

Encountering Hearts of Darkness

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Opening up Littoral Landscapes

Francis Ford Coppola's film *Apocalypse Now*¹ can be read as an allegory concerning how the concepts de-creation and destruction can be related. As an allegory it raises questions about language, images and their relations to a cultural landscape. It also asks questions about art's status as knowledge, in this case exemplified by such an allegorical reading of the film. In my view art's merit is first and foremost critical, i.e. it function as a tool for un-masking rigid dogmas that portray themselves as second nature.

One gain of experiencing the film in an allegorical manner is that it provide opportunities for us to understand a fundamental aesthetic sphere first present at the depth of ourselves as becoming, a vulnerable sphere easily destroyed even if only in certain senses and from perspectives blind for their own presuppositions. Even if this aesthetic sphere is destroyed from the view of such a perspective, it is not clear if this also means that it is abolished from mankind per se, that is if it would be impossible to regain a profound aesthetic understanding of man and his cultural landscape. In other words, could man loose his depth irreversibly? In fact, our capability of providing new allegories and new vivid metaphors speaks to the contrary. It puts us within an aesthetic, in Jean-Luc Marion's words even erotic, realm of possibility, as opposed to the standstill of *ideological* dogmatic epistemological certainty.²

¹ Coppola, Francis Ford *Apocalypse Now*

² Marion, Jean-Luc *The Erotic Phenomenon*, eng. transl. S. E. Lewis (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007), pp 20-26. From my point of view, the dogmatic view that science can reach certainty, and also the belief that it encompasses totality, i.e. that science is able to tell us the truth about all there is, is not a scientific view, rather it is a result of a certain ideology of objectification.

I will relate to such an aesthetic realm as to a *littoral landscape*, and to the being travelling such a landscape as an *amphibian*.³ This in order to, metaphorically, give attention to the openness that lay bare possibilities of self-fashioning as well as cultural critical transformations through encountering aesthetic and erotic expressions.⁴

Concerning destruction we can here remind ourselves of Nietzsche who detected archaic passions erupting in certain individuals even in an age where resentment had become creative giving birth to destructive values to the world. The aim and purpose of re-active resentment is to abolish and destroy old active archaic passions, more aesthetical than ethical.⁵ As in Nietzsche's view of extraordinary individuals expressing archaic passions, each allegorical reading is here treated as parole, i.e. as an individual empirical expressive instance of speech as opposed to formal, general and abstract facts of discursive reasoning (*Langue*).⁶ Here parole focuses the artistic poetic aspect rather than the rational discursive, which means that parole always is within the littoral landscape of the possible rather than in the abstract realm of certainty. Therefore my allegorical reading of *Apocalypse Now* should be looked upon as an instance of Parole in the same manner as new and lucid metaphors are considered as such. In fact I characterise parole in the manner Albrecht Wellmer, while giving a nod to Adorno, characterises the sublime: "The contingent, the meaningless, the absurd, that which is excluded from the world of linguistic meaning because it is disparate or heterogeneous, the nonsensical other side of the world that is disclosed through language."⁷

This means that, for me, parole goes beyond linguistic poetic expression, also for example into bodily per-formative and visual art but also into expressions of erotic desire. But as far as language is concerned I will hold the position that poetry is a species of parole rather than a

³ Nilsson, Per *The Amphibian Stand: A Philosophical Essay Concerning Research Processes in Fine Art* (Umeå: Bokförlaget h:ström—Text & Kultur, 2009).

⁴ Bataille, Georges *Eroticism*, eng. transl. M. Dalwood (London: Marion Boyars Publishers LTD, 2006), pp 11-25.

⁵ *The Portable Nietzsche*, ed. and eng. transl. W. Kaufmann (New York: Penguin Books, 1982), p 451.

⁶ Nilsson, *The Amphibian Stand*, pp 91-99. Parole is reminiscent of Ferdinand de Saussure's use of it. He contrast parole with *Langue* (language as a system), and it was *Langue* that was of primary interest for the structuralist Saussure, while it for me is *Parole* as an aesthetic personal expression, see Saussure, Ferdinand de *Course in General Linguistics* (Glasgow: Fontana/Collins, 1974).

⁷ Wellmer, Albrecht, *Endgames*, eng. transl. D. Midgley (Cambridge Mass.: The MIT Press, 1998), p 263.

species of discursive language, which is the *ideological* language through which an epistemological reduced world is disclosed.

Thereby I consider poetry to be a presupposition for discourse and capable of de-creating it. Poetry brings language into ambiguity and multiplicity of aesthetic expressions and mediations.⁸ Poetry opens up an aesthetic sphere and mediates its content aesthetically into littoral landscapes inhabited by amphibians that are the receptors of the mediated and who utilise this content in order to make sense of their surroundings.

In a similar fashion Pier Paolo Pasolini utilises the distinction between *parole* and *langue* to distinguish between cinema and film: “Cinema is similar to “*Langue*” while films correspond to “*Paroles*”; in a strictly Saussurean context this means that only Films (as only *Paroles*) exist in practise and concretely, while Cinema (as *Langue*) does not exist — it is simply an abstract and normalizing deduction which has its point of departure in infinite Films (understood as *Paroles*).”⁹ This implies, when it comes to language that *langue* is a deduction from all empirical instances of language use and that texts that portray themselves to be *langue* actually are examples of *parole*. It also implies that paroles are in effect on a variety of levels in this text, and even though it disguises itself as discursive it remains an instant of parole.

I will in this essay explain the problem with destructive tendencies and also, by way of parole, i.e. by providing an allegory, tell a story of how an aesthetic experience provided by film can transform itself into an individual example of how aesthetic expressions can de- create forces of destruction. It should be noted that even if de-creation not can be generalised, the same does not hold for destruction. In fact, the aim of destruction is complete abolishment of certain non-generalizable phenomena. The resistance I use are, among other things film, stories, allegories and metaphors in a singular, contingent and per-formative fashion. The meaningless, particular and absurd status of aesthetic expression or *parole* is such only from the viewpoint of an abstract, general and dogmatic epistemology aiming for certainty, which

⁸ Paz, Octavio *The Bow and the Lyre*, eng. transl. R. L. C. Simms (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1973), pp 3-15.

⁹ Pasolini, Pier Paolo *Heretical Empiricism*, eng. transl. B. Lawton & L. K. Barnett (Washington, DC: New Academic Publishing, LLC, 2005), p xxiv.

in itself more is an expression of a certain ideology than an expression of science, an ideology which today is globally predominant.

This means that I will be following Wittgenstein in his idea of meaning, i.e. “the meaning of a word is its use in the language”¹⁰ and not define my concepts in any other way than through their particular use as paroles. This also means that these concepts are constantly becoming, they are within the realm of possibility rather than certainty; their meanings are not fixed, rather they becomes from being used by amphibians travelling littoral landscapes. Hence there are amphibian poetic processes manifested, not only in the use of these concepts but also in their creation,¹¹ since their meanings are constantly transformed, stressing the ambiguous, amphibious¹² quality as parole against the discursive un-ambiguity of ideological epistemological certainty. Meaning is use stresses the openness for multiple interpretations and this goes for poetic, erotic and philosophical expressions as well as for actions within littoral landscapes of aesthetics.

My view is that aesthetics embraces ambiguity and multiplicity, even when it comes to meaning and interpretation and I will use this ambiguous field as starting point for de-creating an *ideological* epistemological reduction, commonly considered as instrumental, aiming for certainty.¹³ As sensible creatures we are constantly involved in making reductions, but some reductions are more destructive than others. For instance an epistemological reduction focusing on certainty is destructive towards aesthetical/poetical orderings focusing on *making sense* of possibilities and relationships or making sense of a chaotic outer and inner reality, which is the presupposition for our creativity and for our ability to love. We can here remind

¹⁰ Wittgenstein, Ludwig. *Philosophical Investigations*, eng. transl. G.E.M. Anscombe (New York: The MacMillan Company, 1953), § 43.

¹¹ Deleuze, Gilles and Guattari, Félix *What is Philosophy?*, eng. transl. G. Burchell and H. Tomlinson (New York: Verso, 2004).

¹² It is interesting to note that Paz refers to the poem as “an amphibious organism” Paz *The Bow and the Lyre*, p 9.

¹³ The problem of such a scientific ideology has been stated throughout the last century, although I find Horkheimer's and Adorno's the dialectic of enlightenment to be the most moving and touching expression of this problem and its consequences, see Max Horkheimer & Theodor W. Adorno *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, eng. transl. J. Cumming (New York: Continuum, 1944).

ourselves Foucault's statement about the soul as the prison of the body,¹⁴ where the soul is looked upon as a historical political construction, created in order to inscribe discipline in our bodies, involving an objectification of our own, as well as other's selves. Such objectification of selves is an example of an epistemological reduction in the ideological sense I'm discussing.

Here we begin to understand why the Socratic dictum "Know Thyself" can be hostile toward our own selves, while Foucault and other's focus on an *ethics of care of self* is not. Admittedly there are different interpretations of the Socratic dictum and here mine is overly Platonic. However this is in order to make a point rather than entering a debate on interpretations of Socrates. It is well known that Socrates turned away from the world, entering some sort of trance while being caught in reflection. In order to reach true knowledge one, according to this interpretation of Socratic trance, had to disregard one's body and withdraw from the world, one had to become *Scheintod im Denken*, to use the title of Peter Sloterdijks book: "Socrates was suggesting that the condition of being dead [...] benefits theory [and] can be learned in some way. Consequently, what we call method is not merely the scientific path to things but also the approach to a state of near-death, a cognition-enhancing condition."¹⁵ There is mutuality here. In order to reach true knowledge of the world we have to reduce the world to a state of material free of value. In order to reach that stage we have to reach a stage of "near death" ourselves, turning away from the world. In other words, we have to reduce our selves in the same way as such reduced selves reduces the world and thereby individual qualities and values are done with. We also know that Socrates in the *Phaedo* is instructing Crito to sacrifice a cock to Asclepius as he was dying. Such sacrifice was done after one had recovered from illness since Asclepius were the God of healing. Socrates instruction implies that life is a disease and that he, as dying, was recovering.¹⁶ This means that "Know Thyself" could be interpreted, not as a factor in an *ars vivendi* but a factor

¹⁴ Foucault, Michel *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, eng. transl. A. Sheridan (London: Penguin Books, 1991), p 30.

¹⁵ Sloterdijk, Peter *The Art of Philosophy: Wisdom as a Practise*, eng. transl. K. Margolis (New York, Columbia University Press, 2012), p 3. The German title of this book is *Scheintod im Denken* as used above in the text since it very well describes the condition I'm elaborating on.

¹⁶ Nietzsche, Friedrich *Twilight of the Idols/Anti-Christ*, eng. transl. R. J. Hollingdale (London: Penguin Classics, 1990) p 39, see also p 44.

in an *ars moriendi*. “Know Thyself” becomes the motto for the I who conduct epistemological reductions, reductions including the own I, an I dead to the world of experiences in littoral landscapes. This act threatens to destroy the presupposition of an I as an amphibian traveller of littoral landscapes, an I involved in *ars vivendi* rather than in *ars moriendi*, an I that is a presupposition for the reduced I.

Here it can be useful to look upon how Simone Weil, who coined the term de-creation, characterise the concepts de-creation and destruction: “Decreation: to make something created pass into the uncreated. Destruction: to make something created pass into nothingness. A blameworthy substitute for decreation.”¹⁷ The aim for Weil was to de-create her own self in order to reach an erotic relationship with God.¹⁸ It was the self that stood in-between her and the creator.¹⁹ It is important to notice that de-creation is not abolishment; rather the aim is to reach the pre-suppositions for the created. Hence the presupposition for the created self is, according to Weil, the creator who gives us being in order for us to be able to give it up to him. As she writes: “We participate in the creation of the world by decreating ourselves,”²⁰ which means that her I, her self, had to be de-created in order for her to be with God.

This entails that de-creation of the rational is not a destructive action, rather it could be considered a way of critically un-masking the ideology of destructive dogmatic tendencies within the rational, that is show that the rational, as it is used in particular cases, is not rational at all but a blameworthy substitute for de-creation and what it tries to destroy is its own pre-suppositions as in the case of “Know Thyself” above. Hence we can say that what is strived for is to lay bare the amphibian character of knowledge and hope, a knowledge of, and hope for, becoming and transformation. I would call this to aestheticize knowledge and also its use.

But Simone Weil was not de-creating rationality, rather she was de-creating her self through aesthetic philosophical expressions, she tried for immediacy through writing, a

¹⁷ Weil, Simone *Gravity and Grace*, eng. transl. Crawford, E. & von der Ruhr, M. (London: Routledge Classics, 2002), p 32.

¹⁸ Carson, Anne *Decreation: Poetry, Essays, opera* (New York: Vintage Books, 2006), pp 155-183.

¹⁹ Weil *Gravity and Grace*, pp 32-39, Carson *Decreation*, pp 167-170.

²⁰ Weil *Gravity and Grace*, p 33.

project involving her in contradictions,²¹ something aesthetically, but not epistemologically, acceptable due to the open, ambiguous character of aesthetics. In my view she tried to de-create her self by aid of aesthetics through using aesthetic praxis of parole and was so in the last instance dependent upon religious faith since the aesthetic presupposition of parole is immediacy, i.e. in her view God. Faith therefore did manifest itself in her life and her conviction led her to starve her self to death, thus finally succeeding as a *hunger artiste* who reaches the implied presupposition for her art: “She [Simone Weil] too was an artiste in the field of weight loss for the sake of the entirely other: the greatest thinker of anti-gravitation in the twentieth century, born in 1909, an anarchist of Jewish descent, converted to Catholicism, an insider on all magic mountains of worldlessness and simultaneously a searcher for a rooting in authentic community, resistance fighter and defiance existentialist, who wanted to starve alongside the workers in order to ennoble her lack of appetite and humble her nobility.”²² She, whom Albert Camus called “the only great spirit of our time,”²³ died at the age of thirty-four from tuberculosis and voluntary starvation. Conviction in such actions is the faithful version of *Quod Erat Demonstrandum* in rational logic formalistic arguments or mathematical proofs, i.e. epistemic certainty. Certainty and conviction are therefore clearly separated by an aesthetic littoral landscape. As we can see here both conviction and certainty potentially have devastating consequences. In my view aesthetics stays short from both extremes, revolving within littoral landscapes, in-between conviction and certainty. But there is a route here from chaos of unknown immediacy, through aesthetics to epistemology and epistemological reduction is a way of doing away with its aesthetic origin.

There is therefore a possibility to confuse certainty and conviction, where one is convinced of future promises of epistemological certainty, that is the promise that science one day will be able to explain everything. Richard Dawkins could constitute an example, turning science and knowledge into a new religion, abolishing both aesthetics and faith, re-placing both with a reductive version of ideological certainty. However, Weil never left aesthetics of parole in her writings but was constantly revolving within its domain, but she did leave her

²¹ Carson *Decreation*, pp 171-181.

²² Sloterdijk, Peter *You Must Change Your Life*, eng. transl. W. Hoban (Cambridge, UK: Polity Press, 2013), p 72.

²³ Carson *Decreation*, p 157.

self over to faith through conviction in action and thereby she left aesthetics through succeeding as a *hunger artiste*. Aesthetics was not enough; she went for religious erotic splendour and through action gave her self up to God where she was not.

Apocalypse Now: An Allegory In-between Art and Philosophy

The two versions of *Apocalypse Now* (1979, 2001) are allegorical enactments of Joseph Conrad's novel *Heart of Darkness* from 1903. The story is moved from Congo to Vietnam and Cambodia.

Captain Willard, a while after returning from the U. S. to Saigon, receives a mission from intelligence officers Lt. General Corman, Colonel Lucas and a civilian to go up the Nung River to Cambodia and terminate Colonel Kurtz command, a euphemism for killing him. The reason for the mission is the intelligence officers concerns that Kurtz has gone mad, running berserk raids into Cambodia with his own local Montagnard troops, killing indiscriminately. The Intelligence officers states quite clearly that there is good and evil fighting a battle within every man, and the good do not always win, also that every man has a breaking point and that Kurtz obviously has reached his. The key issue is that Colonel Kurtz methods are un-sound. Willard joins the crew of a Navy patrol boat that will take him to the destination of his mission, the heart of darkness.

One can say that distinctness of clear and distinct ideas begin to deteriorate for Willard through the practise of war he experiences, while clearness of perception almost becomes unbearable. Clear and distinct ideas are emanating from the rationalistic epistemology of Descartes where he declares that what is perceived both clear and distinct also is undoubtedly true.²⁴ This entails a distinction between what is clear and what is distinct and I will here elaborate on how these concepts will be used. Provisionally we can say that *ambiguous clarity* is aesthetic while the *clear and distinct* is epistemic.

²⁴ Descartes, René, *Discourse on Method and The Meditations*, eng. transl. F. E. Sutcliffe (London: Penguin Books, 1968), p 113.

According to Karsten Harries, Descartes reaches his clear and distinct ideas through a series of reductions with epistemological intent, this in order to discover “in the world’s heterogeneous multiplicity homogeneity and simplicity.”²⁵ The three stages of reduction come about through reflection where in the first stage the world of everyday experience, i.e. the littoral landscape, is transformed into a collection of objects presented to a thinking subject, and this subject can in this first stage be likened with a disembodied, dispassionate eye viewing the world as a picture. However, as this picture is seen or sensed, it is relative to the sensing body, becoming only a superficial appearance, thereby losing all its characteristic values and qualities; reality is quantified. To penetrate beneath this pictorial surface of appearance a second reduction is needed where the thinking subject, not the eye, becomes the measure of all things. Reality becomes that which presents itself to thought. However even this is not enough. In order to gain complete mastery over reality the suggestion now is that we transform what is to be mastered into a “mosaic,” analysing it into “simple natures” and then reconstruct the world from these “simple natures,” whereby in the process absolute knowledge will have been obtained. This is the task of science in this ideological story. What is left after such reductions will present itself as clear and distinct ideas to the thinking I. This would be the ideological epistemological reduction in a nutshell, ending up in reductive certainty if totalised.²⁶ The process is therefore also devastating for the experiencing I since it also is reduced simultaneously with the world, promoting an *ars moriendi* rather than an *ars vivendi*. This is the intellectual point of departure for the journey Willard and his crew is descending upon. It is also the fixed point of view of the officers in Saigon throughout this allegory. But something takes place in Willard, something we can write on the account of the journey itself.

Willard’s journey up river is a rout through hell. There are madness and unsound methods all over the place and Willard starts wondering what separates Kurtz from all other madness going on, all under heading of rational sound methods of a civilised army fighting a justified war on the other side of the world.

²⁵ Harries, Karsten “The Philosopher at Sea,” in *Nietzsche’s New Seas: Explorations in Philosophy, Aesthetics and Politics*, ed. M. A. Gillespie & T. B. Strong (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991), p 38.

²⁶ Harries “The Philosopher at Sea,” pp 38-39.

In order to begin to explain the process of Willard's de-creation through the distinction between clear and distinct I will turn to Thomas Mann and his *Magic Mountain* where he writes:

Isn't it grand, isn't it good, that language has only one word for everything we associate with love—from utter sanctity to the most fleshly lust? *The result is perfect clarity in ambiguity*, for love cannot be disembodied even in its most sanctified forms, nor is it without sanctity even in its most fleshly . . . Caritas is assuredly found in the most admirable and most depraved passions. Irresolute? But in God's name, leave the meaning of love unresolved! Unresolved—that is life and humanity, and it would betray a dreary lack of subtlety to worry about it.²⁷

Here we have a view of perfect *clarity in ambiguity* without distinctness and this provide us with tools to elaborate the distinction between what's clear and what's distinct, or rather between what's *clear and ambiguous* and what's *clear and distinct*. Here the essence of love seems to be its un-distinctness, its ambiguity as embodied and the mystery of love gains from being un-resolved. Love, a concept who's meaning ought not to be defined but becomes a constituted manifold through use, is a concept belonging to littoral landscapes of erotic/aesthetic experiences hopefully developed through *ars Erotica*. Therefore there's a plea to leave the essence of love unresolved and truly there's nothing distinct about knowledge of experiential essences, if anything such experiential and passionate knowledge might be clear and ambiguous, i.e. aesthetic, hence not being knowledge at all from a reductive epistemological point of view. This entails that a perceptual sensitised overload is aesthetically transformed into ambiguous clarity of sense perception, emotions and passions while an epistemological reduction of the ambiguous clear turn them into clear and distinct ideas with a lack of the values and passions we find in ordinary experience.

Willard is given documents from Saigon concerning the background of Kurtz. These documents stated facts about Kurtz's training and carrier. They become a map for Willard

²⁷ Thomas Mann, *The Magic Mountain*, here quoted from Nehamas, Alexander *The Art of Living: Socratic Reflections from Plato to Foucault* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2000), p 19. Italisation by me.

that enables him to keep some distance to the war, emphasising the mission. However, a map is not a tracing hence its relation to the world expresses just one perspective out of many possible, something hidden by the perspective of the map portraying itself as a tracing. The insight into the manifold perspective left out from the map makes Willard more and more sceptic towards it and the distance the documents provide between him and the war deteriorate during the journey.

I use the concepts clear and distinct in the fashion that our perceptions are clear in the manner that they are aesthetically ordered sense perception of a presupposed although unknown chaotic immediacy, this in order to make sense of our littoral surroundings. Such ordering brings forward an ambiguous clarity emphasising reality's poetic qualities. For Weil God acted as a presupposition for her aesthetically ordered self, a presupposition only obtainable through faith. Distinct on the other hand is more of an epistemological, logical concept by which we can separate, reduce and classify objects through epistemological reduction, which lead epistemology to certainty through Q.E.D instead for to conviction in faithful action. The epistemological reduction comes about through a will or urge to master the world, but this will or urge "forces us to share Nietzsche's concern about the price that has to be paid for the power gained: the very success of the attempt to secure human existence threatens to allow us to lose touch with the chaos we bear within ourselves, which is the source of our creativity and of our ability to love."²⁸ We have reached an abyss here and we have to see what aesthetics and eroticism demand from us in order to play their roles in existence. Says Marion about the necessity to de-create the epistemological reduced self that is *Scheintod im Denken*: "Thus it is necessary to have done with that which produces the certainty of objects of the world—the epistemic reduction, which keeps in a thing only that that stays repeatable, permanent and as if permanently under the mind's regard or gaze (I, insofar as object or as subject)."²⁹ This goes not only for the self but for the sensible world as such and also for language. The epistemological reduction only keeps facts of language, i.e. grammatical and logical rules etc., and disregards their presupposition, which is parole; an innovation of speaks that always remains individual.

²⁸ Harries "The Philosopher at Sea," pp 39-40.

²⁹ Marion *The Erotic Phenomenon*, p 21.

This means that experience of ambiguous clarity is individual and concrete in all its abundance while distinctness is general and abstract. However, as in the case of love, the aesthetically clear without distinctness is not blind, but the distinct without clarity is empty. Ambiguous clarity can be communicated, discussed, debated and that expresses its relational aspect. Aesthetical orderings in their manifold also implies an ability to share sensible experiences, to be assured that thou and I share and experience a sensible world together. Hence we have one aspect of art pointed out by Charles Taylor; a work of art is always addressed, it presupposes an other who can assure the work and thereby the artist.³⁰ In fact one characterisation of art is that it is relational,³¹ which goes for most of our expressions.

There is also another reduction pinpointed by Marion, a reduction applicable to Weil, and according to me connected to conviction through faith, called ontologic reduction: “which only keeps in a thing its status as being in order to lead it back to its being, or indeed, eventually, to track it to the point of catching a glimpse of Being itself (I as *Dasein*, the Being in which what is at stake is being).”³² It is to Being itself, the presupposition of being, that Weil wants to give up her being hence de-creating her being.

We do know what a dogmatic epistemology usually demands in order to uphold the ideal of Q.E.D. To be able to demonstrate something in a logical rational fashion, qualities have to be reduced to quantity. This is the epistemological reduction in its clear essence where we only keep what is repeatable and permanent in order to gain certainty. As we have seen such reduction is accompanied by an equal reduction of the self, i.e. a Socratic-Cartesian objectification of the self in order to obtain self-knowledge. On the other hand the ethics of care of self is not epistemologically reducible to an objectified and rational version of a self, rather it entails aesthetic orderings involving our whole bodies with all their senses and perceptions.³³ It entails aesthetic realms, littoral landscapes in which possibility for change, for amphibian becoming always is prevalent; sensible landscapes not reducible to quantity. Rather they are dependent, as are works of art, upon assurance from others, “from elsewhere,”

³⁰ Taylor, Charles *The Ethics of Authenticity* (Cambridge Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1991), p 35.

³¹ Nilsson *The Amphibian Stand*, pp 100-107

³² Marion, *The Erotic Phenomenon*, pp 21-22. Capitalisation by me.

³³ See Richard Shusterman *Body Consciousness: A Philosophy of Mindfulness and Somaesthetics* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008).

it is through assurance we constantly re-constitute ourselves in amphibian manners in chaos beneath certainty.³⁴

In Saigon the clearness and distinctness of the ideas why and how the war was fought were rationally self evident, in the field the distinctness were gradually deteriorating but there was an overload of clear sense perception, every detail manifested its ambiguous clarity in the bodies of Willard and his crew, even if Willard with aid of the map, managed to keep some distance in the beginning of his mission. But as the journey continued the aesthetic qualities and consequences of war became clearly perceived. What epistemologically singled out war as such from other instances of particular violence were, on the other hand, not clear and distinct to them at all since they could not find out what was essentially and rationally connecting the different episodes of their journey, a journey clearly, though not clearly and distinctly, perceived and experienced by their bodies. The different episodes of their journey resisted abstraction and generalisation; rather it was as if they experienced parols of war, hence exploding the epistemological reduced concept of war into bits and pieces.

Let me clarify how I use the concepts aesthetics and poetics in this allegory. Aesthetics has historically been concerned with how we perceive a work of art, traditionally as in Kant in a disinterested way.³⁵ The judgment of value has either been beauty or the sublime, and it is the viewer's response that counts. Poetics on the other hand has regarded a set of rules in accordance with which an artwork ought to be produced. Here I use aesthetics and poetics as inseparably concepts, even if not indistinguishable. There are rules governing the production of each and every artwork, only they are not generalizable. The detection of rules comes after the work is done and can thus be put into multitude of interpretive discourses and theories, the aim of epistemology. The same holds for aesthetics whether we encounter the work or treat it as a representation.

³⁴ Marion *The Erotic Phenomenon*, p 23.

³⁵ Kant, Immanuel *The Critique of Judgment* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1952), 42-44

Aesthetics and poetics are given uniquely in each and every artwork in a clear fashion, and our way of apprehending them ought to be by way of encounter in Gilles Deleuze sense.³⁶ This means that I let works of art approach me, the relational, erotic and amphibian self of aesthetic ordering, rather than approaching the work as a representation through the epistemologically reduced and objectified self of *ars moriendi*. I let works of art open my senses for what is unique, for what I have not perceived before, and thereby I can get a new look upon the surrounding world and myself. In such a way works of art might change my view both of the world and myself, moreover they might open me up for other possible encounters. Art, poetics and aesthetics therefore are relational and as relational they also include eroticism, which connect them to kinaesthetic, involving our whole body with all its sense perceptions, passions and desires. This is one reason why ethics of care of self involves aesthetic orderings rather than the epistemological reduction of “Know Thyself.” The relational character situates art in littoral landscapes; themselves open for interpretation and transformation, landscapes inhabited by amphibians capable of transformation and self-fashioning capable of developing *arts of living* by way of encounters.

Aesthetic orderings works on a presupposed chaotic immediacy that cannot be epistemologically proved. Also, I mean that aesthetic values are manifold, not only reducible to the historical givens.³⁷ They are sensible values concerning our bodies and our worlds, even if these bodies aesthetically never expresses ideal totalities about themselves and their worlds, an urge emblematic of a dogmatic epistemology. In the words of Samuel Beckett “Total object, complete with missing parts, instead of partial object. Question of degree.”³⁸

In order to totalise the self, to gain an all encompassing knowledge of the self, including the body, an epistemological reduction is needed, a reduction hostile toward the missing parts, a reduction that cannot comprehend such completeness that depends on the recognition of missing parts or question of degrees. Rather the reduction risks ending up in a dogmatic objectification where quantity replaces quality while pretending to cover both.

³⁶ Deleuze, Gilles *Difference and Repetition*, eng. transl. P. Patton (London: Continuum, 2004), pp 164-208

³⁷ Nilsson *The Amphibian Stand*, pp 67-74.

³⁸ Beckett, Samuel *Dramatic Works and Dialogues* (London: John Calder Publishers, 1999), p 25.

The difference between Kurtz in the documents and Kurtz in the flesh will become clear once the geographical distance is gone, once Willard and Kurtz share the same, not space but place.

The reason why I'm talking about orderings in an aesthetical sense is because the world never presents itself in its chaotic immediacy, which stands as a prerequisite for faith and as a clear presupposition for aesthetics. From an aesthetical perspective it is clear that the world always is mediated, only there are differences between aesthetic orderings and an epistemic reduction. Aesthetic orderings are orderings of a presumed chaotic immediacy while epistemological reduction is a reduction and objectification of ambiguity of aesthetic experiences. The amphibian self don't know itself but are dependent upon recognition from others, *from elsewhere*, dependent upon encounters. This entails that the amphibian self is ambiguous and clear, but not clear and distinct, about itself.

In his discussion of poetry Octavio Paz emphasise the ambiguous character of poetry and contrast with it the un-ambiguous character of prose. I would not be so harsh disqualifying prose from the ambiguous realm as is clear from my use of Thomas Mann's *Magic Mountain*. Rather, my distinction follows more Saussure where prose clearly can be viewed as a species of parole but where discursive language portrays itself as *langue*, which do not exist other than as a fantasy of dead writing.

However, poetry is, according to Paz, an image and images are ambiguous.³⁹ Serge Daney has also noted the distinction and emphasise it on the pictorial level between visuals and images where ambiguity of images contrast with the epistemologically reduced un-ambiguity of visuals. This, according to Daney lays bare the democratic quality of images as against visuals, since the former are open for discussions and interpretations while the latter are not.⁴⁰ In my discussion it should be noted that images, and thereby poetry are proceeding towards ambiguous clarity, they are expressive paroles, while visuals and discursive language aim for

³⁹ Paz *The Bow and the Lyre*, pp 8-!3.

⁴⁰ Daney Serge "Before and After the Image" in Documenta X, The Book, 1997.

clear and distinct, preferring the latter. Poems as images, as well as paintings have their own methods; only every poem or painting as instances of parole are examples of their own particular, non-generalizable methods. Amphibian selves carry their poetic images on their sleeves, amphibian selves as parole open for interpretations and change both by themselves through encounters, but also through others “from elsewhere.” Such openness is not an option for the version of the Socratic/Cartesian self I elaborated above, which through reductive quantifiable means reaches its ideological Q.E.D.

The pictorial level of *Apocalypse Now* is ambiguous and sublime, without borders between the horrors depicted (borders and frames are for beauty and epistemology, even if beauty *can* be a point both of departure and arrival of criticism if it denies its framing and embraces its ambiguity). The sublime, through its imagery and ambiguousness makes critical work in a de-creative fashion. It de-creates the idea of a clear and distinct connection between rationality and ethics, and is thus providing a critique of such a connection through aesthetics. At the same time the rigid distinction between epistemology and aesthetics is also de-created in another fashion, which will be clear below. However, it does not provide an alternative other than hinting at the possibility, and thereby hope, that things could be different. This hint is presented through the experience of viewing the film, in my case connected to the encounter that gave rise to my allegory, which is one of many possible. Manifold entails that things could be different and thereby brings them into the littoral landscape of possible transformation.

Towards the end of the journey Willard, and what's left of his crew, finally reaches Kurtz domains. The horrors lay out before Willard is immense. There are dead bodies and decapitated heads everywhere. Clearly terror reigns with armed Montagnard troops all over the place. Finally Willard is brought to the conclusion of his mission and he meets with Kurtz. Kurtz ask him what they say about him in Saigon. Willard answers that they regard his methods as unsound. The reply from Kurtz is “What do you think of my methods?” and the reply, a key reply in my allegory: “I see no method.” After that, Willard in brutal fashion with a machete terminates the Colonels command.

But off course there were methods in Kurtz's actions, only not detectable from the rational standpoint held by Willard, a standpoint quickly deteriorating. Soon he will understand that Kurtz's particular actions are just as many examples of his methods.

The real reason why Kurtz has to go is because he's a spoilsport. He leaves the rational game of war planned and played out from Saigon and Washington. It is not that he cheats, plays the game by breaking rules, but that he leaves their game and gathers a new play community around him.

Kurtz is playing a children's game, a children's game he probably un-knowingly has been playing his whole carrier, something that becomes clear when Willard researches the colonels background. The documents provided from Saigon about Kurtz's background functioned as a map for Willard. While following that map, like it was a tracing, he distanced himself from the madness of the war, clinging to the map as to a token of a clear and distinct mission, and yet the journey through the war took its de-creative toll. Finally there were no more map between him and clearness of war, but the clear face of war was nothing like he expected when he accepted the mission. The clear face of war was the face of the man he at last encountered, present in the same place, not detached by distance of a map. Finally Willard understood that Kurtz never really been an officer in the U. S. army, rather he was a warrior, and emotionally more connected with tribal warriors than regular soldiers. As such he never understood the rules and regulations of the army, i.e. what is repeatable and permanent, but went for the aesthetic splendour,⁴¹ the parole of the tribal warrior.

The euphemism "terminate the colonel's command" is part of the rules of a game, a game evolving through civilisation processes so very clearly described by Foucault in *Surveillance and Punishment*. Through such processes war evolves from parole of the splendour of a warriors game into the rationality and efficiency of contemporary war in which distinct rules hide the ambiguous clarity of barbaric actions of warfare, actions even more effectively barbarous since they follow the clear and distinct rules of the game of war.

⁴¹ Lingis, Alphonso *Violence and Splendor* (Evanston, Illinois: Northwestern University Press, 2011), pp 139-150

But there is also an epistemological residue in the warrior Kurtz. He “returns” to the pre-supposition for rational warfare, the tribal warrior of splendour, after he has taken the route through a civilisation process. This is the explanation of the efficiency of his barbarous actions.

Allegory as Littoral Landscapes

The allegory in *Apocalypse Now* can be read as the urge of a dogmatic rational culture to destroy its mythological past while, through encounter, it slowly turns into an image of this past. The space between the Intelligence Officers in Saigon and Colonel Kurtz is not only geographic; it is also, from the point of view of Saigon, cultural, temporal and emotional. The active state of passion is a state of the tribal warrior while an emotional re-active coolness characterises “contemporary” generals and colonels of “civilised armies.” In my view this is primarily a distance between epistemology and faith with littoral landscapes of aesthetics in-between them. The urge in the *heart of darkness* of our rational western culture is to destroy ambiguity and replace with it un-ambiguity, disregard parole and highlight facts of language, transfer everything into an objectifying knowledge deeply connected with utility and consumption as its last claim to justification. If it was possible to get rid of ambiguity and exchange for it distinctness, no doubt that would be the mission as it earlier has been the mission to get rid of immediacy, hence destroying the epistemology of religion, turning it over to something as epistemologically irrational as faith. But just as archaic passions erupt in certain particular individuals even in our day and age, dogmatic epistemology has not been successful in destroying faith and thereby conviction in certain individuals like Simone Weil. However, for now our culture is satisfied with trying to turn ambiguous clarity into clear and distinct by transforming images into visuals, poetry into un-ambiguous discursive language through an ideological epistemological objectifying reduction, trying to turn art into design and individuals into objectified consumers. The quest for certainty reigns.

However, in my allegory rational culture does not end up with the upper hand. The officers in Saigon are convinced that Willard, as their representative, will succeed in his mission. Little have they calculated with the consequences of the journey itself?

The distinct layers of culture are but skin deep, and the closer Willard gets to Kurtz, the more encounters with the war he has, the more warrior like he becomes, the more his heart darkens.

The film, both in length and in story lays out a littoral landscape between what's clear and distinct and what is clear in ambiguity and in fact the journey moves Willard in the direction towards ambiguous clarity, hence his journey is a journey of de-creation from the clear and distinct of epistemology to ambiguous clarity of aesthetics. Willard is thereby lost in-between *two dark hearts* in-between potential devastations of both conviction and certainty. The film becomes an image of a littoral landscape of our culture, only the real presupposition for that landscape is faith.

The peeling of layers from Willard is de-creation doing its work through the ambiguous clarity of the littoral landscape. When Willard meets Kurtz beyond the distance of the researched map and finally, through brutally killing him with a machete and thereby transforms into an image of him as he was an image of a tribal warrior, rationality is not destroyed, it only comes face to face with its dark presupposition, the barbarous children's play of war, it meets its own aesthetic poetic presupposition, goes from the created into the un-created but not into nothingness. It also lays bare the amphibian qualities of Willard's self, qualities that manifests themselves through the transformations within Willard, i.e. his ability to adapt to the ever changing littoral landscape he's been travelling.

The space for all these encounters, the space that carries the mark of de-creation and makes them possible are littoral landscapes of culture, landscapes in-between conviction and certainty, landscapes of aesthetics. Also the self who's travelling such landscape is amphibian, situated in-between faith and epistemology, in-between expression and thought, a self with a transformational power of performance. This sheds light on Foucault portraying himself as an aesthetician:

For me intellectual work is related to what you could call aestheticism, meaning transforming yourself . . . This transformation of one's self by one's own knowledge is, I think, something rather

close to the aesthetic experience. Why should a painter work if he is not transformed by his own painting?⁴²

While the aim of the mission portrayed in the film was the destruction of irrationality and un-civilised barbarous actions, what is detected through the journey through the littoral landscape is the ambiguous, aesthetical presupposition of rationality itself; that at the deep level of un-ambiguity lurks ambiguity and at the deep layers of rationality lurks irrationality and as a presupposition for them all lurks faith. The presupposition for epistemology is aesthetics and the foundation of our knowledge is no more secure than the foundation of aesthetics and aesthetics presupposes faith, but in between faith and epistemology lays a littoral landscape of hope, of aesthetics, travelled by amphibians.

The barbarous face met at the end of the journey, the face adopted by Willard, as the presupposition for civilisation is only more barbarous since it has past through a civilisation process, the evil residue is a product of our own civilisation and we are left over to faith: the horror.

Not being a religious man myself I'm surprised to end up at this stage. I guess I can only put my faith in what Walter Benjamin once said at the beginning of the fascist era; that it's only for the sake of those without hope that hope is given to us.

*Nur um der Hoffnungslosen willen ist uns die Hoffnung gegeben*⁴³

⁴² Foucault, Michel *Foucault Live: Collected Interviews, 1961-1984*, ed. S. Lotringer, eng. transl. L. Hochroth & J. Johnston (New York: Semiotext(e), 1996) p. 379.

⁴³ Benjamin Walter, here quoted from Marcuse, Herbert *One Dimensional Man*, p 257.