
Quiet Disquietude

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Abstract

In describing our ideals of dignity and the like as fictions, I reflect on and uphold a non-pejorative understanding of fiction and how that stance is abused by power, which is unable to recognize any interiority except its own. To allow for that narrative of inner life, I accept the negative charge of the dialectic I am already thrown into; only then can I author my particularity/interiority and respond to the master enframing scheme which conceals our inner lives. All this movement and recognition of disquiet requires a certain quiet, a nothingness as fictitious and factful as the ideals that will spring forth from it. Not without that reflection can I step into my own being, to take account of where I might be wrong, to truly inhabit and entertain that which fascinates me, and to maintain a metaphysics wherein I am not only other but also open to the call of another. This is a reorientating quiet, an invitation to a creative *nihil*.

Keywords

nothingness, interiority, enframing, fiction, Other, incommensurability, paradox, despair

In thinking about aliveness and surrendering to our inner worlds, I begin with the opening excerpt from one of my short stories:

Time is running out; very soon I will disappear like a small animal in the night, my existence a shrinking wild space in the middle of the electric suburb.

He awoke in the middle of the night with this thought in his chest, and found that, for the first time in his life, he had experienced a cold sweat. His shirt clung to his frail physique like cling film on abandoned produce. But the tragedy was yet to come; he knew this, just now. He had already been unable to sleep, his consciousness not willing to let go. It had marshalled itself into this final stand against the coming onslaught of oblivion. And it was certainly coming. Of this, he couldn't be more certain. Even as late as only a few days ago, this thought was only an abstraction, something that might materialize at some distant point in the future. But now, tonight, the enemy had reared its head out from the cover of the frost and the fog. Perhaps it was a mistake on its part, but it was undeniably visible now.

Removing his shirt and replacing it with an old tunic he hadn't worn in a while, he flipped a switch in the little kitchen and leaning against the counter struck a match. Soon, the familiar smell of coffee and cigarettes animated the floor and walls of his flat. He had already awakened into a heightened clarity that urged him onward in the momentousness of his task at hand, and the caffeine-tobacco double-bill was an affirmation of it, a silent bow to the prophetic visitation that he and he alone had been granted that night (Aslan, 2022)

I begin with fiction for at least two reasons. For one, all our ideals of equality, dignity, compassion, love, and the like are naught but

fictions; these are not calculable *things* that can be objectively studied, not facts like the fact of the molecular composition of water being two molecules of Hydrogen and one of Oxygen, or that of global climate change and evident catastrophe. Our ideals are not facts; nevertheless, we still hold them to be true, which lends them the appearance of being non-fiction. It is in the midst of this fiction-non-fiction paradox that we live out and navigate our everyday lives.

Power, too, is cognizant of the fictional nature of our ideals; it knows this because it has trampled on them for as long as it has existed. Its existence is tied intricately with the genealogy of our morals. It sees me calling those morals *fictions* and it celebrates, as this admission allows it to maintain an ironic understanding of them, of my morals as fiction.

This leads me to the second reason why I began with fiction: Power is eager to treat me as fiction, to fictionalize my being and abstract away from my existence, which is drowned out in its cantankerous babble and self-righteous adulation. I am always, by virtue of the colour of my skin, my name, my place of birth, and before I have even said anything, a hair's breadth away from being labelled a "terrorist". That's what it means to be a minority that's reported on: our names and our skin colours speak thoughts not of their own, but of those who are in the business of building walls, making bullets, and plundering the earth for profit and for burying those who get in their way. My parents did not know that I came into this world on the "wrong" side of history, already a pariah to borders, and that by naming me thus they were introducing me to a confrontation with power, that abstract universal that perpetually holds us in a static negative dialectic, unable to become a person except through its own telos.

Even if my whole life were to become politicized, and my very existence a resistance, the machine, the master enframer would still win. I need a different beginning—one rooted in the factual standpoint of my being—to be able to maintain a metaphysic that isn't entirely political. I need the audacity of the invitation to "explore what it means to be alive" (Anane-Bediakoh,

2023), which is a gift, an unexpected rupture in the enframing telos, to begin to narrate interiority.

Inner life is both finite *and* infinite; each of these has its own hermeneutic circle as it imagines different relations between the self and the world. In thinking, for instance, of the persons whom I have adored romantically, and then of their rejections, my finite self, desperate for a quick analysis, is eager to suggest that I was rejected on account of the colour of my skin and the cultural baggage it invokes or is tied to. As distressing and hopeless as this analysis is, and as much as it would be in my favour to disavow it, I cannot easily dismiss it.

Moments such as these led me to further appreciate the masking mandates in response to the COVID-19 pandemic; I didn't stop wearing a mask even when those mandates were relaxed because the factness of my face is a constant, regardless of my wish to escape that fact. However, as Kierkegaard (1998) emphatically states in *The Sickness unto Death*, trying to evade oneself in order to be something else is its own kind of despair. Failing that, my self-hatred has manifested in my avoidance and suspicion of those who look like me, whose tone of voice and, more particularly, whose language resonates with my memory in a certain way. Learning – albeit not exclusively for this reason – different languages has allowed me to slip into other cultures, other histories, other memories that I do not, unfortunately, possess. I resist those others who already look as Other as me. So much so that when someone assumes my history, I respond with the negative of the abstract universal I was born into by saying: “¡Que no! Soy de allá, del abismo” or “من نیستم”. This is my finite self, made up as it is of evasions, elisions, and ellipses...always those beautiful ellipses that postpone the ending of that sentence wherein I am sentenced to an all too immediate identity.

My infinite self, having suspended and overstepped (what with my already being a pariah to borders) the abstract one-sided “ethical” dictated by power, draws a different and larger

circle. It is different because it hosts a dialectic of incommensurables (a paradox rather than a contradiction), and thus the circle can never be closed; it is larger because it allows for the interiority of the other. Rather than assuming the other's reason for rejecting me, it prompts me to imagine them and the circumstances as more complex. This hermeneutic of compassion draws me into its fold, allowing – no, compelling – me to practice that compassion with my own self, my own history, my own immediate facticity. Only with that necessary compassion, in the embrace of a generative quiet, can I begin to acknowledge that my failing at relationships might have less to do with my biology than my finite self had led me to believe. Only in that space, when I am allowed to begin again from nothingness, can I recognize and participate in that which moves me, that which intrigues and fascinates me, and which allows me to create meaning in the process. All these verbs and phenomenological reckonings are made moot by a prefigured ontology, by a world where I am naught but a means to an end with no claim to dignity. It takes quiet to navigate my disquiet, to portion it out and introduce the positive charge of the imagination, of fiction, to turn each contradiction into a paradox. With enough contradictions dialectically engaged in equilibrium, I will even overstep the self-limiting categories of being, as Fanon (1982), that brave soul, had dared to imagine.

The quiet disquietude, a creative paradox, is a step and space away from the domain of logical necessity wherein I am a finite addition to a chain of being always and forever mediated by power. I can have no claim to a free history in such a chain of events; it is only by virtue of this paradox that I can step into a history of my own, a history of failures, anxieties, prejudices, doubts, and the reconciling miracle of the company of friends. There can be no inner world without that absurd paradox, and thus no recourse to a free submission, which itself is paradoxical.

While thinking of how best to say all this here, I stepped out in the middle of the night and found a beautiful fog enveloping the neighbourhood and beyond, blurring the edges and borders of

everything, connecting everything with its delicate hold. In a way, the fog fictionalizes the world, revealing each phenomenon to be both distinct and yet open and linked to another. Everything is infinitized by virtue of that paradox.



If, in the end, all this is somehow proven to be “wrong,” I will still take hope in the words of Gandalf to Pippin in *The Lord of the Rings*. In response to the hobbit’s question about whether there was hope for Frodo and Sam, the wizard smiles and says that there was never much hope to begin with, only “a fool’s hope” (Tolkien, 2007, p. 94). I vow to be such a fool to the end of my days, inciting the paradox of quiet disquietude and inviting other fools to join me, on this bench in the fog, in making and celebrating the fictions we live by and for.

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Acknowledgments

For many years now I have enjoyed the singular privilege of studying, of pursuing an understanding of the ideals that we pursue and constantly fall short of. In the course of these years, my teachers have introduced me to a variety of worlds, to some of the most profound conversations ever recorded. And just as importantly, they taught me how to carry doubt and disagreement with grace. While I often fail them, they can never be forgotten. It is because of them that I am more than my own finite history.

Author Biography

I am a third-year PhD student in the Humanities fascinated by a wide range of concerns, but my studies are primarily and always born out of existential inquiry. Outside of academia, I enjoy classical, folk, rock, and '80s electronic music, along with relatively slow cinema and literature, and the occasional RTS videogame. I like to geek out with people, especially over rounds of coffee and cigarettes.