled the expectations of this other part of me is missed, it acts as a person who fiercely (and negatively) emotionally reacts to this miss, and reappears into the world - and I may perceive this return, at the moment it occurs, as the effect of a will for revenge on me who missed the event. This could explain why the Phi tai hong kills living persons in the same way they died themselves - under the hypothesis that the reference of this term is similar to the phenomenon I described immediately above. When a person abandons her dreams, this person cannot stand the presence of another person having similar dreams and realizing them - as an effect of the negative emotional reaction of the ghost. Subconsciously this person may will to kill the part of this other person which holds these dreams, a will that is realized consciously by uttering the same reasoning which led the person to abandon her dreams.

Let me notice a similar scheme in the vampire-like filipino mythical creature called *Manananggal*, as it has separated its lower part from its body. The lower part may represent the 'lower', deeper and natural part of the self, that it has separated from itself by repressing it. It is also afraid of the light: maybe because it is scared of finding that its lower part is still there ?

For I have not been sensible to this kind of psychological phenomenon, I have let several ghosts enter in me which left me no rest. The difference between me and Prometheus is that I have stolen the fire in order to have the light - and the attention of the others - on me. However, as I could be seen, I realized that the lower part of me was still there. I have tried to redirect the trajectory of light in order for it to reflect only the part of myself who was able to take the fire and not the whole me, so that only this part of me would be visible by others. As I have been looking at me through the eyes of the others, if they could not see my lower part, I could not see it and pretend again that it is not there.

I found that the reason why I desired at some point - like many other persons - to hold a high position in institutional structures was for this self-image to be anchored into relatively stable symbols - while the self-maintenance of this image is inefficient and exhausting. However there always is a part of the self which doubts the path taken, and when the self is tied to a *position*, it expects freedom. Furthermore when a person undertakes by herself her own construction, she becomes mentally the ultimate cause for the consequences of the choice taken for this construction. The part of the self which doubts therefore tends to identify the self as the cause of any event whenever this cause is ambiguous. For this reason \mathcal{I} imagine negative consequences anywhere I can for the choices \mathcal{I} can, for if I am the ultimate cause I have to consider any of these consequences before taking a decision. This, \mathcal{I} also do it for past decisions, as my imagination creates new possibilities afterwards. When this happens I cannot help but wonder *why did I do that ?* For me this phenomenon became even more intense when I decided that I didn't want to *be* the institutional position that I hold. I see two reasons for this: the first one is that on the top of the self-attribution of ultimate cause to myself, the self-image that the institution reflects when stepping outside of it provides every reason to doubt of this decision; the second is that, despite the fact that I have constructed later a way to evaluate myself the decisions I take and the value of my work, this mental construction has been kept mentally local and not '*transmitted*' to and thus '*accessible*' in mental situations other than the one in which I took this decision.

One reason why I made mentally the domain of intellect mine was that the progresses I made at school in mathematics was the result of a decision for experimenting with my life. At some point I perceived the difference in joy and recognition between situations of social interactions

and gatherings with friends and the world of mathematics; I decided to live completely in the later for a while for this reason, but also because I could foresee how the barrier which separated me from properly living in this world was to settle in it, somehow abandoning the past - just like we learn a language naturally by living in a country for a long time in a way that this language becomes omnipresent. It is this understanding that I applied to the world of mathematics which made me do this progress. More fundamentally I discovered that independently from authority I could construct in the scrutiny of my mind another kind of knowledge. When going further I have willed to keep this intuition close to me. In order to direct myself in the world of intellect, I chose only to follow my intimate relationship with it and refused to follow blindly any form of authority, against the institutional structure which initially created my self-worth. This separation has been an important factor in self-doubts I had, and corresponding recurrent memories coming with them: since *formal* recognition is absent, the imagined social pressure, via the recurrence of negative memories, is overwhelming, and creates a conflict between the person I was and the person I am. Despite this I do not regret this history, as I believe that the pain we feel when crossing the invisible lines the society of others has constructed does not constitute a justification to stay inside the lines. Is only needed a way out of the cognitive consequences of crossing them.

This kind of recurrent negative memories is difficult to dismantle, for they are not attached to any particular phenomenon which can be in principle '*externalised*' or '*objectified*' (such as misunderstanding), but is relative to self-contradiction, more precisely contradictions between the various layers of coherence in the relation with the world that were adopted in the past and present. This is for the following reason: when introspecting, '*T*' bring with myself a part of me which enters in contradiction with the remainder, and carries misunderstanding of oneself. An understanding of misunderstanding may be of use, although it is not sufficient. As a matter of fact, solitary reflection weakens the ability to listen. While the presence of other person still manifests itself despite this closure, the layers the self do not have agency, and here an ability to listen is necessary, as well as the ability to take a neutral position - like a judge in front of the court, listening carefully to both parties (after identification of who is whom), conceptualise and understand the interactions they have.

After that comes jealousy; I happen to be jealous when I see others who have what I tend to think I should have taken in the past, especially when these people seem to hold a certain feeling of superiority for this reason - I know what it looks like, because I felt this way for a while. I recurrently remember some people who looked at me that way and instantiate them in my mind in order to explain to them that I do differ from them only by having taken different decisions - which make equal sense - than the ones they made. This kind of internal dialog happens without a conscious construction: they are a somehow mechanical reaction to an emotion which makes me think about a person who made me feel the same way I do at the moment. Some other times it is the contingent recall of a dialog I had with someone recently that triggers an internal dialog which extends it.

In fact I do not regret the decisions I made relative to my career - because it does not matter to me: I prefer to be free rather than what I have been expected to be. However, these memories keep coming back for the reason that I redirect the way these persons looked at me to the things I really wanted to achieve and haven't yet. However I think that this comes from a misunderstanding of what I really want, which, I believe by definition, admits no comparison with what others can exclusively have. I do not really want to be recognized for what I write; what I do really want is to enjoy writing in my own way.

Comparing oneself to others is hurtful when one does not know what one wants. I think that in the same way, the loss of individuality that someone experiences when considered by others not as an individual but only through the spectrum of collective categories, is hurtful when this someone does not know who he or she is.

(iii) Buried feelings. — On the model of this '*experimentation*' with the definition of my identity, I have begun at the same time to experiment with the relationships I could have with others, in particular ones with a sentimental aspect. I wanted in a sense to abstract them from the form they are modeled and instantiated in direct environment (relationships between other known people) and in cultural contents (relationships between fictional characters), with the driving question: "*what kind of forms can they take, and why would they have necessarily to take these forms ?*". This had consequences that I did not expect, to which I was not prepared to react; some persons may find in that a reason against any kind of '*experimentation*' in the social life, but I think that the resulting pain is not comparable to the less graspable pain which comes from a lack of understanding of social interactions.

I would say that consequences on the short term and long term as well are most of the time related to the folklore phenomenon of *idealization*; this is similar to mirages: when we are far from an object of vision, the image of this object might be distorted - it appears not as what it actually is - because of the deviation of light rays on the way. To be more precise, the distortion acts on the *conceptualization* rather than phenomenal experience itself: when considering a mirage, there is no reason to doubt about what I *see*; I should in fact doubt about my judgment what it entails - that if I move towards the '*object*' I see, I will have an experience '*similar*' to the one I have at the moment.

With the distance to a person, the way this person appears might be completely different from what this person is, for her image - the mental action on me of interactions with this person - passes through some abstracting filter which transforms objects into categories (for instance most of the time when we see a cat in the street, what we consider looking at is "*a cat*", the category, and not "*this particular cat*", the object which belongs to the category). The word "*distance*" is usually intuitively understood, but let's try a more precise definition: the more a person does not reveal of herself to another person, the more distance there is; I do hide when I do not know the person - it is the first time this person appears to me - or when I do know the person, but have reasons to believe that her intentions towards me might turn out to hurt me if some information about me is revealed to her.

As the construction of a conceptualization of another person is complex, it may be disturbed in several ways - often of emotional nature. For instance when I was a child, it often happened that when people I did not know were laughing I immediately thought that they were laughing about *me*. With time I found that it was my self-doubts which were responsible for this interpretation. This kind of conceptual distortion can be extremely sturdy when there is no access to the content of the other minds, which is particularly the case when an effect of the distortion is to isolate oneself from others - whether it happens with the unavoidable contact with others, or in the memory. Although \mathcal{I} expect to be hurt when querying the content of the other minds, it is important to do so, precisely because of this. Furthermore, it is an understanding of this kind of mechanisms that allows me to open to the world - doubting not of me, but of the conceptualization that is formed in my mind about what the others think of me.

For a long time the word "*idealization*" appeared paradoxical to me, probably for the reason that I thought that if someone is "*ideal*" for me this means simply that this person has qualities that I like; this *logically* makes the idealization a form of compliment which should in principle make the other person like me in return. However I believe now that the word is rather used to

designate the phenomenon of which consists in forming and holding an inflexible conceptualization of her, that she cannot change by her words or actions - that is the reference of the word "*ideal*", which is factually closer to '*formal*' than '*great*'-, which ultimately replaces this person in the mind, especially with distance to her, as the occasions of a contradiction of the person on this conceptualization becomes scarce. As I have said in the paragraph above, when \mathcal{I} do not really know who I am - which I believe is the case of most of us - \mathcal{I} want to see *me* in the way the other looks at me, meaning specifically me and not the categories I may belong to. When I sense the phenomenon of idealization in the other, I thus tend to keep the distance, for I know that more proximity will hurt me. Somehow paradoxically, this may reinforce the phenomenon of idealization - which appears more evident in interactions with the other, for instance under the form of intellectual considerations on concepts rather than effective emotional communication - and in return the distance, up to infinity; however this does not systematically happen, for the reason that social codes exist to actually get closer to each other, and create relationships based on desire which in fact only have the appearance of a relationship and break down with time, as the illusion appears more and more clearly - together with the difference between the actual person and the ideal that has been found *in* the person at the beginning. As a matter of fact, this social codification ultimately hides the fact that idealization in general might be the origin of problems - for we usually lack perception of long time-range causal relations between mental events - encountered in relation with others. In other words, the social τέχνη makes us believe that *we* are the problem - the person that I am and the person that the other is, the compatibility or incompatibility between them, etc.

In my carelessness, I have at the same time created consequential effects on myself of this phenomenon of idealization - precisely because I was not really aware of it - and the thought of the necessity of a deep understanding of it - this thought makes it less regrettable. For me negative recurrent memories appeared with the situation of indefinitely growing distance from persons I had a deep desire for - whether it has been for the person I happened to know or for the conceptualization of her I created in my mind is difficult to decide. The memories I had of these persons came along with an attraction, a desire, which is frustrated for it is not satisfied by image and memory of the person only. This is the frustration which make these memories come back, for it reinforces this desire.

I think that these considerations map rather well to mythological structures encountered in particular in Homer's *Odyssey*, in the episode of *Circe* and then the one of the *Sirens*. The first one describes the interaction between a man - *Ulysses* - and a woman - *Circe*; in fact I think we should think of *Circe* not as an actual woman, but rather as the image of a woman in the mind of the man, and think of the man *Ulysses*, together with each of his companions, as a part of the psyche of an actual man - they differ from what we usually designate by *gods*, which are also part of the internal world - the ψυχή - in the sense that they are part of the self. Πολίτης for instance might be the one part of the self who acts, and Εὐρύλοχος is the one who observes and thinks - there might be a parallel to be made with the opposition between *Prometheus* and *Epimetheus*; on the other hand *Ulysses* is the part who federates the others, who ultimately arbitrates, decides and construct. We could abstract more and think of the man as a person and the woman as the image of another person that is formed in the mind of the former one - whether this person is a man or a woman is irrelevant. For simplicity though, let us stick to the first abstraction. Let us think about *Circe* as a woman who usually keeps distance with men - for she has doubts about them and their intention towards her in general. At the beginning of the encounter, when the companions arrive on her island, her wolves encircle them - she bares her fangs as a way to protect herself, to set the distance from someone who is about to enter her world - in fact the ocean around the island is what surrounds her and separates her from the remainder of the world. However this is not an open assault: she knows how to behave in society. The wolves

appear as calm, even as if searching for affection from the companions. When Πολίτης knocks on the door of her home, he is present in her mind; she wonders if he is *Ulysses*, the one she heard from the gods would come to take her one day. She does not want to blow this off and presents the best of herself, getting the companions to sit on golden seats and serving them as the most tasty wine and food of the whole Greece - these correspond to aspects of her personality that she lets appear in order to please them. The following makes me think that the myth itself consists in the conceptualization of the encounter by the man from his own perspective, for after the companions have eaten the food and drank the wine, they are transformed into swines by the words of *Circe*. The psychological reality which underlies the myth should be that the woman was disappointed by the companions and rejected them, probably because of the phenomenon of idealization that I talked about above; the distance created co-enforce the idealization and the desire in return, this turns mechanically into an obsession, which means the loss of ability to reflect and the determination of their action only by their desire - this is what the transformation into swines probably represents. As the psychological distance grows - I believe the same one which accompanies the *metamorphosis* in Kafka's story - she expels them from her home - her world. Out of pity she throws them acorns to eat, which is perceived from the first person perspective of the companions as motivated only by the pleasure she gets to see them fight for the food (as in the idealization phenomenon, the intellect dominates the conceptualization of experience, it is blind to emotions). In the end, it is with the assistance of *Eurylochus* and *Hermes* - and his knowledge and understanding of the obscure, the hidden - that Ulysses resists the influence of *Circe* - in the facts the phenomenon of idealization - and conquers her - precisely because, out of this resistance to idealization, he appears to her as a human rather than a swine-, obtaining them from her to liberate his companions.

From this correspondence between the myth and the analysis of folk psychology, the psychological nature of the myth appears quite clear to me, as rather precise description and conceptualization of the mental events which occur from a person's perspective during the encounter with another person she is attracted to. In particular this confirms the interpretation of *Circe* as the mental image of the other rather than the actual other. Furthermore if the myth can be seen as an *explanation* of psychological phenomena related to human interactions, this explanation should be considered as only partial - as it is provided by one person's perspective.

Digression: Let me note that a modification of the way we think about Oedipus myth could allow it to account for a reality that is more complex than what the interpretation of the myth usually conveys: the sexual ideal - ideal as optimum - that a person holds is formed both by the father and the mother, thoughts as representing two modes of formation of desire for someone: by assimilation to the other's authority and autonomy for the father; for what can be taken out of the other (pleasure related to food) for the mother.

Overall I believe that the *Odyssesus* might be interpreted as the psychological journey of *Ulysses* towards his home - towards himself, or in other words to the childhood joy that we experience before encountering the world - where such encounter consists for Ulysses in the Trojan war. On this way back, various forms of desire might acts as hurdles. While in the myth of *Circe* this desire is related to a particular interaction with a person, it seems to be more abstract in the one of the *Sirens*. Homer does not describe them; they are often interpreted, following different symbolisms, else as half-woman half-bird creatures, as in J.W. Waterhouse's 1891 painting *Ulysses and the Sirens* (Figure 2), or as half-woman half fish creatures, as in H.J. Draper's 1909 painting (Figure 1). In both representations, women represent desire (taking a masculine first-person perspective), and both representations present a different aspect of this abstract kind of desire. The former was probably the way Greeks represented them, and the



Figure 1: Ulysses and the Sirens - H.J.Draper (1989)

bird-like attributes may have signified volatility; this coincides with the interpretation by Isidore of Seville of these symbols in his *Etymologiae*: he thought of the sirens as the symbolization of prostitutes who lead the travelers to poverty (hence the fangs). However I think that this falls within materialism in its second form - which might be surprising for a bishop, provided the importance of symbolism in Christianity, but it might be that Isidore of Seville wanted, by this kind of materialistic interpretation, to lower the power of Greek symbols, in order to put forward christian ones at the same time; as a matter of fact I think that prostitution should be seen only a particular manifestation of a more universal psychological phenomenon - this is what should be observable when considering other similar symbols.

In fact when I think about what may correspond to the sirens in my mind, I see that I have in me a form of '*autonomous*' desire which manifests itself sometimes under the form of a complex of memories - I say autonomous because it does not directly derive from the presence of another person whom I may desire.

Remark: the myth of Pygmalion provides an other example of autonomous desire.

The memory of a desire I had for another person, especially when this desire was frustrated, manifests itself again, regularly; however with time this desire becomes abstracted from the particular person, and when occurring let only appear to the conscious mind some singular aspect of this person - for instance the color of her hair or the way she looked at me - that the mind completes - composing with more recent memories of other persons - into a '*real*' imaginary person who makes the desire and its realization more real, until the non-reality of this person appears, and \mathcal{I} begin to search for her in the reality. The problem with this is that the complete form of this imaginary person is permanently changing, as it is created when the desire occurs, and there is no real person who is identical with '*her*' - although this can happen locally in time in an illusory way.

These complexes of memories are strong illusions, and two sides: the one which appears to the conscious mind and attracts it; and the one, deeply unconscious, which mechanistically creates the attraction. I think that the mermaid representation of sirens (half-woman half-fish)



Figure 2: Ulysses and the Sirens - **J.W. Waterhouse (1891)**

corresponds well to this structure. As a matter of fact, we can think of the ocean as representing the unconscious as a whole: the conscious part of the mind only sees the surface, but there is more below that it cannot see; in particular what lives below the surface are fishes, and these fishes can sometimes manifest themselves to the conscious mind under a form which is different from their 'real' one.

In the *Odysseus*, it is Circe who told Ulysses how to resist the sirens; or we can say that the experience of illusion in the idealization phenomenon taught him how to see sirens as an illusion and deal with them as such. Ulysses knows how strong it is, and in order to resist, he attaches himself to his ship's mast; this ship may represent that in which he navigates in the reality - his rational, conscious mind. Personally I feel like I keep attaching myself to the mast, but manage each time to detach myself when under the influence of the illusion; when will the strings be strong enough ?

Provided the similarity between symbols, the russalki in the slavic folklore seem to be equivalent to the mermaids: rusalki are ghosts of young women who died close to a lake or river. Similarly to the mermaids they lure young men and pull them in the depths of water by wrapping their long hair around the man's body. Besides the fact that they are considered as ghosts - which should inform what mermaids in general are really the symbol of - what is interesting about rusalki is that their appearance changes according to the man they target - where this aspect corresponds to some aspect of the complexes of memories I mentioned above.

A specificity of rusalki is that persons can become a rusalka by drowning themselves in the water; I think that this could be interpreted as the idea that '*drowning oneself in the water*' makes the person act on the mind of other persons as a rusalka (being a rusalka *for this other person*); furthermore, if we think about the water as one's own unconscious or subjectivity, then '*drowning oneself in the water*' may be thought of as a form of introversion, the direction of attention towards inside oneself and the contemplation of one's own $\psi\upsilon\chi\eta$; this is causally related to the seduction of others, since when the attention is directed entirely to inside oneself even in the presence of another person, this person will search for one's attention in order to fill the void felt. Keeping in mind the fact that the figure of rusalka changes its form according to the beholder's memory or desire, this image of rusalka drowning oneself into the water as the symbol of self absorption seems to bring contradiction to the coherence of the figure. In the former characteristic the figure seems accommodating whereas in the latter nonchalant. But it makes

sense if we think about the changing of the image being not done by the rusalka itself but by the beholder who idealizes (autonomous desire, which is another form of self-absorption) the rusalka, projecting one's ideals onto this silent and distant figure.

I believe that the psychological interpretation of myths lets appear that even the notion of 'god' should be revised, in order to see them as psychological structures of a particular type; in this interpretation they thus should not be so central in what makes the difference between what we consider as polytheism and as monotheism - in other words, the plurality or uniqueness of 'gods' is only an epiphenomenon. I think that the fundamental difference lies in the use of symbolic language: on the one hand it is used with the preoccupation for the completeness of description; on the other hand it is used with the preoccupation for the language unity - in a way similar to the axiomatization of modern mathematics at the beginning of the XXth century.

The symbol of *Lilith* may not follow Greek myths in real time, but I would say it follows this change in the use of symbolic language. It is difficult not to see a resemblance between Lilith and Circe, and see Lilith as a symbolic encoding of one possible reaction towards the form of desire that Ulysses companions have for Circe in the myth - to consider it, and not necessarily desire in general, as a form of sin (which is represented by the snake). The continuity between Circe and Lilith is also suggested in interpretations of the symbolism, such as in the sculpture of Sir Edgar Bertram representing Circe with a snake in her hair; one can note that this schema is recovered also in the sculpture of the African deity *Mami Wata* (at the Minneapolis institute of art). Practically speaking, the simplification of the symbolism can be seen in two ways: i) the loss in precision prevents a mythical reflection of a real and complex psychological situation which has to be understood in order to be prevented; ii) or one should be able to find in the axiomatization of the language another principle to follow which makes such a deeper understanding secondary. This is of course difficult to decide.

In order to go further, I think that this kind of interpretation can enlighten some other more central myths of European culture, such as the one of Adam and Eve; in particular in the natural - for Lilith was, in Judaism, the wife of Adam before Eve - comparison between Eve and Lilith. To begin with, if we see Lilith as the representation of a certain form of desire, Eve should be seen in the same way. I think also that there is a possible comparison possible between Ulysses and Adam, that I shall also consider as a representation of this part of the self which controls and federates the others, ultimately decides. This would make sense of the fact that Eve was created out of his rib, as a form of desire which serves the project of construction of the self and comes from it. We could think that Eve was created out of Adam to replace Lilith. While Lilith - at least in the representation of J. Collier 3 - seems to enjoy the presence of the snake, being enlaced by it as if the form of desire that she represents was intimately related to the sin, difficult to distinguish from it - we could also see a resemblance between this attitude of Lilith and the attitude of Circe towards Ulysses' companions after they got transformed into swines -, the form of desire that Eve represents could be meant to build on the accidental knowledge derived from experience such as the one of Ulysses had out of his encounter with Circe, and leads rationally to the search for *knowledge* of good and evil - where knowledge should be thought of as definitive, which can be relied on - that is represented by Adam eating the fruit of the tree of good and evil - the tree represents the actual mental tree-structure of knowledge, and the fruit its outcome. In several representations of the myth of Adam and Eve, the snake awaits in the tree, which indicates that the sin lies in this knowledge as a potential - it is not identical to it. This potential is the one of a stiffening of the knowledge of good and evil, the belief that the conception of good and evil that one holds in mind is exact - this is in fact reasonably never the case - for then one searches to impose on the mind of the other a conception that this other can not accept - as it is only partial and dissonant with this other person's point of view on the



Figure 3: Lilith - J.Collier (1889)

world. This is rather straightforwardly a causal relation between the myth of Adam and Eve and the one of *Cain and Abel*.

On the other hand Lilith has been created as the equal of Adam and refuses to serve him: I can not help thinking that the opposition between Adam and Lilith here is of the same nature as the one between Dionysus and Apollo, thought as relations to beauty. The form of desire which is intertwined with the phenomenon of idealization enters, as a matter of fact, in contradiction with the part of self which federates the others and construct, preserves a cap in the existence.

Remarks: *After these lines I am rather convinced myself that in the interpretation of myths, it is most of the time wrong to think of persons in these myths as the representation of the categories of persons we may see in them (women or men for instance); the interest of the symbolism, which makes sense of it, is that what it represents is invisible, intangible, as it belongs to the unconscious conceptualization of the world - while the categories that we tend to project on the symbols are often the most common ones - and thus, on the contrary, visible. I believe also that the recurrence of a certain myth in the culture denotes its fundamental position in the $\psi\upsilon\chi\eta$; in this sense it is natural that as in the myth of Adam and Eve, desire comes along with the definition of construction of self: what one desires the most is what one grows in, believes in - notice the proximity of believing and growing in french: croire and croître respectively. Furthermore, I think that what makes possible an axiomatization of mythological symbolism as I evoked above is that the conscious mind has a way to 'interpret' the unconscious mind's activity - as we see in the memories of our dreams - that seems universal - of course in the myths there is an influence of culture which is added to this universal meaning. Myths are probably the result of a progressive abstraction through time of real stories which marked the minds of the ones who heard them, as the story echoes some structure of the unconscious mind, a central concept of the unconscious conceptualization of the world. There is thus a way to think that the objects of mythological symbolism actually do exist, as such. To end up with, I think that a lot*

of misconceptions in the interpretation of sacred texts derive from the projection of a prescribing nature onto statements of descriptive one: the designation of a sin does not prescribe not to do what it marks, but rather warns of a potential danger, which may not systematically occur but often does.

Also along these lines, it appears that I do not really have an idea of how to dissolve the recurrent negative memories I talked about in this part, except through a longer study and understanding of the phenomenon of idealization for itself - as in mathematics, where the study for themselves of concepts structuring the exposition of a theorem's proof can ultimately lead to more understanding of the corresponding mathematical situation. As this phenomenon consists in the constitution in the mind of a conceptualization of experience which is different from what other persons involved in the same experiential situation hold in mind, what would be aimed for would be a systematic way to *revise* this conceptualization, on the basis of the other's point of view. As a matter of fact, it appears that other forms of this phenomenon of idealization might be tightly related to recurrent negative memories I talked about in the other sections **ii**) [I am thinking in particular about A.Grothendieck's idealization of the world of mathematics and mathematicians in his early carrier, and how this might have shaped his preoccupation in his later life] and **i**) [as in the actual interaction with others we often construct a conceptual interpretation of the other's words and actions in the moment of the interaction which is tainted in particular by one's own vision of the world and does not correspond to the conceptualization by the other of himself or herself]. In this direction, I observed a form of idealization when I remember any city in which I have lived in the past, for I tend to remember only positive feelings I experienced when I was there. The same can be also observed with *some* persons that I left behind - I wonder what exactly are the factors in the interaction with these persons which trigger this. One observation: when considering any event happening in the experience for which there are multiple possible interpretations with no clear-cut choice, some of which are negative and some of which are positive, I believe that we tend to focus and ultimately choose a negative one whenever it is similar or more simple than the others [probably a matter of stability of the conceptualization] - on the contrary a positive interpretation has to be significantly more simple in order to attract the attention. One natural way to deconstruct an illusory conceptualization of a person might be to remember this person not through the conceptualization that one formed of her - which is natural when remembering without effort - but through actual situations lived together, in which it is possible to reconstruct a conceptualization of the person which is closer to her reality. I think that, in general, the basis on which any conceptualization of experience is constructed is an unconscious causal analysis of this experience; furthermore, a '*distorted*' conceptualization distorted by some emotional factors - such as attraction or fear - act on this causal analysis - by what precise action ? - and subsequently this action is reflected in the conceptualization. A systematic study of the phenomenon of idealization should thus rely on a systematic study of the interplay between emotions and unconscious causal analysis and its relation with conceptualization. Let us observe that emotion and causal analysis are also related through the fact that, while emotion acts as a signal and orientation of the attention towards a '*problem*' for the organism it has to react to, the purpose of causal analysis and the conceptualization which derives from it form an understanding by this organism of how to act causally and efficiently on its world - in particular reacting to *problems*.

————— * * * ————— **Around forgiveness** ————— * * * —————

One possible strategy, in order to refine the understanding of these concepts and of the relations between them, is to make an interpretation of central theological notions by expressing

them using these elementary concepts - in fact this might in return shed some light on the theological notions themselves. *Forgiveness* is one important of these notions, which is also relevant here for it appears as one - or the ? - way to dissolve recurrent negative memories.

————— Definitions of forgiveness —————

In the common sense forgiveness is conceived as the act of formally liberating another person from the burden of guilt which has derived from an action that this person did to *me*, a definition which sounds paradoxical: why would anyone choose to forgive ? The common sense response to this query often relies on Kant's *categorical imperative* [Kant], not necessarily and actually rarely bearing in mind the concept of Kant; this principle has been translated as follows by J.W.Ellington: '*Act only according to that maxim whereby you can, at the same time, will that it should become a universal law.*' Following the categorical imperative, \mathcal{I} should forgive others for the reason that \mathcal{I} would benefit from it being a universal law - when \mathcal{I} will harm another person, for we all do mistakes, \mathcal{I} would like this other person to forgive me. This leaves a loophole in its derivative morals: the possibility for individuals to hide in themselves some resentment towards the other, which although not intersubjectively acknowledged, has the same effect on the reality of human interactions as when it is not hidden, on the other but also on oneself, under the form of recurrent negative memories - a phenomenon which restricts freedom (of mind): reminding what the other did to me, \mathcal{I} feel harmed and because of this \mathcal{I} consider mentally and automatically the other as a threat from which \mathcal{I} have to defend, and in order to do so, hurt this other, directly or indirectly. Although \mathcal{I} may search for revenge in imagination, this does not suffice and \mathcal{I} feel frustrated. When \mathcal{I} cannot make it real, which eventually has to happen, this frustration stays. This makes the memories come back, and so on.

The presence of this loophole leads to the idea that this *rationalization* of forgiveness into a principle of social morals results only from a misunderstanding of the concept of forgiveness as it is professed by the religious institution - a rationalization which is natural for Kant's project of preserving religious principles beyond the destitution of religious institutions, but fails its purpose.

As a matter of fact, the real difficulty of forgiveness is that it enters *a priori* in contradiction with a the natural reason of defending oneself - that which the emotional reaction to hurt is meant to cause. Some philosophical theories of forgiveness take into account in the definition of this concept the action of '*letting go of*' certain feelings like resentment or '*moral anger*'; however they keep the idea that the subject should make the *effort* because of social morals [with some variation: for J.Butler [Butler] resentment is problem only when it is excessive, for L.Zaibert [Zaibert], forgiveness is refusing deliberately to punish]. Philosophers seem to be often content with formula which capture a certain understanding which is not necessarily complete; I believe this becomes a problem when analysing concepts for which several intermediate formulations are possible along the way of a complete understanding. Furthermore forgiveness is not only a concept but also a practice, which reveals rather straightforwardly the faults of attempts to define it. In fact I believe that religion begins with the realization that a purely theoretical stance cannot provide understanding as much as the practice can - and rituals themselves are tools in the construction and organisation of this practice. Staying at the level of philosophy though, I think that the concept of forgiveness does make sense only when it is seen as an apparatus which serves to dissolve the internal emotional struggle which results from what should be forgiven - a struggle in which the society of others is not involved-, leaving one's mind lighter. It is of interest for the person who practices it; it happens that this interest coincides with the one of the others.

————— On the matter of thoughts —————

I think that for a researcher, forgiving, in particular other researchers who happened to despise his or her own ideas or research interests or appeared like doing so, does matter also to the quality of his or her research; the reason is that the accumulation of resentment makes the researcher more sensible emotionally to the critics, which distorts communication of ideas with others and can also affect the formation of thoughts - as if thoughts were attracted and distorted by the gravity towards related recurrent negative memories - up to the point that the reflection might be consequence of resentment more than things in themselves. Recurrent negative memories may come also from intellectual misunderstandings; they often result from the frustration of a felt impossibility to explain oneself to others with whom one is having a conversation, and to let appear to them the crucial subtleties of one's own reasoning that they could not perceive. Along the remembrance of these memories the presence in the mind of one's own past ideas ensures the visibility of the continuity, self-structuration and strenghtening of thoughts which come from oneself; the related mental mechanisms then attract the mind which contemplates them; it is capable of pure creation of thoughts and understanding for oneself, but since this creation is not lived intersubjectively, the communication of these thoughts to others becomes certainly difficult.

This reflection made sense for me of the myth of *Κασσάνδρα*: as *Ἀπόλλων* is often associated with the academy, him falling in love with *Κασσάνδρα* could be thought of as the recognition by the academy of her beauty, one that is of intellectual nature. In order to have her - that is becoming part of the academy's machinery-, *Ἀπόλλων* gave her the gift of prophecy: in other words the ability to direct one's own thoughts in the direction of an understanding of the world, and to report this understanding to others. *Κασσάνδρα* accepted the gift, but rejected his advances: she liked holding the faculty of intellectual creation, but willed to use it for her own freedom, and not to serve the academy. However a consequence of that, which she did not foresee, was that this deprived her at the same time from a common language for communicating her thoughts - the prophecies: in a sense intellectual concepts serve prediction, as the mathematical law of gravitation predicts how objects fall - and making them understood, and from the legitimacy which would make others listen to her until they understand.

There are inequalities amongst intellectuals relative the position that they hold in the society of others and the attention directed to them and what they have to say; this attention depends in particular on the prioritization of research directions and the perceived possibility of significant achievements in the short term. This naturally serves the selection of the ones who are in search of glory over the ones who pursue intellectual research for itself. I think of myself as belonging to the latters, and I have found natural in this position to hold resentment for the formers - with which I struggled for some time. Forgiving them has put an end to this struggle - although it is more accurate to say that forgiving is only a manifestation of a deeper understanding of the causes and consequences of the choices I made, as well as the gains and losses that they came with, which is the actual cause of this end. For instance I used to envy the scholars who get a lot of attention on themselves for they have means to express themselves the way I would like to. However one should wonder: do they express *themselves* ? I believe not - in fact it is more than a belief, for when someone chooses to allocate thought effort to the research in a field fixed by the society of others, there is little chance that this coincides with what could genuinely motivate the research from the individual point of view. This is the cost of this choice, where the cost of choosing research for itself is not getting attention on oneself.

Another way to look at this: as thoughts and concepts originating from an inner motive concern only individuals and not the society as a whole, it is rational not to focus collective effort on them. Furthermore, since *I* am thinking for myself, there is no need to express my thoughts to others; *I* shall only practice their construction for the effect that this construction has on me and my world - the outer expression is only a distraction from the very reason which

motivated my choice. I think that ultimately though, this vision should be revised, for the self-conceptualization leaves the possibility to act on oneself in order to reach inner peace, and a proper understanding of this process, even on an individual case, may be beneficial for all.

Part of it coincides with what has been called *demystification*. K.Marx and others have committed the mistake to think that collective mythology is the source of self-mystification, meaning the conception of a distorted image of the world out of the maintained presence of inherited psychological structures. The language of mythology is itself neutral: mystification and alienation lie in the way it is used, the way myths are conceived. While they should be considered as partial descriptive tools of human ψυχή, they are thought on the model of what is thought they should be - statical designations as are the ones of the mathematical language - and then removed from the collective discourse for the reason that they do not respect this expectation - can they ? This removal has only the effect of leaving no tool in order to even perceive the psychological structures that mythology is meant to designate. I mentioned ones I have struggled with - the confusion between forms of desire, and in particular the desire to *be someone* in the academic world and the one of intellectual autonomy and originality - but there are many others. In some sense paradoxically, self-mythology, served by an understanding of collective mythology, can be of use in order to understand oneself.

As a matter of fact, the one who thinks for oneself is more free than the one who participates in collective self-mystification by becoming oneself a myth. This is, for me, the meaning of what is said Ἀλέξανδρος told to Διογένης: "*But truly, if I were not Ἀλέξανδρος, I wish I were Διογένης*", recognizing, despite appearances, the value of his freedom. Ironically Ἀλέξανδρος - the human 'sun', the elected manifestation of human truth - *is* what stands between Διογένης and *his* sun - the divine truth. On the representation of Διογένης by Jean-Léon Gérôme (1860) that I like 4, his lantern seems to be the sun that he carries with him, which animates his thoughts, making them warm and alive, and that he keeps for himself alone.

Digression: *Before I continue on forgiveness, I would like to provide some example of another - complementary way to deal with recurrent negative memories. Often times the memories of misunderstanding situations are the occasion of an internal dialogue with the conceptualized version of the other persons involved in these situations, during which I exhaust the situation and explain myself, in order to remove misunderstanding. However this leaves me with a sensation of void, for the actual persons are not there to listen. This sensation disappears when I write down my thoughts on the paper - the reason, I think, is that when I am writing I am not addressing my thoughts to another person, even a conceptual one. Thus no emotional reaction is triggered. Since then negative emotions are dissociated from the memory in this instantiation, this dissolves, in principle, the phenomenon of recurrent negative memories. At this moment it does not matter whether the thoughts I write down are, as Virginia Wolf puts it, hanging there like clothes waiting for me to wear them - use them in the constitution of concepts - in complete disorder, or arranged in a structured way. I like to compare this way of writing with the practice of prayer. In a sense, praying is a way to address one's thoughts with spoken words to the absolute other. I can think of this absolute other as a person - God - answering these thoughts, but in a way that I can not foresee - contrarily to the internal dialogues I have with conceptual persons - and thus does not maintain the self-loop which underlies recurrent negative memories. If we think of this person as an existing concept, it does not enter in contradiction with a material interpretation of this relation. When I write my thoughts, I like to think that instead of speaking to God, I am writing him a letter, which he can read and read again, and take time to answer it.*

————— On the problem of self-forgiveness —————



Figure 4: Diogenes of Sinope - J.-L.Gérôme (1860)

The approach of forgiveness could be qualified as a form of *engineering* of one's own emotions, based on the conceptualization (in particular) and understanding of recurrent negative memories. One may see a connection with the folklore concept of *self-forgiveness*, which falls under the critics of some Christians thinkers. For this reason I would like to think here about a way to formulate self-forgiveness which is coherent with these critics. Let us begin with the conception of self-forgiveness one can abstract from the well-known *Parable of the unforgiving servant* [Matthew 18:21-35]:

21 Then Peter came to Jesus and asked, "Lord, how many times shall I forgive my brother or sister who sins against me? Up to seven times?"

22 Jesus answered, "I tell you, not seven times, but seventy-seven times.

23 "Therefore, the kingdom of heaven is like a king who wanted to settle accounts with his servants. **24** As he began the settlement, a man who owed him ten thousand bags of gold was brought to him. **25** Since he was not able to pay, the master ordered that he and his wife and his children and all that he had be sold to repay the debt.

26 "At this the servant fell on his knees before him. '*Be patient with me, he begged, and I will pay back everything.*' **27** The servant's master took pity on him, canceled the debt and let him go.

28 "But when that servant went out, he found one of his fellow servants who owed him a hundred silver coins. He grabbed him and began to choke him. '*Pay back what you owe me!*' he demanded.

29 "His fellow servant fell to his knees and begged him, '*Be patient with me, and I will pay it back.*'

30 "But he refused. Instead, he went off and had the man thrown into prison until he could pay the debt. **31** When the other servants saw what had happened, they were outraged and went and told their master everything that had happened.

32 "Then the master called the servant in. 'You wicked servant,' he said, 'I canceled all that debt of yours because you begged me to. **33** Shouldn't you have had mercy on your fellow servant just as I had on you?' **34** In anger his master handed him over to the jailers to be tortured, until he should pay back all he owed.

35 "This is how my heavenly Father will treat each of you unless you forgive your brother or sister from your heart."

Straightforwardly, one possible way to outline this parable is the following: '*you should forgive others, for otherwise God shall not forgive you*'. This seems to contradict the christian idea that God's forgiveness is unconditional; however it is unconditional in the sense that it does not depend on the particular person - in other words it is always accessible, to anyone. As a matter of fact, the point raised by the parable is the following: anyone who does not receive properly God's forgiveness - in particular understand it - may not forgive others like God forgave, and this has consequences on this person's mind and heart - which in the parable are the act of God, but they can be thought as well as resulting mechanically from non-understanding forgiveness, which in my view is the same.

The unforgiving servant is *forgiving himself* in the sense that he is accepting God's forgiveness without taking the time to consider its meaning, how and why he receives it, only caring for the outcome - his temporary peace of mind. In other words he is not surprised of it: maybe he considers that he has deserved this forgiveness because of *who he is* - in a sense '*he*', the image of himself that he holds, is forgiving him, is the cause of his peace of mind. This is why he does not question him not forgiving to his own servant - this one does not deserve it, he thinks.

The misery of the unforgiving servant is not the result of him forgiving himself in this sense per se, but rather from what underlies this: self-mystification - or *idealization* of himself - with which he screens his own imperfection (this screening can consist in other mental reactions as well) - this, I observed, can manifest itself as the projection onto the mind of others of what one would like to hear on oneself. Any fault of another person - his own servant in particular - then acts as a reminder of this imperfection, which comes with suffering the dissonance between his idealization and his real self.

For me this is the reason why christian thinkers insist on the idea that forgiveness can only given by God. I think it should be clear that self-forgiveness in the atheist sense designates christian actual forgiveness by God; the difference lies in the fact that, since atheists do not designate and thus think '*God*', the accent is put on the agency of the person - which corresponds in Christianity to the act of turning to God for forgiveness -, the '*core self*' (where christians use the term self for the '*extended self*'). We could say that this agency lies more precisely in becoming conscious of and overcoming the hurdle of self-idealization in order to really *see* oneself - which is logically a precondition for understanding oneself (whose importance should appear clear in the next section).

In causal terms, God is the *actual cause* of forgiveness, while the subject is its *initial cause*. Furthermore, it is worth noticing that self-forgiveness for atheists implies turning to God in the sense of forgiving him: one who remembers with negative emotion one's own actions tends to blame oneself - *why did I do this ?* - before separating oneself emotionally from the memory and then searching for an ultimate agency behind these actions - *God, why did you let me do this ?*. This does not prevent the memory from coming back though: this has to involve an understanding of the underlying emotional mechanism, which manifests itself in particular in forgiving God.

Often times '*the others*' may take the place of God, that one may directly or indirectly accuse; then the necessity of forgiving others become clear, for social relations are needed. As a matter

of fact, forgiving others is tightly related to forgiving oneself: the resentment for others results from that one does not accept a part of the self - whether this part originates from within or is put there by the action of another person - and it is this part that has to be forgiven in order to forgive others, for one feels resentment for others out of redirection of resentment for this part of the self.

————— **Forgiveness in terms of causal processing and emotion segregation** —————

The evaluation of causal relations between mental events and emotion, as they occur in the course of existence, and despite rooting the conceptualization of the world that the subject holds, are largely non-thought in the collective discourse. As a matter of fact, I think that the way they affect each other roots the phenomenon of recurrent negative memories.

Let me observe for instance that when I am angry, I tend to designate mentally and verbally 'simple' objects (which may be a category of persons for instance) as the actual cause of the event causing me anger; simple means here that it does not take a lot of mental effort to instantiate them in the mind: this is the case when the concept is abstract - a group of persons rather than an individual -, when the object of the concept is present, or when the event is recent rather than deep inside the memory. This simplification is probably the manifestation of a shortened access to causal relations processing, which is itself caused by emotion. In return, the simplicity of identified causes make them more frequently present in the mind, maintaining the emotional reaction.

Based on this, the main point of this text is the following:

Statement: *forgiveness resides first in the active segregation, in the time of memory, of causal processing and emotional reaction triggered by the memory.*

Remark: this segregation principle differs from a co-exclusion of causal processing and emotional reaction. The problem that the segregation resolves is not the composition of these two types of processing, but rather a disorganized and chaotic composition. For an organized composition to be possible, there has to be first a clear distinction of the two terms and their interactions. This segregation principle is close to the segregation principle of A.Schaupenhaur [Schaupenhaur] relative to the will and representation; the difference lies in the preoccupation: rather than the constitution of a collective discourse, an organized relation of the individual with the world.

As a matter of fact, one can think of the interaction between causal processing and emotion as a pernicious relationship - when separated, the persons involved in the relationship recover their individuality. Only as physical pain is a signal 'meant' to attract the attention towards a physical deterioration which calls for repair, emotional pain could be seen as a call for understanding - in particular understanding of oneself and of the others - which consists in a clear vision and conceptualization of the causal structure in which events are embedded, which as for physical pain, is of use in avoiding later situations of the same kind; paradoxically, because the emotion itself is not understood, it takes all the attention away from this analysis.

Often times when an event triggers recurrent negative memories - an important decision for instance -, \mathcal{I} do not have in mind all the factors which determined this event, and in the memory they are not associated with it (this is particularly the case when a decision was made entirely upon intuition) - thus it takes an effort to recover the causal context. In a sense the analysis of this context makes me see that there is a *reason* for it - not necessarily a teleological one but rather a set of causal relations with other events -, where the recurrence of the memory is

caused partly by the manifest absurdity of the situation as \mathcal{I} represent it to myself - and thus the repeated question: *why ? why ?*.

In practical terms, the segregation between emotional reaction and causal processing of memories necessitates an algorithmic way to explore memory, as well as an engagement into focusing only on emotionless aspects of memories whenever it is possible. With time the conceptualization of causal relations related to events triggering recurrent negatives memories are registered and associated with the events in memory, which in other situations may be identified straightforwardly, avoiding misunderstanding and frustration, as well as preventing, as a consequence, other recurrent negative memories to be triggered.

Ultimately the understanding of the causal context of important events should come from an understanding of oneself (including the self of the past), for efficiency reasons - so that this understanding may be applicable to multiple situations (with some effort to connect the abstraction to the particular situation), some of which may be unexpected. Understanding oneself consists in the identification of layers of coherence and discontinuity in the personality, its fragmentation, and how these different parts of the self interact, in principle and in reality; in return this enables me to see this fragmentation in others, and as a consequence to accept it, as a universal flaw. The consequence of this conceptualization is that the causal processing is made more efficient: in a particular situation, \mathcal{I} can immediately see how the interactions between parts of myself caused an event.

Digression: *The concept of forgiveness has been at the center of a philosophical dispute in the second half of the XXth century, about what has been defined as crimes against humanity, and wether they can and should be forgiven. Putting it schematically, for V.Jankélevitch they can not be forgiven for the reason that 'forgiveness died in the death camps' [JH] - in other words one should not forgive whoever attempts against forgiveness. As a consequence, forgiveness is not unconditional. On the other hand, J.Derrida argued [Derrida] that "forgiveness forgives only the unforgivable"; in fact the meaning of forgiveness lies in precisely this - if forgiveness is conditional, who decides the condition ? This seems to be an inextricable conundrum; I think, however, that this is due to the fact that forgiveness is thought too abstractly. One objection I have for both positions is that, although in the contemporary world human groups - like nations interacting in a 'society of nations' - are thought in a similar way as actual human persons, in particular juridically, does this mean that the conceptualisation of human interactions is applicable entirely - including in particular forgiveness - to human groups ? I think no, for human groups differ from actual human persons not only in terms of emotions but also agency and consciousness, which matter for forgiveness. Furthermore forgiveness is only the manifestation of understanding, itself applicable to human groups, and what effectively matters for relations between human groups - I do not believe in particular that punishment would have had any effect, as well as J.Derrida's view on forgiveness, for no one forgives out of intelligence of the society as a whole. Moreover understanding is not excusing, or forgetting: on the contrary, it is insisting in considering the events for themselves, completely and impartially. With time events may be forgotten, but not what their understanding may bring, and this is what matters for the history not to repeat.*

————— Emotional intelligence ? —————

I would like to end this part considering one particular situation in which the effects of a pernicious inner relation between emotion and the analysis of causes are striking: in the attempt to create, maintain or recover a relationship with another person. I find it natural when having feelings for someone to be scared of these feelings, and because initiating a relationship is at the beginning crossing the border of the other's world it is also natural to project a reaction of defense and rejection onto the other - and the mind finds any potential reason for this in the context.

Because of the fear of contradiction of the feelings \mathcal{I} have, \mathcal{I} am searching for a way to act in such a way that formal rejection shall be impossible; a way to remove the fear by resolving the riddle. The desire of resolution affects my judgment over the viability of the reasoning, or even over its possibility. Even the conceptualization I have of the other person and the relationship we had is distorted in order to fit this reasoning. As a matter of fact, there happens to be bridges between individual worlds when there is a situation of common consideration, of the same object or set of interacting objects, which may be intersubjectively conceptualized; in particular the other reacts specifically to what I hold in mind, to which \mathcal{I} react in return, progressing in the construction of an intersubjective vision of the world, exclusive to the involved subjects [and the concept grouping these subjects naturally created and intersubjectively present]. The non-existence or rupture of this co-conceptualization of the world leaves a breach for the influence of fear, the divergence of one's own conceptualization of the intersubjective situation, which itself induces fear in the other - because a dissonant conceptualization is received as forced non-sense, or even manipulation - let me notice that at the scale of a society, this is what the lack of common culture does. When someone feels scrutinized it is natural that this person will not reveal herself - where '*herself*' designates in specific reactions to present events and objects. The silence of the other amplifies the scrutiny, and so on.

Someone told me once told me that '*what we say does not matter, only the way we say it*' (in the context of implicitly creating a relationship, otherwise this would be manifestly false). I think I agree only partially with this. Such a conversation is the co-demonstration of strengths and weaknesses, which are manifested in the way the words are said. In fact this co-demonstration is a part of the conceptualization we make of the direction that the other is making the conversation go; in a sense, it is part of the context, and is not an object of the conversation. Paradoxically, the demonstration of strength [for instance the presumptuous, even though implicit, thought that '*\mathcal{I} solved the riddle*'] is the manifestation of (emotional) weakness, while the demonstration of weakness is the manifestation of (emotional) strength. In the usual conception of the way relationships are created, this paradox often leads to non-sense. I believe sense is recovered when considering the emotional reaction that the demonstration of strength or weakness induces in the other.

This is the kind of situation which, I believe, proves the limits of a purely mental understanding, precisely because here the purely mental observation of the phenomenon *is* for the present self to be involved in it. Writing, on the other hand, makes possible the distortion of the way mental contents appear, and thus a set mechanical ways to explore other relations to memory. In recurrent memories, most of the time the details of the initial scenery never appear altogether in the same occurrence - (as do errors of an algorithm when running it): writing is a way to display them altogether and *remember* the way the scenery appeared to me initially, before \mathcal{I} idealized it. When remembering a conversation with another person, it may even feel like the other person is here in front of me - at least more than when remembering purely mentally. This is enough to remove the frustration which comes from feeling the impossibility of explaining oneself to this person; in fact even when the person is *here*, isn't the concept I have of this person more present for me than her real self, sometimes distorting the meaning of her words? When this distortion manifests itself and becomes visible to the other, this is when one should better listen; this works in the same way with memories. More autonomously, I can try to understand the other by searching for a time in the past when I had a similar point of view as the one of the person - the way this person conceptualizes her experience from this point of view may appear clearly. Furthermore when \mathcal{I} write down a memory, \mathcal{I} can also complete it with what I would like to say to the person; as \mathcal{I} recollect the written conversation, it might replace the old one in the mental memory, as if it happened in the past.

When I look into my personal history, it appears that what seems to be called '*arrogance*' has been central all along; for this reason I have for a long time thought about what this word means.

From the reflection I had, arrogance is structurally related to the conceptualization of the structure of a human society by itself, which includes in particular the set of positions that individuals may take formally in this society, often hierarchical - where the hierarchy reflects, sometimes silently, the relative authority that individuals in different positions have on each other. This conceptualization is blind to the reasons which lead individuals to adopt a certain position - whether it is out of choice or through mechanisms designed for selection - these reasons can actually be more related to the psychological effects of the structure's conceptualization rather than the actual existence implied by the position that the person adopts. Arrogance is then - at least in the eye of the one who judges - a disrespect of this conceptualization of the social structure, stepping out of one's position.

Whatever the actual reason for so doing is, the way it is perceived by others may vary, according to the *location* - in the hierarchy - of this position. The higher the position is, the more this step outside may be perceived as rooted in the mistaken identification of the person's own value with the value granted to the position: because \mathcal{I} hold this position, \mathcal{I} have value, thus whatever \mathcal{I} shall do has value as well - in other words it is a defiance of my human limitation. The lower the position, the more the step outside is interpreted as taking a position without the effort necessary to get it; in other words it is also an attempt against the *reason* underlying the organization of society. Of course the perception of how low is the position of the other is relative to the point of view of the one who judges.

It seems pretty clear to me that the judgment of arrogance is subject to conceptual distortion and simplification - such as the phenomenon of idealization - hiding a more intricate reality. In particular the conception of the social hierarchy may induce a (negative) feeling of inferiority compared to the ones who hold a higher position in this hierarchy: this feeling is mechanically compensated via the projection on them of some faults, especially when the concept of such fault fits naturally the conceptualization of the behavior of the other. In his *Éloge de l'arrogance*, Philippe Vilain [Vilain] mentions as an example of arrogance artists who dabble into other - radically different - forms of art than the one they were trained for.

I believe that it is natural to think that the consecration in this one makes them believe that they are able to make similar achievements in other arts without effort. I can attest in my own way that this is not systematically the case: initially the interest I had in other disciplines than my own - mathematics - was motivated mainly by the idea of confronting the understanding I had of the learning process from my experience in mathematics to the reality of other disciplines - a motivation that I never had the occasion to expose and defend against the judgment I sensed in others. Along the way I unveiled some unexpected aspect of intellectual matter: its categorization into disciplines, although useful, is entirely arbitrary; as a matter of fact there is a lot more 'in between' these disciplines left unexplored.

Often times a judgment of arrogance only instantiates an *idealization* of the social structure by itself which projects, through the collective discourse, a negative image onto persons who point out a necessity subversion of the values rooting the current way the society is conceptualized and organized. Unfortunately, because this negative image is often faithful to what is straightforwardly visible of the person in question, they are not listened to and the idealization is stabilized. In order for the social structure to keep moving towards an optimum of efficiency relatively to its purpose, it is necessary to build tools for segregating mentally the actual concep-

tual content of the discourse of these persons have (which distorted by the idealizing collective discourse) from the negative image that is projected onto them.

Furthermore, from the point of view of social organization, although it seems reasonable to impose a form of effort to the ones who are going to hold a position which is essential for the social structure, the conception of this effort is often too simple and in particular blind to its nature: should it consist in following the authority of persons who hold a higher position [despite other inclinations], or the natural authority of a close relationship to what the existence in this position should consist in [despite other possibilities] ?

The notion of arrogance seems to depend on what notion of effort one chooses to believe in.

————— Arrogance and freedom —————

Philippe Vilain also discusses the rather common sense statement that arrogance is attractive. This statement may appear paradoxical if one thinks about the negative aspects of arrogance, which I think are part of the designation only for the reason that they are instantiated in the persons that are designated as arrogant. It makes more sense if one thinks about the fact that arrogance consists in *freedom* from social normalization, which makes the person who is arrogant conceptualized pre-consciously as a vector freedom. One may be attracted to persons who instantiate it before being attracted to arrogance itself. I think that this conception can explain other forms of attraction - which may be catalyzed by indifference for instance, as indifference instantiates the concept of independence, autonomy and freedom.

Once I have dug into the gaps which separates intellectual disciplines, discovering unexpected freedom - because of its richness, and in fact its invisibility-, my main preoccupation was to keep contact with it, keeping a form of originality, which is only the manifestation of this world on myself. This led me to reject any form of intellectual authority and to rely only on introspection in order to understand *the* world and decide of my intellectual path. With time I realized the following: explaining a point of view which results from an entirely original path takes an exhausting amount of effort (myth of Κασσάνδρα); this effort is rarely rewarded, falling into the simplification of the notion of effort and merit held in the idealization of the social structure by itself; this feels frustrating to see that simplification ultimately shortens the creation of meaning in intellectual research by stiffening a conceptualization of the world that is ultimately meant to change - as it is only a step towards a more accurate understanding of the world. This stiffened conceptualization *is* the matrix:

"The Matrix is everywhere. It is all around us. Even now, in this very room. You can see it when you look out your window or when you turn on your television. You can feel it when you go to work, when you go to church, when you pay your taxes. It is the world that has been pulled over your eyes to blind you from the truth." - **Morpheus**

The stiffening itself results from beliefs on *information*, in particular the idea that it is invariant by general manipulation.

One may say that the notion of effort that is rewarded by the academic structure is related to directions of thinking providing answers to questions for which they are awaited for. What about answers which may be useful, even though the others were not even expecting them ? It is after I realized how blind I was to what is there accessible in principle that I was driven to phenomenological meta-reflection on my research, along with a thirst of making what *visible* is invisible, finding along the way answers to questions that no one has formulated. This is how I found how blind the social structure is to the reality. I wanted to prove to the mathematical world

how mathematical richness can appear from other points of view on the world - and ultimately how any point of view contains more richness than one is able to see from the outside.

The freedom I grasped with my own intellectual hands manifested itself in the relationships that I had with the ones who were supposed, according to the encoding of the social structure, to direct me into a research that can be located according to a grid which emanates from the social structure itself; I conceived this partially as a way to discover ideas which were novel for me, but also as a force driving me away from a deeper purpose that has formed itself in me beforehand. As a matter of fact I was not consciously construction this conception but rather reacted intuitively, and because of this the memory of this reaction has transformed itself as what I called above *recurrent negative memory*, even more so because I characterized this reaction later as '*arrongance*'. With time I unknotted this conception into the one of a resistance against a certain stiffened view of the world and *for a more intimate* intellectual relation with this world.

"Very little is needed to make a happy life; it is all within yourself in your way of thinking." -
Marcus Aurelius (Meditations)

I would add: in the introspective exploration of your way of thinking, its structure, its determination, its variations and the relation between its various components (emotional, intellectual, attentional, etc).

I also understood that the hierarchical structure - of social but also symbolic nature - in the society of mathematicians might be conceived more accurately, rather than rewarding the efforts of mathematicians in the quest of truth, as acting on the mind of young mathematicians, who have thirst for recognition and intellectual excitement, in order to collect and display human resources according to what has been decided to be of interest by the hierarchical core - which does not necessarily coincide with the wider collective interest.

This world - which at the beginning, just like A.Grothendieck, I *idealized*, thinking in particular that in this world wonder was enough to provide grounds for research - does not seem to differ so much from the *Brave new world* of A.Huxley. The brilliant school where I studied - in which I entered because I idealized it - does appear to me now more like a factory encapsulating in students, who were trained for this, brilliant projects already designed for them before they arrive, rather than forming brilliant *minds*. When I was a student there I was asked whether I would like to do: mathematics ? dynamical systems ? philosophy of mathematics ? - the whole course work has consisted in the end in finding an optimal matching between students and projects [as many boxes to enter into]. No, I would like to *think*. Unfortunately for me, I did not know at this time that this was the right word. I responded, but not with words. In the end I hold no regrets: I only had to suffer the difficult consequences on my mind of a choice that my instinct led me to do - ultimately these are the consequences of the social structure.

————— **Isolation from instantiations of authority** —————

The idea of an *intimate* intellectual relation with the world implies that \mathcal{I} am the only one that it concerns, for the reason that I am the only one on whom the form of this relation has *inescapably* an effect. However this does not prevent authority to manifest itself, directly or indirectly, even after deciding that \mathcal{I} am not the position \mathcal{I} hold in the social structure. As a matter of fact, I have noticed that for a long time, in the conceptualization of my experience, the words uttered by other persons often acted as authoritative statements - as if everyone else than me had silent authority on what I should do - that I would subsequently and unconsciously attempt to follow, feeling frustrated when I could not until I realized this and broke this influence by making my choices '*randomly*' - only according to a more fundamental and yet unclear volition.

This was a fundamental step in understanding how the conceptualization of the world that one has in mind can vary from a person to another, as well as in time - now, every time someone advises me on anything I meticulously submit it to an inner systematic conceptualization of the world, which I have constructed apart from it, and then decide if I should or not follow this advice, this whether the person in question holds a '*legitimate*' position of authority or not.

Even after this realization though, the emotional pressure of indirect authority stayed, sometimes under the form of direct judgment coming from the others and sometimes under the form of an indirect one - judgment which may appear as such only in my own conceptualization of what the others say. For some time I tried to throw out there, in casual discussions, the concerns I had about the pernicious effects of the social structure that I have described above. I have been surprised how frequently and straightforwardly these concerns were responded with the defense of the *reason* behind the social organization; often times this defense was, I believed, based on the premise of good will behind this organization, for the argumentation which followed was not so evident than what it seemed to be meant to be. This, for me, revealed a lack of reflection about this subject, a lack which may explained by the fact that the defense of social organization coincides, for the ones who hold a a relatively high position (at least for their own standard), with the defense of them holding this position - without imperious necessity of this reflection, it is thus prevented by the will to preserve the subsequent comfortable thoughts in line with the social organization. A part of this defense is the accusation - sometimes implicit - of arrogance of the one who questions.

Naturally, like others, I yielded because of this less importance to relationships - sometimes cutting them off - with persons in whose eyes I have perceived judgment; in fact when I think about it, I already had this tendency to isolate myself from the others - which may explain why I am interested in occupations for which I do not need others (mathematics, reading, writing, ...).

————— **Instrumentalization of arrogance** —————

After some time I came to conceive my instinctive arrogance as an instrument of knowledge - one could think it is an idealization of what it really is, but I certainly liked this thought for that it is opposed to the conventional way of thinking about it. Arrogance manifests itself in taking the freedom of speech without manifesting in one's inquiry the distance in the conceptualized social hierarchy of one's position relatively to the other's. When doing so, the danger is for me to realize through the subsequent discussion a situation of actual inferiority - what I inquired is evidently false, or what I implicitly stated is wrong - which silently justifies a reaction towards me taking a position of equality. Whether I choose, because of this, to take as subsequently justified the authority of the other - and to follow effectively this authority - or not - for the local authority of the other does not imply the authority that inscribed in the conceptualized social structure - the outcome is to have learned something which I might have not learned if I kept silent. Furthermore, I have observed that the more the other cares about instancing in the discussion the position of authority that this person has in the conceptualized social hierarchy, the more this person will take time to prove me wrong - and thus sometimes providing me with as much conceptual and factual knowledge, at least a better conception of this person's point of view on the world.

————— **The influence of the social position on self-perception** —————

This instrumentalization of arrogance has materialized in my mind the distancing of myself from the authority of others, initially omnipresent in my conceptualization of the words and

actions of these others, and as well in the common conceptualization of social hierarchical structures. This made visible to me my own movement towards (cognitive) isolation. The effect of such isolation, I have observed it in others: the idealization of oneself and in particular one's own ideas and vision of the world - for isolation implies the possibility of the impossibility in principle of the other to transcendently negate this vision of the world (\mathcal{I} do not pay enough attention to critics because they deviate too much of my mind's routine, or even deny the ability of the others to understand well enough and criticize properly my ideas). *How can I preserve myself from this ?*

On the other hand, I know for a fact that self-idealization is not foreign to having a social position, for I have seen in myself a distortion of my self-image that I unconsciously forced to fit the 'high' position - of course relatively to the perception of the world I had before then - that I acquired and with which I identified myself - as a matter of fact I believe that desiring a high social position and the recognition which comes with it *is* the desire of materializing one's own narcissism. Remembering myself manifesting this distortion to others, in order to appear completely in agreement to what I conceived what a person holding such position should appear, had in fact triggered in me recurrent negative memories - where I would say that the negative emotion involved in it is the shame of duplicity regarding the reality, even if with time this distortion appeared to me as rather mild. Ultimately though, the cause of this has been and is the image that the social hierarchy projects on the ones at the 'bottom'. In fact, part of me willed to prove, at this time, in the very act of climbing the social ladder in the way it is conceptualized, its mismatch with the reality; and I wanted my own story to tell this.

———— The authority of God ————

Is there a form of authority which would prevent 'me' from absorbing my world ? When I think about it, I would say that I could accept the authority of someone who would be able to recognize absolutely the infinity of the real which lies beyond her or his own sight and knowledge; who does not have any need to exercise his or her authority on others; someone whose self mastery and subsequent infinite acceptance would impose authority by themselves - in the same way as mathematical truth, not mathematicians, does.

For some time I found the notion of *sin* (in Christianity) of purely intellectual interest; these days I think of it also as a useful concept, in the following form: a *sin* is an action caused from within which initiates a causal chain ending with negative retro-action on the one who acted. Often times the subject is not aware of this causal chain and does not relate the action to its ultimate consequences; because of this, when the action comes with immediate pleasure, the memory of this pleasure recalls the action, together with its negative consequences. If one calls *hell* a mental *place* defined by a phenomenal property - to be in it *is* for my experience of the world to satisfy this property - here being the constant recurrence of negative emotions, then it makes sense to say that sin sends us closer to hell.

Keeping this concept in mind makes its instanciations in me visible to *me*, and this visibility in turn enables me to act on these instanciations. However I believe that no other human being can tell me which ones of my actions are sins and which ones are not - for they may only be *cultural* particularities (in a wide sense) that others might not understand. On the matter of sin, \mathcal{I} can only rely on the authority of *God* - where by this word I mean what or whom rules the existence of the world, including the content of my (phenomenal) experience. The reason for this is that the understanding of sin involves irreducibly the content of an experience that I am the only one to have - what God manifests in me. Because of this it should be clear that it would be foolish to be arrogant against God, in the sense of refusing 'his' authority.

However under no circumstances should one confuse the authority of God with the authority of the ones who claim to represent 'him'; as a matter of fact, the sacred texts may be seen as the support for learning how to hear the words of God - which are in no case identical to the written words of the sacred texts or of the ones who interpret them. Refusing the authority of others who devoted their public existence to find the truth of God may be seen as a form of arrogance, but this is truly the contrary. Legalism is real arrogance, for it is dispositionment of oneself relatively to others and to God, for the legalist hides the words of God with the ones of human law.

"Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God. For many false prophets have gone out into the world" - **1 John 4:1**.

But arrogant against God is also the one who refuses to hear (not to follow blindly !) the opinion of the other by suspicion of arrogance, or on the basis of a superficial conceptualization of the other; and also a sinner, because this is blinding oneself to the richness of the world, to other possible ways to think and experience. In order to counter this, I think it might be good to spend at least as much time to listen as to talk.

Ultimately it is also arrogant against God to accuse the other of arrogance, what I would be right here if I was not solely point out, for my own purpose, to abstract 'others' I would like not to be. Of the actual others, I can only try to understand.

————— **Furthermore** —————

In our culture, the myth of *Oedipus* is often taken as representation of a universal psychological structure, in which the child comes to refuse the authority of the father, which acts as a constraint on the child's desires. This refusal of authority is an act of taking freedom. However, in fact, the child builds later his or her existence *over* a resentment towards the authority, which is only a partial conceptualization of the reality, and because it is not considered as a construction, becomes a hidden initial *datum* of the existence. Although it is *natural*, this relation to the conceptualization of the world could be seen as an *easy* way - despite the extent of its consequences - to which may be opposed the reconceptualization via the adoption of another point of view (what forgiveness teaches but is not reduced to it) - relatively to the construction itself of a conceptualization - on experience.

Despite the manifest descriptive power of the myth, it is probably only *actually* universal rather than *absolutely* so; but because it is considered as such, it is self-recreated through time as a universal one. It would be wrong though to consider it to be an illusion: it is an artifact of language meant to describes a reality, but because it 'invades' the mind, it makes one forget alternative realities. It is not because I see walls everywhere I look that there is no hope.

I would also like to point out that the axiomatization of human psychology in terms of elementary transcendental mechanism provides a general way to conceive the set of combinatorial possibilities within which the actual forms of the mind fall - in particular the ways emotion is dealt with in our culture.

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