

## On Animation

On September eleven, 2001, at 8:46 am, a hijacked commercial airliner flew into the North Tower of the World Trade Center in New York City. The plane hit the northern façade of the building between the 93<sup>rd</sup> and 99<sup>th</sup> floors. It cut through the glass and steel outer wall, destroying a significant number of the perimeter columns, and reached the heart of the edifice where it exploded. The explosion took out an important number of the forty-seven core columns. The elevator shafts and stairwells, located within the core structure, were damaged as well, impeding the evacuation of people on the floors above the impact zone. The exploding jet fuel ignited significant fires over several floors, eventually damaging the tower fatally.

Minutes after the impact, personnel from the city's fire department, medical emergency services, and police forces rushed to the World Trade Center. Initial emphasis was on evacuating the building's occupants. Firefighters were sent up to assist people leaving the building.

At 9:03 am, the South Tower's southern façade was hit between the 77<sup>th</sup> and 85<sup>th</sup> floors by a second hijacked plane. It caused the same effect as did the first plane to the North Tower; destroying bearing elements and igniting fires across several floors.

As fires in both towers raged, evacuation of occupants above the impact zones proved close to impossible. In the North Tower 1,356 people became trapped as all stairwells were blocked or damaged. In the South Tower, however, as the plane had impacted under a slight angle, the so-called A stairwell, in the tower's northwest corner, furthest from the impact zone, remained operational, allowing the escape of fourteen occupants of the floors above the damaged zone. 614 people however remained trapped on the South Tower's upper floors.

At 9:59 am, the South Tower is the first to break down. In close ups we see the perimeter structure give way, allowing the upper part of the tower to come down. Its pressure flattens the floors beneath it, allowing the fall to continue. In rapid succession floor after floor subsides. The upper part of the tower tilts alarmingly, but the downwards motion prevents it from toppling. Then big clouds of dust and smoke hide the falling tower from our eyes and within seconds nothing is left of it but a huge pile of rubble. Dust clouds press themselves through the narrow streets of Lower-Manhattan, engulfing everything and everyone in their way.

At 10:29 am, the North Tower undergoes the same fate in what seems a similar fashion. The last thing we can make out is its antennae disappear in billowing, fat yellow-grey clouds. A huge column of smoke, slowly drifting away, takes its place as a temporary monument.

In both cases, according to official reports, the seething fires caused the floor beams in the impact zone to weaken and sag. These beams were necessary to brace the perimeter columns. When the beams gave way and disconnected, the perimeter columns buckled out under the sudden weight they had to carry. The upper parts of the buildings started to drop, pressing the floors beneath them together under its sheer weight. Gaining momentum with each new collapsing floor, the downward force annihilated both structures completely. A total of 2,606 people perished in the World Trade Center as well as on the ground.

And this is what the Austrian poet, Rainer Maria Rilke wrote in 1910:

Those are the noises. But here there's something that's more terrible: the silence. I believe that sometimes when a great fire occurs you can get a moment of extreme tension: the water jets slacken off, the firemen no longer climb, nobody stirs. Soundless a black cornice edges forward up above; and a high wall, behind which flames are mounting, tilts, also without a sound. Everybody stands, shoulders hunched, tense, with the part of their faces above the eyes

pressed into furrows, waiting for the awful crash. Such is the silence here.1)

When we look back at the images of that day, these words seem written for them. And then it comes as no surprise that Rilke's character, Malte, starts his diary on a eleventh of September.

Often the artist finds himself or herself before a dilemma. On one hand, he or she wants to recreate this single insight in reality that so holds his or her imagination. On the other hand, doing so means isolating the insight from its living context, condemning it to an eternal arrest, dislodging it from the endless stream of successions that reality is. When we visit the Louvre, and pace through its succession of rooms, we see detention everywhere. Bits of what once was alive, has been forever taken. *Frozen*, to use a comparison from the German philosopher Schelling. 2)

We could say that reality, if we don't listen too much to modern physics, has a linear structure. In our average western experience, reality seems a continuing process, coming from the past and going towards the future. One could imagine it as a line, or a river as Heraclitus did, or more abstract, as a continuous stream of successions.

Art, however, we could see as basically circular. The work of art, extricated from reality, isolated from its context, exists *frozen* in one of the silent, neutral rooms of the Louvre, or any other art gallery. We can approach it, stand before it, and examine its characteristics. But, rich as it might be in its expressions, at one moment we have taken it in, used up its resources, drained it from its meaning. At that moment, invariably, we have to return to the point where we started.

Reality and art seem to run on different tracks. One stretches from horizon to horizon, the other one is a child's poor toy, turning around and around till it tumbles over. This is art's drama.

Ovid has described it vividly in his *Metamorphosis*. We see Pygmalion, a sculptor, wrestle with reality. The women of his native Cyprus are not up to his moral standards. He despises them and resolves to live alone. To compensate his loneliness, he skillfully carves a statue of a woman of such beauty that he falls in love with it and wishes it alive.

After the artist has created a work of art, often he or she becomes unsatisfied with the result. During the rush of creation, all that counts is the completion of the work. No disrupting thoughts are allowed in. We want to see it finished. We want to see it in front of us. During the building, the assembling, the composing, or the shaping of the work, it seems in motion. It seems on a par with reality, moving at the same speed. But after the gust of creativity dies down, the work loses its momentum. This can happen slowly, over a couple of hours, or even days, or it can happen fast, the moment the tools are laid down. But come it will. It is the moment the artist realizes the work misses the connection with life.

This is how Ovid describes Pygmalion's despondency after the completion of his masterwork.

Often does he apply his hands to the work, to try whether it is a *human* body, or whether it is ivory; and yet he does not own it to be ivory. He gives it kisses, and fancies that they are returned, and speaks to it, and takes hold of it, and thinks that his fingers make an impression on the limbs which they touch, and is fearful lest a livid mark should come on her limbs *when* pressed. And one while he employs soft expressions, at another time he brings her presents that are agreeable to maidens, such as shells, and smooth pebbles, and little birds, and

flowers of a thousand tints, and lilies, and painted balls, and tears of the Heliades, that have fallen from the trees. He decks her limbs, too, with clothing, and puts jewels on her fingers; he puts, too, a long necklace on her neck. Smooth pendants hang from her ears, and bows from her breast. All things are becoming *to her*; and she does not seem less beautiful then when naked. He places her on coverings dyed with the Sidonian shell, and calls her the companion of his bed, and lays down her reclining neck upon soft feathers, as though it were sensible. 3)

Michelangelo famously expresses this feeling of emptiness, and even desperation, in one of his sonnets:

No longer true or sane,  
The judgment now doth from the mind proceed,  
For 'tis ill shooting through a twisted reed.  
Then thou, my picture dead,  
Defend it, Giovan, and my honor – why?  
The place is wrong, and no painter I. 4)

Baudelaire seems to be hinting at similar feelings when he writes on contemplating a drawing of a woman by an unknown master:

Répond, cadaver impur! Et par tes tresses roides  
Te soulevant d'un bras fiévreux,  
Dis-moi, tête effrayante, a-t-il sur tes dents froides  
Collé les suprêmes adieux? 5)

Also in our time, artists wrestled with the deception of seeing the loss of life after completion. Writes Robert Motherwell:

Having failed to satisfy myself with the Kennedy mural in retrospect, I thought I must proceed otherwise ... to use every technical resource at my command to give spontaneity, that is, the *illusion* that the work was both conceived (which it was) and executed (which it nearly was) with total immediacy in one energetic day. 6)

We cannot distance ourselves from reality. We are taken along. It is like forming part of a large demonstration. We walk on tiptoe to be able to look over the heads of the others surrounding us, to catch a glimpse of what is going on up front, but we see nothing but a mass of heads.

Not having an overview aggravates us. We feel we need to turn this endless change into a state, in something that stops moving all the time. We need to make statements. Muse a little over these words: *state* and *statement*. We do so in religion, in philosophy, in science, and in art.

So, all too soon, what the artist has immortalized, loses its resemblance with the fragment he or she wanted to portrait. Condemned to arrest, you could say, it stays behind. Out of its milieu, the similitude undone, it seems worthless, useless, empty. It lacks life. And confronted with that deficiency, the artist feels failure. What has been killed, needs to be restored to life once more. It needs to be reanimated.

I'm learning to see: I don't know what it's about, but everything is registering in me at a deeper level and doesn't stop where it used to. There is a place within me that I wasn't aware of. What's going on there I don't know. 7)

The answer to death is life. 8)

The work then.

A line of twelve slender cylinders, made from wood, cuts across the space. Each is separated three feet from the next one. They hang from the ceiling, four feet from the ground.

The cylinders are covered with printed imagery and text. Each tells another story about animation in a chronological succession from the Greek myth of Asclepius to Marc Fickett's photograph from a living statue in a New York subway station. 9) There is a contrast between the regularity of the bearers in shape and position in space, and the design of each of the messages they carry. Each message consists of a text in combination with one or more images. Their backgrounds are each of a different color, though most of them are rather dark.

A piece of coarse string attaches the cylinders to the ceiling. It ends in a noose in which a metal catch, screwed in the top of the wooden cylinder, is hooked. They swing softly to and fro as the air around them is brought into motion.

They combine the ideas of succession of reality and circularity of the work of art. One could imagine new contributions to be placed between them or follow up the ones present.

The visitor to the exhibition may unhook a cylinder and handle it to have a better look at the content printed on it, but not many do so.

Animation and reanimation have a rich history, even if we stay in our own hemisphere. There is the myth of Asclepius. Hesiod dedicates 5 lines to him:

I begin to sing of Asclepius, son of Apollo and healer of sicknesses. In the Dotian Plain fair Coronis, daughter of King Phlegyas, bare him, a great joy to men, a soother of cruel pangs.  
And so hail to you, lord, in my song I make prayer to thee! 10)

Not much compared to the many lines that receive Apollo or Hermes from him. But then, Asclepius was a mere half-god, with mighty Apollo as his father but a commoner, Coronis, as his mother. In some stories, Coronis abandons her baby near Epidaurus, out of shame for its illegitimate birth. Hence the site's status as a place of worship to Asclepius and importance as a centre of healing in the classical world. Other stories tell us that Coronis, while pregnant, married a mortal man, which angered Apollo so much that he killed her and her husband. Furthermore, he performed a cesarean section on Coronis, while her body was burning on the funeral pyre, thus saving his son as well as performing an innovating medical deed of certain weight.

The story then goes that one day Asclepius, now an able physician, trained in the lore of healing by his mighty father, brought back from the dead a man named Hippolytus. Hippolytus had died in a chariot accident when his horses were startled by a sea-monster, sent by Poseidon. His death was undeserved as it was caused by his refusal to yield to the advances of his stepmother, Phaedra. As revenge she told her husband Theseus, the very opposite of what had happened: she claimed his son had raped her. In his anger, Theseus used one of the three wishes Poseidon had granted him, to punish his son.

It so happened the Goddess Athena had given Asclepius a magic potion made from the blood of the Gorgon. With this potion Asclepius was able to raise the dead back to life, equaling, and even exceeding, the power of the Gods. When he complied with Artemis' wish to restore Hippolytus back to life, he trespassed the boundaries between godly and human power, and was killed by a jealous Zeus with a thunderbolt.

According to some stories, Asclepius was later resurrected in his turn by Zeus but instructed to never revive the dead again without the supreme God's consent. Other stories tell us that Zeus placed the diseased Asclepius among the stars, thus creating the constellation now known as the Serpent-bearer, also called Ophiuchus.

In this case, animation was prompted by the magic potion made from the blood from a Gorgon, an immortal being.

Cylinder one, clad with image and text, shows a drawing of Asclepius, kneeling down next to the prostrate body of Hippolytus, whom he had just cured from death. His right hand, in which what might be healing herbs are held, is still on his patient's heart, his left hand feels for a pulse. The restored Hippolytus gazes up in wonder, or is it gratitude, at the physician.

I combined this drawing with a depiction of the Serpent-bearer constellation, in which we see a man struggling with two serpents. Later I found, in a Wikipedia article, a drawing made by Johannes Kepler which, because of the "artist" I would have preferred. 11) For the Greek, the Serpent-bearer was Apollo himself. Only in Roman times, the figure started to represent Asclepius. In fact, it would be more correct to speak of Jupiter instead of Zeus.

Both pictures are combined and left with a certain amount of transparency over a bleak, grayish-pink background, meant to enhance the remoteness in time of the history.

When you turn the cylinder around, begin and end fuse reasonably, an effect that underlines the idea of the inescapable circularity of a work of art.

Then there is the myth of Orpheus. Orpheus is a musician. Taught by the Muses, his musical powers can move not only his human audiences, but also animals, trees, and even stones. His wife is the pretty Eurydice. While playing in a meadow with other nymphs, she is bitten by a serpent, and dies. Orpheus, overcome with grief, supplicates the gods of the upper world to return her to him. As this remains to no effect, he decides to descend in the Underworld, *the land of shadow and unhappiness*, to see if he can convince the dark gods who rule over the dead. After crossing a lugubrious territory, he presents himself before Pluto and Proserpine, explains himself, then plays his lyre.

Once more we turn to Ovid:

Tantalus forgets the water he cannot drink. Ixion's wheel stops. Sisyphus seats himself on his stone. No longer Tityos feels the pickings at his heart of the revengeful birds. Danaus' daughters interrupt their task at the bottomless barrel. And even in the eyes of the Furies the rare humidity of tears emerges. Touched, Pluto and Proserpine cannot ignore him his wish. They order Eurydice, still limping from the serpent's bite, to come forward. 12)

However, there is a condition. She will only continue living if Orpheus does not turn to look at his wife while following the path that leads out of the dark, fearful world of the dead.

Here animation is a process. It needs to be fulfilled and is interrupted when Orpheus, in his happiness or maybe because of his mistrust of the gods of the underworld, turns his head to look at Eurydice. She is there, but disappears instantly and forever.

Virgil, in the *Georgics*, describes the Orpheus and Eurydice myth too. Here, the procedure of animation starts with the suspension of the machinery of death. When Orpheus is playing his lyre:

The house of the Dead itself was stupefied,

The actual process of animation, just as in the *Metamorphosis*, is described as the coming forward from the shadows and going along a path that leads, across the underworld, towards the light of the living world. To be successful, this process must be accomplished entirely.

And now, retracing his steps, he evaded all mischance,  
and Eurydice, regained, approached the upper air,  
he following behind (since Proserpine had ordained it)  
when a sudden madness seized the incautious lover,  
one to be forgiven, if the spirits knew how to forgive:  
his will conquered, he looked back, now, at his Eurydice.  
In that instant, all his effort was wasted, and his pact  
with the cruel tyrant broken, and three times a crash  
was heard by the waters of Avernus. 13)

Cylinder two shows a picture of a terracotta bowl for mixing wine and water, that dates from 440 B.C., on view at the MET. 14) It shows Orpheus among the Thracians. Thrace was the country where he retreated after the loss of Eurydice. It is a classical black vase with a drawing in fine black lines over an orange background. I inverted the image in Photoshop. Now, the vase is a cool white, the figures a creamy light blue. It gives an eerie atmosphere I imagine the underworld possesses, the same as you would see in movies or television series that deal with dark subjects.

But I am considering other possibilities of design. As Ronnie Pontiac writes in his article *Orpheus and Counterculture*, the name Orpheus relates to *orphnaios*; the dark of night, *orphinus*; a grey-brownish shade, or *orphanos*; orphan. 15)

Ovid describes the landscape where Eurydice's animation process should have taken place as:

a steep path, leading through inert landscapes to the world. They are surrounded by silence, dusk, and terror. 16)

I would make *orphinus* by mixing yellow, red and blue into a brown, then adding enough white and black to obtain the dead tone of *orphnaios*, through which the two lovers are moving. More or less same color Caravaggio uses to set his Lazarus scene against.

Lazarus of Bethany is the Christian icon of the concept of animation. The *Gospel of John* tells us about the brother of a certain Mary, Lazarus, who fell ill one day. Mary and her sister Martha send for Jesus, but he put off his voyage for Bethany for two days. When he finally arrives, Lazarus is dead and buried for four days. He meets the complaints with a statement:

He that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet he shall live. 17)

Then Jesus has the tomb opened and says a prayer. He calls Lazarus in a loud voice, upon which the man emerges from the tomb, alive and well.

Dutch painter Carel Fabritius, a pupil of Rembrandt, created an image of this moment, which I regard unsurpassed in western art. Caravaggio's raising seems to focus on the wrong moment: we have arrived too early, and although Jesus is stretching out his arm, Lazarus is still but a corpse. Even Rembrandt's version seems meager next to Fabritius' picture.

Jesus occupies the centre stage, standing on top of the opened tomb, raising his right hand in a commanding gesture, and gazing down upon the man who is bound to live once more. A crowd surrounds him. Their faces reflecting a series of emotions that range from sheer astonishment to absolute veneration. But in spite of all this visual muscle, our view focuses on the figure of Lazarus, clad in white, pulled out of his grave by the raised arm of Jesus as if he were a marionette, regaining life.

Cylinder four. I did not want to add anything to Fabritius' picture, but using it just as it was did not appeal to me either. Finally, I treated the image in Photoshop with the mixed use of the eraser and clone stamp tool. I took out areas of the background of miracle bystanders, leaving no more than faces and hands, corroding it as it were. In this way, the theatrically illuminated area of Lazarus stood out against a buzz of incoherent shapes.

When wrapped around the cylinder, the image, with its dark background, gave the impression of being seamless. The resulting circularity was an effect that I hoped to achieve with every image of the series.

One of the central themes of Dostoyevsky's famous novel *Crime and Punishment* is the resurrection of Lazarus, and modeled after that, the symbolic restoring to life of its main character, the murderer Rodion Raskolnikov. The references are various, each taking on a different shape, as if they were working their way towards the final renewal of his person, a feat that happens on the last two of the 562 pages long novel.

The ex-student has purposely killed an old woman, a pawnbroker known for her greediness, as well as, although incidentally, her innocent and goodhearted sister. In the aftermath of this event, he struggles with the concept of guilt, and finally turns himself in. In this process, he undergoes a series of changes, which in an overview we could regard as his symbolic death and animation.

In chapter VII of book two, we find the following line:

Pride and self-confidence grew continually stronger in him; he was becoming a different man every moment.

After an initial weakness, during which he wanted to turn himself in, Rodja now believes that, by means of his superior intelligence, he will be able to conceal his crime from the authorities. He feels reborn. He suddenly feels in the best of spirits.

Later in the novel, book three, chapter V, when Raskolnikov has one of his interviews with Porfiry Petrovitch, an investigator, he is asked:

And...do you believe in Lazarus' rising from the dead?

Something he confirms. Literally. Here, Dostoyevsky seems to hint that Raskolnikov bears the kernel of his restoration to humanity within himself.

Then, in a scene where he gets the first impulse of different way out of his predicament, book four, chapter IV, confronted with the apparently unlimited goodness of Sonia, he asks her, on coming across a Bible:

Where is the raising of Lazarus? Find it for me, Sonia.

And when she does so, he orders her to read the passage. After Sonia has finished reading, Rodja looks upon her with emotion, no doubt touched by her transportation of what Dostoevsky calls the greatest miracle:

... though he were dead, yet he shall live.

He declares that, if he returns to her the day after, they will go away together, following a shared but unknown goal. He is still convinced his crime will remain undetected, and interprets Lazarus' rising as the release of his state as suspect.

His confession to Sonia, that does take place the day after, book five, chapter IV, follows a long and twisting road with Rodja trying to find the real reason for his misdeeds. It is the first step to redemption.

It only meant that *that* minute had come.

But to rise anew, he first has to die to shed his old personae. And indeed, in the same chapter he declares:

Did I murder the old woman? I murdered myself, not her!

Dying appears to be a process. Book six, chapter I.

A strange period began for Raskolnikov: it was as though a fog had fallen upon him and wrapped him in a dreary solitude from which there was no escape.

To makes us aware of this process, Dostoyevsky illustrates it with a parallel dead, this time by consumption, of one of the side-characters; Sonia's stepmother.

At the end of Book six, in chapter VII, he decides to turn himself in. This is the final stage of the dying process. When tells his despairing sister Dounia, meeting her for what might be the last time, of his intention, she exclaims:

Aren't you half expiating your crime by facing the suffering?

And some lines further, Rodja cries:

The great point is that everything now is going to be different, is going to be broken in two.

This breaking in two refers to the separation between his old life and his new one, between dying and being animated. In the next chapter, the epilogue, Dostoyevsky refers again to this severance.

He didn't understand that that consciousness might be the promise of a future crisis, of a new view of life and of his future resurrection.

With these words, Dostoyevsky reveals that it had been his intention from the start on to redeem his hero. Until the last page, Raskolnikov is battling with his old life. Then his death is completed. His fellow prisoners threaten to kill him. One of the prisoners even rushes at him in a frenzy, but Rodja does not react to the threat, seemingly dead already. Later, sitting at the high bank of a river

a broad landscape opened before him.

Then time stops.

It is at this moment that he suddenly finds Sonia next to him and realizes that the moment of rebirth has come. He flings himself at her feet. She jumps, then understands.

They were both pale and thin; but those sick pale faces were bright with the dawn of a new future, of a full resurrection into a new life.

He has become a new person. He has not been re-animated, but truly animated. The old material had had to die, to decompose in a prison camp, to turn into compost to feed the kernel deep inside.

Cylinder seven. I found the image on the Internet where I was looking for a face that would resemble my mental image of Raskolnikov. Apart from that it would have to have Sonia in it too somehow. At length I found an image that fitted my expectations. Two people, possibly Iranian, sitting in what must be an airport waiting area, both occupied with their cell phones, empty food wrappers and a couple of plastic bottles of Vichy on the triangle wall table between them. He has the swarthy, unshaven appearance my imagination has always attributed to Rodja. She is wrapped in many layered, middle-eastern style garments, and although not blond, she seems frail enough to play the part of Sonia.

Above this image, I placed the picture of a large axe; its iron part brightly red and silver, reflecting the blood and the thin, light hair of the pawnbroker. It represents not only the murder weapon, but too the sword of Damocles swinging over Rodja's and Sonia's relationship in the long course of the novel.

Cylinder eleven. The idea of the marionette, earlier hinted on in Carel Fabritius picture, returns. Out of touch with contemporary media, I asked my daughter for a present-day example of animation. She came up with a scene from the science fiction television series *Fringe*, which was broadcasted between 2008 and 2013.

Incidentally, the concluding shot of the final episode of *Fringe's* first season, an episode called *There's is more than one of everything*, famously showed the World Trade Center still standing, resurrected by means of the use of a parallel universe.

*Fringe* stands for *fringe science*; a depreciatory term for questionable science, and the series is indeed supplied with many examples of more than dubious experiments. One of these takes place in the ninth episode of the third season, called *Marionette*, where a mad person, referred to as *the umbrella man*, has recovered the corpse of a woman who committed suicide, and makes it perform a hideous ballet as a prelude to his intention of reanimating her.

From the script of *Fringe*:

Cut to the umbrella man, strapping Amanda into a chair in a dance outfit, lovingly telling her they have to keep her body strong. He plays classical music for her.

She's got ropes tied to her joints. He pulls the levers and she rises up and sort of dances, in a dull-eyed corpse dance. He's moved to tears as he watches his life-like doll. 19)

It reminds us once more of the lines in Baudelaire's poem *Une Martyre*:

Reply, impure cadaver! And by your stiffened tresses  
Raising you with fevered arm,  
Tell me, ghastly head, did he glue on your cold teeth  
The kisses of the last farewell?

Placed on the cylinder, this image too, seems to continue endlessly, illustrating the idea of the circularity of every work of art.

Ghosts exist, that much I know.

These are the opening lines of a Guillermo del Toro movie; *Crimson Peak*.

Could we regard the manifestation of a ghost as another form of animation, a highly temporary one that is? There is no doubt that the appearance that visits the three soldiers on the walls of Ellsinore, in the very first scene of Hamlet, represents the former king.

As thou art to thyself.

says Horatio to Marcellus.

The king keeps returning and remains in obstinate silence until the two bring the prince upon the ramparts. Although a carbon copy of his father, at first Hamlet does not seem convinced. The appearance of a spirit, so soon after a person's death, was seen as an evil thing.

Be thou a spirit of health, or goblin damn'd,

But then he seems to acknowledge, the spirit is his father's and exclaims, deeply moved:

Oh, answer me,  
Let not me burst in ignorance; but tell  
Why thy canoniz'd bones hearsed in death,  
Have burst their cerements, why the sepulcher  
Wherein we saw thee quietly inurn'd  
Hath op'd his ponderous and marble jaws,  
To cast thee up again? 21)

The very mechanics of animation.

The fourth cylinder shows the kneeling, black silhouette of Hamlet against the towering, semi transparent ghost of his father. He looks upon his son, his hand raised, telling him of the serpent that stung him, sleeping in his orchard; his very brother. The blue of the background is that of a luminous night. It is that bright because of the star, *westward of the pole*, of which Barnardo, another soldier, speaks. Contrasting the king, made large and radiant, with Hamlet, made small and dark, I wanted to illustrate the unusualness of their conversation.

A truly scientific attempt of animation was made at the beginning of the nineteenth century by the Italian physicist Giovanni Aldini. He investigated the effect of electrical impulses on the muscles, so-called *galvanism*. In his account of the these experiments we can read the following 22):

Though accustomed to a more tranquil kind of operations in my closet, and little acquainted with anatomical dissections, the love of truth, and a desire to throw some on the system of Galvanism, overcame all my repugnance, and I proceeded to the following experiments.

His love of truth leads him to truly gruesome experiments such as the following, performed on the severed head of a criminal:

...strong contradictions in all the muscles of the face, which were so contorted in so irregular a manner that they exhibited the appearance of the most horrid grimaces.

He goes even further and his experimentations take on theatrical aspects in his experiment number twenty-seven:

I placed the two heads in a straight line on a table, in such a manner that the sections of the neck were brought into communication merely by animal fluids. When thus arranged, I formed an arc from the pile to the right ear of one head, and to the left ear of the other, and saw with astonishment the two heads make horrid grimaces; so that the spectators, who had no suspicion of such a result, were actually frightened.

He describes his way of doing in detail:

In order to try the vital force existing in the human body after death, I immerse the hand in a solution of muriate of soda, and establish an arc, one of the extremities of which is made to pass round the fore-arm, while the other is brought into contact with the bottom of the pile. I adapt to the extremity of another arc an elastic probe, which is applied to one of the ears, moistened by means of a syringe with the same solution, and connect the other extremity of the arc with the summit of the pile.

By this arrangement various contractions, according to the different degrees of vitality in the bodies, are observed, sometimes in the fingers, sometimes in the hand, and sometimes in the whole arm. The fingers bend, and move in a sensible manner; and sometimes the whole of the fore-arm proceeds towards the breast. The importance of this method for determining the duration of the vital powers after death may be readily comprehended.

Although in reality Aldini's experiments were to investigate the existence of the capacity of motion of a body after its death, the result roused the imagination, not only that of writers such as Lord Byron or Mary Shelley, but also his own.

Should means be found hereafter to make further discoveries in regard to this interesting point, physiologists may then be able to determine with certainty those cases when interment ought to be retarded; those where the good of society requires that every possible means of resuscitation should be employed.

The most famous of his experiments took place at the Royal College of Surgeons in London in 1803, on a hanged man named George Forster. Anatomical dissection had formed part of Forster's death sentence, but no one could have visualized quite the violation that Aldini was going to inflict on him. Before a large medical and general audience, he took a pair of conducting rods linked to a powerful battery, and touched the rods to various parts of the body in turn. The results were dramatic. When the rods were applied to Forster's mouth and ear, "the jaw began to quiver, the adjoining muscles were horribly contorted, and the left eye actually opened." When one rod was moved to touch the rectum, the whole body convulsed: indeed, the movements were "so much increased as almost to give an appearance of re-animation"

In a cartoon from those days <sup>23</sup>) we see, with a certain visual resemblance to Carel Fabritius' *Rising of Lazarus*, a man, dressed in white, rising from his coffin. Aldini

stands next to the casket, his arms raised in an imitation of Christ. We also see a battery which spurred the corpse into life, and, most significant; two devils. One of them is lamenting the loss of a corpse, but the other one consoles him with the idea that Aldini even is a bigger devil than himself.

Cylinder five shows images that illustrate an article on *Galvanic Reanimation* in an on-line medical magazine (24). I combined two nineteenth century engravings into one. The second, quite out of scale and daubed in red, is hanging over the first as to criticize the devaluation of the scientific experiment when turned into a public spectacle. In the first we see various onlookers make a dash for it when Aldini puts the electrodes on Forster's temples and the facial muscles start to quiver.

The circular effect, when the cylinder is slowly turned around, benefits from chance. One of the bolting figures at the right side of the picture stretches out his arm. By coincidence, the man's hand seems to find a hold in that of a person standing on the left side of the picture, in this way creating a continuation that overcomes the logical incoherence between the two sides of the picture.

There is a famous photo, made by Dickenson Alley, of Nicola Tesla sitting in his laboratory. He is quietly taking notes while around him, arcing over more than 20 feet, powerful discharges of electricity traverse the space. It symbolizes, not only the genius of Tesla, but also the awe people felt about this relatively new source of energy. A hundred years before, electricity, as employed by Giovanni Aldini, must have seemed an even greater source of wonder, so great that it was not that difficult to imagine its powers able to traverse the laws of nature, and bring to life the inert, as is witnessed in Mary Shelley's revolutionary novel; *Frankenstein*.

Mary Shelley wrote her first novel at the age of seventeen. She and her husband, Percy Bissie Shelley, were staying at Lord Byron's mansion on the shores of Lac Lemman.

The three of them indulged in horror stories, based on information on *galvanism*, provided by Byron's personal physician John Polidori. Byron challenged each of them to write a gruesome story on the subject. In Mary's case this resulted in *Frankenstein, or, The Modern Prometheus*, a story of true animation and its consequences.

The story is well known. Victor Frankenstein, a young Swiss scientist assembles a body with human likeness from parts and pieces he collects at slaughterhouses and the dissecting room. Next, by means of electrical impulses, he installs life into this macabre artifact.

Cylinder seven. I placed the image of an electrical current across the dark background that frames Richard Rothwell's somber yet stirring portrait of Mary Shelley. Her classical presence rather contrasts with the novelty of electricity, which sets her as a daring young author against her later reticence.

When brought into motion, the image revolves uninterrupted.

The next allusion to animation comes from Anglo-American poet T. S. Eliot. In his poem *The love song of J. Alfred Prufrock* he pushes his words across the threshold between life and death time and time again. (25)

In the epigraph to the poem, taken from Dante's Canto 27, we come across

Persona che mai tornasse al mondo

and

non tornò viva alcun.

Apparently, Dante is skeptical about the possibility of the possibility of animation. Eliot is so a good deal less. The poem starts with a comparison:

Like a patient etherized upon a table

An etherized patient looks dead, but is alive.

Then there is that undulating phrase, as water rhythmically sloshing against the boardwalk, which repeats itself throughout the poem:

In the room the women come and go,  
Talking of Michelangelo.

Is not one of Michelangelo's most famous works the *Last Judgment* he made for the Sistine Chapel. It depicts the moment where we see the dead, woken from their graves, been given verdict. Life in heaven or unlife in hell.

Then Eliot says:

There will be time, there will be time

Does he want to say; there will be no death?  
Some lines further on we read:

Do I dare  
Disturb the universe?

which we can interpret in many ways, but in the context of some earlier lines:

There will be a time to murder and create,

annoying the universe might well mean the denial of a closed door between life and death. Disturbing the universe as Asclepius did.

In a next scene, it appears, he oscillates once more between being alive and being dead.

Though I have seen my head (grown slightly bald) brought in upon a platter,  
I am no prophet – and here's no great matter;  
I have seen the moment of my greatness flicker,  
And I have seen the eternal Footman hold my coat, and snicker,

Then follows the scene that sets the tone for this line of thought:

To say: "I am Lazarus, come from the dead,  
Come back to tell you all, I shall tell you all

And in the last strophe of the poem, we are woken up, only to die again.

Cylinder eight then. A London street because it was Ezra Pound who, in London, gave Eliot his chance. No more than the image; a silent street in lemon yellow light, as a homage to the man who could waken as no one the dormant artist in man.

In the foreword to his anthology of poet Gerrit Achterberg, Paul Rodenko, a well-known poet himself, speaks about the importance of the notion of breathing in the Achterberg's oeuvre. 26)

We should know then that Gerrit Achterberg is a major Dutch poet, who lived between 1905 and 1962. From 1931 on, he suffered mental breakdowns, which lead to tragedy eventually. In 1937, and note a certain correspondence with the fate of Dostoevsky's hero Raskolnikov, Achterberg murdered his landlady and wounded her daughter. He was sentenced to involuntary commitment and imprisoned in various psychiatric institutions. His definite release came in 1955. During this period he wrote the bulk of his poetry; over twenty-two volumes.

The main theme of his work is the revivification of the deceased beloved by means of poetry. In almost every single poem a she is personally addressed and given account of the poet's latest attempts to restore her to life. Even in a poem cycle such as *Ode to The Hague*, which primarily concentrates on creating a portrait of the city, she appears on his explorations, and pairs herself with shop windows, department stores, streetcars, or employees from the health department.

The following lines from the poem *Code* illustrate the powerful relationship between language and life:

The force to live that once was yours  
divides itself across the alphabet.  
Keywords I set up, will open  
to your death the heavy lock.

But the summoning of the deceased person does not occur by images only. The very mechanism of poetry, the alternation of stretched and unstressed syllables, is adjusted to the intake and exhaling of the reader's breathing. It is seen as a life force. In the poem, Achterberg revives, although temporarily, his dead love, breathing life into her by the mouth to mouth of meter.

Let us have a closer look at one of his poems.

#### Osmosis

While I keep repeating here, repeat as rain  
my breath, in order that the blood account  
prevails the announcements of your death  
- the ones my body won't acknowledge –  
the languages are interwoven,  
and over places of bewilderment,  
common familiarities arise;  
the reflection of our faces we watch  
in mirror images unite.

The breathing mentioned here stands for living as well as writing poetry. He does so, he has to be doing so, and keep on doing it, because in this way, with his breath, he keeps the beloved one alive, in spite of the announcements of her death he is confronted with. And while he is doing so, the language bends to his will and he recognizes, yet again, the main theme of his poetry and its effect: once more he is united with his love.

No doubt the title of the poem, *Osmosis*, refers to the biological explanation of the term, meaning the process by which nutrients reach the cells.

The ninth cylinder shows the image of a young woman. She deeply enjoys the puff she takes from her fresh cigarette. The image shows the idea of breathing; smoking visualizes the process of inhaling and exhaling. The woman represents Achterberg's perpetual she.

She is outside, among others, in the dark of the night. Turning the cylinder around creates but a minor interruption at the splice.

In 1967, for the first time in history, a human being received a new heart. This happened in Cape Town, South Africa, in the *Groote Schuur* hospital. Lewis Washkansky was fifty-three years old and suffering from chronic heart disease. Cardiac surgeon Christian Barnard implanted the heart of 25-year-old Denise Darvall, who had been killed in a car accident, in his body. Washkansky lived for eighteen days before he succumbed, not to heart failure, but to pneumonia.

Although other organs, such as kidneys or livers, had been successfully transplanted, this operation raised the public awareness in a special way. Both patient and surgeon became instantly famous. Apparently, the heart was an altogether different matter from a kidney or a new hip. More so than other parts or organs, it had the aura of inserting new life into the body of a man given up for dead. It put Mary Shelley's famous novel into a new light, as it did to the Lazarus story.

Cylinder ten shows a black and white picture of Louis Washkansky and Doctor Barnard. Barnard is standing at the patient's bed, one hand laying over the lower part of Washkansky's chest, the other hand raised in an explicatory gesture. There is a certain resemblance between this picture and the one that illustrates Asclepius reviving Hippolytus, not only between the posture of both physicians, but also between the gratifying expressions of Hippolytus and Washkansky.

The picture itself is low quality; smudged newspaper print, with too much contrast resulting in the loss of detail, so chosen to underline the worldwide media attention the operation received. When turned around, the two edges of the image clash.

After Pygmalion had completed his sculpture, he was desperately unsatisfied with its inertia. During the festival of Venus, he brings offerings and then prays to the Goddess to bring the statue to life. Ovid:

The golden Venus, as she herself was present at her own festival, understood what that prayer meant; and as an omen of the Divinity being favorable, thrice was the flame kindled up, and it sent a tapering flame into the air.

*Tribute in Light* is an art installation, made up of two twin beams of blue light, that shoot up straight into the Manhattan sky, there where once the towers stood. It is displayed every year on September eleventh, to commemorate the victims of that fatal day in 2001. A tapering flame into the air.

As soon Pygmalion arrives home, he returns to his habit of caressing the sculpture. He kisses it, and to his wonder the ivory turns warm, then loses its hardness, turns into flesh with veins throbbing beneath the skin. And the maiden blushes and raises her eyes up to her lover. Her name is Galatea, Greek for *she who is milky white*.

A *living statue* is a street act in which the artist strikes a pose and maintains it for a certain time, trying not to move at all. In this way the artist and artwork melt into one. Photographer Marc Fickett made a reportage of an artist, named Galatea, performing at the Union Square subway station in New York City. The girl is painted ivory white, with jet-black hair, black eyeliner and lipstick. She wears a short black dress, long black gloves and boots. In the particular photo I have chosen from this suite, we see Galatea coming alive, bending forward in a small bow to an old man who has given a donation. 27)

Cylinder twelve shows the essential part from Fickett's photo; Galatea's bow. She almost touches the old man's head with a strand of her black hair. Amazed by her sudden movement, he assumes the role of Pygmalion.

The edges of the image fairly match when turned around.

In the Denon wing of the Louvre, in room 75, we find *Pygmalion and Galatée*, painted by Anne-Louis Girodet. Ivory white, but definitely alive, she inclines her body to her creator, he who looks up timidly, his left hand raised to seek her breast, both forever cast in their longing.

Thus the twelve cylinders show various examples of how to infuse life in inert matter. Although their form comments on the general state of an artwork, I regard them as instruments. They are meant to cause. They are compact batteries of knowledge, waiting to be employed. In fact, I needed a body to put to use the hoarded vigor. Habeas corpus.

In the studio of a sculpture friend, I came across seven perfectly circular slabs, made of pinewood. They had a diameter of twenty inches with a thickness of four inches. My friend had recycled them from an outdated artwork, and stored them for future use. I liked the waxy, warm glaze of the wood. Proceeding as Pygmalion did, they appeared soft and smooth to the touch, warm under my fingers. The first promise of animation was lodged in the material itself.

The number seven was another motivation for their use.

I have structured a large part of my work on the number twelve, as the product of three and four. The two numbers are very different in character, each having their own equilibrium, their own alliances and involvements, their own memories. Their difference is symbolized in shape by the triangle and the square. However, they meet at the number twelve. Using three and four in a grid, with twelve as their converging point, enables me to combine elements of a different temperament.

Tree plus four sums seven. This created a numeral relationship between the cylinders and the matter they were to infuse.

In *Gulliver's travels* we can read:

Some time after, asking a friend at court, how they came to fix on that determinate number, he told me, that his majesty's mathematicians having taken the height of my body by the help of a quadrant, and finding it to exceed theirs in the proportion of twelve to one, they concluded, from the similarity of their bodies, that mine must contain at least 1728 of theirs, and consequently would require as much food as was necessary to support that number of Lilliputians.  
28)

I could lend the slabs. No problem.

I imagined a body. I laid out the wooden slabs on the floor in a straight line, each separated from the other by their common diameter. The point of origin I placed exactly under the first cylinder, the one with Asclepius, at an angle of 30 degrees with the line of cylinders. This amount of degrees would theoretically allow for twelve directions within a full circle, a fact that made the angle fit in the total numeral structure.

At present there was a body stretched out on the floor, stretched out as Hippolytus or Waskansky were. A subtle body, strapped in lassitude. To live once more, to sit up as Lazarus, to start moving as Amanda, as Galatea, to be able to see out over the wide

steppe as Raskolnikov, the incubate body needed attributes. It needed its vitals, so to say.

Laid out like that, the line of wooden elements associated easily with the idea of the *chakra*, a concept from Indian religions. Seven in total, round, spread out vertically through the upper part of the human body, they are considered meeting points of energy, I was explained. In my context they could be seen as sockets for the energy emanating from the cylinders. Furthermore, the word *chakra* derives from the Sanskrit *cakra*, which means *wheel*, as well as *circle* and *rotation*, notions that were close to my idea of the artwork being essentially circular.

Another association were the seven metals of Antiquity; metals man had recognized since ancient times and used to create the world we know. They are gold, silver, copper, tin, lead, iron, and mercury.

These, in turn, corresponded with the seven planets, the sun included in this Ptolemaic arrangement.

And finally, the arrangement made me think of Shakespeare's Seven Ages of Man, one stage succeeding the other, but each a well-rounded unity in itself. 29)

Barcelona, September eleventh, 2001

September eleventh is a public holiday in Catalonia. We spend the morning at home and then thought we treat our eight-year-old daughter to a few hours on the beach. We took the subway to the city center, crossed the large Catalunya Square replete with celebrations, and took a second subway to the Villa Olimpica beach. There we sat on the sand, where our daughter could play.

Almost directly behind us were the two equally shaped but differently finished, forty-four story, slender buildings that rise up 505 feet in the sky; one called the *Torre Mapfre*, the other the *Hotel Arts*. They were the latest landmarks in a city that prides itself on urban renewal. We had come to refer to them as the *twin towers*; a private insinuation that the architects had drawn their inspiration, when envisaging the towers stylistic unity, from the *Tower One* and *Two* of New York World Trade Center. But we were used to them and gave them no second thought, sitting there on the beach.

Around five o'clock we broke up and, crossing the Barceloneta neighborhood, walked to the Colón Boulevard where we sat on the terrace of a cafeteria and had a sandwich. When I went in to pick up the bill, my eye fell for a second on the television screen. It showed smoke over a city in ruins. In that second, my mind classified it as a disaster movie and disregarded it. Perhaps it was the commentary, or else the shocked state of the clientele, their attention fixed on the screen, or maybe the non-servitude of the distracted barman, that made me look back at the images and realize that they were real.

I asked.

New York City they said. Planes had crashed into both towers, which, after some time, had come down. A third plane had flown into the Pentagon.

We felt completely besieged by what was happening. We headed home quickly, crossing the famous Ramblas, packed with still unknowing tourists, gaping at the living statues that lined its borders. We felt we needed to be home, regain some of the stability we had just lost. The feeling of disorientation we suffered, and with us a great part of western society, was acute at the moment. It would last weeks to adjust us.

Reality had been suddenly brought into motion. It was as if the two towers had been the sentinels on the walls around our permanence, walls now breached, not by terrorists, but by our own contentment turning against us.

The twelve cylinders are swaying gently in the nimble draft that crosses the now visitor-free exhibition room. They are trying to tempt the wooden slabs beneath them into motion, emanating a malleable promise of life.

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