

# FIRST

FIRST

LOVE

LOVE

FIRST

A

NOVELLA

IN TWO

PARTS

IN

TWO

PARTS

Lily Hibberd

PART ONE  
illustrated  
volume and  
introduction  
with an essay  
by John C.  
Welchman

Lily Hibberd

# LOVE



ELLIKON

# **First Love**

A novella

Part one

Illustrated volume

Edited by Lily Hibberd

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Part one illustrated volume

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Lily Hibberd is a lecturer in the Fine Art Department, Faculty of Art & Design, Monash University, and is represented by Karen Woodbury Gallery, Melbourne. The production of this volume coincides with the solo exhibition of *First Love* at GRANTPIRRIE gallery, Sydney, in June 2009, and was facilitated with the kind assistance of gallery staff. This book was created because of the encouragement and generosity of John C. Welchman, Anne Marsh, Lois Ellis, and H el ene Cixous.

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### Artworks from the exhibition *First Love*, 2009

4-7	Photoluminescent oil paintings on canvas	<i>Delta time</i> <i>Celestial navigation</i> <i>Gravity of light</i> <i>Lunar mirror</i>
10-34	<i>Ice Mirror</i> Oil paintings on glass and mirror	10 works selected from 13 in the series, interspersed through the text
41-44	<i>The preface, First Love</i> Four video stills from 11min film	From a series of short films based on the texts in <i>First Love</i> , volume two



$\Delta t$





## Preface

Lily Hibberd

*First Love* exemplifies the unhinging of time and desire in contemporary life through the image and material form of melting ice. The relationship between time, ice and desire is manifested in a series of interwoven components, firstly as a series of artworks, including four large scale glow-in-the-dark paintings, thirteen paintings of ice forms laid over mirror, in a sequence of short experimental films, and with a time based installation in which a theatre light slowly melts a hole through a large block of ice.

The other aspect of *First Love* is in written form, presented in as a two-part novella. In this initial illustrated volume, a series of reproductions of artworks from the corresponding exhibition are interspersed throughout the text *Ice, time, desire*, a philosophical exposition of the principle elements of the work. Lastly, in an appraisal of the work and its kindred references, John C. Welchman's contribution to this publication corroborates the temporal constitution of *First Love*, revealing the similitude between ice, time and desire through the structure and composition of crystal.

In *volume two*, thirteen narrations of love in confinement embody writing as an act of resistance. These texts function as a mirror image of the crisis of desire under capitalism. While pointing to a breakdown of social order, this is not purported as disaster, for the dysfunction of capitalism offers a chance for freedom. Instead of demise, the decreation of ice and time is thus an opportunity for human transformation, towards a harmonious relationship with nature as liberated desiring organisms.



## Ice, time, desire

Lily Hibberd

We have abandoned our first love. Time is coming undone, as the abstraction of temporality under capitalism increasingly divorces us from reality.<sup>1</sup> Yet every societal precept strains to uphold this impossible system, and we tumble into a temporal chink where no love and no time can exist. This is a crisis that is escalating, for the effects of our continued opposition to the reign of the cosmos are in defiance of the order of nature, and they herald our demise.

There are two aspects to this undoing and they mirror each other: the first is time and ice, and the second is desire and capitalism. Time is held together by ice, while the fury of those who have been disenfranchised runs deeper for the accrual of an age of injustice. The disintegration of the glacial world is an unambiguous illustration of this increasing dichotomy. Terrestrial Atomic Time is scientifically coordinated based on atomic clocks, whereas Universal Time is based on the Earth's rotation and therefore its organic irregularities: one is linear, the other is always changing. The gap between the two temporal measurements is called Delta Time and is calculated by subtracting Universal Time from Atomic Time.<sup>2</sup>

The increase of Delta Time is evidence of a burgeoning chasm between human measures of time and the ever-expanding universe. Meanwhile, capitalism demands that we structure time in a linear fashion, using atomic clocks and in the imposition of little adjustments such as leap seconds to prevent any dissonance being perceived. This of course maintains the dominant order of global markets, ruling governments, human productivity, and more subliminally the belief systems that provide the rationale for this hegemony.



Time as a human construct cannot be divorced from the planet. The Greenwich meridian is the nothing point of global time, fixed on its chosen physical location of zero degrees longitude, eked out across the surface of the earth metre by metre. This is no arbitrary measure, the metre being one ten-millionth of the length of the Earth's meridian along a quadrant. However, in 1889, the International Prototype Metre was defined as the distance between two lines on a standard bar, composed of an alloy of ninety percent platinum and ten percent iridium, which is measured at the melting point of ice.<sup>3</sup> Melting polar masses are thought to be having a further unknown yet unavoidable effect on the velocity of the earth's rotation because of tidal friction, which is caused by the gravitational pull of the moon. This pull is currently slowing the Earth's rate of rotation by about 2.3 milliseconds per day per calendar year. Researchers are indicating that the shifting dispersion of water due to climate change is causing an exponential drag that is dramatically increasing this tidal braking and therefore adding to the length of each solar day.<sup>4</sup>

On the flip side of this mirror, *First Love* challenges the dysfunctional order of human desire in contemporary life.<sup>5</sup> There are two kinds of desire in operation today: one is produced under the law of capitalism, while the other is organic, consistent with anything that strives to exist. Capitalist desires are unsustainable by necessity.<sup>6</sup> They feed the machine of consumption and burn it up like coal, leaving behind only exhaust and pollution. This is the purpose of capitalism; it binds us in its endless replication of production and consumption. The machine that drives this economy is very seductive. Its lure is centred on the false construct of the machine's promise of life, while it spurts and farts and breaks down all the time. We are held in this paradoxical relationship to the productive machine economy in a master-slave dialectic.<sup>7</sup> We feed it; it feeds us. We fear that it will stop working so we give it everything we've got, yet we are never sated for it makes sure that we are always a little hungry because of its empty promise.



Organic or 'biodesires' are simple, although less apparent.<sup>8</sup> They course through our bodies and through everything in nature as a sustainable ecology. They are harder to recognise under capitalism for the constant excess of desiring production has smothered them. Everything is overrun by capitalism's machinery, and everything I can think of is subservient to its organisation: time, thinking, eating, clothing, the home, friends, family, pleasure, and, most pertinently of all, lovers.<sup>9</sup>

The endgame of this factory's line of production is dreadful. For I cannot have everything, and if I imagine that I should I will be overcome by the idea of engorgement. This hunger comes from fear of lack, a fear of a lack of desire even.<sup>10</sup> Yet desire being emptiness perpetually refills itself. It is futile to pursue it. Strength and fullness are founded on a political decision to dismantle this order so that it no longer controls us. But this is hard because it is impossible to separate need from this lure, and we cannot identify what it is we want. But how can we relinquish desire? I wonder if the answer is in apprehending our physical existence in a form of asceticism.<sup>11</sup> For example, to know hunger is a primal sensation, and in a few hours if I abstain from eating I will feel it distinctly. I may even come closer to a feeling of death, which could euthanize the power of capitalist desires so that sufficiency might satisfy my body and mind. In paring back extraneous capitalist production and consumption we may even return to first love, not as a repression of pleasure, nor as a fear of lack, but in an embrace of the joy of need, in which we will be able to dismantle the dominion these lacks have over us.<sup>12</sup>

*First Love* is a response to this collective dilemma. Published in two volumes, the second part of this book takes the form of a collaboration in which 13 unnamed lovers respond to 'first love' as a joy and a predicament. Each contributor relates a dispute with the laws of desire under capitalism, and other such human ordinances as time and measurements of space.<sup>13</sup> These narratives offer a survey of the lineage of political resistance in literature, because for every text the writer has incorporated a literary work that represents the writing of love in confinement.



These historical reflections are realised in an array of formal approaches, either as a melange of quotes, in formulaic similitude, or in one of a number of other wandering interpretations.<sup>14</sup>

Love as confinement comes in many forms, yet is an experience conducive to writing and to resistance, even when the captive is physically ill, criminal or insane. Psychological exile is the most prevalent form of segregation that lovers suffer under patriarchy, such as those who have subtly belied social convention or a dominant culture, like H  l  ne Cixous, Roland Barthes, Charlotte Bront   and Virginia Woolf.<sup>15</sup> Whereas Jean Genet, the Marquis de Sade, Janet Frame and Jeanette Winterson have found that incarceration is the consequence of exceeding the limits of the law. For those quarantined due to serious ailment, such as Marcel Proust, desire is exacerbated by the inability to take hold of the object concerned. Alternatively, philosophers like Simone Weil deploy lack to defy a political limit.<sup>16</sup> Yet for Marguerite Duras, Ivan Turgenev, Anne Carson, Helen Garner and Samuel Beckett, love itself results in confinement as a universal estrangement from others. Within all of these categories the individual experiences a crisis of desire because of repression. And the lover's incarceration is a prison of time as well, for lovers are always in the process of their own undoing, and love will exhaust itself. Yet what the lover fears most of all is their freedom being relinquished once the yearning is satisfied; of being deliberately forgotten, of knowing and relishing the impossible under the false order of love's fugitive nature. Even so, each of the contributors to *First Love* believes that they can write their way out of this trap, because for them words are irrepressible and defiant.<sup>17</sup>

*First Love* plainly states that we can write our way to freedom and bring an end to our conflict with nature. As impassioned responses, the thirteen stories that comprise *First Love* volume two echo discordantly in a call for liberation.<sup>18</sup> They offer a contemporary philosophy of desire, as the writing transforms both the authors and the readers, releasing desire from subjugation to the capitalist machine.

## Notes

- 1 Argued by Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari in *Anti-Oedipus: capitalism and schizophrenia*, trans. Robert Hurley, Mark Seem, and Helen R., New York: Viking Press, 1977.
- 2 See Guinot, B. & P. K. Seidelmann, "Time scales - Their history, definition and interpretation", in *Astronomy and Astrophysics*, vol 194, no1-2, April 1988, pp304-308.
- 3 See Jerrard, H. G. and D.B. McNeill, *Dictionary of Scientific Units: Including Dimensionless Numbers and Scales*. London: Chapman & Hall, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., 1964.
- 4 On a case for restructuring the keeping of global time, see "Why new time scales?" P. K. Seidelmann, and T. Fukushima, *Astronomy and Astrophysics*, vol 265, no2, May 1992, pp833-838.
- 5 In *Anti-Oedipus: capitalism and schizophrenia* Deleuze and Guattari contend that under capitalism we are caught up in a kind of empty illusion or theatre: "Such is the nature of Oedipus—the sham image", *ibid.*, p125.
- 6 This is principal to Karl Marx's formulation of Dialectical Materialism in the theorisation of modern capitalism as a political and ideological superstructure founded on a productive economy that holds the labour class in a binary, yet alienating, relation to consumption and culture (note: Marx drew on Friedrich Engels's treatise on Dialectical Materialism). See *Dialectical materialism: Marxian philosophy, collected from works of Marx, Engels, Lenin and Plekhanov*, ed. L.L. Sharkey. Sydney: Current Book Distributors, 1942.
- 7 On the Master-Slave dialectic see G.W.F. Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit*, trans. A. V. Miller. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1977.
- 8 'Biodesires' is a neologism that I have generated to highlight the centrality of human desire in capitalism's subjugation of the individual, following Michel Foucault's notion of biopower as the administration of political power applied directly to human life. See Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality Vol.1: The Will to Knowledge*, trans. Robert Hurley. Harmondsworth, England: Penguin, 1998, p140. See also Giorgio Agamben, *Homer sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*. Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1998.
- 9 As elucidated again by Michel Foucault in *The History of Sexuality*: "because power is situated and exercised at the level of life, the species, the race, and the large-scale phenomena of the population", *ibid.*, p137.
- 10 A teleology of the Lacanian order of desire and its relentless impossibilities.
- 11 Advocated as a practical philosophy by the French theological philosopher, mystic and activist Simone Weil. In *Gravity and Grace* Weil conceived of the neologism "Decreation" as a kind of freedom through death, saying "We participate in the creation of the world by decreating ourselves". *Gravity and Grace* (1947). London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1952, p29.
- 12 See Gilles Deleuze, *Spinoza: Practical Philosophy* (1970) trans. Robert Hurley. San Francisco: City Lights Books, 1988, in the section on "Power" pp97-104, particularly on p101 where Deleuze states that: "In joy...our power expands, compounds with the power of the other, and unites with the loved object. (Spinoza, *Ethics*, IV, p18)." Deleuze goes on to explain that Spinoza's notion of *conatus* is the "effort to experience joy, to increase the power of acting..."
- 13 *First Love* purports that this is the consequence of an atavistic human compulsion, in that we tend to return to primal law instead of universal openness. See Friedrich Engels' *Dialectics of Nature* (1925), where Engels iterates that, "All nature, from the smallest thing to the biggest, from a grain of sand to the sun, from the protista to man, is in a constant state of coming into being and going out of being, in a constant flux, in a ceaseless state of movement and change." From Engel's "Introduction", in *Friedrich Engels' Dialectics of nature*, ed. C. Dutt. New York: International Publishers, 1940.
- 14 It is recognised in literary genre studies that artworks rarely reside within or are read as a single form. Indeed, the use of this rhetorical device goes as back as far as Plato, the ancient Greeks calling this transposition of form "ekphrasis".
- 15 This notion of being exiled and yet resisting from within that confinement is at the heart of Hélène Cixous' political strategy across literature and philosophy. In "Sorties" (originally published in *La Jeune Née*, 1975) Cixous writes, "If woman has functioned "within" man's discourse... now it is time for her to displace this "within," explode it, overturn it, grab it, make it hers". See *The Newly Born Woman*, with Catherine Clements, trans. Betsy Wing. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1986, p95.
- 16 Simone Weil speaks of this undoing in the following way: "we have to die into order to liberate a *tied up* energy, in order to possess an energy which is free and capable of understanding the true relationship of things". *Gravity and Grace*, *ibid.*, p30.
- 17 For a discussion of James Joyce's *Ulysses* and the textual voice see Hélène Cixous, "Predit" (from *Prénoms de personne*, Paris: Seuil, 1974), in *The Hélène Cixous Reader*, ed. Susan Sellers, trans.

Deborah Cowell. London: Routledge, 1994, pp30-33. This alterity is embodied by any text that proffers the "voice" as a necessarily multiple and intersubjective form of communication. See Walter J. Ong, "Voice as Summons for Belief", *The Barbarian Within, and other fugitive essays and studies*. New York: Macmillan, 1962, p54.

18 See Virginia Woolf, *Room of one's own*, 1929. London: Hogarth Press, 1978. In *Elemental Passions* by Luce Irigaray, this "writing of liberation" is embodied within the text (trans. Joanne Collie and Judith Still. London: Athlone Press, 1992). While for Hélène Cixous this writing is borderless: "I ask of writing what I ask of desire: that it have no relation to the logic which puts desire on the side of possession, of acquisition, or even that consumption-production which, when pushed to its limits, links (false) consciousness with death", in "Prénoms de personne", *The Hélène Cixous Reader*, *ibid.*, p27.



## The Last Marriage of Space and Time<sup>1</sup>

As suggested by the first term of Lily Hibberd's exhibition, one of the main questions here converges on the notion of firstness itself. *First Love* is a disquisition on the uncoupling of the concept of "first" from both its modern codependence with priority and its capitalist extrapolation as the initial term for an (inevitable) increment caught up in the complementarities of interest, profit, growth, or expansion. Ever preoccupied with time, Hibberd makes a plea for the redemption of a parenthetical temporality that contests both the a priori and the future conditional; so that time becomes, in a sense, its own lagging indicator, tracing a dissident path between the false confidence of parametrollogical reckoning and the entropic tailspin of production.

Hibberd, then, throws an interrogatory hood over the serial dependence of the number one, questioning the inexorability of its eclipse by any series it initiates. She knocks down the numerical skittles of her own phantasmatic Fibonacci sequence—

- 1 ice block
- 4 glow-in-the-dark paintings
- 13 narratives and intertexts
- 13 representations of ice on mirror

—by miraculously casting her crystal ball into the gutter under the off-stage pressure of gravity.

When we follow after the artist herself and engage with the slippery veneer of melancholy and unrequited pessimism interleaved with furious hope and constitutional

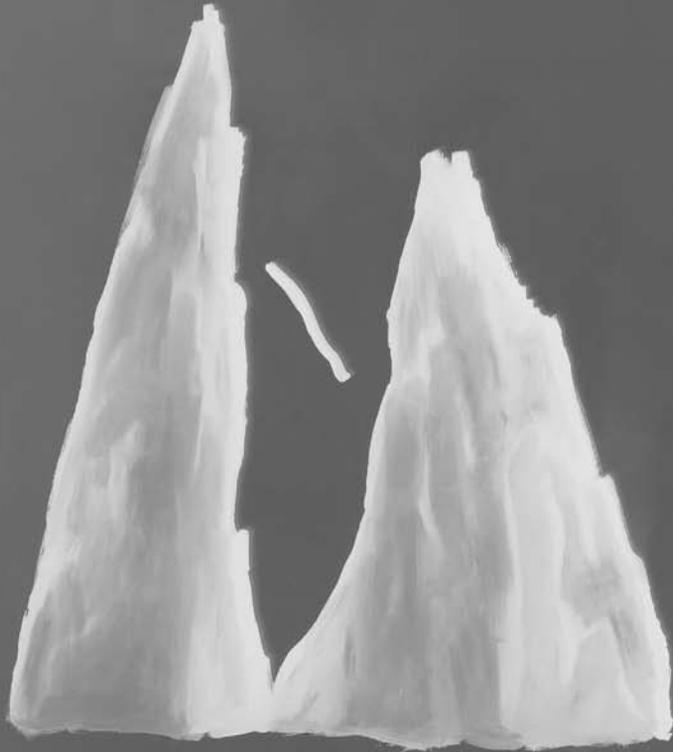


disequilibrium that pervades the stories, videos, sculptures and photographs in *First Love*, it soon becomes clear that the coming into being—or simply into view—of amorous commencement has all the specificity and deliberation of cloud-formation or camouflage. More an uneven tangle of events than a measured step, the unravelling and recouplings of *First Love* at the same time burn along a false fuse of purity and innocence.

Whatever their origin or mutual relations, the protagonists of *First Love*—that is, the agents or motivating objects working through and behind the writing series that supplies the project's grounds and across the author's productions which create its figures—are aligned in a coalition of creatural and material specificities. In the animular domain there are swallows and worms; in the mythological or para-human, centaurs and witches; among substances or conditions are wax, fog, ice and black blood; and in the anthropological register we encounter a range of outcast types including strangers, the vagrant Bum and the prisoner at D Sanatorium.

Written from various positions of confinement and marginality, most of Hibberd's first lovers use constraint as a catalyst for the half-involuntary self-dissolution through which their transport is engendered. For the incarcerated narrator of "Black Blood" his former life of crime precipitates a founding experience of "corporeal degradation" that, in turn, prompts a more general 'amorphousness' as he disappears "into all men." While the "atomization" of this murderer is offered metaphorical support by the blitz-like decimation of a city, the pulverized or disordered selves in the other stories face on to abandonment, desertion, and banishment ("Bums"); are filled with wax and surrounded by fog ("Wax and Fog"); pass through premonitory death and disengorgement ("Love of Strangers"); or reverse engineer themselves into furlessness or self-sustained extinction ("The Worm").<sup>2</sup>

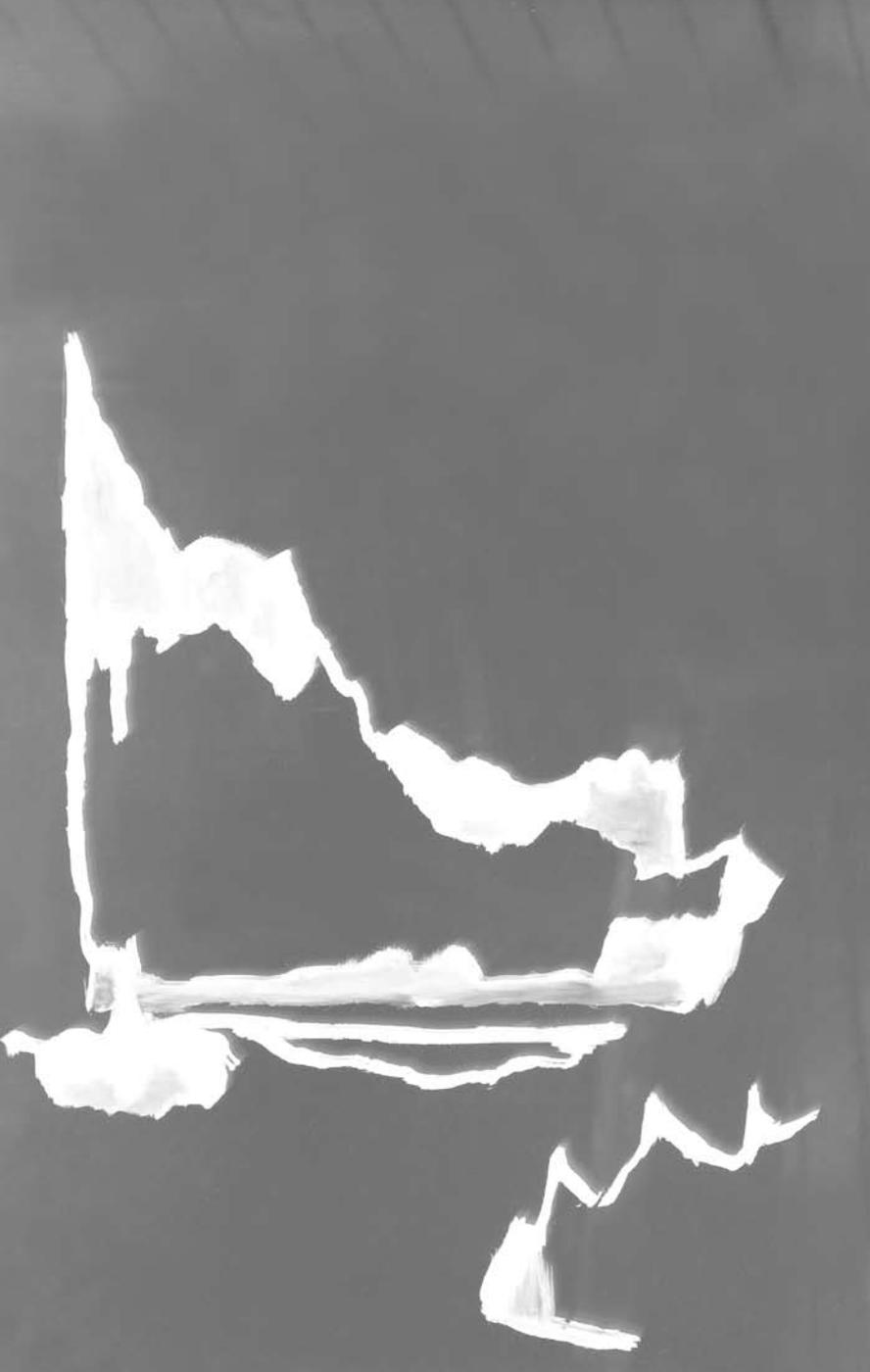
Common to all the firsts, however, is a condition of retrospective recollection through which their intensities are



wistfully re-experienced, hopelessly allegorized and in some measure mourned. First love is never quite recognized as such until later—sometimes minutes or even moments later, sometimes not until near life’s ending. It thus joins with other perfervid experience, such as near-death sensations or the radically uncanny, which at first only baffle or overwhelm, and only later are unravelled into common signification, and thereby lost. Their aftermath bears witness then to an escape route from the dimensional world, a bore-hole under the ice-floes, open once, but now stopped up by both the passage, regained, of normative temporality and the pressures of recollection.

Shared too, however, is a particularity of structural alignment that we can name—following the metaphorical orientation of the exhibition and its entropic arrangement around a melting block of ice—as crystallization. For Hibberd, this trope is situated at the conjunction of several discourses, including eco-aesthetics, the philosophy of the moving image, postmodern theories of simulation and the social formation of the discursive itself. But for us to arrive with any conviction in any of these places we have to review the symbolic genealogy of the crystal and its shifts of fortune as it comes into contact with gyring lattice-work of what Alain Badiou refers to as “art-science-politics-love.”<sup>3</sup>

We should start in Saltzburg, named not so much for the salt mines situated beyond the northern edges of the Austrian Alps but after the toll exacted from as early as the 8<sup>th</sup> century on salt-carrying barges plying the Salzach river. Crystals and capital were ever connected. It was here in the early 1820s that Marie-Henri Beyle, who wrote under the pen name Stendhal, bore witness to an epiphanic conjunction between wood and salt that served as a metaphorical encapsulation of his theory of love. In “Concerning the Birth of Love,” the second chapter of *Love* (1822), a reflective disquisition motivated by his unrequited love for Mathilde, Countess Dembowska, whom he met during his sojourn in Milan, Stendhal writes:



At the salt mines of Salzburg, they throw a leafless wintry bough into one of the abandoned workings. Two or three months later they pull it out covered with a shining deposit of crystals. The smallest twig, no bigger than a tom-tit's claw, is studded with a galaxy of scintillating diamonds. The original branch is no longer recognizable.<sup>4</sup>

In the theoretical application that ensues, Stendhal sets chemical process in apposition to mental activity and subject formation: “What I have called crystallization,” he suggests, “is a mental process which draws from everything that happens new proofs of the perfection of the loved one.” At the same time he builds a second analogy onto the primary metaphor by likening the process of crystallization and its concomitant amorous signification to a journey. This is not any journey, but a pilgrimage for venereal rather than religious veneration—though each objective shares the same destination: Rome, capital city of a people and nation which Stendhal always elevated over his French origins. Italy, he wrote in *The Charterhouse of Parma* (1839), is “a country very far away from us [the French], [where] people are still driven to despair by love.” In the diagrammatic drawing of this journey he sketched on the back on a playing card while visiting the Salzburg mines in the company of Madame Gherardi, the city of Bologna stands for indifference while Rome represents perfect love. The mountainous road between them passes, allegorically, through various states of crystallization, including admiration and marvel; acknowledgement of the pleasures of any interest aroused by the loved one; hope that further progress toward love might be made; and delight in the super-estimation of the qualities of the loved one.

Stendhal's metaphors mark something of a tropic breakthrough for the crystal, underlining the terminus of its old-order figuring as a compound of mystical reflection, sparkling coherence and premonitory scintillation. For all its



seductively digressive rigmarole, Sir Thomas Browne's *Garden of Cyrus: The Quincunciall, Lozenge, or Net-work Plantations of the Ancients, Artificially, Naturally, Mystically Considered* (published with his *Hydriotaphia* in 1658), for example, still concludes with an assertion of the kind of "mystical mathematic" order emblemized by the crystal: "All things began in order, so shall they end, and so shall they begin again; according to the ordainer of order and mystical Mathematicks of the City of Heaven."<sup>5</sup> For Browne, materials like quartz crystal, referred to in some early collections as "Orkuta" or formed stones (lime, chalk, salts, and coal as well as fossils, lodestone, asbestos, and amber could be considered members of this class), were the product of a "lenteous percolation of earth, drawne from the most pure and limpid juyce thereof... [and] wrought by the hand of its concretive spirit."<sup>6</sup>

In a sense, Stendhal continues the whimsical allegorization of the crystal, but by other means. First, he finally severs the ricochet of crystalline signification from its dependence on, issuance from, or serial return to the godhead—or to the more autonomous "concretive spirit" of the earth. De-emblemized from its instrumental relation to the divine, the crystal emerges as a motile sign for an unfathomable process that defines the operating sphere of romantic "man." In this condition, it joins forces, secondly, with what Stendhal clearly regarded as a salutary dose of quasi-scientific rationality. Love here becomes a process or "reaction" rather than merely an ineffable experience. Governed by steps and stages loosely modelled on chemical or physical experiments, it is vestigially beholden to its own variant of natural law.

As these inflections were met by the rise of a more scientized and self-disciplining modernity, the crystal maintained its power as a metaphorical node of concentration and distributional cause. Attempting to define the psychological "nucleus" in *Studies on Hysteria* (1893-95) Freud and Breuer write of a "a psychical group that has once been split off" which "plays the part of a 'provoking' crystal from which a

crystallization which would otherwise not have occurred will start with the greatest facility.”<sup>7</sup> As Andre Green notes (citing the precedent of Stendhal), Freud also took up with the crystal in his later work, remarking that “when a crystal breaks up (experienced a trauma in other words) its fragmentation respects its constitutive line of forces. So does psychopathology in spite of the difference between the mind and the mineral order. The crystallization, a word also used by Stendhal to define the processes of falling in love, can be a synonym for psychic work.”<sup>8</sup>

For the Surrealists in the 1920s and 30s, the crystal was vaunted as “the source of primary creativity,” and, perhaps, as a kind of primal object. André Breton put it in these terms: “The great secret of the environment of things can be discovered in this way: the crystal possesses the key to every liberty.”<sup>9</sup> In *Mad Love*, his advocacy of creative, “spontaneous action” was likewise governed by the “perfect example” of the crystal. “Nonperfectible by definition,” he suggested, “here the inanimate is so close to the animate that the imagination is free to play infinitely with these apparently mineral forms.”<sup>10</sup> As in other matters—and as so often with the crystal—in addition to being “a supreme metaphor of spontaneity, imagination, and creativity” the crystal also “became a principle of order more primordial than the order provided by reason.”<sup>11</sup>

The deployment of the crystal as an operating system for the prismatic refraction of order is also attested in a more moderate faction of avant-garde activity in the mid-twentieth century. For in addition to suggesting several definitions of the nature and purpose of art using the metaphor of the crystal, including in his *Education Through Art* (1943)<sup>12</sup> and essays “What is Revolutionary Art?” (c. 1934) and “The Importance of Living” (1938),<sup>13</sup> Herbert Read put crystalline form at both the literal and tropic centres of his allegorical novel *The Green Child* (1935), which turns on the activities of a race of underground crystal-worshipping humanoids.<sup>14</sup> That these associations are still part of the transparent structure of ‘romantic humanism’ is



attested by Read's forthright separation of the formal orders of 'classical' beauty, which take their cues from natural properties and mathematical clarity, from the disposition of art per se, whose "purely subjective" initiatives broker the creation of "free"—not preordained—"patterns."<sup>15</sup>

Perhaps this line of reckoning finally comes to an end only with J.G. Ballard's *The Crystal World* (1966), the last of his early disaster fictions (along with *The Drowned World* and *The Drought*), written under the influence of the pictorial Surrealism of Salvador Dalí, René Magritte, Roberto Matta and Max Ernst, especially the latter's petrified forests and Matta's interiorized landscapes or 'inscapes.'<sup>16</sup> Set out in unassuaging dialogue with Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*, besieged by Manichean antitheses (black/white; dark/light; transparent/opaque) and crackling with dry, apocalyptic fervour, the viral crystallization of swathes of remote Cameroonian rainforest finally releases the crystalline intensities pent up in the dichotomous compound of order and transcendence so that the crystal and its remorseless becoming resplendently devour the entire biological world. It only remains for this fractal African plague to take root in the west. In *The Crystal World*, this begins in the Florida everglades; while Robert Smithson brings it home more abundantly, to the industrial wastelands of New Jersey, in his travelogue "The Crystal Land," also written in 1966.<sup>17</sup>

From here on we are all crystallized. Or, rather, we have more insight now into how we have already become subjects of the crystal, and like it, are derived from variances of temporal phasing: subjects of the moving image, for example. Sometimes the seeds of crystallization are sown to reap a social harvest, as with the formation of discourses and institutions argued for by Michel Foucault. For Foucault, local programs for communal governance, whether in the penal, or medical systems or the wider economy, offer platforms for crystallization. In the same way, discourses themselves "crystallize into institutions ... inform individual behaviour [and] act as grids for the

perception and evaluation of things."<sup>18</sup> Sometimes, they are catalysts for the formation of "crystallized organizational identities" or the signatory product of writing itself.<sup>19</sup> And sometimes they offer recursive grounds for another round of debate between the conditions of order and chaos. It is on the site of the crystal that Ilya Prigogine, for example, looks for a "passage from a disordered situation to an ordered one" and on the less certifiable grounds they inhabit that Jean Bricmont and others contend against their counter-entropic drift.<sup>20</sup> Something similar occurs in the theorization of ordered networks, which at least in static models such as graph theory, have often been "modelled as crystal lattices." As one of crystallography's few historians puts it, a crystal "is an object which is now laying down the law of imperfections, whereas before, when it was still an outsider, it embodied the perfection of a natural order."<sup>21</sup>

This is one form of the crystal's revenge, but not the only one. For Jean Baudrillard the unexchangeable defiance of the crystal is a function of a crushing indifference that suspends this symbolic object outside the domain of commodities and bestows on it an ultimate "fatality"—figured not so much as a form of death, but in radical continuity with preconditions of fate itself. As a recent discussion suggests, many of Baudrillard's "later sovereign objects are frozen—the photographic object, the crystal, the hostage, the absolute commodity with its 'aura of frozen intangibility' (Agamben). All tend towards inexchangeability."<sup>22</sup> All the former transcendence of crystalline form, all its metaphysical scintillation, are reverse engineered here in the intransigence of a pure objecthood that is severed from every signified. It has neither a semantic threshold nor the means to become. But yet it is there.

In Gilles Deleuze's formulation, finally, the crystal opens up between the spatial and temporal aspects of the celluloid image, folding together a virtual past and actual present so that it is time itself, under this double aspect, "that we see in the crystal."<sup>23</sup> Not just time, of course, as "the crystal is expression,"<sup>24</sup> a site, that is, for the co-production of expressive and content signification

with and through the material order of its constituency. Love is not lost in this dispensation. Instead it emerges through various relinquishments, or liminal ‘hardnesses,’ and synaesthetic referrals, predicated on the practice of art and writing: “for it is through writing that you become animal, it is through colour that you become imperceptible, it is through music that you become hard and memoryless, simultaneously imperceptible and animal: in love.”<sup>25</sup>

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Los Angeles, Spring 2009

#### Notes

- 1 J. G. Ballard, *The Crystal World*. Panther, 1968 [originally published 1966], p162.
- 2 These and subsequent citations are from the unpublished ms. of Hibberd's 13 stories.
- 3 For a discussion of this associative matrix, see *The Praxis of Alain Badiou*, eds. Paul Ashton, A. J. Bartlett, and Justin Clemens (Melbourne: re.press, 2006), esp. p11.
- 4 Stendhal, *Love*, trans. Gilbert and Suzanne Sale, ed. Jean Stewart (Penguin Classics, 1975), p. 45. The story is expanded in a fragment added later, “The Salzburg Bough,” published in the appendix of this volume, pp284f.
- 5 These lines appear at the end of the fifth and final chapter; text available at: <http://penelope.uchicago.edu/gardennoframes/garden5.html#b32>
- 6 Claire Preston, *Thomas Browne and the writing of early modern science* (Cambridge University Press, 2005), p104 (for “Orkuta”) and p126, n10 (for the description of crystalline forms, cited from *Pseudodoxia Epidemica*).
- 7 Breuer and Freud, *Studies On Hysteria*, 1893-95, p282.
- 8 Andre Green, “The Psychopathology of Hysteria, 1995” in *Storms in Her Head: Freud and the Construction of Hysteria*, eds. Muriel Dimen and Adrienne Harris (Other Press, 2001), p80.
- 9 André Breton, *Surrealism and painting*, trans. S.W. Taylor (New York: Harper & Row, 1972), p205.
- 10 André Breton, *Mad Love*, trans. M.A. Caws (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1986), p11.
- 11 Dalibor Vesely, *Architecture in the Age of Divided Representation: The Question of Creativity in the Shadow of Production* (MIT Press, 2004), p44. Vesely identifies and discusses the presence of the crystal metaphor in Breton's writings.
- 12 See, Richard Howard Wasson, *Herbert Read: Contemporary Romantic Humanist* (1962), p406.
- 13 See, Bob Barker, “Herbert Read as a Novelist: *The Green Child*,” in *Herbert Read Reassessed*, ed. David Goodway (Liverpool University Press, 1998), pp115-16.
- 14 In addition to Barker's essay, see Richard Howard Wasson, “The Green Child: Herbert Read's Ironic Fantasy,” *PMLA*, Vol. 77, No. 5 (Dec., 1962), pp. 645-651, which situates the novel the context of Read's association with T.E. Hulme; and Paul Newman, “The Crystal Utopia: The Green Child by Herbert Read,” *Wormwood* # 8, 2007.
- 15 Herbert Read, “The Importance of Living,” in *Poetry and Anarchism* (London: Freedom Press, 1947), p. 78; cited by Barker, p116.
- 16 See, Jeannette Baxter, J.G. Ballard's *Surrealist Imagination: Spectacular Authorship* (Ashgate, 2009).
- 17 On Smithson's “The Crystal Land” (1966) and its possible connection to Ballard, see Eugenie Tsai, *Robert Smithson unearthed: drawings, collages, writings* (Columbia University Press, 1992), pp26-39.
- 18 “Questions of Method: An Interview with Michel Foucault,” *Ideology and Consciousness*, no8 (1981), p10.
- 19 See S.J. Tracy and A. Trethewey, “Fracturing the Real-Self-Fake-Self Dichotomy: Moving Toward Crystallized Organizational Identities,” *Communication Theory*, no15 (2005), pp168-195; and Laurel Richardson, “Writing: A method of inquiry,” in N. K. Denzin & Y. S. Lincoln, eds. *Handbook of qualitative research* (2nd ed.), (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2001), pp923-948.
- 20 See, Ilya Prigogine, “Un siècle d'espoir,” in *Temps et Devenir: Colloque de Cerisy* [“A partir de l'oeuvre d'Ilya Prigogine”], eds. J. P. Brans, I. Stengers, P. Vincke (Patino, 1983, p157); and J. Bricmont, “Science of Chaos or Chaos in Science?” [Physique Theorique, UCL] at <http://www.physics.nyu.edu/faculty/sokal/UCL>
- 21 Françoise Balibar, *The Science of Crystals* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1993), p93. The context for this discussion between social network theory and the chemical and physical properties of crystals derives from Moses A. Boudourides, “Networks, Fluids, Chaos” at <http://www.math.upatras.gr/~mboudour/articles/nfc.pdf>
- 22 See, Jean Baudrillard, *Revenge of the Crystal: Selected Writings on the Modern Object and its Destiny, 1968-1983*, ed. and trans. Paul Foss and Julian Pefanis (London and Concord, Mass.: Pluto Press, 1990); and “A Sovereign Object? Baudrillard and the Inexchangeable,” *International Journal of Baudrillard Studies*, vol 5, no1 (January, 2008).
- 23 Gilles Deleuze, *Cinema 2: The Time-Image*, trans. Hugh Tomlinson (University of Minnesota Press, 1989), p81.
- 24 Deleuze, *The Time-Image*, *ibid.*, p74.
- 25 Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, vol 2, trans. Brian Massumi (University of Minnesota Press, 1987), p187.





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