

language of "room" requires a return to the parasite itself, particularly in its status as Ur-text, an interpretation that a significant contingent of P.S. shares. Two points are most salient here. First, the parasite is room. Room for maneuver. Room for change. Parasitism itself is not death and decay, as it commonly connotes. Rather, as Serres demonstrates, it is change. Second, the parasite's buzz can be understood as a relation of play. Fortunately, these concepts are not as unrelated as they may seem.

Spielraum

The key concepts of the parasite (room and play) come together most neatly in Walter Benjamin's concept of *Spielraum* or "room-for-play." In his famous essay on the historical transformation of art's reception, Benjamin argues that in the past, artworks were singular objects whose craft and physical presence cast an "aura." With the ability to reproduce artwork, aura began to fade. In other words, Michelangelo's David had an aura in a way that a contemporary television series does not. However, as Benjamin argues, "What is lost in the withering of semblance, or decay of aura, in works of art is matched by a huge gain in room-for-play."

The extraordinary Miriam Hansen, a name that should be familiar to any of our members, has paid particularly close attention to Benjamin's theory of play. She notes that

Benjamin "complicates the mimetic, fictional dimension of play ('doing as if') with an interest, following Freud, in the 'dark compulsion to repeat.'" Both of these meanings of room are well known to us: room is the possibility of becoming different, but it is also opens up the chance of failure and all the desires that are bound up with it. Both of these effects have symbolic avatars among our ranks. Indeed, the parasite has made us understand the many nuances of "failure" that include not only an opposite of success, but also such enabling qualities as trial and error procedures, as well what our group has come to call "radical failure."

Another key sense of play that Benjamin brings to bear, according to Hansen, is that of gambling. Gambling "innervates." In other words, it touches on an archaic sense that has no place within industrialized capitalism. It is a remainder within an increasingly rationalized world. Hansen writes:

It is significant that [Benjamin] seems less interested in pursuing analogies with assembly-line work or the stock market than in linking the game of chance to the gambler's ability to seize the current of fate, related to ancient practices of divination that involve the human being in his or her material entirety. Whether or not we are persuaded by this linkage, it represents one of Benjamin's more daring (and, as history would

demonstrate, more desperate) efforts to trace an archaic, species-based faculty within a modern industrial-capitalist context in which mimetic relations (in Benjamin's sense) seem to have receded into "nonsensuous similarity." The rare gift of proper gambling, pursued-and misused-by individuals in a hermetically isolated manner and for private gain, becomes a model of mimetic innervation for a collective that seems to have all but lost, literally, its senses.

This meaning of play (arguably the deepest) of a repressed sense of inhuman and distributed forces is one of the most difficult for new Initiates to grasp. For some readers, it seems to suggest a divine or fatalistic impulse at work in the universe, but in fact does no such thing. It only speaks of an attunement that opens up *room* in the midst of the most calculated plans. Sometimes, P.S. members refer to that process as "harmonization" in the context of the Ruun and the parasite.

In the form of play that Benjamin explores, the gambler gives herself over to the game to the extent that she *becomes* that game, creating new possibilities by going beyond the limits of mere rational thought. It is this sense of play that takes years to build up for most of our Initiates. Some follow Clifford Geertz in referring to this as "deep play." Others find it distasteful or disrespectful to call it play at all —

that is not really the issue. The issue is room, which cannot be so easily debated as a mere metaphor. After all, it *is* and some of us (myself included) have seen, heard, and felt it.

One last note about Benjamin's commentary on *Spielraum*, about the connection between technology and play, which causes the decline of auratic art. Benjamin writes that "Because technology aims at liberating human beings from drudgery, the individual suddenly sees his scope for play, his field of action, suddenly expanded." And yet, this new *Spielraum* is disorienting. One "does not yet know [their] way around." Technology, disorientation, play—the concepts might seem to be connected in a transitory way. Once I am oriented, however, the rationality of technology recomposes itself around me and closes off the room I once held. Technology is both the threat and the benefit, the poison and its cure.

This is why our experiments have such an ambivalent status among our member population, and one of the principle reasons why we must constantly be re-inventing ourselves if we hope to access room. Only in a state of disorientation, or even disintegration is it possible to find the parasite.

Senses of Room: The Architectural

I have waited to broach the topic of room's architectural connotations because so many new Initiates find

this the easiest sense to latch onto. They tend to call it "the room" and leave it at that. That is clearly not a scholar's approach, but I also cannot fault anyone. It took me a decade of study before the intricacies of room started to open up like an elaborate clock. Admittedly, the architectural meanings of room are fundamental to our apprehension of it in space and time. It does appear as a room, at least from time to time.

As a first approximation to how that appearing happens, think about the way that metaphors shape our perception of the world. When one uses the metaphor of a path to understand one's life, that metaphor brings with it certain conceptual relations. A path has a beginning and an end. It is made up of intermediate parts and those parts are in a linear and sequential relation. Some parts of the metaphor do not work. I can go backward on a path, but not in my life. We use basic metaphors constantly to understand the world around us, and rooms are one of the most basic. Rooms are a structuring constraint that we apply to understand insides and outsides, entrances and exits. That metaphor makes it possible to experience the world, in much the same way that categories like time, space, or causality do. It is a metaphor that reaches into the deep past of humans as a species, when we dwelled in caves and needed to recognize sheltering spaces.

That is what we bring to the table. But imagine that

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something else could bring a metaphor to us. That something else — the world, or a part of it — could force our projections. This may seem an absurd exercise to some readers, but imagine that a highway could make you understand itself not as a path but as a cloud. I am convinced that this is an accurate representation of what happens when room is taken to be a room. Testing this hypothesis though is another matter. It is still little more than a thought experiment, and of course represents only one of the three major theories about room's architectural embodiment, and I will discuss the other two later in this section with an even hand. First, however, let me turn to the evidence my research group has been able to collect.

One consequence of this line of thought is that the room's manifestation varies depending on the noumenatic (see glossary) representation of historical rooms that are available from all the activating members. Simply put, each time the room will look different. The factors are many: expectations, range of experiences (a memory of living in architecture from other countries seems to have a pronounced influence), fantasies, dream style, etc. The only stable feature are the objects and of course the parasite. Even this is sometimes concealed, however, when particularly people repress the objects into closets and drawers.

In particular, it should be noted how the one hundred