

MAX BLECHER AND THE MEDIATED UNREALITY: SURREAL CINEMAGIC

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Abstract: Blecher builds his novels on the scheme of an oscillation between essence and appearance consisting in a succession of spaces for escaping the self – fixed points in the memory which define it in the order and in the sense of a secondary world, mediated by cinema. Appearance and artificiality, photographs and pictures gain their „vitality” due to the exacerbations of their ideal imperviousness in which the narrator would like to partake. But the „awakening” sought-after by the narrator only happens during sleep or, sometimes, in analogue spaces of cinema, fair or Panopticon type. These represent an interstice between the person who is real and the one who is „real” within the absolute of the intimate fictions; they entertain the illusion and amplify it by projecting oases of release. They are metaphors of the unconscious/subconscious; thus, from inside the screen or from the psychedelic atmosphere of the fair, apparitions spring out, and they are fast swallowed, appropriated, assumed and lived. He who gets lost in such spaces mimics his own, exterior, death and puts the world in between parantheses, assuming the life of „inhabiting an image”, in Bachelard’s words.

The nihilistic intimacy has only one exit, apart from the final one, and that is towards dreams, into the imaginary or the spectacular. But the lens of the psychedelic immanences intentionally suffer from myopia, which makes the emitter grope through the symbolic labyrinth. Losing oneself in the labyrinth, one seeks to find the centre, to dismantle it and reconfigure the self, purified of the „surplus” of unsatisfactory contingency, within the meaning of the ideal ipseity. The dream, contrary to the technique and intention of the surrealists, does not decompose/dislocate the Blecherian world but to reveal only the essential, which remains the main factor of mental cohesion, of reconciliation with the immediate reality in/by negation. Therefore, according to Nemoianu, cinema-type dreamlike grace notes and mediated unrealities, fair, Panopticon take away the morbid baggage and cathartically release the holder in the super-worlds he accesses, especially from the inside. Here is where one should search and find the transcendence of immanence in Blecher’s work.

Keywords: Max Blecher, ideal ipseity, thanatophoria, mediated unrealities, transcendence of immanence.

Thanatophoria – the mouse that gnaws at the narrator’s eye lid – in *The Lit-Up Burrow* ([...] *I saw, running on the edge of the blanket, the mouse that was gnawing my eyelid [...]*) – finally reaches its peak when the patient finds himself in the narrow room as if inhabiting a huge skull, that of his favourite horse that had died a few days before: *I found myself in the skull, the horse’s skull, in the splendid and dry emptiness of his dried bones. It was my room [...]*. From within death, the sanatorium takes on the appearance of a corpse gnawed at by mice and worms, continuously disappearing and decaying. The space moulds on the body, unveiling through sensory visions the past, the present and especially the future. And just as the sick young man eats his pet (the horse) „in a cruel beeftek” – hence the union with death – so the walls of the hospital end up pushing him into the devouring stomach of the predators and erosion: [...] *the decaying sanatorium [...] deserted in the storm, under the croak of the crows and the howling winds. I was on cement, shivering with cold and did not know what to do.*

The nihilistic intimacy has only one exit, apart from the final one, and that is towards dreams, into the imaginary or the spectacular: [...] *one should observe the mutations that occur during the brief developments from the denial of reality and re-colonization of it with fantasies drawn from an unknown “interior” biography. We can find here also the experience of nothingness [...]* (Mihăieș, p. 93). But the lens of the psychedelic immanences intentionally suffer from myopia, which makes the emitter grope through the symbolic labyrinth: *A misunderstanding of huge proportions and great diversity lies in the substance of reality, out of which our imagination can extract a tiny amount... the unknown warehouse full of shadows and surprises of reality.* Losing oneself in the labyrinth one seeks to find the centre, to dismantle it and reconfigure the self (purified of the *surplus* of unsatisfactory contingency) within the meaning of the ideal ipseity: *I often wonder with great emotion what the meaning of this continuous inner illumination might be and what is its proportion in the world.*

The dream, contrary to the technique and intention of the surrealists, does not decompose or dislocate the Blecherian world but to only reveal the essential, which remains the main factor of mental cohesion, of reconciliation in/by negation, with immediate reality: *The mythical metaphors and images of the disease threaten its reality and amend it, just as any secondary phenomenon tames and modifies the forces of the principal, openly expressed as harmful and self-destructive.* (Nemoianu, p. 109). Therefore, according to Nemoianu, cinema-type dreamlike

grace notes and mediated unrealities, fair, Panopticon take away the morbid baggage and cathartically release the holder in the super-worlds he accesses, especially from the inside: [...] *the fine thread of life, like a continuous strand of light and dreams that everyone draws from the maternal tank of reality [...]*. Here is where one should search and find the transcendence (of immanence) in Blecher's work.

Following Jung's footsteps (Jung 2004), the patient accesses the basis of the „collective unconscious” making the archetype the tank for the self and on the footsteps of Durand, the narrators juggle with the „anthropological structures of the imaginary”, gracefully taking advantage of the „fantastic function”: *It is the unknown store house of reality full of shadow and surprises*. The absurd, the aleatory comes as countered by seemingly chaotic modulations of the global screen.

Also, the evocation of a dream, of events, is more intense and realistic than the referent, as well as the contrived situations, the reveries: *Sometimes I evoke a memory with my eyes closed and it is reborn with the intensity of previous reality, sometimes scenes and events that have never been... go through my head with the same intensity [...]*. The writing mediates now between reality and dream, causing the osmosis and highlighting in depth similarities (*It's the same thing to live or to dream something, the trivial every day life is just as hallucinatory and strange as that in the dream*) for the disease has released into the world a creature with the consistency of air: *When I took a breath, I felt as if I weighed nothing [...]*. The text, thus, becomes „the burrow”: the liaison area, „neutral” at wartime in its aestheticizing trenches, the sometimes baroque volutes of the sentence that hide meanings, only to reveal the ego of the narrator: *So we have the means to analyze the psychology of the subject that expresses itself, moreover, that of the subject that imagines its expression... that which moulds its responsibility to the very poetry of its expression.*, as Bachelard (p. 66) notes.

Sometimes the oneiric sphere completely swallows reality and arrogates itself full authorial rights: *I also like to think that there is in the sleeping world at least one booklet of verses signed by me that sleeping people read in their nightmares [...]*. The release into the collective unconscious has demonic valences, Blecher proves to be a subtle decadent, obsessively stating that „life is a dream”, an artifact of the mind, which is permanently connected to the vast „sea” of the Collective Mind: [...] *the surprise is absolutely the same whether I keep my eyes open or close them*. Given to the delirious-opioid scenarios of fantasy, the narrator frees himself with

schizoidism from the reality inside the mental images which, again from within, moult the surface of the flesh. The less remains present on the outside, in historical time, the more fruitful the depth probing will prove to be, in a time of enlightenment and salvation: [...] *if the meaning and importance of moments escapes me, it is perhaps because I “escape them” at any moment and free myself into a closed, secret world and [...] in the strictest intimacy [...] there is no difference between the outside world and that of the mental images.*

And yet, just as „feelings do not produce personal life” (Buber, p. 70), nor do the reverie, the memory, the oneiric images create an independent super-reality, but one that, regardless of the patient’s perception of exteriority and the desperate attempt to overlap it with narrative ipseity *au dedans*, continues to be supported by thin pillars. They are like the spider’s infinite legs that the great elephants in Dali’s paintings walk on – huge weights on a friable edifice, which is why it is so necessary. Especially since, in his dreams, actions have continuity, a narrative which transferred to the plane of wakefulness flows first in the writing before reaching the territory of immediate reality: *I’ve been pursuing in my dreams for many years a recurrent action that happens in the same decor and if I tried to record it here [...] I couldn’t figure out in which half of my life it had happened, because exactly the same continuity [...] the same discontinuity of life exists also in the light [...] in which [...] I write, just as I did in the clarity of that day [...] “in the dream” [...] .* The text affirms and includes in reality, organizes anamnestic and imaginary contents and delivers them to the present, „it means to turn the impossibility of living into the possibility to express”. (Starobinski, p. 15).

In one of the narrator’s oneiric „films” that runs „every night” with almost questionable consistency, manic in any case, a dilapidated wall, similar to a screen, appears. It actually symbolizes the boundary between the conscious and the unconscious; then a dusty road comes to view and the tall acacia tree in the shades of which the narrator in *The Diary* watches how always the same character is walking in the sketched decor: the ice cream merchant with a golden tooth. The dreamer extracts from his own mine of memories the gold of stable thought: *Maybe the ice cream boy is very young and he had this golden tooth implanted in his mouth at the front [...] to bring an element of maturity to his face [...]. Or maybe he has it because he needs it.* Thus, only in sleep can one reach a teleological vision of the world, especially since the dreamer gets involved and comments on the oneiric *facts* as if the fate of the universe depended on them. It is

however a certain fact that his mental equilibrium is strongly influenced by them: [...] *as soon as I try to differentiate the realm of dream from that of reality I am confused and I have to give up.*

Hypnos's decor becomes the scene for Orwellian „adventures” that „occurred recently on the outskirts of the city, on that deserted path”, covering full pages of *The Lit-Up Burrow*, written before 1938: we note a shift in the hierarchy of planes, by allocating much larger space to the oneiric „facts”. We are told the same satire, in filiation – through reversed chronology – with *The Animal Farm*, published in 1945, in which well-trained police dogs take the place of their masters, they lock them in their cages, so that after this rebellion, impeccably designed and carried out, the animals start marauding and feasting until the citizens of the city and the beasts intervene. Humanized to the point of dehumanization, they end up being hung in front of the wall. The dogs represent the narrator's need and desire to move beyond the borders, but what he is left with is a *shattered poem*: „[...] the work remains unfinished: a hostile force will mutilate it [...], the present reality is dislocated [...]. (Starobinski, p. 15). In an attempt to define himself only according to the oneiric, imaginary data (*But the logic of things is the last point of view that ever concerned me [...] how many crazily beautiful things I've know in my dreams [...] the most common aspects acquire in sleep [...] ineffable aspects from which I cannot separate myself [...]*), the patient is exposed, because of imminent failure, to a tautological dream: the path of disease. For the dream is also a diversion, mediation between worlds, crippled reflection and alchemy of turbulent content, repression, memories and trauma, it's another kind of illness imagistically, symbolically undermined and, thereby, transfigured. Through the above short film, Blecher proves to us, involuntarily, and therefore even more significantly, that he drank from the same source of imaginary structures as Orwell.

The twilight state is one of the brands of the Blecherian space, defined by duality, it combines data of subjectivity with the objective ones which appear, like in surrealist paintings, only like a flash, a pretext. We see the author's declared affinities for surrealism, in painting, in literature. Blecher is playing, pouring cold, expressionistic colours over photographs, mixing the spheres at will, and from this overlap one deduces the formal technique which makes the content of the *The Lit-Up Burrow*, in particular. This way the narrator's eyes glaze real decors (*There is the ordinary plaza with the post office columned building, and in front, the House of Savings [...] white down to the to the smallest detail, completely white [...] One day, however, a small change occurred [...] the whole plaza was overrun by a flood of red like blood and purple [...]*), just as the

dream absorbs his flawed identity like a sponge. The objects enter a personal oneiric museum, sometimes dense and sticky, white as milk („[...] white is a limit value [...] a colour of passing [...] of the rites through which the mutations of being occur.” – Chevalier, Gheerbrant, p. 75), sometimes blood red („Centripetal [...] red is the colour of the core fire of the human being and of the earth, the fire of the womb and the athanor of the alchemists, in which, in the rubedo phase, the digestion, baking, conception or regeneration of man or of the Work take place.” – Chevalier, Gheerbrant, p. 171) and, thus, he perceives them to be more elegant and exacerbated, fanciful at the cross-roads with the fantasies of others: for example, the eccentric woman in red who crosses the plaza. There is a repeated attempt to bring together the outlines between spheres, ultimately, he faces a continuous derealization. Hence the inability of the character, resembling the two-faced Ianus, to truly leave his mark on any of the worlds, apart from that of the writing: *A few interferences of this kind managed to shake my belief to the core in a well-done reality [...] showed me the true sleepwalking aspect of all our daily actions.*

Saving that, in a scenario of symbolic chronology, things exist first in the oneiric plane, thus, the garden in the castle courtyard (a sort of floral and fragrant Arcadia, where the senses jubilate) – which is originally dreamed of – will be found in reality as if in a mirror: *It was the garden that I had often seen in my dreams, and I was hardly surprised to find it so accurately similar.* This makes us think of the comparison with Plato’s ideas. The Eden-like, isolated, lonely space that takes him out of the gangrenous self and of the daily life in the Berck sanatorium (alias the city of the damned), immerses him into a fairy atmosphere, where flowers swallow the morbidity and cancel it for a moment. It is no wonder, therefore, that he can’t see the garden when his carriage passes by it, as this time he is caught in a circuit of tragic events, like the suffering and imminent death of Bobby, the talented teenager who had once sketched the portrait of the narrator: *I still have left from him the drawing he did of me, and, in a certain way, the memory of seeing again the “castle” on the day he died, such a nostalgic and full of sadness memory that made me never pass with my carriage through that village again.*

Therefore, the dream always finds its counterpoint in reality. The latter even takes possession of Hypnos himself in the slumber, wearing his face as a mask: *[...] my dream fitted like a thin and smooth skin over my real position and over my sleep at that moment [...] I am afraid that the sleep will engulf me so deeply that I will never come back.* While oneiric disarticulations border on surrealism à la Dali – for example the dog that eats carnations in

Adventures, or the three friends from the countryside „of “specificities” where people took on physical traits from their trade”, or that of their obsessions, evoked in *The Lit-Up Burrow*) – things don’t become tragic yet, the ipseity *au dehors* acquits itself gracefully. But once trauma establishes its headquarters at the centre of being, through narrative ipseity *au dedans* and memory or sharpness of physical pain, the nightmareheartily bites at alltheescapist constructs: *I returned to the life that I would live in until the next dream. Memories and present pain are suspended inside of me and I want to resist them, to not fall in their slumber, from which I may never return [...]. Now I am struggling in reality, screaming, begging to be awakened in another life.* Reality blends the paste which traced its present outline, and subsuming its dexterity and instruments to dreams for fading it in confusion and terrible abysses, it sinks the beacons to the last.

The difference between the dream in *Burrow* and the one in *Adventures* resides in the amount of morbidity which it tends to cancel. And even if it seems less in the case of *unrealities*, the ending testifies to the contrary: *Who will wake me up? It has always been like this, always.* Where the melancholic young man sees flowers that he envisions as a simple red scarf (*In such an accurate world, any initiative became superfluous [...]*), his emotional fulfillment, his love for Edda descends from reverie (*[...] other warm, beloved and secret intimacies occurred inside me, like a horrible inner leprosy.*), the mechanism of theretina seems to have been damaged and the character in *Adventures* is forced to live according to this mechanism delivered to him through the anamnesis of the narrator from the present, who is fighting the demons of material accuracy, ofinalienable contingencies: *[...] the world had its own common aspect and I found myself in the middle of it, like a flaw.*

The awakening sought after by the narrator only happens during sleep. Or, sometimes, in analogue spaces of the cinema, fair, or Panopticon type: *When I escaped [...] the tedious and dull vision of an uncoloured world, I would come across its theatrical, emphatic and obsolete aspect [...] life should have been lived falsely and ornamentally in a spectacular and decorative universe.* These represent an interstice between the person who is real and the one who is „real” within the absolute of intimate fictions; they entertain the illusion and amplify it by projecting oases of release: *Within an instant, there came such noise from the hall, that it seemed that the spectators, who had until then sat in silence and darkness, had done nothing but crowd in themselves howls and bellows, as some calm and harmless accumulators which explode.* They are

a metaphor of the unconscious/subconscious; thus, from inside the screen or from the psychedelic atmosphere of the fair, apparitions spring out, and they are fast swallowed, appropriated, assumed, lived: *I was living the episodes of the film with an extraordinary intensity, integrating myself within the plot like a genuine drama character.* He who gets lost in such spaces mimics his own (exterior) death and puts the world in between parentheses (*During the summer, I would go to watch the matinees early in the morning and come out in the evening when it was getting dark.*), assuming the life of „inhabiting an image” (Bachelard’s phrase). The sought freedom rivals with that of the town madwoman who has admirably created the synthesis between fiction and dream, becoming a character as bodacious as it was pathetically lost in a parallel world: *She alone among some individuals so rigid and filled with prejudices and conventions to the top of their heads, she alone had kept her freedom to scream and to dance on the street whenever she wanted to.* The narrator takes the backward road, from hyper-lucidity, which is sometimes equal with madness, to the fluctuant borders of identity out of which he never resents enough to remain a simple fair figure.

At the limits of normality, the fair gathers dregs and frustrations, as desolate it appears during the day, as fascinating – by that baroque-fantastic-surrealist and grotesque congestion which one also finds in the prose of André Pieyre de Mandiargues – it reveals itself during the night (*What seemed admirable in front of the barracks, facile and sometimes even pompous, here, in their backs, in full daylight, would relapse in a mean and uninterested familiarity [...]*), hence the idea of intertwining with the oneiric worlds and acceding to the groundwater of universal phantasms. On the stage, the spectacle adorns frocks and even death „borrowed [...] factual decors, full of nostalgia [...], whereas behind the curtain, the adolescent discovers frustrations and defeats, the spell is perceived as a „terrible melancholia of a petrified life”.

Blecher builds *Adventures* on the scheme of an oscillation between essence and appearance, which complicates the planes so much that not even its characters can distinguish them anymore. Here we have a succession of spaces for self-escaping, fixed points in the memory which define it in the order and in the sense of a secondary world, mediated by cinema. Appearance and artificiality, photographs and the pictures in the add gain their „vitality” due to the exacerbations of their ideal imperviousness from which the narrator would like to partake. This is due to a bivalent inability: that of changing the unchangeable and manifest haphazard, and that of resigning without a fight, for: „...where there is peril there is also a greater chance for

salvation.”(Buber, p. 82). The reactivity of the Blecherian characters lies in their vision towards the profoundly melancholic world, and, therefore, implosive, containing the substance of negation.

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