

Wrestling with the Angel: Maurice Dantec, God, and Deleuze

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Abstract

Maurice Dantec (1959-2016), Canadian-French novelist, was a cyberpunk author with a strong interest in Science, Christian theology and the philosophy of Gilles Deleuze (1925-1995). He married those sources in his novels and his literary journals. This article analyzes the interplay of religious, scientific and Deleuzian imagery, guided by the figure of angels. I begin with a study of Dantec's stylistic characteristics, his journey toward Catholic orthodoxy and his apocalyptic understanding of our world. It is in one of his novel, *Cosmos Incorporated*, published in 2006, that Dantec's recipe coalesced in the most brilliant manner. The last part of this article is centered on a long passage from this novel, describing a struggle between Good and Evil, where all the intellectual resources and philosophical and theological references of the author are mobilized.

Keywords: Dantec, Deleuze, angels, sci-fi, theology

Introduction

Maurice Dantec did not believe in mystery, he believed in God and Deleuze. For him, literature was not only about the spirit in the machine but also about the angel as the ultimate interface between man, machine and God. The strange alchemy of Dantec's novels, full of noise and fury, was fueled by the fires of theology, science and philosophy. Some of Gilles Deleuze's concepts innervated the wings of his angels, thus adding philosophical vigor to the apocalyptic world of his imagination.

Maurice Dantec (1959-2016) left France and became a “cultural refugee” in the land of Quebec. No stranger to political controversies, he managed, in the course of his (relatively) brief career, to make his mark on the French version of the cyberpunk movement. He made use of all its possibilities, but also oriented the techno-scientific settings of his world not toward a redefinition/annihilation of (human) nature but toward a *surnaturalization* of mankind, a process of transformation/evolution leading to a new humanity whose bodies become angel-like. While he inscribed some of his novels (starting with *Babylon Babies*, published in 1999) more and more within the traditional Christian discourse on the final destiny of man, this inscription became explicit in his latest novels.

This evolution toward Catholic orthodoxy can be observed germinating through the parallel intellectual journey constituting the *other half* of his oeuvre. Maurice Dantec's novels can indeed be considered the point of emergence, the indirect result of an intellectual process actuated through the three tomes of his journals/essays¹. In those journals, he wrote the distillation of his abundant readings, reflections and musings on a vast variety of subjects; they constitute an important part of his literary work and, as we will see, a preparation for some of the narratives of his novels.

Indeed, his novels and journals cannot be treated separately: there is as much intellectual speculation in the novels as there is literature in Dantec's journals/essays. Both open a fascinating window into the novelist's “black box”. Stylistically, the journals often mirror the “mise en scène” of Gilles Deleuze's own work. That is particularly the case with Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari's 2004 edition of *Mille Plateaux (capitalisme et schizophrénie 2)*.

Dantec's journals will allow us to explore two aspects of Dantec's work. The first one is the Christian Catholic thematic present in two novels, 2006 *Cosmos incorporated*² and 2012 *Satellite sisters*³. Those two novels illustrate the theme of the transmutation of human beings into angel-like beings, in an apocalyptic world, ravaged by war and devolution.

The second one revolves around Gilles Deleuze's influence in Dantec's work. Dantec declared in a conference (2007) that he integrated some of the philosopher's theories in his works⁴. As

¹ Those journals are: (2000). *Manuel de survie en territoire zéro. Le Théâtre des opérations 1: journal métaphysique et polémique*, 1999. Paris: Gallimard, quoted below as *T1*; (2001). *Laboratoire de catastrophe générale. Le Théâtre des opérations 2: journal métaphysique et polémique*, 2000-2001. Paris: Gallimard, quoted below as *T2*; (2007). *American Black Box (2002 to 2005)*. Paris: Albin Michel, quoted below as *ABB*.

² Paris: LGF, quoted below as *CI*.

³ Paris: Ring, quoted below as *SSI*.

⁴ Conference presentation of Maurice G. Dantec, 75th convention of the AFCAS (Association francophone pour le savoir) “Contr'hommage à Gilles Deleuze”, May 11, 2007 : “De la machine de 3^{ème} espèce aux hommes du 4^{ème} type.” The text of the conference, revised by Dantec himself, can be found through <http://ledaen.over-blog.com/article-6677637.html>, retrieved on December 14, 2016.

we will show, those Deleuzian references are very often integrated in the narration not only as concepts but as direct quotes. We will show that indeed, some Deleuzian notions (for example *rhizome* or *machine désirante*, not always used by the novelist in a very faithful way) have a specific role, played within a narrative and literally demetaphorized, that is to say transferred from the realm of semantic derivation (metaphor) to the one of literality. Dantec inverted it when he took Christian notions and applied them within a technological framework in a process we call the technologization of Christianity: the symbolic became then literal. We will see nevertheless that this literary device corresponds to the Catholic interpretation of some aspects of its dogma.

In the course of this article, we will examine some aspects of Dantec's style and concentrate the study on the Christian thematic in the novelist's work. We will see then how he reinterpreted Christian notions and dogmas through the prism of scientific references. We will conclude by focusing on a long passage across two chapters of *Cosmos Incorporated*: this text is a "tour de force," a distillation of Christian and Deleuzian thematic. It is centered on the opposite figures of the angel and the demon, described as opposite machines, and constitutes a systematic reworking, theologically oriented, of the important Deleuzian concept of machine.

Maurice Dantec, a Catholic Prophet at War with the Modern World

Who was Maurice Dantec? His literary career began in 1993, when he published *La Sirène rouge*, a dense crime novel exploring the murky world of snuff movies, full of bloodbaths, torture and cruelty (a signature of almost all Dantec's works). He is usually described as a sci-fi author but any such judgment is superficial. In another conference (January 29, 2000), he presents himself as a shaman, a conceptual machine and a caretaker, a wordsmith in charge of ushering in a new understanding of the world's essence. He describes this world in the throes of chaos and war, ambling toward the destruction of humankind.

As Hervé Pierre Lambert noticed, "French post-human narratives are mainly narratives of war caused by a struggle between cultures" (2009, p. 110). Dantec's work made use of the imagery of war, its tactics and strategy, in a quite systematic way. This interest in war is also manifested in many Deleuzian works. One would, for example, remember that in Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari's *Mille Plateaux, capitalisme et schizophrénie 2* (pp. 434–528), there is a "treatise on monadology: the war machine (traité de nomadologie : la machine de guerre)". Dantec could have written this sentence found in *Mille Plateaux* (p. 35) – "... (a book) which blends (words) with a war machine ([un livre] dont l'écriture épouse une machine de guerre)" as his personal maxim as a writer. Dantec's work is indeed a war machine but with a twist: The Catholic theological and eschatological frame of his novels centered on the narrative of a final conflict.

This conflict is described by Jean-Louis Hippolyte as "the story of a degenerate world, where (Western) man fights for his right to exist, against the social and cultural forces (many of them machine driven, and often global) that threaten to overtake him" (2009, p. 87). It is not only material in nature but also spiritual, pitting holy warriors against a technological version of Evil. Dantec added to it an apocalyptic perspective. For example, his reflections on the Christian dogmas of the Trinity and the eternity of God led him to assert that: "The End of the World is nigh (la Fin du Monde est là)" (*ABB*, pp. 523–524). Baptized in the Catholic church, February 16, 2004, Maurice Dantec defined himself as a "Catholic of the End-time" (Catholique de la Fin des Temps) (*ABB*, p. 568).

His conversion amplified his criticism of the evil of the modern world, described in almost clinical terms and reviled vociferously by a novelist displaying, to quote again Hervé Pierre Lambert (2009, p. 114), his “talent d'imprécateur”. This strong streak of imprecation led Dantec (*TI*, p. 180) to dream of a “holy euthanasia” (une sainte euthanasie) for modern society. In his last journal, *American Black box* (*ABB*, p. 49), Dantec saw the narratives of his novels as a “prophetic principle (principe prophétique),” that is to say an unveiling or more properly a revelation of the secret forces (divine and unclean) shaping the world. Dantec can be compared to Léon Bloy, another self-styled “prophet” and a reference explicitly claimed by Dantec, He was not only a Catholic firebrand but also an experimenter of new forms of styles and narratives⁵.

Style and Rhythm

Dantec’s stylistic experimentation was based on the bedrock of his philosophical, scientific and theological sources. His ambition aimed at: “daring to collide philosophy and police investigation, espionage and cybernetics, biotechnologies and metaphysics, political economy and experimental literature, movie cut thriller, machine-like kinetics, mutant narratives and transgenic fictions” (*TI*, p. 549)⁶. He also played with different types of narrative techniques. Isabelle Périer studied some stylistic characteristics of Dantec’s play with temporality, mentioning the mimicking of *slow time* (as in movies and video games) (2013, pp. 24-26). There is another narrative technique used by Dantec, a *découpage* of action. We call this *stroboscopic time*, the literary equivalent of a decomposition of physical activity in the real world under the rhythmic flashes of a very powerful light. Here is one example from *SSI*, p. 314⁷. One of the principal characters, Toorop, arrives in a suborbital space hotel and his trajectory is described this way:

Toorop went to his suite, elevator, corridors, electro-mechanical stairs.
 Door.
 Card cybercode.
 Opening.
 Grand Salon, biblical ceiling Renaissance style...
 Shane Starck.
 Joan Mercury.
 Domenica Ortiz.
 Astrid Wong.
 Toorop erased his surprise with a simple neuronal code...’’⁸.

⁵ The singular and vehement Catholicism of Léon Bloy is evoked in Henri Quantin (2014), *De Verbe et de Chair*, Paris: Cerf, pp. 287–292. This “companionship” with the great Catholic Imprecator predates Dantec’s official conversion. He already stated (*TI*, p. 472) his affinity for the “reactionary Catholicism” (Catholicisme réactionnaire) and his distaste of the ideology of progress inherited from the Enlightenment.

⁶ “Oser faire se collisionner ... philosophie et investigation criminelle, espionnage et cybernétique, biotechnologies et métaphysique, économie politique critique et littérature expérimentale, thriller aux découpages cinématographiques et cinétiques machinales ... narrations mutantes et fictions transgéniques.”

⁷ This book, a continuation of the novel *Babylon Babies*, revolves around a war waged by the last free people on Earth against a world government (UNO 2.0). Those heroes, guardians of a new breed of humans (the twin Zorn girls first presented in *Babylon Babies*, whose physical nature has evolved out of human limits and frailties) escape finally to the new frontier that is space and to start to colonize Mars.

⁸ “Toorop se rendit à sa suite, ascenseurs, couloirs, escaliers électromécaniques. Porte. Carte cybercode. Ouverture... Shane Starck. Joan Mercury. Domenica Ortiz. Astrid Wong. Toorop effaça l’effet de surprise d’un simple code neuronal... ;’’ we have kept the original page layout.

This is not a description of a short travel but a succession of sequences without transition. The sentences, reduced to a series of names, enhance the effect of abrupt changes. Only the more prominent features of the environment are evoked, suddenly put into focus as by flashes of light, to be replaced immediately by other objects. In stroboscopic time, it seems that the perception of the character isolates each object, thus reducing them to absolute units, blocks so to speak, focused upon one at a time.

The result of this narrative dispositive of broken rhythmic is not a slowed but a sequenced and compressed time. The end of the passage seems to include the other human characters into the preceding sequences (which are only composed of inert objects), characters emerging brutally from those sequences and revealed as fellow human beings. The narrative uses this technique to introduce the reader to the surprise felt by Toorop who is himself described as a kind of machine through the use of code. The last sentence, written in a more classical way, puts an end to the accelerated rhythm of the preceding sequences and reconnects Toorop with the (paradoxically) normal human time.

In other instances, Dantec attempted to grasp one object through all its angles simultaneously. For example, in *SSI*, he describes a living forest waking up and controlled by one of the allies of the heroes (an intelligent plant) in Peru, attacking and destroying a group of soldiers (p. 172). This hybrid vegetal is of course a demetaphorized rhizome, one of the Deleuzian concepts Dantec used in his narratives. The concept of rhizome has been developed in Deleuze and Félix Guattari's *Mille plateaux, Capitalisme et schizophrénie*, pp. 13, 31. A rhizome is a kind of plant which develops sprouts in any direction; for Deleuze and Guattari, it is a metaphor of a structure without any reference to verticality and transcendence. As such, it is opposed to the figure of the tree: "Codex-Plant... Ayahuasca/transgenic intelligence was indeed an adapting Evolution in being" life form. It was a warrior plant (Plante-Codex ... Ayahuasca/intelligence transgénique était bien une forme de vie adaptée « Evolution-en-acte. Elle était bien une plante-guerrière) » (*SSI*, p. 45). The forest is a composite being described as a "Fluid/liquid, gaseous/expanded, concrete/fleshy, the tsunami-legion was alive, it was a being composed of beings, a collective intelligence, indefinitely multiplied (Fluide/liquide, gazeux/expansif, solide/charnel, le Tsunami-Légion était vivant, c'était un être composé d'êtres, une intelligence collective, démultipliée par myriades)". This sentence describes exactly the same thing, in an analytic way (the closing of the sentence) and at the beginning, in three connected pairs of words expressing simultaneously its contradictory qualities. In other words, what Dantec did was to subsume the complexity, not of the moment but of the substantial reality of one part of the universe he created, in one and instantaneous moment. Those two examples cannot be reduced to a simple stylistic "trick"; they try to express a relationship to time and space, which is different from a simple "stream of consciousness". In other words, through those descriptions, Maurice Dantec tries to overcome the limits of a linear narrative in order to convey a synthetic perception which (first example) objectifies perception or (second example) globalizes it.

This reality was, for Dantec, an admixture of physical and metaphysical forces. He attempted to decipher it through the prism of theology, (often Deleuzian) philosophy and physics deployed in narratives. Those three domains were not separated but reworked in a paradoxical way.

The Deleuzian Machine, Christianized

Since the importance of Christian theology cannot be overstated in his work, Maurice Dantec's reworking of Christian and Deleuzian concepts is indeed paradoxical, since Christian theology

deals with transcendence while Gilles Deleuze himself was the thinker of immanence par excellence. Dantec himself was aware of this paradox and, in the text of his 2007 conference “De la machine de 3^{ème} espèce aux hommes du 4^{ème} type”, qualified Deleuze as “THE philosopher of immanence” (Le philosophe de l’immanence). While there is in Dantec’s novels a narrative deployment of the “devenir” (a Bergsonian notion), it is oriented toward eternity, a topic irrelevant for Deleuze. This paradox can be somewhat attenuated if we consider that Deleuzian notions have been transformed and reused by Dantec within a Catholic frame.

The Christian Sources

Maurice Dantec’s journals give a key to understanding how he interpreted the tenets of the Catholic faith (the dogmas) through the prism of a scientific (or scientific sounding) discourse. One can say that compared to the traditional forms of interpretation of the Holy Writ, namely literal, typological, moral and anagogical, Dantec has elected to focus on the literal meaning of the dogmas. His method consisted of materializing theological concepts, framed by evolution and technology.

The Christian references take the form of theological notions, one of them being the resurrection of the flesh. At the heart of the Christian worldview, it appears in the tension between the present (corrupt) world and what will happen at the End Times. In the New Testament, the obvious references are:

Matthew 22:30, “At the resurrection people ... will be like the angels in heaven”,
St Paul 1 Corinthians 15:42, “It is sown in corruption, it shall rise in incorruption” and
1 Corinthians 15:43: “It is sown in weakness, it shall rise in power”, “it” designating of course the body, rendered immortal and incorruptible.

The eschatological discourse of the Catholic Church on this is by no mean symbolic, that is to say a figure of speech: it is intended literally. Maurice Dantec has inherited this impetus toward literalism from this long tradition but translated it in a narrative replete with scientific references. He retro-transcribed the concept of *corpus gloriosus* (glorified bodies, assimilated to angels, of the resurrected human beings after the End Times) (to use a biological metaphor) in the pseudo-scientific language of technology. While the narratives, the novels, are the final product, the concepts that flourish in them have been prepared in his journals, bearing witness to the author’s intellectual evolution.

Materialization of Christianity – A Work in Progress – Or in Evolution

Dantec’s essays are indeed informed by the concept of evolution, the biological one (Evolution) and his own – spiritual evolution – meshed. His conversion to Catholicism seems to have emerged not only out of his experience but also his readings, which encompassed almost every subject, with an early interest in religions and their theologies. Not baptized a Catholic yet, he read the history of Christianity as the story of a (literal) biological mutation: (*TI*, pp. 76–77). “Christianity is what antiquity Judeo-Christian/Roman humankind could achieve with the concepts of schizophrenic androgenesis, anthropic principle, genetic mutations and neuro-dynamic control of the mind, that is to say other-worldly concepts for the time (Le christianisme, c’est ce que l’homme de l’Antiquité judéo-gréco – romaine pouvait faire avec les concepts d’androgénèse schizosphérique⁹, de principe anthropique, de mutation génétique et de contrôle neuro-dynamique de la conscience, autant dire des concepts extra-terrestres pour

⁹ This neo-adjective “schizosphérique” is of course a transparent reference to Deleuze. Dantec has fleshed out this concept in several of the characters of his novels. In his first journal (*TI*, p. 23), he made the “schizophrène” a figure of the true man of knowledge because, “homme multiple”, he was as multiple as a “multiplicité cellulaire”.

l'époque)”. In other words, Christianity was for him the result of an encounter between a certain state of civilization (Antiquity) and a new species of human being represented by a Christ described in (pseudo) scientific parlance. The reference to evolution is very strong in Dantec's thinking but his systematic preference for heterodox versions of scientific theories led him to reject Darwinism¹⁰.

Dantec considered that Christianity was not about a moral message of redemption but represented a new step of human evolution. He wanted to find “the practical, esoteric, scientific meaning of the coming of Christ (le sens pratique, ésotérique, scientifique, de la venue du Christ sur la Terre)” (*TI*, p. 78). At this stage of his personal evolution, Maurice Dantec conceived religion as a “natural” emergence, fruit of evolutionary processes and, in line with his enduring obsession with the end of humankind, the sign of the destruction of humankind. This led him to envision the “production of Christ by us as Son of Man that is to say successor of Man (production du Christ par nous comme Fils de l'homme c'est-à-dire Successeur de l'Homme)” (*TI*, pp. 72–73).

There are other precedents in European literature, such as Edward Bulwer-Lytton's 1871 novel *The Coming Race* (translated in French under the title *La race qui nous remplacera*), or even *Le Horla* by Guy de Maupassant, published in 1887. Those two novels envisioned the surging of a new type of “human” (or superhuman), destined to replace human beings, probably in line with the emergence of Darwinism and speculations on the relentless advance of natural selection in the future.

Dantec went as far as to claim the need for a “new metaphysics” (nouvelle métaphysique) and a “new biophysics” (nouvelle biophysique) in order to create “a new humankind (une nouvelle espèce humaine)” (*TI*, p. 459). This new species, brought into the world by a process of evolution, an evolution as spiritual as it is material, is angelic in nature: humanity evolves from beyond itself and dissolves to give birth to the ultimate creature, an angelic one. In Dantec's own personal evolution, at the time those lines were written, this concept of the emergence of the divine was thought to be the result of natural forces at work.

He did not refuse science and technology, he embraced it. In one of his journals, Dantec wrote: “It is about translating current physics theories unto philosophy, metaphysics and esthetics concepts (Il s'agit ... de trouver la traduction pertinente des théories physiques et cosmogoniques modernes dans le domaine philosophique et métaphysique, sur le plan des concepts esthétiques)” (*TI*, p. 369). By metaphysics, Dantec meant of course religion. One hesitates to say that he Christianized technology; it seems rather that he technologized Christianity. In other words, Dantec interpreted the major tenets of the Catholic faith in a material, asymbolic way. This redeployment of the old Christian idea of the glorified bodies of the resurrected was embedded in Deuleuzian notions, themselves transmogrified or to use a more accurate word in the context of Dantec's Catholic faith, transfigured. The novel where this transfiguration is narrativised in the most complex way and achieved with the most mastery is *Cosmos Incorporated*.

¹⁰ On Dantec's epistemology and his conception of the relationship between science-fiction and literature, see Hervé-Pierre Lambert: “Dantec et Narby: Sciences, épistémologie et fiction”, *Épistémocritique*, (winter 2010), online article: <http://epistemocritique.org/dantec-et-narby-sciences-epistemologie-et-fiction>

Plot of the Novel

Cosmos Incorporated (below quoted as *C.I.*) is the story of a killer, Sergei Diego Plotkine, living in a world dominated by a super state, named UniMonde Humain (the motto of which is “One world for all, to each one’s god” (Un monde pour tous, un dieu pour chacun). Plotkine is the product of a narrative, inserted, literally written into the story of the world by a young woman, Vivian McNellis, who is in the process of becoming an angel. He is described as the instrument of liberation of the last “real” humans facing the horror of a “benign” global State: “... on the planet, the cold face of the Machine and its horrible smile darkens human hope (sur la planète, le visage froid de la Machine obscurcit de son immonde sourire tous les horizons humains)” (*C.I.*, p. 99). Gilles Deleuze (1990), building on Foucault’s *Surveiller et punir*, noticed the formation of “ultra-fast forms of control” (formes ultra-rapides de contrôle) characteristic of world governments. Those reflections obviously constituted a source of inspiration for Dantec.

At the end of their lives, creator and creature, having vanquished an incarnation of evil, give birth to a child who will be raised by a female android, Sydia Sexydoll Nova 280, a Christian convert. This child named Gabriel Link de Nova (literally the new link, the link *de novo*, in the image of Christ), emerges in a world descending into devolution, near to the End Times. This idea was prepared in one of Dantec’s journals where he described our world as in the throes of de-creation (*ABB*, p. 597). In *C.I.*, he has incorporated creation (*genesis*) in his narrative, in a very specific way.

Genesis and anti-Genesis: Angel and Demon in *C.I.*

Cosmos Incorporated can be read as a narrative revolving around the metamorphosis of one human being, a young female, into an angelic being, whose body is free of the limitation of the ordinary human condition. This transformation is expressed in a vocabulary which merges two different references, the Christian and the technological, resulting in a tension between technological and Biblical or patristic terms. To those two threads informing the structure of the narrative, one must be added: Deleuzian concepts, particularly those revolving around the body and the different types of machines. *Cosmos Incorporated* is in fact a structure *en abîme* where the novel’s main story is deployed in a double literary process of creation and de-creation, mirroring each other. This conflict is described through a narrative intertwining Deleuzian and theological concepts with, at its center, the image/concept of the machine.

The Creatrix and the Angelic Machine

As it is said in the Holy Writ (John 1:1), in the beginning was the Word, and the first appearing “hero” of the story emerges from nothingness as the main character in the narrative created by a young woman, Vivian McNellis. In other words, Vivian’s narrative mirrors and imitates the divine creating Logos. As Claire Cornillon noticed, for Dantec, language has the ontological power of the biblical Logos (2012, pp. 165-166). At the beginning of his mission, Plotkine, a creature of fiction, “did not even know that he aimed to exist (ne savait même pas encore qu’il aspirait à être)” (*C.I.*, p. 195).

He is accompanied and guided in his endeavor first by an A.I. named Metatron, after the angel who, in Jewish angelology, is the voice of God. This A.I. is also designated throughout the novel as Plotkine’s guardian angel (ange gardien), a metaphor reinforcing the identity between the computer program and an angel, both creatures of pure mind (*CI.*, p. 83). This identity between electronic and spiritual entities is reinforced by Dantec, when he interprets angels as technological devices: “We, the angels, are God’s technology... We are God’s black box [...]

quantum fields, whose individuality emerges only at the discontinuity of all discontinuities, as in the pivot point of our machine-like time (Nous les anges, nous sommes la technologie de Dieu ... nous sommes la boîte noire de Dieu [...] nous sommes des champs quantiques dont l'individuation n'émerge qu'à la coupure de toutes les coupures, comme dans le point pivot de notre temps-machine)" (*C.I.*, p. 298). The "temps-machine" is the technological transmogrification of the theological notion of the *aevum*, a time proper to angels. Dantec's reflections on the subject have been prepared in his last journal (*ABB*, pp. 546–547). This reinterpretation is exposed by Dantec in a very thorough and didactic way in *C.I.*, p. 289. *Aevum* "is the measure of duration enjoyed by the heavenly bodies: the planets, the angels, and the saints" (Toussaint, 2017).

The namesake of the A.I., Metatron, as the voice of God (also called in the novel the "scribe" of God), is also understood as the conduit through which the Divine Narrative, that is to say Creation, is done. In other words, Plotkine, himself an artificial being, is quickened into the narrative of his own life by an artificial analog of an angel. Angels are presented in the text as examples of God's technology, a notion that makes use of the Deleuzian concept of *coupure* (discontinuity). It is of course a direct reference to Deleuze and Guattari's analysis of the principal characteristic of machines: "A machine can be defined as a system of discontinuity" (Une machine se définit comme un système de coupures) (1972, pp. 43–44). This reference (quoted directly by Dantec in *C.I.*, p. 421) is also used for the description of what happens to Plotkine when he meets his creatrix: the revelation of his origin is done to the "network of the machine-like discontinuities of his being (réseau des coupures machiniques de son être)" (*C.I.*, p. 264). A "coupure" interrupts a flux; for Deleuze and Guattari, this continuity is material but Dantec reinterpreted this notion in the context of two other fluxes, the information network (in the case of the A.I.) and, of course, the spiritual, for the angels. One could say, in the light of Deleuze and Guattari, that a *coupure* is a discontinuity, the building-block of differentiation. Angels would be then the machines through which Creation is ordered.

The notion of *coupure* also refers indirectly to the technical language used by Christian theology. Dantec, familiar with Jewish and Christian Angelology, linked this "jeu de coupures" and angels, guided by Medieval theology's designation of angelic beings as *separated intellects*. The term of *separated intellect* describes the state of angelic creatures as pure minds, without (separated from) a body¹¹. Dantec uses another version of this Deleuzian reference in *SSI* (p. 63) when one of the protagonists, Darquandier, says to the twin sisters whose body has become angel-like after they have reached another step of their evolution: "You are what Deleuze called a network of discontinuities (Vous êtes ce que Deleuze appelait un *réseau de coupures*— italics of the author)."

The A.I. first introduces Plotkine to his creator in a dream: it takes the appearance of a young woman, Vivian McNellis, whom he will encounter later (*CI.*, pp. 235–236). In his dream, the young woman says: "It is time to bring fire to the world. At that moment, the hotel started to burn (Il est temps que le feu soit jeté sur la terre. A cet instant, l'hôtel entier se met à brûler)." This sequence is prepared, when in Plotkine's mind appears a quote from Luke 12:49: "I have come to bring fire on the earth, and how I wish it were already kindled" (*C.I.*, p. 98). Plotkine suddenly writes the Latin sentence "IPSE VOS BAPTIZABIT IN SPIRITU SANCTO ET IGNI", (in capitals in the text) coming from the Vulgate (St Matthew 3-11), pronounced by St

¹¹ See for example St Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* (prima pars, Q. 79) on the topic of intellectual powers. On the topic of angels, we have also consulted T. Suarez-Nani's two books on medieval angelology, *Connaissance et Langage Mo des Anges selon St Thomas d'Aquin et Gilles de Rome*, (Paris: Vrin, 2002), *Les Anges et la Philosophie*, (Paris: Vrin, 2002).

John the Baptist who announces a new baptism given by Christ, in the Holy Spirit and the fire (*C.I.*, pp. 174–175).

What was a metaphor, the metaphoric fire of God’s love, is demetaphorized immediately into a real fire when Vivian’s room starts to burn, during one of the stages of her angelic transfiguration. She is presented to us in the guise of an Orthodox painting, the circular window of her room framing her like a halo (*C.I.*, p. 249).

The creator-creature relationship between Vivian McNellis and Plotkine mimics at one point of the narrative the relationship between Christ and the Catholic faithful: Vivian gives Plotkine part of her DNA saying: “It is my flesh and my blood, you will eat it (C’est ... ma chair et mon sang. Vous l’avalerez)” (*C.I.*, p. 435). This motif is the culmination of the narrative through which Vivian creates Plotkine: her *logos*, a straightforward literary (angelic/divine) technique, must be supplemented by a gesture of communion. It is obviously an evocation of the Communion during which the faithful are given the Eucharist, the Body of Christ under the *species* of bread and wine. For the Catholic faith, this of course is not a symbol, that is to say a physical object evoking something else: the technical term used to describe what happens to the bread and the wine used in the ceremony is *transubstantiation*. It means that body and bread become literally the Body (or the flesh) and the Blood of Christ: there is nothing metaphoric in the Catholic interpretation of Eucharist. Dantec, following the same rejection of metaphors, transfers this religious “motif” (Eucharist) into a biological, concrete reality, DNA. Hence, Plotkine acquires the substance of his creatrix the same way the Catholic faithful absorb the substance of Christ.

The same rejection of metaphors is also manifested through intertwined images and meshed concepts about this first appearance of Vivian, when the novelist tries to describe what he calls “the thermodynamics of the phenomenon” (*la thermodynamique* – italics of the author – du phénomène) (*C.I.*, pp. 261–263). As we have already said, Christianity is made the matter of science, a science suffused with theology: Dantec evokes pell-mell John of Patmos and Denys the Areopagyte, a theologian famous for his theories on celestial hierarchy. He also evokes the figure of the angel with the flaming sword, guardian of the Tree of Knowledge in Eden. This constitutes a faulty but commonly mistaken interpretation of the famed (or infamous) Tree, not of knowledge, but of the Knowledge of Good and Evil, transmogrified here into a symbol for ultimate and divine knowledge. This is the only passage in *C.I.* where the metaphor of the tree is employed by Dantec.

In the Bible, this angel (a cherub) is tasked with casting Adam and Eve out of the Garden. If Plotkine and Vivian are to be considered as a new “first couple”, one must notice immediately an inversion: Eve came out of Adam’s rib, Plotkine comes out of Vivian’s mind. Hence, the origin (male) becomes female, his story becomes her telling. This narrative, mirroring Genesis, does not have the same consequence. In the Bible, the first humans had fallen prey to the Snake, but the “original couple” in *C.I.* manages to vanquish another incarnation of Evil.

The Child in the Box: The Technology of Evil

This incarnation is a child, an interface between the global government and its machines and humankind. The epic confrontation pitting Plotkine the killer against Evil is developed in a narrative which is a cross-fertilization of literature, philosophy and theology, with multiple references (through the names of the child) to science and pop culture. It is also a *mise en abyme* of literary creation, inserted into the Great Narrative of the biblical creation via the

figure of Metatron and the recreation of Vivian McNellis as an angel. Those passages are pivotal in the narrative of the book and we have endeavored to peel away most of its layers, embedded one into the other. They are the focal point where the author mobilizes his knowledge and incorporates it into his narrative.

The character of the Child-machine is the heart of the story, since it is the void that the Child is that allows the narrative to reach its center. In other words, he is the antithesis to the final unfolding of the apotheosis of Vivian McNellis. The whole passage is a *tour de force*, a brilliant evocation of a monstrosity that embodies, literally, an interplay between a series of concepts, Deleuzian, Baudrillardian and biblical, articulated around the one which gives all the others their orientation: the (anti) body (*C.I.*, p. 402 “anticorps”) of the child.

The “enfant-Machine” lives in Plotkine’s hotel; he gives his name as “John Smith” (*C.I.*, pp. 401–416, 465–475). This Child-machine is isolated and sexually abused by his jailor, Clovis Drummond, anti-creator of the anti-Christ so to speak and manager of the hotel, who uses the Child to concoct illegal computer programs. He is placed in a box, wearing a spacesuit, which of course evokes space but while in *SSI* space is the “final frontier” where the new humankind will escape the blandishments of U.N.O. 2.0 world government. The Child’s space suit is a marker of his alienation. The image of the box is one of the few common points between the Child-machine and Plotkine, since the hero, as narrated in the beginning of the novel, is the man coming from a concentration camp, which is a kind of a box. His opponent, the Child-machine is (p. 401) “The man in the box” (l’Homme dans la boîte) and literally: “The child in the dome lived in a box, literally” (L’enfant du dôme vivait dans une boîte et cela n’était pas une métaphore) (*C.I.*, p. 409). This is an apparent contradiction with another passage, p. 463: “The Child-machine is a living metaphor” (L’enfant-Machine est une métaphore vivante) but this is another way to say that he is not a metaphor at all but an embodiment of an abstract concept. The Child-machine incarnates the total transparency of our post-modern world and its endless voyeuristic pleasures and dreads.

This box, made of a carbon construct, is bathed in an “absolute light, without any trace of shadow” (lumière totale, sans la moindre zone d’ombre), cold and perverted imitation of the divine light of angels. It could also be an image of a camp but while it is a place of destruction of the individuals who are placed in it, the Child’s box has a different purpose: “(the box) allows me to live in the world but at the same time separated from the world” (Elle me permet de vivre dans le monde sans y vivre, elle me permet d’être dans le monde sans y être). This box encompasses all the quantified and digitalized aspects of a world thus contained and literally boxed in. What does the Child-machine embody? What makes him a “fleshed-out hallucination” (*délire qui avait pris corps dans le monde* — italics of the author) (*C.I.*, p. 408)? The type of society described in *C.I.* is one where human beings have been expelled from the decision-making process. In other words, what electronic machines express for Dantec is not a society but an anti-society, reduced to electronic virtuality. There is another apparent contradiction: while the Unimonde exists without physical frontiers, the Child boxes up all reality: through code, he acts as a dissolvent on reality itself. It appears that, for Dantec, the physicality of frontiers is a guarantor of it.

By contrast, in the Child “time evaporates in the space of numbers, the space of the boxes and thus disappears constantly” (le temps joue à s’évaporer dans l’espace des nombres, l’espace des boîtes, ainsi il disparaît sans cesse) (*C.I.*, p. 404). The Child-machine, used by his jailor to build “simulations (univers simulés)”, is also the incarnation of a new era, an era described by Baudrillard as an epoch of simulacra (1981, p. 11). In the narrative of *C.I.* (pp. 459–463), the

Baudrillardian reference is combined with Averroes' (Ibn Rushd, 1126-1198 A.D.) theories on the agent intellect, summed up by the technical term *monopsychism*. Maurice Dantec, through a dialogue between Plotkine and Vivian McNellis (pp. 426–429), gives his own exegesis of the very existence of the Child-machine: he is the incarnation of Averroes' monopsychism. Monopsychism, derived from Aristotle's concept of active and passive intellect involved in the act of thinking, is a philosophical doctrine according to which the active intellect is numerically unique and the same for every human being; that is to say, there is one intellect for all men and consequently, man does not think, he is thought¹². P. 502, the "Metastructure of control" (Métastructure de contrôle) with which the child interfaces is named explicitly "Monopsychic metastructure" (Métastructure monopsychique). In a long exposé, Dantec presents this entity as a materialization of the monopsychism of Averroes, one of the thinkers that inspired Medieval nominalists. The Child-machine's story is therefore linked with the question of names: he does not have a real and personal one. The Child-machine is nameless not only because his official name is so common (John Smith, that is to say nobody) but also because he has too many of them, 99 to be more precise (see the list *C.I.*, pp. 413–416).¹³ Those names are a strange hodgepodge of fictional, mythical or "real" names; among those, one finds ... Gilles Deleuze himself! The Child-machine is reminiscent of an important character in the book of Revelation: the anti-Christ, who is given only a number (666, that is to say a multiplicity) but no name. Our remark is based on the fact that Dantec explicitly connects the anti-Christ and Legion (as the demon is also known) in *ABB* (p. 663). The names of the Child-machine make it also the cyber-equivalent of the demons evoked in Mark and Luke's gospels: in the narrative of the the Gadarene swines' exorcism, Jesus is confronted to a multiplicity of demons who said to Him "my name is legion for we are many".

The Child-machine is also the embodiment of an old dream, the cybernetic governance, an electronic machine that governs all without the hassle of politics¹⁴. This system, that is to say the global government, is defined as "the global rhizome of the control cyberstructure" (le rhizome global de la cyberstructure de contrôle) (*C.I.*, p. 420). This description is steeped in the Deleuzian concept of *rhizome* but while Deleuze made it a positive concept as an image of immanence, Dantec uses it obviously in a negative way. The last intellectual journal of Maurice Dantec bears witness to the evolution of the author vis-a-vis the Deleuzian notion of rhizome, within a critique of *Mille Plateaux* and its *a-topiques* structures, opposed to the figure of the tree and its roots, image of the *lignage généalogique* characteristic of (idealized) patriarchal societies, favored by Dantec (*ABB*, pp. 405–406). The rhizome is here assigned to evil, a ubiquitous soulless negation of individuality, where all possible wholesomeness of the world is dissolved. That is why, when Dantec designates the 99 names of the Child as "ontological rhizome (rhizome ontologique)", it is the same thing as saying that Evil is a negation of the wholesomeness of Being (*C.I.*, p. 469). The Child himself has no interiority, no depth, his mind designated as "rhizome-like exconscious" (exconscient rhizomique) (*C.I.*, p. 475)¹⁵; his activity is in fact dictated by the global system of control, analogous to the active universal intellect

¹² Cf. Averroès (1999, p. 58) (trad. Marc Geoffroy, préface Alain de Libera), *Discours décisif*, Paris : Flammarion. We have also consulted Alain de Libera, *Thomas d'Aquin contre Averroès. L'unité de l'intellect contre les averroïstes, suivi des Textes contre Averroès antérieurs à 1270*, (Paris: Flammarion, 1994).

¹³ The Child in the box is a non-being, despite all his names. To the contrary, in *ABB* (p. 269), Dantec mentions that names are given being in the black box, that is to say his journal. It seems therefore, that *C.I.* is an inverted reworking of the *American Black Box* journal.

¹⁴ On the history of this idea, see Alain Supiot, *La Gouvernance par les Nombres*, (Paris: Fayard, 2015), particularly the chapter 1 ("En quête de la machine à gouverner"), pp. 27–50.

¹⁵ The neologism "exconscious" is the opposite of "unconscious," that is to say a negation of all interior reflection. It is therefore the negation of the interior dimension of human beings, a mechanization of the soul.

and distinct from every man. In other words, his mind is not his own. He does not speak but communicates, and it does not interact, not even with itself (*C.I.*, p. 411). This is the entity that must be slayed.

Body and Text, Body as Text

As the *Daodejing* (chapter 13) said: “What makes me liable to great calamity is my having a body”, or should we say “my confrontation to a body”. The whole passage of the struggle between Plotkine and the Child and the (literally) literary fight that ensues is based on a series of corporeal oppositions. The first opposition is between polymorphous sexuality and chosen – ascetic – asexuality, between a gendered but desexualized robotic approximation of humanity and a child whose normal sexual (and otherwise) growth has been artificially stifled. This child is perpetually frozen at an age of 12 and is not defined by any gendered categories: “The Child-machine was neither man, nor woman, neither male nor female (L’enfant-Machine n’était ni homme, ni femme, ni mâle, ni femelle)” (*C.I.* p. 449). This passage is of course reminiscent of St Paul’s Galatians 3:28: “There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus”, but while St Paul “crowns” his revolutionary assertion with an oneness in Christ, the Child-machine subsumes the world in him/itself thus: “ONE MACHINE FOR ALL; TO EACH, ONLY ONE INTERFACE” (UNE MACHINE POUR TOUS; UNE INTERFACE POUR CHACUN – uppercase of the author) (*C.I.* p. 430).

To vanquish this incarnation of the world reduced to its numerical values, Plotkine requests the services of a sexless android, Sydia Sexydoll Nova 280. She is described as a basic pleasure model, evoking the figure of one of the movie *Blade Runner*’s androids, Priss. Nevertheless, this machine, because it yearns to become human, is a kind of machine of desire (*machine désirante*).¹⁶ By contrast, the child in the box can be construed as an *anti-machine désirante*. This is another example of Dantec’s use of Deleuzian concepts, here subverted, since the child in the box is at the same time the emanation and victim of Evil. His (natural) body is artificialized and has become the nexus of de-creation, that is to say the anti-narrative collapsing reality into its numeric ghost. What Plotkine uses is the “WHOLESOME BODY (CORPS PLEIN)” (uppercase of the author) of the sexbot (*C.I.* p. 449). There are two meanings contained in this designation: the first one is what is called in French the *corps du texte*, that is to say the substance (body) of the text/narrative; the second one is the notion of solidity/wholesomeness, opposed to the empty virtuality for which the Child-machine stands.

The “corps plein” evokes another Deleuzian concept, the body without organs (*corps-sans-organe*), from which (we think) Dantec’s “corps plein” is derived. This *corps-sans-organe* originated with Antonin Arthaud; this body was first presented as a critical tool against the Cartesian Cogito, with its reduction of the “soul” to an ideal dimensionless construct opposed to a matter reduced to its physical, measurable dimensions (Alain Beaulieu, 2002, pp. 511–522). It was also conceived in opposition to unity (the unity of the organism) and transcendence. It was finally the *topos* of sexual pleasure since there is no difference in the body between erogenous and non-erogenous zones (Deleuze, Guattari, 2004, pp. 187–196). The sexual meaning of the *corps sans organe* is present in Dantec’s narrative, through the description of the abuses the Child is submitted to by his pedophile jailor. This sexuality is at the same time mechanical, done through orifices in the spacesuit of the Child and therefore bearing no relation to any sexual organ. It is therefore a perfect illustration of the Deleuzian notion of a total and

¹⁶ See Florence Andoka (2012, pp. 85–94). *Machine désirante et subjectivité dans l’Anti-Œdipe de Deleuze et Guattari. Philosophique* 15 on this Deleuzian concept.

limitless sexuality, presented, contrary to Deleuze, in a negative way. This sexual negativity is fought through, negated by a gendered asexuality.

Dantec proceeds by opposing to the *corps sans organe* of the Child an embodied narrative, the *corps plein* of the android, Sydia Sexydoll, is a machine made only to satisfy any human sexual desire but who had this sexual programming erased: her wholesome body, as a substantive narrative, is used as a weapon against the anti-narrative of the Child-machine (*C.I.*, pp. 454–455). In other words, a machine conceived as a simulacrum of female, is tasked with the deconstruction of a real human being reduced to the embodiment of electronic fakery.

The *corps plein du texte*, at the same time literary and real machine, recreates reality when the physical wholesomeness of the android, through her spiritual renunciation (a figure of Christian asceticism) and her quest/desire for her own humanity, collides with and erases, so to speak, the diabolical multiplicity of the Child. Free then to die, he will die the death of a human being, that is to say the death of an irreducible, non-coded singularity.

For Deleuze and Guattari, humans are conceived as a particular case of machines as they are producers and what is produced is “machine-like effects but no metaphor” (des effets de machine et non des métaphores) (1972, p. 7). Dantec is also Deleuzian in his refusal of metaphor and the imagery he deploys in his narrative culminates in a struggle between literature itself and “code.” The narrative acknowledges the existence of its own tools (narration itself), weaves itself into the chain of (pseudo) reality it evokes and transforms it into itself. In other words, the narrative of the text is mirrored and echoed by a narrative in the text. This creative process of narration is conceived by Maurice Dantec elsewhere as a rejection of his own identity, through which he gives birth to (literally) another body, a book seen as a “different body (*corps-autre*),” that is to say the body of the narrative, the “body of the book (*corps du livre*)” (*ABB*, p. 268).

Conclusion

Dantec’s narratives are usually replete with a complete and (almost) exhaustive system of internal exegesis, directly provided in the text. It seems that Dantec wanted absolute control of his work, and tried to hinder any possibility of external commentary.

In his novels, his recipe, so to speak, involved a literary reworking of Christian and philosophical concepts, sometimes resulting in an apparent loss of mystery. What was at stake for him was transfiguration through literature. He mobilized the vocabulary of the Eucharist to describe his personal voyage (*ABB*, p. 458) “toward the corpus scripti of (my) life” (vers le corpus scripti de [ma] sa propre vie). There is an obvious double play on words, the first one with the southern Texan city of Corpus Christi, the second one with the Latin expression *corpus Christi*, meaning the “body of Christ”. One could say that for the author, literature was a matter of transubstantiation. In the same way that the Catholic Mass of bread and wine are transformed into Christ’s body and blood, so the matter of Dantec’s life was transformed by virtue of literature. The primary matter of all his readings was to become, through the operation of his logos, one book, the embodiment of his thoughts and his life.

Does it mean that, to (mis)quote Jean-Paul Sartre: “God is not a novelist; neither is mister Dantec”? Hardly. While it could be argued that the explicit theological and philosophical references stifle the imagination of the reader, I find that his novels constitute a highly potent intellectual stimulant. As for his fascination with Deleuze, it is not slavish. Maurice Dantec

finally learned that in order to be faithful, one has to appropriate. Was Dantec faithful to God and Deleuze? This question is left to readers to decide.

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