

KANT, ASCHER/STRAUS AND A STEP FURTHER IN THE SEARCH
FOR ARTISTIC CREATION

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In The American Adam, R. B. Lewis refers to Whitman as the apostle of a freedom which was a "climax as well as a beginning, or rather, the climax of a long effort to begin". He is compared to the first man and the first poet, at one time creator and creation. What Ascher/Straus present, in "Between Two Walls"⁽¹⁾ is their own contribution to this American Genesis, where the reader is summoned to come along and help break the "pane of glass" which separates real life from Artistic Creation.

In the five opening propositions⁽²⁾ the reader is confronted with a concrete wall and learns that emotions can be projected into it, which is old newspaper or faded hopes-and-longings". And as we couple these symbols of inner and outer reality we get two walls, one existing independently of our will ("a guide to nothing but itself"), and the other, product of individual imagination ("a guide to another universe or anti-universe"). We could add here the notion of complexity by comparing these two walls with two mirrors, one facing the other and image-ricocheting an infinity of symmetrical projections. Between these walls stands the prophet and priest of the newest truth, the AUTHOR, who lies "approximately half-way

(1) Paris Review, Number 64.

(2) "Between Two Walls" is divided into three parts: Five Propositions, A Walk on the Open Moors, and Five Anti-Propositions.

between detective fiction and the durable ugliness of yellowed walls".

We are left, therefore, with plenty of options: we can examine the actual anatomy of the wall (wall for wall's sake); we can project sensations into it; or also ignore it, while reading a book (where we can find either a detective story or the wall itself).

How are we to define Reality or Art, now that these concepts become questionable and we can slide freely from one to the other and back again (as the five closing anti-propositions state)?

Are Ascher/Straus somehow tangential on a central idea in the work of Borges, proposed in "Caminata" as:

Yo soy el único espectador de esta calle;
Si dejara de verla se moriría.

Or, according to Ascher/Straus:

Life until now = fiction until now. One
has only to topple life to topple fiction.
Or to topple fiction to topple life.
Or: Fiction, if it's anything, is a
methodical technique of bumping into oneself
by accident.

.....

In the Robbe-Grilletesque section "A Walk on the Open Moors"⁽³⁾, we are confronting the detective's realization of how pathetic his quest is. The impression he experiences is familiar to any human being who has faced crucial moments: the floor dematerializes under his feet; the very notions of time and space grow dim inside a mist which carries him into another dimension:

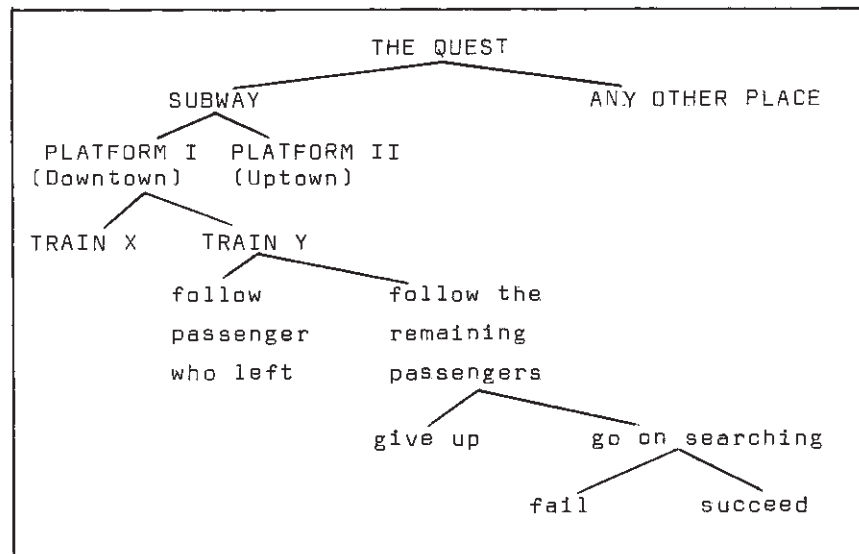
One instant ago things were like a pane

(3) cf. Robbe-Grillet's Les Gommés.

of glass. You looked straight through actual life... into a vacuous other world. Now you or circumstances have struck the glass with a hammer and a million forking paths, sharp fragments, webs of logic, appear where there was nothing.

What I want to analyse, now, is the part of the above quotation where the stratified order of reality is broken into a million forking paths, in order to get to the usage Ascher/Straus make of Kantian 'a priori' notions of SPACE and TIME.

As the detective decides to search for the suspect in the subway, he automatically gives up going to any other of the x places in the city. We could present a scheme of the quest that goes like this:



No matter which way he chooses, he can't escape the single truth that "The simplest action is capable of division into endless alternatives". He tries hard to break the postulate, distorts all chains of Logic

and Probabilities, missapplies syllogisms:

Since he's searching for the suspect, the suspect must be on the train. The logic of this apparently paradoxical statement is unassailable in the light of the alternatives that have led to this point.

Yet, he fails. Each step he advances in the quest represents an advance in time and a direction in space. As he walks through the open moors of yesterday - the city of New York today - who knows what tomorrow - he gradually creates his own story. He is not able to predict what is going to happen next moment, what he will be doing or saying. And this incertitude is present in the very structure of the story. New concepts start to exist, a further step towards a greater freedom. We have now what can be called the 'NEW NARRATOR' who, instead of telling a story, presents a fan of "forking paths" and gives the reader the liberty of choice brought by the 'MODULABLE PLOT'. The old notion of "Stream of Consciousness" is given other dimensions: now we can follow the train of thought of the characters, or of the narrator, or the authors themselves at the moment of creation and, in a way, our own thoughts. In "A Walk on the Open Moors", while the character sits in the train, it is the reader who chooses whether he is (1) reading a newspaper; (2) reading a Marxist tract on Criminology; (3) reading a chapter on the "Nature of Things"; (4) or one on "Space, Time and Gravity"; (5) examining a bank advertisement; (6) chewing BAZOOKA bubble gum; (7) scrutinizing his thumb; (8) scrutinizing the thumb of a suspect, etc. The story ceases to be flat and becomes a geometric figure; now it can be touched and analysed under different, and maybe even opposite lights.

EVERYTHING, from now on, can be questioned and restructured:

How is it that the detective is able to read this hidden text...unless he's succeeded in slipping into the man's overcoat, hat, suit, shoes, mask, and so on.

And how is it that we're able to see through the detective's eyes unless...

... Unless we are the witnesses of something new, a radical revolution, a daring innovation which promises a lot.