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Fenduq of the Heart

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In his famous speech “Structure, Sign, and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences” delivered in 1966 at Johns Hopkins University, French-Algerian philosopher Jacques Derrida takes on the notions of center and origin that are at the basis of philosophy and of structuralism more specifically. Derrida claims that “all discourse is bricoleur,”¹ reading Claude Lévi-Strauss’s bricolage as the only possible process of production that draws on instruments and means that are available and ready at hand and engaging in trial and error. Responding to the distinction between the engineer and the bricoleur in Lévi-Strauss’s work, Derrida argues that the engineer is a myth produced by the bricoleur. “What appears most fascinating in this critical search for a new status of discourse is the stated abandonment of all reference to a *center*, to a *subject*, to a privileged *reference*, to an origin, or to an absolute *archia*.”² Production in this context is no longer centered in a particular locale or place, originating in a map that would then get executed or actualized as object or as discourse, but is also the outcome of play, of bricolage, of a 3D printer that zigzags in its path to the object. The finished product retains the memory of this zigzagging, of this uncertainty, of this improvisation that becomes part of its narrative, its life story, and its significance to others.

In Eric Van Hove’s case, this Derridean notion of bricolage emerges from the *funduq*, the Moroccan trading place and workshop, a ubiquitous scene in every medina in Morocco. But what distinguishes Van Hove’s *funduq* in Marrakech is that what is produced is not merely the local and authentic craft, but also engines and scooters that could no longer be traced to a fixed origin or center either in the industrial world, nor in the old techne passed from generation to generation and from master to apprentice in the Maghreb and elsewhere. The *funduq* that Van Hove runs and inhabits and where Moroccan craftsmen produce engines and scooters is a site of assemblage that brings together parts produced in German factories, bones from animal carcasses, and leather. These different objects are sutured and weaved to produce an affordable mean of transportation that is not too concerned with high speed and symmetry. The products of Van Hove’s *funduq* are sublime objects where the boundaries between east and west have dissipated and the unidirectionality of technology through the import and export of finished products have collapsed. Van Hove’s *funduq* tells the life story of works in progress that arrive at their destination through other means and circuits and containers.

The technology emerging from Van Hove’s *funduq* brings to mind another debate in philosophy this time involving Heidegger and his essay “The Question Concerning Technology” (1954),³ in which he traces the non-instrumental genealogy of technology, turning to *poiesis*, and arguing

¹ Jacques Derrida, *Writing and Difference* (Chicago: U of Chicago, 1978), 285.

² *Ibid.*, 286.

³ Martin Heidegger, *The Question Concerning Technology and other Essays* (Harper Torchbooks, 1977).

that the essence of technology is not merely the conquest of nature but the revelation of truth (*alethia*), a form of *kashf*, a lifting of the veil (*hijab*) as in the Sufi tradition. The truth that technology is meant to reveal could not be reduced to efficiency and speed, cheap exports and after-sale warranties.

The *alethia* that Van Hove's work seeks to reveal by practicing a reflection on the nature of technology with an eye on energy efficiency and the improvement of the conditions of low-income Moroccans debunks speed, aggression, and conquests as the framework through which modern technology has been framed. The poetic technology of Van Hove stands as a bulwark against the poetry of the futurists expressed in the 1909 manifesto by Filippo Marinetti who saw in speed, war, and aggression the only possible future for human kind.⁴ This machine with the futurists and Marinetti went for speed, a utopian project of conquest of the elements and of colonial expansion that has determined the fate of the world and subjected its people to the state of consumers of finished goods. The technology and the machine assembled in Van Hove's funduq sees no contradiction between the engine and the heart, between the poetic expression of tenderness and ache and that which allows machines and cars and motorcycles to come to life.

In Moneera Al-Ghadeer's work on Bedouin poetry from the mid-20th century in the Arabian Peninsula, women poets embraced the car engine, interchanging it with the beating or broken heart of the lover.

Oh hum of my heart
A Mack truck groaning
Up a grade,
Double-downshifts through the gears
A heavy-bodied truck
Straining beneath its load
Working the pedals
It's never enough.⁵

However, the engine as the heart, aching and roaring for the beloved, has not replaced the desert animals. The advent of technology and the car to the desert and into the oral poetry continued to co-exist side by side with the identification with animals and elements of nature.

My moan is that of a she camel whose calf
Has been slaughtered.
She ascends to the lookout, reunited with the herd,
Then returns to search for her lost calf.⁶

Al-Ghadeer explains that there is a modernity that was welcomed, incorporated into the most intimate realm of the Arabian Peninsula, namely poetry, and that this modernity was not antithetical to tradition but rather coexisted with it, inhabiting like Van Hove and his artisans, a space of production that is bodily and artistic, technological and poetic.

⁴ Filippo Marinetti, *The Futurist Cookbook* (New York: Penguin Classics, 2015).

⁵ Moneera al-Ghadeer, *Desert Voices: Bedouin Women's Poetry in Saudi Arabia* (New York: IB Tauris, 2009), 154.

⁶ Ibid.

In Eric Van Hove's work, from his *mahjouba* (the veiled one) project that captures the Heideggerian *alethia* and plays with its folds, it's the body of the machine and its beating heart that are materialized as steel, car parts, wood, and horn. Craftsmanship becomes a rhizomatic process of suturing, a rewriting of the Lacanian subject at the mirror stage, doing away with lack, accepting the conditions of the fragments and in-authenticity, practicing a bricolage for a non-utopian future that steps out of the industrial and futuristic race, formula one. Van Hove's work puts in question the competition with the West and industry whose condition have been skewed from the beginning by setting itself the task of civilizing the world as Ferdinand de Lesseps argues in his quest for funding for his grand project, the Suez Canal. In his manifesto for financing the Canal,⁷ de Lesseps announces the triumph of industry and the domination of nature in the 19th century, opening the door to the colonial project in Africa and elsewhere through grand projects of "ponts et chaussées" from canals to dams and railroads that turns the Maghreb, Africa, and other parts of the words into labs of colonial and industrial practice starting with Napoleon's campaign on Egypt in 1798.

Van Hove's work invites us to consider a model of development that refuses to be interpellated by the binaries of backward/advanced, tradition/modernity, heart/engine, pre-industrial/industrial, and the bricoleur/engineer. His *funduq* is a startup building of modern production and craftsmanship at the same time, erasing the ideological boundaries constitutive of the narrative of progress imagined by colonial and neoliberal discourse. Van Hove's *funduq* is not the factory of Chaplin's modern times that alienates the worker, nor is its eastern or southern site of resistance. The sublime object emerging from this *funduq* are not authentic or imported, for their origins have been mitigated, forgotten, and refigured just as the heart in the Bedouin poems. *Mahjouba*, or the electric scooter whose parts are produced by Moroccan artisans allows us to rethink industry as conquest of nature and of the other, and to consider it as an assemblage that points to a future that is undetermined, open, evolving through a bricolage that meets the other rather than eliminate it.

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⁷ Ferdinand de Lesseps, , *The Isthmus of Suez Question* (London: Longman, Brown, Green, and Longmans, 1855).