

# About the Original Event: The Antichrist's Trickery and Oblivion in the Biblical Ontology

## THE RETURN OF THE CHRIST

If the historical report written by Gregory of Tours (538 – 594) is to be believed, the re-appearitions of Christ began approximately six centuries after his famous crucifixion. One among many was reported to have happened around the year 591, when the man who lived near Bourges, found himself surrounded by a swarm of flies while he was cutting logs in the deep woods. In the light of this unpleasant incident he was said to have experienced a divine revelation: he grew certain that the flies were, in fact, the harbingers of the End and that he himself was the One who had come to Earth for the second time in the moment of its deliverance. This ambush of flies pushed him to the verge of madness for two whole years, after which, as reported by Tours, he publicly proclaimed himself as Jesus Christ and began his prophetic campaign, accompanied by a woman “who passed as his sister”<sup>1</sup>, naming her Mary. The campaign eventually escalated to the point, when he marched upon Le-Puy-en-Velay with more than three thousand followers and, instead of his host, sent forward a line of completely naked and dancing messengers “who announced his Coming”<sup>2</sup>

to the amazed bishop. If this gesture by the self-proclaimed Christ from the 6<sup>th</sup> century could seem a bit odd, Aurilius, then bishop of Le Puy, knew exactly how to answer to “Christ’s” dancing message. According to Tours, the bishop’s men disposed of “that Christ who ought rather to be named antiChrist”<sup>3</sup> and pronounced the impostor as a false prophet immediately after his violent death.

In his work *Historiae*, also known as *History of Franks*, Gregory of Tours describes apparitions of three different “prophets” in his time. Besides the Christ from Bourges, Tours also writes of Desiderius of Tours, a suspiciously abstemious healer, who supposedly liked to vigorously stretch limbs of “paralytics and other cripples”<sup>4</sup> to the point where the unfortunate had to be carried away “half-dead”<sup>5</sup> or had, in some cases, even died. Eventually, he was found guilty of fraud and cast out of the city’s territory<sup>6</sup>. Tours also includes the report of the foul-mouthed “prophet”, whom he had a chance to meet in person and who was later found to be a run-away slave who carried with him a bag full of “roots, moles’ teeth, the bones of mice, the claws and fat of bears”<sup>7</sup>. After attending the holy processions in Paris accompanied by a band of prostitutes, he was thrown into custody, released and then thrown in again, but soon broke out of prison and arrived highly intoxicated to the church of Saint-Julien-le-Pauvre, where he passed out on the pavement and with his bodily odour – “stench that surpassed the stench of all sewers and privies”<sup>8</sup> – prevented Gregory of Tours himself from entering the church.

For the latter there was no doubt – all the prophets turned out to be common con-men; however, although the potential reader of the *Historiae* might think that the story of the deceivers is ultimately brought to its end with their exposure, their appearance connects to a much wider problem of the Middle Ages that can be analysed precisely through an occurrence of the *deceit* as such. Gregory of Tours was aware of this problem, which is clear from his direct referral in the ninth book of *Historiae* to the teachings of Bible, according to which the coming of “false Christs” and “false prophets” will announce the beginning of the all-worldly End. With this gesture Tours isolated a key sign among the multitude of apocalyptic signs, which apparently had the tendency to appear vastly in his time and which by no means were something that was to be ignored by medieval observers like him.

If we follow the biblical narrative with a similar enthusiasm that is so typical for the Middle Ages, we find that the principal event announcing the End is not the Second Coming of Christ, but the arrival

of *someone* who is supposed to *falsely* pass himself as the true Messiah. The main role in this epochal scheme of things was therefore ascribed to the fraudster – the deceiver who, as the herald of the End, threatened the very dispositif of the medieval world, (the world which essentially constituted itself through the anticipation of its own end) but at the same time appeared also to be the main internode – the only one that can fulfil and lead the world to its desperately anticipated resolution. It seems more and more justifiable to argue that the finalization of the eschatological scenario is essentially conditioned by the deceit of the most notorious biblical figure. The great Antichrist must come – before, and if the world is to end.

#### ALL THE FALSE PROPHETS

Although it is known that Gregory of Tours was not strongly inclined towards the eschatological calculations of time<sup>i</sup>, it is hard to miss the apocalyptic tone of his report on the false Christ from Bourges. Nevertheless, in the very beginning of the report, before the false Christ of Bourges gets even mentioned, Tours lists the nuisances that pestered the French territory at the time: plague in Marseille, great famine in Angers, Nantes and Le Mans<sup>9</sup>. Tours also mentions the earthquake, peculiar natural phenomena (“balls of fire [...] speeding across the sky”<sup>10</sup> sun eclipse, heavy rains) and the lethality of the bubonic plague in Viviers and Avignon (Ibid.). Doing so, Tours actualizes famous prophecies of the synoptic gospels in his time and place: “There will be great earthquakes, famines and pestilences in various places, and fearful events and great signs from heaven.”<sup>11</sup>

With the focus shifting to the figure of the false prophet, who’s arrival was supposedly to follow these catastrophic accounts, Tours transfers the context of the End even further, to someone who was perceived to be the key biblical figure of the End: “Christ who ought rather to be named *anti-Christ*”. The fraudster, who for Tours comes across not as who he claims to be, but rather as a dangerous «anti-thesis» of Christ – The Antichrist, whose arrival was perceived to be the most threatening among all of the anticipated apocalyptic signs. However, we must already at this point, propose a question of wheth-

i A very widespread medieval practice of calculating the imminent arrival of the end of the world, based on the idea that the end will come exactly when the world reaches the age of 6000 years, and will be announced by certain signs of the end.

er this old narrative, reflecting in Tour's words, thinks the Antichrist as the antithesis of Christ, or rather, perceives both figures as being somewhat akin. The latter preposition might turn out to be even more dangerous than the former.

Tours' statement implies the connection between the two. The Second Coming of Christ presented was supposed to be preceded by the Coming of Christ's imitator – and the latter was prophesied to be very successful in his pretence. Although the Christ's *Parousia* was supposed to belong to *him* and him alone, it was prophesied to be usurped by an imposter who, according to the biblical narrative, would arrive sooner than Christ. The Christ's absence would consequently be the condition that would enable the Antichrist to successfully snatch the unoccupied role.<sup>ii</sup> Thus, the Coming of the Antichrist is presented through this narrative as a rather perplexing riddle, since the Antichrist is to pretend to be someone whose arrival would indubitably not go unnoticed, but who would surely be very warmly welcomed and hardly expected by Christ's followers. Christ, after all, was deemed to lead his people into eternal salvation. And it is precisely here where the entire dilemma of that easily deceived follower, namely, the one who is to *recognize Him*, arises.

In fact, the recognizing subject has no other choice than to put himself to work in this recognizing process, albeit at equal risk of Antichrist's deceit and Christ's rage, if a mistake is to be made, since only one of them is the *true* Christ. The eternal salvation of his soul dangles on a thread.

Nevertheless, Christ's followers have been warned by Christ himself. They must follow the *true* Christ if they want to reach their salvation, while to follow anyone else would be blasphemous and ruinous for them. However, there were no instructions left for them to navigate through this, seeming impossible identifying process – how were they to recognize the true Christ if he had truly returned? There was a very strong probability that they would become victims of the Antichrist's deceit. Christ warned his disciples about the meaning of the mass appearance of *pseudo-Christ*s and *pseudo-prophets*, when they pleaded him to disclose the signs of his Coming and the End that would follow:

ii The Antichrist and Christ are also terminologically connected – *parousia* in the New Testament, carries a meaning of Arrival meaning separate emergence of both figures in this specific context (2 Thess 2:9).

See to it that no one deceives you. For *many* will come in My name, claiming, ‘I am the Christ,’ and will deceive many.<sup>12</sup> At that time if anyone says to you, ‘Look, here is the Messiah!’ or, ‘There he is!’ do not believe it. For *false messiahs* and *false prophets* will appear and perform great *signs and wonders to deceive*, if possible, even the elect. See, I have told you ahead of time. “So if anyone tells you, ‘There he is, out in the wilderness,’ do not go out; or, ‘Here he is, in the inner rooms,’ do not believe it.”<sup>13</sup>

We can notice that the imposters that Christ describes, are not bearing any recognizable signs and that only their true nature is deceitful but not necessarily their potential appearance— the fact that rather perplexed some medieval readers. Yet, there are some key moments in Christ’s words that ought to be emphasized: apparently, someone *will* come, who *will* try to *deceive the followers*; he *will claim to be the Christ* himself, perform “great signs and wonders”, even the same ones that the true Christ had once, in order to make them believe him to be Christ; and he *will succeed* at deceiving “even the elect”. Christ warns them in advance, and announces that he will return also, but only after being preceded by a multitude of pseudo-Christes who will use his name with pretence and falsely pose as him.

The predicament of successfully recognizing the false prophets presents itself as the problem of distinguishing between what is true and what is deceitful. Many eschatological interpreters, including Tours, had to confront it. However, by itself, this problem connects to a much wider and renowned philosophical intricacy of the “truth” and the “appearance”. Why an attempt to address the relationship of “true” and “deceitful” instead of “true” and “false”? Can “deceitfulness” or better, “trickery”, work any differently than a lie? Or can it be seen, at best, only as a certain variant of falsity? Why leave behind the traditional pair of “Truth” and “Lie” that is so often to be thought together and the withdrawal from which might seem, at least at first, too hasty? Is it possible to argue, that Trickery – with its specific form of deceit – does not really fall into the order of a Lie, but possesses its own logic that perhaps should be thought independently? We will argue why we must do just that.

#### TRICK OR LIE

In the Biblical context, these two terms are merged entirely, giving the appearance that their reciprocal differentiation is not (yet) established. The Antichrist is essentially depicted as a Liar<sup>14</sup>, as the one who

*employs* deceit<sup>15</sup> in order to institute himself as Christ and refutes the existing God by self-apotheosis<sup>16</sup>. He is therefore “a liar”, since he appropriates the identity of someone else, whilst simultaneously being a Denier of the World Order, to which he threatens with modification, so that he could occupy the coveted place which does otherwise not belong to him by provenance.

The issue is, above all, that a certain place, albeit an ephemeral place in the entrenched God’s order, is already reserved for him. And that is the place of “trickery”, or if you wish, for the time being, a “lie” – which is nothing else but *a vacant place* of the other: if John states in the First Epistle that *no lie can stem from the truth*, meaning that the Antichrist’s *deceitfulness* cannot surpass Christ’s *truthfulness*, when the latter is revealed, it largely does not exclude the notion that truth could emanate from a lie. After all, the deception itself seems a necessary condition for the emergence of the Truth – it must precede it in order to be affirmed as such. Christ’s descent from the sky has, as it seems, its own condition: the Parousia of his personal doppelgänger and the latter’s failed attempt of establishing the lie as the truth. With its *clepto-parousia*, to borrow Aleš Bunta’s neologism from another context<sup>17</sup>, the Antichrist steals someone else’s Parousia by deceiving Christ’s followers, as though his arrival is in fact the Second Messianic Coming, thus seizing Christ’s place, which apparently remained empty. This holy deceit triggers the true Christ’s Second Coming, which automatically annihilates the imitator, and this event then onsets the affirmation of the truth that sprung out of the deceit.

By tracing these fundamental features of the Antichrist, it becomes evident that as such he is not a lying, but a deceitful figure of the biblical narrative, since he, as the Grand Deceiver, in contrast to a Liar, is wholly constituted through his identity-relation with Christ. With the theft of Christ’ identity Antichrist manages to secure the position however, he accomplishes that through his immense likeness to the substituted, and therefore usurps with his *sameness*, not *otherness*, which is what the prototypical liar would do. The liar’s function would be to distort the truth, not duplicate it, which Antichrist spontaneously manages to achieve. The conniver’s deceit possesses an utterly different structure than a liar’s lie. The lie tends to morph the truth into something *else*, while the Trickster at work, gets completely engrossed into the mechanism of Trickery. Not only does he not perform his deceit arbitrarily, but as we will show, he manages to *oblivate* himself as a deceiver in his constitutive moment of becoming.

## DOSTOEVSKY'S SCENARIO

That Christ's arrival is evidently problematic we have already discerned. But what would happen if Christ had materialized without his deceitful predecessor? We encounter such a situation in Dostoevsky's *The Grand Inquisitor*, a poem by Ivan Karamazov, in which Christ after centuries of quietude, begins to glance upon his followers and then out of mercy and his love for them, decides to reappear, however

“this is not, of course, that coming in which He will appear, according to His promise, at the end of days in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory and which will take place suddenly, "as the lightning cometh out of the east, and shineth even unto the west". No, He has conceived the desire to visit his children at least for an instant”<sup>18</sup>

As the site of his emergence, he chooses Seville in the middle of 16th-century. He heads towards the territory of the Spanish inquisition, one morning after they have burned on the bonfires *ad maiorem Dei gloriam* a hundred heretics in his name. As he walks along the scorching streets, he is instantly recognized. People flock towards him and he “passes among them with a quiet smile of infinite compassion”<sup>19</sup>, yet remains silent. Incidentally, he cures a blind man from the gathered crowd, so that he may gaze at him, and revives a girl who has just been taken to her burial. The Grand Inquisitor witnesses these events transpiring around him but decides to incarcerate Christ without a moment's hesitation. He then pays Christ a visit in his cell at night and condemns him to death after a prolonged monologue – not as a heretic, but as the disturber of the established order:

I tell you again: tomorrow you will see that obedient flock, which at the first nod of my head will rush to rake up the hot embers to the bonfire on which I am going to burn you for having come to get in our way. For if there ever was one who deserved our bonfire more than anyone else, it is you. Tomorrow I am going to burn you. *Dixi.*”<sup>20</sup>

Christ's fate is therefore repeated. Mere moments after his return to the world, he is thrown into a cell and sentenced to death. While He remains silent, the Grand Inquisitor speaks. Not only does he speak, his final word inaugurates the might of the Word he is holding.

*Dixi* [I spoke] is the final-word, spoken by the highest authority<sup>21</sup> – permitting no objection. The context is marvellously enhanced by Alyosha’s incomprehension of Christ’s silence:

He says nothing either? Gazes at him, but says no word?<sup>22</sup> His brother Ivan responds by explaining that the Grand Inquisitor remarks to Christ that “[even] He has not the right to add anything to what has already been said by Him in former times.”<sup>23</sup>

The act of adding or *supplementing* would cause a certain modification of the *already-spoken*, and consequently, its *substitution*. The one who possesses the Word holds the power. According to Karamazov, the Word was passed down from God to those who, in His absence, can exercise authority on His behalf. The re-emergence, and that before the Judgment Day, undermines his own power.

According to Dostoevsky’s “scenario”, Christ with his arrival, before the Antichrist’s deceit ever ensues or he materialises, violates the rules of the game and He is hence compelled to assume the role of the undesirable prophet who needs to be eliminated for the preservation of the world order. Christ’s silence is thus explained – the Word must be constrained until the Antichrist’s Coming, since nothing can be added to the already written text.

The medieval world of Tours and the Grand Inquisitor is a world that completely absorbs the biblical *transferral* of the world – a world, in which God is “the logos, the truth that speaks and hears itself speak”<sup>24iii</sup>, which directly connects to Foucault’s understanding of the episteme of the Middle Ages, where “writing is part of the fabric of the world”<sup>25</sup> and marked by “the profound kinship of language with the world”<sup>26</sup>. The Antichrist as the anti-messiah is not simply the One who would oppose the Word, but someone who would try to seize it for its own. He is a figure whose sly speech obtrudes upon the Truth; a “word that pretends to be the truth when it is not”<sup>27</sup>, if we follow

iii Here Derrida refers precisely to that medieval interpretation of the world as a text that can be read: “Nature, Gods’ Book, appeared to the medieval mind to be a written form consonant with divine thought and speech” (Derrida, 2004: 33, whilst Foucault invokes “the prose of the world” as the concept of 16th-century episteme, by which the mystery of the world persists as a text that needs to be learned how to be read: “The process is everywhere the same: that of the sign and its likeness, and this is why nature and the word can intertwine with one another to infinity, forming, for those who can read it, one vast single text.” (Foucault 1989: 38)

Origen's interpretation of the Antichrist. Desiring the Word, he is annulling it unknowingly and with his own existence: as a word that tries to profess itself as the Word.

The deceiver's formation through speech is analogous to the structure of "Rousseauesque" Writing, as coined by Derrida (namely, being a *supplement* of the speech). In this regard Antichrist adds itself as a supplement to Christ who, being the Word, *speaks itself*. Antichrist adds to the Word as an image or representation of its speech, as "the addition of a technique, a sort of artificial and artful ruse to make speech present when it is actually absent"<sup>28</sup>. He inflicts a certain *violence* upon the Word and turns dangerous in the moment when, as a representation, he commences the pretence of being the *presence* itself. He functions on the principle of *transcription* – as a pseudo-Christ he *transcribes* Christ and then, by a certain inherent necessity constituting him as a *substitute*, "forgets" about his function of supplementation, thus begins purporting as the *fullest measure of presence*.

He contrives his ancestry and begins operating from the *vacant place* left behind by the original. By resorting to mimicry, he attempts to eliminate the difference, which separates him as an imitator from what he is copying, as if the concealment could enable him the crossing into the original form. In the mimetic relation with the absent Christ, Antichrist *adds* to Christ's absence. He intervenes as a *supplement*, imposes himself on Christ's place in the latter's absence and "if it fills, it is as if one fills a void"<sup>29</sup>. Hence, he appears as "an illusion that side-tracks us"<sup>30</sup>, since he is, through the workings of trickery, successful in obscuring the fact that he cannot as intrinsically empty replace the original or add himself to him without a failure.

Since the Trickster is seizing the place of the one and only Truth, he cannot be anything but a lie (*to preudos*), a deceit. Christ manages to retain his position in such a way that at the very instant when the Antichrist's deceit is revealed, and precisely because of this deceit, he gets reaffirmed in the world as the latter's End. With the splendour of his Coming, Christ is supposed to "*overthrow him with the breath of his mouth*"<sup>31</sup>. With the Word, speaking the Truth, Christ announces his identity and causes Antichrist's immediate downfall. His battle with his failed *double*, who never completely manages to *form* as such and who can be recognized and thus revealed *only* by Him, the original, befalls in the field of *speech*. We can read about it, about the last event in Revelation:

I saw heaven standing open and there before me was a white horse, whose rider is called Faithful and True. With justice he judges and wages war. His eyes are like blazing fire, and on his head are many crowns. He has a name written on him that no one knows but he himself. He is dressed in a robe dipped in blood, and his name is the Word of God.<sup>32</sup>

Christ's name remains veiled until it is ultimately announced by One who truly carries it, since He himself is that spoken and heard, the *true* Word of God. When the latter, at the end of time, finally *speaks itself*, Truth springs into existence and the Trickster collapses. As such he can no longer endure, considering he has directly bound his identity (as an imitator) to the imitated object. His failed attempt at establishing himself as the Truth signals that the Antichrist, as a False Christ, possesses essentially a structure of trickery that prompts his formation as a Trickster when stuck in a *vacant place* – a place, which is indefinitely and immovably occupied, because it already belongs to someone else, even if this *someone*, or better, *something*, is in fact the *absence* of the original.

Antichrist's most prominent feature is precisely his trickery – that he will impersonate Christ, and will do so successfully, and that his impressionist ability will soar. It seems that the only one who can penetrate through his guise is the real Christ – the one who knows for certain, who is the true Christ and knows that he is dealing with an imposter. Even more, with someone who has embraced the same intention, namely, to ascend to the Kingdom of Heaven and re-appropriate as God in the new forthcoming order. The Antichrist's induction as a deceiving figure in the eschatological scenario is indeed triumphant, yet only partially – he can remain on the place that was reserved for him in advance but is concurrently inhabited by the *absence* of another.

During the moment of usurpation of this vacant place his final transgression into positivity is blocked, which projects in the established order as an attempt of *forbidden duplication* – nevertheless, the position of the original is singular, and the Antichrist is not allowed to duplicate the Holy Trinity. Thus, the Trickster stands numbed in the place of the trickery, where he was put by God himself, when he allocated him a role in the grand scheme, as on a chessboard, to act as the main condition of Christ's *Parousia*. He cannot step any further than this; he is instantaneously broken in his attempt. Same as Tours' pawn

from Bourges, he is not aware that his movements are constrained, and that he is not permitted to step across to the king's position or to employ his own presence to transfigure the king, in order for the *real* to become his – mostly because he never manages to possess the *presence* as such<sup>iv</sup>.

It all points to the notion that Antichrist as the imitator necessarily exhausts himself in adapting to what he imitates. He fails in his doing due to some particular necessity, for which the irreparable chasm is seemingly responsible, since it embeds between him and the copied original object – the similarity that intervenes as a foundation of difference and is duplicating the original with a difference, which cannot be sustained by the place of the deceiver's usurpation. This place, which is a *place of the original's absence* and simultaneously the *impossible (un-reachable) place* of the deceiver, is in truth the only place of the deceiver's apparition where the latter emerges as negative in all of his occurrence. Negative in the sense, that he is rather predominantly being as *non-existent* – existentially coupled together with the imitated object, but otherwise completely tenuous, practically originarily<sup>v</sup> erased, since he is, which is essential, *self-obliviated* at the very point of his constitutive moment.

The Trickster is thus not something that would gravitate towards replacing the original object, as is the initial impression, but rather something that duplicates it through its imitation. Hence, we are confronted by two identical agents at a given moment – the copy and the original – between whom is no “positive”, qualitative or, in a certain sense, even topological difference, thus making it futile to discuss *substitution* in the ordinary sense of the word as this would inherently imply a certain *otherness* of the *substitute* in relation to the *substituted*. For the very logic of substitution, a different kind of imitator's otherness would be required, which is not manifested here at the level of the logic of Trickery, which never enters the game directly, even though

iv We can read about something similar in one of Hildegarde von Bingen's (1098–1179) most famous visions, which in a stream of medieval mystic interpretation of the Holy Bible confirm the failed Antichrist's attempt of usurping Christ's spot in the process of illicit duplication. In her vision the deceiver is cast down from the sky in the moment when he tries to climb onto it: “[...] and it raised itself up upon the mountain and tried to ascend the height of Heavens. And behold, there came suddenly a lightning bolt, which struck that head with such great force that it fell off the mountain and yielded up its spirit in death.” (Bingen 1990: 493).

v By its origin.

the Trickster gets automatically plunged into the *difference* when confronting the original.

We can locate two causes of the Trickster's failure. The first is conditioned by the empty place of the original, which the Trickster has (in a very narrowed sense) occupied, but has not taken a hold of in its entirety, since the original's place refuses to be (and cannot be) fulfilled by him and therefore, as long as it remains bound to the original, stays empty and does not yield to the Trickster, since he, being himself "void", can neither fill nor seize it. As a deceiver, he is trapped in the aimless wandering on this same *one-and-only* place, which continues to be perennially empty and resists his advancements. At the time of Trickster's formation as such, it is empty because it is stripped of the Original and marked by its absence and simultaneously due to being pursued and invaded by something without independent essence – something that adds as a mere "negativity". The second cause of the deceiver's demise is constituted by the very nature of trickery that rejects being kept in a concealed state of deception and strives towards self-disclosure, revealing the Trickster and consequently bringing him to his destruction<sup>vi</sup>.

#### THE PORTRAIT AND THE NAME

A mechanism, similar to the deceptive mechanism of Trickery, can be found in Freud's descriptions of the *mechanism of forgetfulness*, or more specifically, in Freud's accounts of the famous conversation he held with his traveling companion on the train that took him from Dubrovnik to Bosnia and Herzegovina in 1889. First, in a letter to his friend Fließ<sup>33</sup>, a little later in the paper *On psychical mechanism of forgetfulness* (same year) and finally, in *Psychopathology of Everyday Life* (1901), Freud describes a curious phenomenon of forgetting a particular name. He emphasizes that this was not an occurrence of ordinary forgetfulness, since almost simultaneously as the proper name flew into oblivion, the substitutive names started to obtrude instead. Freud realized he himself produced them in his pursuit of «the hidden name». However, the latter, no matter how hard he tried, "remained obstinately in hiding"<sup>34</sup>. His great inner torment was resolved only

vi The disclosure is viewed as a condition for establishing deception as *the deception*, but also as that which causes its elimination. The End induced by a disclosure of the deceit, is thus the affirmation of its inherent logic as well.

a few days after when, as he himself writes, a «cultivated Italian»<sup>35</sup> finally released him by telling him the name he struggled to recall. Immediately after, Freud writes, “I was myself able to add the artist’s first name, *Luca*.”<sup>36</sup>

According to Freud, this incident of forgetfulness was not coincidental – a specific and not so rare mechanism was at work. In *The Psychic Mechanism of Forgetfulness* we can find his most detailed description of this famous occurrence:

A little later, our conversation turned to the subject of Italy and of pictures, and I had occasion to recommend my companion strongly to visit Orvieto some time, in order to see the frescoes there of the end of the world and the Last Judgement, with which one of the chapels in the cathedral had been decorated by a great artist. But the artist’s name escaped me, and I could not recall it. I exerted my powers of recollection, made all the details of the day I spent in Orvieto pass before my memory and convinced myself that not the smallest part of it had been obliterated or become indistinct. On the contrary, I was able to conjure up the pictures with greater sensory vividness than is usual with me. I saw before my eyes with especial sharpness the artist’s self-portrait - with a serious face and folded hands - which he has put in a corner of one of the pictures, next to the portrait of his predecessor in the work, Fra Angelico da Fiesole; but the artist’s name, ordinarily so familiar to me, remained obstinately in hiding, nor could my travelling companion help me out<sup>37</sup>.

The name that disappeared from Freud’s memory was the name of the famous Italian Renaissance painter Luca Signorelli (1445 – 1523). But what, according to Freud, separates the Signorelli’s case from the “ordinary case” of forgetfulness, is that it is composed by “...not only forgetfulness, but also false recollection”<sup>38</sup>.

In all the effort that is put into remembering the proper name, not only does it not have a tendency to appear on command, but, quite on the contrary, the substitutive names make persistent attempts to usurp its place (hence, the famous displacement from Signorelli to Botticelli and Boltraffio occurs). Ergo, this is not only a name finding problem, but also a problem of persistent production of substitutive names. Their act of substituting leads to inevitable failure, as they are immediately (at their very outset) noticed by their producer. The one

who is producing them realizes their falsity in the very moment of their generation. However, this recognition does not halt the productive process – instead, it accelerates it and doing so, confines it to self-repetitiveness.

The shift, caused by the faulty remembrance of the proper name, enables the appearance of substitutes. Thus, substitutes of the proper name continue to generate themselves tirelessly right until – when through the process of the subject's recognition of the intruder as false and his consequential refusal of it – they return, and the cycle repeats itself all over again. The name cannot be recovered through repetitive production of substitutes, as substitutes always lead their producer back to themselves and never to the hidden name.

It seems that those substitutes in their multiplication, although being produced dependently from their producer enter a completely self-governing process, over which the producer has no control. The producer in this regard becomes the «observer», as it appears that he might be merely passively observing the production of a process over which he holds no productive power. As the process is overpowering, he gets deduced to the mere function of a tool, and the process begins to produce itself through and over him.

Freud's states that in the Signorelli case, he unintentionally forgot »something« when he really wanted to forget »something else«. However, this was:

...not the name of the master of Orvieto; but this *other* brought about an associative connection between itself and this name, so that my act of volition missed the aim, and I forgot the *one* against my will, while I intentionally wished to forget the *other*.<sup>39</sup>

We can see, that the »other«, although it gets restrained, has no tendency to vanish completely, but keeps returning. It obtrudes with the substitutes of the »one« that has been displaced. These substitutes, which wish to take the place of the *one and only* proper name, get generated through the producer's associations – they are inherently connected to the hidden name and the latter is desperately searching for itself in the process of the producer's remembrance. Thus, these substitutes are not foreign to the hidden name but attempt to substitute with similarity. They deceive with their resemblance to the lost original. The mechanism of Trickery causes the »other« to seize the original in an attempt to usurp the place of a proper name and replace it

with a substitute similar to the forgotten »one«. However, the process of substitution clearly fails and never gets completed, as the producer keeps refusing the obtruding replacement for the hidden, immediately recognising it as false.

Anecdotally, there exists another parallel with trickery that runs alongside the Signorelli's parapraxis. This particular fresco from Orvieto that Freud so thoroughly describes, is none other than the famous Signorelli's depiction of the Antichrist from approximately 1501, titled *Sermon and Deeds of the Antichrist*. A self-portrait of the artist, located in the lower-left corner of the fresco suggests that this must surely be the image Freud had in mind when trying to remember Signorelli's name, as Signorelli depicted himself in the corner of only one fresco that decorates the chapel San Brixio in Orvieto – and the main figure is precisely the Antichrist.

This is the most famous portrait of the Antichrist from this period, if not the most famous one of all – the Trickster occupies the central position in the artwork and all of the surrounding events align with him. Signorelli's fresco depicts Antichrist's rise, life and ensuing fall, while he stands erect on a white pedestal preaching to the deceived followers, whom he misled and consequently doomed for all eternity. The devil rises behind, keeping close and blending almost into his torso. He is easily identifiable by horns burgeoning from his head, while he whispers into Antichrist's left ear and reaches for his arm, as if guiding his gestures.

When glancing over the Antichrist's face and posture, it is difficult to overlook that Signorelli painted him entirely on a model of Christ. If we did not see the strange, glassy sort of gleam in his eyes, and if the devil standing right behind him would not be so eye-catching, we would believe that we are, in fact, looking at the portrait of Christ and not of his imitator, as it retains a characteristic Renaissance's face of Christ, his long hair, an expression, a creased robe and nevertheless, the posture. Taking all this into the account, Signorelli clearly intended to portray the crookedness of the Antichrist – not of his features, that would make him recognizable for the viewer, but his deceptive character that would make him, by definition, completely unrecognizable. Signorelli's portrait of the Antichrist is a portrait of an impostor who is posing as someone else without really possessing any other trait that would expose him as a deceiver.

In this process of one usurping the place of another through similarity, the relationship between Christ and Antichrist resembles

the usurpation of proper names by substitutive names through association. It's possible to observe an analogous, mimetic and substituting logic in both mechanisms - in mechanism of forgetfulness and in mechanism of trickery. Although the Antichrist strives to usurp the Christ's place and substitute him, he performs an illegitimate duplication which cannot stand and is therefore, before it gets properly realized, recognized as false (in the order of things) and eliminated by the proper subject.

#### THE ORIGINARY OBLIVION

One might spontaneously assert that the most recognizable feature of a deceitful figure lies in its pretence to be something *else than what it really is* or to suppose that a deceiver fabricates reality with his mere presence. But these claims seem to imply additionally, that the deceitful figure must already *be something by itself*. Something with its very own identity, which could be so divergent from the object threatened by the substitution, that could counterfeit it and thus oust it from its entitled place.

However, the Trickster maneuvers precisely with his immense similarity to the original whom he is pretending to be, yet by himself he is merely *nothing* – a vacuous imitator of someone else. The fact that *something is not as it seems*, cannot be spontaneously extended into asserting that it therefore must be *something else*. Namely, because there is nothing layered underneath the deceitful, as there is in case of a lie – nothing that a deceit could cover up by its own intent and presence. Hence, to simply conceal the original cannot be the Trickster's essential function. This opens up a completely autonomous field of Trickery that inherently differs from a lie.

A substantially different relation can be observed between the trickery and the truth, if compared to the one that stirs between the truth and the lie, since the Trickster does not seem to possess the tendency to stand in opposition to the truth, but quite on the contrary, attempts to infiltrate it. That is the main motive behind his almost flawless imitation of the truth. The Trickster's imitation of Christ is an attempt of substituting him and since it is rather unsuccessful and doomed to be so by a certain necessity, the Trickster's aim rather results in his accidental *duplication* of the original instead of an intended substitution.

Appearances can be deceiving – if the trickery as an appearance, in its operative deceitful function conceals anything, it conceals only

the empty place of the Trickster – his own nullity, if we paraphrase the function of the transcendental appearance in Kant’s dialectics. There is no conceited form or shadow of an idea (or the truth of you wish). But, as Alenka Zupančič explains in one of her articles on Kant, we are dealing with an appearance as, I quote “something in place of nothing, [something, which] does not deceive in a way, that it represents anything falsely, it deceives with a mere fact, that it exists.”<sup>40</sup>

Trickster does not place himself on the other side of the truth as in opposition but settles directly on a vacant spot of the hidden original object. He accumulates within the seemingly unoccupied place, which is at the same time the exact place which remains reserved for the missing object, the original one. The condition for this self-accumulative act of the Trickster is the structure in which the mechanism of trickery prevails, and to which the Trickster is completely subdued. He is not an outsider or the creator of his deception but acts as an internal and fully engaged agent of it.

As such the Trickster is characterized by the binary movement of deceit: he is tricking another to establish himself as deceiving but is at the same time internalized into deception and disabled therein. He does not duplicate the original object intentionally, but is hooked on the movement of Trickery, which generates and eventually annihilates him through the same process, as trickery always strives for its own disclosure to be able to affirm itself as such. As the Trickster is existentially bound to it, he consequently shares the same fate. He is incorporated into the mechanism of trickery, grows out of it, and gets ejected by its disclosure, since he is existentially bound to the precarious identity relation with the imitated object.

If we apply Rousseau’s words on «false wisdom» that he conceived in his famous *Emile* to our problem, we can say that the trickery as such makes a persistent effort to remove Trickster from *where he is not* and brings him to the place *where he will never be*.<sup>41</sup> So, it is a transfer him from the *vacant* to the *impossible* place, however this is not simply the transfer from one place to another, but it is more of an act of a revolving on the same spot.

The Trickster is thus constantly located on the vacant place, which is at the same time the place of his own accumulation and the place of his bounded persistence – on which he is accumulated as the non-existent product of nothing. There he strives towards establishing himself in the impossible place of the original, since this could enable him to rise from *nothing* to *being*. However, in this effort, he is unsuccessful.

The impossible place is impossible for the Trickster to usurp due to the resistance of the original which, although being absent, manages to persist from afar and block the imposter, who is constituted by two simultaneous acts: the *self-accumulation* and the *self-erasure* through the act of *self-forgetting*. This oblivion of his – namely, that he forgets the fact that he is an imposter, thus merely the duplication and not the original – is the reason for his attempt of usurping the place that does not belong to him – he tries to usurp it not as its duplication, but as the *original* itself.

This similarity between the Trickster and the original that completely dominates their relationship, leads to confrontation of both sides. Deception arises as a battle of similarities which are at the same time, in this duality of theirs, marked by *difference* – thereby, if I paraphrase Hegel, deception as such has an ontological status of becoming that is inherently “self-opposing”<sup>42</sup>. In the Trickster both moments of becoming are present as merged, the *coming-to-be* and *ceasing-to-be* but only as »vanishing moments«.<sup>vii</sup>

The negativity of the Trickster who carries out the deception and is self-produced through this very act, is in this strict sense, not *nothing*, but rather falls into this category of self-contradictive duality. In deception, when understood as becoming, the two in union are opposed to each other in unstable unrest and consequently, sublated in itself – coming-to-be as *nothing* and ceasing-to-be as *being*.

However, the result of their sublation is not *nothing* but equal vanishment of both. This moment of the Trickster’s sublation, that is, after the Trickster has been revealed and his identity with the original fails – does not result in nothing. I quote: »What is sublated does not thereby turn into nothing. [...] it still has in itself, therefore, the determinateness from which it derives« (Ibid.) Thus the Trickster, although sublated, leaves behind a certain *trace* in the original, which survives this confrontation, thus he as an imitator becomes the *mediator* in the original’s self-affirmation.

The Trickster could thus be thought of as a *vanishing mediator*. One that deceives with his own paradoxicality, since he never exists in the full sense of being. With his deceit he transfers the original as his

vii “...becoming is the vanishing of being into nothing, and of nothing into being, and the vanishing of being and nothing in general; but at the same time it rests on their being distinct. It therefore contradicts itself in itself, because what it unites within itself is self-opposed; but such a union destroys itself.”(ibid.)

exact duplication, but for the reason of his inherent negativity, also vanishes simultaneously when the original gets affirmed. As the original's mediator, the Trickster appears to be, in fact, an *intermediary moment* of the original – the one that in his negativity enables original emergence and after, when this gets accomplished, sublates himself back to nothingness.

In the biblical narrative, the emergence of the Antichrist reveals a certain gap in the nature of God, which although being the Truth itself, is nevertheless conditioned by the Antichrist's deception. For it is only through the deceiver as a vanishing mediator who brings the end, that Christ as the original is allowed to appear in the world and finalize it according to God's plan. This gives rise to the question if the status of the original, as we have presumed by now, is truly *originary* in sense of its apparition being prior to the one of its imitator?

The answer is no. In the mechanism of trickery, the original object is not also the object of an *origin* – meaning, the object that would have been present prior to its own disappearance – since without the affirmation through the Trickster's intervention, the original is not even probable. But this does not also mean that the original's disappearance is not. The original existence is, so to say, an existence dwelling only in its imitative, yet completely and inherently empty, double. Therefore, the original object does not have its own original predecessor that would ever precede the appearance of the Trickster. The original object in its *original absence* does not only anticipate its own imitation, but also fully depends on the latter's intervention and cannot exist without imitator's mediation.

In biblical narrative, mankind anticipates the End as an event that is essentially an event of the origin – the end in this sense arises as an original event. Trickster emerges as the main representative of the End, but also as a figure which in its constitutive moment, forgets its own origin in an act of *self-forgetting*. The Trickster's original oblivion might well be the only *original event* in this story.

The oblivion implies a complex, but completely synchronous structure of the original and the Trickster – the two in their mimetic relationship do not only reciprocally legitimize each other's constitutive moment but are fundamentally included in *becoming* of another. In their confrontation, the two form a split unity, which through their interaction gets constantly reactivated and, through an act of forgetting, also re-constituted through its inner difference.

While defending the figure of the Trickster, as something con-

ceptually autonomous, it is not difficult to notice, that as such, he deviates from the biblical framework of the Antichrist from which we traced him. With his *self-obliviation* – his *original erasure* of himself, in the very moment of his own *becoming*, he simultaneously erases the myth of preliminary present origin, of which biblical ontology is so fond.

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- 1 De Tours, *Historiae*, Book X. 25.
  - 2 *ibid*
  - 3 *ibid*
  - 4 De Tours, *Historiae*, Book IX. 6. 186
  - 5 *ibid*
  - 6 *ibid*
  - 7 *Ibid.* 188
  - 8 *ibid*
  - 9 De Tours, 1965, 304
  - 10 *Ibid*, 302
  - 11 Lk 21:11 Similar in (Mt 24:7) and (Mr 13:8)
  - 12 Mt 24, 4-5, Similar in Mr 13:5-6 and Lk 21:8.
  - 13 Mt 24, 23:26, Similar in Mr 13:21-23.
  - 14 First Epistle of John 2: 18–26
  - 15 Thessalonians 2:10
  - 16 Thessalonians 2:4
  - 17 Bunta 2016, p. 76
  - 18 Dostoevsky 1998: 286
  - 19 *Ibid.*
  - 20 *ibid.* 299
  - 21 “I, the LORD, have spoken.” (Numbers 14:35)
  - 22 *ibid*: 388
  - 23 *ibid.* 289
  - 24 Derrida 2004: 33
  - 25 Foucault 1989: 45
  - 26 *ibid.* 47
  - 27 Origen of Alexandria (c. 185 -254), translated by McGinn 1994: 64.
  - 28 Derrida 1997: 144
  - 29 *ibid.* 145
  - 30 *ibid.* 154
  - 31 2 Thessalonians 2:8
  - 32 Revelation 19: 11–13
  - 33 September 22, 1898
  - 34 Freud 2013: 5
  - 35 *ibid.*: 6
  - 36 *ibid*
  - 37 Freud 2013: 5-6
  - 38 Freud 2001: 1
  - 39 Freud 2001: 4
  - 40 Zupančič 1994: 101
  - 41 Rousseau 1997: 69
  - 42 Hegel 2010: 81

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