

Revolution Fabrication Convulsion: Bringing Art (Back) Down to Earth

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1. Bruegel is the name used by the artist himself, but he is also called Breughel or Breugel.

2. To be found in the Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna.

3. Some natural or medical explanations ranging from being struck by a lightning to an epileptic attack can be found at <http://www.forteanimes.com/strangedays/medical-bag/6/blinded_by_the_light.html>.

I. Introducing Saul, Paul, the Theological Turn and the Longing for Revolution

Pieter Bruegel the Elder, also known as Peasant Bruegel, has been a favorite for all those who have reflected on language and the theme of the Tower of Babel or who wanted to think through the human desire to be divine in relation to the story of Icarus.¹ He is a little less known for a painting that might well be of more importance for current debates in which (Saint) Paul plays a pivotal role: *The Conversion of Paul*, from 1567.² In renaming the painting by giving it the title *The Convulsion of Saul* I am putting my cards right on the table. The latter title is more apt since at the moment of being struck down Saul is not converted as yet. He is, above all, hit by something he cannot fathom. Some two thousand years later one could stick to a down to earth, or literal explanation of what happened to Saul.³ Still, today as well, there are a considerable number of people who want to read what happened 'there' theologically, as a conversion, and because of the importance of Paul, by extension, as a revolutionary change of history. In fact, Paul functions prominently in what may be called an immense theological revival in the domain of the humanities and political theory

4. On this see Vedder, Ben. *Heidegger's Philosophy of Religion*. Pittsburg: Duquesne University Press, 2006. Vedder, by the way, is also at the heart of a special research program concerning Paul at the Radboud University of Nijmegen.
5. Emilie and Julien Deleuze (eds.). "Gilles Deleuze: Lecture transcripts in Spinoza's concept of affect." See <http://www.gold.ac.uk/media/deleuze_spinoza_affect-1.pdf>.

in the last decades, one that has been connected explicitly or implicitly to a longing for revolution, if we understand revolution here as a sudden and unexpected opening up of history towards the New.

In this revival, Paul has been a topical figure, first in the work of forerunners such as Blaise Pascal and Friedrich Nietzsche (who saw in Paul a paradigm of "holy lying"). Then, more connected to current debates or constantly at the back of them, Paul was dominant in the work of Martin Heidegger. From there on Alain Badiou, Giorgio Agamben, and Simon Critchley, respectively, would bring in Paul as of relevance for the current situation. My argument with especially the latter three or four will not be philosophical *per se*. It concerns the task, impossible in my view, given by these thinkers to art and literature. It is a task that has distinctly theological overtones or underpinnings. This shows itself in Heidegger's idea that art and literature can replace both the loss of God (or the gods) and be a medicine for the technological rage of modernity. Art is immediately linked to religion, here, in the shape of a "poetry of religion."⁴ For the other three, art and literature both have to, and can save the world by a messianic (Agamben) or revolutionary opening up of history towards the New (Badiou and Critchley). In the words of Alberto Toscano, this theological turn of late is not be explained by a real religious need, but by a theoretical necessity (or a theoretical deficit).

Such a theological turn, in fact any theological turn, is what Gilles Deleuze would find a depressing mistake, or perhaps better: an option that would imply sadness and, as

a consequence, a diminution of the power to act. In one his Vincennes lectures on Spinoza, Deleuze states:

Spinoza will engender all the passions, in their details, on the basis of these two fundamental affects: joy as an increase in the power of acting, sadness as a diminution or destruction of the power of acting. This comes down to saying that each thing, body or soul, is defined by a certain characteristic, complex relation, but I would also say that each thing, body or soul, is defined by a certain power [pouvoir] of being affected. Everything happens as if each one of us had a certain power of being affected. If you consider beasts, Spinoza will be firm in telling us that what counts among animals is not at all the genera or species; genera and species are absolutely confused notions, abstract ideas. What counts is the question, of what is a body capable? And thereby he sets out one of the most fundamental questions in his whole philosophy (before him there had been Hobbes and others) by saying that the only question is that we don't even know [*savons*] what a body is capable of, we prattle on about the soul and the mind and we don't know what a body can do.⁵

Although Badiou, Agamben and Critchley are calling for creative ways out of the suffocating subjection by capitalism, their fascination with and, in essence, re-turn to theology can hardly be creative or adequate in Deleuze's frame of mind. The simple reason is that they appear to miss *body*.

With respect to all this, Bruegel's painting will help me to bring literature and art down to earth from the high realms and deep demands of religion and theology. Theoretically speaking the painting will help me to forge an alliance between Gilles Deleuze and Hannah Arendt, being fully aware that the philosophy of both is in some senses incompatible. Yet this is why calling them *allies* is putting it the right way. It is, besides, an immediate hint to what for both Arendt and Deleuze is at the heart of politics. This is not power and violence but the ability and potential to connect bodies and parties that have their own inconsistencies and are not living in harmony, but that will be able to act and work together nevertheless. Such collective (Arendt) or synthetic or correlative (Deleuze) enactment will help them, moreover, to be overcome by surprise, in meeting the new—a "new" that, in what follows, will be distinguished principally from the separating demands of the revolutionary New.

6. To be found in the National Gallery in Washington; <http://www.nga.gov/fcgi-bin/timage._f?object=46142&image=9189&c=>.

7. To be found in the Odescalchi Balbi Collection, Rome, and in the Cerasi Chapel of the Santa Maria del Popolo, Rome, respectively.

8. <http://www.philosophyandscripture.org/Issue3-1/Badiou/Badiou.html>.

9. Badiou is not the first, of course, to define Paul's movement as one of universal implication. This has been a commonplace in modern catholic theology. There, obviously, the universality of the catholic belief must also imply the antagonism with others, as was also a point of concern in Giorgio Agamben's *The Time that Remains: A Commentary on the Letter to the Romans*.

2. Politics Derailed: The High Way of Sovereignty

Bruegel is one of the few who depicts Saul's convulsion in the proper context. In the earlier Tintoretto-version of 1545, Saul is lying on the ground in utter helplessness while his companions flee the scene.⁶ These companions are clearly soldiers but it was surely not with a few companions that Saul was on his way to destroy the Christian community in Damascus. In the two later versions by Caravaggio, from 1600, the company has even been reduced further to one or three companions.⁷ Instead, in the Bruegel version we see an army on its way through the mountains to Damascus. In this train of men, Saul's convulsion does not take place center stage, up front, as with Tintoretto, nor is it taken out of its context. The inattentive viewer might miss the scene, and even those who know what the theme of the painting is will have to look for it. As Jonathan Goldberg defines it "Paul is all but visible in the press of figures" (Goldberg 218). To be sure, a convulsion hitting their leader would certainly be of major concern to all soldiers. As it is, however, the majority does not even seem to notice what is happening since Saul is at the head of the train.

For the convulsion to become a conversion, Saul first has to be taken out of the context of his army, so that the story of what had happened can be made up. As a result he changed, from someone suffering from a convulsion to someone who found himself to have become an instrument in the hands of God. As a consequence the convulsion-turned-conversion becomes a revolutionary, that is to say "separating moment," not just in the basic sense of a complete upturn of the status quo but also in the more fundamental sense that the world

can be defined anew, or better: that the world, through the gateway of the unconventional, as Badiou defines it, can be separated from the old one in opening up towards the New.

In *St. Paul: The Foundation of Universalism* Alain Badiou reads the writings of St. Paul “literally,” as he puts it: non-hermeneutically. Badiou is not looking for the text’s deeper or true meaning, that is to say, its religious meaning. In an interview with Adam S. Miller this is emphasized emphatically.⁸ According to Badiou there is no deeper truth in his reading of Paul, nor is he developing a “revelation” since his relation to Paul “does not involve faith or church.” His basic or literal reading of Paul serves to provide us with “the general conditions for a new truth.” With the latter phrase Badiou indicates that he is looking for a possibility, or an event, that is essentially revolutionary, in that it upturns and exceeds “evident differences.” In the case of Paul the difference that is exceeded is the one between Jew and Greek, between the law of circumcision and the irrelevance of circumcision, even between man and woman, according to Badiou. In the latter’s reading, Paul is creative in defining the New, the New Faith, as open to all—all falling under the same all encompassing rubric of universality.⁹

If understood in a mathematical sense, I have no problem with this. It comes down to saying that, for instance, all beings on this planet have to obey the law of gravity, which exerts a universal force. According to Badiou, Paul is the first in saying, enforcing a separation thus, that on earth all differences between religions can be exceeded since all people can belong to the same, universal faith. This would be the end of sectarianism. Surely, this must also mean, as Agamben (2005) argued, both the installation of an ultimate sectarianism and the prohibition of sectarianism. My concern is first and foremost, that there is no installation of a limit—or what Hannah Arendt defined, in the context of classical Greek political thought, as *nomos*—without violence, or without politics. Here, Paul’s opening up towards the New is distinctly different from Galileo’s revolutionary laws, although the similarity of the two is posited explicitly by Badiou. Galileo’s natural laws separate his form of science from previous forms, to be sure, but this separation is not political. Paul’s new law of separation is, and must be.

In terms of politics it is telling that Badiou states to read Paul literally. He does so, however, without reading the story of his conversion literally, as the description of a convulsion. He cannot read it as such, of course, since the story is *about* Paul, but not *of* Paul. Yet, the story of the convulsion-

turned-conversion is of the essence since it is through this revolutionary moment that Paul becomes the instrument in the hands of a supreme, sovereign God that separates this belief from all others, and that as a result exceeds, for instance, the difference between the God of the Jews and other gods. As a consequence of a sovereign act of grace, Paul can extend the sovereign gesture by opening up the faith to all, universally. In this context the subtitle of Badiou's study is apt. Very much unlike Galileo, Paul is *founding* something, if not a community then a set or collection, by means of a sovereign gesture. This implies that, with Badiou, politics becomes thinkable in terms of truth, by means of the universal. This comes at a cost. It is only possible, principally, if one thinks politics in terms of sovereignty, that is: in terms of a supreme power to whose laws all have to obey.

According to Hannah Arendt, this is precisely where the European trajectory of political thought or political philosophy got fundamentally derailed. This is also where Gilles Deleuze would opt for a radically different path. For the latter, the option of sovereignty as supreme power installs inescapably the Hegelian dialectic of master and slave, which has a lot to do with power but fairly little with politics, in a macro or micro modality. For Deleuze, if sovereignty has any meaning politically speaking, it concerns the realm of the potential, in which an uncontrollable vitality of things and beings rules; things and beings—bodies—that want to exist, connect, and in the process find already established or new modes of existence. Instead of separation, connection is here of the essence.

Such a principal rejection of a master slave dynamic is crucial for Arendt as well. Her position is summarized by Keith Breen in a recent volume on Arendt and law under the telling title: "Law Beyond Command?" (2012). For Arendt, first of all, sovereignty must always be defined in terms of a house or household, an *oikos*, since in the Greek context any household has to have a master of the house. And indeed, with Paul the universalism of the new faith consists in the fact that all are welcome in the Father's house. His is certainly not the domain of contest and compromise of the *agora*, not even of the *ecclesia*, where at least things are pronounced openly and, as a consequence, remain contestable. Or better: these he will use as his domains as long as he is busy with founding the new faith. As soon as it is established there is no longer a need for *agora* or *ecclesia*. The *oikos* of the church will do. Secondly, Arendt's important implication is that politics can never be the domain of truth. It must be the domain of disaccord or of, indeed, conflict, but a conflict that is organized

and put on hold by the principle of living together in disaccord. This brings her to state, thirdly, that ever since Plato the desire of political philosophers has been “to escape from politics altogether” in turning from the messy world of praxis to the sovereign and supposedly pure realm of *poiesis* that is one of *strategic fabrication*. With respect to this, the recurrent idea is to *make* the world anew, or New, more true of course, or really true. For this, Revolution is required, for how else can one get rid of the messy old world? Such a revolution requires conversion, since people will have to see the New first, they have to be enlightened, they have to hear a divine voice showing them the way the “the objective.” I am willfully punning here on Badiou’s idea of objectivity, which, with his reading of Paul, turns into a political objective.

Despite, then, Badiou’s insistence that his so-called literal reading is not-religious, not concerned with church or house, it stands in the tradition of sovereign thought which is unthinkable without the theological source of supreme power at its basis. This sovereign power can be traced at the moment of separation, which is tellingly defined by Badiou in passive terms: “the becoming separate of universalism.” Such “becoming separate of a universalism” has been part and parcel of political thought after the fusion that took place between the former “Creator God or Immortal Legislator” (Breen 19) and the supreme secularized, judicial power of the sovereign. For Arendt, this “transference of absolute authority from the divine to the mundane realm set in train events that could only conclude in misfortune” (Breen 19). Such misfortune can be sensed in Badiou’s dealing with Paul. The becoming separate must imply at least a limit, and by implication some form of “house,” but this is evidently Badiou’s pain point. Things must remain open, for him, although they always run the risk of closure, as happened for instance with the revolutionary Leninist party (Badiou’s example). Arendt would argue that this is not a risk, but an inevitability that is intrinsic to sovereign powers. Likewise, the struggle between opening up the New and its untimely or unfortunate closure translates itself to the connection between Paul, on the one hand, and Badiou’s thoughts on “politics, art, science, and love” on the other. On the one hand Paul, so states Badiou, has nothing to do with these four. Paul’s concern is philosophical in offering “a new experience of what is probably something like a truth” (Miller 2005). Nevertheless, this requires a sovereign gesture to open up the New. There, the connection with politics, art, science and love is of the essence since they all have to bring us the New—and Truth. Even if I would accept the possibility of reading

10. See also: <<http://humanistni.org/filestore/image/bruegel.pdf>>.

Paul non-politically, without contest and conflict and the desire to separate in order to found something, this remains my major point of concern.

3. Supreme Fabrication

Pieter Bruegel the Elder was also called Peasant Bruegel because, as stories go, he liked to put on peasants clothes to mingle among peasants, feast with them, work with them, eat with them—and then paint them. Whether these stories are fabricated or not, it is well known and documented that Bruegel functioned among the cultural, political, and financial elite of his time and was a smart business man as well, who claimed the intellectual and commercial ownership of his engravings with the signature “Bruegel inventor.” Not much is known explicitly about his religious belief, let alone theological convictions, but mingling with the best and brightest of contemporary humanists, he must have picked up a lot of the spirit of revolt alive in these circles. It may have inspired him to engrave “Big fish eat the small ones” and it must have defined his views on the relation between religion and politics. One scholar has it that “God and religion are humbled in Bruegel’s art”—Brian McClinton (2010: 13) is focusing, in this case, on the 1562 painting entitled *The Triumph of Death*.¹⁰ The painting, according to McClinton, reflects explicitly on the enormous destruction wrought by politically inspired religious conflicts or religiously inspired political conflicts in the 16th and 17th century.

In this context McClinton brings in the famous poem by W.H. Auden about Bruegel’s painting *The Fall of Icarus*. When visiting the Musée des Beaux Arts in Bruxelles, which gave

the poem its title, Auden was so impressed by the painting that he made the following poem:

About suffering they were never wrong,
The old Masters: how well they understood
Its human position: how it takes place
While someone else is eating or opening a window or just walking dully along;
How, when the aged are reverently, passionately waiting
For the miraculous birth, there always must be
Children who did not specially want it to happen, skating
On a pond at the edge of the wood:
They never forgot
That even the dreadful martyrdom must run its course
Anyhow in a corner, some untidy spot
Where the dogs go on with their doggy life and the torturer's horse
Scratches its innocent behind on a tree
In Breughel's Icarus, for instance: how everything turns away
Quite leisurely from the disaster; the ploughman may
Have heard the splash, the forsaken cry,
But for him it was not an important failure; the sun shone
As it had to on the white legs disappearing into the green
Water, and the expensive delicate ship that must have seen
Something amazing, a boy falling out of the sky,
Had somewhere to get to and sailed calmly on.

The poem has been read as a call to accept both the complexity and ordinariness of life, despite shocking events, and for some it foreshadows Auden's re-conversion to the Christian faith. I read the poem, first of all, as a poem, a work of art, that mirrors the work of art that is its theme. As such, the poem becomes a reflection on how it may work in the domain of religion and politics. It brings together things in fundamental disaccord, things and bodies that co-exist and relate despite the disaccord. The Icarus painting depicts not just one dominant or supreme poetic moment, but a simultaneous or coexistent set of moments, inconsistent in themselves but kept together through a style, just as the poem grasps moments of praxis and refuses to capture them under the heading of a supreme fabrication.

If I take Auden's reflection on *The Fall of Icarus* to bear on *The Conversion of Paul*, the first thing to keep in mind is that we do not know whether this is the title of the piece. The title is given to it with hindsight,

11. "Simon Critchley – Interview." *STIR*, spring 2012; <<http://stirtoaction.com/?p=1174>>.

12. This connects also to what Critchley himself has said about Wilde. For this see: "Oscar Wilde's faithless Christianity - Oscar Wilde's radical reinvention of Christianity while he lay in Reading Gaol is a profound justification of faith"; <<http://www.guardian.co.uk/commentisfree/belief/2009/jan/14/religion-wilde>>.

13. <<http://www.politicaltheology.com/blog/author/creston-davis/>>.

in a double sense: on the level of *diegesis* after the depicted moment, and on the level of representation in the centuries after Bruegel made the painting. As for the first, we only know it as a conversion because of poetic fabrication. After Saul has been brought speechless and blind to Damascus he will resurface as the very eloquent Paul, backed up by a story of what happened. The moment depicted in the painting itself, however, is in the midst of things. In this context, the painting is, literally, a pre-fabrication. This is not like saying it is no fabrication. The painting is a work of art, and as such *poetic*, a product of fabrication. But it is not serving the fabrications of power. It depicts not just *one* moment but a set of moments, one of which concerns a military leader that has fallen from his horse and whose body is lying on the ground, twisted, in apparent convulsion. Some of his companions respond immediately, a few are struck by a ray of light, one calms down the horse, others are pointing: "Look, something is happening to Saul!" Many others have not even noticed what has happened and busy themselves with other things. The majority is making its arduous way through the mountains. As such the painting is a pre-fabrication in the sense that it chooses a moment amongst a set of moments, before one of them it is turned into a decisive story, by later poetic fabrication, as a result of which Saul the exterminator will have changed into Paul, the theologically chosen and underpinned founder of a House.

What Arendt would describe as the key-characteristic of *poiesis* in the political realm after Plato is this element of strategic fabrication. It concerns fabrications such as: "Look, this is not just the one dominating our house and subjecting all that live under his rule, it is a

divinely inspired and supported force that brings us the New!” It is such fabrication that is explicitly reflected upon by Simon Critchley in his *The Faith of the Faithless: Experiments in Political Theology*, from 2012. About this book, Critchley himself states in an interview with STIR:

[...] we live in a world where the realm of politics is a realm of fiction. It’s a realm of what Hobbes called the artificial man and the artificial soul. But to expose those fictions as fictions—so the fiction of popular sovereignty, the idea that we the people actually govern things or that we don’t live in a plutocracy or an oligarchy—it doesn’t mean we go from fiction to fact but that there can be this other idea of which I call a supreme fiction, which we knew to be a fiction yet we still believe. That in many ways is a way of formulating what might be a kind of political, poetic, and religious project.¹¹

With the last sentence we enter familiar ground again: the conflation of politics, religion and art. And as sympathetic as I am with regard to Critchley’s explicit rejection of “phallic, heroic politics,” as reserved am I about the source-less source of this supreme fiction. Theologically speaking, in terms of our having to believe it, this must fall back on a masked Prime Mover, a Creator God, an Immortal Legislator, or if not all of these, than the Supreme, in example, the masked sovereign. Even if Critchley’s study is defined by himself as an examination into “the dangerous interdependence of politics and religion,” and even if this relationship, as he states, is important for the diagnosis of a problem, the book connects to and depends on the sovereign high way—if not directly, as with Badiou, then indirectly.

Accordingly, the critics are astute in defining the book’s project as a search for truth, either by repeating the quote with which the book starts (Oscar Wilde: “Everything to be true must become a religion”¹²), or by bringing in the fabrication of Jesus: “Like Christ’s brokenness on the cross, he opens up a way through suffering that does not cancel out the void and lack that grounds us but unites us in the very brokenness itself” (Creston Davis on his blog *Political Theology*).¹³ This, of course, is what all sovereign rulers would like us to believe: that we are in void, in lack (in untruth) and that we need to be filled in, by a supreme power. Such a power needs *poiesis*, fabrication, fiction, even a supreme fiction, to show us the New.

Why, on earth?

4. Revolution as Convulsion: Humile Art

The reason I admire the Bruegel painting is that Saul is so clearly depicted as a contorted, spastic, twisted body-in-convulsion that has fallen to earth. The body is *down to earth* for a literal and figural reason, with the figural meaning being that that nothing divine is going on but that a body is grasped by earthly contractions, since it is not God pulling the strings of these muscles. As a spastic, uncontrollable body that is the object of a convulsion, the body of Saul-to-be-turned-Paul is a much better metaphor for what a revolution really is than the established meaning of a wheel revolving and bringing up what was down, and down what was up. The latter image is, in fact, the result of a fabrication with either pre-sight or hindsight that fits all too well in the sovereign trajectory sketched earlier. God brought down brings the king up. The king brought down brings up the people. Saul the particular destroyer brought down brings up Paul the Founding Father of Universality. In all cases the system of sovereignty remains intact, whereas poetic fabrication wants it that the wheel of history has turned, as in progress, bringing in new hierarchies.

With all this I am not implying or saying that there is either no progress possible or that a world cannot be made anew, but it can surely not be of our “making,” poetic or not. A distinction that structures Deleuze’s thought is pivotal with respect to this: the distinction between the possible and the virtual. In a sense what is possible is already here, conceivable, as a plan, a project, a supreme fiction, or what have you. I can think of the possible as indeed, something possible. The virtual is not un-real. It is real, but cannot be known. For this, it first needs to be actualized, and this actualization, described by Deleuze as dramatization, introduces the new. The virtual cannot be actualized then through strategic fabrication, it can only be actualized through enactment. It cannot be a matter of grace, consequently, only of surprise. If Deleuze would have busied himself with Paul’s moment of convulsion/conversion his diagnosis would have been that Paul is clearly affected. His body is acted upon and as a result acts, in loneliness. Nothing new happens: he is struck, like many before and after him. When the story of his conversion is fabricated, this serves strategic purposes; nothing new there either. As for the element of Saul’s changing sides, from being a persecutor to a defender, this is not new either. The historical cases abound. What nobody could have foreseen and what did materialize, becoming actual, was the Roman Catholic Church. In this context the title of the relevant Bible book is more than apt: *Acts*. Perhaps there would have been no Church without Paul, but he was certainly not

the one fabricating it. It was a matter of collective dramatization, and in that sense a matter of politics.

The role of art in such collective dramatization is not one, and as much a matter of *praxis* as of *poiesis*. In terms of enactment, art has many roles to play, including roles that exists in confirming, defending, intensifying, or flattening out what already exists. There is no reason to posit that it would have to be art, and art *per se*, to show us the New. In terms of enactment art has many roles to play, roles that I would like to capture under the heading of the *humile*, a term that is not new as such. It was part and parcel of the study of generic forms and styles. In Cicero's *De oratore* he distinguishes between the three styles or modes of presenting something: *genus humile*, *modicum* and *vehemens*. Tellingly, however, the *genus humile* was also called *subtile*. In the middle ages, this style would be called "low" (derived from Latin *humilitas*), connecting to the lower classes and the lower genres. With Cicero there is nothing pejorative, derogative, or hierarchical in his distinction between the genera. The *genus humile* or *subtile* relates to the attempt to prove something (with *modicum* and *vehemens* relating to pleasing and moving or persuading respectively). The *genus subtile* connotes *puritas* and *perspicuitas*: purity and clarity. No nonsense; no decoration, no fabrication.

It seems to me that for the thinkers mentioned previously, it is almost impossible to think of art and literature in terms of the *genus humile*. For this, their demands are too high. In contrast, by turning the adjective into a noun I would like to radicalize the potential of art to be plain and down to earth. I know it is never wise to introduce a new concept, but then again, that is not what I am doing. The *humile* already exists as a Latin adjective and as a noun, now, it may serve to indicate a position or way of life that is literally and figuratively close to earth, doing justice to the etymological root of *humile*, which is *humus*—ground. Still, apart from the etymological root, I would like to take the contemporary meaning of *humus* on board as well, as the subtle, fertile and slightly messy product of reworked and decomposed animal and vegetable material (although newspapers, coffee filters and some forms of plastic would be equally helpful). Furthermore, and lastly, I would like to do justice to the association of *humile* with human. It would concern a kind of humanity that would not mind mixing up materials, because it would be close to life as *zōē*.

Would *humile* art be able to work towards, would it be willing or desiring a Revolution? No. Would it be suffocating in a totalitarian system and as a result scream for the New? No. Would it try to find

a productive, down to earth mode of being that would keep it alive, exploring its capabilities and limits, connecting and disconnecting with whatever would surround it? Yes. Sovereignty, for such a form of art, would be inconceivable, unless its material could be used in a process of decomposition.

Reading Bruegel's painting literally, I do not only note that Paul's convulsion is happening in the margin of a marching army, I note also that the army itself is marginal in the vast mountainous landscape. Its major task, as for now, is not destroying the Christian community in Damascus, its major task is to wrestle its way through the mountain, twisting and turning, almost forced into a convulsion by the limits of nature. There is nothing of a revelation, here. It is hard work getting an army through the mountains. Then there is a surprise: the leader falls from his horse, his body shaking, losing his ability to see and hear. The surprise is translated to the unsuspecting viewers who might miss the scene unless it hits them with the realization: "Damn, that is Saul in convulsion." As such, the painting is revolutionary: it may upturn the way in which we saw it at first. Yet, as I stated earlier, it does not turn like a wheel, bringing in hierarchy and historical progress. When being hit by the body of Saul, we enter his convulsion, his being struck, being the subject and object of something happening. If revolutions exist without the poetic fabrication beforehand or afterwards, they exist as such convulsions.

Humile art would not be interested very much in participating in the fabrication of a story that would reconfigure the convulsion into a revolutionary conversion. If confronted with Paul's convulsion, humile art might flee the scene fearing to be destroyed; it might start a conversation with a passing soldier; it might attempt to find a place next to Saul, or next to his horse, in the grass. It might even fall asleep and wake up after the body of Saul was already taken out of context by Powers of the Future. It would think: "Let them have him."

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SUMMARY

In the course of the twentieth century art has been charged with ever higher requirements by artists and philosophers alike. Art is given a massive and pivotal task in the revolutionary opening up of a new world: to get us out of the instrumentalisation of modernity and capitalism, for instance.

In this context it is as if art has become the desperate last resort for thinkers such as Heidegger, Badiou, Agamben and Critchley. In their work the special role of art has been defined in theological or religious terms. This article takes the conversion of St. Paul, as it is depicted by Pieter Breughel the Elder, as the starting point for an alternative, more humble way of looking at the role of art in the context of the revolutionary New, and in the process it turns Hannah Arendt and Gilles Deleuze into philosophical and political allies.

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