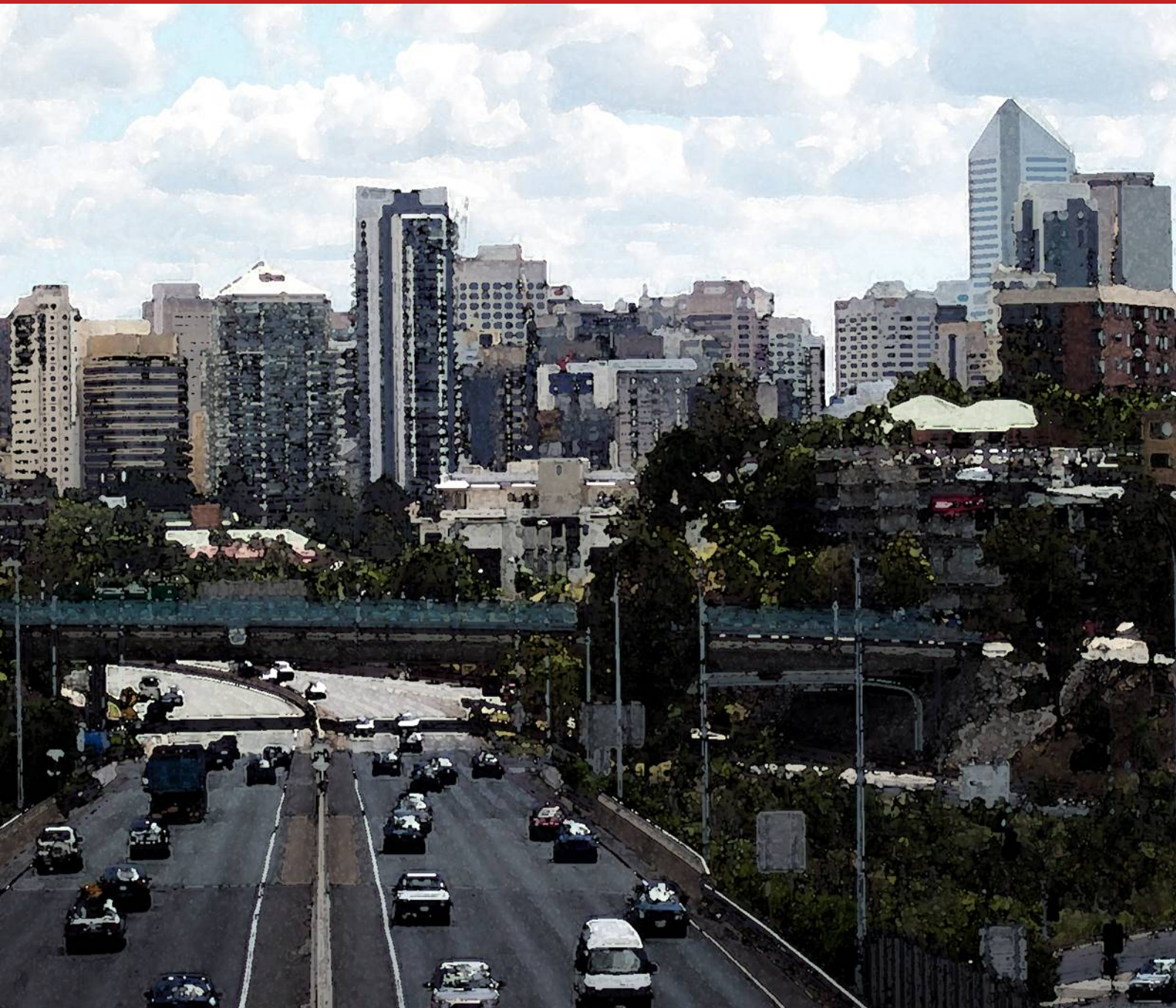


# **The Production of Knowledge: A myth of infantile sexuality**

**Stephen Horton**



**Urban Research Program**

**Research Paper 21  
November 2008**



**The Production of Knowledge:  
A myth of infantile sexuality**

Stephen Horton

Urban Research Program  
Research Paper 21  
November 2008

**The Urban Research Program acknowledges the generous support provided by *Brisbane City Council* in the production of the Urban Research Program publication series.**

ISBN 978-1-921291-47-0

© Stephen Horton  
Urban Research Program  
Griffith University  
Brisbane, QLD 4111  
[www.griffith.edu.au/urp](http://www.griffith.edu.au/urp)

First released November 2008  
Reproduced with minor edits March 2009.

Copyright protects this material. Except as permitted by the Copyright Act, reproduction by any means (photocopying, electronic, mechanical, recording or otherwise), making available online, electronic transmission or other publication of this material is prohibited without the prior written permission of the Urban Research Program.

## **About the Urban Research Program**

The Urban Research Program (URP) was established in 2003 as strategic research and community engagement initiative of Griffith University. The strategic foci of the Urban Research Program are research and advocacy in an urban regional context.

The Urban Research Program seeks to improve understanding of, and develop innovative responses to Australia's urban challenges and opportunities by conducting and disseminating research, advocating new policy directions, and by providing training assistance. We aim to make the results of our research and advocacy work available as freely and widely as possible.

## **Urban Research Program publication series**

URP *Issues Papers* tackle current problems and challenges, and advocate potential new directions in Australian urban policy. URP *Research Papers* impart findings and conclusions from our research program.

The *Issues Papers* and *Research Papers* are edited by Jago Dodson, Research Fellow in the Urban Research Program. Email: [j.dodson@griffith.edu.au](mailto:j.dodson@griffith.edu.au).

All URP publications and can be downloaded from our website free of charge:

**[www.griffith.edu.au/urp](http://www.griffith.edu.au/urp)**

Hard copies are available for purchase. Contact via email, [urp@griffith.edu.au](mailto:urp@griffith.edu.au).

## **About the Author**

Dr. Stephen Horton is an Adjunct Research Fellow in the Urban Research Program, Griffith University.

Email: [s.horton@griffith.edu.au](mailto:s.horton@griffith.edu.au)



## Table of Contents

Qualification .....	1
Myth .....	1
Recitation .....	2
Interpretation .....	6
Endnotes .....	11



## Qualification

I am not a professional anthropologist yet I will interpret not only myth but a new variety of myth – modern, urban myth. My credentials are: I think myth neither innocent nor ignorant fiction; I understand participatory observation to be a necessary condition of ‘the study of man’; and I have read in Evans-Pritchard, Malinowski, Mauss and, most significantly, Claude Levi-Strauss (*The Savage Mind*<sup>1</sup> and *The Raw and the Cooked*<sup>2</sup>). This would be insufficient were the interpretation not buttressed by the analyses of Walter Benjamin and Sigmund Freud. Of the latter Wittgenstein remarked: “There is an inducement to say ‘Yes, of course, it must be like that. A powerful mythology.’”<sup>3</sup>

## Myth

This essay treats of a discourse of contemporary mental labour (of which academic production is an increasingly modest and undistinguished part) that speaks of ‘the knowledge economy’ and, even, ‘the knowledge city’. Mental labour, unlike physical labour that manifestly changes the material world, is, by nature, hidden from vulgar eyes and ripe for idealist interpretation.

Origin of false consciousness: ‘Division of labour becomes truly such only from the moment when a division of material and mental labour appears ... From this moment onward, consciousness *can* really flatter itself that it is something other than consciousness of existing practice, that it *really* represents something without representing something real.’<sup>4</sup>

Claude Levi Strauss is indifferent to consciousness. In the *Introduction to a Science of Mythology* he declares: “I therefore claim to show, not how men think in myths, but how myths operate in men’s minds without them being aware of the fact.”<sup>5</sup> In mythic operation discourse ‘thinks’ but not as consciousness. It ponders not in the meaningful ideas of the ego but in an *allegory* of *represented practice*. In the language of things, as in dream, a cigar is never a cigar. It is, unknowingly, a fishy vision (see gar); an authoritarian revolution; or, even, a phallic signifier. Levi-Strauss famously invokes the image of a bricoleur: a handyman condemned to construct ever-provisional solutions with things-at-hand. His English name is Heath Robinson. His machinations have no end. His construction is never complete; a meaningful goal is never realised. Rather, endlessly, step by step, relational contrasts are rudely articulated: adult and child, up and down, culture and nature, cause and effect, male and female, the raw and the cooked, death and desire. The ever-provisional, Heath Robinson nature of synchronicity betrays its motive. Inadequate, it is always already in need of further elaboration. Driven by failure its obsessive ambition knows no boundary. Modern science may be satisfied to investigate narrow fields of ‘physics’, ‘chemistry’ and ‘psychology’, but mythic discourse seeks to account for the *relation* of *everything* with *everything*. As one difference is articulated with another (A:B :: C:D) a synchronous structure emerges in a spreading, ramshackle discourse of virtual or pictured ‘thing relationships’. In vain! The difference left unarticulated, the increment of (in)significance, the gap in the picture, traces through the structure. The part leftover represents the whole in its insufficiency. It is the medium of diachronic truth: the timely significance of absence. Such discourse is driven beyond failure, beyond anger, beyond impotence even, to Thanatos. There, unfinished, but almost certainly with relief – O Death old captain it is time! – it is extinguished. The golden thread articulated in the ramshackle structure of myth has neither end nor meaning. It is an obsession – the passion of lack. Its Freudian name is death drive.

*The Raw and the Cooked* picks up the trail of interpretation in a ‘key’ text. The text is of no particular quality - “the following is one of the many myths told by the Bororo Indians.”<sup>6</sup> Mythic structure having no end is indifferent to beginning. Its neurotic discourse, forever turning back on itself, may be traced from any point. The bricolage of *The Raw and the Cooked* articulates 187 individual myths ranging from M<sub>1</sub>Bororo (The macaws and their nest – the discourse of “the sort

of boy who, as we say, ‘clings to his mother’s apron strings’<sup>7</sup>) to M<sub>187</sub> Amazonia (The visit to the sky – “which explains the origin of the use of poison”<sup>8</sup>). The following interpretation also makes use of a number of mythic texts, notably, *Capital*<sup>9</sup> (a discourse of value), *Leonardo Da Vinci: a memory of his childhood*<sup>10</sup> (a Freudian interpretation of the renaissance scientist-artist) and *Les Fleurs du Mal*<sup>11</sup> (a poetic explication of urban modernity). The key myth is chosen from none of these. It is, rather, taken from the writing of “one of the world’s leading public intellectuals on economic competitiveness, demographic trends, and cultural and technological innovation.”<sup>12</sup> Richard Florida’s inspired vision “*The Rise of the Creative Class: And How It’s Transforming Work, Leisure, Community and Everyday Life*<sup>13</sup> foresees “...a golden age of rising productivity and living standards”.<sup>14</sup> In the agora of this gilded future a figure from a bygone age is materialised. Hunter or prey, we know not. He looks about:

*Out on the street, this time-traveller would see different ethnic groups in greater numbers than ever he could have imagined – Asian, Indian, and Latin-Americans and others – all mingling in ways he found strange and perhaps inappropriate. There would be mixed-race couples, and same-sex couples carrying the upbeat-sounding moniker “gay.” While some of these people would be acting in familiar ways – a woman shopping while pushing a stroller, an office worker having lunch at a counter – others, such as grown men clad in form-fitting gear whizzing by on high-tech bicycles, or women on new roller skates with their torsos covered only by “brassieres” – would appear engaged in alien activities.*<sup>15</sup>

## Recitation

Following the Bororo Song, *The Raw and the Cooked* breaks into recitative voice to trace, in patterns of settlement, the (matrilinal) structure of Bororo society. The lineage of the emergent age is commonly traced in virtual technology and novel forms of mental labour. This mode of production has been variously labelled ‘post-industrialism’, ‘informational capitalism’, ‘the knowledge economy’ and ‘post-modern, globalisation’. Inaugurated in 1989 under the directorship of the seer of double helix DNA, James D. Watson, the human genome project (HGP) is an early, and iconic, form of contemporary ‘knowledge production’. The U.S. Department of Energy, the initiating co-ordinator, lists 6 project imperatives.<sup>16</sup> The first two define a quantitative dimension:

- *identify* all the approximately 20,000-25,000 genes in human DNA
- *determine* the sequences of the 3 billion chemical base pairs that make up human DNA

Production at the virtually mythic scale of the HGP required the industry of a global labour force, in networked form, working day and night for thirteen years. The representation, in the language of science, of the “**Sequence ... 1.** The fact of following after or succeeding”<sup>17</sup>, that is the logical time of every genetic significance of human life, spelled out in 3 billion dualities, finds expression in a vast aggregate of data beyond the comprehension of the human individual. The effect of this surfeit of information is not in the classic world of science where a naked man runs through the streets proclaiming “Eureka” or “*I* have it”. Hyper-modern knowledge, it appears, is properly represented as something other than egocentric intelligence. In the dawn of modernity Samuel Johnson proposes a bi-polar knowledge. “Knowledge is of two kinds. We know a subject ourselves, or we know where we can find information on it.”<sup>18</sup> An internal synthesis bearing on the subjectivity of the individual is distinguished from a geography of information – an instrumental knowledge about a now once-removed knowledge. For Manuel Castells: “knowledge and information are critical elements in all modes of production ... what is specific

to the informational mode of development is the action of knowledge upon knowledge itself as the main source of productivity”.<sup>19</sup>

The Department of Energy (DoE) requires its project:

- *store* this information in databases

The iconic database of Dr. Johnson, the dictionary, is, in its contemporary form of the *Oxford English Dictionary*, an array of over 200,000 word entries. Attached to each signifier are a number of alternate signifieds. A random test of the compact edition of the OED shows the word ‘slay’ to have 84 centimetres of attachments.<sup>20</sup> In base data meaning is entangled in a multidimensional weave of countless strands of information. The shaping of this ambiguous massif of abstract data into useful form is, in practice if not theory, beyond the power of the knowing human. The testing of variance between numerical data to expose significant associations, for example, is a readily conceived project. It is not, for the individual, readily applied to a 3 billion-entry database. There is, simply, not enough time. The processing of the mythic quantity of information stored in the database into knowledge, that is the production of a geography of information, requires not the qualitative extension of human mental capacity but its quantitative development. The life blood of information-based knowledge production is not new thought but improved performance.

In previous age stone, bronze and iron tools augment the physical capacity of humans to transform the natural world. The contemporary ‘computer age’ has at its disposal embodied binary logic (0/1) at inhuman, that is electric, levels of energy. The computer makes possible the rapid, accurate scan of base data. The form of the scan, the program of a particular search, is materialised in logical abstraction. These virtual instruments of knowledge production are the subject of the third dimensional imperative of the Human Genome Project:

- *improve* tools for data analysis.

Like the loom and the lathe before it, the computerised tool requires the service of a trained human. Peter Drucker, the management analyst who first distinguished the modern ‘knowledge-worker’, recalls the classic judgement of skilled labour. “Knowledge in application is ... highly specialised ... Socrates some 2500 years ago, refused to accept it as knowledge and considered it mere techné, that is, mere skill.”<sup>21</sup> The organisation of hyper-modern mental techné betrays its narrow, fragmentary nature. “That the knowledge in the knowledge society has to be highly specialised to be productive implies two new requirements: 1. knowledge workers work in teams; and 2. knowledge workers have to have access to an organisation which, in most cases, means that knowledge workers have to be employees of an organisation.”<sup>22</sup> The foundational form of industrial capitalism, the mass organisation of fragmented work, is reproduced in knowledge-based production. The individual, creative genius struck by a bolt of inspiration is out-moded. Announcing the discovery of a commercial cervical cancer vaccine, its patron declared it to be: “the result of a 25-year effort ... Over 2000 scientists were involved”.<sup>23</sup> In so far as knowledge workers are an organised mass of employees producing for the market their mode of production is familiar: “the new techno-economic system can adequately be characterised as *informational capitalism*.”<sup>24</sup>

The fourth HGP imperative confirms, with human absence, the importance of capitalist property. Director Watson objected to vesting property rights in genetic material. In 1992 he was, patently, forced from his position. The DoE was determined to:

- *transfer* related technologies to the private sector

*The medium is the message*

For the ‘prophet of the electronic age’ “the effects of technology do not occur at the level of opinions or concepts, but alter sense ratios and patterns of perception, steadily and without resistance.”<sup>25</sup> The technology of the assembly line, a work order of sequential places, materialises the tick of time. In modern production linear time is expressed in spatial extension. The progressive steps of production, conceived as time dependent, are stilled in space and can now be worked on simultaneously. Time now no longer passes: fragmented production happens all at once. The base product of mass industrialism is time stilled or frozen in contemporaneity. In the factory Ford declares: “History is bunk.”

Unknowingly, he finds common cause with Marx. Recalling classic Aristotle, and ancient (slave-based) commodity production, Marx reminds himself: “There can be no exchange without equality, and no equality without commensurability.”<sup>26</sup> The human experience of value-in-use varies by commodity and consumer. Use value is an incorrigible egocentric variant. In its place Marx proposes a *representation* of the *activity-of-labour*. “The value of a commodity *represents* human labour pure and simple, *the expenditure of human labour in general*.”<sup>27</sup> A representation of generalized labour or labour-expenditure-as-such, exchange value is conceptually prior to any concrete work of production. In this time-space: “Not an atom of matter enters into the objectivity of commodities as values; in this it is the direct opposite of the coarsely sensuous objectivity of commodities as physical objects.”<sup>28</sup> The metric of exchange is a virtual reality. Of what? “As exchange values, all commodities are merely definite quantities of *congealed labour-time*.”<sup>29</sup>

“If commodities could speak they would say this: our use-value may interest men, but it does not belong to us as objects. What does belong to us as objects, however, is our value. Our own intercourse as commodities proves it. We relate to each other merely as exchange-values.”<sup>30</sup> As exchange values commodities relate to each other simply, by the *quantity* of frozen time embodied in each other. The vital medium of the social market is one-dimensional, time-at-a-standstill. Called value, it allows for commensurable counting. “And so no one can buy or sell, unless he has the mark, that is, the name of the beast, or *the number* of its name”.<sup>31</sup>

Hyper-modern technology increasingly lacks sensuous material extension. An abstract realm of virtual raw material (the database) and virtual instruments of production (the encoded algorithm) it is in its non-dimensionality increasingly proof against the classic friction of distance. The electric technology of information materialises abstract production in a rapidity of communication that, absent the frictional separation of space, abolishes temporal specificity. Information production is, fundamentally, a realm of *non-dimensional now*. “Today, after more than a century of electric technology, we have extended our central nervous system itself in a global embrace, *abolishing both space and time* as far as our planet is concerned.”<sup>32</sup>

Socialised production organised in null place and shared contemporaneity is indifferent to day and to night, to winter forest and summer beach, to meal time or to crying time. It is a virtual world of no-thing frozen in the always already 24/7 of now. Industrial production, in the assembly line and the endless repetitions of the ‘factory hand’, is frozen in time but distributed in place(s). Now, however, each productive place, attended by virtual mental labour, is exchangeable, in frictionless space, with any and all others. If industrial capitalism fixes time to

the profit of mass fabrication, informational capitalism dissolves place to the ends of mass exchange. Before contemporary production and consumption is conjured a 24/7 global market of super choice.

Let us therefore, in company with owner of money and the owner of labour-power, leave this noisy sphere, where everything takes place on the surface and in full view of everyone, and follow them into the hidden abodes of production, on whose threshold there hangs the notice 'No admittance except on business'.<sup>33</sup>

The features of industrial labour are inherited in hyper-modern labour. Massed labour-power fragmented by specialised technique is constituted in the arrested time of contemporaneity. Classic industrialised labour manifests such arrest - a dog straining on a leash - in repetitious simultaneity. The trained, 'semi-skilled' worker symptomatically performs the same action again and again as if time cannot move forward. In hyper-modern production the neurotic symptom is refined and displaced. It now occurs in the computer – the medium *par excellence* of repetition. Its timely abolition of space revolutionizes the boredom of industrial work. No longer trapped in a single place of repetition, labour-power is subject to the singular repetition of space. The electric abolition of time-separated-place constitutes in the subject what McLuhan terms 'implosion'. "The stepping up of speed from the mechanical to the instant electrical form reverses explosion to implosion."<sup>34</sup> Mental labour-power is subjected to a global flood of stimuli beyond any human capacity, altering sense ratios and patterns of perception.

Freud contends: "For a living organism, protection against stimuli is an almost more important function than the reception of stimuli".<sup>35</sup> The poet Valery concurs: "The impressions and sense perceptions of man actually belong in the category of surprises; they are evidence of an insufficiency of man."<sup>36</sup> The dialectic of such insufficiency is: "Recollection ... an elemental phenomenon which aims at *giving us time* for organising the reception of stimuli we initially lacked."<sup>37</sup> For Freud time-giving recollection is manifest in the individual in dream and in society in myth, legend and fairytale. All recall foundational anxiety but as antithesis – in mirror-image form. In short, as wishful resolution (and they all lived happily ever-after). In this perspective the contemporary desire for 'authenticity of place' and 'conservation of history' is symptomatic of a (technologically-induced) absence of space and time.

The final dimension of the Human Genome Project is concern.

- *address* the ethical, legal, and social issues (ELSI) that may arise from the project.

The object of HPG anxiety is the structure of social interest in industrial knowledge production – in brief, its property relations. The established ethical, legal and socio-political framework of modernity, that emerged and was established largely in the last three centuries, is called into question. This, too, is an historic symptom:

At a certain stage of development, the material productive forces of society come into conflict with the existing relations of production ... Then begins an era of social revolution. The changes in the economic foundation lead sooner or later to the transformation of the whole immense superstructure.<sup>38</sup>

## Interpretation

Floridian myth dreams the social foundation of knowledge-based production.

*Out on the street, this time-traveller would see different ethnic groups in greater numbers than ever he could have imagined ... all mingling in ways he found strange and perhaps inappropriate.*

The gaze of the time traveller is confronted by a sea of “**Ethnic ... 1.** Pertaining to nations not Christian or Jewish”<sup>39</sup> difference, articulated in strange and inappropriate ways. The primal scene is, not unusually, conjured in obscene multiplicity. Not that mirrored narrative notices: *There would be mixed-race couples, and same-sex couples carrying the upbeat-sounding moniker “gay”*. Interpretation, a production in language, cannot but be struck by the textual ambiguity of “gay”. For Freud equivocation is a knot of pacifying ‘conscious’ narrative and insurgent ‘unconscious’ discourse.

Gay – “The ulterior etymology is disputed; the view of Diez, that the word is ... gáhi swift, headlong ... is now generally abandoned. An etymon more satisfactory ... is OHG wáhi pretty.”<sup>40</sup> The physiognomy of ‘swift’ is obscured under a veil. The frenzy of strange and inappropriate mingling is soothingly portrayed as pretty coupling.

*... some of these people would be acting in familiar ways – a woman shopping while pushing a stroller, an office worker having lunch at a counter ...*

Comforting images of ‘normal’ reproduction (woman with child, buying) and production (office worker at rest) appear. They however quickly fade into the background in the face of:

*... others, such as grown men clad in form-fitting gear whizzing by on high-tech bicycles, or women on new roller skates with their torsos covered only by “brassieres” ... engaged in alien activities.*

A stream of *grown* male forms (*whizzing*) and women (*new*), encased in *brassieres*, are seen to be engaged in *alien* “... of or belonging to another person or place”<sup>41</sup> activities. On this ‘other’ stage, language is heard differently. Here *whizzing* sounds as slang: “**W** - whiz – verb - to urinate.”<sup>42</sup> The conjured hieroglyph, an ejaculating penis, is captioned ‘grown(up) man-form’. Discursive place, dissembling somewhat, pictures a potent erection; and a “**Brassiere** – [Fr., orig, (17c) bodice, now chiefly pl. ‘leading strings (of infants)’.] A woman’s undergarment worn to support the breasts.”<sup>43</sup> In the stays of a bodice, twin female breasts are pressed into proud bust: the iconic image of ur-matron. Yet familiar ‘Mother’ is captioned woman (new)? Its alien nature lies in its activity. It is coupled with adjacent image. The hieroglyph is a paired image. Penis has matron. In multi-dimensional desire potent male is pictured fused with nursing woman.

*The Rise of the Creative Class* finds it “... amazing ... [m]any people ... seem to think, both in the academe and in the general public ... there is a direct connection between being gay ... That is not what we are saying ... It simply represents ... a place that is open and tolerant.”<sup>44</sup> And further: “The key to understanding ... creativity and its effects ... lies in ... the 3Ts ... Technology, Talent and Tolerance.”<sup>45</sup> Such discourse recalls to mind the letter of the New Testament: “So faith, hope, love abide, these three, but the greatest of these is love.”<sup>46</sup> The myth of the production of knowledge writes of faith in “**Technology ... 1.** A discourse or treatise on an art or arts”<sup>47</sup>; of hope in “**Talent ... 1.** An ancient weight, a money of account”<sup>48</sup>; and, the greatest of these, of love in “**Tolerance ... 1.** The action or practice of enduring pain.”<sup>49</sup>

On a few details of Da Vinci’s childhood and a fragment of written memory, Freud pictures the psyche of the iconic artist-scientist. An only son born out of wedlock, Leonardo was raised to consciousness in the home of his working mother. His moneyed father married another but when the union proved infertile young Leonardo was removed, before his fifth birthday, into his father’s household. The dramatic accidents of Da Vinci’s early life are prompts for the

foundational wish Freud finds hidden in a scene of earliest recollection. Ignoring the narrative of a vulture and a child in its crib he reads the picture: "... *mother has a penis* ... the male organ has been added to the breasts which is the mark of the mother."<sup>50</sup> Freud finds echo of his discovery in myth. The primal texts agreed between original nature and cultures of emerging desire:

"... can teach us that an androgynous structure, a combination of male and female sex characters, was an attribute not only of Mut but also of other deities like Isis and Hathor ... like Neith of Sais - from whom Greek Athene was derived ... that the same was true of many of the Greek gods, especially those associated with Dionysus, but also of Aphrodite ...".<sup>51</sup>

Proust reports a sighting of such an androgynous structure in his re-construction of the high culture of modern Paris. In *Remembrance of Things Past* it is written:

... this man who was so enamoured of, who so prided himself upon, his virility, to whom all other men seemed odiously effeminate, what he suddenly suggested to me, to such an extent had he momentarily assumed the features, the expression, the smile thereof, was a woman.<sup>52</sup>

The meld of virile man and virtual female pleasure re-members the combination of penis and matron. Proust captions his wraithful persona 'man-woman'. Time has re-named the image. The contemporary conflation of buffed manhood and womanly pleasure, invoking an extensive scope of desire, is now known as 'metro-sexual'.

His treatment of neurosis convinced Freud of a "polymorphously perverse" foundation of human sexuality.<sup>53</sup> Polymorphous in its catholic nature, perverse in that it knows only its own, single body. Freud's image of infantile sexuality is of a kaleidoscope of erogenous zones and (auto-erotic) desiring acts ... "incomparably more variegated than might have been expected".<sup>54</sup> The maturing child must account in its mind, if not in consciousness, for this bewildering plurality: *in greater numbers than ever he could have imagined ... all mingling in ways he found strange and perhaps inappropriate*. 'Mother-has-a-penis' covers a multitude of sins, but under the pressure of phallic authority, the psychical threat of castration, the boy-child must renounce sexualised Mother, splitting her off from phallic desire. Penis can no longer have matron as well.

The mythic desire of childhood so extensive in media and ambition, like energy, cannot be destroyed. It is part repressed, using psychical, or emotional energy, and part sublimated in discharge(s) of acceptable expression. In many people repression is so complete as to leave only a thirst for ready answers, not only in the field of sexuality but in all fields. In others there is an appetite for less digestible investigation and understanding. In a variety of circumstances repression is considerably less than total: woman yet has a virtual penis, phallic desire yet includes unadmitted bosom. The common result is obsessive research motivated by, but not openly treating of, the anxiety of polymorphous perversity. "Some time after the infantile sexual researches have come to an end, the intelligence, having grown stronger, recalls the old associations and offers help in evading sexual repression, and the suppressed sexual activities of research return from the unconscious ... to sexualise thinking itself and to colour intellectual operations with the pleasure and anxiety that belongs to sexual processes proper."<sup>55</sup> In a third case, in genius, sexual anxiety (in Da Vinci's case coupled with sexual dormancy) is completely sublimated and thought flows freely, unhindered by unconscious censor.

Charles Baudelaire, bohemian, flaneur, icon of creativity, and the first urban poet wrote of his researches in images of Paris of the Second Empire. As Haussemann blasted the city into modernity, opening it to a multitude of alien influences, Baudelaire, who professed "literature which refuses to make its way in brotherly concord with science and philosophy is a murderous and suicidal literature"<sup>56</sup>, roamed the boulevards of the capital. Ambitious but alienated, on the road to renunciation (his last written words promise "abstinence from all stimulants whatsoever"<sup>57</sup>) the desperate poet clings to a tatter of sexuality.<sup>58</sup> To her who is too gay, he

confesses: “I have felt the sun like irony/Tear my breast ... I would wish, one night/When the voluptuary’s hour sounds/To crawl like a coward, noiselessly/Toward the treasures of your body ... to make upon your starting thigh/A long and biting weal ... my venom/O my sister!”<sup>59</sup> Always already he knows it is hopeless: “Tall, slim, in deep mourning, making majestic grief ... And I drank, trembling as a madman thrills/From her eye, livid sky where storm is born/The softness that fascinates, the pleasure that kills ... Too late! Perhaps never!/For I do not know where you flee, nor you where I am going/You whom I would have loved, O you who *knew* it!”<sup>60</sup> Benjamin interprets the amorous text: “The delight of the city-dweller is not so much love at first sight as love [in guilty mutual recognition] at last sight ... What makes his body twitch, spasmodically is not the excitement of a man in whom an image has taken possession of every fibre of his being; it partakes more of the shock with which an imperious desire suddenly overcomes a lonely man ... and of which one might not infrequently say that it was spared, rather than denied, fulfilment.”<sup>61</sup>

On the boulevard Baudelaire reports the creative effect of imperious urban culture. “Anyone who is capable of being bored in a crowd is a blockhead. I repeat: a blockhead, and a contemptible one.”<sup>62</sup> His analyst names and pictures the medium of modern urban desire. “The mass was the agitated veil: through it Baudelaire saw Paris.”<sup>63</sup> The crowded boulevard, Baudelaire explains, affords: “the poet [] the incomparable privilege of being himself and someone else as he sees fit. Like a roving soul in search of body, he enters another person whenever he wishes. ... the holy prostitution of the soul that gives itself wholly ... to the unknown that passes ... [and compared to which] that which people call love is quite small, quite limited, and quite feeble.”<sup>64</sup> Benjamin analyses the expansive sexual dimension of the modern medium: “only the mass makes it possible for the sexual object to become intoxicated with the hundred stimuli it produces.”<sup>65</sup> The urban mass of the Second Empire offers to the roving soul the chance to slake its virtual desire-for-union in a limitless range of bodies: it conjures the form of polymorphous sexuality. Metro-sexual roams the urban boulevard – but not, as s/he fondly imagines, of own, subjective volition. An effect, s/he has been summoned for cause.

“[I]t sounds obscure when Baudelaire writes: ‘The pleasure of being in a crowd is a mysterious expression of the multiplication of numbers.’ But this statement becomes clear if one imagines it spoken not only from a person’s point of view but from the viewpoint of a commodity.”<sup>66</sup> Exchange value – ‘not an atom of matter enters into the objectivity of commodities as values’ – trapped in limbo, embodies only the desire that it (ex)change its virtual existence for the coarsely sensuous body of an ‘other’. Every commodity “is always ready to exchange not only [exchange value] soul, but [use-only-for-an-other] body, with each and every other commodity, be it more repulsive than Maritornes herself.”<sup>67</sup> Commodity, urban poet and contemporary knowledge production, no matter, all are prostitute to the polymorphous sexuality of infantilism.

Thus creativity has come to be the most highly prized commodity in our economy – and yet it is not a ‘commodity’.<sup>68</sup>

Floridian myth confirms the nature of contemporary knowledge production with the wish it were not so. As in Freudian dream, faced with awful desire, it conjures a mirror image of misrecognition that substitutes right for left, effect for cause.

*People would seem to be always working and yet never working.*<sup>69</sup>

In a global 24/7 network of virtual no-place and intense time, labour for competitive market is a constant – people are, effectively, seen-to-be-always-working. Global society, as it dreams of vacations in exotic locales and preaches work-life balance, is brought to a straining standstill. In so far as contemporary work takes the form of mental labour it can flatter itself it is something other than consciousness of existing practice: in wishful image people appear, not at the end of their tether, but never to be working. Against the backdrop of the classic image of spatialised,

time-bound labour, abstract work is invisible. In the space-time of gesture, thought-labour, lacking extension, is readily misconstrued as non-work.

... *lazy and yet obsessed with exercise* ...

Constituted in a virtual world of mental labour, contemporary worker, lacking dimension in the physical world, now appear misplaced – ambiguous. “**Lazy** ... Of obscure etymology”.<sup>70</sup> In compensatory anxiety society appears driven to construct places and occasions to disport and test the human body – in space and time. In the spectacle of the Olympic Games and in the mirror of the urban gym the secret fantasy of the hyper-real world plays out. “**Exercise**: ... The etymological notion of exercēre is obscure: it is often regarded as having meant primarily ‘to drive forth tillage beasts’ and hence ‘to employ, set to work’.”<sup>71</sup> In exercise the discourse of physical labour is rescued, in sweated moment, from the dustbin of history.

... *career-conscious yet fickle* ...

“**Career** ... 1. The ground on which a race is run”.<sup>72</sup> The consciousness of creative labour is grounded in competition: a time-space where the race is always being run. A winner is never crowned. Staked out on the ground of competition mental labour-power is fixed in striving, forever unsatisfied, dimension. False consciousness flatters itself time-at-a-standstill is something else: “**Fickle** ... 1. False, deceitful, treacherous.”<sup>73</sup> Knowing labour dreams it has all the time in the world; that it will never be called to account.

... *caring yet anti-social* ...

“**Caring** ... 1. The action of the verb CARE.”<sup>74</sup> “**Care** ... 1. Mental suffering, sorrow, grief, trouble.”<sup>75</sup> Misrecognising cause for effect, mental labour-power unconsciously projects its care on others: it suffers, sorrows, grieves and is troubled for other victims. Abstract feeling, lacking the boundaries of subjectivity, becomes sentimental: “... Originally in favourable sense ... In later use: Addicted to indulgence in superficial emotion”.<sup>76</sup> Yet, though disowned, original care will not be denied. It returns, the mirrored image of the mirror image, as *anti-“social* ... [anti]capable of being associated or united *to* others.”<sup>77</sup> Thus, Charles Baudelaire “became profoundly lonely.”<sup>78</sup> This affected his vision:

*While the physical surroundings would be relatively familiar, the feel of the place would be bewilderingly different.*

In the words of the poet himself “everything for me becomes allegory”; urban images appear now to connote unfamiliar things. The estranged modern artist is constituted in the pictured language of things. Here the gestures of his fate, especially his death, become historically significant – to the degree they can be read.

In March 1866 Baudelaire suffered a severe stroke that took away his voice. The poet’s aphasia – the loss of word memory – condemned him to a world full of stimulation that he could no longer protect himself against by translation into the words and ideas of consciousness. He suffered, as the living-dead must, in silence, save for the distressing compulsion to angrily exclaim: *Cré nom!* – a corruption of *Sacré Nom* with a meaning close to the English *godddam*.<sup>79</sup> His blasphemous grief anticipated the 26<sup>th</sup> of August 1867. His analyst concludes he “died lonely and deeply disturbed.”<sup>80</sup> Others, basing themselves on his mother’s account, claim he passed “with an expression of joy” crying repeatedly: “Sacré nom! [holy name] Ah! Sacré nom!”<sup>81</sup> His mortal journey is thus reported from either side of life: by history and by myth. What is contested by neither is the modern poet died in the arms of his mother. The last wish of the infant had been granted. In frozen-to-a-standstill-time, in defiance of the primary discourse of reproduction, the death of the child precedes that of the parent. Trapped outside the boundaries of adult purpose

the avatar of Creativity, having consumed all value, is stripped to essence. In history and myth the infantile heart is laid bare. Imperious to the end it includes everybody in Desire; conjuring the death drive.

O Death, old captain, it is time! Let us weigh anchor!  
This country wearies us, O Death! Let us set sail!  
Though the sea and the sky are black as ink,  
*Our hearts* which you know well are filled with rays of light

Pour out your poison that it may refresh us!  
This fire *burns our brains* so fiercely; *we wish* to plunge  
To the abyss' depths, Heaven or Hell, no matter  
To the depths of the Unknown to find *something new!*<sup>82</sup>

## FLUER DU MAL



(dieing-for-something-new)

## Endnotes

---

- 1 Claude Levi-Strauss, *The Savage Mind*, (Chicago, 1966).
- 2 Claude Levi-Strauss, *The Raw and the Cooked, Introduction to a Science of Mythology, Volume 1*, translated by John and Doreen Weightman (Chicago, 1969).
- 3 Cited Sigmund Freud, *The Penguin Freud Reader*, selected and introduced by Adam Phillips, (London, 2006), vii.
- 4 Walter Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*, translated by Howard Eiland and Kevin McLaughlin (Cambridge MA, 1999), 651/652; X1,4 (original emphasis, citing Marx)
- 5 Levi-Strauss, *The Raw and the Cooked*, 12 (emphasis added).
- 6 Ibid. 35.
- 7 Ibid. 57.
- 8 Ibid. 326 (emphasis added).
- 9 Karl Marx, *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy*, trans. B. Fowkes (London, 1976).
- 10 Sigmund Freud, *Leonardo Da Vinci: a memory of his childhood*, (London, 1957).
- 11 Charles Baudelaire, *Flowers of Evil and other poems of Charles Baudelaire*, translated by Francis Duke, (Charlottesville, 1961).
- 12 Richard Florida, [http://creativeclass.com/richard\\_florida/](http://creativeclass.com/richard_florida/) (accessed 02/08/2008)
- 13 Richard Florida, *The Rise of the Creative Class: And How It's Transforming Work, Leisure, Community and Everyday Life*, (New York, 2002).
- 14 Ibid. xv.
- 15 Ibid. 3.
- 16 see [http://www.ornl.gov/sci/techresources/Human\\_Genome/home.shtml](http://www.ornl.gov/sci/techresources/Human_Genome/home.shtml) (accessed 16/05/2007).
- 17 *Oxford English Dictionary*, Compact Edition (Oxford, 1971), 2734.
- 18 James Boswell, *Life of Johnson*, new edition. (London, 1953), 627.
- 19 Manuel Castells, *The Rise of the Network Society: Economy, Society, Culture, Vol. 1*, (Oxford, 1996), 17.
- 20 OED, 2579.
- 21 Peter Drucker, "Knowledge Work and Knowledge Society: The Social Transformations of this Century", *Edwin L. Godkin Lecture*, John F. Kennedy School of Government, (Cambridge MA, 1994), 4.
- 22 Ibid. 5.
- 23 Hannah Davies, "Science the Saviour, says Frazer" in *The Sunday Mail*, (Brisbane, 09/09/2007), 31.
- 24 Castells, *The Rise of the Network Society*, 18.
- 25 Marshall McLuhan, *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man*, (London, 1964), 19, emphasis added.
- 26 Karl Marx, *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy*, trans. B. Fowkes (London, 1976), 151.
- 27 Marx, *Capital*, 135, emphasis added.
- 28 Ibid. 138.
- 29 Ibid. 130.
- 30 Ibid. 176/7.
- 31 Revelations 13: 17, cited Marx, *Capital*, 181.
- 32 McLuhan, *Understanding Media*, 3, emphasis added.

- 
- 33 Marx, *Capital*, 279/80.
- 34 Ibid. 38.
- 35 cited Walter Benjamin, 'Some Motifs in Baudelaire', in *Illuminations*, ed. Hannah Arendt (London, 1973), p.157.
- 36 cited, *ibid.* 158.
- 37 Op. cit.
- 38 Karl Marx, *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*, (London, 1971), 21.
- 39 OED, 901.
- 40 Ibid, 1123.
- 41 Ibid, 55.
- 42 On Line Slang Dictionary – <http://onlineslangdictionary.com/thesaurus/words+meaning+to+urinate.html> (accessed 26th April 2008).
- 43 OED (Compact Edition), Supplement, 89.
- 44 Florida, *Creative Class*, 258, emphasis added.
- 45 Ibid. 249.
- 46 1 Corinthians 13:13
- 47 OED, 3248.
- 48 OED, 3227.
- 49 OED, 3343.
- 50 Freud, *Leonardo Da Vinci*, 46, emphasis added.
- 51 Ibid. 42.
- 52 Marcel Proust, *Remembrance of Things Past*, in 3 volumes translated by C.K. Scott Moncrieff and Terence Kilmartin, (New York, 1982), Vol. II, p. 626.
- 53 See Sigmund Freud, "A Case of Hysteria, Three Essays of Sexuality and Other Works" in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud, Vol. VII*, translated by James Strachey in collaboration with Anna Freud (London, 1953). (277 for citation)
- 54 Ibid. 277.
- 55 Freud, *Leonardo Da Vinci*, p. 27.
- 56 cited Walter Benjamin, *Charles Baudelaire: A Lyric Poet in the Era of High Capitalism*, translation Harry Zohn (London, 1973), 43.
- 57 Charles Baudelaire, *Intimate Journals*, translated by Christopher Isherwood, with an introduction by W.H. Auden (London, 1969), 83.
- 58 For Benjamin this is decisive. "The man who goes the length of passion of male sexuality, comes through his sacred value to be a poet. The poet to whom no social mission can be imparted, makes the market and the commodity his objects." Cited Susan Buck-Morss, *The Dialectics of Seeing*. (Cambridge, Mass., 1989), 214.
- 59 Charles Baudelaire, *Selected Poems of Charles Baudelaire*, trans. by Geoffrey Wagner, with an introduction by Enid Starkie (New York, 1974), 111 & 113.
- 60 Ibid. 79, emphasis added.
- 61 Benjamin, *Charles Baudelaire*, 45, 46 & 125.
- 62 cited, *ibid.* 37.
- 63 Ibid. 23.
- 64 Ibid. 55/6.

- 
- 65 Ibid. 57.
- 66 Ibid. p. 58.
- 67 Marx, *Capital*, 179.
- 68 Florida, *Creative Class*, 5.
- 69 Ibid. 3/4.
- 70 OED. 1587.
- 71 Ibid. 923.
- 72 Ibid. 339.
- 73 Ibid. 991.
- 74 Ibid. 340.
- 75 Ibid. 339.
- 76 Ibid. 2730.
- 77 Ibid. 2903.
- 78 Benjamin, *Baudelaire*, 96/97, emphasis added.
- 79 “Remnants of the original dual meaning are still supposed to be preserved even in a language so highly developed as Latin , in the use of words like ... *sacer* (‘sacred’ and ‘infamous’)”. Freud, *Penguin Reader*, 23.
- 80 Ibid. 87.
- 81 Enid Starkie, *Baudelaire*, (Norfolk, 1958), 521.
- 82 Charles Baudelaire, *Le Voyage*. Translation based on: <http://fleursdumal.org/poem/231>, accessed 17 April 2008, emphasis added.



**Urban Research Program  
Griffith University  
Brisbane, QLD 4111  
[www.griffith.edu.au/urp](http://www.griffith.edu.au/urp)**