

Beyond the Red and the Blue Pill: The virtual as the substance of reality

Summary

Our article makes an attempt to examine *the virtual*, determined in the primary sense as a field where infinite possibilities can potentially actualise. We take a look at the philosophical background of the virtual, then refer, via the principle of minimal difference, to the virtual as the substance of reality, and examine the possible principles of the actualisation of the virtual (the virtual genesis), in order to describe the *catastrophic character* of reality and reveal *redemption* as the essential purpose of fiction.

The article relies on Jaan Undusk's argument concerning the substance of language and tries to indicate how it is possible, via the relations between *language* and *silence*, to explicitly show the relations between *reality and the virtual*, and how describing the virtual makes it possible to describe what is characteristic of reality itself.

The main theoretical starting points include Jaan Undusk's analysis 'Magical Mystical Language', Gilles Deleuze's descriptions of transcendental empiricism in his 'Logique du sens' and Slavoj Žižek's Deleuze-treatment 'Organs Without Bodies'. The latter is significant because it makes it possible, via discreet critical developments, to apply Deleuze's thought schemes to the widespread theoretical or philosophical categories that Deleuze himself denies or regards as secondary illusionary effects. The main literary examples that enliven the theoretical journey are J. L. Borges's short story 'The Garden of Forking Paths' and Mehis Heinsaar's short story 'Bernard the Doubter'.

Our article by no means aspires to fully

cover the topic of the virtual; the aim is to establish a primary theoretical foundation, which would then provide a new angle in further discussions of various theoretical principal issues of culture and fiction: showing, for example, the pseudo-virtual wrong solution of contemporary society, which exists in conditions of an increasingly lax grip on reality (simulation, the society of the spectacle, cyberspace, hyper-reality, cultural schizophrenia etc.), to the perceptive problem of dissipating reality, and critically reconsidering, via shattering the opposition between reality and fiction, some traditional treatments of the term *fiction*.

The first part of the article ('Pre-lingual within language itself') takes a closer look at Jaan Undusk's book 'Magical Mystical Language', and at its treatment of the substance of language. We point out how Undusk deconstructs the opposition between language and silence, indicating that the silence towards which mystical writing aspires does not in fact oppose language, but is instead a thoroughly linguistic phenomenon. This is not the kind of silence in which language directly emerges, nor a silence that appears when the word ceases. This is silence that is born pre-lingual, as a result of utterance itself: only when it has been uttered can it be claimed that there was silence before utterance – and precisely in that sense, 'in the beginning was the word'. True silence is born as pre-lingual within the language itself. This silence is all-permissive, but the word, utterance, is its precondition.

By way of determining lingual silence, it is possible to move on to utterance as being lingual inevitability, to which Undusk also refers via Derrida and Lévinas. Both Derrida and Lévinas agree in one way, as far as utterance is concerned: it is no longer possible to speak, because no-one can start speaking

without immediately referring to everything else but what is being said. This claim reveals the inevitable tragedy characteristic of utterance: as soon as I say something, the utterance embodies (and also behind it, in the duration of the act of uttering itself) everything left unsaid, everything that could have been said differently, everything that the utterance ‘excluded’ or ‘foiled’, everything I (now, afterwards) *really* wanted to say. Or in other words, the utterance embodies the all-enabling silence, the silence that was (by now) before utterance and which, having always *already been* (or always lying still ahead), can never be again. The moment of utterance reveals the constant crumbling of silence, the constant fading of the sublime nature of silence. However, it is utterance that establishes silence as something pre-utterance, and precisely in that sense silence is pre-lingual inside language itself. Hence, the first significant summary: utterance is always a catastrophe, as it diminishes, narrows and conceals the all-permissive silence in the language. Utterance should aspire – and mystical language treatment does so – towards capturing and revealing lingual silence.

The second part of the article, ‘Binary Opposition and Minimal Difference’, tackles an aspect at which Undusk’s opposition of language-silence seems to point: that, in any binary opposition, we should not merely see mutually dependent ‘confrontation’ between equal elements; behind the structuring framework of binary opposition emerges antagonism as a minimal gap – split or inconsistency – in the One (Whole). This inconsistency constitutes the difference between the two parts/poles of the one whole – the difference between the universal and the ‘singular’ particular that directly fills the place of that universal; whereas, the paradoxical particular, having no place in the

structure of the universal, promptly gives the universal its body. Therefore we can also see the language-silence opposition as a split in the language itself: on the one hand, the language, the organically structured Whole and, on the other hand, silence, the ‘singular universal’, which provides language its body. In its multiplicity of possibilities and infinite richness, silence is a single element which, in its ‘non-existence’, constitutes the entirety of language. This part of the article ends with the admission that any antagonism is actually a minimal difference within one Whole, between a specific actualisation and its substantial (virtual) source and, via this assertion, it is possible to move from the language-silence difference to a similar difference between reality and the virtual.

The third part, ‘Ontology of virtual space’, gets closer to the virtual, regarded here as a field of potential actualisation of infinite possibilities. We are not dealing with virtual reality (which is simply a simulation of reality or an experience of reality via an artistic or a technological medium), but instead with the reality of the virtual itself, a pre-real dimension within reality. We postulate the virtual as the substance of reality and take a closer look at the ‘mechanisms of the emergence’ of reality. We do that via Gilles Deleuze’s philosophy of the virtual; Deleuze’s idea of the virtual relies on the opposition between Becoming (represented by the opposition pair virtual-actual) and Being (fiction-reality), and the radical end result of that opposition is pure Becoming without Being. Reality is formed upon the actualisation of the virtual field of possibilities (Becoming) and this field is infinitely richer than reality. From that aspect, reality could be described as a hiding or loss of all the remaining virtual possibilities. On the basis of Aare Pilv’s literary reflections, we also examine the par-

icipation of perception in a similar actualisation process:

(1) Perception inevitably limits the virtual to what we experience as REALITY, (2) the virtual gives an indication of its existence only via the perception of a concrete reality, and (3) in reality, something else (the virtual space of infinite possibilities in its entirety) remains unperceived. The inevitability of the effect of perception (concretised reality) is where (4) we have been condemned and by which we will be understood.

Additionally, we explain the reality of the virtual itself by means of other literary examples, finding that J. L. Borges's short story 'The Garden of Forking Paths' and Mehis Heinsaar's short story 'The Doubting Bernard' contain meaningful descriptions of the infinite field of possibilities.

The final part of the article places the opposition language-silence closer to the opposition real-virtual, and via that we create a short circuit in the opposition between Becoming and Being, and show that the opposition virtual-real should be regarded as the minimal difference within reality itself. The virtual is not something that – as spectral, eternal and infinitely multiple – disconnectedly opposes the temporal concreteness of reality. It is something that, although belonging to the realm of reality, has no true place in the structure of reality, but directly provides reality with its 'body'.

Hence, it appears, as it does from comparing the oppositions placed side by side, that reality, just like utterance, can be described as a kind of catastrophic inevitability, a tragic loss of historical possibilities or the hiding of the virtual possibilities behind the immanence of Becoming. Our last allusion is to fiction as that which compensates for this catastrophe. The constant regulation of relations between reality and the virtual

(as a component that constitutes reality as its substance) is necessary for the coherent functioning of reality. True fiction fulfils exactly this role: if one takes reality as continuous loss of possibilities, as a catastrophe, the aim of fiction could be to redeem the 'spectral surplus of reality', and 'reconcile' it with reality again.

Thus, (1) the virtual is the substance of reality; (2) reality is a loss, a catastrophe and (3) fiction constitutes reality by compensating for its catastrophic nature, reconciling reality with its 'virtual surplus'.

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