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Making the created pass into the uncreated.

A passing to the act; an act of passage.

So many things must one overlook in order to "act" ¹!

1/ Decreation

To address the question of the action of art, I shall begin by looking at the concept of decreation as put forward by Simone Weil. I quote:

Decreation: to make something created pass into the uncreated.

Destruction: to make something created pass into nothingness. A blameworthy substitute for decreation. ²

Creation: good broken up into pieces and scattered throughout evil.

Evil is limitless but it is not infinite.

Only the infinite limits the limitless.

We shall explore the nature of this concept so as to relate it to art and its contemporary modalities through the digital and the Internet, with copyleft as its driving force.

"Decreation: making something created pass into the uncreated": it concerns, therefore, a shift. This act is the creation of a passage rather than of a tangible object; or to be more precise, the act renders a tangible object -since the intention is not to deny the object as it is- one that takes a tangent, changes, in which something occurs that exceeds its contours. It is not an end point; it is a starting point. The created object is unstable in its completion. It is evolving towards its completion; its way of being is a possible infinity.

Simone Weil ponders the ethical quality of our actions and our creations. It is an examination of the very nature of action in relation to what is already here, created: Creation (with a capital 'c'); and in relation to what one does with it, what one makes on earth; in other words, what one does with one's life and what purpose one gives to it. Which way is right, and which action? What is doing right, doing good, doing best what can be done? If the act of creation is unsatisfactory, since it is "the good broken up into pieces and scattered throughout evil", then the act of destruction, which could be a critical, active and even pertinent stance with regard to creation (so much has it become gratifying

¹ P. VALERY, *Tel quel, Choses tues, Œuvres II*, Gallimard, La Pléiade, p. 503.

² S. WEIL, *La pesanteur et la grâce*, Plon, Agora, 1947 et 1988, p. 81.

to be labelled an “iconoclast”) is none the more so. Destruction is “to make something created pass into nothingness. A blameworthy substitute for decreation.”

What is clear to us is that decreation is not destruction, which makes the created pass into nothingness. Decreation makes the created pass into the uncreated. “Uncreated” does not imply the obliteration of the created. It is its infinite future, into infinity. One might argue that the uncreated is a mode of the created, when not fixed in what seems to be its completion, its final stage. Such a completion could be formally satisfactory in esthetic terms, but unsatisfactory in terms of art, which cannot content itself with formalism alone. Doing something “for the sake of form” in fact obscures what a form truly is: quite the opposite of a formality.

2/ The es-ethics of decreation

For if esthetics is that which is perceived by the senses, it cannot halt at the surface of the perceptible. The surface of the skin, of the retina; all our surfaces that act as interfaces between us and all that we come into contact with. Esthetics is a vehicle of perception for grasping the imperceptible and, in this way, opening up to that which goes beyond the formalism of a form fixed solely in its external appearance. It is for this reason that esthetics must be understood as “es-ethics”³; in other words, an ethical form that is an action of the form and which, through beauty, through traversing it, will reveal the potential to be right and truthful, without this being concluded in a definitive affirmation. Es-ethics is an intimate and unstable awareness of this dimension which, not halting at the surface of the senses - common-sense included – dives into the skin of an object, its corpus, its substance, to access its heart - its central core - which is the engine for real action.

When Andy Warhol states, “If you want to know all about Andy Warhol, just look at the surface: of my paintings, and films and me, and there I am. There’s nothing behind it,”⁴ it is the very negation of such an es-ethic possibility. A negation of what might exist beyond the image; negation of the possibility of a passage from the created to uncreated. This iconoclastic stance might reveal a satisfaction at having saved face - the proof being the artist’s success - but as far as art is concerned, it is a dead end, for esthetics comes to be a social ritual, a strictly bureaucratic formality, where the form is merely façade. To halt at the surface is to not recognize that the skin is not an end in itself, but rather the visible interface of the soul.

It's modern civilization, this godless civilization, that makes men attach such

3 Cf. Our thesis, *Le copyleft appliqué à la création hors logiciel. Une reformulation des données culturelles ?* <http://antoinemoreau.org/index.php?cat=these> Ainsi que P. AUDI, *Créer, Introduction à l'esthétique*, Verdier, 2010.

4 <https://warholandy.wordpress.com/> (page visited 30/03/16).

*importance to their own skins. One's skin is the only thing that counts now. The only certain, tangible, undeniable thing is one's skin. It's the only thing we possess, the only thing that's our own. The most mortal thing in the world! Only the soul is immortal, alas! But what does the soul count for now? One's skin is the only thing that counts. Everything is made of human skin. Men no longer fight for honor, freedom and justice. They fight for their skins [...]*⁵.

Let's take up again our examination of decreation with Simone Weil. After having stated that creation is "good broken up into pieces and scattered throughout evil," she goes on to specify, "Evil is limitless but it is not infinite. Only the infinite limits the limitless." Just as decreation is not destruction, the infinite referred to by the passing to the act of created to uncreated is not an infinite beyond reach. The infinite is not unlimited. Via the infinite, decreation seeks to confine our unbounded fascination with evil, to limit the unlimited, which gives end to everything.

Evil is licence and that is why it is monotonous: everything has to be drawn from ourselves. But it is not given to man to create, so it is a bad attempt to imitate God. Not to recognize and accept this impossibility of creating is the source of many an error. We are obliged to imitate the act of creation, and there are two possible imitations—the one real and the other apparent—preserving and destroying.

*There is no trace of 'I' in the act of preserving. There is in that of destroying. The 'I' leaves its mark on the world as it destroys.*⁶.

Hence when I create, I in fact merely imitate the act of creating. I can only act to preserve, to look after, that which has already been created, is already here, is "ready-made."⁷ Otherwise, I resort to destruction since creation is impossible ("it is not given to man to create, [so] it is a bad attempt to imitate God.") If decreation is "to make something created pass into the uncreated," then uncreation thus obtained is in accordance with the original state of Creation, the gaping void from where everything emerges, the initial chaos at the time of the world's invention: "And so, first of all, Chaos came to be, then broad-breasted Earth,"⁸ according to Hesiod's account, in which "Chaos" or "gap" are also translated as "Void, Chasm, Abyss, Gape, Cleft."⁹ This chaotic gap of the original creation condemns to

5 MALAPARTE, *La peau*, Gallimard, Folio, p. 172.

6 S. WEIL, *La pesanteur et la grâce*, op. cit. p. 130, 131.

7 "Objet usuel promu à la dignité d'objet d'art par le simple choix de l'artiste", Article "Ready Made", *Dictionnaire abrégé du surréalisme*, cited in M. DUCHAMP, *Duchamp du Signe*, Flammarion, p. 49, note 3.

8 HÉSIODE, *Théogonie Les Travaux et les Jours, Hymnes homériques*, Éditions de J.-L. Backès, Gallimard, Folio classique, 2001. p. 40.

9 M. DESGRANGES, *Encore Hésiode, et un fichu chaos ; du vide au plein ; le rire des haruspices*.
<http://www.lesbelleslettres.com/info/?fa=text75> (page visited 02/03/16).

failure all tangible attempts at human creation as man cannot, in seeking to create, do other than destroy the movement of creation in which he is immersed. And it is through decreation - through withdrawal from the act of creation - that it is possible to be understood, and included, in the Creator's Creation.

This withdrawal by the creature¹⁰ from the creation act, as Simone Weil imagines it, implies the disappearing of its "I", in order that the pre-existing Creation come into view.

*May I disappear in order that those things that I see may become perfect in their beauty from the very fact that they are no longer things that I see.*¹¹

To see a landscape as it is when I am not there....

*When I am in any place, I disturb the silence of heaven and earth by my breathing and the beating of my heart.*¹²

This withdrawal from creation does not signify a negation of human agency. It is a question of reformulation, a return to form, a "re-drawing"; a process in the negative which is neither its negation, nor its first and positive affirmation. It can be argued that decreation today enables the real presence of art after it becomes "a thing of the past."¹³ We shall now look at how, and under what conditions.

3/ Passing to the act of decreation. A new era of "doing".

Preserving the Creation created by the Creator – tending to it, observing it, making sense of it within one's way of life – designates decreation as an act that is radically engaged in the very reality of the act of creation. It takes part in Creation. "Taking part" must be understood as devoid of any taking, devoid of any desire to take, to have power or to dominate. Decreation makes sense of Creation "all science transcending"¹⁴, without qualities of its own. The artist cannot appropriate for himself the position of creator, but rather that of observer, or let us say of the "viewer" who makes the picture.¹⁵ Decreation is able, therefore, to accommodate the creative activism¹⁶ of those artists threatened with idleness.

10 In other words, by all the "creators" thereby uniting with the Creator.

11 S. WEIL, *op. cit.*, p. 94.

12 S. WEIL, *idem*, p. 95.

13 HEGEL, *Esthétique*, textes choisis par Claude Khodoss, PUF, 2004, p. 23.

14 J. DE LA CROIX, "Couplets du même, faits sur une extase de très haute contemplation", Thérèse d'Avila, Jean de la Croix, *Œuvres*, trad. Jean Ancet, Gallimard, La Pléiade, 1997, 2012, p.879

15 M. DUCHAMP, *Duchamp Du signe, écrits*, Flammarion, 1975, p. 247.

16 S. LEMOINE et S. OUARDI, *Artivisme. Art, action politique et résistance culturelle*, Alternatives, 2010.

Let us consider how the digital and the Internet are in keeping with the process of decreation. A few years ago, when I was asked about art and the internet, I answered, that “the artwork is the network.”¹⁷ This artwork, a “network of networks,” is a multimedia and transmedia one, at the centre of all our activities, both online and offline; it is a decentralized centre made from a substance as volatile as it is weighty (the immaterial holds on by the weight of the machines). This “genius” work¹⁸ where talent evaporates is of the upmost mediocrity: “mediocrity” is its original sense, meaning that which is located in the middle ground, neither too high nor too low, just right, historically right. The work exists, and we are the workers.

Yet, we must concede that this constitutes an act of faith in the art achievable. It establishes the procedural reality of what is at work today, without accepting the market as sole criteria for attributing a value to art. This faith in the art possible today (once it has become a “thing of the past”) seeks the pursuit of “the *work of Art*,” made through the “work at work” that is the Internet, including its non- digital beyond¹⁹. We are neither idle, nor are we the masters of works. We are put to work by decreation that passes through technical means, and by a reality that has materialized and become popularised through the digital and its reticular way of transporting. This act of faith in “the work at work of art” is made through connecting the mechanical and the mystical.

Man will only rise above earthly things if a powerful equipment supplies him with the requisite fulcrum. He must use matter as a support if he wants to get away from matter. In other words, the mystical summons up the mechanical [...]

We must add that the body, now larger, calls for a bigger soul, and that mechanism should mean mysticism. The origins of the process of mechanization are indeed more mystical than we might imagine. Machinery will find its true vocation again, it will render services in proportion to its power, only if mankind, which it has bowed still lower to the earth, can succeed, through it, in standing erect and looking heavenwards.²⁰

Let us look, then, to this new sky: the new, immaterial and infinite space that is the

17 N. HILLAIRE (editor), *ArtPress, Internet all over*, 1999 (First name in the text erroneous : Alain instead of Antoine).

18 A ference to Robert Filliou. “Filliou considered himself to be a genius without talent, but also believed everyone to carry genius that the exercise of talents prevents him from developing.” Exhibition guide produced by a team of instructors for the Musée d'Art Moderne in Lille, 12/2003, “Robert Filliou, Génie sans Talent”, <http://ekladata.com/WHLLeEflWZIK8WuZ4YxngNxow6is.pdf> (pdf document opened 30/03/16).

19 B. L. de la CHAPELLE “De l'art "post-internet"”, *Zéro Deux* magazine, <http://www.zerodeux.fr/dossiers/de-l-art-post-internet> (page visited 05/04/16).

20 H. BERGSON, *Les deux sources de la morale et de la religion*, PUF, Quadrige, 1988, p. 329 – 331.

Internet, in order to examine its living nature and the objects found within it. We thereby distinguish a principle of creation associated with decreation: copyleft.

4/ Copyleft: a driving force for decreation.

Copyleft is a legal concept resulting from the creation of what is known as “free” software, and is formalized by a licence. The first such free licence was the General Public License, an initiative of the GNU project²¹. It entitles users to study, copy, share and modify software creations, and comes with a fundamental obligation to keep these four rights intact. A work that is “open” in such a way cannot be appropriated in an exclusive manner.

Let us take a prime example of a free, copyleft software from among the most renowned: the operating system Linux. It is of particular interest to us for in 1999 it was awarded the first prize, in the Internet category, at the Ars Electronica digital art festival²² and was recognized as a work of art. For the first time in the history of art, an operating mechanism and piece of software, an object not created by an artist recognised as such, was considered a work of art. To deny the existence of art at work would be to equate the making of objects to a process of creation when in fact, the Internet and the digital are based on an act of decreation. Neither creation, nor destruction, but infinite making that is eternally ending: moving objects adjusted to the very movement of their period of existence, through the cycle of updates.

Wikipedia²³ is another good example of what can be identified as decreation at work. In this free, copyleft-licensed encyclopedia (CC BY-SA²⁴), there is no creation (rather, the gathering of the fruits of existing knowledge), nor destruction (acts of vandalism are quickly dealt with, and erroneous information swiftly corrected.) It is instructive. It is viewed and expanded by invention²⁵, and the state of the world.

After becoming aware of the process of free software creation, and enthused by the ethics behind copyleft, in 2000 I organised a discussion cycle with members of the art and free

21 GNU <http://www.gnu.org> (page visited 05/04/16).

22 “History of Prix Ars Electronica / 1999”, http://www.aec.at/prix_history_en.php?year=1999 and “Linus Torvalds Wins Prix Ars Electronica Golden Nica”, 29 May 1999, http://www.linuxtoday.com/news_story.php3?ltsn=1999-05-29-003-05-PS (pages visited 25/08/10).

23 <https://wikipedia.org> (page visited 05/04/16).

24 Creative Commons Attribution-ShareAlike 4.0 <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/4.0/> (page visited 29/03/16).

25 From the latin *inventor* (discoverer, one who finds out), from *invenire* (find). French Civil Code, Tome III : Different ways of acquiring property. General provisions. Article 716 : “Treasure is anything hidden or buried of which no person can prove its ownership, and which is discovered by chance [...] The inventor of a treasure is he who, by chance, uncovers it.”

software worlds to ascertain if copyleft could be applied to objects other than just software. In the July, with the help of legal experts, the Free Art License was drawn up. The following is an extract from its preamble:

The Free Art License grants the right to freely copy, distribute, and transform creative works without infringing the author's rights. The Free Art License recognizes and protects these rights. Their implementation has been reformulated in order to allow everyone to use creations of the human mind in a creative manner, regardless of their types and ways of expression [...] The main rationale for this Free Art License is to promote and protect these creations of the human mind according to the principles of copyleft: freedom to use, copy, distribute, transform, and prohibition of exclusive appropriation. ²⁶

Through the lens of art, it can be said that copyleft considers the act of creation as an act by many, where "I is someone else"²⁷, according to Rimbaud, the poet with "soles of wind," and where "nothing will ever take place except the place", as in Mallarmé's poem, *Un coup de dés jamais n'abolira le hasard* (*A Throw of the Dice will Never Abolish Chance*).²⁸ Art is present; it is altered and expanded by occurrences, by what comes to pass to both the authors and to the works. Works of art are "openings of art" that bring about a passing, and whose authors, for their part, are the "workers" that transfer know-how in understanding with "the object of the object": the very object of art. Is it simply a question of transmitting the possibility of an art, to bring up to date the traditions that are today becoming set in their ways.

*Tradition refers to the continued transmission of cultural content through history from a founding event or an immemorial past (from the latin **traditio**, **tradere**, from **trans** "through" and **dare** "give", "transmit to another, hand over"). This intangible heritage can be an expression of identity for a human community. In its fullest sense, tradition is both memory and intention, a collective conscience; a memory of what was, with the duty to transmit and enrich it.* ²⁹

With copyleft's insistence on leaving open to copying, sharing and modifying, the movement of creation continues on, resisting the stranglehold of ownership which seeks exclusive enjoyment of intellectual creation. There is limitless development towards the

²⁶ Extract from the Free Art Licence preamble <http://artlibre.org/licence/lal> (page visited 15/02/16).

²⁷ A. RIMBAUD, *Œuvres complètes, correspondance*, "lettre à Paul Demeny", 15 May 1871, Robert Laffont, Bouquins, Paris, 2004

²⁸ S. MALLARMÉ, "Un coup de dés jamais n'abolira le hasard", *op. cit.* p.409 and particularly p. 426-427.

²⁹ "Tradition", <http://fr.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tradition> (page visited 15/03/16).

infinite, as free artworks are plunged into the “void of creation”³⁰, to meet with the initial “gap”.

5/ To not conclude.

To not conclude I shall end by leaving the final words to Simone Weil:

*If I desire that this world should exist – this world in which I am but an atom – then I become a co-creator.*³¹

*A rational creature is one that contains within itself the germ, the principle, the vocation of decreation.*³²

Antoine Moreau, “Making the created pass into the uncreated. A passing to the act; an act of passage”, April 2016, a text written for the symposium “L’action d’art (The Action of Art)”, 15-16 April 2016, Sursock Museum, Beirut, Lebanon. <http://www.sursock.museum/content/international-conference-laction-dart-action-art>

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Selected quotes taken from the following English translations of the works cited by the author:

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30 M. CASSÉ, *Du vide et de la création*, Éditions Odile Jacob, Paris, 1995.

31 S. WEIL, *Œuvres complètes*, VI, 2, Gallimard 1988, p. 420, cité dans *Cahier de l’Herne, Simone Weil*, 2014, p. 398.

32 *Idem*, p. 384.