

THE TILTED "X" - ESSAY ON POSTMODERNISM

by Al Razutis

First Performance on December 19, 1986 at The Funnel, Toronto, Canada  
Amended and performed on May 10, 1987 at Pacific Cinematheque, Vancouver, Canada

The exhibitor agrees to undertake this performance piece in a manner consistent with the original themes with minor modifications and improvisations.

SET: Speaker's podium, lit with garish colors and framed (torso and head) area in which the speaker situates himself/herself. Fresnel lens is optional as "TV" magnifying/framing device. Film projection/slide projection screen is prominent; audio system for speaker is processed through synthesizer (ideally Yamaha SPX-90 with preset voice effects). Speaker wears clothing over torso only and utilizes dildo as slide pointer.

MATERIALS SUPPLIED: 16mm film (15 min. silent), 35mm slides, text and pointer.

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MONOLOGUE

(Professorial entrance with thesis paper; normal voice)

I WISH TO THANK THE HOST INSTITUTION FOR THE OPPORTUNITY TO PRESENT A WORLD PREMIERE OF MY NEW ILLUSTRATED LECTURE ENTITLED "THE TILTED X - AN ESSAY ON POSTMODERNISM" WITH RESEARCH WORK FUNDED BY THE SOCIETY FOR CRITICAL DISMEMBERMENT OF OUTDATED THEORIES AND I WOULD ALSO LIKE TO THANK FREDERIC JAMESON AND ARTHUR KROKER FROM WHOM I SHALL AT TIMES QUOTE UNQUOTE SINCE THESE AUTHORS AS WELL AS MY HOST FIGURE PROMINENTLY IN COMMEMORATING THE DEATH, I REPEAT, DEATH, OF MODERNISM AND OF COURSE THE RISING PROBLEMATIC OF POSTMODERNISM, A PROBLEMATIC TYPIFIED BY AN EVER INCREASING CONFUSION AS EACH VERSION IS REVISED AND ENLARGED AS A GROWING INTERTEXTUAL POTENCY...

(grasping pointer)

A KEY CONCEPT IN OUR RAPIDLY DEVELOPING SEMIOTIC, THIS POTENCY, ONCE ASSIGNED TO THE PATERNAL LOGOCENTRIC TUTOR SIGNIFIER IN SEARCH OF THE NIETZSCHIAN WILL TO WILL FORTH THE SUPPLE BODY OF DISCOURSE ONCE KNOWN AMONG THE ANCIENTS NOW SADLY DISJUNCT AND DISMEMBERED AS FRAGMENTED NIHILISM... HERE THEN IS THE RUB AS I AM SURE YOU WILL AGREE WITH ME: WE LIVE IN AN AGE OF THE ANUS WHERE SEX WITHOUT SECRETIONS IS NOT ONLY POSSIBLE BUT ACTUAL, AND VARIOUSLY THEORISTS HAVE AGREED WITH ME THAT A PECULIAR TYPE OF HYPER-AESTHETIC AND ITS PRIMITIVISM, ONE BASED ON STIMULATION OF THE HYPER-IMAGING LANDSCAPE, PRIMAL SENSATIONS, KINESIS AND HYPER-ABSTRACTION... YES, THIS IS THE POTLACH GONE POSTMODERN, MYTHOLOGICAL FEAR TURNED RADICAL, THE MEDIASCAPE AS PARASITE ON THE BREAKDOWN IN THE INNER CHECK IN SOCIAL BEHAVIOR, AS THE WILL TO LIQUIDATION UNDERGOES ONE LAST SEDUCTIVE AND PURELY SPECTACULAR CONVULSION... IS THIS CARNIVAL TIME? NO. WE SHALL DEAL WITH THE DRY ANUS OF CULTURE SIMPLY AND DIRECTLY, THROUGH DISCOURSE NOT SUBORDINATION... THIS, THEN, IS MY THEORY, WHICH, I SHALL ILLUSTRATE SHORTLY.

MY STRATEGY IS TO TRACE AN ARCING DISCOURSE VIA WAY OF THE IMMATERIAL ASSUMPTIONS INHERENT IN MODERNISM, VIA MYTH TO MATERIAL, TO THAT VERY SPECTRE OF HISTORY THAT MAY PROVIDE A CLUE, AS IN A DETECTIVE STORY, OF THE WHEREABOUTS OF THE VICTIM, IN THIS CASE KNOWLEDGE AND REASON... AND WHILE THE LISTENER MAY AGREE THAT THE PROBLEMATIC IS LOGOCENTRIC, I WOULD AFFIRM THAT WE ARE NOT IN THE BUSINESS OF REASSERTING THE PRIVILEGED POSITION OF THE PHALLIC BUT RATHER ARE CHARGED WITH THE TASK OF DISCOVERING ITS OTHER, NAMELY DISEMBODIED STATE, ITS ORIFICE AS IT WERE, WHICH HAS COME TO RESEMBLE A BLACK HOLE IN THE ANUS OF POSTMODERNISM. LET ME BEGIN MY ILLUSTRATION.

(run film: crosshair)

WE ARE NEUROTIC LACAN ONCE SAID, AFTER HE COMMITTED FREUD, TO MEMORY; THE SPLIT OF THE SUBJECT, THE SPLIT BETWEEN THE EYE AND THE GAZE HE SAID, YOU NEVER LOOK AT ME FROM THE PLACE I SEE YOU, AND WE OF COURSE CAN INTERPRET THAT TO MEAN CULTURE AS WELL BUT I ASK YOU WHICH CULTURE THEN OR NOW, OR DOES THE FUTURE BECOME MIRRORED IN THE NOW AS WELL. THE ANSWER OF COURSE WILL ELUDE US FOR A MOMENT AND IT NEVER SUFFICES TO IDENTIFY CULTURE AS PURELY EXCREMENTAL. BUT I AM DIGRESSING. THE REPRESENTATION BEFORE YOU IS INTERESTING TO SAY THE LEAST. IT IS A SYMBOLIC REPRESENTATION WE MIGHT AGREE, THAT IS, A SIGNATURE OF A PARTICULAR FILMMAKER, KNOWN TO SOME OF YOU AS "X" NOW CINEMATICALLY TRANSFORMED INTO A FILM, THE "TILTED X". OF COURSE THIS SIGNATURE IS BOTH THE LETTER "X" AND THE MARK "X" AND THE GRAFFITI STROKE "X", A KIND OF PROLIFERATING PERSONAL SYMBOLOGY ET MYTHOLOGY THAT IS INDICATIVE OF THE PRIMAL... SPLIT SUBJECT. YET, HE NEVER LOOKS AT ME FROM THE PLACE I SEE HIM, AND NEITHER DO YOU. IT IS APPARENT I AM SURE TO YOU ALL THAT THIS X IS PRESENTED IN A TILTED FORM, TILTED... SO THAT IT NOW APPEARS AS A CROSSHAIR. I THINK YOU CAN SEE THIS GRAPHICALLY DEMONSTRATED BY TILTING YOUR OWN HEADS APPROXIMATELY 45 DEGREES IN EITHER DIRECTION... SO... WHILE YOU VIEW THIS IMAGE-FILM IN AN UPRIGHT MANNER YOU SHOULD BE MINDFUL OF THE FACT THAT MISRECOGNITION IS TAKING PLACE, MECONNAISSANCE, YES, YOU AND I ARE DECEIVED INTO BELIEVING THAT THE IMAGE IS ACTUALLY A CROSSHAIR, A TARGET FOR FILM FOCUS.

(film focus)

YET, WHAT IS OF PARAMOUNT IMPORTANCE, IS THE SEMIOTIC OF THE IMAGE: THE IDIOLECTICAL SYMBOL "X", THE FILMMAKERS SIGNATURE IS TRANSFORMED INTO AN INDEX OF THE APPARATUS SIMPLY BY REPOSITIONING THE IMAGE AND THIS TRANSFORMATION HAS OCCURED A PRIORI, THUS COMPLETING THE DECEPTION.

IN A SO6I0-HISTORICAL CONTEXT OF COURSE, MOST WOULD AGREE THAT THIS MODERNIST GESTURE (WHERE THE PURE ESSENCE OF THE MEDIUM OF FILM, THAT IS, THE ABILITY OF PHOTOGRAPHIC MOTION PICTURES TO DEPICT AN IMAGE IN FOCUS AND FLICKER FREE IS FOREGROUNDED) IS STRATEGICALLY PLACED TO DENY THE CAUSALITY OF ITS OWN OPERATING PRINCIPLES. THIS OF COURSE IS DEBATABLE, BUT AS WE COMPOUND THE PROBLEM, RUN SLIDES PLEASE...

(run slides -- superimposed over film)

WE CAN SEE THAT BY INTRODUCING OTHER GRAPHIC AND SPACIAL CONCERNS, ARISING IN OTHER MEDIUMS, CONCERNS ALL INTERSECTING AS SIMULATION... A PURE SCREEN, FOR ALL THE NETWORKS OF INFLUENCE, SAID BAUDRILLARD, AWASH IN A SEA OF PRIVATE LANGUAGES, ALL SIMULATION RESULTS FROM THE COMPOUNDING OF THE INITIAL MISRECOGNITION.

HERE, AS WE CAN OBSERVE, THE INTERTEXTUAL RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN HIM AND THEM, THAT IS BETWEEN THIS AND THAT, OR IT AND OTHER, YES, BETWEEN MODERNISM ARISING FROM PERSONAL MYTHOS AND POSTMODERNISM AWASH IN A SEA OF INFLUENCES ARISES ON THE OCCASION OF ERASURE... PLEASE NOTE THIS POINT, ERASURE, OF HISTORY AND AUTHORSHIP, WHERE EVERYTHING IS SUPERIMPOSED ON HIS NAME, FOR EXAMPLE, IF I WERE TO CLAIM THIS WORK AS MY OWN, I APPROPRIATE IT ALL, ITS MINE...

(voice slowly changing)

A CLEVER PLOY, ONE THAT HAS ESCAPED MUCH CRITICAL ATTENTION UNTIL NOW. YES, OBSERVE HOW THE FILMMAKER CLEVERLY CONSTRUCTS THE THEORETICAL SUBSTATE THAT IMPLICATES NEGATION, DENIAL, OR WHAT FREUD TERMED THE "VERNEINUNG" INTO AN AFFIRMATION OF THE PATERNAL FUNCTION, THE PHALLUS, AND OF COURSE POTENCY. HERE, FREUD AND LACAN, AS MY UNIVERSITY COLLEAGUES WILL AGREE, ARE INSTRUCTIVE, HERE THE LETTER "X" STANDS SIMULTANEOUSLY FOR DENIAL, SELF EFFACEMENT AND NEGATION, HERE, TO CITE FREUD, SUBJECT MATTER OF A REPRESSED IMAGE CAN MAKE ITS WAY INTO OUR CONSCIOUSNESS ON CONDITION THAT IT IS DENIED... PLAGIARISM, THEREFORE, BECOMES ACCEPTABLE ONLY IF IT IS DENIED AND REPRESSED...

THIS REPRESSION BRINGS ON AN UNCONSCIOUS IDENTIFICATION WITH THE PHALLUS (the pointer is animated), THAT IS, THE PATERNAL NAME OF THE FATHER WHICH IS CHARACTERIZED IN CINEMA AS THE CINEMATIC APPARATUS ITSELF. THIS THESIS IS CENTRAL TO THE WORK OF CHRISTIAN METZ AND THE PSYCHOANALYTIC SEMIOTICS OF CINEMA AND NOWHERE IS IT MORE GRAPHICALLY DEMONSTRATED THAN IN THIS CASE WHERE WE HAVE THE CROSSHAIR, THE MOST BASIC OF CINEMATIC TECHNICAL SIGNIFIERS, ACTING AS A KIND OF INDEX FOR THE ABSORPTION OF ALL IMAGES, A REFERENCE AND LOCUS ORIGINATING FROM THE FILMMAKERS PRIVATE MYTHOS NOW TRANSFORMED INTO A MEDIASCAPE OF METALINGUISTIC PROPORTIONS SUGGESTING THAT VERY HYPER-IMAGING LANDSCAPE WHICH REDUCES TO HYPER-ABSTRACTION BUT IN REALITY IS A KIND OF PARASITE, AS I PREVIOUSLY CITED KROKER, ON THE BREAKDOWN IN THE INNER CHECK OF SOCIAL BEHAVIOR. IS THIS THEN THE WILL TO LIQUIDATION, OR IS THIS CARNIVAL TIME? LET US NOT BE DECEIVED, THE PHALLUS IS NOT THE PENIS.

(voice changes)

YET, THAT WHICH KROKER CALLS THE EXCREMENTAL CULTURE, WHERE COITUS IS THE PARODY OF CRIME AND BATAILLE'S PINEAL EYE, DETACHING ITSELF FROM THE HORIZONTAL SYSTEM OF NORMAL OCULAR VISION APPEARS IN A KIND OF NIMBUS OF TEARS... AND I SENSE, AS YOU MUST, A SICKENING DESPAIR OF CONFUSION, A VERTIGO...

IT IS A PORTMODERN WILL TO NOTHINGNESS I AM SURE...

ESTHETICIZED RECOMMODIFICATION...

SEX WITHOUT SECRETIONS...

STOLEN SPEECH...

ART, LINKING ARTIST TO ITS OWN HISTORY, IN ITS OWN PROCESS OF ALIENATION, PROCEEDING ONWARD TO A HISTORY OF ITS OWN...

TO COLLAPSE FINALLY UNDER ITS OWN WEIGHT...

A BLACK HOLE WHICH ENGULFS THE SOCIAL...

STOLEN SPEECH WHERE CLASSIC DISCOURSES ARE EFFECTED

WITH THE RESULT THAT GENRE AND CATEGORY COLLAPSE INTO ONE KIND OF GIANT MUSH...

EXCUSE ME...

(voices change more rapidly)

HERE COME'S EVERYBODY SAID JOYCE...

IN THE FUTURE EVERYONE WILL BE FAMOUS FOR 15 MINUTES, SAID WARHOL...

ALL THAT IS LEFT IS TO IMITATE DEAD STYLES  
TO SPEAK THROUGH THE MASKS AND WITH THE VOICES  
OF THE STYLES IN THE IMAGINARY MUSEUM, SAID JAMESON

THE OLDER BOURGEOIS INDIVIDUAL SUBJECT NO LONGER EXISTS,  
WHAT ABOUT YOU AND I? WHAT THEN? IS THE ALTERNATIVE DEATH?

THE DEAD WEIGHS LIKE A NIGHTMARE ON THE BRAINS OF THE LIVING  
AND THEY'VE ALREADY BEEN INVENTED AND DIED...

YES, ART HAS ALREADY BEEN INVENTED ALONG WITH ITS AESTHETICS AND DIED,  
BURRIED AS HYPER-AESTHETICS, THIS SIMULACRUM OF SHATTERED MIRRORS  
THIS IMAGE LANDSCAPE THIS BLACK HOLE WHICH ENGULFS...

YOU NEVER LOOK AT ME FROM THE PLACE I SEE YOU, YET NOW THIS QUESTION IS  
SECONDARY, THE PHALLUS CANNOT EVER FIND THE BODY FROM WHICH, TO WHICH,  
UPON WHICH CORPUS... YES, THE FAILURE, OUR FAILURE, THE IMPRISONMENT IN THE PAST...

ALL THAT IS LEFT IS TO IMITATE DEAD STYLES  
AND IT WEIGHS LIKE A NIGHTMARE,

THIS TRULY IS PATHOS. ALL THAT IS LEFT. IMITATE. STOLEN. SPEECH.

IMPRISONED. FAILURE.

I MUST SAY, I DIDN'T THINK IT WOULD COME TO THIS. MY CONCLUSION WAS QUITE DIFFERENT.  
BUT NOW, SEEING THE IMPLICATIONS OF THAT WHICH IS BEFORE ME.  
IT IS TRULY.

THE ANUS.