

Jalal Toufic

The Contemporary Is Still Forthcoming

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Contemporary art? As far as I am largely *unconcerned*, *none* of what is termed contemporary art, including what is exhibited and screened in various “museums of contemporary art,” for example the Museum of Contemporary Art in Sydney (MCA) or the Museum of Contemporary Art in Los Angeles (MOCA), is contemporary¹ and most of it is not art! There can be no museum of contemporary art since while now we can have museums but not contemporaneity, with the coming of the messiah we are going to have contemporaneity but no museums – there is going to be no need for a museum in the redeemed world, a world where one finds only what is willed to eternally recur.

In 1666, Sabbatai Zevi, the purported Jewish messiah, apostatized and converted to Islam; while most of his followers left him, some persisted in viewing him as the awaited messiah. 1676 should have proved to be the year of a far greater crisis in messianism. What happened in 1676? Sabbatai Zevi died, but also, far more crucially for messianism, “the Danish astronomer Ole Roemer ... became the first person to measure the speed of light. Until that time, scientists assumed that the speed of light was either too fast to measure or infinite. The dominant view, vigorously argued by the French philosopher Descartes, favored an infinite speed. Roemer, working at the Paris Observatory, ... was compiling extensive observations of the orbit of Io, the innermost of the four big satellites of Jupiter discovered by Galileo in 1610.... The satellite is eclipsed by Jupiter once every orbit, as seen from the Earth. By timing these eclipses over many years, Roemer noticed something peculiar. The time interval between successive eclipses became steadily shorter as the Earth in its orbit moved toward Jupiter and became steadily longer as the Earth moved away from Jupiter.... He realized that the time difference must be due to the finite speed of light. That is, light from the Jupiter system has to travel farther to reach the Earth when the two planets are on opposite sides of the Sun than when they are closer together. Roemer estimated that light required twenty-two minutes to cross the diameter of the Earth’s orbit. The speed of light could then be found by dividing the diameter of the Earth’s orbit by the time difference. The Dutch scientist Christiaan Huygens, who first did the arithmetic, found a value for the speed of light equivalent to 131,000 miles per second. The correct value is 186,000 miles per second. The difference was due to errors in Roemer’s estimate for the maximum time delay (the correct value is 16.7, not 22 minutes), and also to an imprecise knowledge of the Earth’s orbital diameter.”² I would like to think that it is not

fortuitous, but fitting, that the death of the purported Jewish messiah happened in the same year in which it was discovered that light has a finite speed and in which the first real calculation of that speed was being done. Messianists went on as if this did not concern them! And yet this (as well as, later, the four dimensional spacetime of the block universe of relativity) should, as far as they were concerned, have been thought provoking and produced a crisis, as a crucified messiah (Jesus) or one who apostatized and converted to another religion (Sabbatai Zevi) was and did for earlier messianists. They proved not to be really the contemporaries of the discovery that light has a finite speed of 131,000 miles per second (actually, 186,000 miles per second), a discovery that made it impossible for them to be the contemporaries of what they perceived and makes it impossible for us to be the contemporaries of what we perceive. Taking into consideration that the speed of light is finite, more specifically 299,792,458 meters per second in a vacuum (c), and that the speed of sound is finite, approximately 768 miles per hour in dry air at 20 °C, one perceives only the past. To see how the sun is presently, I have to wait for its light to reach me. In terms of what they see and hear, indeed of what they can see and hear, people are not the contemporaries of each other and, more generally, of the universe, a universe where light has a finite speed of 299,792,458 meters per second in a vacuum, thus a universe that does not allow for contemporaneity. The awaited messiah/Mahdî is going to end waiting, including the recurrent wait of the ones living then for light to reach them from objects,³ ushering the epoch of contemporaneity⁴ (that until then we cannot be contemporaries, including, indeed mainly, of the event, should not mean that we are bound to be behind the event [Baudrillard: "It was Rilke who said 'Events move in such a way that they will always inevitably be ahead of us. We shall never catch up with them'"]⁵ – we can be ahead of it! – including, as thinkers, through thought experiments). *The messiah is forthcoming* has several meanings: the condition of possibility for his fulfilling his function, the experience of countless recurrence, which can become possible through either time travel to very similar branches of the multiverse or virtual emulations,⁶ is yet to be made possible⁷ (had he, as we are told by many messianists, already come or were he, as millions of Jews and Twelver Shi'ites wish and hope would happen, to appear on Earth today, the messiah/Mahdî would have been and would be still forthcoming, since the conditions for his full presence were not then and are not yet present); moreover, once this condition has been actualized, between his

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appearance on Earth and his ending up willing the eternal recurrence of various events, he continues to be forthcoming both in relation to us, since, given that light travels at 299,792,458 meters per second in a vacuum (and sound at approximately 768 miles per hour), we perceive him at a delay (that's imperceptible to the naked eye), and in relation to himself, that is, he is not yet fully the messiah – the messiah arrives first as forthcoming. It may very well be that the day that the forthcoming Messiah/Mahdî as an overman would be made to experience over and over is the very day in which he became occulted in relation to those living then and to the world ("He [Jesus] went away a second time and prayed, 'My Father, if it is not possible for this cup to be taken away unless I drink it, may your will be done'" [Matthew 26:42]). If, as the New Testament reports, the crucifixion was not taken away from the Christ, then it must have been willed by God, that is, willed to recur eternally,⁸ with the consequence that Jesus would be made to go through it countless times until *he* wills its eternal recurrence, and that while many happenings would not only disappear, but would retroactively never have existed in the willed, redeemed world, the crucifixion, if not all that led to it from the time Jesus Christ prayed to God, is going to continue to be part of the willed, redeemed world. I would rather think that in answer to his prayer, Jesus came to the realization that it is not the will of God that he be crucified ["They slew him (the Messiah, Jesus son of Mary, Allâh's messenger) not nor crucified him, but it appeared so unto them ..." (Qur'ân 4:157)], and consequently that the crucifixion [of another] would most probably not be part of the willed, redeemed world,⁹ or another day that's within a generation of when he was occulted ("Truly I tell you, some who are standing here will not taste death before they see the Son of Man coming in his kingdom" [Matthew 16:28] – his kingdom is the world resulting from his willing the eternal recurrence of some events of that day). Thus the messiah would have come again (in a virtual reality or in branches of the multiverse very similar to the state of the world at the time in which he said he would come back) within the period his earliest disciples were expecting him to come – in the case of the Mahdî, within the Lesser Occultation (*al-ghayba al-sughrâ*), which lasted from 874 to 941. I can very well imagine the following remake of the Wachowski brothers' *The Matrix*: Neo, whose body is actually in suspended animation while his brain is connected to a computer simulation, believes he lives in Palestine in AD 1, then he is "awakened" by someone (Morpheus) and informed by him about the actual state of affairs. At one point in the Wachowski brothers' *The*

Matrix, Neo exclaims: “Djà vu!” Trinity: “What did you see?” Neo: “A black cat went past us, and then another that looked just like it.” Trinity: “How much like it? Was it the same cat?” Neo: “It might have been. I’m not sure.... What is it?” Trinity: “A déjà vu is usually a glitch in the Matrix. It happens when they change something.” How can one affect the world outside the simulation? In my proposed remake I envision that in some of the other very similar branches of the multiverse, Morpheus later subjects Neo to countless recurrence through trapping him in a simulation, most fittingly one of Palestine in AD 1, so that he would end up, across many virtual suicides, willing the eternal recurrence of some events, thus making actual the epochal will, which affects, like meditation does, all simulations and all worlds (with the inaugural appearance of the epochal will in a simulation, many things in the universe or entire branches of the multiverse outside the simulation may cease any existence, vanish as if they were simulations, and the “laws” of the universe or multiverse may be abrogated) – it is those who have designed and implemented the Matrix who would try to obstruct the experiment of subjecting Neo to countless recurrence. Dōgen: “When even for a moment you express the buddha’s seal in the three actions by sitting upright in samādhi ... all beings in the ten directions, and the six realms, including the three lower realms, at once obtain pure body and mind ... all things realize correct awakening Thus in the past, future, and present of the limitless universe this zazen carries on the buddha’s teaching endlessly.... Know that even if all buddhas of the ten directions, as innumerable as the sands of the Ganges, exert their strength and with the buddhas’ wisdom try to measure the merit of one person’s zazen, they will not be able to fully comprehend it” (“On the Endeavor of the Way [*Bendō-Wa*]”);¹⁰ one can paraphrase Dōgen’s words with respect to zazen thus in relation to the will: “When even for a moment, you will the eternal recurrence of three actions ... all beings in the ten (to be precise, eleven?) dimensions and/or the multiverse, including the three lower simulations, are affected ... all things that are still there then are ones that are willed to eternally recur. Thus in the past, future, and present of the limitless multiverse this willing carries on the will’s affirmation endlessly.... Know that even if all the scientists and thinkers of the ten dimensions and/or the multiverse, more innumerable than the sands of the Ganges, exert their strength and try to measure the merit of one person’s willing of the eternal recurrence of some events, they will not be able to fully comprehend it.” The messiah is the overman who goes through countless recurrence and ends up,

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across many suicides, willing the eternal recurrence of various events, thus making actual the epochal will. Once the will has become an actuality, the speed of light becomes if not infinite then so fast that the light travel time from the most distant objects in the universe to a sentient being falls below the quantum mechanical uncertainty, and – allowing for the associated changes in the electron charge, e , and/or Planck’s constant, h , that would preserve the fine-structure constant¹¹ and/or other changes that would permit intelligent beings to continue to exist – those living then become the contemporaries of what they perceive, for example of the willful overman as messiah/Mahdī and of the sun as it is and not as it was 499 seconds (8.32 minutes) in the past.¹² During the transition, during the birth pangs of the messianic age, they might see two suns, the sun as it was 8.32 minutes earlier and the sun as it is at that very moment. In Coppola’s *Dracula*, whose events take place in the final years of the nineteenth century, i.e., when the experience of countless recurrence was not yet possible, Dracula’s first words to Mina, “See me now!” are twice ironic, twice problematic, because he is doubly not in the now, since, as is made clear by the absence of an image of him in the reflective windowpane in front of which he is ostensibly standing, he is not really (fully) there,¹³ and since the light reflected from him and traveling to Mina’s eyes at 298,925,574 meters per second would reach her at a delay. Coppola’s Dracula is an imposter, a counterfeiter of the one who can properly utter the words “See me now!”;¹⁴ indeed the latter words could very well be the ones with which the messiah announces that he is no longer forthcoming.

Can there be one or more events in the universe of relativity where every point in spacetime is misnamed an “event”? Yes, the appearance of the will and its overruling of relativity. If everything that has ever occurred cannot be redeemed, then the universe that’s the end result of the attainment by the overman, then the accomplished messiah, of willing the eternal recurrence of some events cannot be the block universe of relativity. Nietzsche wrote: “Impotent against that which has been – it [the will] is an angry spectator of everything past. The will cannot will backward; that it cannot break time and time’s greed – that is the will’s loneliest misery. Willing liberates ... That time does not run backward, that is its wrath.... This, yes this alone is *revenge* itself: the will’s unwillingness toward time and time’s ‘it was.’ ... Has the will already become its own redeemer and joy bringer? Has it unlearned the spirit of revenge ... ? And who taught it reconciliation with time, and what is higher than any reconciliation – but how shall

this happen? Who would teach it to also will backward?"¹⁵ (with the exception of the *will* in *willing liberates*, the "will" in the rest of the citation of Nietzsche should be qualified by quotation marks, since what Nietzsche is writing about is not yet the will); and Derrida wrote, "‘Forgiveness died in the death camps,’ he [Vladimir Jankélévitch] says. Yes. Unless it only becomes possible from the moment that it appears impossible. Its history would begin, on the contrary, with the unforgivable,"¹⁶ and "forgiveness forgives only the unforgivable.... That is to say that forgiveness must announce itself as impossibility itself. It can only be possible in doing the impossible."¹⁷ One of the consequences of the willing by the overman of the eternal recurrence of various events and the ensuing inaugural appearance of the epochal will is that the latter abrogates the laws of the unwilled, unredeemed world,¹⁸ including the "laws" of nature,¹⁹ and that the ones still there then would no longer be living in the block universe of spacetime of relativity, in which all is preserved,²⁰ even what is Evil, even what is unforgivable, even what cannot be willed to recur eternally, but would be living in a universe where things are transient but subsist only because they are willed to eternally recur.²¹ What is higher than any reconciliation and what is higher than any forgiveness that can accomplish the impossible of forgiving the unforgivable but not the impossible of undoing what has been done is the inexistence, once the will has appeared, of anything that cannot be willed to recur eternally.²² At the most basic level, the forgiveness of the unforgivable that Derrida – who, like Nietzsche ("To 'will' anything ... I have never experienced this")²³ and like all of us still, lacked will – wrote about was still revengeful, as the forgiveness of anyone is until the will becomes possible and is actualized, following which anything that cannot be willed to eternally recur not only disappears but has never existed (many films are no longer going to exist in the willed universe, since they are unworthy of being willed to return eternally). The will, which wills backward as well as forward, liberates from all that cannot be willed, i.e., willed to return eternally, including what, until the will's actualization, had already occurred, and thus from revengefulness and the nihilism that's a consequence of the past's *fait accompli*, of the resigned conviction that what has already been done cannot be undone. That the will wills also backward does not mean that it wills the disappearance of specific events of the past, for that would still be revengeful; rather it means that it wills affirmatively what in the past can be willed to return eternally, with as a *byproduct* that what thenceforth cannot be willed to recur

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eternally, including in the past, would have disappeared, indeed never have existed. Notwithstanding an article of faith of most, if not all Twelver Shi'ites, the willful overman, who is going to be deemed the Mahdī, is not going to avenge imam Husayn, prophet Muhammad's grandson (who was slaughtered alongside many members of his family and his companions in Karbâlâ'), not because he is going to accomplish the impossible of forgiving the unforgivable but because, by making possible a universe where only what can be willed to eternally recur can exist, he is going to accomplish the impossible whereby the unforgivable, what cannot be willed to recur eternally, would no longer have ever existed, with the consequence that there is then nothing to forgive – were the forgiveness of the unforgivable or Derrida's texts on his concept of such a forgiveness, which is forgiveness as such, to continue to be part of the universe when the will becomes actual, then the willful overman as the contemporary messiah is going to "forgive" this will-less forgiveness, this still revengeful forgiveness and Derrida's concept of forgiveness.

PS: Is this text of mine also forthcoming, though for an additional reason?

x

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Jalal Toufic is a thinker and a mortal to death. He was born in 1962 in Beirut or Baghdad and died before dying in 1989 in Evanston, Illinois. He is the author of *Distracted* (1991; 2nd ed., 2003), *(Vampires): An Uneasy Essay on the Undead in Film* (1993; 2nd ed., 2003), *Over-Sensitivity* (1996; 2nd ed., 2009), *Forthcoming* (2000), *Undying Love, or Love Dies* (2002), *Two or Three Things I'm Dying to Tell You* (2005), *'Āshūrā': This Blood Spilled in My Veins* (2005), *Undeserving Lebanon* (2007), *The Withdrawal of Tradition Past a Surpassing Disaster* (2009), *Graziella: The Corrected Edition* (2009), *What Is the Sum of Recurrently?* (2010), and *The Portrait of the Pubescent Girl: A Rite of Non-Passage* (2011). Many of his books, most of which were published by Forthcoming Books, are available for download as PDF files at his website: <http://www.jalaltoufic.com>. He is presently a guest for the year 2011 of the Artists-in-Berlin Program of the DAAD.

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1
This applies, in terms of its reception, even to the art that constructs and/or presents universes in which the signals from anything are not necessarily forthcoming, where people perceive the present, not the past.

2
"Profile: Ole Roemer and the Speed of Light," excerpt from *Cosmic Horizons: Astronomy at the Cutting Edge*, ed. Steven Soter and Neil deGrasse Tyson (New York: New Press: Distributed by W.W. Norton & Co., 2001), http://www.amnh.org/education/resources/rfl/web/essaybooks/cosmic/p_roemer.html.

3
Things bombard us at a quicker and quicker pace, but, given that light has a finite speed of 299,792,458 meters per second in a vacuum and that ostensibly no other signal can be faster than the speed of light, they continue nonetheless to be forthcoming, however minimal the delay.

4
In this respect, and with the exception of entangled subatomic particles, everything has aura before the full presence of the messiah.

5
Jean Baudrillard, *Fragments: Conversations with François L'Yvonne*, trans. Chris Turner (London; New York: Routledge, 2004).

6
See "You Said 'Stay,' So I Stayed" in my book *Forthcoming* (Berkeley, CA: Atelos, 2000).

7
In one of his letters from prison, Antonio Gramsci writes of "the pessimism of the intellect and the optimism of the will" (*Selections from Prison Notebooks* [London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1971]; Gramsci attributes these words to Romain Rolland). Unfortunately we already have intellect but we do not yet have the will, which can be achieved only if we one day reach its condition of possibility, the experience of countless recurrence.

8
Can an event that is willed to recur eternally be repeated? Rather, one day some people are going, through time travel to very similar branches of the multiverse or virtual emulations, to repeat or to be subjected to repetition until they will the event, i.e., will it to recur eternally. Once the epochal will has become an actuality, God creates, every instant, events that are willed to recur eternally, never repeating any of his self-disclosures (Ibn 'Arabi: "The Real does not disclose Himself in a form twice").

9

The withdrawal of tradition, and of the messiah or Mahdī as part of tradition, seems to happen not on the worst day but subsequently.

10
Moon in a Dewdrop: Writings of Zen Master Dōgen, ed. Kazuaki Tanahashi; trans. Robert Aitken et al. (San Francisco: North Point Press, 1985), 145–147.

11
See "Variable Speed of Light," http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Variable_speed_of_light, more specifically this quote by John Barrow: "[An] important lesson we learn from the way that pure numbers like α define the world is what it really means for worlds to be different. The pure number we call the fine structure constant and denote by α is a combination of the electron charge, e , the speed of light, c , and Planck's constant, h . At first we might be tempted to think that a world in which the speed of light was slower would be a different world. But this would be a mistake. If c , h , and e were all changed so that the values they have in metric (or any other) units were different when we looked them up in our tables of physical constants, but the value of α remained the same, this new world would be *observationally indistinguishable* from our world. The only thing that counts in the definition of worlds are the values of the dimensionless constants of Nature. If all masses were doubled in value [including the Planck mass m_P] you cannot tell because all the pure numbers defined by the ratios of any pair of masses are unchanged." (John D. Barrow, *The Constants of Nature; From Alpha to Omega – The Numbers that Encode the Deepest Secrets of the Universe* [New York: Pantheon Books, 2002]).

12
In so far as they are in a state of entanglement, do subatomic particles already belong to the world of the messiah?

13
While the vampire is not found where he "is," as shown by the mirror at the location, he is "found" where he is not – he haunts.

14
A consequent filmmaker would have subsequently made a film in which the words "See me now!" would be unproblematic. Might this essay prompt Coppola to make such a sequel? I very much doubt it since this essay is most probably forthcoming, including in relation to him.

15
Friedrich Wilhelm Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra: A Book for All and None*, ed. Adrian Del Caro, Robert B. Pippin; trans. Adrian Del Caro (Cambridge: New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 111.

16

Jacques Derrida, *On Cosmopolitanism and Forgiveness*, translated by Mark Dooley and Michael Hughes (London; New York: Routledge, 2001), 37. "Anyone who speaks a word against the Son of Man will be forgiven, but anyone who speaks against the Holy Spirit will not be forgiven, either in this age or in the age to come" (Matthew 12:32). One might interpret these words as implying that speaking a word against the Son of Man is forgivable. But that is not necessarily the case; rather, if we consider these words while keeping in mind those of Derrida on forgiveness, we can view them as indicating that speaking a word against the Son of Man is unforgivable and that by forgiving it God accomplishes the impossible. Between the first part and the second part of the aforementioned sentence in Matthew 12:32, there is going to be the pivotal event of the appearance of the will. While the God of the first part of the sentence has no will yet, the God of the second part of the sentence has will and so it makes no sense for him to forgive anyone who speaks against the Holy Spirit, because speaking against the Holy Spirit is not going to be part of the willed world, indeed is going never to have existed since it cannot be willed to return eternally.

17

Ibid., 32.

18

Jalal Toufic
February 7, 2005

Very dear Lyn [Hejinian]:

I hope that the rise of Iraqi Twelver Shi'ites is going to be accompanied within Twelver Shi'ism itself, and unlike in Iran and Lebanon, by an emancipation of its esoteric tendencies from the long-reigning stultifying, exoteric ones. If Iraq cannot become one day one of the secular sites of research into and development of the coming technological singularity, which is going to be able to manipulate the laws of physics, then may the nihilistic lawlessness of present day Iraq, in large part the work of Sunni rural fundamentalists, be replaced one day by the antinomianism of some genuinely (Twelver Shi'ite) messianic era, one à la (Nizârî Shi'ite) Great Resurrection of Alamut from 1164 to 1210.

19

Friedrich Nietzsche: "I beware of speaking of chemical 'laws': that savors of morality" (*The Will to Power*, trans. Walter Kaufmann and R.J. Hollingdale [New York: Random House, 1968], 630).

20

According to the theory of relativity, when we believe that

things pass, we are mistaken (it may be that the sense of unreality one experiences in death is in part a consequence of the circumstance that the time one undergoes there is not that of the block universe of relativity, but, humorously, what most living people mistakenly consider their time to be: a fleeting time, the past vanishing irremediably moment by moment). How to make what does not pass do so? One way of doing this is by exhausting it (that's what we have in the Many-Worlds interpretation of quantum physics, according to which all the possibilities are actualized in different universes). Not to be fooled by their seeming passage into failing to explore and exhaust things in order to make them really pass. Yes, the great attempt of exhaustive people is, paradoxically, to make that which they are exhausting at long last pass.

21

It should go without saying that "eternity in heaven" does not mean necessarily that the one in heaven is going to be there for eternity, moving from one joy to another; it means essentially that he or she has an eternal relation to everything that happens to him or her there, that he or she wills the eternal recurrence of everything that happens to him or her there, that he or she blesses each thing that happens there thus: "I will you to recur eternally."

22

Contrariwise, many events that are presently considered the hallucinations of schizophrenics and the insubstantial visions of mystics (at least some of these eliciting from the one undergoing them a description in terms of eternity) are going to be considered then part of the willed, redeemed world.

23

Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Anti-Christ, Ecce Homo, Twilight of the Idols, and Other Writings*, edited by Aaron Ridley and Judith Norman; translated by Judith Norman (Cambridge University Press, 2005), 97.

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