

MATTHEW WATSON

SURPLUS TO REQUIREMENTS

November 25 - December 23, 2016

Scholia:

1. Robert Musil negotiates the common border between subject and object. He terms this “the Other condition”, where “one participates in things (understands their language). In this condition understanding is not impersonal (objective), but extremely personal, like an agreement between subject and object.” He characterizes this condition as a “de-reification of the self as of the world”.

2. Reification indicates the passage from one state to another. The thing that is reified, the substance that is made into a thing, is the very matter that regulates our being-in-the-world. Reification is the state that puts emphasis on the “among”, puts the human animal “among” the objects of the world.

3. Louis Althusser discusses the abstraction of the relations between humans and objects through his analysis of the painter Cremonini. “This does not mean it is possible to paint living conditions and social relations, but it is possible, through their objects, to depict the determinate absence which governs them... To see these relations on the surface of a painting is simultaneously to enter into other relations: those that obtain between the artist and his work, or rather between the work and its artist.”

4. Two famous myths of subject formation are found in Narcissus and Pygmalion. First, the myth of Narcissus, which there is no need to retell, as it has been too often cited as the proof of so called narcissism. As Peter Sloderdijk points out, “glass mirrors of the type today have only existed since c. 1500, and initially only in Venice. Supplying large parts of populations with mirrors would not be complete in the First

world until the middle of the 20th Century. Only in a mirror saturated culture could people have believed that for each individual, looking into ones own mirror image realized a primal form of self-relation." For Sloterdijk it is not through our own reflection that the self is formed, but in looking into the face of another human, and knowing that they are looking back at you. People return to themselves by way of the sight of the other. The social imago situates our experience of the being-in-the-world.

In turning to the myth of Pygmalion, we are faced with the story of a sculptor who fell in love with his own creation, a marble sculpture of a woman. Unlike Narcissus, who was punished for self-eroticism, Pygmalion was rewarded for his mad love for an inanimate object, and thus Aphrodite granted life to his statue, they wed, had a child, and lived happily ever after. It's a strange fable for the relationship between humans and things, yet one that points to the muddled distance between subjects and objects.

5. As Giorgio Agamben says, "things are not outside of us, in measurable external space, like neutral objects of use and exchange, rather they open to us the original place solely from which the experience of measurable external space becomes possible... Like the fetish, like the toy, things are not properly anywhere, because their place is found on this side of objects and beyond the human in a zone that is no longer objective or subjective, neither personal nor impersonal, neither material nor immaterial, but where we find ourselves suddenly facing these apparently so simple unknowns: the human, the thing."