

1

If we want to look for the possibilities of grace at the end of the world, we could start with the phenomenon of *late style*. "Late style" is hard to think about without Edward Said, and through Said it is related to names like Adorno, Beethoven, Visconti, Strauss, and all the rest – white, dead, lonely names, solitary masters of the last European century. Late style acknowledges mortality, much more than finitude; and expresses the late wish to give that coming formlessness a form. It usually involves a trait of not communicating, or an outright refusal to do so, a tendency towards the "abstract and ornamental" – out of radical consequence or maybe also more profane reasons like arrogance, impatience or a sudden loss of strength. A quick attempt to define the concept of grace could follow Said in connecting it to the crucial predicament of late style, "the predicament of **an ending without illusory hope or manufactured resignation**" (Said 2006).

2

Mortality, not finitude. If this body perishes, it perishes so that others can dwell and thrive. Late style, as a relentless embrace of inconclusiveness, is also a way of making space, of withdrawal, retreat, and, why not, decreation.

3

Reading Simone Weil, one is tempted to feel that her style was a late one right from the start. Perhaps this has something to do with what Anne Carson (2005) has described as Weil's tendency "to arrange for her own disappearance on several levels," something with her alleged anorexia, with the rumor of her consensual starvation. And with her unbelief in the worth of her own work, although she never seemed to lose faith in its truth. One of the main ingredients of Weil's natural-born late style is of course her celebration

of the anonymous and impersonal, which she translated into **an art of making undeniable statements that are neither dogmatic nor merely aphorisms**. "All the natural movements of the soul are controlled by laws analogous to those of physical gravity. Grace is the only exception." (GG) **Statements such as this one are not irrefutable by content, but by form.** They represent Weil's tireless effort to make space for *brute reality* itself as it directly speaks to *you*, uncontaminated by the programmatic authority of a *we* or the rhapsodic originality of an *I*. They seem to provoke one out of two possible reactions: instant surrender or permanent escape. If we want something else, if we do not want to run away from Weil's sentences nor blindly submit ourselves to their seductive power, we should perhaps adopt that "attentive silence" Weil speaks of, the "tender and sensitive attention which is needed to understand" (HP) the century's deep and profound cries for justice.

4

But if we think of late style in the present moment, we are perhaps not only thinking the late style of this or that artist, but also **the late style of humanity**: late climate, late liberalism, late modernity, late, late capital. The late style of our endangered present has of course nothing to do with Beethoven's alienation or Beckett's reduction and all the other examples of what Susan Sontag has described as the rigorous "dismantling of the artist's competence" (AS). It is exuberant, grotesque, volatile, cynical, and it cultivates, instead of embracing mortality, endless reproduction. If – despite the powerful release of queer energy – if the late style of this century wasn't so pervasively homophobic, we could perhaps describe it as camp, as a conservative or even reactionary kind of camp.

5

Reactionary camp. Is this a name for the late style of our century?

6

The style of late liberalism certainly involves a considerable amount of "nostalgic exaggeration", which Said finds in the late compositions of Richard

Strauss. The neo-Baroque nostalgia of Strauss seems quite different from Beethoven whose late style begins in "a moment when the artist who is fully in command of his medium nevertheless abandons communication with the established social order of which he is a part and achieves a contradictory, alienated relationship with it" (Said 2006). One thing about the **planet** that's very different from any "established social order" is the simple truth that one cannot simply walk away from it, even if walking away from an established order has never been simple at all. Everything changes when the adversary is organized along the lines of extinction, not of exclusion. **If there is no place left to go, exile is simply not an option.**

7

I am reading Simone Weil and I am thinking of running away from her, of abandoning her – for now, or once and for all. Then I am thinking of abandoning thinking.

8

If a thought occurs, who is thinking it? *I don't care if there is a voice for this particular thought*, says the late queer German writer Ronald M. Schernikau. And then he says something that is even more interesting: *warum sollte ein gedanke vermittelbar sein?* Why should a thought be communicable? Why should it be the object of mediation? *mir reicht, dass er da ist*. I am satisfied if there is one.

9

One of my favorite Simone Weil moments is when she says that the tragedy of heteronomy is not the fact that it manipulates and destroys your self. The tragedy is that when your self has been destroyed by manipulation, you can no longer destroy it by yourself. You can no longer get rid of your self by yourself, through grace and decreation.

Grace is what destroys the self from the inside. The inside is not your self. The inside is what can destroy your self. Thinking needs not-thinking. Thinking needs un-thinking, more-than-thinking, other-than-thinking. Grace is a specific kind of negation.

11

Grace is not the opposite of gravity. Remember that? **Grace is not only an exception; grace is *the only* exception.**

12

On a syntactic level, grace often comes with interruption. I can only make sense of Simone Weil's thoughts as unfinished sentences, witnesses to a poetic way of worldmaking. **For sudden interruption is the conscience of poetry.** It is not a coincidence that Anne Carson reads Simone Weil next to Sappho. An interrupted poem has no meaning, even less than a completed one. "I have no idea what this sentence means but it gives me a thrill", says Carson (2005: 177).

13

"The extreme difficulty which I often experience in carrying out the slightest action", writes Simone Weil, "is a favor granted to me. For thus, by ordinary actions and without attracting attention, I can cut some of the roots of the tree. However indifferent we may be to the opinion of others, extraordinary actions contain a stimulus which cannot be separated from them. This stimulus is quite absent from ordinary actions. To find extraordinary difficulty in doing an ordinary action is a favor which calls for gratitude. We must not ask for the removal of such a difficulty: we must **beg for grace** to make good use of it." (GG)

14

Grace is the acceptance of difficulty, not its abolition. "We must beg for grace to make good use of it."

15

So what is grace? Here are a few things grace is not:

- grace is not the opposite of gravity, not even its mere suspension
- grace is not dialectical – it does not elevate through *Aufhebung*
- grace is not tragic – it does not resolve through *katharsis*
- grace is not an answer to a call of hope
- grace is not a reaction to routinized despair
- grace is not less of the same; decreation is not deceleration
- grace is not effortless – look at the late style of our present moment, how would grace come easy?
- one cannot affirm grace through a logical act – one cannot recognize it, one must consent to it
- grace can not be produced – it is not a product, yet it is not nothing
- **decreation is not an immaterial act**

16

But what if it is not only late, but already *too late*? What if we have to look for grace not *at*, but *after* the end of the world? The challenge of adopting a philosophy of it's already too-late, as Malcolm X would have it, while simultaneously dealing with **a late style that is not even decadent** because the horizon is not decline, but extinction.

17

In *Late Style*, Said makes a connection between grace and precision, which is neither hopeful nor desperate. Perhaps grace as precision is a thing that distances us from "romantic hope and routinized despair," the two dominant affects of our late-melancholic mood.

18

Late melancholy involves the constant conversion of breathing into sighing.

19

What is precise, can not be reproduced. It needs to be constantly reinvented. Simone Weil's thinking is poetic because it puts faith in interruption.

A poetic thought has a content and a condition, but no meaning, says Anne Carson; it interrupts in so far that it is itself interrupted. *Interruption*, says the Belgian phenomenologist Marc Richir, is a *gateway for the sublime*. Interruption, not plenitude.

20

Grace emerges at the intersection of poetic worldmaking and planetary survival. It prevents us from falling into romantic hope or routinized despair. It destroys the self from the inside and makes space not for the soul, but for matter. "Decreation," says Anne Carson, "is an undoing of the creature in us." But this undoing is not an immaterial act. Grace needs matter, flesh, labor, a real alternative to endless reproduction and relentless extraction, repair and redistribution beyond recognition. This is late liberalism, remember? This is the crisis of recognition, this is the exhaustion of Hegelianism. And that is not necessarily a bad thing.

21

They kill him every day and grace is everywhere, say Fred Moten and Wu Tsang in their performative poem *Sudden Rise at a Given Tune*. Perhaps we must understand first that "grace [– grace-in-the-flesh –] is everywhere", and then we must understand that this is not necessarily a good thing.

22

Grace certainly rises suddenly, if ever. My favorite thinkers all share one thought that regularly interrupts their given tune. Their given tune is the defense of poetry, and the sudden thought that interrupts it, a reminder that there can be no direct line from critical performance to resistant politics. Grace emerges at the intersection of aesthetic worldmaking and planetary survival to remind us that thinking is not personal, that poetry is not political, and that style is always already too late.

23

So what remains at or after the end? "We must destroy continuity," says Susan Sontag, "by going to the end of each emotion or thought. – And after

the end, what supervenes (for a while) is silence." But I refuse to end with silence. The least that we can hope for which comes after silence is reading. Reading: its mystery, its concept. "The mystery," writes Simone Weil in *The Concept of Reading*, "is that there are sensations that are pretty much insignificant in themselves, yet, by what they signify, what they mean, they seize us in the same way as the stronger sensations. There are some black marks on a sheet of white paper; they couldn't differ more from a punch in the stomach. Yet, they can have the same effect. [...] Sometimes, when time has lessened the pain a bit, one is shuffling through papers and suddenly the letter jumps out, an even more stabbing pain surfaces, just as piercing as any physical pain, **seizing us as if it came from outside ourselves** and as if the letter itself were on fire."

Anne Carson: "Decreation. How Women Like Sappho, Marguerite Porete and Simone Weil Tell God." In A. C.: *Decreation: Poetry, Essays, Opera*. New York: Knopf, 155–183.

Fred Moten and Wu Tsang: *Sudden Rise at a Given Tune*. In: *The South Atlantic Quarterly* 117:3, July 2018, 649–652.

Marc Richir: *Variations sur le sublime et le soi*. Grenoble: J. Millon, 2010.

Edward Said: *On Late Style: Music and Literature Against the Grain*. New York: Pantheon, 2006.

Ronald M. Schernikau: *Die Tage in L*. Hamburg: Konkret, 2001.

Susan Sontag: "The Aesthetics of Silence." In S. S.: *Styles of Radical Will*. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1969, 3–34.

Simone Weil: "Essay on the Concept of Reading." In S. W.: *Late Philosophical Writings*. Transl. Eric O. Springsted and Lawrence E. Schmidt. Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 21–28.

Simone Weil: *Gravity and Grace*. Transl. Emma Crawford and Mario von der Ruhr. London and New York: Routledge, 2002.

Simone Weil: "Human Personality." In: S. W.: *An Anthology*. Ed. Siân Miles. London: Penguin, 2005, 69–98.