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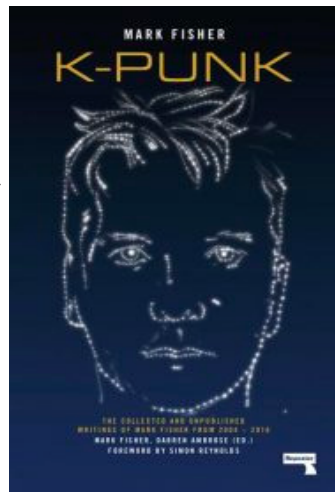
To Wish Impossible Things: On Mark Fisher's Ab-joy (After All)

As a new volume of Mark Fisher's K-Punk writings appears in Italian translation, Enrico Monacelli and Massimo Filippi struggle with the ambivalent jouissance of their untimely call to Deep Futurism and the paradox of their recovery, rehabilitation, and re-present-ation.

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Why I started the blog? Because it seemed like a space—the only space—in which to maintain a kind of discourse that had started in the music press and the art schools, but which had all but died out, with what I think are appalling cultural and political consequences.¹



So begins the *K-Punk* anthology, the Italian translation of which is divided into four volumes, a merciful choice compared to the monolith that is the English edition, collecting together, in addition to a few short articles appeared in various magazines, Mark Fisher's posts on his blog *K-Punk*. The first volume, dedicated to his political writings and entitled *Il nostro desiderio è senza nome* [*Our Desire is Nameless*], was released in Italy at the beginning of 2020, and the second, *Schermi, sogni e spettri* [*Screens, Dreams and Spectres*], a few weeks ago (both translated by Vincenzo Penna for minimum fax).

1. M. Fisher, *K-Punk*, ed. D. Ambrose (London: Repeater, 2018), 31.

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It is impossible to deny that around the CCRU—and what followed after its demise, Fisher's blog included—there has emerged a mythology which exudes the vague stench of obituaries and anatomical theatres. Even in

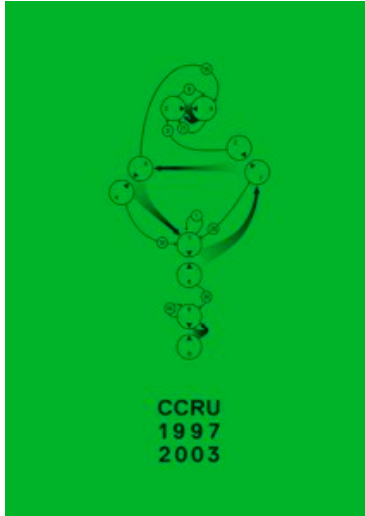
the parochial Italian collective consciousness, the para-academic group, born in a tiny room at the

A cascade of amen breaks, Ballard's and Gibson's cyberpunk, the death of sound philosophy under the blows of a new pulp theory....

University of Warwick and finally killed off by the Millennium Bug, is becoming, along with its defectors, descendants and followers, a mythological figure that immediately translates into very specific, standard responses: the nineties transfigured by an upheaval of epic proportions, the shock of the augmented reality of and by the web, a cascade of

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amen breaks, Ballard's and Gibson's cyberpunk, the death of sound philosophy under the blows of a new pulp theory....



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These knee-jerk reactions, however, do not seem to address any real issue; rather, they are becoming a problem in and of themselves in their return in the form of clichés. Progressively freed from any connotative and descriptive function, these associations are in fact transforming into an authentic commonplace, made, as is usual with common sense, out of immediate and unflattering correspondences. In other words, they are becoming yet another theoretical mannerism, not dissimilar from the epidemic fevers of, first, the Frankfurt Sickness, and then later The Deconstruction Syndrome, a fever whose miasmas and outpourings threaten to cosy up real nice—where they have not already done so—in the stiff atmosphere of academic classrooms, virtual or IRL. Truly, a return of the depressed.

'[R]eality has fundamentally altered, and this must be faced, not denied'. We can't deny that 'internment camps and franchise coffee bars coexist'.²

The 'reality' that is designated is significant more for what is absent from it than for any positive properties it is deemed to possess. And what is absent, above all, is fantasy. Or rather, fantasy objects.³

2. Ibid., 237, 173.

3. Ibid., 125.

We would love to live in this frigid simulacrum woven by the threads of the fantasy tale born from the ashes of the CCRU

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Even if, abiding by intellectual etiquette, we feel obliged to denounce this sclerotization, to try to flee such facile and common thoughts—or, more realistically, Pavlovian reflexes—we will not hide the fascination we feel for these flat images and for the shimmer of the macabre celebration of the disappearance of the CCRU, the 'diaspora' of its members under the blows of a Capital which, even post-mortem, as McKenzie Wark would have it, remains capable of ever faster and ever more lethal mutations. We would love to live—if only it were possible—in this frigid simulacrum woven by the threads of the fantasy tale born from the ashes of the CCRU, a tale that weaves hi-fi dreams in a lo-fi life. ('Late capitalism can't produce many new ideas anymore, but it can reliably deliver technological upgrades').⁴

Friction-free, this common place, this inane smooth space, keeps alive, deep in our guts, the insane hope that this posthumous joy will prosper, or at least survive the wear and tear of time and allow us to bathe in it 'till the end of days. After all, we are not immune—and why should we be?—to the compulsions of the Great Other, whom we all blame for producing and reproducing the conformisms that we claim to recognise and, therefore, reject in the little others around us.

God, the Father, the Big Other, the Symbolic does not exist; but it *insists* through the repetition of these rituals.⁵

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This flat image, free of anything abrasive, is tied, certainly, to a form of nostalgia, for a time when the future still pressed on the doors of the present. Unheimlich (weird or eerie, accordingly) of course, a source of delirium but, at the same time, of hope.

4. Ibid., 211.

5. Ibid., 167.

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In a sense, the mythical halo that surrounds the CCRU's corpse enchants us because it looks like the naive and exhausted mirage of a frontier, of a line on the horizon, ever deferred and distant. A banal but effective bait. It was an era—that of the CCRU, an era that glaringly loomed over K-Punk's posts—that mastered capitalist thaumaturgy—“liberal communism”—as exemplified by the charitable gifts made by super-successful capitalists such as Bill Gates and George Soros—is now the dominant form of capitalist ideology⁶—and could still try to steer Capital's enforced excitement toward emancipatory ends. An ethos which, in the midst of our mad black cultural counter-revolution, could only look like heresy.

The opposition that sets elitism against populism is one that neoliberalism has put in place, which is why it's a mistake to fall either side of it. The neoliberal attack on cultural “elites” has gone alongside the consolidation and extension of the power of an economic elite⁷

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The sharpest and most enduring symbol of this nostalgia for a future shock, for a breakneck whiplash coming from a not so distant tomorrow, is Terminator, the cult character played by Arnold Schwarzenegger in the 1984 film of the same name. One of the most vivid symptoms of the Deep Futurism that innervated the CCRU.

Terminator is a cyborg from the future, reshaping the course of history in a radical and totally unpredictable way. Assembled from the remnants of Fordist assembly lines and representing the technological upheavals that were banging on the door, Terminator was the libidinal precipitate of a world open to the unknown and the improbable. A world in which the acceleration of the flows of goods, signs, and bodies promised a deflagration so devastating as to unravel



and reshape the plot of the world. Terminator heralded a liquid aurora, a renewed horizontal cosmos, in which every object would be dissolved in the corrosive acid of this blob made of flat batteries and silicon flames saturated with information. In the presence of this shocking wonder, Nick Land wrote:

Terminator: an astronomical division between the illuminated side of a cold body and its dark side, describing a boundary. The Terminator movies feature a bio-technical reconstruct called Arnold Schwarzenegger, wrapped in level after level of artificiality, as a Turing-test nightmare retro-infiltrated to forestall human resistance to a neorepublica tor usurpation.⁸

Land, however, seems to avoid the fact that *Terminator*—already since the suspiciously superior 1991 sequel—had become a saga, and that it had turned into a bloodless Hollywood franchise. While remaining a symptom of something other, it had developed further symptoms (a symptom of the Other, perhaps?), a symptom turned chronic, stagnant as the times we still live in today.

Fisher too, in a sense, never abandoned Terminator's ab-joy, that desperate vitality (to use Pasolini's livid terminology). Fisher never stopped keeping alive the disquieting hope for a Deep Futurism in the midst of

6. Ibid., 453.

7. Ibid., 208.

8. N. Land, 'Meat (or How to Kill Oedipus in Cyberspace)', in *Fanged Noumena* (Falmouth and New York: Urbanomic/Sequance Press, 2011), 422.

Fisher, in a sense, never abandoned Terminator's ab-joy, that desperate vitality

Cyclone T.I.N.A.—at whose centre swirls the motionless, hedonic depression induced by our addiction to Capitalist Realism. Precisely for this reason, his subsequent distancing from Terminator is the disconsolate, but far from tame, recognition of the victory of a present in which every novelty has atrophied, or been deprived of fangs and virulence.

'By this point, we've already seen the original 1984 model of the Arnie Terminator blown away by an older Terminator', an 'already irritating combination of cutesy smart alecric [...] and apocalyptic foreboding', '[b]ut by 2015 that excitement has long since flatlined'. Terminator turns into the sad employ of some boring non-place somewhere where 'twenty-first-century labour' is reduced to 'quasi-automatism is expected of workers as if the undeclared condition of employment were to surrender subjectivity and become nothing more than a bio-linguistic appendage tasked with repeating set phrases that make a mockery of anything resembling conversation'.⁹

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That Fisher would continue to feel the emancipatory power of the first *Terminator* is shown in the distance that he inserts, even in this case, between himself and Land:

Land's piratings of *Terminator*, *Blade Runner* and the *Predator* films made his texts part of a convergent tendency—an accelerationist cyber-culture in which digital sonic production disclosed an inhuman future that was to be relished rather than abominated.¹⁰

This brings us to an even broader theoretical question: the political conceptualisation of hyperstition. A conceptualisation that has never stopped tying/separating the two in an indissoluble non/relationship: the techno-science of 'cultural objects' that

9. Fisher, *K-Punk*, 245.

10. M. Fisher, 'Terminator vs. Avatar', in R. Mackay and A. Avanessian (eds.), *#Accelerate: The Accelerationist Reader* (Falmouth: Urbanomic, 2017), 335–46: 344.

make themselves real generates a nostalgia feeling in Fisher and a nostalgia mode in Land. By 'nostalgia feeling' we mean a protracted production, even at the height of despair, of visions of a future that hopefully we might be able to secure at some point; by 'nostalgia mode' we mean, instead, a mode that, even at the zenith of mania, continues fixating only on the irretrievably lost (eg. the idea of a runaway capital even in the stagnancy of our post-history). In this sense, Fisher is *ab-joyous*. and Land is not.

[T]he nostalgia mode is about the inability to imagine anything other than the past, the incapacity to generate forms that can engage with the present, still less the future.¹¹

We believe that, at the end of the day, Fisher comprehended that it was impossible to 'recover a lost moment', an intuition that naturally leads to the conclusion that, maybe, 'this moment never existed in the first place'.¹²

Hyperstition generates a nostalgia feeling in Fisher and a nostalgia mode in Land. In this sense, Fisher is ab-joyous, and Land is not.

8

The great, paradoxical value of *Screens, Dreams and Spectres*—and of the *K-Punk* volumes in general—is precisely that they embody the sense of defeat that Fisher discovered in contemporary mass phenomena and against which, despite everything, he never ceased to fight—with critical obstinacy and moral rigour. The entire volume, in fact, is a kind of painful schizoanalysis of cinema, pop culture and, more generically, of the images of our present, dissected as if they were the zombie return of a broken and dismembered desire. It could be said that the screen (or TV set), protagonist of this second volume, is the glossy wreck of a Ballardian automobile upon which glint the symptoms of anxiety, disorientation, and the paranoid drifts of our present—the identity closures and the broken minds. It is certainly

11. Fisher, *K-Punk*, 116.

12. *Ibid.*, 116.

A kind of painful schizoanalysis of cinema, pop culture, of the images of our present, dissected as if they were the zombie return of a broken and dismembered desire

not a pleasant read, but it is instructive and useful—that is, potentially transformative—to feel with such a degree of intensity how far our sadness and neuroses go.

No tragedy now—only spasms of soon-to-be-forgotten outrage, ejaculations of hatred and suffering snacked on like fast food.¹³

Or;

The rise of fantasy as a genre over the last twenty-five years can be directly correlative with the collapse of any effective alternative reality structure outside capitalism.¹⁴

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It creates, however, a certain discomfort to re-read these ‘live’ interventions within the bounds of a book that, *volens nolens*, reterritorializes the deterritorializing flows of Fisher’s diffractions.

All the pieces that make up *Screens, Dreams and Spectres* and, more generally, the entirety of *K-Punk*, were conceived of as interventions on a blog, interventions loosed without precautions—like screenless dreams—into the magmatic flow of the web. They were bullets aimed at the present in fieri, moved by the desire to be quick and compact, to hit the flesh of the collective imagination right where it hurts most. In short, they were interventions designed to be fragile, contingent, and lethal creatures. We cannot, therefore, fail to notice the pungent smell of incense that spread from this premature embalming. Perhaps this anthology is the expression of an excess of zealous tact toward writings that continue to claim their right to die together with what they criticised or celebrated.

13. Ibid., 251.

14. Ibid., 118.

We are aware, however, that the extraction of these writings from a blog that could disappear at any moment is an operation not without merit. In other words, we would not want to lose forever the chance to read, for example, Fisher’s lightning-fast and illuminating diagnostic reports such as: ‘Postmodern fascism is a disavowed fascism [...] just as homophobia survives as disavowed homophobia. The strategy is to refuse the identification while pursuing the political programme’. Or: ‘We know that our wealth and comfort are achieved at the price of others’ suffering and exploitation, that our smallest actions contribute to ecological catastrophe, but the causal chains connecting our actions with their consequences are so complicated as to be unmappable—they lie far beyond not only our experience, and any possible experience. (Hence the inadequacy of folk politics)’. And again: ‘Yet work can be affective and linguistic without being cognitive—like a waiter, the call-centre worker can perform attentiveness without having to think. For these non-cognitive workers, indeed, thought is a privilege to which they are not entitled’.¹⁵

Let us ask ourselves: ‘[H]ow long can a culture persist without the new?’

The ambivalence between affection and comprehension—towards Fisher—ought to suggest a supplement of reflection, and should force us to ask ourselves whether it is really necessary to stuff every cultural product into its paper box or whether we are bound to respect its mysterious and impalpable volatility.

‘A culture which takes place only in museums is already exhausted. A culture of commemoration is a cemetery’. Let us ask ourselves: ‘[H]ow long can a culture persist without the new?’¹⁶

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And now, at the very end, some ab-joy:

The problems are logistical, not ethical, and the issue is simply how and when revolution can be made to happen, not if it should happen at all.¹⁷

15. Ibid., 156, 198, 149.

16. Ibid., 174, 173.

17. Ibid., 219.