3. Male

INTRODUCTION

He almost falls back to sleep.\textsuperscript{47} The ‘he’ in question here is the echo of the previous ‘I.’ A ‘he’ always comes after a first person pronoun, once an ‘I’ is heard—which does not mean that this ‘I’ has been recognized or identified. ‘He’ is the pronoun of representations and narratives. At the risk of being accused of illeism, the ‘he’ in this chapter will echo the ‘I’ because representation is the only tool available to make sense of what cannot be talked about: my resting male body.\textsuperscript{48}

\textsuperscript{47} Suffering from insomnia, sleep in this chapter will not refer to the state in which the nervous system is inactive and consciousness suspended, but to a state of drowsiness or somnolent watchfulness, the sense of being ‘there’ and yet unable to fully grasp what this ‘there’ actually means.

\textsuperscript{48} As Jean-Luc Nancy says, when I sleep, “I no longer properly distinguish myself from the world or from others, from my own body or form my mind either. For I can no longer hold anything as an object, as a perception or a thought, without this very thing making itself felt as being \textit{at the same time} myself and something other than myself”: Jean-Luc Nancy, \textit{The Fall of Sleep}, trans. C. Mandell (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2009), 7.
In his slumber, he is able to seek refuge from the never-ending task of always attempting to compose himself, to take action, and being someone. In other words, with rest, he gives up the task of always seizing himself in order to fight for his place in the sun in this exiguous present that is never present enough, never accomplished, never totalised. His rest allows him a relief from this exhausting, and, alas, at times, violent task.

Dozing off is thus more than simple rest from alertness and war. Besides being a moment of recuperation, sleep, however light, is also the manifestation of a suspicion towards the limits that appear to structure him and his day. In other words, with a nap, the suspicion is expressed that the fight might not be entirely necessary, that the exiguity of the present might not be as real as it seems. Sleep is the suspicion of being.

However, even this refuge is not entirely peaceful. He drifts off with the covert or blanketed knowledge that a hand will perhaps rouse him, even arouse him, thus forcing him to abandon his refuge and return to the laborious day-task of articulating and positioning himself in the world. He thus rests knowing that the suspicion of being is only temporary, that the violence of being knows no real refuge, except death.

But this other hand isn’t there yet. In his or her temporary absence, this male body reveals himself in all its vulnerability. How is one to think this exhibition of maleness? If the masculine—as previously defined—is the deployment of language, then how does this deployment manifests itself in this display of maleness and how does this male body relate to the feminine interrupting him every second of time? These will be the questions of this third chapter.

Two main authors will help to address them. These two authors are careful readers of Levinas, but who interestingly, diverge in their reading of his work: Catherine Chalier and Luce Irigaray. The latter arguably inaugurated the now classic reading of Levinas as a misogynous philosopher. Irigaray’s aim is to avoid not only reducing women to alter-egos of men, but also to alert to the danger in Levinas’s work of allowing the feminine to stand for alterity. Catherine Chalier, by contrast,
takes up this juxtaposition of alterity and the feminine in order to continue throwing into question the dominant masculine modes of thinking that permeates western philosophy. For Chalier, the feminine as alterity, on the contrary, ruptures (male) ontological categories. The divergences are clear and the following text will attempt to negotiate them as (un-)faithfully as possible.

Please note that although the following chapter focuses on the male body, there will be only dangerously tangential references in what follows to the gender known as man as opposed to woman. The male body retains here as its intrinsic characteristic the fact that it is neuter and both masculine and feminine as previously defined. Male here means the incredulity of being a man not because of an unwillingness to believe in the condition of being a man, but because of the impossibility of ascribing a property to what is called ‘man.’

The word ‘incredulity’ does not imply an event, like, for example, ‘He now doubts that he is a man.’ Incredulity exposes itself over time; it exhibits itself as a historical narrative without discernable beginning or end. In this way, his body exposes that it will ‘always already’ be incredulous that he is a man or that ‘man’ is indeed his property—or a property as such.

Please also note that some people will not recognize in what follows a male body. Those—men or women—who think that a male body is only truly representative if it comes in the shape of sweaty fighters, skilled action heroes, brave warriors, iron-willed bodybuilders, or airbrushed supermodels will simply be disappointed. This is the male body, as it is not supposed to be seen.

THE MASTER

He is now resting and yet, when he will be fully awake, he will immediately fall into a cliché: however much he dislikes it, his body will stand for what society expects it to stand for: a male who, because he is male, necessarily masters language
(being strong, for example). He will be the one who in his body is ‘naturally’ unconstrained by language: the master, or so he will hope to be (and so does, when it is convenient, the rest of the human race).

With such power and freedom, he will take his body to work. At work, his body will use a language that constantly confirms his stability and mastery. In the process, he will further stabilize his body by associating himself with other terms such as vigour, power, potential, virility, phallus, authority, etc. He’s all guts and balls, changing his life, changing the world, for good or worse—more often than not, for good and worse.

Something else will also happen: while looking, his body will conquer and objectify (he apparently knows no other way of looking: an unfortunate impediment of his sight). Through this taking and possessing, his body will thus becoming invisible, un-representable. His body will be all eyes, objectifying the world from an unshakable seat of power: his ocular centrisms, a position that knows no proper rival.

However, having such a stable base and referent has a price: he cannot articulate his body otherwise than in relation to a scrutinized and projected (idealised or not) opposite: a fragile, feeble, or vulnerable body. In one word, his (‘invisible’) body will be dependent on what (‘visibly’) is not ‘pure-eyes’: a female body. He will indeed not only define his body as this opposite, but he will also articulate his body in the necessary dependency of this opposite: he will be male because he desires and/or rejects female bodies, thus helping him being who he imagines he ought to be.

This price has a curious consequence: however much he longs for independence, he can never achieve it. His body will always already be dependent on an other body (for example, the body of a feeble and mannered ubiquitous poofter) who will also never be able to be independent. The chain of dependency will always be infinite. However much he hates it, his grasp of his body will remain always already shaky and indefinite, never properly accomplished or perfectly hollowed out, never entirely asserted or erased.
In this way, however much his body will struggle to be the master of language, this very body cannot allow him to be secure, the day-work will always have to be re-started, the fight for mastery will have to be directed, this time, against other bodies, other real or imaginary powers or weaknesses. Never, will his body allow him to escape the demands of being such a cliché (but then, maybe this is the fate of all bodies).

This is not a defeatist thought: ‘boys will be boys,’ or ‘he’s just a bloke, really’—thus vindicating the cliché. This simply means that however much the pressure is on, the grasp of the male body is always already uncertain. The cliché is never always properly accomplished. The fight thankfully never always properly won. (What always needs to be fought is the fall into the cliché, the abdication to the delusions created by biological fate.)

THE SENSIBLE

And yet, here he is, lying there in the sun. His body is open to examination: He is passive, fragile, vulnerable, and exposed. Since he is outdoors, his skin is exposed to the fiery sun, his body is vulnerable to the winds coming form the sea. There is an over-abundance of exposed maleness here that is curiously ready for representation, that is, possession.

As such, he is not quite the one who masterly represents; he is no longer the subject, the lord of theory and concepts, pure eyes. He is here, most simply, the sensible, a vulnerable significant phenomena, a non-ideal chaos of corporeal being. As this sensual body, he is thus anterior to the violence of representation and to violence full stop: an unusual state for a male.

Currently failing in his task of trying to be the master, this male body cannot therefore present himself in terms of sameness and representation. He is not the self-present or the self-evident. This does not mean that, while he is suspicious of being, he is the outside of presence or the other of representation, for example. He is here simply, and in the most relaxed
manner possible, failing mastery. His supposed power over representation is here clearly lacking.

However much he cannot escape properly the demands of being a cliché, this cliché paradoxically does not therefore always apply. This male body here has none of the attributes usually associated with (virile) male bodies. He is here most simply an empirical beginning. While he will never be maternal, he can at least be here matrical: he provides for representation; he is a gift for representation.

**MORPHOLOGY**

Here are a few recklessly chosen examples of how he can be a gift for representation:

First, inevitably (for where else can one start?), he has a penis (that joker) and a scrotum. These protuberances are

---

49 There is no space here to explore the theme of the matrix or the matrical as a (male) empirical beginning. Suffice to say that the matrical is not understood here as something in space and therefore as something visibly attributable to women only. The matrical is the giving of space and time; a giving or providing that knows no gender strictly speaking. As such, I distance myself here from the remarkable work of Irina Aristarkhova who writes most eloquently on the theme of the matrix and the maternal. The reason I distance myself from this work is simply because the matrix or the matrical cannot for me be understood within a measured spatial and temporal framework and consequently be limited to biological or cultural references. For more on this a-gendered matrix, see Jean-Paul Martinon, *After “Rwanda,”* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2013), especially chapter 2, “Matrix - Akantu.” For Aristarkhova’s work, see Irina Aristarkhova, *Hospitality of the Matrix: Philosophy, Biomedicine, and Culture* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2012), especially, chapter 2, “Materializing Hospitality.”

50 “When it comes to the naked male form, the penis is the joker: it is that which cannot be represented because of its ability to veer the representation into pornography, it is what is improper to representation”: Jean-Luc Nancy and Federico Ferrari, *Nus sommes (La peau des images)* (Brussels: Yves Gevaert, 2002), 68, my translation.
supposed to prove that a male body is not only invisible, but also, paradoxically, visible to itself. A man or a woman can look down and see that indeed he is male. Nothing is here hidden. All is in plain view, nothing evades representation; everything is morphologically emphatic.\textsuperscript{51} Nakedness never stares back.

This familiar interpretation of the male body, as that which is visible to itself, implies an absurd reduction of the male body: a monolithic and monologic economy with a few protuberances. As is well known, the male body is more than this apparent visibility, which at times gets hidden on a surgical table or under a roll of fat.

Second, the reversed myth that the male body is always already visible to itself obscures the fact that this male body lying here is also easily penetrable. He moves in his sleep and the between of his legs offers a penetrability, which he himself cannot see. This is a contrary aperture, but an aperture nonetheless, a darkness that easily bleeds at any violent intrusiveness.

This penetrability unexpectedly transforms the male body into a dwelling, a dangerous supplementary welcome par excellence. As such and however unusual this may sound; this male body becomes an open interiority that cannot be appropriated; a ‘hospitality’ before any form of sociality; a natural and yet contrary supplement—if one can say such a thing.

Finally, his obvious visibility clearly shows that his body is unable to bear children. This does not mean that he is infertile. This simply means that he can never be two—we will come back to this. This confines him to this world of representation and to this endless struggle of mastery, the athletic and yet pathetic commonplace effort of being.

\textsuperscript{51} As a radical counterpoint and as an inevitably unwise step aside into the realm of sexuality, see, for example, the persistent and problematic \textit{figuration} of lesbianism as unrepresentable, invisible, and impossible in Annamarie Jagose, \textit{Inconsequence: Lesbian Representation and the Logic of Sexual Sequence} (New York: Cornell University Press, 2002).
His fertile and yet barren situation gives him an unusual attribute: he is eschatology itself; he is the end of man. This does not mean that he is a genetic dead-end or that he alone stands for eschatology, as if some symbolic walking end. He is the end because however much the feminine interrupts his body perpendicularly every second of time, his male body forces him to be above all the deployment that leads to the end.

In other words, being ‘sexed,’ and his sex being male, gives him no other choice, but to embody the end. His bodily deployment ‘speaks’ of the end. This ‘speech’ is not an ability to express thoughts and feelings by articulate sounds. This ‘speech’ is that expressed by his always-lonesome male body. If he didn’t have this mediating ‘speech,’ his body would be dead matter.

Although he can play at being the messiah and project into the future, he can never be properly messianic: he can never be the beginning of man, for example. He can only be messianic by proxy. Never ‘two,’ his male body simply prevents him from opening the future with another ‘one.’ Confined to distance, mediation, representation and therefore ends, he can only deploy the end—eschatology.

In this way, while the (fecund) female body tears humankind out of history with her children and therefore into a hereto-unheard future, this male body can only take himself and others into the future conceived teleologically, that is, as the outcome of accumulated past and future presents. This is his lonesome task: deploy for himself and others the end. In this way, this male body is simply—a simplicity that often pains him—the laborious finality of history.

Unable to give birth and therefore always an origin at a distance—a metaphorical distance for it can also be the sultriest of intimacies—his inextricable eschatological confine puts him in an always uncomfortable double bind:

Firstly, his body is a call to fiction. This call is directed to the female body and this whether he is ‘heterosexual,’ ‘homosexual’ or ‘queer.’ The fact of the origin is unknown to
him because always already mediated, imagined, represented. This does not a) equate the female body with fiction, b) elevate the female body over the male body, or c) give the female body a privileged knowledge; this is simply the recognition of an inevitable bodily call to fiction about the facticity of origin.

Secondly, his body is also a plea to women to extend himself beyond death. Never two, he (in most cases, a ‘heterosexual’ ‘he’) longs to meet a woman who can give birth to ‘his’ child, a child that, at a distance, will take him, whether he likes it or not, somewhat beyond death. Once again, this does not elevate the female body or women in general as the sole provider of a life beyond finitude. This is simply the recognition of a lonesome plea to be taken out of eschatology.

This call to fiction and, for some, this plea to women shows that although his body is condemned to be eschatological, he is not just for death; he is also for a beyond death. In other words, while his body can never tear mankind out of history, his efforts at being the laborious finality of history is also paradoxically an effort to be (together) the laborious infinity of history. Eschatology is never one-sided, providing, of course, one can recognize a side to eschatology.

NO HERO

Notwithstanding his often-aggressive pride in his maleness—masculine deployment does not always translate well in the male body—he is thus an alienated being. Even his daytime work will not be able to overcome this: He will always remain alienated not only by the ‘other’ (as un/defined in the Introduction) but also by the products he creates, these manly tools that always end up rising up against him, always untamed and hostile, mere symbols of his end of history.

Even when he is seen (supposedly) mastering his existence and his products (the media bombard us enough with such delusory images), his eschatology still prevents him from being a hero. He can be no hero properly because death still holds him in its grip. Death indeed remains (even for him, who
stands for the end) a ‘never now,’ something that will always already evade his eschatological grasp. In front of the great reaper, he is effectively a weakling, like anybody else.

The male body lying here in the afternoon sun is therefore clearly no hero because as soon as he will awake, he will always already hope not to die: death will simply come to him, eventually, the final submission to time. And even if he plans to commit suicide, he will still be unable to master death; he will simply succumb to it because of his inability to carry over to the other side his mastery.

THE APPEAL TO THE FEMININE

Hence his never acknowledged appeal to the feminine, which here, in this context, is not a call to the female body as his eschatological salvation or a plea to woman as his bio-anthropological opposite, the potential mother to ‘his’ child. This is a different kind of appeal in comparison to the previous two because it is not, as we have seen, relational, but perpendicular.

As stated before, in (or all over) this male body lying here in a slumber, the feminine and the un-mediated future coincide in a coincidence that knows no incidence. In this way, his appeal to the feminine is an appeal to the future, to what comes from above, takes his breath away, and marks (and therefore allows for) his singular lonesome and finite deployment. How is one to understand this appeal (which is also, paradoxically, an appeal to self)?

In his intractable solitude, this male body finds himself bound to and by an indefinite present. Within this present, he is breathless: he is always already trying to find a solid base from which to assert himself. Unfortunately, however much he tries, he remains stuck precariously in this indefinite, but finite present: between an inherited past that always eventually vanishes into the immemorial and an always-mediated future that always seems to come from nowhere.

And so he turns, for want of a better solution, to what he thinks is the ‘instant present’: trying to live ‘it’ as much as
he can: young, working and partying hard, old, enjoying the moments that come knowing the end is near. In each case, he exposes an always failing sovereignty, a lack of mastery over a time that is never really his. This failing mastery is the only result possible when the instant present (past-present or future-present) is sought out.

The only way he might be able to overcome such failing is if he finally acknowledges his appeal to the feminine. The perpendicular fall of the feminine—this fall that gives him his confining present—is indeed the only ‘thing’ or the only ‘one’ that can allow him to escape the fatality that structures and overwhelms him in the present: his eschatology.

Unsurprisingly, the recognition of this appeal is not what will finally tame once and for all his endless propensity to master himself. The acknowledgement of this appeal only allows him to relax a little, that is, to accept that his body is also this feminine fall that both makes possible and alleviates his end-game—a strange kind of acceptance, an odd taming of mastery because it is the exact opposite of becoming effeminate.

To become effeminate is indeed to dismiss the body’s eschatological confine; it is to pretend that a male body can potentially or momentarily open the future. While the act of becoming effeminate is a valid endeavour; it unfortunately can never entirely overcome its limit: the end of man. Saying this does not imply calling for a return to an archaic virility, but for a sustained questioning of improprieties (masculine and feminine) all in the aim of taming mastery—and this, even if dresses are being worn.

Once a little tamed, he will then perhaps be able to stop grasping his body only to stupidly shatter it against death, haughty and proud: the vainglory achievements of man-folk. If this taming ever happens, then this male body will perhaps begin to take time to be against death, to postpone it, procrastinate, have patience. If this taming ever happens, then this male body will perhaps also begin to signify otherwise, that
is, at the same time, in an impossible simultaneity, otherwise than being\textsuperscript{52}—a difficult task that is far from being achieved.

But hush, this male body is slowly stirring, turning over, progressively regaining consciousness, growing grumpier as he awakes: the need for mastery steadily clenching ‘its’ grip. This slow turn reveals his many sides, angular, hairy, robust, smelly, warm, delicate, graceful. An abyss in every crevice, a mass at every turn, this male body can reach neither a plenitude of meaning nor a truly stable referent. His language, like his body, betrays him at every turn: never quite masculine, ever more virile/effeminate, never enough feminine.

\textsuperscript{52} The intention here is not to put forward an easy philosophical quip that would pretend to overcome in one single brushstroke Levinas’s outstanding argument in \textit{Otherwise than Being}. The intention here has its roots in a previous book where the juxtaposition of the violent (male) ‘being otherwise’ and the ethical (feminine) ‘otherwise than being’ are analysed at length. See After ‘Rwanda,’ particularly chapters 5 and 6.