

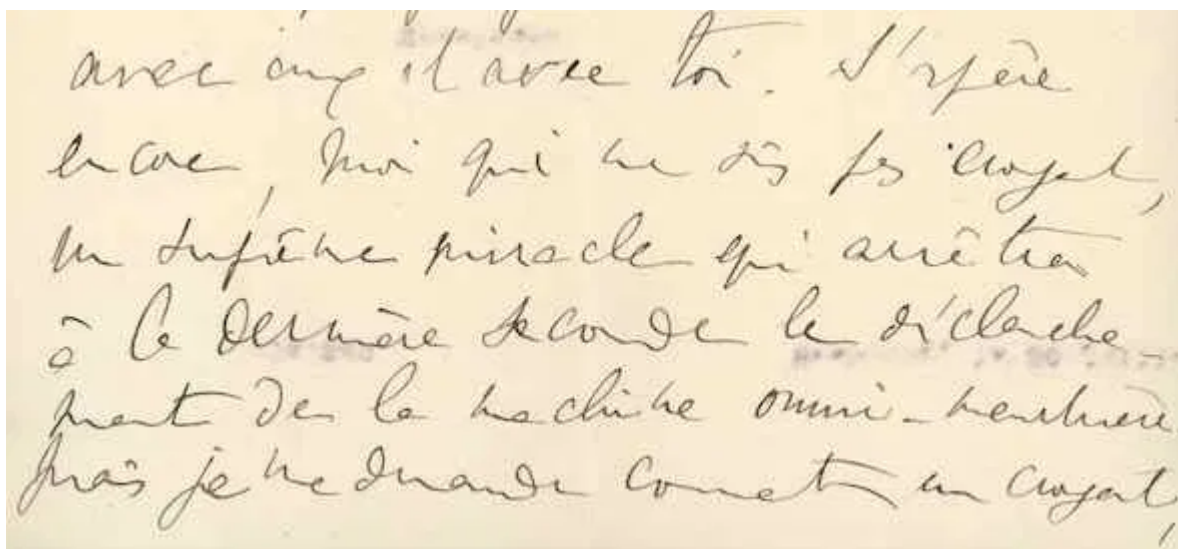
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Bartleby Politics: On Disavowal, Derangement, and Drugs

By Jake Nabasny.



As I lay in this bed, slightly dizzy with a minor hangover, I am reminded of **Marcel Proust** in his cork-lined room. He was always a sick child, but later in life his illness restricted him to his bed for all but a single hour of the night. He could only leave his room at that unique hour of the night when the late-night drunks were sleeping and the early-morning workers had not yet woken up. The air was moist and easy to breathe even though his illness was intensifying. Despite being so reclusive, Proust loved to throw parties *in absentia*. With his hour of freedom, he would visit the halls in which parties were thrown. Constantly feverish, he walked around in a gaudy coat with a fur-lined hood; Proust was an Eskimo in a desert. What better hero could there be to begin this meditation than one who experienced all kinds of displacements, dispersions, delays, derangements, and departures?

When many read Proust they see a plethora of anchors, like graveyards of old nautical vessels that have not moved in the past fifty years and probably will not move for another fifty. A history is built and links to the past are constantly made. One imagines the entirety of the Search to be consisting of traces and recollections. This could not be more wrong. Proust's brilliance lies precisely in his explication of the opposite of this interpretation. What connects Proust to his grandmother's boots is not remembrance or nostalgia, but delirium. The very proliferation of signs and the impossibility of an absolute reading (*viz.* an absolute origin) is what the

Search truly discovers. In other words, it is not the destination that the reader discovers at the end of the Search, but searching itself.

Proust introduces a new polarity, one that is usually ignored, but more often miscomprehended. Anchors and memory define one pole, while the other is designated by wild oceans and delirium. According to this framework, one can begin to understand state violence, the prohibition of drugs, Western epistemology, human rights, behavioral health clinics, and several other politically-charged topics. Proust provides a new revolutionary strategy by re-conceptualizing power structures. Following this line of thought may be *enlightening* for some, but for those to whom it speaks directly, it will be *intoxicating*. At this point we must depart from the Proust anecdote (which is also an antidote) and turn to a web of texts that contribute to a general theory of disavowal.



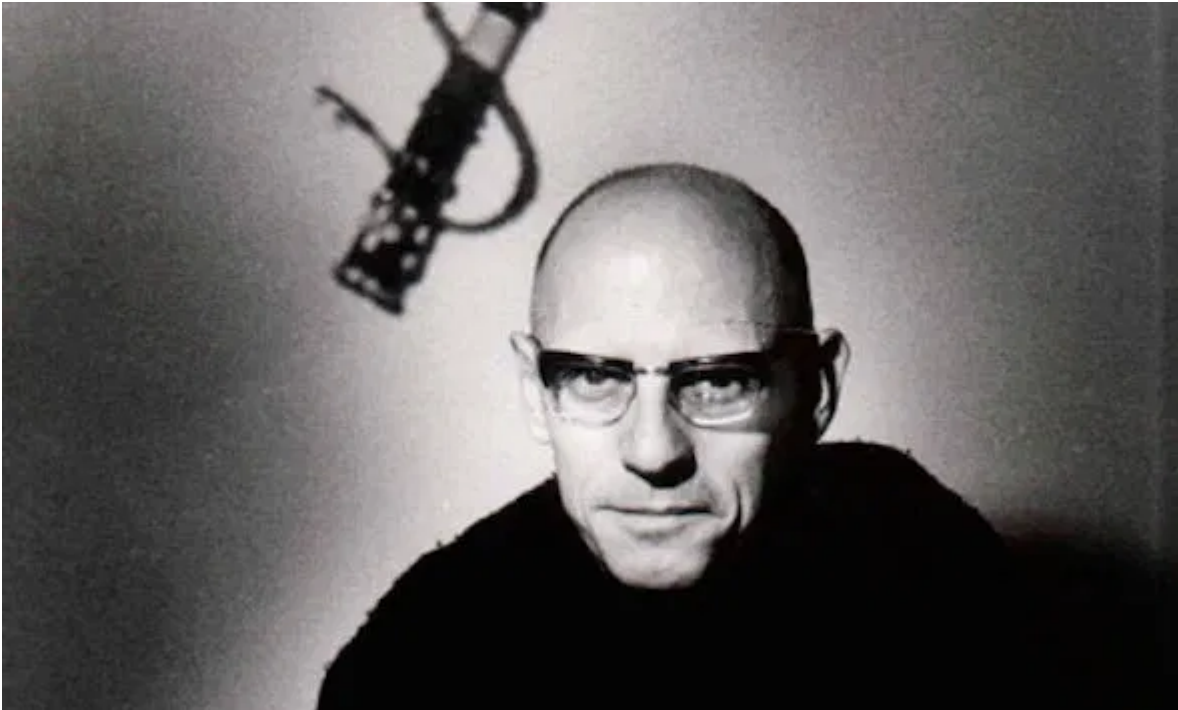
to derange all the senses

In the past, political theorists have been skeptical of the disposition for disavowal. It seemed to be an impossible praxis or an all-too-common one. Questions kept occurring that seemed to be paradoxes. Should I avow my disavowal? Can disavowal itself be disavowed? These perplexities are unavoidable, but certainly not invidious to a radical politics. It comes from confusion about what the disavowalist does.

The politics of disavowal is its own tradition, but it also takes after one. **Michel Foucault** was possibly the first to notice that the negation of a discourse is part of that discourse. In defining the methodological *rule of immanence* for discursive analysis, he admits that “between techniques of knowledge and strategies of power, there is no exteriority.” For example, the liberation of sexuality in the 1960s was a disguise for more pervasive techniques of control that inhibited sexuality. As soon as one believes that one has resisted a certain discourse, one is already trapped within the bind of another discourse:

One must not suppose that there exists a certain sphere of sexuality that would be the legitimate concern of a free and disinterested scientific inquiry were it not the object of mechanisms of prohibition brought to bear by the economic or ideological requirements of power.

Here one finds what Foucault means by “there is no exteriority.” One can never step outside of power relations; even the resistance to power must be structured by some form of knowledge-power. The avowal/disavowal framework often falls into this problem. By disavowing, one merely reacts to a given discourse with as much autonomy as a contrarian. However, this is not a radical disavowal. There exists a form of disavowal that does not fold back into avowal. Where weak disavowal affirms a certain *op-position*, radical disavowal is a shift in *dis-position*.



The shift that constitutes radical disavowal requires a departure from one's private subjectivity. One must renounce one's possession of oneself. This is accomplished by wandering away from all that is appropriate (*ap-propri-atus*) and autonomous (*autos-nomos*). The mistake that is made in weak disavowal is precisely the establishment of another self. This self is always created in front of a mirror with its negated reflection staring directly back at it. Radical disavowal smashes the mirror and demands to become other. It knows that power is dynamic and mobile, not static or concrete. If one could translate position, *op-position*, and *dis-position* into language, they would resemble the following utterances:

Avowal: I am for *x*.

Disavowal: I am against *x*.

Radical disavowal: I is another *x*.

What is at issue is how we resist things, whether it is the state, the police, patriarchy, ageism, etc. Is it possible to oppose a position without recreating the violent regime one seeks to escape? The radical disavowalist would answer in the affirmative. Of course, this is not the affirmation of the top over bottom, good over bad, masculine over feminine, etc. It is rather an alter-affirmation, a side-step, a call for pure horizontality. This formula of alter-affirmation comes from *l'enfant terrible* himself: **Arthur Rimbaud**.



Rimbaud begins with a simple premise: “*Je est un autre*” (“I is an Other” or “I is someone else”). Once, when citing this remark to a friend of mine, she mechanically corrected the grammar: *Je suis* (“I am”). However, Rimbaud’s improper conjugation is not the folly of a sixteen-year-old, but a means by which he tries to get us to think beyond the primordially of the subject. One cannot say “I am” because one does not immediately speak from the “I” position, but from *an-other* position. Rimbaud reprimands traditional conceptions of subjectivity: “It’s wrong to say I think: one should say I am thought.” But why should this be the case?

In a letter dated May 13, 1871, Rimbaud writes: “For I is someone else. Tough luck to the wood that becomes a violin...” Again, in a letter from the same month, he writes: “For I is someone else. If the brass awakes as horn, it can’t be to blame.” The theme here is that the thing only becomes what it is in the moment that it acts. The brass awakes as a horn because it is used as one. Likewise, I become an “I” for myself at the moment that I realize I have adopted a certain position. But this “I” does not precede my entanglement as a subject. On this view, I do not have an essence or form which grounds my identity, something that Rimbaud reiterates in his poem sequence *A Season in Hell*: “What was I in the century past? I only find myself today.” Rather than begin with the “I,” ego, or subject, Rimbaud presents us with a self which is always already other, what he calls the seer (*voyant*). The tendency to posit a centralized or unified ego has been the mistake of philosophers (whom he calls “old fools”) who have left us with the task of sweeping up “millions of skeletons.” Rimbaud contends that the egoist only succeeds in making his or her “soul into a monster.” In opposition to this tendency, Rimbaud

offers the following as a formula for becoming a seer: “a long, involved, and logical derangement of all the senses.”

This derangement of all the senses involves the consumption of substances in all their hallucinogenic varieties. Rimbaud believed that for a soul to be ripe with potential, it must experience all kinds of sorrow, madness, love, and joy. This is the only way to get at the true essence of something: not by approaching it from the position of an isolated, transcendent, or primordial ego, but by becoming that thing. I only know the other by becoming the other. The goal here is not to collect many experiences. (Who, after all, would be the collector?) Rather, Rimbaud asserts that it is simply the experience itself which is meaningful, even if we become bewildered and eventually lose our understanding of it.



In *A Season in Hell*, Rimbaud describes derangement as a kind of “elementary hallucination.” If I see a mosque instead of a factory or a playground where there is only industrial ruins, I must take these experiences to be phenomenologically valid, even when they are at odds with previous experiences. If there is no ego, then there is no internal rubric for which experiences pass as valid or not. The ego only functions as an anchor, which impoverishes the soul by delimiting proper experience through self-referential verification.

In Rimbaud’s view, each person has several other lives. This plurality of experience gives rise to a plurality of selves, none of which can lay claim to a privileged or sovereign position. Rimbaud describes how he has been able to have conversations with moments from a person’s *other* lives. This, he explains, is how he fell in love with a pig:

It seemed to me that everyone should have had several *other* lives as well. This gentleman doesn’t know what he’s doing; he’s an angel. That family is a litter of puppy dogs. With some men, I often talked out loud with a moment from one of their other lives—that’s how I happened to love a pig.

Despite Rimbaud’s love for the absurd, he is unwaveringly serious about the importance of the seer and the derangement required to become one. At one point, he uses the example of seeing with the eyes of a prisoner. Only by seeing as the prisoner had could Rimbaud be witness to his “glory and his rightness.”

Yet, becoming a seer is not simply a matter of running away or having empathy for someone else.

One must be divested of the notion that one could run away or “get lost” in order to find oneself. This idea can be found in everything from **Sean Penn**’s film *Into the Wild* to **James Joyce**’s self-exile. The idea of “getting lost to find oneself” establishes a teleology that is absent in Rimbaud’s formulation of “I is someone else.” Every occurrence of “getting lost” is indirectly related to a search for the self. The assumption here is that if I remove all heteronomous elements in my life, I will eventually be left with nothing other than my own autonomy, understood as *autos-nomos*, or law of the self. One is still left with a kernel of interiority, property (from the root *proprius*, meaning “pertaining to one’s self”), and presence in which the exterior other can be defined, excluded, and exploited. The subversive power of Rimbaud’s doctrine lies precisely in the undermining of autonomy itself as it pertains to the primordially of the self. When one imagines becoming the other, it is not in terms of a central “I” that tries on many different clothes. What one actually discovers is the lack of origin, or a non-originary origin in which the not-I vacillates between *it-self* and *its other*. Once the not-I has congealed into an I, once it begins to think, it opens the possibility of becoming other (i.e., of becoming thought). Therefore, “getting lost to find oneself” is commensurate with the “derangement of all the senses” only insofar as they both posit pauses, gaps, and displacements in the “self.” With this exception, the rest remains incompatible. While getting lost invokes a process that repeats “I, I, I, I, I...” for every encountered other, Rimbaud’s seer is in a continual process of becoming in the form of “not-I, I, not-I, I...” and so on, ad infinitum.

randise based Tin Hat Inc. For this under his own name, he has swapped itters for the much in demand jo of Greg Cohen on bass and ten on vibes, drums and percussion. a consistently intense drive his album's showcase for Burger's ard forays. coordination, pump organ, piano, f toy piano, celeste, glockenspiel, fermond organ, music boxes and ly named manophone. Burger use elements with a fine ear for ce, revealing an innate ability to with sound. The album's moods ally, although the overall flavour is tem European. At times romantic, Burger's songs are isons are distinguished by his music drama. t music is brooding and all this is plex, bearing the hallmarks of his But Cohen and Holliston are equal is project, driving Burger on to standing virtuosity. He can derive om the occasion, while elsewhere nothingness of touch, much illi as bandoneon player Cino r produced the album too, and the musical vision is evident in the ays to sonic detail. Adding a o overlay, toy piano or a music box ps things consistently interesting. i the characteristics of his more mentation to great effect, precisely p organ's wheeze or a Casio's tinny t and shade the music.

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reg Tate, founder, leader and s sprawlingly diverse Gotha- le. "Burnt Sugar is a territory bel these, a conservative hand a

engaging, the music itself. Formed in 1999 around the nucleus of Tate and Lawrence Burch Morris, this present Burnt Sugar line-up features no fewer than 18 musicians, including four guitarists, three drummers, piano and cello. In addition, there's trumpeter Lewis Flip Barnes, from Williams Parker O'Neill's Porch Go-UP, and a trombonist from Egerton D'I Muzicassik. The Rites also lists special guests Melvin Gibbs and Phil Cose, who between them boast an impressive CV ranging from Agnès B. Pargana to Miles Davis to The Rollins Band, DeLanté and Arts Lindsay. In their own estimation, Burnt Sugar are a "contemporary version of Miles Davis's *Bitches Brew* band" with myriad references to a common thread linking Eddy Haze, AR Kane, Sui Ra, Jimi Hendrix. The Rites is Burnt Sugar's third album, and its opaqueness makes it seem that they're going close to delivering on their genre-melting manifesto. Songs spring lithely from turn-of-glitches, disembodied voices coil around guitar and piano, blending videoscopically into a shifting mosaic of textures underpinned by a one-note double bass riff and larval drums. The subtitle, "Conductions inspired by Stravinsky's *Le Sacre Du Printemps*", refers to Burch Morris's system for directing orchestral improvisation. If the album falls short of the fury or bombastic highs of Stravinsky's *Rites of Spring*, it's a shame. Burnt Sugar deploy their farzinak-derived themes with a subtlety approaching near-exaggeration. Their quieter moments consist of colours and textures are continually engaging, self-haunting and surprising. But the ensemble have a tendency to resolve each of these passages into loose improv sections that recurrently fall into the same languid pace despite the Frigg-like helixes etched into them by Pete Cosey's guitar. This repeating pattern makes for an episodic, somewhat static album that's only really broken in the heavily Miles inspired closing 17 minute workout, where the conduction's textures and layers finally find a convincing place amid the improv. Right now, the album is caught between two imperatives: sprawl and incarceration. With its listless pace of

RY DAN WARBURTON
These four discs document the entirety of Alan Silva's 23 piece Celestial Communication Orchestra's two appearances on 24 and 27 May 2001 at the Uspool Festival in Pullyville, Switzerland. *Human Res.57* references the resolution passed by the US Congress in 1987 that designated jazz as a "highly valuable national American treasure." (celestial Silva interprets, therefore 228). The text of that resolution forms the basis of four of the 14 extended track pieces. *Measure Now* inscribes itself in the CCO's discography of epic recordings, from the Xenakis-like density of 1969's *Luna Surface* and the following year's *The Seasons* (on BYG Actual) through 1971's neglected masterpiece *My Country* to the sweaty groove of 1972's *Desert Mirage*. In addition to his conduction of the orchestra via gesture cues and hand gestures, Silva guides the music's direction with a minimum of composed passages such as the arching Messianic *Measure Now*. That he can harness the collective force of so many strong-willed individuals – half of these cats are band leaders in their own right – to create music of such heroic force and structural coherence is a testament to his theoretical rigour and charisma. And however dense things get, Silva always manages to make himself heard, screaming out the shades of rhythmic cells for the group to play like a crazed Indian guru. But when he's controlling the action from his synthesizer, plugging in raw patches that occasionally getting in the way of the other soloists, that quality is a rather mixed blessing. There are a few rough spots, but the overwhelming barrier sweep of the music and justifies Silva's decision to release both contents in the entirety. However, someone along the line ought to have taken the red pen to Matthew Goodheart's somewhat self-indulgent yet, for Silva, indispensably playful essay accompanying the set. It should have been up space for a brief synopsis of who's playing what where. With no fewer than seven saxophonists, three trumpeters,

Rimbaud well understood his place in history. He knew that he was not the first seer. In actuality, the first seer was his predecessor and fellow French poet **Charles Baudelaire**. Indeed, it was Baudelaire came closest to writing anything that could resemble a mantra of the seer. It can be found in a prose poem aptly titled “Be Drunk!” The first couple lines are as follows:

You have to be always drunk. That's all there is to it—it's the only way. So as not to feel the horrible burden of time that breaks your back and bends you to the earth, you have to be continually drunk. But on what? Wine, poetry or virtue, as you wish. But be drunk.

from drifts to drugs

It would be wrong to consider Rimbaud a proto-situationist. The “derangement of all the senses” is not a drift (*derive*), but a drug. The tales from Rimbaud's personal life make this clear enough: drinking absinthe, smoking hash, pissing on poets, jerking off into **Paul Verlaine's** milk, experimenting sexually with all kinds of partners, *playing the fool to the point of madness*. All of this is connected for Rimbaud. His love for big-breasted waitresses in rural taverns cannot be dissociated from his fascination with colorful children's hymnals. He took Baudelaire's mandate seriously: be drunk! But on what? On what should one become drunk? *Wine, poetry, or virtue, as you wish.*

While Baudelaire's list remains relatively short, Rimbaud found it necessary to expand the notion of drunkenness and, with it, the notion of *drug*. It was no longer important what mild deliriums could be accessed by getting closer to the gods. These Aristotelian fetishes eventually collapsed under the momentum of history and gave way to the atheistic-anarchistic impulses of the disavowalist. For the disavowalist, everything is a drug. Even the hangover and illness that comes after the use of a drug are, in their own ways, drugs. This is what **Thomas de Quincey** taught us in *Confessions of an English Opium-Eater*. In the same way, **Virginia Woolf** extolls illness in her unforgettable essay “On Being Ill.” Illness, like drug use, opens up a new space of possibility that disrupts life as it is currently lived. Woolf, who was chronically ill (or should we say chronically deranged?), attempts to transmute the values of the sober herd:

Yet it is not only a new language that we need, more primitive, more sensual, more obscene, but a new hierarchy of the passions; love must be deposed in favor of a temperature of 104; jealousy give place to the pangs of sciatica; sleeplessness play the part of villain, and the hero become a white liquid with a sweet taste—that mighty Prince with the moths' eyes and the feathered feet, one of whose names is Chloral.

The Prince, for Woolf, sometimes goes by the name Chloral, which was formerly used as a sedative. Of course, she is careful to note that this is only *one* of the Prince's names. Could he not also be called acid, adderal, or alcohol? Could the Prince have any name? If so, how is this name significant at all? If everything is a drug, can the notion “drug” still have meaning?



Jacques Derrida offers an answer by first noting the socially-charged meaning of the word “drug” itself. We consume drugs every day: nicotine, caffeine, rBGH, sunscreen, etc. However, a “drug” (in the sense of the “war on drugs”) is always already a drug that society has morally condemned. Nothing apart from this moral condemnation separates the chemicals in your morning orange juice from those found in heroin. Sometimes we tell stories about how some drugs are natural and others are not. “If it comes from the earth, it has to be good for you.” Yet, even the decision to label something “natural” is inscribed within a politico-juridical matrix which exists solely for distinguishing between the “natural” and the “conventional.” What we call a “drug,” against all presuppositions, is a non-scientific concept.

So, what is the function of this thing we call a “drug?” What does it mean to be *some-thing* that is also *every-thing*? A drug is always something that is taken in. Thus, a drug can only be situated within a setting that acts as the site of this “taking in,” “consuming,” “injecting.” Often times, the ground is the ideal or pure body: our body before it is contaminated by drugs. We can see this in every facet of life from the child who is not allowed too much sugar to the addict who needs to get “clean.” Thus, a drug is always a penetration of the self by the other. It is a disorientation or derangement of the self that is like wading into the unknown. *Terra incognita*. Derrida muses on how the “taking in” of drugs may always be operative, even in expression:

We will always have unclassified or unclassifiable supplements of drugs or narcotics. Basically everybody has his own, and I don’t just mean stuff that is patently comestible, smokable, or shootable. As you know, the introjection or incorporation of the other has so many other resources, stratagems, and detours...It can always invent new orifices, in addition to and beyond those, for example the mouth, which we think we naturally possess. Besides, orality does not open up only to receive, but also, as they say, to emit, and we should ask ourselves whether drug addiction consists simply and essentially in receiving and taking in, rather than in “expressing” and pushing outside, for example in a certain form of speaking or of singing, whether or not we drink what we “spit out.”

Disavowal is the recognition of the drug *as such*. The disavowalist goes to rehab to learn how to be a better addict. In the case of the red pill or the blue pill, the disavowalist washes down both with some molly water. But why is this political? What does drug use, no matter how revolutionary it is, have to do with the state, patriarchy, ageism, class warfare, etc.? The contention of this short discussion of radical disavowal is that the drug is the most basic unit of *an-archic* force—that is, its primary purpose is the creation of “other lives,” which undoubtedly obscure the possibility of ever having one authoritative life.

Contrary to radical disavowal, the state occupies itself with the production of numerous life-styles. These so-called life-styles are cultivated through techniques of self that firmly ground a person in sobriety. “For each life-style, its own culture!” This is what we learn from capitalism, from our history books, from **Tiqqun’s** *Theory of a Young-Girl*. This is not an introduction to the problems that everyone is already aware of; there is no need to regurgitate unless it is in order to derange your senses. The violence of sustaining a pure or ideal self, designated previously by *avowal*, is not lost on Derrida, either. Hinting at themes we have already discussed, Derrida explains what motivates the fear of drug use:

It is in the name of [the authenticity of a work that has been properly labored for, e.g., the creative productions of a poet] that drug addiction is condemned or deplored. This authenticity can be *appropriated*—either simultaneously (in confusion) or successively (in denial) to the values of natural or symbolic normality, of truth, of a real relation to true reality, of free and responsible subjectivity, of productivity, and so forth. And it *appropriates* such different values, makes them *proper* to itself the more so in that it is itself founded on the value of *properness* or *property*, and of the appropriation or reappropriation of self. It is the making proper of the proper itself, in as much as the proper is opposed to the heterogeneity of the im-proper, and to every mode of foreignness or alienation that might be recognize in someone’s resorting to drugs.

The passage rightly ends with a gesture towards the *im-proper*. If the state is proper, the drug is *im-proper*; if the self is proper, the other is *im-proper*. To move away from the proper (the “subject” in its most literal sense) is to move closer towards foreignness and alterity via the drug. The state’s primary concern is homogeneity, and, in response, the disavowalist proposes a defense of heterogeneity, of the other, of the drug. It is no surprise that tactics as diverse as Food Not Bombs, co-op urban gardens, window smashing, and violent insurrection can be grouped under the notion of the “drug.” In this way, the politics of disavowal is as much about becoming a drug addict as it is about recognizing how the violent pressures of the state promote and reinforce the stabilizing nature of sobriety across all aspects of everyday life.

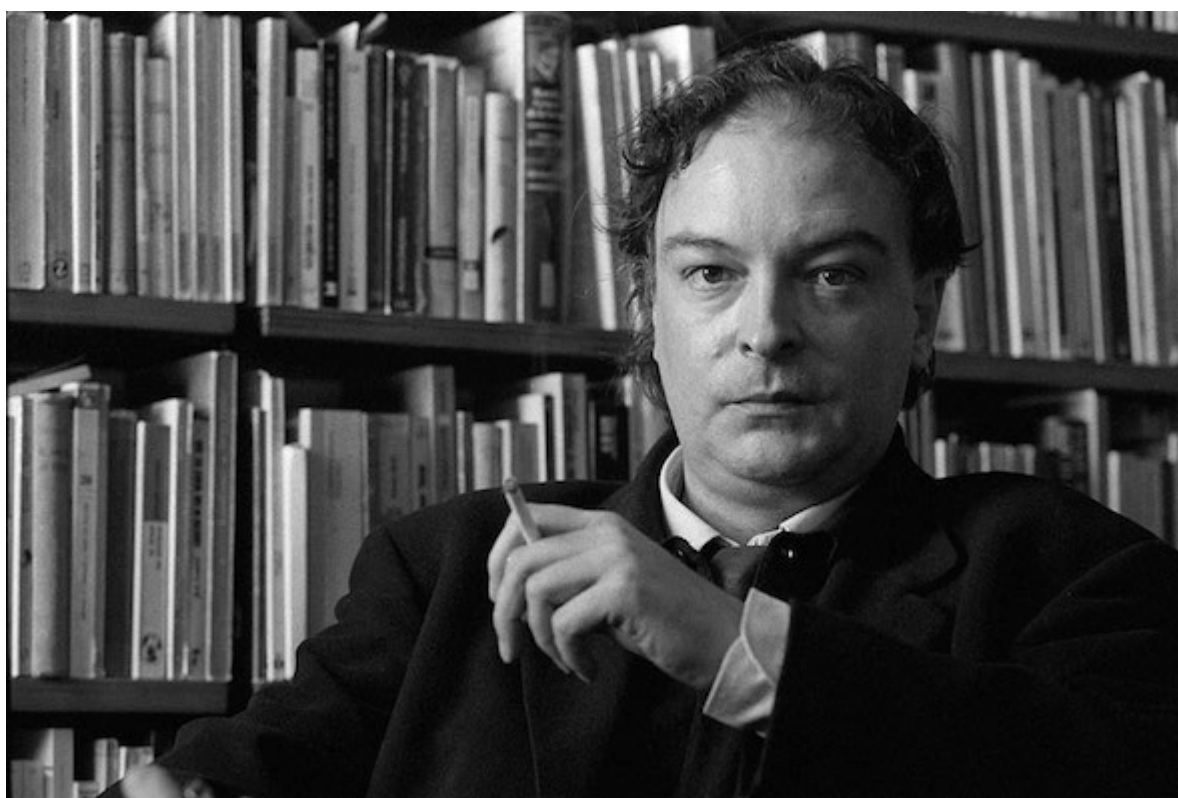


The state wants to restrict, suppress, and codify disavowal. Only certain disavowals could be enacted and they usually require a statement of intent and two weeks’ notice. Every disavowal must correlate to its opposite. Alcohol does not contribute to the interests of the state, so it must be a *controlled* substance which falls under tax and surveillance. Alcoholics Anonymous teaches amateur disavowalists to use more responsible forms of derangement like caffeine and nicotine so they can still make it to work. Caffeine intoxication as disavowal correlates to its productive avowal in the efficiency of the worker. As long as you are contributing to various industrial complexes (prison, medical, military, etc.), the state does not care if you are deranged or not.

But as soon as you drift outside of these requirements, you become a criminal or, even worse, an addict. Citizens spend their lives either building up the state or being controlled by it. Disavowal is a tool for escaping and searching for new forms of social organization. Disavowalists renounce the weak drugs of the state, which are cut with oppression and violence. The Disney world derangements of John Smith are given up for a rusty boat and the possibility of living other-wise.

à la recherche de Bartleby

I began this short discussion of the politics of disavowal with a comment about Proust. He may not be the best example of a disavowalist, but his life was not just a search for the truth of the past. Proust returned continually to his deliriums, fighting off every anchor that weighed him down. Likewise, the disavowalist favors the pole of derangement, compassion, and drug over and against the pole maintained by the state and its program of sobriety. More aptly, the politics of disavowal might name the figure of **Herman Melville's** Bartleby the Scrivener as its spokesperson. It is precisely the difference between weak and radical disavowal that is illuminated when one utters: "I would prefer not to."



Many have taken and mistaken Bartleby; he has been put to use in more campaigns than any other literary anti-hero in the past two hundred years. In *Bartleby & Co.*, **Enrique Vila-Matas** traces the pathology of what he terms "Bartleby syndrome," present long before its appearance in Melville's story. By outlining the "literature of the No," Vila-Matas catalogs writers who have quit writing or never even wrote a single word. *Bartleby & Co.* vacillates between the avowal of writing and its disavowal, which is characterized by prolonged silence. Through an archeology of silence, Vila-Matas hopes to find the path to the "writing of the future." However, his pursuit never points to a revolution in literature because it remains chained to contemporary standards by establishing a negative identity through weak disavowal ("I am not x"), not a radical one.

To affirm a Bartleby politics of disavowal, one must break entirely with the defeatist dualities of everyday life. While Vila-Matas recognizes the radical potential of writers like Rimbaud and de Quincey, his notion of refusal remains conceptually limited. His hallucinatory reading of **Socrates** as the "illustrious predecessor" of Rimbaud is mildly imaginative, but it is only a feeble derangement that does not lead to any discoveries in the Rimbaudian seer sense of "derangement." The Socratic antipathy toward writing implies a dedication to truth and juridical responsibility that can only be actualized in the vocal confessions of a self-same subject. In contrast, Rimbaud's

search for other lives euphorically embraces the dishonesty of writing since there is no originary subject to which one's writing ought to be faithful.

Most of all, Vila-Matas's premature congratulations for being the first to "demythologize" Rimbaud's silence demonstrates a complete misunderstanding of Rimbaudian derangement. Rimbaud's departure from writing at the age of nineteen was not, as it is argued by Vila-Matas, an avowal of silence. Rather, it is a radical disavowal of the literary drug as such. Even while he was writing, Rimbaud was already engaging with silence: "I turned silences and nights into words. What was unutterable, I wrote down." It appears to many interpreters that Rimbaud is giving up on writing in his final works. Vila-Matas notes that Rimbaud's call to be "absolutely modern" signaled a utilitarian turn in the young poet's thinking. Specifically, Rimbaud chastises his childhood imagination in *A Season in Hell*: "I used to believe in every kind of magic." However, less than eight years later in 1881, he would write from Aden to his family about his continued interest in magic:

I would like to learn about the best technical instruments made in France (or abroad) used in the following disciplines: mathematics, optics, astronomy, electrical engineering, meteorology, pneumatics, mechanics, hydraulics, and mineralogy. [...] I also require catalogues devoted to novelties, pyrotechnics, magic, mechanical models and construction summaries, etc.

Rimbaud never renounced magic. His adieu to poetry, foreshadowed implicitly in *A Season in Hell* and *Illuminations*, was merely a horizontal maneuver; he was seeking a new drug, a new disavowal. He left behind his alchemy of the word in search of new alchemies that were capable of building entire civilizations out of sand. This lateral move constituted one of Rimbaud's many radical disavowals. For Vila-Matas, however, one either writes or remains silent. One is reduced to the dynamic of avowal and (weak) disavowal. Such a reading of Rimbaud fails to acknowledge the genetic condition of silence, which is itself a kind of writing or, as Derrida would say, *arche-writing*.

Arche-writing presents the possibility of writing *otherwise*, of establishing a milieu of writing outside of contemporary standards; it also delimits the current divisionary relationship between writing and silence. In this sense, *arche-writing* is the foundation which allows for the drug or *pharmakon* to transmute the self into someone else. Vila-Matas exhibits a confusion about the structure of the drug experience when he claims that opium was de Quincey's way of saying No. Opium cannot be properly categorized as an affirmation or negation. It rather initiates a radical disavowal that completely realigns the current parameters of Yes and No.



Arche-writing is to literature as radical disavowal is to politics. Bartleby's formula has been appropriated by many writers and philosophers, but few fathom the delicate distinction it draws. In Bartleby, one does not find a resistance to the current political order, but a becoming other that threatens the legitimacy of that very order. Recently, **Slavoj Žižek** has linked this aspect of Bartleby to the terrorist silence practiced by protesters who do not seek negotiations. He invokes Bartleby in following manner:

Bartleby says, "I would prefer not to" and not "I don't prefer (or care) to do it" [...], Bartleby does not negate the predicate, he rather *affirms a non-predicate*: what he says is not that he *doesn't want to do it*; he says that *he prefers (wants) not to do it*. This is how we pass from the politics of "resistance," parasitical upon what it negates, to a politics which opens up a new space outside the hegemonic position *and* its negation.

While one must hesitate at equating derangement with affirming a non-predicate, Žižek's treatment of Bartleby adequately places any Bartleby politics outside of the "hegemonic position *and* its negation." This outside is only accessible through radical disavowal.

The potential for radical disavowal is subterranean: it is there, but not yet present. Its actualization resides in a reorientation of our bodies to the state. A disavowalist politic must no longer be about positioning our-self to the state or reclaiming a self beyond the state, but of opening the self to the radically other in the form of the drug. This, perhaps, is the only *prescription* of disavowalist politics, but it is also one that must be dosed. Too much of any drug becomes counter-revolutionary. The overused drug takes the place of a new self, rather than a foreign *other*. There is nothing more authoritarian than the disavowalist that develops a personal, subjective preference for a certain drug. After all, this is precisely how the state defends its claim to sobriety as what is proper to the "clean bodies" of its citizens. Never be afraid, as Derrida says, to "invent new orifices!"

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Jake Nabsny has just finished an MA in philosophy. While plotting his next pursuit, he is reading and thinking about deconstruction, desiring-machines, alchemy, and the history of eugenics. He is currently writing a book on Charles Bukowski's notion of magic. You can find more of his musings and manifestos at [his blog](#).

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