

THE POLITICS OF A SMILE

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Abstract In this article, I explore the smile as regulatory mechanism installed in the face to organise a subject's responses to neo-imperial/biopolitical capitalist governmentality. I begin by situating my reading with respect to Sara Ahmed's and Lauren Berlant's work on affective labour before turning to German philosopher Helmuth Plessner (1892-1985) in order to consider the smile as theory of sovereignty. I propose that these two meanings or deployments of the smile – as (1) act that demonstrates forced enslavement to capitalist culture and (2) as articulation of the sovereign self/state – converge in their joint purpose, which is the elimination of sociality and solidarity. My article thereby contributes to recent scholarship on the face, in particular its function in affective/service labour, which it supplements by drawing on Plessner's work: at stake is not only the worker's subjection to capital but also to a regime obsessed with securing borders.

Keywords smile, capitalism, biopolitics, Helmuth Plessner, border control

In Mark Leckey's 2010 project *GreenScreenRefrigeratorAction*, performed and filmed at Gavin Brown's Enterprise in New York, a voice-animated, high-gloss, jet-black Samsung fridge appears, in the blinks of an eye, in various landscapes, next to a range of other appliances, daily consumer items and commodity fetishes like a flat screen TV, a mobile phone, a computer tower, a games console, etc., defined through their elegant functionality. The fridge occurs in spaces like Stanley Kubrick's monolith from *2001: A Space Odyssey* (1968): now you see it somewhere, now you don't; it is already taking its place elsewhere. Its arrival at destinations is ushered in by a logic of awakening, a type of autopoeitic birth, conveyed through sound, a droning that initially recalls the low hum of a flying machine (the unit, though, is more advanced than that; it teleports itself). This sound, in time, hosts another one, itself suggestive of the start-up of an early-generation PC – it's coming alive – and out of noise emerges information, a voice, while we remain face-to-face with the object, inscrutably inviting our gaze.

The fridge begins testifying to its subjectivity, its existence amongst 'beings' to which it is connected: 'See... See we assemble ... Here, we exist. In streets, and houses, cars, in fields'.¹ It forms part of a 'group', composed of objects erupting into visibility as single entities, 'each to each, in each order'; it also stands in communication with a curious, vast, outside – the sublime is incongruously equivalent to mundane things – and its own 'immense inner space', where intensities circulate, transitioning through all states of

1. Mark Leckey, *GreenScreen RefrigeratorAction*, 2010. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8X1QkseVjIY>

Accessed 20 August 2018. All subsequent citations come from this video.

2. Esther Leslie, 'Mark Leckey's *Anima Mundi*', *Afterall: A Journal of Art, Context and Enquiry*, 33, Summer 2013, p11.

3. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8X1QkscVjIY>. Accessed 14 September 2018.

4. Gilles Deleuze, *Cinema I: The movement-image*, (trans) Hugh Tomlinson & Barbara Habberjam, London, Athlone Press, 1997, p87. (Hereafter *Cinema I*).

5. Sigmund Freud, *Leonardo Da Vinci: A Psychosexual Study of an Infantile Reminiscence*, (trans) A.A. Brill, New York, Moffat, Yard and Company, 1916, p85.

6. Margaret Atwood, *The Heart Goes Last*, London, Virago, 2015, pp7-8.

matter: the transmission of the coolant brings into play different becomings, a cycle that repeatedly starts anew. Before entering its own organism (a delightful masturbatory logic), the fridge, in outdoor scenes with trees, stone monuments, in a graveyard, speaks, as Esther Leslie notes, 'of its own exchangeability' as desired object.² It likens itself to other things, 'a dark mirror, a walled garden, a monstrous insect, a Spearmint Rhino, the staff of Hermes, a black sun, rising pylon', but the visit, or montage, that is missing is Leonardo Da Vinci's *Mona Lisa*: both fridge-freezer and painted subject bearing their enigmatic smiles.

Underneath a video of the exhibition posted on YouTube, a user, Crabhat1, comments: '[a]t first I thought it was the pareidolia, then I realised it really does have the Gioconda smile'.³ Rather than seeing a relation between objects, we need to notice a relation between expressions, and might well make reference, considering the movements of the camera eye lovingly beholding the object in close-up, to Deleuze's affection-image. In *Cinema I*, Deleuze argues that the 'affection-image is the close-up, and the close-up is the face', and that even images without faces, if rendered as close-ups, are effectively facefied, because they have come to function as 'receptive immobile surface[s]', looking at us.⁴ The facefied fridge stands there, facing us, moving in and out of shadows, the dusk or dawn of sublime 'natural' settings, abolishing spatio-temporal coordinates, the result of any object in close-up acquiring 'movement of expression' (*Cinema I*, p87), constitutive of pure affect. Deleuze, following Béla Balázs's and Pascal Augé's work, calls such an abstraction or deterritorialisation of the image 'any-space-whatever' (*espace quelconque*), the absolute 'locus of the possible' (p109) translating the object into 'disconnected' spaces, responsible, too, for the fridge's rendition as extra-terrestrial monolith. (p120) If a close-up cannot be talked about without affect, without those other dimensions a facefied surface is able to open up, I would nonetheless like to keep other-dimensionality – the unit's dreams of 'becoming, becoming, becoming' – at bay for now. Instead, I want to concentrate on the 'demoniacal charm' of the shared smile,⁵ because it allows me to think about the following things:

the reason, perhaps, that Crabhat1 locates the seductive smile of the Gioconda on the facefied surface of a Samsung fridge is because the smile has become the enforced expression of neo-imperial capitalist culture off the production floors, to the point that it appears everywhere, must, in fact, appear everywhere. The 'total shopping experience', as Margaret Atwood writes in *The Heart Goes Last* (2015), includes the smile, though 'smiles were hard; they could turn into grimaces or leers, but if you got the smile right, [people]'d spend extra for it';⁶

the smile is the act demanded of capitalist culture in order for the subject to demonstrate its attachment to fantasies of the good life, to objects (like

kitchen appliances, historically measured as indicators of happiness, to recall the 1959 ‘Kitchen Debate’ between Vice President Nixon and the Soviet Premier Khrushchev) promising to deliver the good life; the smiling housewife, especially, whose labour is erased, is conditioned to know about fridges as vehicles of fantasy;

the smile, gouged into faces, draws attention to the disciplinary apparatus, its ongoing regulations, of consumer capitalist culture; the smiling subject/object is compelled to work according to this mode of organisation, which is not to deny its *Arbeitsqual*: the smile is yet another contortion of the body of the worker;

the market banks on the smile’s contagion, designed, as it is, to spread and feed back consumer happiness; objects or little icons invite mimetic communication through ‘innocuous facial affect[s] that [are] almost impossible not to smile back at or feel positive about in some way’, as David Foster Wallace writes in ‘Mr. Squishy’.⁷

7. David Foster Wallace, *Oblivion*, London, Abacus, 2004, p4. (Hereafter *Oblivion*).

The list above, and argument below, especially in its opening stages, consults Sara Ahmed’s and Lauren Berlant’s work on the ways subjects are pulled into relationships with ‘happy objects’, into making, maintaining and repeatedly renewing cruelly optimistic attachments with respect to a political and economic project that uses promises of sanctioned forms of happiness to ‘motivate’ what Thomas Pynchon, in *Gravity’s Rainbow* (1973), calls the preterite, those that are always already passed over but who, despite their status as sacrificial lambs, have to keep performing their attachments to the state, the law, the market.⁸ For the purposes of this article, that performance is limited to the smile, whose polyvalence I have deliberately cast aside; never mind, also, the ways the smile can be deterritorialised through off-kilter executions: women, instructed to ‘cheer up’ by passing men – ‘why so serious?’, as the Joker asks in *The Dark Knight* (2008) – prop up the corners of their mouths through both raised middle fingers. The injunction to smile arrives at us from everywhere: on trains, where signs alert us to ‘smile, you’re on camera’; on doormats issuing commands to smile at the thresholds to flats, as if the smile were the condition of entry; as I log in to pay my electricity bill to Switch2, wishing me a ‘happy [day of the week]’, accompanied by a smiling emoji of sorts, with smiling eyes pressed shut; on my Bundesliga app, which now hosts advertising at the bottom of the screen, featuring, for example, Amazon’s logo, which implies the smile just as much as the speed of delivery (AmazonSmile, further, is an initiative that donates 0.5 per cent of the net price of ‘eligible’ products to a charitable organisation of the consumer’s choice: feel good about your purchase, about the company’s commitment to ‘ethical’ profit-making).

8. See, especially, Sara Ahmed, *The Promise of Happiness*, Durham & London, Duke UP, 2010, & Lauren Berlant, *Cruel Optimism*, Durham & London, Duke UP, 2011. (Hereafter referred to as *Promise of Happiness* and *Cruel Optimism*, respectively.)

The smile has become a form of harassment, a phenomenon designed to

instruct us into the ‘proper’ modes of conduct in the contemporary world. If we fall short of performing our assigned roles, as women, employees, consumers, we are liable to be punished, exposed as inadequate, irresponsible, killjoys, because we are not participating ‘correctly’ in (public; corporate) life. In the iterations above, the smile, as unit of signification, either bids or signals compliance, reminding us of surveillance, of our expected (gender) roles: I have to agree, if I am to be ‘valuable’, to the terms and conditions of my existence under the laws of neo-imperial capitalism; I smile, therefore I am. The social dimensions are, here, abstracted, made ‘useful’ to a particular political moment, which sanctions the subject for poor performance, an admonishment that, additionally, often also comes in the form of a smile, with the intention to mask the violence it causes and to neutralise responses against it in advance. There is, for one, Bill Lumbergh (Cary Cole), the boss in *Office Space* (1999), directing his staff to do unpaid overtime (‘that’d be great!’), but also, explicitly threatening, Jack Torrance’s congealed smile, floating between novel and film, in *The Shining* (1977 and 1980, respectively). The ‘bland, meaningless smile’, in this instance, is expression or impression of fatherly ‘duty’, a deployment that is, indeed, linked to ‘correction’ – wife and child need to be ‘corrected’ for their lack of care, or open hostility, towards the Overlook Hotel, the phallic order that it represents.⁹

9. Stephen King, *The Shining*, London, Hodder & Stoughton, 1990, p328.

In light of these functions – indicative of the subsumed subject, cultivated or coerced to produce smiles; the subject whose smile is armoured mask, and whose logic is aggression, if not assault – the smile has crystallised into a specific meaning, in short, de-socialisation, that I see as expressive of the present political and economic culture. The ‘present’ is not necessarily a well-defined event, neither in time nor space, partly because capitalism is, of course, a global phenomenon, colonising both these – and all remaining – dimensions. The examples I use emerge from the Global North, across a period of roughly 100 years, beginning with a Samsung fridge (2010) and stretching to encompass Wyndham Lewis’ *Mr Wyndham Lewis as Tyro* (1920–1921), and although that framing (fridge → Tyro) gives the impression of a reverse chronological order, my study, to a certain extent, dispenses with historical context in order to posit or assemble a portrait of neo-imperial, read also biopolitical, capitalist faciality. I approach the smile, then, in terms of what Deleuze, in *Cinema I*, calls the ‘reflexive face’, the face ‘whose features remain grouped under the domination of a thought which is fixed or terrible, but immutable and without becoming, in a way eternal’ (p89-90). While for Deleuze the reflexive face retains, citing Richard Rushton, the ‘insolubility of the infinite’,¹⁰ it is, here, stripped of its potential (the face has lost its virtuality), above all in terms of intersubjective relations: the smile as indication of social abstraction, as non-social performance.

10. Richard Rushton, ‘What Can a Face do? On Deleuze and Faces’, *Cultural Critique*, 51 (Spring 2002), p229. (Hereafter *Deleuze and Faces*).

The face has, of course, been the subject of a number of investigations, recent and otherwise: it is object of fascination (Freud on the smile; Lacan on the gaze), apparition of an Other before which I am responsible (Levinas),

a thing that is made, and which decides where a 'human' subject is to be recognised (Deleuze and Guattari). My contribution adds to the emergence of the face as site of discussion about a particular politics that brings it into being – Deleuze and Guattari's work is, hence, central – by way of an encounter with a self-aware Samsung fridge, which, bar those aspects already listed (the desired object to be faced affectively, etc.), also prompts an engagement with the 'goal ... to keep whole', an incantation of sorts that the unit repeats. It utters this spell after it beholds its 'arctic and fresh select zones', dividing up its interior space designed to keep the contents stored within from decay (keeping them 'whole'): preservation, after all, is its *raison d'être*. Itself part of a global network of low temperature storage and distribution facilities, the fridge, as generic object, is synonymous with atmospheric regulation, which, in turn, defines the way we eat and live, in or out of season.¹¹ It's not, consequently, much of a leap to link the function of the fridge and the operation of a smile as refrigeration, cold and colder, executed with the objective to 'keep whole', to retain command over processes that, like the unit's coolant, could otherwise cause shame, disastrously overwhelming the organism:

The infernal elephant [the pump] ... squeezes the coolant, torments it, humiliates it, into a high-pressure state. Out of its despair, the coolant takes to the torturous path of the condenser coil, and as it toils up, and on, back, and on, forwards, on, it undergoes a change, and rids itself of the heat of shame, which phases the gas into a liquid, its most coherent state.¹²

The Gioconda smile, accordingly, immobilised on the device's surface, is the response to keep in check the constantly recurring cycle of shame, or other 'high-pressure states', manifesting internally, but not impressed on the face, a reading that I am performing with reference to the German philosopher Helmuth Plessner (1892–1985). It is his work that allows me to supplement current studies on the face and its affective labour. To the smile as trait slashed into the corners of the mouth of the 'customer-facing' worker (at Prêt-à-Manger, say)¹³ – and which can, more generally, be interpreted as functioning to orient us toward 'happy' events like the accumulation of capital – I propose to add a second element, situating the smile, via Plessner, as part of a discourse of, and deep commitment to, sovereignty, coherence, preservation. This might, at first sight, be an incongruous proposition, considering the function of the smile as command, the occupation of your facial muscles by capitalist governmentality, but it nonetheless is one that, as defensive, 'preservative, immune-type function',¹⁴ belongs to, and is determined by, the regime that constitutes our horizon of existence.

Seen in this (cold) light, the smile happens in the context of a preoccupation with borders and, hence, with protection and defence, a *modus operandus* evident in Plessner's work. In 1950, Plessner published a short essay on the smile (*Das Lächeln*) – the epicentre of this essay – which, together with the rest

11. Nicola Twilley, 'The Coldscape', *Cabinet*, 47, Fall 2012. <http://cabinetmagazine.org/issues/47/twilley.php>. Accessed 23 August 2018.

12. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8X1QkseVjIY>. Accessed 14 September 2018.

13. See, for example, Paul Myerscough, 'Short Cuts', *London Review of Books*, 35, 1, January, 2013. <https://www.lrb.co.uk/v35/n01/paul-myerscough/short-cuts>. Accessed 23 August 2018.

14. Roberto Esposito, *Immunitas: The Protection and Negation of Life*, (trans) Zakiya Hanafi, Cambridge & Malden, Polity Press, 2011, p88.

15. Helmut Lethen, *Cool Conduct: The Culture of Distance in Weimar Germany*, (trans) Don Reneau, Berkeley, University of California Press, 2002, pix. (Hereafter *Cool Conduct*).

16. Michel Foucault, *Society Must be Defended*, (trans) David Macey, London, Penguin Books, 2003, p249. (Hereafter *Society*).

17. Hagar Kotef, *Movement and the Ordering of Freedom: On Liberal Governances of Mobility*, Durham & London, Duke UP, 2015, p6.

18. Sianne Ngai, 'Visceral Abstraction', *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies*, 21, 1, 2015, p40.

19. Jean Baudrillard, *America*, (trans) Chris Turner, London & New York, Verso, 1999, p34.

20. Arlie Russell Hochschild, *The Managed Heart: Commercialisation of Human Feeling*, Berkeley, University of California Press, 2012, pp4, 90.

of his writings, is indicative of 'a culture of distance',¹⁵ a document exploring the possibilities of removal, or *Abgrenzung*, from communalism. In each of the two cases or meanings – as commensurate with the demands of capital, or as stabilising a coherent, controlled state – the smile is established as regulatory mechanism installed in the face to optimise the subject's responses, seeking to maintain a complete psychic and physical subjection to capital, while it is also 'technology of security',¹⁶ an adjustment of the body to biopower, whose functions it performs at a local, individuated, level. These two meanings, then, converge in their joint purpose, that is, the elimination of sociality and solidarity which lays down the laws of neo-imperial/biopolitical capitalism – where social relations exist only as a relation between things – and of the sovereign state/self as 'apparatus of closure',¹⁷ protecting itself against the other.

TOWARDS IMMUNITY

Sianne Ngai uses the smiley face as a point of entry into her analysis of abstract labour, noting that it 'confronts us with an image of an eerily abstracted being', but that, at the same time, it also is 'an uncanny personification of the collectively achieved abstractions of the capitalist economy: abstract labour, value, capital'.¹⁸ Her work, in many ways, structures my response because of how she attends to 'the radically alienated status of sociality itself' (p45); I seek, here, to trace, and thereby witness, the reification and biopoliticisation of the smile, whose social function has been evacuated to behave purely according to the conditions set out by capitalist governmentality. In this environment – capitalist modernity as 'cryogenisation of emotions'¹⁹ – no intersubjective mutuality exists or ensues, because the circuit of affective communication is broken; the smile issuing from the face is not sign of contact, that is, recognition of and by the other, but, instead, a scene refusing sociality with the other, all the while compliant, because compelled to be, with the system that orders it as mechanism, productive activity, of the accumulation of capital and the securing of borders.

I'm not necessarily concerned with trying to distinguish a 'true' from a 'false' smile, a face from a mask, since the face is already mask, the smile, like any other expression, always imitation, though the 'false' smile might still be defined through absence: it is signifier without 'appropriate' signified; there is, as it were, no living soul to sustain it. I'm thinking of Arlie Hochschild's work on the emotional labour of flight attendants in *The Managed Heart* (1983), whose 'personal smile is groomed to reflect the company's disposition' thereby inducing, especially if maintained over extensive periods of time, states of 'emotive dissonance' between the worker and her own face, her emotional/inner life, subsumed to, if not totally extinguished by, corporate use.²⁰ Even though I have to rely on such distinctions between true and false, or presence and absence, my interest lies, above all, in the performance of systems/

faciality machines ‘overcoding’ bodies with ‘eternal’ or constant smiles, the death masks of capitalist governmentality and territorialisation, a logic whose operation does not depend on any notion of interiority but only demands functional units of labour power and/or consumption.²¹

The command to smile is, of course, often gendered; if the good subject, following Ahmed, must demonstrate its ‘flows’ with the world then more effort has to be expended by the good girl (*Promise of Happiness*, p11). She is responsible for the ‘interface’ with others, read specifically those of use to the activities of capital – itself, of course, so repeatedly linked to vampiric teeth – on the basis of her territorialised smile. The subject largely held to obligations of happiness, the happiness, that is, of others, is the woman, whose labour, emotional and otherwise, is invisible, yet it is to her that such enormous duties – the achievement of the good life – fall. In *Cruel Optimism*, Berlant questions the persistence of good life fantasies, considering their unattainability or costly sustention, the harm that they cause in structuring the subject’s being and horizon of meaning: they become (have always been) traumatic, ‘a landfill for overwhelming and impending crises of life-building and expectation’ (p2), therefore operating as scenes of loss and/or precarity all the while holding out their promise of returns. The object, that is, the fantasy of the good life, is always already lost at the same time that it endures, apparently quite close but really and infinitely beyond reach. This type of relation, ‘cruel optimism’, upholds a dependency on, and toxic attachment to, the im/possible object – because it ‘hovers’ just over there – and the culture that taunts ‘us’ with its availability or proximity (p24), though there are those that are and remain forever expelled from its universe of wealth and well-being.

Both Ahmed and Berlant understand this upholding of, or alignment with, certain objects or horizons as individuated duty, in the sense that the failure of their attainment is not the result of the system’s crucial structural inequalities (without which it could not generate profit), but a subject’s personal shortcomings, her inadequate application, poor work ethic, etc. In other words, the subject has to profess to do everything in her power to ‘[face] the right way’, to find pleasure in objects approved and circulating as being ‘good’; the most evident act of this ‘facing the right way’ is the smile, the instrument or technology ordained with assurances of success and, analogously, investments of faith in object/system/horizon.²² Smile, because you are facing the right way; smile, because you will be rewarded for your compliance, your sustained efforts and trust, your optimistic relation to fridge-freezer units, whose faceified surface mirrors your own, a smile set, as it is, in the ‘hydraulics’ the machinery, of your face (*Oblivion*, p255).

21. Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus, Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, transl. Brian Massumi, London & New York, Continuum, 2004, p9. (Hereafter *Plateaus*).

22. Sara Ahmed, ‘Happy Objects’, in Melissa Gregg and Gregory J. Seigworth (eds), *The Affect Theory Reader*, Durham & London, Duke UP, 2010, p37.

FACIALISED POLITICS

Faces are ‘loci of resonance’ that ‘conform in advance to a dominant reality’ argue Deleuze and Guattari; it is in light of that dominant reality that the face

takes its concrete form (*Plateaus*, p186). As a political entity or project, the face establishes its acts and expressions with respect to the order of signification that has produced and programmed it. What follows is an engagement with Deleuze and Guattari's reading of the face, to arrive, eventually, at the smile, the 'positive' – that which is 'impressed', an effect of power – facialisation of capitalist governmentality.²³ This apparatus implements a politics that disallows and disavows the other outwith – the refugee, the migrant, the preterite – as well as within (or around) the subject, namely the unconscious, in the sense that the latter is a 'being' that 'can spread over everything'.²⁴ The concrete face, administered by the play of power, is brought about as a safeguard against the 'horror' of the face, the 'multi-dimensional' portals (*Plateaus*, p187) – becomings and othernesses curtailed – that lie within it but are subsumed to the 'computation of normalities' (p197).

'Year Zero' of *A Thousand Plateaus* deals, if not exclusively, with the political construction of the face; this system of signification delimits the subject's field of possibilities or becomings and mitigates or expels elements threatening to the hallucinated unity of subjective identity. 'The face is a politics', write Deleuze and Guattari (p201): inscribed according to codes, it is that on/in which marks of signification and subjectification take place, and is information machine (to adapt Ernst Gombrich's description of the face as 'instrument board' or 'dial').²⁵ Matter of apparition, because it is made to appear, the face is the result of processes of capture, and proceeds to overcode the rest of the body, whose coordinates are arranged so as to trace back – the tracing, as opposed to the map, organises and neutralises – to the production of the face, or abstract faciality machine:

A concerted effort is made to do away with the body and corporeal coordinates through which the multidimensional or polyvocal semiotics operated. Bodies are disciplined, corporeality dismantled, becomings-animal hounded out, deterritorialisation pushed to a new threshold – a jump is made from the organic strata to the strata of signifiante and subjectification. A single substance of expression is produced. The white wall/black hole system is constructed, or rather the abstract machine is triggered that must allow and ensure the almightiness of the signifier as well as the autonomy of the subject. (pp200-201)

According to Deleuze and Guattari, the body is made to signify when it is facialised: the face 'facialises' (p189) the entire body, landscapes everything around it according to its functions or dimensions: it territorialises the body, as subject, inscribes it into a grid of meaning, itself stabilised around the 'White-Man face' (p197) thereby establishing the logic of racialisation. What was map (faceless body) becomes a tracing (facialised body), whose purpose is, as it were, managerial: the face, like the tracing, involves 'an alleged "competence"', is tied to a particular destiny, a predetermined axis of signification (p14). In

23. Hegel cited in Giorgio Agamben, 'What is an Apparatus?', in *What is an Apparatus and Other Essays*, (trans) David Kishik and Stefan Pedatella, Stanford, Stanford University Press, 2009, p4.

24. Jacques Lacan, *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*, (trans) Alan Sheridan, New York & London, W. W. Norton & Co., 1998, p26. (Hereafter *Fundamental Concepts*).

25. E. H. Gombrich, *The Image and the Eye: Further Studies in the Psychology of Pictorial Representation*, Oxford, Phaidon, 1982, pp107, 108. This reference is also cited in Rushton, *Deleuze and Faces*, p222.

The Telephone Book, Avital Ronell talks about a ‘headless subject’²⁶ receiving a call to which the subject-to-be has always already responded; in Deleuze and Guattari’s terms, the head is removed and replaced by a face, a discourse or cultural apparatus that determines who is or will be recognised as subject (*Plateaus*, p191). The instant the headless/faceless not-yet-subject accepts the call of the law, it is bestowed with a face, as if the latter were waiting for something, me or you, to occupy its system. ‘You don’t so much have a face as slide into one’, write Deleuze and Guattari (p196).

I have been recognised, facialised, my identity has been inscribed (echoes of Franz Kafka’s *In the Penal Colony* (1919)), the faciality machine overcoding me into a good subject. Faciality is designed to ensure docility, as much as it delivers citizenship; the face is that which produces me as particular programmed subject in accordance with systems of control, the law of the father ‘hounding out’ those elements (polyvocality; becoming-animal, etc.) that threaten its rule. The faciality machine seeks to make legible the subject, a being that is acknowledged, because constituted, by a particular signifying system that always refers to an abstract ideal, the normative image of the white heterosexual, able-bodied male, against which we are measured and against which the othered is excessively visualised, as a result threatening the security of her body, turned into object to be plundered. (The other’s bodily security is never an issue, neither is her right to authority over her body; ‘what can it [your body] possibly matter to you’, as Scottie asks Judy in *Vertigo* (dir. Alfred Hitchcock, 1958), as he claims possession over it. The ‘bodies of the powerful’ assign value only to the preservation of their own; the destruction of the black body, the body of the woman, is not only ‘incidental’ but the prerequisite to this goal).²⁷

Even though the abstract machine, performing the facialisation of the body, can’t guarantee the fixity of the face it bestows, it wields an enormous ‘humanising’ power (it is ‘anthropological machine’, to borrow Giorgio Agamben’s description, which cannot abide alterity).²⁸ ‘Year Zero’, locating the future of the ‘human’ in its defacing, keeps returning to that prospect, to what Deleuze, in *Cinema I*, calls the face’s virtuality, pure possibility, evident, as already discussed, in the close-up, which the face is by its very nature. According to Deleuze and Guattari, the close-up reveals the fundamental inhumanity of the face, the face as ‘horror story’ (*Plateaus*, p187), ‘holey surface’ (p189) that is curiously formless, at once the locus of identity fixation/inscription and of mutability, a sliding – as if encountered in a mist. The organisation of the face can, then, be undone, because the face exists at the intersection of ‘white wall’ (signifiante) and ‘black hole’ (subjectification) and is, therefore, as Rushton explains, always on the way to somewhere else (*Deleuze and Faces*, p225). An exceptionally mobile, or viscous, object, whose status is never really assured (an event pertaining, especially, to horror fiction), the face, in its concreteness, its functioning within dominant systems of control, is something that must constantly be monitored to ensure an impression of

26. Avital Ronell, *The Telephone Book: Technology – Schizophrenia – Electric Speech*, Lincoln and London, University of Nebraska Press, 1989, p82.

27. Ta-Nehishi Coates, *Between the World and Me*, New York, Spiegel & Grau, 2017, pp71, 84.

28. Giorgio Agamben, *The Open: Man and Animal*, (trans) Kevin Attell, Stanford, Stanford University Press, 2002, p33.

the face as it 'should' be, over there, in the 'empty dimension' of the subject as recognisably 'human', hallucinating 'his' sovereign faciality (*Plateaus*, p9).

THE HARDENED SMILE

If I have given the impression of having lost sight of the smile, it is because the preceding elements, of a facialised politics and the instability of the face, despite its flattening (*Plateaus*, p200), initiate the process of paying attention to a particular meaning of the smile developed by Helmuth Plessner, specifying its deployment as mechanism of immunisation, its alignment with border patrols and biopolitical security mechanisms. A trained biologist, Plessner, unlike his contemporary Heidegger, who defines existence in terms of temporality, situates it spatially: the corporeal body's relationship to its surroundings, to the other, as well as to itself, specifically structures 'human' life. This concept of the corporeal depends on the lived experience of the boundary or, in Plessner's vocabulary, 'positionality', which can't be conceptualised without that experience of the border; a subject is determined and assured by how it reacts to situations, in public life, that threaten its borders. It is, in other words, the subject's expression, its behaviour, that ascertains its sovereignty, which it must defend; it must, further, armour itself against eruptions of its own 'authenticity', that is, those moments in which it loses mastery, fails to maintain distance between itself and the other, but also between 'being a body' and 'having a body', between lacking or asserting control over its corporeal existence/reactions.²⁹ The divide between subject and other exists internally, then, too, because the subject's interiority is something that requires guarding against. It has to avoid situations of exposure and exhibitions of affective expression, hence its conceptualisation as cold figure obsessed with performing its sovereignty through 'diplomatic' or 'tactful' behaviour, designed to shield the subject from being abandoned to an outside where the sheltering border has ruinously been breached.

Plessner's study of the smile proposes one such education in 'diplomacy', a tactical manoeuvring with which to preserve the safeguarding boundary: the essay imagines the subject's total control over 'his' faciality (because Plessner's project is a phallic one: man affirming his pre-eminence) by way of the act of smiling. Plessner's understanding of the subject, in fact, altogether disables psychoanalysis and the laws of the unconscious: what Lacan describes as the 'opacity' (*Fundamental Concepts*, p21) of the subject does not exist, neither does a region, a 'non-being' (p30), indeterminate to knowledge or inaccessible to the commanding ego. Plessner conceptualises the smile as full spectrum dominance, setting into motion an unfailing faciality machine that regulates all the coordinates of the facialised body, yielding a personal identity that is absolutely overcoded: pure ego-regime. Disciplinary in nature, Plessner's smile function generates the body's *Abgrenzung* – from its own unconscious, which no longer disturbs, and from the other – while cutting across the systems

29. On this note, see Hans Peter Krüger, 'Persons and their Bodies: The Körper/Leib Distinction and Helmuth Plessner's Theories of Ex-Centric Positionality and Homo asconditus', *The Journal of Speculative Philosophy*, 24.3, 2010, pp256–274.

in place designed to assure national 'survival', the immunitary or biopolitical procedures that operate at state level.

I am using Plessner's 1950 essay to think through the current 'crisis of solidarity',³⁰ because of the correlations between disciplinary and biopolitical technologies that run throughout the piece: Plessner is proposing a principle of least engagement with the stranger conceptualised as threat, the latter rendered inoperative through the act of smiling so as to preserve face (*das Gesicht bewahren*). The central proposition of Plessner's philosophical anthropology is what he terms 'eccentric positionality', deriving from the experience of borders: the borders of the living, as opposed to the lifeless, body, between inner and outer; between 'human', plant, and animal, arranged in an anthropocentric system of thought that privileges the 'eccentric' being of 'man'.³¹ Plessner defines eccentricity as the *Grundstruktur*, the fundamental principle, of 'human' existence: 'man' is that which is 'constitutively homeless' (*konstitutiv heimatlos*), because marked out, or marked off (*abgegrenzt*), from 'his' environment.³² *Abgrenzung* contains the word border (*Grenze*), so essential to Plessner's work; each living being has a specifically determined relationship to the borders of 'his' corporeality, and occupation in, as well as against, space: 'man' is both within, and outwith, 'his' body, inner, and outer environment.

The border, therefore, remains the crucial concept through which to approach his essay; rather than gesture of contact, however brief and fragile it may be, Plessner interprets the smile as cold/cryogenic project, maintaining the distance between the subject and 'his' surroundings and fellow citizens. An expression linked to shame, it must be projected against potentially shameful encounters, those threatening the subject's balance or grip on itself; in his extraordinary book *Cool Conduct*, specifically analysing Weimar Germany, Helmut Lethen argues that Plessner:

constructs a subject that is required to balance countervailing psychological impulses, as if walking a tightrope: the tendency to reveal and to expose must constantly counteract the tendency to be ashamed and to conceal. Whenever the manoeuvre fails, resulting in 'unchecked affective expression', the psyche appears 'naked' in public.... The penalty is others' merciless laughter, which, by offending the dignity of the persona, produces shame. (p60)

Giving face must, as such, be sacrificed to preclude the loss of face, that curious 'double movement ... toward painful individuation' and, simultaneously, 'toward uncontrollable relationality',³³ to cite Sedgwick, and nakedness, vulnerability, any indication of exposure or revelation be made impossible. The smile, so Plessner, is mechanism allowing precisely such manoeuvres of withdrawal, masking, read the erection, the rearing and making rigid, of border systems.

The smile refrigerates, cools sociality into its peculiar asocial condition

30. Ban Ki-Moon, 'A Crisis of Solidarity', *Handelsblatt Global*, 13 May 2016. <https://global.handelsblatt.com/opinion/a-crisis-of-solidarity-518274>. Accessed 17 August 2018.

31. Jos de Mul, 'Artificial by Nature: An Introduction to Plessner's Philosophical Anthropology', in Jos de Mul (ed), *Plessner's Philosophical Anthropology: Perspectives and Prospects*, Amsterdam, Amsterdam UP, 2014, pp15, 18.

32. Helmuth Plessner, 'Der Mensch als Lebewesen', in *Mit anderen Augen: Aspekte einer philosophischen Anthropologie*, Stuttgart, Reclam, 1982, pp17 & 9. All translations mine. (Hereafter *Der Mensch*).

33. Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Touching Feeling: Affect, Pedagogy, Performativity*, Durham & London, Duke University Press, 2003, p37.

associated with the ‘semiotic of capitalism’ (*Plateaus*, p202), and further hardening into a desire for absolute control. Lethen, though commenting on another text, remarks on the affinities between Plessner’s and Carl Schmitt’s work, an alliance that remains under-researched, considering that both are intent on preserving the world of the father (*Cool Conduct*, p104) and sovereign as *Kältemaschine* (p6). Plessner’s essay evidently stands in stark contrast to the vulnerability that Levinas sees when looking at the face in all its nakedness and abandonment:

34. Emmanuel Levinas, *Ethics and Infinity*, (trans) Richard A. Cohen, Pittsburgh, Duquesne University Press, 2011, p86.

There is first the very uprightness of the face, its upright exposure, without defence. The skin of the face is that which stays the most naked, most destitute. It is the most naked, though with a decent nudity. It is the most destitute also: there is an essential poverty in the face; the proof of this is that one tries to mask this poverty by putting on poses, by taking on a countenance. The face is exposed, menaced, as if inviting us to an act of violence.³⁴

35. Gilles Deleuze & Félix Guattari, *What is Philosophy?* (trans) Hugh Tomlinson and Graham Burchell, New York, Columbia University Press, 1994, p17. I’m referring to Deleuze’s discussion of the ‘concept’ in *What is Philosophy?*, where he writes that objects/events exist not in relation to a particular subject, but to a ‘simple “there is”’. He proceeds: There is, at some moment, a calm and restful world. The other person appears here as neither subject nor object but as something that is very different: a possible world, the possibility of a frightening world. This possible world is not real, or not yet, but it exists nonetheless: it is an expressed that exists only in its expression – the face, or the equivalent of the face.

What Plessner cannot abide is, precisely, destitution, the ‘poverty in the face’; in *Das Lächeln*, the smile is, as mentioned earlier, an ‘immune-type function’, even though, or really because, his philosophical anthropology is concerned with intersubjectivity, with the ‘human’ as at once self-reflexive and embodied subject, whose ‘inhabitation’ in the world, ‘his’ own body, is irrevocably dislodged. Plessner’s ‘eccentric positionality’, characterised, as it is, by a distance between body, self and world – the human is that which is ‘lifted’ from its being [*Selbstsein*] (*Der Mensch*, p11) – means that ‘our’ embodiment is not absolute, the subject not totally bound to its *Umwelt*, nor to its own subjective or ‘inner’ sphere. This *Abgrenzung* is at once fundamental and necessary, the loss of face to be avoided at all costs; intersubjectivity is risky, means the possibility of destruction. A meeting with a stranger, whose face suddenly arrives out of the field, is potentially catastrophic, compelling the subject to ‘capitulate’ before the other.³⁵

36. Helmut Plessner, ‘Das Lächeln’, in *Mit Anderen Augen*, pp185 & 183. All translations mine. (Hereafter *Das Lächeln*.)

[S]oundless and subdued’, not an ‘explosive’ reaction, the smile is an expression attributed to the ‘temperate zone’ of interpersonal dimensions; temperance, though, does not suggest warmth but, rather, gestures towards the ‘peculiar light’ that provides the smile with its ‘distinctive shine’.³⁶ Plessner situates it as means to ‘safeguard distance of expression in expression’, arguing that its ‘idiosyncratic property’ is its ‘detachment, reticence’, its *Verhaltenheit*, indicative of restraint, a non-committal act, muted and measured (*Das Lächeln*, p189): behaviour modulated to that which is ‘proper’ to the human as self-controlled [*beherrscht*], ‘manned’, phallic figure. The smile is, also, mask – Plessner refers to the racialised ‘mask-like smile’ of the other (‘the Asian’) – that renders the face as ‘playing field’:

Nothing speaks more clearly to the exceptionality of the smile as

mimetic expression than the impossibility, given its silence, attenuation [*Gedämpftheit*] and restraint [*Verhaltenheit*], to sharply draw borders between its naturally occurring gesture and its passage into shrouding mask. (p189)

The distance the smile affords, mediating the face as *Spielfeld*, site of play, is associated with good conduct, polite or mannered behaviour, and is, therefore, expression of a 'world-averted' (p192) subject. Absolutely focussed on self-command as necessary *Schutzfunktion*, the smile acts as 'privilege of minimal obligation' [*Privileg der geringsten Bindung*], as immunitary function whose main purpose is to maintain the self, against the risk of the other.³⁷

Capitulation, as such, is associated with expressions like laughter and tears, both in and of themselves *Katastrophenreaktionen* (*Das Lächeln*, p194), indicative of the subject's inability to respond 'adequately', with restraint, to the situation functioning as 'collision', and which, as a result, demands that 'the coldness of outer space ... sink between [the strangers]', encountering each other, at every occasion, as if for the first time.³⁸ In *Crowds and Power*, Elias Canetti writes that 'man' fears to be touched, every boundary that 'he' raises, against the touch of the (abject) other, is insufficient: 'it is easy to tear [clothes] and pierce through to the naked, smooth, defenceless flesh', just as 'he' is easily disturbed in his sleep:

Man's body is naked and vulnerable, exposed it its softness to every assault. With care and cunning he may be able to fend off things which come near, but it is easy to reach him from a distance; spears and arrows can transfix him. He has invented shields and armour and built walls and whole fortresses round himself; what he most desires from all these precautions is a feeling of invulnerability.³⁹

The emphasis, here, lies on the ease with which defences/distances are dismantled, on the exposed flesh, the subject's desire to shield itself, which extends to the mask, crafted through the face. The mask works in/as the face, the fixed face, the face of the 'figure', an entity Canetti describes as 'completed' (p373) in the sense that it has crystallised into a definite shape, what Klaus Theweleit calls a '*Stahlgestalt*', the armoured subject.⁴⁰ If the face appears naked, vulnerable, smooth, the mask is less that which hides the face 'behind' its inflexible countenance than the face itself, stiffened, expressive of the desire for distance:

a man shuts [emotions like pleasure and pain] away inside himself and his face remains calm. The real reason for this attitude is the desire for personal autonomy: no intrusion on oneself is permitted, nor does one intrude on anyone else. A man is supposed to have the strength to stand alone and also the strength to remain himself (*Crowds and Power*, p375).

37. Helmuth Plessner, 'Elemente menschlichen Verhaltens', in *Mit Anderen Augen*, p83. All translations mine.

38. Plessner cited in Lethen, *Cool Conduct*, px.

39. Elias Canetti, *Crowds and Power*, (trans) Carol Stewart, New York, Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1984, pp15, 228. (Hereafter *Crowds and Power*).

40. Klaus Theweleit, *Male Fantasies*, Vol. II, (trans) Chris Turner and Erica Carter, in collaboration with Stephen Conway, Cambridge and Malden, Polity Press, 2007, p159. (Hereafter *Male Fantasies*).

Canetti, above, describes the function of masks as 'hiding' whatever lies beneath, already hardening into a 'fixity of form' (p375); for Plessner, self-regulation hides nothing, because the inner-directed, shameful subject has ceased to matter, or, indeed, to exist (*Cool Conduct*, p72): there is only the outward persona, its expression, the fridge-figure facing the world. The ego, eccentric as it is, is *Herrscherfigur*, which does not concern itself with the unconscious; to Freud's ego as 'poor creature' beset by three masters, that is, the external world, the libido of the id and the 'severity of the super-ego',⁴¹ Plessner's is an image of completeness (as if in possession of *objet petit a*). There is no remainder, nothing exorbitant; this subject is not defined by lack (nor, as the case would be for Deleuze, excess) but is, instead, unassailable body-form whose interior life is eroded: figure as plenum, fully there, compact, 'totality machine' (*Male Fantasies*, p162).

What remains to be done, here, is to propose a type of lineage, a perspective of gestation, if you wish, for the smiling subject, armoured by neo-imperial capitalist governmentality. In order to do so, I look to Wyndham Lewis' exhibition of a self-portrait as Tyro in April 1921 at the Leicester Galleries in London, capturing a smile that, while initially only etched into the faces of returning British veterans, became indicative of an entire phallic-fascist culture, beginning with the first world war and not yet at an end. Lewis defines Tyros as 'immense novices [that] brandish their appetites in their faces, lay bare their teeth in a valedictory, inviting, or merely substantial laugh'.⁴² He continues to remark that the Tyro, puppet-like thing smiling stupidly, radiates an overwhelming but purposeless, and therefore often malignant, energy, most evident in the impression of the 'screaming voice underneath' its 'necessarily very restricted' actions (p254). The Tyro, a satirical creation, references the British Tommy;⁴³ exposed to gas warfare, the troops at the front refused victimhood through stoic endurance and 'an air of amused detachment', expressed, for example, in Bruce Bairnsfather's 'Old Bill' cartoons: strained joviality as defence against despair.⁴⁴ For Lewis, the Tyronic smile, if at first deployed to suppress unprecedented trauma, remains forever arrested in the figure's face: the smile is conclusion, made fixed, marking the end state of Tyro 'life'. A 'permanent distension of the muscles', the smile has set into the face as defensive reaction whose spell is gradually emptied out, 'spontaneously' shining, as Lewis imagined it, twenty thousand years into the future:

let us allow them [the Tyros] to have arrived, at the time the narrative opens, at a civilisation bearing such striking resemblance to our own Atlantic, European-American, capitalist civilisation, that the reader least apt at seizing an analogy would discover something that would remind him forcibly of his own surroundings (p259).

Lewis captures the controlled smile of the subject as the reflexive face of the

41. Sigmund Freud, 'The Ego and the Id', in James Strachey (ed), *The Standard Edition of the Complete Works of Sigmund Freud*, Vol. XIX, London, Vintage, 2001, p56.

42. Wyndham Lewis cited in Paul Edwards, *Wyndham Lewis: Painter and Writer*, New Haven and London, Yale UP, 2000, p254.

43. Thomas Karshan, 'Apes, Tyros and Humans: Wyndham Lewis' Portraits', *Modernism/Modernity*, 16, 2, April 2009, p428.

44. Edward Madigan, "'Sticking to a Hateful Task": Resilience, Humour and British Understandings of Combatant Courage, 1914-1918, *War in History*, 20, 1, 2013, p96.

first world war, but, as he observes above, he is convinced of its longevity, continuing to exist far beyond his own time: what started off as a traumatic response to war turns into a sign of obedience to a militarised and, in time, fascist or fascist-capitalist ‘European-American’ order. The Tyro, with its face seized by the war machine, is fundamentally that, a totally disciplined subject to power that shapes the way biopolitical, (crypto)fascist capitalist governmentality generates, not quite twenty thousand years into the future, the facialised body.

The most sustained description of such a figure, which in itself forms the link between the first and second world wars, occurs in Theweleit’s *Male Fantasies*, analysing the writings of the *Freikorps*, published in the 1920s and composed of novels and memoirs written by former imperial soldiers organising into anti-Communist, fascistically-coded terror commandos post-first world war; later, these soldiers were frequently recruited into the SA and SS. Bearing in mind Agamben, who regards the camp as *nomos* of contemporary political life,⁴⁵ the image of the mastered subjecthood called forth by the Nazi state is far from historical but instead, still, paradigmatic. I recognise the *Stahlgestalt* as conceptually affiliated to Plessner’s rigidly organised sovereign figure; even if not explicitly fascist – Plessner was, after all, partly Jewish, was forced to leave Germany and the Nazi-occupied Netherlands – it is nonetheless imagined along similar lines. For the *Freikorps* figure, ‘the interior has lost its meaning’, because it is ‘deluge’ – it is that which is and must be abjected (*Male Fantasies*, p162); the ego, reigning supreme, is exterior machine. Theweleit notices the predominance of eyes in these writings: organs, after all, of ‘touching across a distance, touching without touching’ (p133). Contact happens exclusively elsewhere, over there, though over here, the gaze of the Führer or his representatives erects the subject to verticality because its ‘beam is hard and active, ... phallic’ (pp133-134), demanding a response in kind. There is no question about ‘melting’ into each other’s eyes, but of stepping up to the command of the gaze: a sovereign, erect, self exists in sharp distinction. The corresponding points I detect between Theweleit’s study and Plessner’s essay, or between a particular function of the *Glanz* of the eyes and the *Glanz* of the smile – bearing teeth, with their symbolic meaning as *Urpenis* – is the exaltation of the subject, blitzing phallic sovereignty, driven by the desire to keep intact, and the refusal to surrender.⁴⁶

I have adopted a longer view of kinship – which can’t, though, measure itself against Lewis’ sense of perspective – between a fridge, the Tyro, the *Stahlgestalt* in this essay in order to investigate the concrete face of capitalist modernity, whose injunction to smile articulates the subject’s ‘proper’ orientation to current politics. We could, subsequently, with yet another reference to Agamben, and because of Plessner’s emergence into the circumference of ‘face studies’, propose the smile’s ‘kenomatic state’, locating the functioning of the state of exception – with the paradigm of security, the safeguarding of phallic, neo-imperial sovereignty, at its core – at work in the

45. Giorgio Agamben, *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*, (trans) Daniel Heller-Roazen, Stanford, Stanford UP, 1998, p166.

46. Donald Capps and Nathan Carlin, ‘Sublimation and Symbolisation: The Case of Dental Anxiety and the Symbolic Meaning of Teeth’, *Pastoral Psychology*, 60, May 2011, p785.

47. Giorgio Agamben, *State of Exception*, (trans) Kevin Attell, Chicago and London, University of Chicago Press, 2005, p6.

48. Philip K. Dick, *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep*, New York, Ballantine Books, 1996, p143.

face.⁴⁷ A technique of the self (disciplinary) captures the technique of the state (biopolitical) and vice versa; in the smile, the one nests within the other. If the smile is the required act to bear today so as to demonstrate our (preterite) alignment to the commands of capital, then its distribution is also linked to the safeguarding of life against risk: the risk of contamination, sociality and solidarity. Smile, because you are seeking immunity, smile because you look to 'optimise a state of life' (*Society*, p246), life free from being touched, free in the infinite distances that exist between me and you, between subject-figure and abjected other. In Philip K. Dick's *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep* (1968), the bounty hunter Phil Resch, after the 'retirement' of the android Luba Luft, engages in a discussion with Deckard on the necessity to intervene against 'Nexus-6 types' – 'they'd roll all over us and mash us flat' –, insisting that they form a 'barrier' to keep the two, so-called human and replicant, distinct and apart.⁴⁸ As the argument comes to an end, the biopolitical agents, with varying degrees of commitment, imagine the rape-murder of a 'female type', while Resch's 'hardended smile' (p144) remains: in his face shines the apparatus and pure activity of biopower, devaluing certain forms of personhood while exalting his own. The injunction to smile thus articulates the two overwhelming orientations that neo-imperial capitalist governmentality – a phallic-fascist order – demands of its subjects, that is, on the one hand compliance with the commands of capital, and, on the other, the compulsion to live life predicated on immunisation, on the basis of a militarised/fortified subjectivity.

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