

The Corpse Bride:  
Thinking with *Nigredo*

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The living and the dead at his command,  
Were coupled, face to face, and hand to hand,  
Till, chok'd with stench, in loath'd embraces tied,  
The ling'ring wretches pin'd away and died.<sup>1</sup>

The punishment imposed by Mezentius on the soldiers of Aeneas should be inflicted, by coupling him to one of his own corpses and parading him through the streets until his carcass and its companion were amalgamated by putrefaction.<sup>2</sup>

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1. Virgil, *The Aeneid*, VIII 483-88.

2. Erinensis, 'On the Exploitation of Dead Bodies', *The Lancet*, 1828-9: 777.

## COLLAPSE IV

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### A PRELUDE TO PUTREFACTION

In the eighth book of *Aeneid* (483-88), Evander attributes an outlandishly atrocious form of punishment to Mezentius, the Etruscan King. However, it is not Virgil who first speaks of this punishment, for before Virgil, Cicero cites from Aristotle an analogy which compares the twofold composite of the body and soul with the torture inflicted by the Etruscan pirates. Revived during the reign of the Roman Emperor Marcus Macrinus, the notoriety of this atrocity survives antiquity and the Middle Ages. In the sixteenth century, the horror of this torture is expressed, once again, by a popular emblem called *Nupta Contagioso* showing a woman being tied to a man plagued by syphilis, at the King's order. Widely distributed throughout Europe, the emblem continues to reappear in different contexts during the Renaissance and even toward the nineteenth century. *Nupta Contagioso* or *Nupta Cadavera* literally suggests a marriage with the diseased or the dead: a forcible conjugation with a corpse, and a consummation of marriage with the dead as a bride.

Haunted by the unusually philosophical insinuations of this punishment as well as its subtle imagery, to which human imagination cannot help contributing, Iamblichus and Augustine – like Aristotle – ruminate on the Etruscan torture. They both adopt it as something more than a fundamental allegory in their philosophies: they see in it a metaphysical model that exposes and explains the condition(s) of being alive in regard to body, soul and intellect.<sup>3</sup> Jacques Brunschwig, in his 1963 essay *Aristote*

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3. For more details on Aristotle and the fragment on the psyche see A.P. Bos, *The Soul and its Instrumental Body: A Reinterpretation of Aristotle's Philosophy of Living Nature*, (Leiden: Brill, 2003).

*et les pirates tyrrhéniens*, describes the baroque details of the Etruscans' punishment. A living man or woman was tied to a rotting corpse, face to face, mouth to mouth, limb to limb, with an obsessive exactitude in which each part of the body corresponded with its matching putrefying counterpart. Shackled to their rotting double, the man or woman was left to decay. To avoid the starvation of the victim and to ensure the rotting bonds between the living and the dead were fully established, the Etruscan robbers continued to feed the victim appropriately. Only once the superficial difference between the corpse and the living body started to rot away through the agency of worms, which bridged the two bodies, establishing a differential continuity between them, did the Etruscans stop feeding the living. Once both the living and the dead had turned black through putrefaction, the Etruscans deemed it appropriate to unshackle the bodies, by now combined together, albeit on an infinitesimal, vermicular level. Although the blackening of the skin indicated the superficial indifferenciation of decay (the merging of bodies into a black slime), for the Etruscans – executioners gifted with metaphysical literacy and alchemical ingenuity – it signalled an ontological exposition of the decaying process which had already started from within. Also known as the blackening of decay or chemical necrosis, *nigredo* is an internal but outward process in which the vermicular differentiation of worms and other corpuscles makes itself known in the superficial register of decay as that which undifferentiates. For the Etruscan pirates, chemistry started from within but its existence was registered on the surface, so to speak; explicit or ontologically registered decay was merely a superficial symptom of an already founded decay, decay as a pre-established universal chemistry. The victim could only be unshackled from the

## COLLAPSE IV

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corpse and released when decay finished its ascension from within to the surface. Therefore the so-called climax of the punishment – the blackening of the body – coincides with the superficial conclusion of decay, the exposition of decay on an ontological level.

In a now lost piece, the young Aristotle makes a reference to the torture practiced by the Etruscan pirates.<sup>4</sup> In that text, Aristotle draws a comparison between the soul tethered to the body and the living chained to a dead corpse (*nekrous*):

Aristotle says, that we are punished much as those were who once upon a time, when they had fallen into the hands of Etruscan robbers, were slain with elaborate cruelty; their bodies, the living [*corpora viva*] with the dead, were bound so exactly as possible one against another: so our souls, tied together with our bodies as the living fixed upon the dead.<sup>5</sup>

Whether this fragment points to a Platonic phase in the philosophical life of Aristotle or not, it provides us with a unique resource for discovering the less explicit ties between his *Metaphysics* and *De Anima*. Accordingly, it also holds a key for understanding the severed ties between Aristotle's philosophy and that of Plato on the one hand and the enduring bonds between Aristotle and Scholasticism on the other. Yet more ambitiously, this fragment subtly points to a moment in philosophy when both the philosophy of Ideas and the science of being qua being are fundamentally built upon putrefaction and act in accordance with the chemistry of decay. It is the moment when beings must

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4. Aristotle's fragment regarding the body-soul composite and the Etruscan torture is believed to be a part of *Eudemus* or *Protrepticus*.

5. Quoted by Cicero from Aristotle in *Hortensius*. Also see *Saint Augustine Against Julian (Writings of Saint Augustine, V. 16)*, (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America, 1957). Augustine uses the same quote from Cicero.

undergo necrosis and decay in order to remain in being and the Ideas must be founded on an intensive necrosis and an extensive decay in order to remain in their essence and to synthesize with other Ideas. In other words, this moment marks a necessity for Ideas – even the Idea of ontology itself: in order to be active intensively and extensively, inwardly and outwardly, the Idea must first be fully necrotized and blackened on all levels, intensively and extensively.

The following is a disorganized venture – more in line with grave robbers and necrophiles than with archaeologists and scholars of history – to disinter the twist inherent to the fragment associated with Aristotle and to delve into the moment when, prior to all arrangements and establishments, a pact with putrefaction must be made; the moment of *nucleation with nigredo*, as we must call it.



## COLLAPSE IV

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### NECROPHILIC REASON

Aristotle's fragment regarding the Etruscan torture bears a deeply pessimistic irony; it is not the supposedly living body which is tethered to a corpse to rot, because it is exactly the soul qua living which is bound to a corpse – namely, the body. For Aristotle, the soul, as the essence of a being, needs a body to perform its special activities, and it is the responsibility of the soul to be the act of the intellect upon the body. Therefore this necrocratic confinement is both the price and a means of having a body as instrument, and then using this instrument to govern and eventually unite beings. The soul, in this sense, has two activities, inward and outward. The outward activity of the soul is the actualization of the body according to the active intellect (*nous*) which is immortal; in other words the extensive activity of the soul is the animation of the body according to the *ratio* (reason) derived from the *nous*, the intensive and inward activity of the soul. The inward activity of the soul is its unitive activity according to the intellect as the higher genus of being qua being. The intensive activity of the soul is the act of bringing the universe into unison with the intellect according to *ratio*; for this reason, the intensive activity of the soul coincides with the enduring of the soul in its relation to the intellect, which itself is internal to the soul. Here, the intensive and extensive, inward and outward activities of the soul must be in accordance with one another in order for the world to be intelligible and, in its intelligibility, to move toward intellect in proportion to reason.

If the intelligibility of the world must thus imply a 'face to face' coupling of the soul with the body qua dead, then intelligibility is the epiphenomenon of a necrophilic

intimacy, a problematic collusion with the rotting double which brings about the possibility of intelligibility within an inert cosmos. The intelligibility allotted to the body as *corpora cadavera* by ratios of the intellect (or reasons) – each inherent to a different type or gradation of the soul – animates the world according to the intellect. Yet in doing so, reason reanimates the dead rather than bestowing life upon it; for in terms of the Aristotelian body qua cadaver, intelligibility is the reanimation of the dead according to an external agency. Reason grounds the universe not only on a necrophilic intimacy but also in conformity with an undead machine imbued with the chemistry of putrefaction and *nigredo*.

Both in Etruscan torture and in Aristotle's fragment, the living or the soul is tied to the dead or the body *face to face*. The Greco-Roman motif of the mirror is obviously at play here; one sees itself as the other, the perfect matching double. However, the great chain of philosophers from Aristotle to Augustine and beyond only tell us about one side of the mirror, shamelessly underestimating the understanding of both the living and the dead. They tell us that the soul sees itself as the dead party whilst chained to the body. But this is surely a ridiculous attempt to unilateralise the mirror motif, for not only does the living see itself as dead, but the dead also looks into the eyes of the living, and its entire body shivers with worms and dread. It is indeed ghastly for the living to see itself as dead; but it is true horror for the dead to be forced to look at the supposedly living, and to see itself as the living dead, the dead animated by the spurious living. Neither Aristotle nor Augustine tell us about this infliction upon the dead of the burden of the living, this molesting of the dead with the animism of the

## COLLAPSE IV

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living. It is the Barbarians who formulated and exposed the ulterior cruelty of the Etruscan torture in retaliation for the Romans' atrocities: they slaughtered their own cattle, disembowelled them and then forced the Romans inside the carcasses in such a way that only the talking heads of the soldiers protruded. In doing so, they exhibited the farce of vitalism by ventriloquising the dead with the living.

The binding of the soul to the body as a tying of the living to the dead is later arithmetically captured by Aristotle in the formulation of a metaphysical model which is best understood arithmetically, or at least geometrically, as scholastic philosophers preferred. In vitalizing matter and actualizing it, the soul needs a body as an apparatus by which the universe of beings can be led toward the intellect which causes the noumenal universe to exist. In order both to use and to be used by the body under the direction of the intellect, the soul must first remain in itself. And conversely, in remaining in itself, the soul must animate the body and bring about the synthesis and unification of bodies. In other words, in simultaneously governing beings and conducting them toward being qua being (higher genera of being), the soul must first remain in itself and extend beyond itself. For Aristotle, this metaphysical model, the model of intelligible ontology, is arithmetically distilled as *aphairesis* (*apo+airein*, abstraction), a taking away or subtraction. As an Aristotelian mathematical procedure, *aphairesis* consists in two vectors of operation, of negative and positive directions in regard to each other, in diametric opposition but synergistically continuous and reinforcing. For *aphairesis*, as taking away or subtraction, emphasises simultaneously removal (that which is taken away) and conservation (that which is left behind by removal) – the removed and the remainder. A soul coupled with the body mixes with the impure –

since the body debases its essence – and at the same time approaches being qua being by remaining in itself (i.e. by ascending in its purity). For Aristotle, only subtraction can make such double-headed and simultaneous mobilization possible. *Apharesis* or subtraction, accordingly, maps the vectors of the *mobilization* and *effectuation* of reason. *Apharesis* is thus a procedure whereby the soul can be captured simultaneously in the sense of its belongings (or bodies) and in its movement toward *nous* which sheds those belongings as it approaches the intellect – an arithmetic formulation of the Etruscan metaphysical cruelty.<sup>6</sup>

The Aristotelian procedure of *aphairesis*, or subtraction, as a formulation for the metaphysical model of intelligible ontology, resurfaces explicitly during the Middle Ages – especially during the period known as High Scholasticism (1250–1350) – creeping beneath metaphysical systems, alchemical models and theological creeds. However, before affecting scholasticism, Aristotle’s model implicitly exerts its forbidden influence on Neo-Platonism, especially through apophatic or negative theologians for whom the ineffability of God must be exposed by *aphairesis* or abstraction. Plotinus states that the reality of the One (*hen*) cannot be explained through the epistemological registers or attributes (belongings) which it shares with humans. Therefore, the Divine must be stripped of all its belongings by *aphairesis*,

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6. *Apharesis*, as a subtractive correlation between the soul and the body, simultaneously offers the soul the capacity of having a body as an instrument or belonging, and the opportunity of preserving its ultimate correlation with intellect. Arithmetically, in *aphairesis* or subtraction, the amount that is negated or taken away marks the dying correlation of a magnitude with its belongings (as the correlation of the soul with the mortal body). The amount that remains after subtraction, however, represents the correlation between the remainder and that which continues to remain regardless of the magnitude of subtraction. This can be expressed as the undying correlation between the soul and the intellect.

## COLLAPSE IV

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a procedure which takes away all that exists extraneously and negatively contributes to all that remains and itself progressively diminishes (becoming sublime). Here, the conceptual abstraction of *aphairesis* returns to Aristotle's subtractive model, seeded within his fragment on the Etruscan torture: the coupling of the soul with the body qua belonging is necessary in order to shed belonging and lead toward being qua being. This is so given that being qua being is a genus of being which persists and remains under any condition or environment synthesized by other beings whatsoever. In other words, being qua being is that which continues to remain after all belongings are shed, removed and taken away. This is what makes *aphairesis* the fundamental procedure in revealing or exposing the One, as employed for the most part by neo-Platonists such as Plotinus and Proclus.

Both Aristotle's and Plotinus' formulations of *aphairesis* are grounded on one precondition, which can be summarized in terms of *conservation after subtraction*: despite being chained to the festering corpse or being subtracted, the soul is able to conserve some of itself and render the body intelligible. In the same vein, no matter what is taken away from the Divine, it will continue to remain as the One already there. Correspondingly, if magnitude Y is subtracted from magnitude X the result can be either zero, or  $x$  (where  $x$  is a remainder from X). Both Aristotle, in regard to the soul vis-à-vis the intellect (as part of the soul which remains under any condition), and Plotinus, in regard to the One, take conservation of a remainder for granted. The world cannot be intelligible and move toward intellect without the assumption that the subtraction or mortification of the soul by the body does not lead to the total erasure of the soul in

the first place. Aristotle's system of metaphysics is thus built upon an assumption which has been taken for granted: that for every subtraction, there is a possibility of conservation in the form of a remainder, and for every remainder, the possibility of persistence in remaining, i.e. a resistance toward further subtraction through remaining in itself.

The coupling of the soul with the body could indeed lead to the instant mortification of the soul, thus eliminating the possibility of the soul's conferring intelligibility on the universe. But this is not the case, for the soul remains in itself and brings about the possibility of intelligibility. For this reason, the possibility of intelligibility is based on the possibility having a conserved part or remainder after subtraction – that is, the continued possibility of the soul after coupling with the dead and being putrefied by its rotting double. Only when this possibility is taken as a determinable and certain possibility can reason be associated with the intelligibility that issues forth from *nous*. The persistence of the soul in conserving its essence, or the determination of the One in remaining, certainly wards off the threat of becoming the dead qua the body or belonging; but only at the cost of becoming intimate or problematically hooked up with the dead. We shall now see how the insistence in *remaining so* or *conservation* in regard to subtraction pushes the soul to a more rotten depth of *nigredo*, and how reason exhumes a more problematic intimacy with the *nekrous*.

### **HORROR IN THE NEGATIVE**

Subtraction is an economical mobilization of non-belonging in two directions: (1) the shedding of belongings or extension by means of *expendable* belongings; (2) remaining or intensive resistance against the

## COLLAPSE IV

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expendability of belongings. The subtractive procedure of bifurcates into two directionally opposite but synergistic vectors – the extensive and intensive vectors of subtraction. The outward and extensive vector of subtraction is the one by which belongings are taken away or by which the soul can extend beyond itself via a body. The latter, however, is the vector of remaining so and as such. As the inward vector of subtraction, remaining – or, more accurately, the persistence of the remainder – characterizes an intensive vector of subtraction whereby that which continues to remain brings about the possibility of being qua being or the Ideal. It is the persistence of the soul in remaining after its katabatic contact with the body that opens up the opportunity of its coming into unison with the intellect. Similarly, only that which continues to remain despite being stripped of its belongings or attributes can eventuate the One (*hen*) and the Idea of being qua being; for once again, being qua being is ‘being in *remaining* so and as such’. To this extent, not only must the soul remain after its necromantic contact with the body, but also at least a part of it must continue to remain. In other words, Aristotle’s model of conservation (*viz.*, having a conserved part after subtraction) might be based on the determinability of having a remainder in the first place, but it mainly concerns the continuation of the remainder.

Having a remainder after subtraction is not sufficient for the march toward the intellect, or for the exposition (explanation) of the Idea of being qua being. The remainder must *continue* to remain – this is the insinuation of the metaphysical model of conservation. The possibility of the remainder is necessary but not sufficient, for its sufficiency lies in the possibility of the remainder in remaining.

The remainder as an exposed and determinable quantity must be hosted by the indeterminable vector continued remaining, namely, *to remain*. The remainder alone as a determinable quantity is exposed by what is subtracted, but *to remain*, or in other words, to persist in remaining, coincides with the continuation of subtraction – a greater and greater subtraction. In short, the more the remaining persists, the more it is subtracted, the less the remainder gets. Persistence in remaining means to shrink more, because the act of remaining coexists with the progression of subtraction. To remain is at the same time a persistence in subtraction (hence mobilization of the vector that takes away belongings) and the continuation of the remainder in remaining less. *R* as the remainder reveals something *already there*, but persistence or continuation in remaining suggests insistence on what is *always* already there and can only be perpetuated through *rs* smaller than *R*. A system of cosmogenesis whose Ideals and infinities have been established prior to its building processes – as *the ones already there* – has a certain destiny with regard to the horror genre: Horror stories are inherently concerned with decay even if they deal with other themes and dabble in other affairs.

To provide further clarification as to how the continuation of the remaining or remaining in itself is only possible in remaining less – subtractive extension and diminutive intention – the procedure of *aphairesis* can be mathematically (albeit schematically) demonstrated. Take two geometrical magnitudes *A* and *B*, where  $A > B$  as the Ideal ground of the procedure and a guarantee for its continuation (iterative subtraction). The procedure starts by subtracting the greatest multiple of the smaller magnitude *B* (henceforth  $mB$ ) from the greater multiples of the greater magnitude *A*:  $A - mB = R$ . The result of the subtraction as

## COLLAPSE IV

hitherto a conserved part is the remainder  $R$  which is less than the smaller magnitude  $B$  ( $R < B$ ). Since the remainder  $R$  is less than the smaller magnitude  $B$ , the procedure is continued by subtracting the greatest multiple of the remainder  $R$  (henceforth  $nR$ ) from the smaller magnitude  $B$ :  $B - nR = r'$ . The result of the subtraction is again a remainder but it is less than the previous remainder ( $r' < R$ ). The procedure of subtraction (*aphairesis*) will continue in this way to reveal that which remains as the one already there. For this reason, the persistence in remaining or the act of remaining (to remain) – as the continual result of the subtractive operation – can only invest itself in *remaining less* and as ontological decay. The continuity of remaining and thus the revelation of the One (already there) and being qua being (being in remaining so and as such) is only attainable, and must be conducted, through diminution and decay:  $R > r' > r'' > \dots$

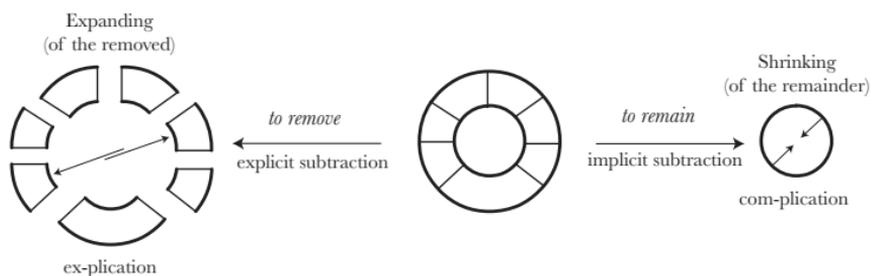


Fig. 1. Extensive and intensive vectors of subtraction

The tenacity of the soul – as an act of the intellect upon the body – in conserving its inner parts brings life to the universe as an intelligible principle. Yet this insistence on survival or remaining introduces decay and *nigredo* into both intelligibility and vitality. The persistence of the

remainder in remaining (*viz.*, to remain) is submission to the *de facto* reign of putrefaction, the universal of intelligibility and the particular of a problematical openness to the dead. For the body which is nourished by the soul, the mandatory submission of the soul to decay (*diminutio* or lessening) is in fact the mimesis of the dead by the soul. By mimicking the dead, the soul can repose intimately with the dead until it is reclaimed through reason by the intellect. But the exposition of the intellect is too contingent upon its correlation with the soul through reason which is itself aligned with decay or the intensive diminution undertaken by the soul. Accordingly, *to remain* as such is equal to intensive diminution coupled and differentially connected to extensive decay<sup>7</sup> – the shriveling soul whose continuity extends to the necrotized body through the worms which twist in and out of it:

For as the Etruscans are said often to torture captives by chaining dead bodies [*nekrous*] face to face with the living, fitting part to part, so the soul seems to be *extended throughout and affixed* to all the sensitive members of the body.<sup>8</sup>

Mapping the vector of intensive decay or diminution, the act of remaining bridges the gap between the subtractive extension and the interiorization of no-thing

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7. In medieval literature and painting, the intensive and extensive vectors of decay are imagined as a shriveling body from which a cosmic range of other beings emerge. While the shriveling body which folds back upon itself visually narrates the intensive aspect of decay; worms, corpuscles and other nameless beings which come forth from the contracting body stand for the extensive vector of decay. As the inheritor of the alchemical tradition, Giordano Bruno sees the intensive decay of the shriveling body in the *caput mortuum* (death's head) or the residuum of a substance after its attributes have been extracted by distillation; while the extensive vector of decay is seen by Leibniz as worms which contain smaller worms, *ad infinitum*.

8. Iamblichus, *Protrepticus* 8, (Leipzig, 1893), 47. 21-48.

## COLLAPSE IV

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or no remainder. If the soul must conserve the inner parts of itself (corresponding to the higher genera of being qua being) after coupling with the body, then it must remain itself at the same time as extending beyond itself. However, as argued above, remaining (as of the soul) is not possible except through remaining less, that is to say as intensive diminution of the remaining. Yet what is the guarantor of remaining *per se*, or to be exact, what guarantees that the remaining shrinks and becomes less? Keeping in mind that remaining in itself is *remaining less*, intensive diminution is reinforced by extensive subtraction. The answer is that only through the interiorization of nothing qua non-belonging, can remaining continue to remain, or to be precise, continue to *remain less*. Without *nothing* being interiorized diachronically within the remaining, the remaining cannot continue to become less and thus persist. This nothing qua non-belonging cannot be simply equal to the exhaustion of the remaining; nor can it be equated with the Idea of being qua being (*viz.*, the One) which sheds belongings. In other words, *nothing* as the guarantee of ‘continuation in remaining’ is neither the content of the exhaustion, nor can it be taken as correlated with the remaining. Interestingly, the reasons for this resistance toward correlation with what remains and what is removed lies in the premises of the act of remaining – persistence in remaining assumes two basic Ideas: diminution or shrinkage, and continuity in diminution. Not only must that which remains/survives become less, it must also maintain continuity in lessening. For this reason, the guarantor of remaining must simultaneously be the impetus of the intensive diminution and induce a continuity in remaining (in remaining less) from outside. The guarantor must be autonomous and separate from that which remains, because if correlated

with that which remains, it will be indexed by exhaustion. Yet the guarantor cannot be the subject of exhaustion for if it were then it could not maintain and guarantee the lessening of the remaining, that is to say, the continuity of remaining. What is itself consumed cannot sufficiently guarantee the exhaustion of that which correlatively succeeds it.

In short, if the guarantor of remaining is correlated with the act of remaining, it will be indexed by exhaustion and thus cease to influence. Any disruption in the influence of this guarantor induces a discontinuity in the persistence in diminution, which in fact is the continuation of remaining. Moreover, the guarantor of remaining should not be sought in the extensive vector of subtraction by which belongings are taken away, because the subtracted magnitude cannot influence the fate of remaining magnitude. Therefore, not only must this guarantor evade correlation with that which remains (something), but it must also inspire the act of remaining, or in intensive terms, remaining less or diminution. Exterior to the Idea of ontology (namely remaining), the guarantor of remaining as such is *nothing* – the impossibility of being correlated either with what is removed or with what remains. To this extent, this impossibility of correlation and belongings entails both diachronicity and exteriority. The guarantor of remaining – no-thing – must be diachronic and external to the remaining, otherwise the remaining cannot maintain its continuity, whose ontological constitution is anchored by remaining less. By approximating no-thing as radical exteriority, the remaining can continue to remain and shed its belongings, that is to say, it can remain less or remain in itself. Remaining in itself is the medium of being qua being and hence the medium by which union with the intellect and

## COLLAPSE IV

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the exposition (revelation) of the One is possible. But this medium only takes on its structure in so far as the remaining approximates or limitropically approaches no-thing or the impossibility of belonging in order to maintain an intensive diminution necessary for remaining less or remaining in itself. Intensive diminution is in itself synchronous only by virtue of its disjunction with a diachronic exteriority which ontologically underpins the continuity of the remaining in remaining less.

In order to remain in any instance, first of all nothing, as impossibility of belonging, must be prioritized and postulated in its exteriority. The reason for this prioritization of nothing as a non-correlatable exteriority is to satisfy the prerequisite ontological status required for effectuation of the remainder in any instance. This prerequisite status is the intensive diminution or remaining less, for the diminution of the remaining is nothing but remaining as such. In subtraction, diminution or intensive decay is at the same time a solution to the problem of remaining and the very ontological constitution of the remaining *per se*. However, this solution simply cannot work, or in other words, is not able to be correlated with its problem, unless *nothing* as radical exteriority is taken as a necessity. In order to shed belongings and remain less, the uncorrelatable primacy of non-belonging must be affirmed. In other words, *nothing* must be prioritized prior to all arrangements and establishments of the remainder.

Accordingly, something that remains, or *something* in general – as that which remains – always testifies to the binding or interiorization of nothing as priority and primacy. In the persistence of its remaining, the remainder must shed its belongings (or remain less) by affirming the primacy of

nothing, for only nothing, as the impossibility of belonging, can guarantee the continuing shedding of belongings. This relation between solution and problem, secured by means of the prioritization of nothing, can be explained in Aristotelian terms as well: Chained to the body, the soul cannot bring the universe into unison with the intellect or bring about the possibility of progression toward *nous* (the problem) unless it continues to *remain* according to an inner part of itself, conserving the innermost depths of its essence (the solution). Here the solution, which pertains to remaining, cannot be correlated with the problem without submitting to the priority of nothing or – in terms of the soul – the void. The soul must submit to the priority and primacy of nothing or the void in order to solve its problem in regard to the intellect.

In short, intensive diminution or remaining less is the solution to the problem of remaining, but this solution itself must bind the priority and primacy of nothing to the fullest extent. In this sense, nothing as exteriority is interiorized to provide that which remains with the ontological constitution requisite in remaining as such – but only as a problematic bond with nothing, which, as the impossibility of belonging, cannot be relieved through being captured by correlation. If nothing qua non-belonging is uncorrelatable, then it is the embracing of *nothing* by the soul or the living that becomes the manifest problematic. In order to survive or enlighten with life, the soul must either sleep with the dead, or accede to the priority and primacy of the void as its internal guide. What could be worse for vitalism than at once being animated through a necrophilic alliance, and simultaneously, protected under the aegis of the void? It is decay that provides the bridge between the latter

## COLLAPSE IV

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(the problematic embracing of nothing) and the former (the subtractive bond with the body or belonging). That which arises from death can only peacefully repose among the dead, as living.

The interiorization of nothing through which the remainder continues to remain and is subjected to ontological shrinkage by remaining in itself, deploys a subtractive vector which is implicit in remaining. This internalized or implicit subtractive vector corresponds with the persistence of the remainder, or more precisely, it coincides with the survival of the remainder in its resistance to the explicit subtractive vector through which belongings are exteriorized. The medium of survival and its constitution are thus, problematically, the implicit apparatus of death. It is in this sense that the persistence of that which remains – the innermost depth of the soul, the intellect or the One – is ultimately indeterminable; for it is not only determined by the exteriorization of belongings but also by that *nothing* to which it must implicitly submit in order to remain (less). Once the intellect, as the highest genus of being qua being, is deprived of its determinability, reason, in its mission to redeem the world on behalf of the intellect, reclaims the world for a problematic death qua life instead.

As for Plotinus' metaphysics, the horror of abstraction (*aphairesis*) is akin to the horror implicit in the Idea of ontology or remaining as such: the apogee of the One is undermined by another culmination which emphatically precedes it, yet cannot be chronically culminated. The search for the Ideal turns out to be a *sub rosa* search for the problematic on behalf of nothing, conducted all along through the bottom-up chemistry and differential dynamics of decay and putrefaction. As we shall see, the guarantor of any Idea of persistence, regardless of its Ideal or telos, is

*nothing*. Remaining might be a solution in regard to finding a medium through which the Ideal can be explained, but such a solution brings with it the problems inherent to the clandestine alliance with nothing. Persistence under any subtractive condition is definitely a fitting solution for the revelation of the One and the effectuation of being qua being, but this solution was already infested with problems which do not belong here. Our survival or continuation in remaining is indeed a vitalistic solution, but it is not an authentic or genuine one, for it inherently transmits an entirely alien set of problems to which it can neither correlate nor belong. Survival, in this sense, is the remobilization of problems whose nature is radically detrimental to our solutions.

In contrast to the exteriorization of belongings, the exteriority of nothing in its primacy is internalized in order that the remainder might remain and survive. Remaining is a trajectory whose *continuity* is described by the removal of its attributes and belongings, but whose *continuation* is guaranteed only by its diminution and decay. To stave off the realism of the dead which follows from its coupling with the body, the soul disguises its putrefaction as survival; that is to say, reformulates the problem of decay according to new correlations with its own Ideals and reasons. However, in distracting the dead, the soul is exposed to problems whose concerns belong neither to the living nor to the dead. *Katabasis*,<sup>9</sup> or the descent of the soul, is not radical enough, for it conveys the profit-seeking openness of the soul to the body as an instrument, an *economical* openness

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9. In Greco-Roman ritualistic tradition, *katabasis* refers to a journey which is characterized by descent (usually to the underworld). *Katabasis* is a depthwise and pro-ground (*profundus*) movement; for that reason, in scholastic alchemy, it is often associated with *nigredo* or depthwise and intensive decay.

## COLLAPSE IV

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based on mutual affordability. Yet it is exactly this conservationist affordance of the soul-body composite that causes the soul to be cracked open by nothing from within. The first descent of the soul is only a twist that opens the soul on to an ultimate *katabasis* where the soul is directly – albeit problematically – fettered to nothing, kept alive to rot away in and for itself. It is here that Aristotle's analogy of the relation between body and the soul with the tribulation imposed by the Etruscan pirates proves to be, if not wrong, then problematic; for it sincerely suggests the necrotization of the soul by the body only to divert attention from a second necrosis, blacker than the first.

The soul is necrotized in its mission to govern the universe and vitalize matter according to the intellect. In full conformity with its vitalistic intention, the soul assumes an intimacy with nothing: it is invaded by *nothing* from behind (*a tergo*). The second necrosis of the soul – shrouded in the explicit cruelty of the first – is its unbreakable and wilful bond contracted with nothing in order to remain, a tie fully based on reason. It is only in the second necrosis that the climax of the Etruscan torture finds its proper narrative. The fastening of the living to the dead is a culmination from the perspective of a collective gathering, but surely of minor interest when we know that the living, the soul, is itself rotting. The real climax of the Etruscan torture, for this reason, is the *feeding* of the living while strapped to the dead. It is only this second necrosis that fully suggests the culmination of the Etruscan torture: while tethered to nothing, the soul qua remainder continues to live, as its continuation in remaining (less) is guaranteed by the primacy and priority of nothing. Bound to nothing, the remainder effectuates the act of remaining in the form

of diminution and decay whilst fastened to nothing as a constitutional primacy. The two necroses of the soul, to this extent, can be categorized, as regards of their extensive and intensive development (*-plication*) in metaphysical cruelty and nigrescent *katabasis*, as *explicit* and *implicit* necroses of the soul. The former – the explicit necrosis of the soul – is the coupling with the body qua *cadavera* in order for the soul to extend beyond itself by means of subtracted or necrotized belonging (the body). The latter – the implicit necrosis of the soul – is entailed by the internalization of nothing in its primacy in order to shed belongings and remain in itself. The two necroses of the soul upon which the universe and intellect are fixed bring about the possibility of ontology as a great chain of corpses whose arrangement is determined by their explicit and implicit indulgence in necrophilia. Aristotle fully exposes the first necrosis only to exploit its explicit drama to conceal the second.

### THE IDEA AND THE WORMS

The subtractive correlation between vitalism and matter, we argued, is accomplished by means of explicit necrosis, or the soul-body composite according to Aristotle's system. Yet the explicit necrosis is linked to an implicit necrosis whose necessity is fully supported and affirmed by reason. For the sake of clarity, we shall delineate the nature of the second necrosis before moving forward: The subtractive correlation between matter and vitalism is intensively conducted through a medium which constitutes the very Idea of ontology – that is, of remaining so and as such. Yet remaining as remaining less – diminution or intensive decay – requires a guarantee whereby it can be perpetuated or at least made possible in both its lessening and its continuity.

## COLLAPSE IV

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While this guarantor cannot be included by the extensive and intensive vectors of subtraction, it can be problematically posited in such a way that the remaining can maintain its diminution and continuity by approaching it as a limit process. This guarantor is the impossibility of belonging or the disjunctive nothing which, once presupposed by the remainder, can impose the continuous shedding of belongings. Recall that the shedding of belongings is registered extensively as the subtractive extension or exteriorization of belongings, and intensively as remaining, or more accurately, remaining less. In a similar vein, Plotinus' procedure of *aphairesis* or abstraction exposes the One through remaining as an ontological medium, but in doing so it exerts the imposition of nothing or no-one. It is in this sense that for both Aristotle and Plotinus, the medium of revelation for the Ideal (that which continues to remain under any subtractive magnitude) is diminution and intensive decay. Yet this is not the only twist inherent to the problem of exposing or explaining the Ideal. The second – implicit – necrosis brings a far more convoluted twist to the assumed correlations between the Ideal, the problem and the solution.

We argued that both the intellect and the One as the Ideal posit problems in regard to their ontological status (being qua being) as related to the universe or beings. Speaking somewhat reductively, part of the problem posited by the intellect regards channelling the progression of the universe into unison according to reason. Likewise, the problem posed by the One is the exposition of the One as the Ideal of being qua being – that is to say, the exposition of the One as that which is indifferent to, or even resists, the subtractive mobilization of belongings. The solution

lies in the establishment of an ontological medium which not only reinforces subtraction but also remains in itself and according to the Ideal. In other words, to settle the problem of exposing Ideals, the solution must abide by the ontological status of ‘the Ideal as that which withstands any subtractive magnitude’. For this reason, the solution must be correlated both to subtraction and to the ontological medium of the Ideal. Although correlated to subtraction from one side, the ontological intension of the solution must only correspond to that of the Ideal. Otherwise it undoes the problem by dispossessing it of its assumed ground.

Now, if the ontological intention of the Ideal is indifferent to subtraction, then in order to explain the Ideal, the solution must expose the continuity of the Ideal in remaining, or more accurately, the intractability of the Ideal in regard to subtraction. Accordingly, then, remaining in itself – or in other words, *remaining as such* – constitutes the solution. However, as argued, in order to expose the Ideal, *remaining as such* must correspond to the act of remaining less, which is impossible without the intervention of nothing. Therefore, the solution (*viz.*, remaining as an ontological medium) radically betrays the Ideal because, firstly, it submits to the priority and the primacy of nothing; and secondly, it internalizes the disjunctive exteriority of nothing in order to realize and authenticate itself. To this extent, if the Ideal is to be explained (the problem), the solution must essentially be posed on behalf of *nothing* because only through remaining less, or more exactly, decay (the solution), can the Ideal, the problem and the solution encompass each other as Idea. As the medium cementing the Idea in its most concrete – albeit volatile – form, decay or remaining (less) entails *nothing* on both planes of exteriority and interiority because through

## COLLAPSE IV

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the intervention of nothing, the true Idea of remaining can be underpinned in its continuity, diminution and being. The Idea of something as that which remains or survives subtraction even transiently points to the essentially duplicitous nature of this intervention. The intervention or imposition of nothing in its priority and primacy ensures the act of remaining and persistence of something, but at the same time this vitalistic triumph takes place by remaining less or approximating nothing. To put it differently, the imposition of nothing imparts an inherently duplicitous nature to the Idea of ontology: remaining is at the same time a vitalistic persistence and an intensive decay on the part of a problematic intimacy with nothing. Decay conveys this duplicity in the most subtle manner where the Idea of *remaining per se* becomes that of *remaining less* and the Idea of ontology as such coincides with the second necrosis.

Correlated to this double-dealing solution, not only is the problem betrayed, but also the Ideal is undermined by virtue of its correlation with the problem. Rather than securing the Ideal as ground, the correlation between the solution (i.e. remaining) and the problem (i.e. explaining the Ideal) perforates and ungrounds the Ideal with nothing. If the correlation between solution and problem is built upon a double-betrayal and the duplicity of solution, then such correlation twists itself out of its assumed intension rather than terminating it – That is, given that this assumed intention is either that of exposing the Ideal or that of effectuating the Idea of *something* (anything) through remaining. The Idea of correlation – that is, the correlation between solution and problem – does not need to be terminated so that *nothing* can be imposed. On the contrary, the correlation *per se* is what is fundamentally needed to bring about the

imposition of nothing as the exposition of the problematic. By problematic we mean the submission to the priority of nothing in order to effectuate the Idea of something or the short-circuiting of ontological intention with the intervention of nothing in order to bring about the possibility of ontology. In pursuing the ontological intension of the Ideal, the correlation between the solution and the problem traffics and imposes the intention of nothing as the implicit constitutional necessity and the radical exterior of the Ideal and its intention. Correlation, in this sense, is equal to the very Idea of twist (*flectere*), for which inflection (pursuing the intension of correlativity) is already a deflection (inviting that which is radically exterior to that intention). In twisting into something, the correlation between solution and problem, twists into nothing; and in twisting into nothing such correlation twists back into something. Only through these twists in and out can the Idea of something be resonant. The correlation between solution and problem is effectuated as intensive decay or depthwise putrefaction (*nigredo*), but it is the twist of correlation that makes for the peculiarly vermicular sinuosity of implicit putrefaction, the second necrosis. If the explicit necrosis, the coupling of the soul with the body is differentially consummated by worms' bridging of the dead and the supposedly living, the second necrosis or the tie between the soul and the intellect is vermicularly completed by the correlation as twist.

By adhering to *remaining so and as such* as a fitting ontological medium, the One submits to the intension of that which bores through it. Once the Idea of correlation is established, it refracts toward the problematic and is adopted by the Idea of twist. As what necessitates the intervention of nothing, the correlation between solution and problem

## COLLAPSE IV

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renders the fate of *being something* entirely problematic. At the same time it makes the destinies of the Ideal, the problem and the solution indeterminable in themselves by factoring in the exteriority of nothing as another determinant to which they have no access and over which they have no influence. Given that the destiny of the Ideal is to survive at all costs, the destiny of the problem is to expose the Ideal and the destiny of the solution is to locate (*chorizein*) an ontological medium that encompasses the problem, the Ideal and the solution. In this regard, correlation-as-twist is also twist-as-destiny (*wyrd*). If the Ideal anticipates the correlation between the solution and the problem, then twist as correlation can also operate under the aegis of the Ideal. Corresponding to the explicit and implicit necroses of the soul and the Etruscan metaphysical cruelty, correlation as twist also operates through two concurrent waves of distortion. The explicit twist of correlation is the Idea of ontology that is generated under the aegis of nothing qua non-belonging or disjunctive exteriority. The implicit twist – more insidious than the first – is the problematic intervention of nothing under the shroud of the ontological medium or the reign of the Ideal. In this sense, the Ideal becomes a necessary excuse to transmit the intention of nothing in the form of the problematic. Whether on the side of the Idea of ontology or that of nothing, the problematic as twist becomes more intricate as each side maintains its position by conforming to the reason that either bilaterally or unilaterally supports it. As the problematic intertwines with reason, it unleashes the problematizing powers inherent to reason as a double-dealer. Once reason and the problematic copulate, the Idea of reason comes forth as that through which nothing can reside outside the pandemonium of the problematic either in supporting itself or the other.

What is at stake here is not reason as glorified tool of disclosure or sponsor of quixotic ventures toward the intellect, but rather the chameleon nature of reason unmasked by the problematic. Bound to the problematic, the animation of reason spawns writhing coils, convolutions, bends and ogees – worms, ratios of putrefaction.

The Idea of survival or the persistence of the remaining characterises the problematic both as the Idea of perforation between the problem and the Ideal, and as the twist between solution and problem. The Ideas of perforation and twist are inherent to the machinery of putrefaction and decay for which remaining less is persistence in remaining, which in turn is insistence upon nothing in the form of the problematic. Only through diminution or intensive decay, which binds survival to the problematic, can the remaining be posited as the solution to the problem of exposing Ideals. Nothing inside the Idea or encompassed by it, can invest itself outside of decay; putrefaction becomes the generative medium of the Idea. In order to be revealed or effectuated, the Ideal must not only remain in itself but must also be bound to decay. The revelation of any truth whatsoever is conducted through decay; but decay is the radically problematic – the Idea. In its intensive and implicit form, decay is problematic intimacy with nothing qua non-belonging; it is the intensive movement of the Idea according to its ontological medium and intention. The Idea of persistence in remaining or persistence in general immanently points to decay as the solution where the continuity of remaining is sponsored by nothing; thereby, the problematic imposes itself regardless of the objective of the ontological medium and its vitalistic impetus. Whether the act of remaining is bound to the intention of the Idea, the Ideal, the problem or the solution,

## COLLAPSE IV

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the problematic is enacted. In short, regardless of what shrinkage through remaining entails, the Idea of remaining as such always envelops an encounter with nothing under the heading of the problematic.

### MEZENTIUSIAL METAPHYSICS

The fact is that every living thing among us suffers the torment of Mezentius - that the living perish in the embrace of the dead: and although the vital nature enjoys itself and runs things for a while, the influence of parts nevertheless gets the upper hand not long afterwards, and does so according to the nature of the substance and not at all to the nature of the living one.<sup>10</sup>

The vitalizing forces of the soul move in the direction of two necroses, vectorially opposite but functionally synergistic and collusive. The soul is a bicephalous necrosis. The extensive deployment of the soul through the body is equal to the synthesis of the Idea with that which does not belong to it, while the intensive employment of the soul in itself and according to the intellect is the necessary intention of the Idea. More succinctly, the coupling of the soul with the body is the outward and extensive activity of the Idea and the soul in itself as the activity of the intellect is the inward or intensive activity of the Idea. The outward activity of the Idea is marked by contingency, yet its inward activity is defined by necessity. Only through the two necroses can the necessary and contingent activities of the soul or the Idea be correlated to each other. In the same way, the creativity of the Idea, as correlation between its contingent / extensive and necessary / intensive activities, is only possible through the two necroses. The first necrosis couples the Idea (X) with that which does not belong to it (not-X) in order to

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10. Francis Bacon, *De Vitis Mortis*, VI 357.

extend it beyond itself; it is caused by the profit-seeking or economical openness of X to not-X. The second necrosis, the persistence of the Idea or the progress in the direction of proper perfection by virtue of imposing the primacy and priority of nothing; it is entailed by the survival of X or the possibility of the Idea in its temporal continuation. The Idea in its creativity is the distance between survival and openness. By openness we mean the extensive deployment of the Idea according to that which does not belong to it; by survival, the intensive employment of the Idea according to its ontological medium or its proper objective. Whilst establishing continuity between openness and survival, this distance also posits a subtractive correlation between them.

By virtue of this distance, openness and survival, the first and the second necroses negatively reinforce and contribute to each other. Through this distance or subtractive space, investment in openness contributes to survival or remaining which, simultaneously, coincides with diminution (remaining less) and closure (remaining in itself). Conversely, the immersion in survival is a contribution to openness, yet it is openness in terms of that which does not belong to the Idea (not-X) or is not the subject of its survival. Creativity is therefore the *art of ratios*<sup>11</sup> between openness and survival, or to be exact, between the first and second necroses. The subtractive space or the distance between openness and survival maintains the Idea between two necroses; but even the two necroses have to encompass this space to reinforce each other. The subtractive space between openness to the body and remaining according to the intellect is defined as the *third necrosis*; for it is the space where only death can enter and death is the only outcome.

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11. Here, the word 'art' is employed in its Lullian connotation.

## COLLAPSE IV

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The third necrosis of the soul or the Idea simultaneously binds and unbinds the first and the second necroses; it is the effectuation of correlation as subtraction or the impossibility of addition. The third necrosis is the *vinculum of doom*, the bond through which every contribution, every investment and every impetus is subtractively – and not additively – engendered. Change through subtraction, or the mobilization of extensive and intensive vectors in regard to each other, is the very Idea of decay.

In its gradation (step-by-step movement) between the body, the soul and the intellect, reason aligns with three necroses; the truth it confirms is predominantly determined by the ternary logic of three deaths. More gravely, with regard to the connection between reason and truth, whatever necrosis reason invokes, the two other necroses will join the gathering. One should not forget that the three necroses of the soul are firmly fastened to each other in the same way that the three necroses of the Idea are subtractively tied together. Accordingly, for reason, there is always a crowd of deaths. The movement of reason is the enumeration or counting of these deaths. The first, second and third necroses, at poles and their in-between: ‘It is strange’, Reason shrugs; ‘all roads lead to the bosom of the dead.’

Fig. 2 (Facing Page): Goya’s *Disparates* plate no. 7, The ‘Matrimonial’ – or, according to a trial proof, ‘Disordered’ – Disparate (folly, nightmare) introduces a curious adaptation of Andrea Alciato’s emblem regarding marriage by force to a corpse or a man seared with syphilitic scabs. In Goya’s depiction, the coupling of the living with a putrid corpse is already a fiendish redundancy, for the supposed living cannot come into being other than by being fixed upon a phantom rotting double. When the implicit necrosis of the living is extended to the explicit necrosis of the dead, it begets a nonhuman deformity, a quadrupedal necrosis each of whose four legs – now two – have already been amalgamated by putrefaction.

