6. The Factory

INTRODUCTION

Most of time the focus is on the vertical conduit or delivery system that shamelessly always tries to reach up as high as is humanly possible. Any discourse for which this upright conduit is standard emphasizes the triumph of verticality, signification, and self-possession. For some, this conduit is the alpha and omega, the beginning and the end, the (toy-like) entertainment prop that sets the standard for everything else…

But what is one to think of the site of production underneath? Little attention is indeed paid to what we will call here the factory. By over-emphasizing the heroic uprightness of the tubular member, man-folk and their relationships to other bodies, male or female, suffer from an unfair distortion: everything is always about the mastery of the earth and skies, and not about the work that goes on in order for this supposed mastery to take place.

But this is not all. By over-emphasizing erectility over what goes on below, the general tendency is to ignore the fact
that the factory, contrary to the endlessly repeated selfishness attributed to the vertical conduit (and men by default), produces something ‘for another.’ This ‘product for another’ is a difficult one to describe, as it is never neutral: it is both potentially positive and negative, a threat and a gift; the most problematic because emblematic double-bind offering men can put forward.

In this way, and unlike verticality, signification, and self-possession and therefore pleasure, the site of production necessarily implies ‘two’; it is, however dangerous it is to recognize this, inescapably social. This does not necessarily emphasize reproduction. Even when no procreation is sought out, the factory still produces ‘for the other’ even when there is violence—we will come back to this.

Overall, when it comes to that which is below, the hackneyed question is always invariably and tiresomely: is there a factory there or not? This has nothing to do with the visibility of the factory (whether it is hidden or dangling noticeably) or the invisibility of its work. This has to do with the factory’s ability or capacity to generate what it takes for the upright character to play its role. As will become evident, this commonplace ur-question refers to something infinitely more complex than at first anticipated.

As the above references to ‘tubular member,’ ‘conduit’ and ‘upright character’ clearly show, the following text will not address the mechanisms, structures, and discourses imposed by that other metaphor, the monolithic psychoanalytical ogre known as the phallus. This does not mean to invalidate, evade or discard any link between the body and a whole range of already existing metaphors, symbols, and tools used by that discipline or practice. I simply have no expertise in articulating what follows from a psychoanalytical perspective.

The aim instead is to put forward a different metaphor (i.e. here the factory) in order to address, in one’s own terms, the experience of a living male body, even if it is deeply problematic in other disciplines or practices such as psychoanalysis (in a way, what follows is ripe for the couch: a promising narrative full, no doubt, of neurotic symptoms of castration anxieties
and the like). However, the idea is, as has been shown many times before, that the phallus is not the only signifier of masculinity and masculine sexuality is not exclusively phallocentric. Something else is also at stake and this is what will remain to be shown with this alternative or complementary metaphor.

Inevitably the danger in elaborating another metaphor of this kind is to be accused of yet another simplistic biological reductionism (‘ironically,’ alongside that other reduction, the phallus). In order to prevent this danger, I can only reference here Jean-Luc Nancy who says that the body is not just a biological, social or cultural entity; it is also that which first articulates space (and) time. The body, following Jean-Luc Nancy and Merleau-Ponty before him, is indeed that which takes place at the limit; it is an event at the limit of sense, in the emergence of sense and signification. The body does not have sense (or have a phallus) and it is not sense (be a phallus). The body can only be “the taking place of sense [l’avoir-lieu du sens].”

As the taking place of sense, the body can only generate metaphors, symbols and tools (the phallus, the factory, etc.) only if it also exceeds, defies, and challenges them at the same time. This is the body’s double bind, one which no disciplines can overcome once and for all, and this however much they try. In a way, the body is precisely that which forces disciplines to always become unrecognizable. In the end, the body always wins.

Armed in this way against the accusation of crude biologism, the aim of the following chapter is therefore to think a more provisional, heuristic and personal gesture that goes—on all accounts—with the sense of this body, that is, with the way this body exceeds itself. The aim behind this gesture is to suggest the idea of turning the discussion on the male body (and its ontological structure) towards not so much a different metaphor, but a different mode of operation and description.

Finally, please note that the following reference to the factory is deliberately and self-consciously intended to come

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Nancy, *Corpus*, 119.
across as butch, sturdy, and robust. Considering the fact that this site of production is physically rather fragile, one would have perhaps expected a more delicate or dainty metaphor. But this would have never worked. The aim behind the use of this cliché or macho metaphor is really to emphasize something very common to men: their (obsessive) propensity to produce.

**Bromide**

The factory is a dual-chambered excrescence. It is strategically located between elevation and descent into darkness. The reason for this position appears to be to keep the factory at a low temperature. For this reason, the factory has the curious characteristic of continually contracting or extending itself in order to keep the ambient temperature at optimal productive conditions. This movement up and down is completely involuntary and results in often-amusing changes in appearance.

In each chamber, the factory produces its goods and the substance that gives life to them (as well as wanted or unwanted side effects elsewhere—unusual growths or changes in tone, for example). The factory itself isn’t heavy or large, but ludicrously small in comparison to the importance of its role: twenty grams at most and about five centimetres in length.

A common myth, based on some obscure etymological homonymy, says that the factory is the witness to the (in)exhaustible work of the pipe above.78 In other words, there would be no law without these witnesses guaranteeing the assumed authority of the ‘one.’ And the fact that it is located in a dual-chambered setting confirms this obscure homonymy, thus attributing to them a certain truth-value: one confirming what they other has ‘witnessed.’

There is a whole series of words—some caricatural—that conjures up the factory’s attributes. In most cases, these have

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been made to include the tubular member.\textsuperscript{79} If one confines oneself to the site of production these words are: tool-kit, gear, accessory, the machines, the instruments, and even the equipment, to take only examples from the specific ‘builder’s’ vocabulary opted here. The most significant is perhaps ‘the attire,’ which designates the couple of objects destined to perform the particular task necessary to accomplish the symbolic work of the over-exposed one above.

However, the factory is not always well equipped. Sometimes the accessory is insufficient, the tool-kit malfunctions, the machinery is inefficient, the instruments fail to perform, the gear is unsatisfactory. When this happens, the law of the ‘one’ becomes debatable and war rages on. But however unhappy it is, one thing is certain: it never ever goes on strike. Even defeated, it produces till the bitter end.

When in good working order, the factory produces its good on a regular basis, some say, on average 10,000 outputs over a life-time. The goods—areferred in some contexts as pearl jam—are tiny, but each one contains constituents that rank in the millions. It takes two and a half months from development to maturity. Once it is mature, the goods can travel a ‘mighty’ 7.5-10 centimeters or 3-4 inches on their own and survive from 30 seconds to 6 days depending on conditions.

\textsuperscript{79} In a candidly written text, Paul Smith uncovers probably the most under-studied of these expressions: vas as in \textit{vas deferens}. Drawing inspiration from Michèle Montrelay’s work and particularly her text “L’Appareillage,” he writes: “The characteristic feature of the pre-oedipal in the male imaginary would then be its va(s)illation. Vas: that which men carry around in the real and which at the same time contains the unsymbolizable; it represents that which we consist in and that which we don’t symbolize; that which we both carry and lose; or, to use an older vocabulary, that which we both accumulate and spend”: Paul Smith “Vas,” \textit{Camera Obscura} 6, no. 2 (May 1988): 101. See also Judith Halberstam’s commentary in relation to female masculinity in: Judith Halberstam, “The Good, the Bad, and the Ugly: Men, Women, and Masculinity,” in \textit{Masculinity Studies and Feminist Theory: New Directions}, ed. Judith Kegan Gardiner (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002), especially 354–6.
Of course, the end result of this work is that once the goods enter the infamous pipe, its goods can travel at a ‘whoopee’ 28 mph, but by then, the show is no longer the factory’s. The law of the ‘one’ takes over and witnesses change.

**Filth**

The process of fabrication and delivery is often seen as a form of defilement. It is a form of filth because it transgresses borders, which means that it also transgresses identities. The reason this is often mentioned is because identities are often tied to their physical borders and anything that passes through these borders is seen as a threat to its supposed self-containment.

Of course, the goods produced in this factory are not unique in being seen as a form of filth that threatens stability and autonomy. Others, some of which cannot be mentioned here, have the same worrisome and dangerous status.

However, something distinguishes it from these other threats. Julia Kristeva indeed says that the factory’s produce is simply more abject than others.\(^{80}\) It is abject because, once it is out, it still stands for the possibility of life and as such, it is still, as mentioned earlier, out of control, accidental, chancy. This is more controversial than it seems at first because the goods are effectively the only type of filth that potentially remains outside of all forms of mastery.

Outside of any form of control, the goods fall outside of the law. No one can indeed explain or regulate rationally why one of its constituents is chosen over all others. Why this reproduction rather than another and why this one rather than nothing? The law of the ‘one’ never rests on certainty, but on the dicey play of a multiplicity run amok.

All this comes to ask the more hackneyed question, why life rather than death? No law will be able to extend its jurisdiction

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over such a mystery. A cast of the dice never indeed abolishes chance, as the old Mallarmé would say.

It might therefore be filth and abject, but the factory’s output has a curious propensity to remind human beings—men and women—that ultimately no one has control over life, not even its proud or shamefaced producers and the ones who accept it carelessly, suffer it in disgust, or embrace it productively.

COGLIONE

This perhaps explains why, unlike the pole, the factory is often seen as an object of ridicule. Some people are embarrassed by it, fearing perhaps that the factory is a far too laughable a symbol for man-folk’s inability to master life. Other people even refuse to touch it, fearing perhaps that, whether they want it or not, they might be part of the ridicule.

As an ‘object’ of ridicule, the factory is often therefore compared to something idiotic or stupid. So much so that there are some people who love to kick, knee, squeeze, or otherwise abuse the factory. When struck, the factory causes extreme pain, which can be either welcome or not.

But this isn’t all; in addition to being compared with something stupid, the factory is also considered by many as an ugly appendage. The fact that its two chambers are most often asymmetrically positioned could have something to do with it. Asymmetry never figures as a criterion for beauty in aesthetic treaties, the number of fig or maple leaves and loincloths in the history of art partly attest to this.

Finally, the factory is also used as an expression of contempt, annoyance, or defiance, clearly indicating that these dangly oblong spheres are really of no importance, that what counts is the singularity and mastery of that which is above. In these cases, other terms are usually used—often by cocky and obstreperous people.

In any case, what all these unpleasant references suggest is that the factory is there to remind us that there is always something a bit risible about man-folk. As Diderot rightly remarked,
there is always a bit of testicle at the bottom of men’s most sublime feelings and their purest tenderness. Some of men’s most awe-inspiring and most hideous thoughts, creations, and ideologies would perhaps never have seen the light of day if they hadn’t been driven by the annoyingly tiresome work of these odd oblong spheres.

**EXTRAVAGANCE**

Notwithstanding its ridiculousness, ugliness, and comical aspects, the factory has a curious, but not unique characteristic that distinguishes it from all other factories. Its machinery constantly produces at a loss. The factory participates, to follow a specific Bataillean vocabulary, in what could be termed forms of non-productive expenditures.

This curious characteristic unintentionally challenges the commonly held belief (held by both Capitalism and Communism, for example) in the primacy of exchange as the sphere of meaning and production. The factory indeed produces at a ridiculous loss because out of an average 10,000 outputs in a sixty-year life span, only a truly ridiculous number is productive.

This clearly shows that, overall, the factory is the unruly reverse of work, utility, politics, laws, truth, or knowledge and therefore pleasure. As such, the factory is really the opposite of what is usually understood by economy; it is, like Adam’s parting rib, that which is precisely without return, what is always in excess of conventional economy, thus contradicting

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82 The following argument is borrowed from Georges Bataille’s analysis of eroticism. The focus of this chapter is intended to push Bataille’s idea in another direction in order to emphasize the liminality of the male body’s erotic afterlife. See Georges Bataille, *The Accursed Share*, Vol. 1, trans. R. Hurley (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1991).
or compensating for man’s obsession with productivity, effectiveness, leadership, order, authenticity, and wisdom.

In this way, not unlike laughter or drunkenness, this factory operates paradoxically in a non-fatherly way, some might even say in a perpetually adolescent manner: it operates on the basis of an economy that is pure destruction, a repetitive squandering of a by-product of health or ill health and this, whether in a lovely ‘heterosexual’ or hard-core bare-backing environment.

In a way and if one is permitted to make ruthless appropriations, death and life on earth are not due to the benevolence of God or a system that can be scientifically comprehended; it is partly the result of a senseless and wasteful squandering of energy. In other words, death and life are not due to a thought-out plan, but to the fortuitous outcome of a preposterous extravagance.

Now it would be wrong to understand this extravagance as something that can be quantified or qualified, calculated or analysed. However much references are made here to specific number of ‘outputs,’ the extravagance remains always already un-representable because it lies outside of any form of totalisation. The same goes with artistic experiments (Duchamp’s Faulty Landscape 1946, for example): they can never properly represent this extravagance.

The activity of squandering recklessly, which curiously and in all modesty, goes on a par, as Bataille would say, with the sun’s endless prodigality, knows indeed no transcription. This does not mean that it can only be embodied: pure somatic experience, for example. This simply means that the anarchy of its flow can never be translated, classified, ordered. In other words, unlike the phallus, which always equals ‘one,’ the factory’s produce is alien to any economic system that would reduce it in order to allow it to finally signify as this or that.

Of course, one could argue that once the goods are channelled through utility, they are necessarily—and perhaps now more than ever—always already a form of commodity. The factory does not obviously operate out of pure generosity. It patently operates within a utility framework, that is, through
an economic system, or as part of a set of contractual agree-
ments (whether solitary, with another, or with others). In this
way, what is essentially pure loss is nonetheless still channelled
through profit.

But, however much extravagance is used for selfish gratifi-
cation and turned into a product for sale (from prostitution, to
bukkake orgies, to fertility clinics), the factory itself remains
always already a work of prodigality that only an unfortunate
accident, a severe localised illness, or death can stop. The
factory is one of the few things in life that produces life, most
of which is murdered, thus paradoxically emphasizing the
impossibility of distinguishing it from death. Mother nature
has obviously no regard for human ethics or feelings because
it clearly never ceases to prevaricate between life and death.

**Unrly Gift**

There is one major consequence to this reckless extravagance
that is dangerous to express, for it concerns, as announced in
the introduction to this chapter, its destination, which, as we
will see, is not a destiny: ‘for the other.’

However problematic it is to acknowledge the following,
the fact remains that this ‘for the other’ is really (also) a call out
of self (‘self’ understood here not as idem, but as ipseity, that
is, as what is already produced and inscribed as an unstable
arrangement of sex and gender). This is indeed a tricky issue
because the focus on the conduit above usually determines
the whole machinery (and by reductive extension, men in
general) as exclusively self-centered and selfish, and therefore
as necessarily violent.

The argument here is the fact that to produce in such
prodigal fashion implies an exteriorization that contradicts
the conduit’s violent unsociableness. The factory’s work is a
call out of self because it knows no interiority. Giving, whether
out of choice or not, is effectively—however infuriating this
is—its only possible mode of operation. This gift is not, as we
have seen, an exchange in a conventional economic sense; it
is an ‘unproductive expenditure’ for the other that, beyond selfish pleasure, can know no return.

In order to make sense of this dangerous thought, it is necessary to think the moment this factory is put to use in the encounter with the other—albeit with the same caveat as that announced in the Introduction. When it is put to use, it is so only with the other as the unforeseeable. Once again, this does not reduce the other to a state of invisibility or irrelevance. The unforeseeable does not mean absence. She, he, or it is what cannot be projected upon or predicted as self-evident.

In this way, this other is not another person (man or woman), another time (a child), death as such, or a day after history strictly speaking (God). It is whoever or whatever is present at the heart of a shared experience. Present not only as a ‘total’ presence (and thus able to respond in disgust or anticipation) but also as trace, the trace of the other—that is, as what or who is not yet.

As such, the factory works—before all articles of faith and philosophy and before all political protest—as a call out of self because it is essentially eschatological at its origin and in each of its aspects. In other words, the factory is one of the few ‘things’ that is able to produce some ‘thing’ that crosses over to the other and still manages to remain potentially a ‘beyond death’ (and this even if it is temporarily mediated by the gaze).

The fact of being potentially ‘beyond death’ is what distinguishes it from any other gesture (love, for example) because, as we have seen in the previous chapter, it is the only opening onto the future that exceeds all future-presents, that is, all forms of projection or predictions. As Levinas rightly observes against Heidegger and conventional readings of The Song of Songs, it is Eros and not love that is stronger than death.83

This obviously does not mean that, because it is intimately coupled with pleasure, it is not also irascibly violent, inescapably self-centred, and unbearably selfish. ‘Take that’ or ‘you want it?’ are the usual expressions used in pornography.

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83 Levinas, Time and the Other, 76.
to express such an unbearable violence. However, amidst all this brutality, this also expresses a call-out-of-self that paradoxically reaches out to what is no longer ipse (and this, even if celibacy, chastity, and abstinence are the chosen options).

This also does not imply the stability of a possession, the security of an always-replenished gift ‘shop,’ or the assurance that life is secure because of man’s endless propensity to produce. Instability, unreliability, and contingency rule this productivity. If this was not the case, then men would be permanently ‘turned’-on working fountains: a parody of life’s munificence (cf. Bruce Nauman’s Self-Portrait as Fountain, 1966–7).

However, notwithstanding this contingency (or perhaps because of it), there is a rather repetitive emphasis that perhaps should be taken in consideration: not everything is self-absorbed, self-seeking, self-serving and this, however much the act itself is inescapably wrapped up in the constitution of self (ipseity). In other words, however debilitating and dangerously unpredictable horniness can be, it is also paradoxically, a way of rejecting the overwhelming self-sufficiency of virility (as defined in chapter 5, “End(s) Meet”).

In this way, and however unsettling or disturbing this is if one considers humanity’s long history of virile violence, the factory’s work is a self-serving appeal to be freed from self (ipseity). In other words, the factory’s tireless work is perhaps the most unsettling of men’s call, for it remains secretly a selfish plea to no longer be selfish—a plea that can perhaps be translated each time anew as: ‘bollocks to Being.’ A rather

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84 In saying this, I deliberately remain prior to the constitution of the subject as phallus—hence my repeated reference to ipseity as an unstable arrangement (in lieu of idem as a recollected identity). As such, I slightly differ from Michèle Montrelay’s idea that ejaculation is a loss of subjectivity in relation to the phallus. For Montrelay’s ideas, see: Michèle Montrelay, “L’Appareillage,” Cahiers Confrontations 6 (Spring 1982): 33–43. For commentaries, see Smith, “Vas,” 95–100; and Murat Aydemir, Images of Bliss: Ejaculation, Masculinity, Meaning (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2007), 118–9.
disconcerting thought when considering the overwhelming presence of the money shot in pornography.