

The Image of Power and the Power of Reading (Leviathan, In Sum)

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Abstract

Constantly passing through visual regimes and reading regimes, this essay (already published in French as “L’image du pouvoir et le pouvoir de la lecture”, *Geste*, 2004, 131-141) aims to depict Hobbes’ *Leviathan* as a reading machine, that is, a political learning or literacy device open to each and every one. By reading it, we are bound to submit ourselves to a certain reading regime that the book constructs simultaneously with the theory of sovereignty and the State. And in our reading, we construct ourselves as readers exactly like the space of the political constructs itself.

Opening Hobbes’s *Leviathan*, we come across an image, that of the frontispiece. And, at the front of this temple, of this monument raised to a certain conception of power, what waits for us, what faces us or meets us head on, is the head [*chef*], the giant head of the sovereign. That looks us in the eye.



Symbol or allegory (or a monstrous combination of both), this page is to be read as much as it is to be seen. Indeed, in it we decipher, like a curtain veiling the body of the text, the title, which thus announces or promises, while leaving it to be desired, that which hides behind it. Reading will be to lift this veil, this stage curtain, and to be one with [*faire corps avec*] that which comes from the other side.

But reading already begins here, on this side of the drape. Not only because the text seems to be *in* this image, but because the image itself is to be read. To the left and right of the curtain, symmetrically positioned, one thus deciphers the attributes of, respectively, secular power and ecclesiastical power: the fortress and the church, the crown and the miter, the canons and the lightning bolts of excommunication, the firearms of war and the weapons of logic, the military battle and the theological debate (*disputatio*).

Adding up these two powers, holding a sword and a cross in his left hand and his right hand, the sovereign looks at me, his bust composed of an accumulation of “over three hundred persons,” according to Horst Bredekamp’s description (Bredekamp 2007: 38).¹ An exchange of glances, face-to-face, that the art historian describes as follows:

Densely packed human beings fill both arms and the entire torso, only dispersing in the area of the neck, in the shadowed zone below the chin... The gaze of each one of them, regardless of position, is directed toward the giant’s head and returns through the latter’s eyes back to the viewer, who seeks to adopt the frog’s perspective of the figures showing their back and, at the same time, is directly addressed at eye level by the sovereign. (38-40)

This composite image of a composite body, this header made up of hundreds of heads, this frontispiece assigns me, future reader, to a point of view that is structurally double. This perspectival apparatus that already prescribes to me my place or point of reading, this construction, inscribes me on the one hand into the multitude of gazes that, with their backs turned, converge toward the sovereign: I am one of these subjects, one among all the others, subjected like the others. But, on the other hand, I’m the one who the sovereign seems to look at straight in the eyes, me and no one else: future reader, already caught in this complex device, I am facing the sovereign, in a kind of *tête-à-tête* that situates me outside of the mass composing his body.

In the multitude and out of it, inside and outside at once.

Sovereign Reading

Let us enter, then, *Leviathan*. Let us enter by the door, properly, that is, by the *Introduction*.

We go, starting with the second sentence, from the domain of the visible to that of speech. And it is this passage which, discretely, topples the astounding [*médusante*] verticality of the frontispiece into its horizontal deployment, into a text to be read:

Nature (the Art whereby God hath made and governes the World) is by the *Art* of man, as in many other things, so in this also imitated, that it can make an Artificial Animal. For seeing life is but a motion of Limbs, the begining whereof is in some principall part within; why may we not say, that all *Automata* (Engines that move themselves by springs and wheelles as doth a watch) have an artificiall life? (9)

Natural life, then, is being looked at, we *see* it, we observe its moving image. Whereas

¹ The English translation of Bredekamp’s article is modified (see the German original: Bredekamp 2012: 15).

the artificial life which imitates it *speaks*, it is stated in language, by these analogies that *logos* allows:

For what is the *Heart*, but a *Spring*; and the *Nerves*, but so many *Strings*; and the *Joynts*, but so many *Wheeles*, giving motion to the whole *Body*, such as was intended by the *Artificer*? *Art* goes yet further, imitating that Rationall and most excellent worke of Nature, *Man*. For by *Art* is created that great LEVIATHAN called a COMMON-WEALTH, or STATE, (in latine CIVITAS) which is but an Artificiall Man; though of greater stature and strength than the Naturall, for whose protection and defence it was intended; and in which, the *Soveraignty* is an Artificiall *Soul*, as giving life and motion to the whole body; The *Magistrates*, and other *Officers* of Judicature and Execution, artificiall *Joynts*... (*ibid.*)

Etc., according to an *effiction* of this large fictional body that the text produces in the image of the image of life.² Once this body is thus constituted by words that analogically redouble, in reading, the allegorical image of the frontispiece, Hobbes declares that he will endeavor to “describe [its] Nature” by considering, first, “the *Matter* thereof, and the *Artificer*; both which is *Man*.” And it is thus by commenting on this double function of man, both craftsman and material of the large artificial body, that Hobbes introduces for the first time in *Leviathan* the theme or motif of reading, in a paragraph that must be read in detail:

Concerning the first [man], there is a saying much usurped of late, That *Wisedome* is acquired, not by reading of *Books*, but of *Men*. Consequently whereunto, those persons, that for the most part can give no other proof of being wise, take great delight to shew what they think they have read in men, by uncharitable censures of one another behind their backs. But there is another saying not of late understood, by which they might learn truly to read one another, if they would take the pains; and that is, *Nosce teipsum, Read thy self*: which was... meant... to teach us, that for the similitude of the thoughts, and Passions of one man, to the thoughts, and Passions of another, whosoever looketh into himself, and considereth what he doth, when he does *think, opine, reason, hope, feare, &c*, and upon what grounds; he shall thereby read and know, what are the thoughts, and Passions of all other men, upon the like occasions. ... But let one man read another by his actions never so perfectly, it serves him onely with his acquaintance, which are but few. He that is to govern a whole Nation, must read in himself, not this, or that particular man; but Man-kind: which though it be hard to do, harder than to learn any Language, or Science; yet, when I shall have set down my own reading orderly, and perspicuously, the pains left another, will be onely to consider, if he also find not the same in himself. For this kind of Doctrine, admitteth no other Demonstration. (10-11)

² I spoke of *effiction*, of this ancient trope that *Rhetorica ad Herennium* defines as expressing and building with words the shape of a body, in Szendy 2016.

Such are the last words of the introduction to *Leviathan*, to this book on whose threshold we stand and which presents itself as a *reading prosthesis*: indeed, reading it will be to read Hobbes's reading, this reading that he will have left for us, in order to facilitate for us the learning of the reading that makes us read one another, but also read *ourselves*, according to the deliberately inaccurate translation of the precept inscribed on the pediment of the temple of Delphi and often attributed to Socrates (*gnôthi seauton, nosce teipsum*, "know thyself").

But to whom does it address itself, this introduction presenting the reading of the book to come as the learning of a certain *political literacy*, of a certain capacity to read the whole of humanity in oneself? Evidently, the one to whom it promises this *method of reading*, be it syllabic or global, is the sovereign himself: it is to "he that is to govern a whole Nation," to he who will apply himself to educate himself in this task of reading "harder than to learn any Language, or Science," it is to the *sovereign-reader* that this reading aid called *Leviathan* is proposed, in order to spare him some effort.

And yet, it is *we* who will read it.

We, yes, we simple readers, we who find ourselves, then, in this same and double position to which the perspective of the frontispiece assigned us: just as our position *qua* beholders, our *point of view*, made us oscillate infinitely between our inclusion in the multitude of glances of the subjects and a face-to-face with the sovereign himself, our *point of reading*, as it inscribes itself here, similarly makes of us, at the same time and in an undecidable manner, some ordinary reader, undefined but in the process of being subjected to a way of reading, and a *sovereign reader*.

Leviathan, the book that carries this title, thus announces itself as a singular machine that *makes one read sovereignly*. And this monster-book is indeed a strange prosthesis, preparing as it does the Leviathan-monarch himself to read himself. The book will be his propaedeutics for mastering his reading of himself, for bestowing upon himself the power to read himself better than anyone; but, at the same time, this political literacy is in the end reserved to no one in particular, it remains open to any future reader of *Leviathan*.

We all, readers, we can thus occupy this place belonging to no one [*de personne*] that is the place of the sovereign who reads like no one else [*comme personne*]. Just as we could, facing the frontispiece, find ourselves reflected as though in a mirror in the eyes of the monarch, from a point of view that any eye, coming to be taken in it as in a net, will be able to embody.

To Capitalize, From Chapter to Chapter

One has to read this large, this masterful, reading device that is *Leviathan*.

We all can read it, we said. Just as we can all look at it: together, in this shared subjec-

tion that constitutes us as an us, in this hand-to-hand [*corps-à-corps*] within the sovereign body; but also singularly, in this unique face-to-face that makes us look at him, every man for himself, straight in the eyes.

Well, if *Leviathan* is thus a political learning or literacy device open to each and every one, by reading it, we are bound to submit ourselves to a certain reading regime that the book constructs simultaneously with the theory of sovereignty and the State. Or better yet: in our reading, we construct ourselves as readers exactly like the space of the political constructs itself.

What is this to say?

Let us read, step by step and methodically, let us read in an orderly way in order to find out. Or rather in order to *experience* it.

The first occurrence of the reading motif, after the introduction, is found in the fourth chapter, in a passage where we will soon cross paths with birds twirling across the pages. Let us follow it, paragraph by paragraph, by letting ourselves be more and more taken by the reading machine or the machine that makes us read, of which here is the first cog:

Seeing then that *truth* consisteth in the right ordering of names in our affirmations, a man that seeketh precise *truth*, had need to remember what every name he uses stands for; and to place it accordingly; or else he will find himselfe entangled in words, as a bird in lime-twiggs; the more he struggles, the more belimed. And therefore in Geometry ... men begin at settling the significations of their words; which settling of significations, they call *Definitions*; and place them in the beginning of their reckoning. (28)

To not *stick* to words, then, it would be necessary, on the one hand, to keep in mind what they are representatives of; and, on the other hand, to position them well, to organize them in a satisfactory, proper manner. It is not an accident if a certain political lexicon crosses paths already here, although in a yet discrete and almost insignificant manner, with the lexicon of semantics in reading: words, like those people Hobbes will talk about in the sixteenth chapter (attorneys, proxies, and other representatives or placeholders), words are kinds of delegates that must be *established* in their function (*settled*, the same verb that will be used in the twenty-sixth chapter to speak of the institution of the State) and it is a question of putting them in order, according to the proper hierarchy of speech.

Now, what allows this crossing of lexicons, between the vocabulary of reading and that of the political, is calculation. This calculation that Hobbes will define a few lines further down as reason itself and which here allows to calculate meaning in reading, as though we were counting coins—words—in a capitalizing economy:

By this it appears how necessary it is for any man that aspires to true Knowledge, to

examine the Definitions of former Authors; and either to correct them, where they are negligently set down; or to make them himselfe. For the errours of Definitions multiply themselves, according as the reckoning proceeds; and lead men into absurdities, which at last they see, but cannot avoyd, without reckoning anew from the beginning; in which lyes the foundation of their errours. From whence it happens, that they which trust to books, do as they that cast up many little summs into a greater, without considering whether those little summes were rightly cast up or not; and at last finding the errour visible, and not mistrusting their first grounds, know not which way to cleere themselves; but spend time in fluttering over their bookes; as birds that entring by the chimney, and finding themselves inclosed in a chamber, flutter at the false light of a glasse window, for want of wit to consider which way they came in. ... [T]hose men that take their instruction from the authority of books, and not from their own meditation, [are] as much below the condition of ignorant men, as men endued with true Science are above it. . . . Nature it selfe cannot erre: and as men abound in copiousnesse of language; so they become more wise, or more mad than ordinary. ... For words are wise mens counters, they do but reckon by them: but they are the mony of fooles, that value them by the authority of an *Aristotle*, a *Cicero*, or a *Thomas*. ... (28-29)

Reading is thus essentially a monetary commerce of words that regulates a calculating logic. And this *economy* of reading is additive, cumulative: it proceeds from sum to sum, it *capitalizes* words, sentences, chapters (*capitula*), just like the State which will soon be defined as a combination or accumulation of a power that everyone delegates, that is, exchanges for the security received in return. In other words, in this capitalizing calculation of meaning that reading is, words behave just like subjects that *subject themselves* to a reason calculating the political representation that sums or summons them [*qui les somme*].

Hobbes, indeed, describes the tally of names or words as follows:

Subject To Names, is whatsoever can enter into, or be considered in an account; and be added one to another to make a summe. ... The Latines called Accounts of many *Rationes*, and accounting, *Ratiocinatio*: and that which we in bills or books of account call *Items*, they called *Nomina*; that is, *Names*: and thence it seems to proceed, that they extended the word *Ratio*, to the faculty of Reckoning in all other things. ... (29)

And in fact, thirteen chapters later, Leviathan himself will be precisely nothing but such an extension of the additive and cumulative *ratio* to the calculation of power:

And in him consisteth the Essence of the Common-wealth; which (to define it,) is *One Person, of whose Acts a great Multitude, by mutuall Covenants one with another, have made themselves every one the Author, to the end he [Leviathan] may use the strength and means of them all ... for their Peace and Common Defence.* (XVII, 121)

In short, as the name of a subject is the identity that makes of him a person and gives him a voice that he'll in turn be able to pass on to his representative in the pyramid of political summation, words themselves are also subject to accounting, they inscribe themselves into this vast accountancy that is reading, in its ascending movement toward the capitalization of meaning.

But, by a supplementary turn or fold that is woven through the entire work, and that readers cannot not experience, it is not only Leviathan—this large political allegory, this biblical monster representing the State—that obeys the calculation of representation or additive delegation. It is also *Leviathan*, namely the book that we hold in our hands and whose paragraphs or pages we follow: regularly, the very *facture*³ of Hobbes's text, like an accountant checking his tallies, repeats this capitalizing logic, prescribes it within its weave, as if to better inscribe the reader into a reading regime corresponding to the political regime of representative summation.

Here is an example of it among so many others, that we have to read, and read *according to a certain reading*:

When a man *Reasoneth*, hee does nothing else but conceive a summe totall, from *Addition* of parcels; or conceive a Remainder, from *Substraction* of one summe from another: which (if it be done by Words,) is conceiving of the consequence of the names of all the parts, to the name of the whole. ... These operations⁴ are not incident to Numbers onely, but to all manner of things that can be added together. ... For as Arithmeticians teach to adde ... in *numbers*; so the Geometricians teach the same in *lines, figures* ... and the like; The Logicians teach the same in *Consequences of words*; adding together *two Names*, to make an *Affirmation*; and *two Affirmations*, to make a *Syllogisme*; and *many Syllogismes* to make a *Demonstration*. ... Writers of Politiques, adde together *Pactions*, to find mens *duties*. ... In summe, in what matter soever there is place for *addition* ..., there also is place for *Reason*. ... (V, 31-32)

In sum, yes.

In sum, says Hobbes in the last sentence concluding this paragraph, everywhere where there is *sum* and *summation*, that is to say almost everywhere, we can proceed according to the additive calculation of ratiocinating reasoning. Arithmetic and politics, *in sum*, are the same thing, it suffices to replace numbers by contracts.

But what Hobbes does not say, all the while doing it or making his reader do it, is that

³ *Facture*, in French, in a mercantile or economic sense, can be translated into English as “bill,” “invoice,” or “receipt.” The term can also mean “craftsmanship”. Though the English word *facture* is “rare,” according to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, I have used it here as it is borrowed directly from the French and has the same meaning: “The manner or style in which a thing is made; the materials with which a thing is made; workmanship. ... The action or process of making or creating. ... An invoice or bill.” (Translator’s note.)

⁴ Indeed, Hobbes also speaks of subtraction, multiplication, and division. If I overlook these here it is because they all refer back to addition: subtraction is its inversion, multiplication is its repetition (itself inverted in division).

this empire of additive calculation that stretches out step-by-step and *more and more*, also seizes, annexes, reading itself. For how are we to *read* this passage, this continuous expansion of generalized summation, how are we to *read* this *in sum*, if not by miming or subscribing to, *in the very act of reading*, this capitalizing movement that carries everything away with it?

Yes, *in sum*, in reading Hobbes, reading and the political participate in the same regime, maybe even confirm one another, combine or add each other up to reinforce one another in the general submission to calculating reason. Until the final firework, until this apotheosis of the *in sum* that is the conclusion of *Leviathan*, whose facture resembles the spreadsheet of an accountant busying himself with the line-by-line verification of his account book. Reading but the structure of this ultimate chapter (*capitulum*) capitalizing the whole, here is what a somewhat myopic or maniac reader would see, blinking his eyes:

... I have shewed before in the end of the 21. Chapter. ... In the 29. Chapter I have set down. ... In the 35. Chapter, I have sufficiently declared. ... In the 36. Chapter I have said, that. ... And as to the whole Doctrine... . (*A Review and Conclusion*, 484, 486, 487, 488, 489)

After all the negotiations with the calculating and economic reason of the State, by this exhilarating but also a little uneasy summation, by this grand finale of the *in sum*, Hobbes prepares to take some time off: “I return,” he reveals on the last page, alluding to the drafting still underway of his *De corpore*, “I return to my interrupted Speculation of Bodies Naturall.” In short, doing his accounting on Sunday, after the laborious genesis of this artificial body politic that is Leviathan, he gets ready to take a vacation.

But, in the meantime, he will have had us, readers, swallow or incorporate a certain regime of reading. Or better yet: his Leviathan-text, his monster-text, a machine that makes us read, will have devoured us.

Completing-Reading (*Accomplire*)⁵

What happened?

The *in sum* and all its equivalents (“I have shewed before,” etc.) act as, stand for, represent each time, from sentence to sentence and chapter to chapter, the partial accumulation from which, by reading, one can pursue the capitalization and investment to the profit [*bénéfice*] of a conclusion. *In sum*, this little syntagma or those that resemble it, functions at each of its occurrences as a delegate, a proxy, which plays the role, which

⁵ *Accomplire* in the original French is meant to be a portmanteau condensing the verbs *accomplir* and *lire*. In order to preserve this double meaning, I have translated this term into English as *completing-reading* (Translator’s note).

acts as or in the place of that which precedes it, of that which was previously added or accumulated. In short, within the process of reading, the *in-sum* is a kind of *person*, as Hobbes defines it in the sixteenth chapter:

A Person, is he, whose words or actions are considered, either as his own, or as representing the words or actions of an other man, or of any other thing to whom they are attributed, whether Truly or by Fiction. When they are considered as his owne, then is he called a *Naturall Person*: And when they are considered as representing the words and actions of an other, then is he a *Feigned* or *Artificiall person*. The word Person is latine: instead whereof the Greeks have προσωπον, which signifies the *Face*, as *Persona* in latine signifies the *disguise*, or *outward appearance* of a man, counterfeited on the Stage; and sometimes more particularly that part of it, which disguiseth the face, as a Mask or Visard: And from the Stage, hath been translated to any Representer of speech and action, as well in Tribunalls, as Theaters. So that a *Person*, is the same that an *Actor* is, both on the Stage and in common Conversation; and to *Personate*, is to *Act*, or *Represent* himselfe, or an other; and he that acteth another, is said to beare his Person, or act in his name ... and is called in diverse occasions, diversly; as a *Representer*, or *Representative*, a *Lieutenant*, a *Vicar*, an *Attorney*, a *Deputy*, a *Procurator*, an *Actor*, and the like. (111-112)

In sum, these two words that almost make up but one, as well as all the other syntagmas that *play the same role*, are *proxies* within the process of reading that the text prescribes—they are deputies, representatives, lieutenants, or vicars that act as substitutes for that which precedes them, that accumulate it by mandate: in the same way that a pronoun is the delegate of a name, in the same way, in this large additive calculation of affirmations and syllogisms that for Hobbes is the reading of a discourse, all the forms of conjunction indicating consequence are proxies that the text gives itself in order to represent itself and construct itself cumulatively. This is how, literally, the reader becomes the spokesperson who carries the text forward, from delegation to delegation. *In sum*, he becomes the actor of its authority.

Constructed as the *artificial person* produced by the facture of the text, the reader is its *prosopopoeia*: he lends it his voice, his fictional body, to the erection of the *one* meaning that reproduces, that mimes the erection of the Leviathan-State, itself put together by accumulated delegations:

A Multitude of men, are made *One Person*, when they are by one man, or one Person, Represented; so that it be done with the consent of every one of that Multitude in particular. (114)

In sum, it's thus by means of *in-sums*, by dint of unifying capitalizations that the text, like sovereignty, constructs and erects itself. And it is the reader's task to add the finishing touches, in his reading, to both *Leviathan* as text and *Leviathan* as State. It is he who

must both effect and play them [*les agir et les jouer*], as one would have to say in French to translate the untranslatable English verb *to act*. He is called to accomplish them by reading, as he's the one who sees himself constrained, by the cumulative reading machine, to *complete-read* them [*les accomplire*]. In short, if *Leviathan* is *in-sum* cumulated in the paradigmatic verticality of pyramidal power, *Leviathan*, the book, is the horizontal, linear, accretion of ratiocinating power in reading.

The reader of *Leviathan*, of this device where the modern State and its power are erected, this reader, unwittingly, is thus taken, included, comprised in the gears of the big automaton. For this artificial machine, by *completing-reading* itself [*en s'accomplissant*], is no longer only the symbol or allegory of political sovereignty; it is also, indissociably, an apparatus assigning the reader to a place, constraining him to follow the pace, obliging him to acquire / take on / [some verb] a certain *cadence*.

In the artificial movement that *Leviathan* imprints on its reader, the latter sees himself *summoned* to conform to the progress of his approach [*démarche*] to the cadenced footstep of a summation that, from partial sum to partial sum, progressively erects meaning in the act of reading. And, as *Leviathan's* reader reads the erection of *Leviathan*, of this figure of the State as it constructs itself by delegation and accumulation of the powers of its subjects, this reader thus also, despite himself, experiences it *in his reading*.

This is the incredible knot that forms in the fabric of the text and toward which, as we have seen, the frontispiece and introduction were already working: it is a matter of binding, weaving, interlacing reading and politics, to make of the first the *experience* of the second. To work toward a *politics of reading*, a politics structurally inscribed in the very act of reading, whether or not the reader knows it.

Leviathan is thus a reading machine. Or rather a machine that *makes us read*, that determines and prescribes a certain modality of reading: cumulative, capitalizing. A certain *regime of reading*, which organizes itself in a way strictly parallel to the construction of power and the governing machine. In the conjunction of these two mechanisms, in the analogy or homology of their regime, in their manner of combining themselves by operating together and simultaneously, *Leviathan* erects itself, in fact, like a large apparatus for *governing-reading*. That is, for constituting, establishing, or instituting a *stately reading*, which seems to overlap with rational or philosophical reading.

Post Scriptum: From Reading to the Image

Leviathan, one could say, concludes twice. Two conclusions that we must read in turn.

The *first* is found at the end of the second book (the thirty-first chapter), where the construction of the State strictly speaking comes to an end, since Hobbes has also, basically, settled the question that he will however reexamine in the third and fourth books, namely that of ecclesiastical power and its potential rivalry with civil power.

This anticipated conclusion announces itself in the following way:

And thus farre concerning the Constitution, Nature, and Right of Sovereigns; and concerning the Duty of Subjects, derived from the Principles of Naturall Reason. And now, considering how different this Doctrine is, from the Practise of the greatest part of the world, ... I am at the point of believing this my labour, as uselesse, and the Common-wealth of *Plato*; For he also is of opinion that it is impossible for the disorders of State, and change of Governments by Civill Warre, ever to be taken away, till Sovereigns be Philosophers. But when I consider again, that the Science of Naturall Justice, is the onely Science necessary for Sovereigns, and their principall Ministers; ... I recover some hope, that one time or other, this writing of mine, may fall into the hands of a Sovereign, who will consider it himselfe, (for it is short, and I think clear,) without the help of any interested, or envious Interpreter; and by the exercise of entire Sovereignty, in protecting the Publique teaching of it, convert this Truth of Speculation, into the Utility of Practice. (254)

These last lines of the thirty-first chapter (which are incidentally immediately followed, at the beginning of the following book, by one of these big markers of cumulative reading that one finds disseminated throughout the text: *hitherto*) thus constitute a renewed appeal to the reading of the sovereign, echoing the introduction. The sovereign, Hobbes *in sum* says and says again, must read these pages to be sovereign, to exercise the exercise of this sovereignty that he has without having yet mastered it. In short, the sovereign reader, conflated here also with the reader on his way to becoming sovereign, will emerge, will be born of the incorporation of the doctrine that the book displays, as well as of the reading regime that it imposes. In other words, once again, the homology of reading and politics is reaffirmed.

The *second* conclusion is that of the actual conclusion (*A Review and Conclusion*), at the end of the work, right before the word end, *finis*, written in Latin. Well, a big surprise waits for us there, us readers on our way to becoming sovereign through the exercise of capitalizing reason. For, at this culminating point of addition or facture, at this point where ratiocinating bookkeeping jubilates (“I have showed,” “I have said,” etc.), the *good* reading, the reasonable or reasoning reading, the accounting reading that accounts for everything that it has read, becomes indiscernible from the *bad*, from this fickle or distracted reading that was the one of the birds.

Let us read closely, if we can, this summary where the text, prescribing its reading, both assumes itself by subsuming itself and lets or makes the figure of the reader implode, this figure that was so patiently and laboriously constructed or instructed:

And as to the whole Doctrine, I see not yet, but the principles of it are true and proper; and the Ratiocination solid. For I ground the Civill Right of Sovereigns, and both the Duty and Liberty of Subjects, upon the known naturall Inclinations of Mankind, and upon the Articles of the Law of Nature; of which no man, that pretends but rea-

son enough to govern his private family, ought to be ignorant. And for the Power Ecclesiasticall of the same Sovereigns, I ground it on such Texts, as are both evident in themselves, and consonant to the Scope of the whole Scripture. And therefore am perswaded, that he that shall read it [this Doctrine] with a purpose onely to be informed, shall be informed by it. But for those that by Writing, or Publique Discourse, or by their eminent actions, have already engaged themselves to the maintaining of contrary opinions, they will not bee so easily satisfied. For in such cases, it is naturall for men, at one and the same time, both to proceed in reading, and to lose their attention, in the search of objections to that they had read before: Of which, in a time wherein the interests of men are changed (seeing much of that Doctrine, which serveth to the establishing of a new Government, must needs be contrary to that which conduced to the dissolution of the old,) there cannot choose but be very many. (489)

In sum, Hobbes tells us, us readers of *Leviathan* that have followed it until now by submitting to its cumulative logic, we are of two types: either we simply want to be *informed*; or else we must be convinced against our own avowed opinion.

Now, it's by being the second case, it seems, that we should be able to be the actual touchstone of *Leviathan*. Since who could better *complete-read* [accomplire] the book if not he who, never trusting the author, would verify his reasoning step-by-step, by controlling all the partial sums in order to reach without error the total sum of this conclusion that he currently has right before his eyes? Who could better represent the rational reading that Hobbes did not cease to prescribe if not this kind of fussy reader, never convinced in advance, objecting each time he can? Only this kind of reader would strictly speaking embody the figure of the *good reader* which has constructed itself throughout the text, *against* its others, like these birds lost while glancing over pages to which too much confidence was granted.

But the eminent reader, ratiocinating, meticulous and wary, is also the one who *does not read*. The one who lets himself get distracted, whose attention is flighty, diverted from the thread of the reading in order to object. Closely reading this strange paragraph, we understand, and Hobbes insists on it, that it is *both, simultaneously, at the same time* that the reading proceeds and comes to an end. The reading moves forward while being suspended. Or rather—and this is *in the end* [*au bout du compte*] the paradox of the cumulative regime in reading—it *goes on to the very extent that it interrupts itself*. In short, the good reading of *Leviathan* would be in sum a *permanent crisis* of its continuity: at its hyperbolic point, brought to its climax through a kind of *over-revving*, capitalizing reading implodes, it becomes aporetic, the very experience of the impossible. And this is why, no doubt, *Leviathan* comes to an end, as we will see, by a return to the image, to the frontispiece.

But, before coming to it—before coming back after the fact, *post scriptum*, toward this visual threshold from where we started before reading— it is also necessary to say a few words about the first kind of reader we could be: the one who reads only to be “in-

formed”. Which could be understood in two ways, in English as in French: either we are looking in *Leviathan* for simple information, a simple piece of information, skimming it absent-mindedly without necessarily following its discursive scaffolding step-by-step; or else we let ourselves be *shaped by* it, impregnated by the book, which would construct us in the capacity of these readers that we have become thanks to it, just when we get to this sentence that we are reading at this very moment. It is obviously toward this second meaning of the verb *to inform*, toward this second reading of what is said about reading, that I will lean. As though Hobbes, in sum, for lack of being able to *count on* good readers, banked on *virgin* readers who must be informed by being *given a form* that they do not yet have.⁶

Be that as it may, after this concluding paragraph where capitalizing reading seems to wobble, tremble, for an instant in its very possibility, Hobbes, in the very last lines of *Leviathan*, refers the reader to the image: he drives reading back to seeing, thus closing the loop initiated by the introduction and returning to the frontispiece, to this pediment that preceded the book. Taking his leave of his book and his reader, indeed he writes, in a kind of *post scriptum*:

And thus I have brought to an end my Discourse of Civill and Ecclesiasticall Government, occasioned by the disorders of the present time, without partiality, without application, and without other designe, than to set before mens eyes the mutuall Relation between Protection and Obedience. ... And though in the revolution of States, there can be no very good Constellation for Truths of this nature to be born under, (as having an angry aspect from the dissolvers of an old Government, and seeing but the backs of them that erect a new;) yet I cannot think it will be condemned at this time, either by the Publique Judge of Doctrine, or by any that desires the continuance of Publique Peace. And in this hope I return to my interrupted Speculation of Bodies Naturall. ... (491)

The discourse, *in fine*, just before the word of the end (*finis*), thus seems to want to summarize itself, absorb itself, in the image, which will be able to show everything, make everything seen, “set [everything] before mens eyes.” Hobbes, in his long parenthesis, seems to even make direct allusion to the frontispiece when he evokes “the backs” of those who erect the new body politic: we cannot not think here of these homunculi who, turning their backs to the spectator of the famous allegory, look at the sovereign whose bust they literally compose and construct.

Why this return to the image in this conclusion that is incidentally entitled *review* in English? Why this final interruption of the reading by that which is given to be seen, as though reading finally needs to pass on the power to seeing, as though it needs to cede

⁶ In fact in the Latin version of *Leviathan* (Hobbes 1676), we can read the following (326): “If I had written in pure hearts (like blank slates), I could have been briefer.” (*Si cordibus scripsissem (instar Tabularum rassarum) puris, brevior essere potuissem*).

its authority to it?

This is a capital question, in this final chapter where capitalization comes to an end, where the reader sees himself put back in the place of the spectator that he was, face-to-face with the sovereign at the head (*caput*) of the body of the State. It is a question that is also ours, today, when there is so much talk against the power of images, deemed responsible for the current erosion of reading.

Always More: The Desire of Desire, Without End

To understand the necessity of this interruption of the reading thread by the visible, by the power of the image of power, it is necessary to take a bit of a step back. We, readers of *Leviathan*, who let ourselves be *informed* by it by following it until now, we must ask ourselves: what could have driven us *here*, to this last page where we are driven back to the image? In other words, what desire stirred us or insisted in us to have us accompany, and even *complete-read* [accomplire], the erection of a sovereignty both political and readerly?

Hobbes defines desire in general in the following way:

... we are to consider, that the Felicity of this life, consisteth not in the repose of a mind satisfied. For there is no such *Finis ultimus*, (utmost ayme,) nor *Summum Bonum*, (greatest good,) as is spoken of in the Books of the old Morall Philosophers. ... Felicity is a continuall progresse of the desire, from one object to another; the attaining of the former, being still but the way to the later. The cause whereof is, That the object of mans desire, is not to enjoy once onely, and for one instant of time; but to assure for ever, the way of his future desire. ... (XI, 69-70)

Desire, for Hobbes, by essentially being the *desire of desire*, desire that there be desire to come, would not be satisfied by an object. By being perpetually in search of itself in this sliding that makes it move from one object to the next, pursuing itself to infinity, until death, Hobbes's desire has an *autoadditive* structure. What it most desires, and in the form of *always more*, is to desire again, without end.

Well, this structure is also, very precisely, that of power [*pouvoir ou puissance*]:

The Power of a Man ... is his present means, to obtain some future apparent Good. And is either *Originall*, or *Instrumentall*. *Naturall Power*, is the eminence of the Faculties of Body, or Mind. ... *Instrumentall* are those Powers, which acquired by these, or by fortune, are means and Instruments to acquire more. ... For the nature of Power, is in this point, like to Fame, increasing as it proceeds. ... (X, 62)

The powerful desiring machine of power and desire thus necessarily produces *always*

more moreness [toujours plus de plus] in its autoadditive functioning destined for an incessant confirmation by extension. And yet this logic, this calculation, is also that of reason which, in the capacity of ratiocinating summation, is nothing other than its own verification, which summarizes, at every step, this account, this *ratio* that it is. So much so that power, desire, and reason seem here to partake of the same general force of capitalization that we could call *autoaddictive*, to the extent that it is driven by the infinite quest for itself.

Even philosophy, for Hobbes, participates in its own way in this general accumulation, this bulk hoarding. Indeed, in the forty-sixth chapter, Hobbes defines philosophy as a certain “*Knowledge acquired by Reasoning.*” (458) He then carefully distinguishes it from “that which is gotten by Reasoning from the Authority of Books,” (458-459) reiterating his familiar warning against bad reading, which would simply have faith in the author without verifying the accuracy of the ratiocinating account. And it’s there that he continues by recounting a kind of brief history or genesis of philosophy, which goes completely hand in hand with the development of additive calculation as well as with growing numbers leading to the foundation of *great Commonwealths*:

The faculty of Reasoning being consequent to the use of Speech, it was not possible, but that there should have been some generall Truthes found out by Reasoning, as ancient almost as Language it selfe. The Savages of America, are not without some good Morall Sentences; also they have a little Arithmetick, to adde, and divide in *Numbers not too great* (my emphasis): but they are not therefore Philosophers. For as there were Plants of Corn and Wine in *small quantity* (my emphasis) dispersed in the Fields and Woods, before men ... made use of them for their nourishment, ... so also there have been divers true, generall, and profitable Speculations from the beginning; as being the naturall plants of humane Reason: But they were at first but *few in number* (my emphasis again); ... there was no Method; that is to say, no Sowing, nor Planting of Knowledge by it self, apart from the Weeds, and common Plants of Errour and Conjecture: And the cause of it being the want of leasure from procuring the necessities of life, and defending themselves against their neighbors, it was impossible, till the erecting of great Common-wealths, it should be otherwise. *Leasure* is the mother of *Philosophy*; and *Common-wealth*, the mother of *Peace*, and *Leasure*: Where first were great and flourishing *Cities*, there was first the study of *Philosophy*. (459)

This is the reason why, Hobbes adds, philosophy was first born in India, Persia, Chaldea, and Egypt, as the Greeks, whose States were divided into small city-states, did not yet know peace. We must wait, to see Plato’s and Aristotle’s Greek philosophy be born, for the war to “unite” a number of these city-states in such a way that they are “fewer” but “greater,” that is, better *added up*. We must even wait, Hobbes goes on, for the Athenians to “[get] the Dominion of the Sea; and thereby, of all the Islands, and Maritime Cities” (ibid.). In short, philosophy, the daughter of peaceful leisure and thus granddaugh-

ter of the expanding State, is fundamentally, quite simply, the great granddaughter of large added numbers, of the cumulative or capitalizing principle.

Freeze Frame

And what about us, us readers?

The reading that *Leviathan* constructs for us, we will say, is indissociably a *rational, philosophical, stately, and capitalizing reading*. It is an additive reading, the cumulative nature of which is rooted in the desire that drives us to read: desire of desire and power to acquire power.

Of course, the capitalizing regime of reading is but one of the effects, one of the manifestations or one of the symptoms of this machine that operates everywhere in *Leviathan* and churns out *always more moreness* [toujours plus de plus]. But it is also, we read it, the medium, the element or mode in which this machine can *complete-read itself* [s'accomplire]. And that is also precisely the reason why, *in the end* [au bout du compte], *Leviathan's* conclusion must refer back to the frontispiece: it must stop the reading, interrupt it by the image, as though the reading machine could not find in itself its end or limit.

Imagine what would happen if this conclusion, instead of calling on an image continued to call on reading? What if it ordered us, in sum, to *reread*?

No longer progressing, no longer having something to feed its appetite (and its appetite for appetite), backtracking on itself instead of pursuing the infinite expansion of the always more, the reading would autodeavour itself. Or better still, it would *deconstruct* itself; the reading machine would falter, using and consuming itself, a glimpse of which was offered by the strange paragraph of the conclusion (489), dedicated to the readers who, at the same time, pursue and interrupt. In other words, *rereading itself, the reading machine would get carried away and risk imploding*.

That's why, in these last lines of *Leviathan*, where Hobbes takes his leave of the reader, we find ourselves facing a *freeze frame*. As though he was saying to his reader, to his readers of yesterday and today: click *here*, on this *icon*, in order not to reread; turn your back not so much on the reader but on reading itself—and *look*:



Idolatry, It Remains to Be Seen

The image from the beginning returns at the end, to *put an end* to infinite reading, to prevent it from rereading itself, since reading, like the State erected by Hobbes, would otherwise be bound to infinitely pursue its expansion: like the fundamentally imperialistic Commonwealth conceptualized by Hobbes, reading too, one could say borrowing

Hannah Arendt's words, "is a vacillating structure and must always provide itself with new props from the outside." (Arendt 1973: 142) Only an image can stop it in this mad race, since, for Hobbes, "there can be no Image of a thing Infinite." That's what he affirms in the forty-fifth chapter (448), in this passage preparing a definition of *idolatry* that could apply to the frontispiece itself:

Having shewn what is *Worship*, and what an *Image*; I will now put them together, and examine what that Idolatry is, which is forbidden in the Second Commandement, and other places of the Scripture. To worship an Image, is voluntarily to doe those externall acts, which are signes of honoring either the matter of the Image, which is Wood, Stone, or Metall, or some other visible creature; or the Phantasme of the brain, for the resemblance, or representation whereof, the matter was formed and figured; or both together, as one animate Body, composed of the Matter and the Phantasme, as of a Body and Soule. To be uncovered, before a man of Power and Authority, or before the Throne of a Prince, or in such other places as hee ordaineth to that purpose in his absence, is to Worship that man, or Prince with Civill Worship; as being a signe, not of honoring the stoole, or place, but the Person; and is not Idolatry. But if hee that doth it, should suppose the Soule of the Prince to be in the Stool, [...] it were Divine Worship, and Idolatry. (449)

What then was the *matter* of *Leviathan's* frontispiece, of this image reproduced as a kind of header for the reading? And how do we distinguish it from the *phantasm* for which it was formed? How do we know, how do we decide if the image of sovereignty is made of paper (of wood), or if is it composed of "some other visible creature," like these homunculi that one sees accrue to erect the body and support the head of capital power? And above all, where do we situate the *soul* of this artificial body, which the introduction told us was sovereignty itself?

Whatever it be, addressing us at the end, us readers who accompanied him by *completing-reading* [accomplisant] his general capitalization, Hobbes thus tells us, *in sum*: stop reading as it's the end; and do not reread, do not lose your focus, nor your desire nor your power as sovereign readers, by verifying again the account, by revisiting your reading. Do not take this risk of a rereading. Rather, let us worship Leviathan—idolatrous or not, *it remains to be seen*:



Finis.

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