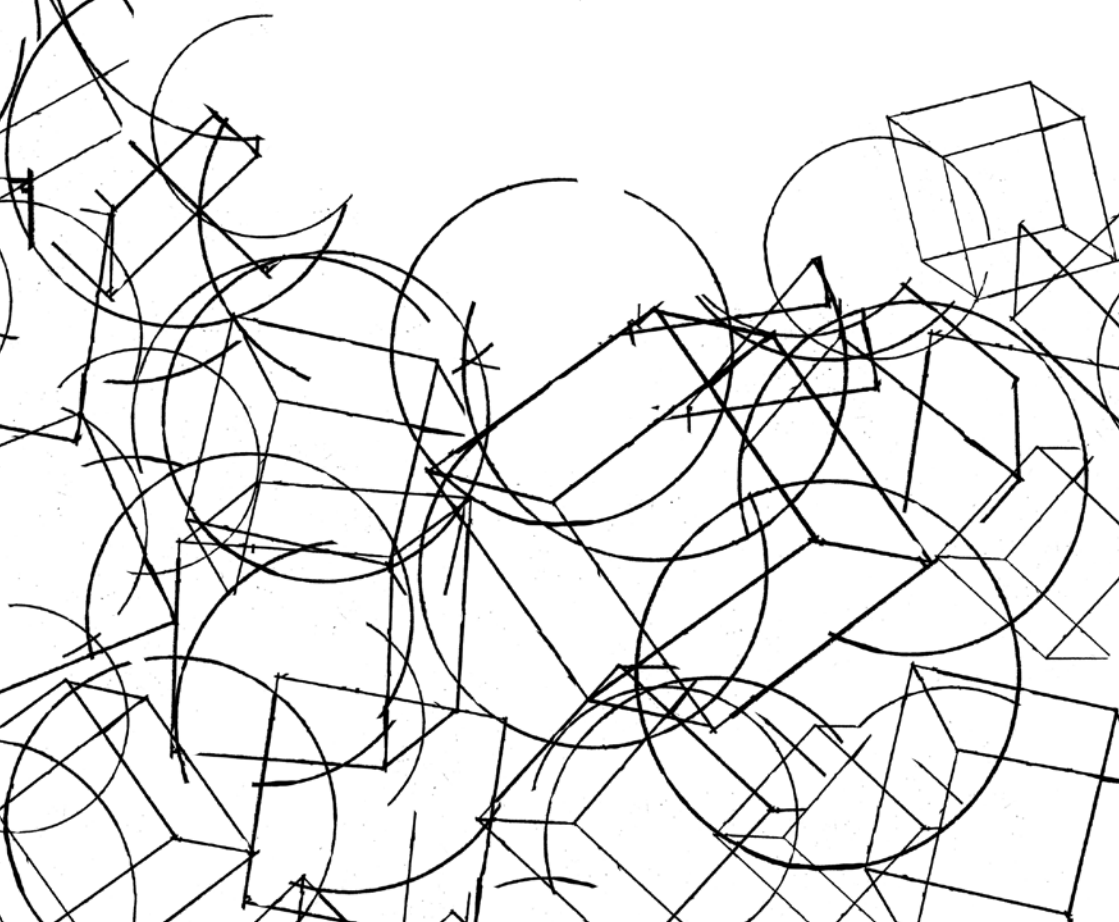




JOÃO MARIA  
GUSMÃO & PEDRO  
PAIVA



MOLYNEUX'S  
PROBLEM





# Molyneux's Problem

A decorative flourish consisting of a horizontal line with ornate, symmetrical scrollwork at both ends and a central decorative element.

On my street at nightfall the same scene occurs every day: the customers of the tavern – Lopes, Beto, João and the one woman among them, ‘Fatso’ – all leave and, on the inside, Paulinho pulls down the rolling security shutters, turns off the light, squats down and passes beneath it to close the establishment; he lets out a fart and everyone there holding a bottle of beer laughs. They stand there in the twilight, as they do night after night, always the same ones, with nothing to do while everything is moving around them. Minutes later one perceives that Lisbon is also a public urinal; between the parked cars Lopes burps loudly and empties his bladder, Ahhhh, he says, and he must feel very relieved, the others laugh again, do you see the Chinese gal coming up the street, Beto says, they all have pussies on a slant, isn’t that right Paulinho? They say that with the situation like that, on its side, it squeezes your dick real good, and he winks, there is no such thing, ‘Fatso’ says, I worked with a Chinese gal on housecleaning jobs and her cunt was as straight as mine. ‘Fatso’ is the first to arrive at the tavern, I guess she’s unemployed or else she’s doing odd household chores of some sort. If you fit in there then your dick is also slanty replies Paulinho. The only pussy you guys have seen is your mother’s, and ‘Fatso’ makes a jacking-off gesture to say that none of them ever gets any. And they really never do. I’ve never seen Lopes, Beto, João or Paulinho with any other woman except for ‘Fatso’ or their respective mothers. On another occasion, Lopes, without a doubt the one who drinks the most, nearly started brawling with his friends, it’s one thing to say that I am a liar and I accept that, now you call me a clown and other things, and I won’t allow it, then he rolled up the sleeves of his T-shirt and clutching the empty bottle by its neck he prepared to jump on top of Beto. Paulinho, the owner of the tavern tried to separate the two, but did I call you anything, yelled Beto, by any chance did I call you something? I heard you say it, said João, you called Lopes a son of a

whore. I called him that? You did, but I know that you didn't mean it in a bad way, Lopes was red with fury, but Beto quieted him down, what I wanted to say is that your mother is just as much of a whore as mine, look Lopes, just forget this, 'Fatso' insists, you know he's not serious, if his mother is like yours then he meant no harm by it.

The conclusion of the foregoing: there are rare cases where the syllogism is so usefully applied in loutish discussions. If the truth be said, 'Fatso' and Paulinho at least understand one thing, against all bastard reasoning they insist on following a certain logic: Lopes is a son of a whore / Beto's mother is as much of a whore as Lopes's mother is / Therefore, either they are both sons of ladies who engage in professional activities in relation to coitus, or the first premise is false and neither of them is the son of a prostitute. The Chinese gal has a pussy on a slant / 'Fatso' has a cunt the same as the Chinese gal's / Therefore, either they both have a serious physical anomaly in the vaginal passageway, or else the first premise is mistaken, and they both have a sex organ just like that of any other woman.

What attributes an indecision relative to the two solutions presented is their distancing from argumentation in the strict sense. Classical logic does not admit of variables from the tavern; an ambiguous premise always results in a sophism, so, in discussions of this nature the ambivalence of the premises is precisely what lends validity to the various possible postulates that spring from it. Aristotelian logic is based on the law of identity, the law of noncontradiction and the law of the excluded middle, something that is not confirmed in the open interpretation of the aforementioned truths. The logic of the tavern is vaguely *paraconsistent* and *intuitionist* at the same time: the law of the excluded middle is more or less solid (Lopes either is or is not a son of a whore, there is no other hypothesis), the law of noncontradiction is nearly coherent (he cannot be both the son of a whore and not the son of a whore at the same time), but the law of identity has no structure (after all those beers it is hard to say that Lopes is identical to himself).

The irregular conclusion of the preceding: only when Lopes is beside himself, when he is drunk, can one insult him with the whore line with impunity because only in these circumstances does this apply

without a shadow of a doubt, after all that's when he always pisses right on my doorstep.

On the night before we flew to Kenya I asked Pedro, how many books are you bringing? I don't know, he said tiredly, I haven't packed yet, don't forget to bring that small book by Diderot, I said. It was the *Letter on the blind for the benefit of those who see*, where we found Molyneux's problem: 'Suppose that a blind man, sightless since birth, knows how to use his sense of touch to distinguish a cube and a sphere of the same metal and approximately the same size, in such a way that by touching one or the other he can indicate whether it is a cube or a sphere. Suppose that the cube and the sphere are on the table, and this blind man recovers his vision; and he is asked if by just looking at them, without touching them, he can tell them apart and say which is the cube and which is the sphere.' Later in the book, Diderot asked another blind man, 'what is a mirror?' He responded, 'it is a machine.'

When we were in Kenya, upon leaving a restaurant we noticed a man of our age, walking barefoot, with white, milky eyes, with a fishing net draped over his shoulder. Hassan, our guide, greeted him in the same way he said hi to everyone, do you know him? we asked, of course, he is Solar, we call him that because he is a blind fisherman, it is said that he can tell if the tide is rising or falling just because he feels the sun on his back.

We went to talk with him, and asked him, 'what is a blind man?' he responded, 'a blind man is a mirror'. We convinced him to come that night to the house where we were staying for us to film him in the empty patio... Open your eyes wide and when we say 1, 2, 3, start eating one of these papayas, the camera has no sound and it will film very quickly, it will only take 5 minutes, but I cannot eat the papaya with the peel, and Hassan agreed, the peel needs to be cut at the place where he is going to eat it because otherwise the papaya burns a lot, it burns the lips. Solar complained, the lights were very close, they were making him hot, we are only going to repeat it once more, open your eyes and then bite hard and chew, are you able to open your eyes more? it's the light, it's very hot... just once more for us to be sure it turned out well.

During the afternoon, while we were planning what we were

going to do with our protagonist, we talked like this... imagine the shot, the camera close to his face, slow motion, for about 1,500 images per second, what does that give? 5 seconds of action later transposed to 3 minutes, yes, only his face with his eyes open and eating a fruit; seeing a blind man eating a fruit is like seeing him tasting the unvisual nature of things, that which we can never imagine but that the blind man, for not having vision, has full access to, an edible metaphysics, a branch of materialism, as though the essence, instead of being unattainable as transcendental idealism says, could actually be accessed by the palate, and we at a distance can witness this terrific event because his eyes are empty, his body is unrepresentable, he doesn't see us, we are not even present there to see him, and we are also watching an erotic event, because in fact he is eating the fruit as though it were truly sexual, libidinal, simultaneously illustrating this strange coincidence: that the female sex organ resembles a papaya.

Conclusion of the foregoing: Solar is seen devouring the world, eating an erogenous and extraterrestrial planet, the phantasm-fruit of the female genitalia.

In 1926 Freud used the expression 'a dark continent' to refer to the psychoanalytical unknown regarding adult female sexuality. No matter how hard we try it is impossible to get away from the colonialist connotation. *A Dark Continent* is the name of the book that 19th-century British explorer Sir Henry Morton Stanley wrote about the trip he took up the Congo River for 999 days between 1874 and 1877. He was allegedly brutally violent against the indigenous people, and is also said to have spoken the phrase, 'Dr. Livingstone, I presume?' Which marks one of the most literary episodes of British exploration, 'Yes, and I feel thankful that I am here to welcome you.' But Freud did not find the feminine, and in '23 he stated in *Infantile Genital Organization*, 'For both sexes, only one genital, namely the male one comes into account. What is present, therefore, is not a primacy of the genitals, but a primacy of the *phallus*'. Certainly the dark continent is an obscure and unrepresentable thing. The papaya is, in the vernacular of the tavern, the greatest enigma of Western man, and it is no wonder that Beto thinks that the slanted papaya exists in nearly the same proportion as the Caucasian hairy

papaya, since, after all, China has a quarter of the world population and the same genetic root extends through Asia and Oceania, an entire alien province. It follows that the crossing of the Congolese forests of this world should be made groping with the hands much more than with open eyes as is recommended in the exploration of unknown territories.

The irregular conclusion of the foregoing: scholars of St. Thomas have made the correction that the true origin of the epithet attributed to the apostle, Doubting Thomas, should not be *seeing is believing*, but rather, *touch it to feel it*, 'The other disciples therefore said unto him, We have seen the Lord. But he said unto them, Except I shall see in his hands the print of the nails, and put my finger into the print of the nails, and thrust my hand into his side, I will not believe.'

Believe in what? In the slanting pussy of 'Fatso'!

- July 2013



# The Third Man Argument



When we stopped filming, the old woman went crazy. We'd asked the drunken couple to dance a bit in front of the camera. Why did they give me this man, if I had my way, I'd have another, she turned to face us, opened her eyes wide, waved her hands in the air and in a lewd gesture grabbed the brightly printed cloth between her legs, put her hand on her crotch and shouted that she was on fire, on fire in there, and with that she started to dance by herself and arse into our trousers, I want a white man to get myself a mulatto, give me a white man and I'll make a mulatto. Behind her, Zebndequias was explaining to Pedro, drinking alcohol every day doesn't hurt you, drinking every day doesn't hurt you, how many languages do you speak, parlez-vous français? Ich spreche 27 Sprachen, dialects and whatever; Ich spreche 27 Sprachen, drinking every day doesn't hurt you, unless you overdo it, not every day, if you drink too much water, you die, a lot of water's a bad thing, it's like laughing, if you laugh too much you can fall over and hit your head on the ground, and die, but drinking every day is good. The old woman sang, panting for breath, she opened her eyes, give me fire or money.

It was the last day of our stay in Mozambique. We'd seen enough to realize that there's nothing here to understand. A French woman once told us that a European should be ashamed to go to Africa, it was criminal to return to the scene of colonialism. She was right. There's always a third man, the colonizer, the colonized and the mulatto. With FRELIMO in power and the armed struggle dating back to '64, first against the Portuguese rulers, until '75, and then against RENAMO, in a civil war, until '92, with a death toll estimated at 1 million, Mozambique looks at first sight as if it escaped unscathed from the worst wounds of colonialism. We asked an albino guy if he could tell any jokes about the Portuguese, he laughed and said, a Portuguese man arrived here in Maputo, couldn't believe his eyes, and asked a smart and friendly looking

native what they called motherfuckers in Mozambique. But sir, we don't call them, they come from Lisbon of their own accord. And there we were, two motherfuckers in Maputo, 38 years after independence and 20 years after the civil war, the old drunk woman shouting, her eyes irradiating blood and misery, give me a mulatto, give me a mulatto or money, motherfucker. We stayed for a week in the house of a Portuguese man who had settled in the outskirts of Maputo, who one day told us, there's one thing you have to understand, you don't need to feel sorry for the blacks, only today I had to give Silva a dressing down, and told him in no uncertain terms, my wife and I give the orders round here, we're the boss, then the kids, and then the dogs, OK? Say it after me. And Silva repeated, the dogs are the boss, there's always a third man. What came first, the chicken or the egg? In Mozambique, there are two breeds of hen, the African and the white hen, and two beers, one dark and one pale. The African hen is hard to catch, the white chicken is always first into the pot, it's lazy and the meat's not so tough. Our joke-telling albino went on, round here everyone calls me portugua, I've never been to Portugal, but I like it; my brother-in-law worked there for a year, one day he went to get his ID photo taken, he went to the counter to complain, excuse me but it looks a bit dark to me, the lady replied, it's dark because you're black, if you were white it would be lighter, what do you want me to do?, you're black. That's engraved on my memory, I'll never forget it, he laughed and laughed, we laughed too, he went back to the shop because the photo looked dark, but you're black, and he laughed. That was in Lisbon, motherfuckers. We met a crazy guy who wouldn't answer anyone's questions, he would just write numbers and multiplication problems on the ground, when he saw the school kids he would shout after them, you don't know your maths, you idiots! MA-THE-MA-TICS! We showed him the symbol for pi, and asked him if he could write the number while we filmed, he stared into the distance. Write this number and then carry on and we'll film you, OK? We'll give you a cigarette and then we'll film you, OK? So he took the cigarette and got up, took hold of a stick, squatted in the shade and started to write. *Pi* is infinite.... Hang on, it's 3.14 and then 1592653589793, he just carried on writing numbers, not *pi* any more, but another unending number,

accepted another cigarette, are you thirsty?, thirst is infinite. Remember who's boss Silva, and between ourselves, I've been here 24 years and never drunk tap water, here at home we only drink bottled water. Drinking too much water will kill you. Not alcohol, drinking every day won't hurt you, quite the opposite. Do you want a cigarette, there's one thing you have to understand, it's 3.14 and then a lot more numbers, it never ends, do you see, it's like counting the stars, there's lots of them, each one points to another and an infinity of more stars... We wanted to film an African hen, they told us, oh, but that's tricky, you'll need to be cunning, Pedro can wait there behind the hut and I'll go round this side, when it comes out, make a grab for it. Have you tried our national dish? Barbecued chicken with piripiri and chips, don't eat the salad, and when you get home you'll need to take deworming tablets. The hen got away and hid under the oil cans. Then the camera broke down.

We went to the witch doctor, we took him the camera, told him we had tried to repair it and as it still didn't work it could only be witchcraft. He looked at us, he must have wondered how he could get us to pay more, and asked, how many people use the camera? Us two. He lowered his hand to the ground, gathered up a handful of that damp red sand, scattered the earth on the bench... there's one thing you have to understand, look at the van, it's clean, if I put my hands down here they get dirty, then when I use the car, whenever I touch it, it won't be clean, like this bench, I put my dirty hand on it and now anyone who sits down will ruin their trousers. The witchcraft isn't in the camera, it's in you, and it's you who need sorting out, not the camera. The camera's fine. To release the spirit of the camera I'll have to cleanse you too. That'll be 60,000 meticaïs, you don't need to pay it all at once, the first half before the work, and then, if it works, come back and pay the rest. It was very expensive. We told him we would think about it, and let him know. We asked our driver if there were also white wizards, he thought about it... he took my mobile phone, when the white wizard does his magic it's for development, you see, it works, he invented the mobile phone for us to buy, now we can talk to everyone, the black wizard uses bushes, what? he use them to make phone calls? No, he uses plants and herbs to make remedies. But the black wizard also kills a lot of people, he's not

like the white wizard who's for development. He kills people, he really does. On the other side of the bay, in Catembe, the wizards kill with thunderbolts; a thunderbolt hits you from the sky, and you're dead. Samora didn't die from a spell, the ones that killed Samora knew he was protected on the ground, they couldn't do anything, no witchcraft could touch Samora, it had to be up there, that's how they killed him, because he was protected on the ground but not up there, that's how the plane crashed with Samora on board and he died.

At home we watched videos on YouTube of Samora Machel, the historic FRELIMO leader, making his post-revolutionary speeches: "Some feel proud because they were colonized by the English. The English are civilized and built a great empire. (laughter) And others because they were colonized by the French, they think they are intellectually superior, more civilized and advanced, because they were colonized by the French. (laughter) But as for me... I was colonized by the Portuguese, by the most underdeveloped country in Europe, but still colonialist (roars of laughter)." "The struggle continues! (and the people chanted back, the struggle continues), the struggle continues! (and the people chanted back, the struggle continues) against what?", asked Samora.

We then explained to the albino why we wanted to make a film with him. Vicente, that was his name. Vicente, we don't want to film people working in the fields, we haven't come to make documentaries, we came here because everything people think about themselves is a lie, because a person isn't just himself, he's also what he sees and transforms, by naming things, counting and adding them up, when he buys and sells, he only thinks of selling, of buying everything he sees, because he thinks life makes sense when it's a lie, buying and selling. Just like the writing on the wall over there: "the false genius", man is a false genius. Vicente, you're black, but at the same time you're not, because you're white, but you're not like white mulattos, you're like an alien, not white, not black, not a mulatto, you came from space like the cave man, neither white nor black, without representation, and that's our job, fighting against all representations, especially abstract ones. Vicente, if you knew how pathologically hypocritical art is, because it thinks so highly of itself, and is created by vain, self-regarding people, with their precious

sensibility, black cats in dark rooms, the problem is that our reasoning is too abstract to avoid what we're fighting against, there's an issue here of intellectual frailty that we should bring up, because however much we try the unrepresentable, something too human always persists, it's a paradox, a man is human if a second ideal man exists on whom he can reflect his humanity, but for this second man, looking at the first is not enough, he has to find a greater, more human third man, and this third man does the same, and so on to infinity, a paradox, so what do you say, will you do the film? What's in it for me? 700... I'll do it for a thousand.

Sitting in the fish market in Maputo, an old high school teacher told us about a diver he knew in Inhambane, who before independence used to catch the strangest sea creatures to sell to the Portuguese tourists who flocked there from all around. He would bring back animals never before seen, fishes with no name, and things with no name always lurk at the bottom; my fisherman friend was never afraid, he wouldn't fish anything else, just fish with no name. One day, he saw a tiny fish in the water, he so loved catching things that no one had a name for that he followed it and the fish, whoosh, swam into a grotto. In Inhambane, you've never been there, the water is as clear as glass, but the hole the little fish swam into was dark, you couldn't see anything inside, and my friend just swam straight in because he really wanted to catch that tiny fish, but the tiny fish swam into the mouth of a really big fish, and he went in right behind. Whoosh, the monster closed its mouth and he was stuck inside; it's what happens when you want things that have no name. The fisherman never again went into the water. But how did he escape from the fish's belly?, we asked. That I can't tell you, but he did, I often saw him on the beach after that, he never again went in the water, he was too scared, the fish had eaten his fisherman's spirit.

- April 2013  
Text edited for the exhibition *Third man argument*,  
Sies + Höke Gallery, Dusseldorf, Germany

## 5 Films, Some Annotations



## ☪ Solar, the blind man eating a papaya ☪

*It so happened that a wine taster was intrigued when he saw a blind man. This is what was said, give or take, between these two illustrious anchorites:*

Wine taster: Quite accidentally, kind sir, and without asking your leave, I couldn't help noticing how you ate your dessert. You consumed the papaya just as it was, with its skin, and all that remains is a single seed.

Blind man: Indeed, I ate the whole papaya using only my teeth. The seed you see on the plate is all that I left, serving, if you please, as proof of what I say.

Wine taster: I am amazed to witness this, as popular wisdom tells us that the skin of the papaya should never be eaten raw nor ever chewed upon. It may result in the most insidious of maladies: painful cuts inside the mouth and countless inflammations throughout the digestive system. This being so, as it *is possible that that which happens to us some time happens to us always*, I would like you to explain why you treat your palate so ignominiously.

Blind man: For my part, I am little concerned by these popular sayings to which you ascribe such good sense. That which you call ignominy is nothing but a delusion that has misled your spirit. To relieve you of your concern for the ills of my digestion, I would like to clarify immediately that I suffer no cut or inflammation on ingesting a ...

Wine taster: You astonish me! Go on, go on.

Blind man: And for this to be so, there is no secret concealed behind my teeth. I shall tell you a story, you will perhaps gain a better understanding of your own beliefs.

Wine taster: I am all ears!



Blind man: There was a young man, a mystic, a follower of a celebrated Hindu yogi, who was making a journey of spiritual self-discovery, seeking out, from village to village, the masters who could guide and advise him on how he should live. Spying an elder teaching his young students under a great tree, he drew close and, requesting his blessing, sat down with the others. It was dinner time. They all started to eat their meal and the traveller took the chance to do the same. When everybody had finished, the young man was still just starting, eating slowly, in a long, chewing meditation. The elder who was watching him asked: "Tell me, young stranger, why do you eat like that?" The young man replied that he ate that way, with care, so that the nourishment would be best assimilated by the intestine. So in a kindly manner, the elder explained: "Chewing the food with such care reduces the work done by your stomach, making it lazy, due to the lack of natural exercise. It is the opposite of what you should do. At your age you need to swallow pieces whole, if possible swallow bones, to make your stomach work." - "You astonish me!", replied the young mystic. - "Dear young man", the elder continued, "on this subject I shall tell you a story I know well. A dervish used to go down to the bank of a stream and realised that it was a new stream he saw every day. He also noticed in his observations that the landscape was made up of many parts. So he spent his time ascribing individual realities to the stones, trees and flowers, developing a profound interest in each of them and seeking to discover the material reality of the landscape on the basis of his impressions. One day, as he went about his studies, in this instance biting on small stones to learn their taste, the dervish was surprised by the presence of a poet who also looked astonished at what he saw: 'How amazing that you should eat stones!' - 'On this point', said the dervish, 'I would like to tell you a story that took place in ancient Greece. One day, questioned by someone who was amazed at everything, the satirical poet Timon replied: "Why are you not amazed that we, although we are three, have only four eyes?" Indeed, Timon had only one eye, and so had his disciple Dioscurides, while the person he addressed was normal. Timon continued in the following fashion: "I heard the story of a wine taster who, astonished at the wisdom of a man who was blind from birth and ate an entire papaya,

started to ramble on about the organoleptic qualities, which is to say, the intimate nature of wine.

Wine taster: Some wines possess floral bouquets, others have fruity bouquets which remind me of pineapple or quince, others of toast and honey. Sometimes you find complex flavours that can range from vanilla and caramel to coconut, walnut, tobacco and truffles. And depending on the acidity and body of the wine, they can also be light as spring or broader, rich, strong and generous.

Blind man: But this is just stupid! How can you see so many meanings concealed in the composition of the wine when you drink it? Things are what they are, things just exist. Wine that might be toast would not be wine. Thank god wine is just wine, a stone is just a stone, and a papaya nothing but a papaya.

## 3 Suns

Isaac Newton, in one of his letters to John Locke, recounts how, in one of the first optical experiments he conducted as a young man, he used his own right eye. Standing in his room and facing the window, he closed his left eyelid and looked directly at the sun for a certain length of time. Afterwards, completely dazzled, he observed the objects in his room or just sat in the darkness analyzing and reflecting on the effects of an *image rémanente* that blinded him and followed his eye wherever he looked. Repeating this procedure several times, he came to realize that the image – the image of the sun – appeared in his field of vision like an optical memory, not just straight afterwards but whenever he wanted or recalled the said experiment.

So what is staged in the film *3 Suns* is a thought experiment: not a scientific experiment like Newton's, but rather a hypothesis posed at the limits of representation. Following Newton's ocular recollection, this film aims to create a subjective plane of the eye itself, as though we could idealize a detachment of the retina, grasp this image of the eye blinded by too much light and take it to other considerations of a speculative nature. We are no longer on the plane of the fabrication of appearances – the eye that observes the world; rather, this concerns the production of the image of the image – the process of mentally creating the appearance of things, the way that the image intellectualizes what is around the observer. This dislocation obeys a certain encephalic topography, it is a movement that begins at the eye but which then speeds toward the brain until it becomes another image that is projected on the internal wall of the cranium. The procedure turns the eyeball into a chamber or cave, where the three suns that are there outside the "window" (the outer world) reveal the notion of ablepsy (blindness) – a tunnel vision in every way similar to what happens in Plato's Allegory of the Cave where a man, dazzled by the sun, is not able to discern the light of the real world. By means of this concatenated image we see vision itself; the

retinal transparency as a structure of the visible insofar as it was possible to suspend the decision between the various images of the sun: the one that is really seen, the image synchronized with the world, and the other recorded ones, relating to the past experiences of blindness.

In the suspension of visibility we are confronted with a *trilemma*, three equally frustrating hypotheses for the resolution of the problem posed by the film, the unreality of the visual as veracious – an unsuspected three-way solipsistic dream image of what is not out there.

The terms of this *trilemma* are as follows:

1. We state that one of the images of the sun is true and the others are produced by blindness (axiomatic principle);
2. We state that all the suns are past memories of over-exposed eyesight, that therefore there is no real sun in the image, and that the same is true for any other infinite suns seen from the cave when trying to reconstitute an original sun (infinite regression);
3. We state that every image of the sun is true in its own time (circulatory argument).

Thought experiments like this contemplate the existence of a phantom conception or phantom order. As with the assumption in Maxwell's demon\*, we first have to come up with a subject that tolerates the experience of paradox in order for us to consider the ambivalent hypothesis of abstraction. This process, which might loosely be called conception, is by nature an arrangement outside the normal order. Here, the regular set of laws that go with factual phenomena are bent in order to form and conceptualise a doppelganger world, one that relates to the original world in a hermeneutical way and is designed to reveal how deceptively real all representations set out to be. The significance of these enquiries points to a particularly extraterrestrial enterprise: thought is here enacted illogically in relation to the actual experience of

the world. The mind concentrates not on the accuracy of what is there but on the conditions of representation, relying on its exceptions (the unrepresentable) to form grounds for the groundless.

*\* "... if we conceive of a being whose faculties are so sharpened that he can follow every molecule in its course, such a being, whose attributes are as essentially finite as our own, would be able to do what is impossible to us. For we have seen that molecules in a vessel full of air at uniform temperature are moving with velocities by no means uniform, though the mean velocity of any great number of them, arbitrarily selected, is almost exactly uniform. Now let us suppose that such a vessel is divided into two portions, A and B, by a division in which there is a small hole, and that a being, who can see the individual molecules, opens and closes this hole, so as to allow only the swifter molecules to pass from A to B, and only the slower molecules to pass from B to A. He will thus, without expenditure of work, raise the temperature of B and lower that of A, in contradiction to the second law of thermodynamics...."*

## Fruit Polyhedron

1. If, as mentioned above, the world is on top of a table and not under it, then where the hell is this table? Diderot asks the same question: 'Ask an Indian how the earth hangs suspended in mid-air, and he will tell you that it is carried on the back of an elephant; and what carries the elephant? A tortoise. And the tortoise?' And so on, and this is then followed by another, possibly even more pertinent, question: What is actually on the table? Does it belong to the world or is it in fact just more furniture? What is the world in actual truth? A sequence of endless representations or, regardless of any analogy, something *unreasonable*: turtles all the way down and turtles all the way up, us in the middle?

2. Geometricians are often faced with this ambivalence about their object of study: they don't know whether the forms of the spirit inscribe themselves in the world or hover in the soul. In *De divina proportione*, Pacioli writes: '... just as God cannot be properly defined, nor can be understood through words, likewise this proportion of ours [the golden rectangle] cannot ever be designated through intelligible numbers, nor can it be expressed through any rational quantity, but always remains occult and secret, and is called irrational by the mathematicians.'

Look at the *Portrait of Luca Pacioli* (attributed to Jacopo de' Barbari) and notice the enigmatic glass *rhombicuboctahedron* half-filled with a translucent liquid essence.

3. *Adynaton* (*Adynata* in its plural form) is a figure of speech which uses hyperbole to explain the impossibility of certain events; for instance saying that something will only happen 'in a month of Sundays', 'when hell freezes over' or 'when pigs fly'. And so, if we take Hume's argument against cause and effect - 'That the sun will not rise tomorrow is no less intelligible a proposition, and implies no more contradiction, than the affirmation, that it will rise' - we are eventually forced to conclude that

anything is still possible, which makes *adynaton* not an impossibility but a contested fact.

*'I will sooner have a beard grow in the palm of my hand than he shall get one on his cheek.'* (Shakespeare)

## ❧ Pot Smaller than Pot ❧

René Lavand is an Argentine illusionist who lost an arm in a car accident when he was nine. He is so skilled with his left hand, however, that he can perform illusions with incomparable dexterity. During his tricks, he likes to repeat: 'Watch carefully. It can't be done any slower.' He has been compared to Borges, not just because he is South American, but because during his shows he makes constant references to literature and poetry. In his magic routines he usually includes what has come to be known as the 'Li Bai trick' or 'illusion of the three breadcrumbs'. He places a coffee cup and three pea-sized balls made of bread on a table. Sitting, he shows the cup to the audience: it is completely empty. After a short introduction he starts reciting these verses by the Chinese poet Li Bai:

*I drink from a pot of wine amid the flowers  
(and with his only hand, he puts a breadcrumb in the cup)  
and we, my shadow and my friend the moon, are three friends  
(he puts another breadcrumb in the cup)  
When I sing, the Moon listens,  
and when I dance, my shadow dances with me  
(he picks up the third breadcrumb and throws it at the audience  
or puts it in his pocket)  
When the party ends, the guests head home,  
but that sadness I know not,  
for we leave as three,  
with the moon as company and my shadow following behind.'*

At the end of the poem, he turns over the cup and three breadcrumbs fall out – the same number as had originally been on the table. He then repeats the poem and does the same trick saying: 'Watch carefully. It can't be done any slower.'



## Probóscide

We should make the reader aware that, upon arriving at this work, it will not take long to perceive that one is at the soft end of an expository appendage, a more or less loose one, being at the same time less and more than any representation: the pre-figurative sweeping proboscis, an acephalous one, without a body, like a lizard's tail, of a starving elephant. Once again it is not clear that this is what it is, because the tip of the thing, although it is a good indication, does not show us the entire figure of the male animal of the savanna. This ownerless trunk is specifically privileged to have Molyneux's problem (see page 7) as its most intimate concern; it is without a doubt here that the alterity of the problem is inscribed in an unvisual theory.

The parable of the blind men and the elephant: six men blind since birth come upon an elephant for the first time, and start examining it. When they are asked what it is, the first one, groping the animal's hindquarters and tail declares that it is a rope; the second blind man, who was feeling the legs, said that they were the columns of a building; the third one spoke of a wall; the fourth said that they were huge fans; the fifth one next to him said that it was an arrow; while the last blind man said that he was standing before a huge toothless snake.

A snake, a pipe, a hose, a diver's tube, or following the outlines of terrestrial biomechanics in a flow of combinations, the strange physiognomy of an arm, the physiognomy of a labial arm, a nose with pre-sensible skills, a snouty arm, a nose with hands, or, above all, a blind arm, Molyneux's arm. This is because, by interrupting the anatomical *elephantidae* continuity, we are naming another thing extrinsic to the link that joins the real with its representations. This is what makes the trunk an accomplice with Molyneux's hesitation. The problem of the blind man can only be thought about, it is unrealizable. Letting an elephantless trunk to go out on its own, a groping blind arm, is to enter a metaphysical affiliation with the distance that separates it from things; when the blind man recovers his vision he stops seeing his objects, the things are lost in the world because they are hidden in encrypted signals: the sphere

and the cube participate at the limit where the thing itself and the other touch their own interruption, the unrecognizable. We are left with the last problem: what is the trunk looking for on the table? Peanuts Sir, they are just peanuts.

\* 5 films, some annotations:

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*Solar the Blind Man Eating a Papaya*

2011

16mm film, colour, silent, 2'35''

Produced by Frac Île-de-France/Le Plateau, Paris

With thanks to Lamu Palm Oil Factory, Kenya

*3 Suns*

2009

16mm film, colour, silent, 0'50''

Official Portuguese Representation at the 53rd International Art Exhibition, La Biennale di Venezia, Commissioned by DGARTES, Ministry of Culture, Portugal

*Fruit Polyhedron*

2009

35mm film, colour, silent, 2'42''

Produced by Instituto Cultural Inhotim, Brumadinho (Minas Gerais), Brazil

*Pot Smaller than Pot*

2010

16mm film, colour, silent, 2'25''

*Probóscide*

2013

16mm film, colour, silent, 2'45''

*O Problema de Molyneux*  
João Maria Gusmão & Pedro Paiva

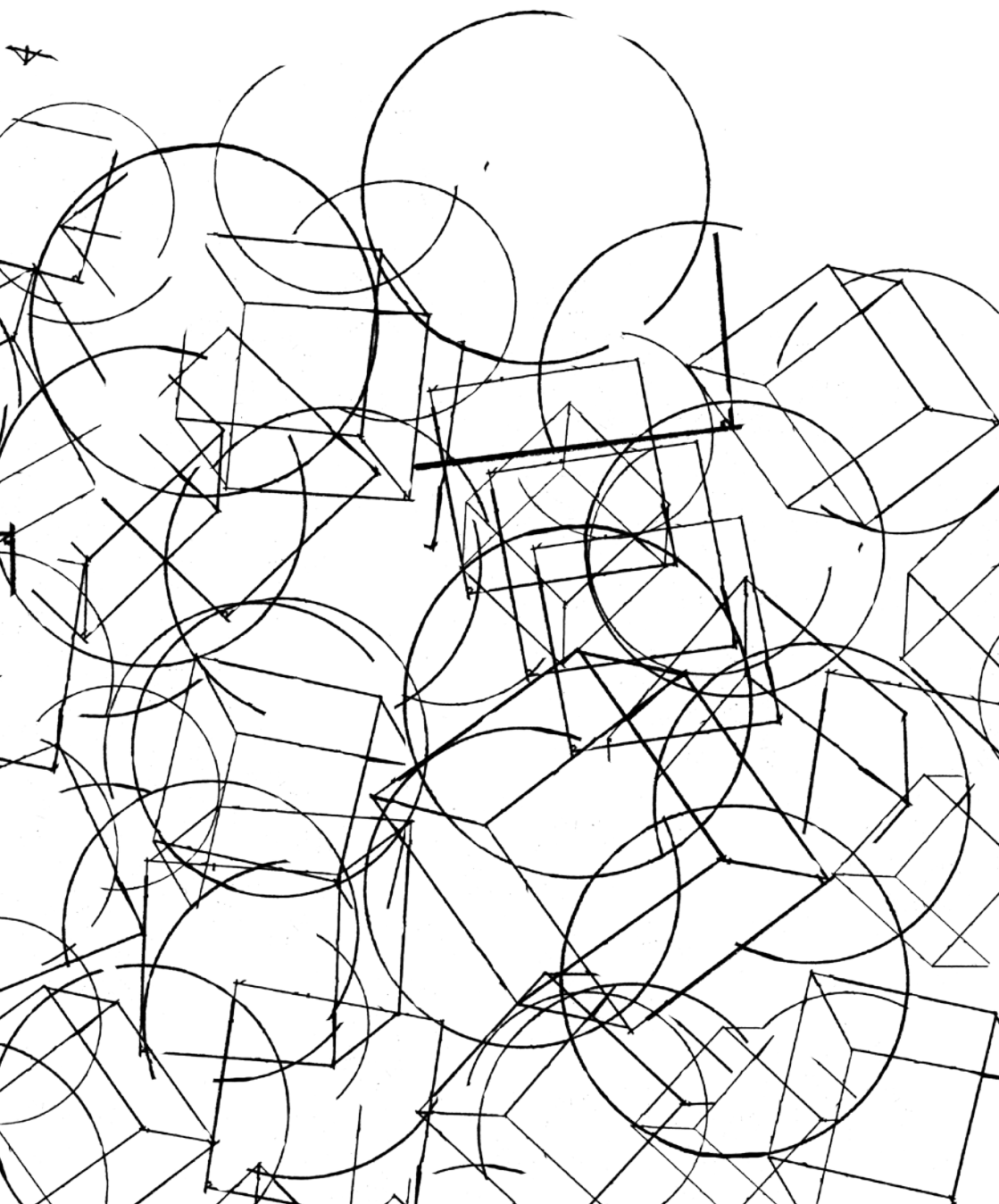
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