

THERE IS A DRAGON ON MY BACK

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Theodor W. Adorno, the cat, not the thinker, already proved to be a great ghost detector. One morning he interrupted his stretching routine with an abrupt move, freezing his gaze somewhere in the void between himself and a dull white wall. Following carefully every step of the invisible intruder, Theodor, with his eyes wide open, made the ghost realize his inconvenient presence. Disconcerted after being noticed, the shy ghost blushed and finally left the room. Instead of leaving through one of the four walls as he was used to, he took the open door which confirms how disturbed he was. Already completely indifferent as a cat should be, Theodor got back to his usual morning stretching with no further interruptions.

This episode is narrated by Theodor's owner, Cortázar, in one of his essays on the fantastic. The apparition seem to be an unexpected encounter for both sides: for the distracted viewer and for the unmasked viewed. In this episode, Theodor recognized the supposedly invisible guest. The ghost, betrayed by his invisibility, also recognized Theodor's awareness as if they both reached a crossroad at the same time, surprisingly bumping into each other. Who is the apparition for whom? It might be easier to realize Theodor's side of the encounter, but sometimes we are the one who blushes when betrayed by visibility. Either way, in order to recognize an apparition, one cannot be entirely distracted. It is also a matter of will. Some viewers, entirely aware and attentive, nearly beg to be caught off-guard. This tendency in expecting to be surprised, which is in itself a contradiction, provokes false alarms in most of cases. Still, these false alarms suit specific purposes, such as the imaginative one. Fortuitous and forced at the same time, they bind together all of those that are susceptible to the marvelous. If we can keep the faith in the fantastic, in the fictional, as an implicit agreement (within a certain group of people), it doesn't really matter if by the moment we reach the crossroad for our meeting, the shy ghost is there waiting to be run into or not.

So, let's keep our disbelief suspended. After all, if we are here waiting to see a woman be cut in half, we don't really want to bother checking if later she needs an ambulance – it is exclusively the magician's concern. I remember when I was seven years old, I was convinced for a week that I had developed the power of a dragon. A friend and I (for such conviction having an accomplice is useful), who developed another animal's power during the same week, tried to keep it a secret while learning how to control our new powers. The first step was how to turn them on. The specific feature I can recall was that when our powers were activated, an image of our respective animal would appear as a tattoo covering the whole area of our backs. Therefore, curiously the only

way of knowing if my powers were on or off – since I couldn't feel anything else – was by asking my friend if he could see a dragon appearing on my back. My belief was then held by a totally partial witness, who would promptly confirm it when asked. And of course, I would also confirm the appearance of his animal, not only as a form of politeness, but also in order to keep believing what he said about my dragon was the truth. Our shared conviction depended on complicity, specially because we both knew about our faith's fragility.

Sometimes, I can still have this same feeling while facing some fictional or conceptual constructions. 'Can you see the dragon on my back?' is an engaging question I'm first confronted to answer, in order to get involved in any proposition. It may sound friendly at first, but accepting such given rules makes me as guilty as the one who shows me his back. To say 'yes' is to be an accomplice in the crime of killing realism, even if it is just for a few minutes inside a gallery, a theater, a church or a grocery store. On the other hand if nobody says 'yes', there is no crime at all. The one who shows his back is then taken as a lunatic or, even worse, as a romantic.

There are different strategies to attain accomplices. Some artworks for instance state straightaway 'there is a dragon on my back'. With no preoccupations in proving so, they might not even turn their backs towards you. The relation of trust in such confrontation comes to the foreground and you, as a viewer, are trapped. You have a good hand with Ace-Jack but already in the first round your aggressive opponent goes all-in. If you believe and fold, you are confirming the dragon's existence with no proof. Your acceptance in fact says 'no' to the rules of engagement and ceases the game. You are confirming the opponent's authority with no means of knowing if his move is a bluff or not. On the other hand if you pay to see his hand, it is your distrust that keeps you in the game and the game itself. The final moment when 'backs' are revealed only happens if you doubted your opponent in the first place. But the real trap is: when this moment comes, if you finally cannot find the dragon, there is a chance the problem might rely on your lack of sensibility. Getting frustrated, accusing your opponent of being a crook, trying to break his statement into pieces are all understandable reactions, but you might be missing the point. In the end there should be no end, since there are no confirmations, no proof, no winners, no rewards, nor authorities. It is indeed a perfect crime scene. There is no need to reveal the cards since it's not a matter of convincing. It is instead a matter of keeping an open fissure on reality's fabric, sustaining the silent tension between their dragons and your eyes as a mutual *confiction*.