



<http://www.necronauts.org>

Official Document

Title: New York Declaration on Inauthenticity

Type: INS Declaration

Authorised: First Committee, INS

Authorisation Code: TMcC290907

Document follows

The New York Declaration: INS Statement on Inauthenticity

Delivered by INS General Secretary Tom McCarthy and INS Chief Philosopher Simon Critchley at The Drawing Center, New York, 25th September 2007.

We'd like to thank the Drawing Center for providing the INS with its first beachhead in the Americas. Following tonight's declaration, we will be recruiting agents, sleepers and moles throughout American institutions and networks, as well as establishing agencies, sub-committees and transmission centers in a number of cities with a view to general Continental infiltration. To borrow the words of the strange dwarf in David Lynch's *Lost Highway*: We're in your house.

On the advice of the INS Chief of Propaganda, we are not going to speak, here, *about* the INS: to explain what it is – as if from first principles – or recount its history as if from the beginning. That would be a declaration *about* the INS and not an INS declaration. Let us merely say, with a nod to our hosts, that drawing is at the center of what we do. The General Secretary’s First Report to the First Committee, *Navigation Was Always a Difficult Art* (delivered in the Map Room of the Royal Geographical Society in London in 2001) revolved around the attempt of Melville’s Queequeg to represent himself as a whole by *drawing* himself out across his coffin. Readers of *Moby Dick* among you will recall that the Polynesian harpoonist, fully expecting to die after contracting a fever, has the Pequod’s carpenter knock him up a coffin; when he unexpectedly recovers, he adorns the redundant coffin with the tattoos covering his body, copying them from the living organic surface to the dead one. These tattoos, you might further recall, represent the layout of the earth and heavens according to Queequeg’s people’s belief, and thus form ‘a mystical treatise on the art of attaining truth’. Yet, as they cover his whole body, Queequeg cannot see them, and so needs to copy them – that is, himself – onto another surface, projecting space in the manner of a cartographer.

For the INS, it is no coincidence that the surface he projects onto is that of death, or at least its synecdoche (which is not a town in upper

New York State), the coffin: marker of a death imperfectly experienced, deferred. That Captain Ahab, watching the ‘rude’ Queequeg, shakes his fist at heaven is no less telling: Ahab, too, is projecting himself narcissistically towards the whale, hoping to etch himself out across its skin, to behold himself on that white screen as whole, complete, an avenging hero – and thus embodies a certain Western fantasy of subjectivity as authenticity. For all its ‘rude’ primitiveness, Queequeg’s task, in its futility, mirrors Ahab’s own, and that of Western man in general. For the INS, this is ultimately what the Great American Novel has to tell us: space, in the end, will not lie flat and form a passive surface for our narcissism, our self-projections. A book that devotes so many of its pages to the sheer materiality of what lurks on the horizon and beneath the surface – their fat, sperm, bones, bile, livers and so on – can only have one winner. The whale’s materiality, its excessive weight, shatters the Pequod, rendering all self-projections void – or, to put it another way, the screen becomes blubber.

Tonight, we want to advance a set of proposals, of numbered theses, that will state categorically – catechistically even – some core elements of INS doctrine. These statements, like all INS propaganda, should be repeated, modified, distorted and disseminated as the listener sees fit.

1. We begin with the experience of failed transcendence, a failure that is at the core of the General Secretary's novels and the Chief Philosopher's tomes. Being is not full transcendence, the plenitude of the One or cosmic abundance, but rather an ellipsis, an absence, an incomprehensibly vast lack scattered with debris and detritus. Philosophy as the thinking of Being has to begin from the experience of disappointment that is at once religious (God is dead, the One is gone), epistemic (we know very little, almost nothing; all knowledge claims have to begin from the experience of limitation) and political (blood is being spilt in the streets as though it were champagne).
2. For us, art is the consequence and experience of failed transcendence. We could even say, borrowing defunct religious terminology, that it produces icons of that failure. An icon is not an original, but a copy, the copy of another icon. Art is not about originality, but about the repetition of the copy. We'll be coming back to this point repeatedly.
3. In order to grasp its place within INS doctrine, the experience of failed transcendence must be elucidated with reference to the classical philosophical opposition of form and matter. For Plato and Aristotle, nothing was more real than form. Knowledge of

a thing, for Plato, is knowledge of the *form* of that thing, which is what makes that thing the thing it is, what Plato called *eidos*. For Aristotle, it is the essence or form of a thing that makes it the thing it is, what he called *ousia*. For Plato, higher than the material world and more real than the material world stands the world of forms, the world of ideas. For Aristotle, essence stands higher than existence.

4. Christianity imbibes, divinizes and somatizes this thought. If, for Plato, the highest knowledge was knowledge of the form of the Good, then for Christianity, the highest knowledge is of God. God is the most real thing there is, and if knowledge of God is impossible because of our fallen state, then our soul should strive to love God and love God alone and above all else.

5. If form is perfect, if it is perfection itself, then how does one explain the obvious imperfection of the world, for the world is not perfect *n'est-ce pas?* This is where matter – our undoing – enters into the picture. For the Greeks, the principle of imperfection was matter, *hyle*. Matter was the source of the corruption of form, of the corruption of the visible world. In Christianity, the imperfection of matter is made much sexier as the imperfection of the material world after the Fall and most

of all the imperfection of the flesh, which drove St. Paul into such ecstasies of self-denigration or mortification (we like that), as when he speaks of ‘the body of this death’, of the law of sin that rages in the body’s members.

6. For us – necronauts, modern lovers of debris, radio and jetstreams – things are *precisely* the other way round: what is most real for us is not form, or God, but matter, the brute materiality of the external world. We celebrate the imperfection of matter and somatize that imperfection on a daily basis.

7. How do we let matter matter? How is the mattering of matter to be muttered and uttered? How is it to be formed? Following one of our heroes, Maurice Blanchot, we can isolate two tendencies, two temptations, two sloping *pistes* of possibility:
 - (7.1) One temptation is to try and ingest all of reality into a system of thought, to eat it all up, to penetrate and possess it. This is what Hegel and the Marquis de Sade have in common: the desire to assimilate all reality to the subject through the power of the Concept. This is the idealistic rage of the belly turned mind where matter is soaked up into concepts that function like blotting paper. This is what Deleuze had in mind when he said that philosophy was one long ass-fuck. On this view, language is a sort of murder and Adam was the first serial

killer when he wandered around the Garden of Eden giving names to material things.

(7.2) The other option is to let things thing, to let matter matter, to let the orange orange and the flower flower. On this second slope, we take the side of things and try and evoke their nocturnal, mineral quality. This is, for us, the essence of poetry as it is expressed in Francis Ponge, the late Wallace Stevens, Rilke's *Duino Elegies* and some of the personae of Pessoa, of trying (and failing) to speak about the thing itself and not just ideas about the thing, of saying 'jug, bridge, cigarette, oyster, fruitbat, windowsill, sponge'.

(7.3) Sponge

(7.4) Sponge

8. In a sense, and this is the point that Blanchot makes so powerfully, all art and literature is divided between these two temptations: either to extinguish matter and elevate it into form or to let matter matter by making form as formless as possible. The INS delivers itself solidly to the second temptation: to let matter matter, to let form touch absence, ellipsis and debris. Like Flaubert at the end of *The Temptation of St. Antony*, who says he wants to, '...flow like water, vibrate like sound, gleam like light, to curl myself up into every shape, to penetrate each atom, to get down to the depth of matter – *to be matter*'. But

instead of seeing the radiant face of Christ like the tortured saint, Flaubert disintegrates into the void like Madame Bovary on her back in the woods, rifled by a man's organ, her eyes burnt by the fire of a star.

9. Thus our other heroes: not the Dorian Grey who projects such a perfect figure out into the world, but the rotting flesh-assemblage hanging in his attic; not the Frankenstein who would, through his creation, see himself in the likeness of God, who stands like Caspar David Friedrich on high mountaintops to contemplate the sublime – but his morbid double who confronts him there with the reality of industry, the stench of meat-packing factories; not the imperial dreams in the head of the polar explorer Ernest Shackleton but rather his blackened, frostbitten toes which, after the white space into which he'd ventured and on which he hoped to write his name solidified and crushed his boat, he and his crew were forced to chop from their own feet, cook on their stove and eat. Necronauts are poets of the antipodes of poetry, artists of art's polar opposite, its *Antartica*.

10. In short, against idealism in philosophy and idealist or transcendent conceptions of art, of art as pure and perfect form, we set a doctrine of poetic or necronautical materialism

akin to Bataille's notion of *l'Informe* or 'The Formless': a universe that 'resembles nothing' and 'gets itself squashed everywhere, like a spider or earthworm'. This is the universe that must be navigated. And, as *Moby Dick*'s narrator Ishmael knows all too well as he floats on the decorated coffin that has become his liferaft, navigation is a difficult art.

11. Question: how do we navigate? How do we deal with matter? Answer: *inauthentically*. This brings us to a further central element in INS doctrine that we want to propagate tonight. In relation to the form/matter distinction, the dominant modern response to this dilemma is to believe that one can form oneself as a unified, autarkic, autonomous subject. This is the modern dream of authenticity: that, after the failure of metaphysical transcendence, the *self* can rise up, complete, godlike even, as a heroic subject and many such heroes can band together into a unified people. We choose to abandon the idea of the people and the individual subject. On the contrary, the necronaut is a *dividual*.

12. For us, inauthenticity is the core to the self, to what it means to be human, which means that the self has no core, but is an experience of division, of splitting. As such, all cults of authenticity, whether traditionally religious, political, new age or

neo-Buddhistic that attempt to recuperate some notion of authenticity, should be abandoned.

13. We want to advance the concept of originary inauthenticity, which we freely adapt from Heidegger. The thought is that human existence is formed in relation to a brute material facticity that cannot be mastered. Any attempt at authenticity slips back into an inauthenticity from which it cannot escape, but which it would like to evade. It is in this movement of evasion, of the self's turning away from itself, that our fatal embeddedness in materiality is revealed. Inauthentic existence is experienced as a burden, a weight, something to which I am riveted without being able to know why or know further, like Racine's Phaedra rooted to the fact of her erotic longing for her stepson from which she longs to escape. Or like Ibsen's Hedda Gabler, languishing within an unsatisfied desire, an unbearable physical weariness whose only escape is her father's pistol. Inauthentic existence has the character of an irreducible *thatness*, what Heidegger calls '*das Daß seines Da*'. I feel myself bound to the 'that of my there', to the sheer fact of my facticity, in a way that demands a response.
14. However, from this point onwards we part company with Heidegger. For us, the nature of this response cannot be

the authentic decision of existence that comes into the simplicity of its fate (*Schicksal*) by ‘shattering itself against death’ as Heidegger melodramatically puts it. The response will not be the heroic mastery of our inauthentic state in the authentic present of what he calls the *Augenblick* or ‘moment of vision’, which produces an experience of ecstasy and rapture. On the contrary, for us, the response to the materiality of our inauthentic state is a more passive and less heroic decision. This calls for comic acknowledgement rather than tragic affirmation.

15. Let us explain. Ever since Kant, the tragic-heroic paradigm has dominated the modern philosophical, aesthetic and psychoanalytic traditions. The tragic is the aesthetic genre that reconciles the freedom of the subject with the causal necessity of the material world. Oedipus, for example, is defined by a free acceptance of his determination by necessity: that he did murder his father and marry his mother is necessity, and the dramatic process is the free acceptance of that. As such, the tragic hero can live the identity of freedom and law and die authentically.

16. For us, though, the key aesthetic genre is not the tragic, which always conveys meaning and authenticity on life through the control of death, but comedy, which is the mechanical

splitting of the self, the divination or disintegration of the self into insubstantiality. This is why Hegel's *Aesthetics* ends with comedy rather than tragedy. For him, comedy is the end of art and the passage to philosophy; for us, it is the truth of art that reveals what philosophical conceptuality always misses, the mattering of matter, the vast *Klang* of the pyramids, the black stone of Mecca.

17. This sense of the comic is best articulated by the likes of Bergson and Baudelaire. For Bergson, comedy lies in the duplication that undermines uniqueness. Two similar faces, a repeated action – these things are funny. For Baudelaire, it lies in a twofold fall: the fall from the divine into the human *and* the pratfall. I watch another man trip on the pavement and I laugh in sudden glory. Baudelaire goes on to claim that what distinguishes the poet or philosopher from others is that he can laugh at himself. That is, he can simultaneously be the one who trips *and* the one who watches the trip: he can split himself in two – what Baudelaire calls *dédoublement*. However, as de Man points out in his essay on Baudelaire, once you're split and reproduced you're not unique anymore: you're fake. The ironic self-awareness of the poet or philosopher can only be that of his own inauthenticity, repeated at increasingly conscious levels, and 'to know inauthenticity is not the same as to be authentic.'

18. What's more, the falling man is, to quote de Man, 'a thing in the grip of gravity', the end point of all gravity being the grave. Thus comedy confronts us with 'the temporal reality of death'. Tragedy does this too, of course – but whereas the tragic hero strides into death in order to confer transcendent meaning on their life, the comic one dies badly, incompletely. Wiley Coyote gets blown up by dynamite and falls off cliffs, Sylvester the Cat gets electrocuted and squashed by trucks, but both come back and die again, and again and again.
19. Broken-hearted romantics dream of an authentic death, on the model of Empedocles extinguishing himself in the flames of Mount Etna, Socrates discoursing calmly with his followers as the hemlock does its inexorable work, or Christ in the bloody joy and Pelican-like self-consummation of his Passion. On the contrary, the necronaut does not die well, at the right time or in the right way. That is, the necronaut dies almost without noticing, feeling a twig in his back instead of a bullet, stung on the neck by a flying insect and succumbing to the resulting fever, like Max Stirner, or tripping over a bronze utensil in the night, like Xenocrates. Sometimes the necronaut does not die at all.

20. Do not misunderstand us. We are not advocating cowardice or compromise. The captured *Résistance* member who refuses to betray his comrades and dies shouting ‘Vive la liberté’ is the one whom we would welcome to our organization, not his collaborating counterpart. But what is his experience of that moment? We submit that it is neither divine transcendence nor an ecstatic spasm of self-fulfillment, but rather an angle of the sunlight on the wall of the execution yard, a clump of earth, a beetle trying to mount a stick and falling off repeatedly.
21. In his stunning short paper on humour, Freud writes of a prisoner condemned to be hanged. On the morning of his execution he is escorted from his cell and led out to the courtyard. Seeing the gallows ahead, he looks up at the sky and says, ‘Na, die Woche fängt gut an’ – ‘Well, the week’s beginning nicely.’ *That’s* our necronaut.
22. I am, but I do not have myself. Humour is the highest expression of the principle of dividuation, of an ever-divided self-relation, of our essential lack of self-coincidence. In other words, I find myself ridiculous, which is to say that I do not find my *self*, whatever that might mean, but rather see myself from outside and laugh. This is what Beckett calls the ‘*risus*

purus’, ‘the laugh laughing at the laugh, the beholding, the saluting of the highest joke, in a word that laugh that laughs – silence please – at that which is unhappy’.

23. How does one die properly? Mustn’t Wiley Coyote long for a simple death to come and free him from his suffering, from its endless repetition? Beckett’s Vladimir and Estragon, torn between waiting for Godot’s arrival, which would save them, and hanging themselves, which would at least give them a hard-on, re-enact the scene of cruelty they witnessed between Pozzo and Lucky on the previous day. ‘Was I sleeping,’ Vladimir asks, ‘while the others suffered?’.
24. For Maurice Blanchot, who was himself lined up in front of a firing squad but reprieved at the last moment, there is a distinction between death and dying, or *la mort* and *le mourir*. If death is something that can be affirmed ecstatically in an act of tragic heroism, then dying is something we cannot control, a process of finite neutral drifting, a movement of absencing. The paradox of suicide is that at the moment of kicking away the chair and hanging oneself, what the suicide feels is the rope tying them ever more tightly to the existence they wanted to leave. Thus, for the Blanchot of *The Writing of the Disaster*, dying is the opposite of death: it is ‘the incessant imminence whereby

life lasts, desiring.’ He continues: ‘If death is the real, and if the real is impossible, then we are approaching the thought of the impossibility of death.’

25. Comedy over tragedy: that is, repetition, incompleteness, rupture and mess over neatness, uniqueness and transcendence. Indeed, on closer scrutiny we see the comic already inscribed within the tragic. Next to the body of Cordelia, the Fool, hanged with a rope, *une corde*. Consider the botched deaths of Hamsun’s Nagel in *Mysteries*, who downs his poison only to discover he’s been sold lemonade (by a dwarf, no less); or Conrad’s Nostromo, who misses his own heroic immolation and wanders around town like a beggar; or Faulkner’s Quentin in *The Sound and the Fury*, continually distracted from the moment of his death while riding trams, his father’s admonition that ‘tragedy is second hand’ ringing in his ears, what we call ‘the tinnitus of existence’; or that of Addie Bundren in *As I Lay Dying*, who takes so long about it that her actual death-scene doesn’t even make the novel’s final cut, starts to reek and then gets substituted, replaced.

26. As Blanchot points out, the disaster doesn’t have a writing: it has no accurate transcription – rather, it de-scribes, un-draws. And yet make no mistake, we are living under the

sign of the disaster. Whether you take the disaster to be the Pequod's wreck, the death of God, the fall of communism, the electoral coup in Florida and subsequent invasion of Iraq, or the exorbitant price of fish is your affair; but you'd be hard pressed not to see that there is wreckage one must navigate through – or, like Ishmael, on.

27. Thinking begins with disaster – or, more precisely, with the forgotten origin of a trauma that clefs the self in twain and in whose ripples all subsequent thinking must find its contours. That is, thinking awakes in the wake of something unthinkable.
28. Trauma confers on those who experience it a feeling of inauthenticity: subsequent life does not seem 'real'. This feeling clouds the trauma-victim's entire world-view. To quote Warhol: 'Before I was shot, I suspected that instead of living I'm just watching TV. Since being shot, I'm certain of it.'
29. Trauma bequeaths a propensity to repeat. The trauma-moment, expelled from proper memory, plays itself out in a chain of repetitions that I instigate, modulating them even as I repeat them. We submit that almost all art, from Aeschylus' *Oresteia* to Sterne's *Tristram Shandy*, to the novels and plays of

Beckett or the images of Warhol, can be interrogated along the lines of trauma.

30. Art is governed by what Mark E. Smith of the mighty Fall calls the three R's: repetition, repetition and repetition. As a consequence, we think artists should continue to do what they have always done: *steal*. Art is a repetitive mechanism that functions through theft, forgery, copying and embedding.
31. As McLuhan puts it, the true content of each medium is the previous medium. Or as we would say, Apache attack seven times the speed of sound. When you are in the cloud you can see nothing.
32. Skiing on art's first slope of possibility, art attempts to extinguish matter and achieve authenticity as a hypnotic, monotonous, endless recurrence of repetition. This produces the trance-like stasis and intense psychic tingling that we sometimes think of as aesthetic pleasure. At times it almost feels real. Then again, so can masturbation.
33. But art's dirty secret is inauthenticity all the way down, a series of repetitions and reenactments that attempt to cover over the traumatic event of materiality. As Joyce realized in

- Finnegans Wake*, literature is rich trash to be recycled and adapted in a commodious vicus of recirculation. Yet, there is always a remainder that remains: a shard, a leftover, a trace, a residual. Everything must leave some kind of mark. The attempt to coincide with reality is always undone by the material mark of an event, an accident of which we remember very little...almost nothing.
34. Listen: the world is a sign of restless visibility, greater than six miles.
35. Listen: Ovid 251 Fight the Chimera. Winds aloft extended decode. Seminole. Going once going twice.
36. Listen: S.A.F.A. taxes may apply. Other taxes may apply.
37. Listen: between cities, countries and continents, we are going to crash.
38. We are sometimes asked: How do I join? How does one become a necronaut? Wrong question. As Paragraph Three, lines five and six of the INS's First Manifesto make clear, willfully pilfering and re-using the tired language of deconstruction, 'We are all necronauts, always, already.' Our

mission here tonight is to disseminate that fact: not as conceptual knowledge but rather in the way that Molly Bloom fills her husband's mouth with seedcake, then repeats that moment, with a silent Yes.

39. As modern lovers of debris, radio and jetstreams, go spread the seed, tune into and repeat it until its signal echoes up and down the balconies, taken up by barking dogs, muttering bums, music traffic down windy streets, across parks and soccer fields. Illusion is a revolutionary weapon. Thank you for listening.