The Culture of the Excluded Middle, 1914-1989
A Preliminary Investigation

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‘We do not work together, we work between the two ... We don’t work, we negotiate’
(Deleuze and Parnet 1987: 17)

The Problem

If, in cultural criticism, the beginning and end are difficult to define, then how does one approach the ‘middle’? Too political, or too topographical critics might say.¹ Then how does one approach the ‘excluded middle’? Does one start from an absence? Can the absence of a ‘middle’ quality be used to prove something? Our task is not to define the ‘middle’ out of the negative. Rather, the ‘excluded middle’ argues a consistent, complementary cultural tendency for much of the twentieth century, which was a period of ‘unhappiness,’ as understood by Hegel. In his The Philosophy of History, Hegel writes: ‘Periods of happiness are empty pages in history, for they are the periods of harmony, times when the antithesis is missing’ (Hegel 1988: 29). To draw an outline of the problem presented here in other terms, we are looking at how post World War One thinkers coped with various antitheses.

The Broken Middle

This paper examines the bifurcated or excluded middle in the twentieth century: first as it is ‘broken’ in Kafka’s and Arendt’s time; then the middle as it is more sympathetically endorsed by contemporary thinkers and, in particular, by key postmodernist figures such as Deleuze who sheds some positive light on the contemporary problem of the middle, arguing that it has returned to the political fold. Twentieth-century polarities existed between Left and Right, the elite and the masses, revolution and totalitarianism,

¹. This remark is attributable to Dr. Anssi Halmsvirta.
east and west, interior and exterior, even — as Gabriel Marcel put it, spiritually — as the ‘hidden polarity between the seen and the unseen’ (Hughes 1968: 82). It begins most fundamentally as a division between past and future, as Kafka elaborates in a parable, entitled ‘He’ in the collected work, *The Great Wall of China* (Kafka 1936: 276-277). The parable depicts two powers, two ‘fighting’ and guarded antagonists, the unreconcilably infinite forces of the past and the future, clash in battle. ‘He’ must, as it were, do battle on both fronts, as someone ‘between’ the antagonists while a modest power unto himself.

Thirty-five years after Kafka authored ‘He’ in the wake of World War One, Hannah Arendt applied it to her exploratory pieces of political thought, *Between Past and Future*. Therein she makes the case of a ‘gap’ between the past and future; ‘our inheritance was left us by no testament,’ thus heralding us — as the text refers — in a Tocquevillean manner (Arendt 1954: 5). Without tradition there is no continuity in time, and hence there is no past and no future. She appeals to Kafka’s parable and ‘his’ dream — which is assuredly her own — to get out of the fighting, and to judge the antagonists, as an umpire, in their fight with each other. Curiously Arendt can find no umpire: ‘Seen from this viewpoint of man, [she writes] who lives in the interval between past and future, time is not a continuum, a flow of uninterrupted succession; it is broken in the middle....’

The notion of a ‘broken middle’ seems to have much — albeit depressing — resonance across this century, particularly in its first quarter. For Yeats, in his famous poem, ‘The Second Coming’ written in the immediate wake of the Russian Revolution (and Irish Civil War): ‘things fall apart; the centre cannot hold;/ mere anarchy is loosed upon the world’ (Yeats 1989: 294). Here we have another indication that history is working from opposite ends; the future is unravelling all that is vital about the past. Assuredly Yeats wants a judge, too. He shares with Arendt that same yearning for the past with its rich meanings, un tarnished by lethal strife and antagonism with the future.

Closer to our own time the Hegelian theorist Gillian Rose picks up the notion set by Arendt in her book, aptly titled, *The Broken Middle*. Gillian Rose writes against the postmodern tradition, against the discourse on ‘discourse,’ against the use of ‘plurality’ instead of criticism, against the concept of ‘the Other.’ The intellectual sophistry of postmodernism, in other words, has not undone any ‘straining contrarieties,’ despite a prevalent fascination with ‘the Other’ (Rose 1992: xii). In effect postmodernism seems to neglect legal-rational concepts as a whole and thus dismisses any attempt at mediation. Thus according to Rose, postmodernism still continues to exclude opportunities in the middle, a specious claim, as the rationalist apparatus of legal
concepts is incapable of achieving the non-rational sense of the postmodern inbetween. Postmodernism does not reify; rather, it tends to be never-ending.

Middle And Centre

What distinguishes the middle from centre? The concept of the middle runs a different path from the centre. Decentredness means a loss of subjectivity; it raises the question of the subject. The loss of the middle invites the bipolar condition, but this as we shall see is also linked to structuralism. Aristotle offered us two distinct impressions of the middle, neither of which were related to the other in his works in any conscious or expressly articulate fashion (Goodkin 1991: 25-44). In the *Nicomachean Ethics*, we have the middle of virtuous moderation: inclusive, centripetal, dwelling in imprecision, attesting to change and to the ability to adapt. Virtue is the intermediate, the mean between excess and deficiency. In the *Metaphysics* we have the law of the excluded (or third) middle, which tries to overcome the contradictions that can be found in change. Exclusive and centrifugal, the law of the excluded middle dwells on extremes and requires that we choose one extreme over the other: there exists no third alternative, no mediation, and there are only contradictory opposites. The law of the excluded middle attests to no middle space, which amounts to zero, and it is unyielding, fixed, unopen to change.

In essence Aristotle offers us two middles, one which eliminates ambiguity and another which creates a stable milieu, an inhabitable space. One is uncompromising, binary, the adversary of the indeterminate; the other is comforting, all encompassing, about the average. The relationship between the two middles is never discussed by Aristotle, but assuredly one existed, in some fashion. The middle-as-virtue and the excluded middle were mutually exclusive, each appealing to a basic human need while neglecting the other (Goodkin 1991: 37). The law of the excluded middle might be uncompromising in its clarity, but at the same time it is disadvantaged by its inflexibility. While the middle as virtue might offer comfort, it lacks the rigour of the excluded middle.

Our concept of the middle borrows from Aristotle’s virtuous middle and should be regarded as a compromise with respect to a plurality of others, not just one totalitarian other. We can see the middle in the horizontal and the vertical: it occupies space between all sides, amorphous and undefined, shaped by what it is not. The middle can best be defined in contrast to the centre, as betweenness, as being in the midst, which recognises difference and otherness: it is other recognition. It is defined by the range of extremes between which it lies, not by itself. The centre, on the other hand, is self recognition. It is self consciously defined. As Hegel would put it, the centre functions as
2. There deserves to be a study of pre-war anti-humanism and its links to structuralism, for example in the work of T.E. Hulme.

an act of self knowledge. The centre does not find unity outside itself. But the middle looks outside itself to a possible centre. And in the postmodern sense it is the recognition of difference.

If we accept that the modern age began with the rise of natural sciences in the seventeenth century, then ‘modern’ is associated with a certain — albeit not consistent — ‘decentring’ process, one that begins with Copernicus and is developed later by Darwin, Marx and Freud, and carried on by poststructuralists as well as by postmodernists. The scientific term ‘centre of gravity’ can have a moral meaning associated with the Enlightenment view of man’s alleged rationality as immanent. The Enlightenment located the ‘centre’ within oneself; each individual created his own point of view. The modernity of the Enlightenment atomised the perceptual field. Structuralism eliminated messy atomisation, offering a deep structure which takes the individual locus of control even further away from the perceived centre. It should come as no surprise that Deleuze thinks of structuralism as ‘fascistic’ — both were ‘scientific’ methodologies that obliterated the peculiarities of the subject; no-one can deny structuralism’s striking anti-humanism.2

Following the First World War, the history of the subject was largely recast, decentred in a paradoxically self conscious way. Marx, for example, had earlier argued that ‘the human subject, the economic, political or philosophical ego is not the “centre of history”’ (Smith 1988: 19). There are two fundamental attacks on the philosophy of the subject: one by psychoanalysis and the other by structuralism (Ricoeur 1974: 236-266). Both question the notion of the subject as an original act on and by itself. Freud made the scientific case that the ego was not the autonomous centre of the personality; psychoanalysis suspends consciousness, cutting it off from its own meaning by repression. Psychoanalysis instead tunnelled under the consciousness and the ego, not to replace or eliminate them, but to displace the role of the subject. Neither consciousness nor the ego are considered the source of origin. According to Lévi-Strauss, structuralism decentred man from his meanings. Structuralism defined the unconscious such that it took the peculiar, the unique, the individual out of being, reducing the unconscious to a function. Under structuralism, the human subject is

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no longer — as Althusser put it — ‘conceived as centred in human consciousness’ (Smith 1988: 19). Being predominates, not man. Even deconstruction — with its death of the author — was decidedly subjectless under Derrida, as poststructuralism tried to rid itself of the Cartesian cogito (Burke 1992: 163). Today the term ‘modern’ implies a centre without power and a power with a centre (Touraine 1995: 204).

Structuralism and Binary Opposites

An examination of structuralism is necessary in order to clarify its dependence on binaries, the pivots on which the twentieth century excluded middle functions. The pervasiveness of structuralism must not be misunderstood. Ernst Cassirer who flirted with structuralism for many years wrote in 1945 shortly before his death ‘Structuralism is no isolated phenomenon; it is rather, the expression of a general tendency of thought that, in these last decades, has become more and more prominent in almost all fields of scientific research’ (Caws 1988: 11). Modern structuralism can be located in the literary criticism of the Russian Formalists, the anthropology of Marcel Mauss, and the linguistics of N.S. Troubetzkoy and Ferdinand de Saussure.

Structuralism finds its earliest beginnings in the work of Saussure, who thought in terms of binary oppositions (Caws 1988: 67). Most of the binaries were called parallel except for langue and parole which were considered orthogonal. In addition to this main dichotomy, there is the dichotomy of the message, which is individual and contingent and the code which is collective and systematic. Structural linguistics is global in conception, because it no longer treats language as ‘a form of life’ (as Wittgenstein would put it); rather it was self-sufficient, with its own system of inner relationships (Ricoeur 1976: 6). If we are to distil Saussure to his basic elements, we find two important ideas circulating before 1914; one is the theme of dichotomy in language; the other is notion of language — after Durkheim — as ‘social fact’ (Holdcroft 1991: 8). For Saussure, linguistics was a branch of sociology. As Saussure put it, ‘Contrary to all appearances, language never exists apart from the social fact’ (Holdcroft 1991: 8).

Saussure’s preoccupation with binary oppositions had as much to do with linguistics as it did with social fact. Saussure died in 1913, too soon for the First World War, but not too soon for the ongoing tensions of an arms race between Germany and England, the infamous Dreadnought, ‘yesterday’s deterrent,’ and the English two-power standard. Structuralism emerged as Europe bifurcated; the concept of the ‘balance of powers’ came under serious threat for the first time since it was first recognised after the Thirty Years’ War. In World War One the structuralist loss of subjectivity indicated a loss of faith in the concept of a ‘balance’ and in the sense of particular rationality. The concept

Saussure’s acclaimed binaries were developed by Roman Jakobson who met with Claude Lévi-Strauss for the first time, as exiles in New York in 1942. Continuing from Marcel Mauss and the notion of reciprocity, Lévi-Strauss was looking for a methodological device for his theories of kinship. Both men were working towards the same direction, though independent of each other, and in 1945 Lévi-Strauss systematically began applying binary oppositions (though poorly understood) to anthropology.

It is worth noting that the marriage of anthropology and linguistics — along with the binary foundation — came about just as the Cold War was to begin. Was this an insignificant complementarity? In 1952, however, the use of binary oppositions had been abandoned by Jakobson, Fant and Halle in favour of ternary oppositions, perhaps a consequence of the Chinese Revolution in 1949, which perhaps acted as a ‘third’ pole. In any event, by 1957, all ternary oppositions had been removed, and all oppositions had been put in binary form. That year Morris Halle published an article ‘In Defense of the Number Two,’ and his work was supported in varying degrees by the U.S. Army Signal Corps, the offices of research of the US Air Force, the US Navy and the National Science Foundation (Halle 1957: 65-72). Was binarism the imposition of the linguist or the language? And why was the article written specifically in the defense of the number Two? By 1957 Jakobson had contradicted Saussure by arguing that binarism was peculiar to the language.

This is an example of how structural linguistics makes the methodologically ‘scientific’ case that language is self-sufficient. Language is perceived as an autonomous entity, in other words a ‘structure’ without inner dependencies; an independent system of signs having no subject. By means of displacing the subject, by finding an unnamed locus like Freud’s unconscious, linguistics remained impervious to history and historicising. My questions to the structural linguists are this: can a system of language function independently of an act of speech? And can we tolerate structuralism’s synchronic point of view? This paper suggests that the structuralists were steeped in a particular social, cultural and political milieu. Binarism complemented Cold War mentalities.

That structuralism employed the analytical tool of binary opposites was indeed well-known. The transition from explicitly binary to bipolar thinking came with Roman Jakobson and Morris Halle, who argued in the Fundamentals of Language, published in 1956, that the occurrences of the language disorder aphasia ‘oscillate between two polar
types’ (Halle and Jakobson 1956: 76). They argue that the development of language takes place along two different lines, one through similarity, and the other through contiguity. The first way is metaphoric and the second is metonymic, and hence was born the bipolar dualism of the metaphoric and the metonymic. In aphasia, the bipolar structure of language is fixed to one of those poles, thus excluding the other (Halle and Jakobson 1956: 78-79). Jakobson and Halle argue that ‘the actual bipolarity has been artificially replaced in these studies by an amputated, unipolar scheme which, strikingly enough, coincides with one of the two aphasic patterns, namely with the contiguity disorder’ (Halle and Jakobson 1956: 82). They saw themselves replacing an amputated unipolar scheme with a presumably healthy bipolar one. This basic dichotomy, they hold, is of ‘primeval significance and consequence for all verbal behaviour and for human behaviour in general’ (Halle and Jakobson 1956: 79).

Jakobson implicates aphasic disorders with linguistics and a mental abnormality. It is with certain irony that the ‘bipolar’ world finds its namesake in the ‘disorder,’ now the psychiatrical term for Manic Depression. Why do we find Manichean polarities and references to Schizophrenia scattered across our readings of such figures as Arthur Koestler? Perhaps revolutionary consciousneses produce a Manichean understanding: two fronts approach each other from opposite directions. As Koestler argues, ‘The self-contradictory, split pattern of Communist propaganda induces an equally split, schizophrenic mentality in those who are exposed to it’ (Koestler 1952: 285). Elsewhere he describes the ‘double-faced’ character of the Communist movement as that of ‘Jeckyll and Hyde’ (Koestler 1952: 283-4).

Poststructuralism And The Middle

Perhaps at the heart of this paper lies the broadest of questions: what does it mean to be modern, or better yet, postmodern, and how does it pertain to the problem of the ‘middle’? The middle has a significant tradition in western culture and in political thought from ancient Greece to the juste milieu of the early nineteenth century. Karl Mannheim makes the point in Ideology and Utopia that in the twentieth century the middle can no longer be occupied by a class such as the middle class; rather it is best defined as a ‘relatively classless stratum which is not too firmly situated in the social order’ (Mannheim 1954: 137). The middle in other words, is the equivalent of the ‘socially unattached intelligentsia.’ This disassociation of the concept of the middle from that of any given order, or form, predates Deleuze’s nomadism, and it runs counter to structuralism’s dominance during the second half of the twentieth century.

We have had the habit, from the First World War and until the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989, of viewing the ‘other’ as engaged in a ‘versus’ situation: the enemy
opposite. World War One ended in 1989 as Germany became reconstituted as one, and as Russia rejected its Soviet past in an anti-totalitarian revolution. 1989 makes us speculate more about the culture of the middle than any event since the Great War, save perhaps for the Holocaust. In effect 1989 seems to revive aspects of Europe before 1914, in particular the chilling sense of unexpected collapse, from the point of view of Russia as Communism fell from power. As one supporter of perestroika remarked in Moscow in 1988: ‘We are all in the Titanic rushing in the night towards the same iceberg’ (Beilhartz, Robinson, Rundell 1992: 94-5). The iceberg is a frequent metaphor that dots Alain Touraine’s work, *Critique of Modernity* (1994), and its appearance revives the cultural resonances between 1914 and 1989, in particular, the emergence of structuralism and its subsequent demise. The towering iceberg that crushed the Titanic is a perfect metaphor for the loss of ambivalence in structuralism, its anti-humanistic assumptions.

Recent critics of structuralism appear to agree on its anti-humanism and its denial of human subjectivity (Lilla 1994: 37ff.). Foucault administers a powerful blow against humanism, one which invites a kind of eschatological vision of the end of man. Structuralism radically decentres the world, and it has a regressive sense of origins, since all things are relational, as Jakobson might put it. It represents the loss of totality, which postmodernism later borrows (Smith 1988: 81). It can be argued that the recognition of anti-humanism in structuralism (and poststructuralism) has fuelled the recent neo-liberalism one finds loosely associated with postmodernism. While Habermas may be critical of the liberal revival in postmodernism, judging it as neo-conservative, further attention must be given to its anti-structuralist humanism, the postmodern nuance of ambiguity.

The postmodern middle with all its ambivalence is best analysed in *A Thousand Plateaus* (1987) by Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari. With the concept of the rhizome Deleuze and Guattari attack the idea of an excluded middle. Referring to their collaboration on *Anti-Oedipus* (1983), Deleuze and Guattari recall: ‘Since each of us was several, there was already quite a crowd’ (Deleuze and Guattari 1987: 54). And again, ‘We do not work together, we work *between the two*.’ For Deleuze and Guattari what is ‘between,’ the continuing process of negotiation, is of greater value than what is arrived at in the end. Perhaps if they were to borrow from Marx, the joint authors might argue that betweenness is a moment of non-alienation. The metaphor of the crowd represents the multiple, and so does the rhizome.

For Deleuze the somewhat aristocratic and sometimes radical metaphor of the rhizome represents ‘in betweenness.’ It is the weed and the rat, the bulb and the tuber. A rhizome is the tuberous underground stem of a plant, an example of which is the Iris.
They spread their roots outwards, forming a kind of network, or underground grid. The rhizome is valued because it is flat, in other words non-hierarchical, and it works by dislocation and scattering (Best and Kellner 1991: 101). In essence Deleuze reverses what he calls modern 'arborescent' culture, but not its organic character, challenging Burke's and Barrès' essentialist tree. The arborescent model has roots (a past) and branches (an hierarchy) and concentric rings (the centre) (Best and Kellner 1991: 98-99). For Deleuze, modern culture is as much founded on biology as linguistics. Trees are rooted in structuralist paradigms: 'If we ask the general question, 'What holds things together?', the clearest, easiest answer seems to be provided by a formalising, linear, hierarchised, centralised arborescent model' (Deleuze and Guattari 1987: 327). Deleuze's point is that 'Binary logic is the spiritual reality of the root-tree' (Deleuze and Guattari 1987: 5). Deleuze shakes structuralism, the bond between linguistics and psychoanalysis, and argues that this 'system of thought has never reached an understanding of multiplicity' (Deleuze and Guattari 1987: 5).

According to Deleuze, the logic of binaries still dominate psychoanalysis, linguistics and structuralism. Lacanian psychoanalysis, for example, has its object; the acorn becomes the tree, the child is in the adult; and there is always the leader, the ultimate father figure, another centre with his dictatorial unconscious: General Freud, the centre of the decentring process. Deleuzian 'schizoanalysis' wants to treat the unconscious as an acentred system, as a rhizome. And he turns to the concrete example of Amsterdam as a city without roots, 'a rhizome-city with its stem canals' (Deleuze and Guattari 1987: 15).

Deleuze's rhizome operates by short term memory or antimemory, hence lending to the ahistoricism of postmodernism. It is antigenealogy. It operates by 'variation, expansion, conquest, capture, offshoots' — like guerilla warfare: no central command (Deleuze and Guattari 1987: 21). It represents the nomadic, hence opposition to universalist state thought. Deleuze values the rhizome because it grows — like a blade of grass — between things, among them (Deleuze and Guattari 1987: 16). 'It has neither beginning nor end, but always a middle (milieu) from which it grows and which it overspills' (Deleuze and Guattari 1987: 21). In other words the rhizome is an 'acentred, nonhierarchical, nonsignifying system without a General and without an organizing memory or central automaton, defined solely by a circulation of states' (Deleuze and Guattari 1987: 21). The middle is not an easy perspective to view from. The middle has no co-ordinates and yet has an angle on all: left and right, up and down, but it cannot be located on a grid map.

For Deleuze, then, middle does not mean average: rather it is the space where things pick up speed in a perhaps overplayed neo-Bergsonian becomingness. Precisely because
the middle is not necessarily at the beginning or the end, it builds in the stream of life; in fact the beginning 'begins in-between, intermezzo' (Deleuze and Guattari 1987: 329). And not unlike Hegel, Deleuze's middle is a place of great activity, or creativity. He continues this theme in another chapter curiously entitled '1837: Of the Refrain,' and he repeats his thesis by asking the general question, 'What holds things together?' (Deleuze and Guattari 1987: 327). The linear, hierarchical, centralised arborescent model seems clear and easy, perhaps too clear and easy, for the postmodern age, and he introduces the notion of further in-betweens — 'transversals' and the non-arborescent notion of 'detrimentalization.'

Deleuze values the rhizome for its ability to break down the dichotomous foundations of binary logic, the legacy of structuralism and World War One. Its path is the subterranean and hence — like madness — poses something of a subversive threat to the power of arborescent culture. *A Thousand Plateaus* is actually volume two of Deleuze and Guattari's series on *Capitalism and Schizophrenia, Anti-Oedipus* (1983) being volume one. For Deleuze and Guattari, schizophrenia is not an illness; rather it is an emancipatory mental state that results from an ability to decode bourgeois society — and inherently capitalism — by decentring oneself from it. Deleuze and Guattari want to use 'Schizoanalysis' — which is different from psychoanalysis or, say, marxism — to articulate a postmodern discourse of emancipation.

Deleuze and Guattari are predominantly concerned with the area of the middle, and for good reasons; rhizomatic qualities are best embodied by the nomadic schizophrenic, well equipped to decode modern capitalist structures. The schizophrenic is always 'in between,' split in relation to the world, split in relation to himself, a divided self as R.D. Laing called it. While the intellectual and political forces behind structuralism may be fading, the idea of being in the middle is still something regarded as an anathema: it is considered the source of mediocrity and middling-type qualities. That which is perceived as 'neither/nor' is made out as not much of anything. It is underappreciated; that 'grey area' of multiple nuances are lost to forced dichotomisation. Middle is confused with a hypothetical 'norm' when it is not. Middle represents a rejection of the concepts of polarity and linear systems of thought. As Deleuze argued, only the schizophrenic can unscramble the codes of modernity. Madness craves the middle, and madness is the stuff of 'difference' as Foucault would say. Madness not only heightens the awareness of bipolar structures, it drives the mind to look in between, for shelter perhaps, where all the extremes are held in check. Strange as it may seem, the madness of World War One bifurcated Europe, and as that war closed its final chapters, in 1989, a rhizomatic mentality is emerging to dissolve further those structures.
But is the postmodern middle truly an inhabitable space, if it requires strains of nomadism and schizophrenia to appreciate its liberating aspects? The rhizome is like a street-wise weed when compared to the arborescent garden plant. And the illness that is implicit in the schizophrenic is, by any ordinary conception, often more painfully debilitating than emancipatory. Do we empty our hospital beds in order to create an inhabitable field of the middle, out of the otherwise ‘repressed’ and marginalised? It would seem that alienation, made common, becomes an element of the inhabitable middle. In other words Deleuze denies the ‘silent majority’ of their traditional monopoly over the concept of the middle, as marginality can now be considered a universal concept. The earth is ‘not only a point in the galaxy, but one galaxy among others.’(Deleuze and Guattari 1987: 345) Furthermore, we, as people are ‘a molecular population, a people of oscillators as so many forces of interaction’ (Deleuze and Guattari 1987: 345). The ‘interactive’ tone rings strong in Deleuze’s middle, as does his anti-institutionalism, precisely because they strike at the very core of structuralist assumptions. But his nomadism can border on a kind of hardy individualism, the very stuff of the silent majority itself. Is the middle then created through a return to ‘repressed’ practices and forms? Is the man of the middle a manic nomad, or a Nietzschean superman who breaks through all the cracks? And are either of these visions tolerable? Who then would really want to inhabit the middle?

The middle is not inhabited by some existing social order, or educated elite, or political type. It is not a question of ‘who’ can technically operate in the middle. It is a question of how can one engage in it. The best explanation, and the most explicit, is offered by Gadamer in his Truth and Method who defines ‘play as a process that takes place “in between”’ (Gadamer 1992: 6). The concept of the ‘in between’ here, shared by Deleuze and Gadamer alike, probably owes a common indebtedness to Plato’s Philebus. Gadamer’s ‘play’ is primordially medial, not to be confused with playfulness. Play occurs without goal or purpose; it is without end, and unquestionably without effort. The inhabitability of the middle is defined by relentless oscillation, the acts of neither and nor, to and fro, movement backward and forward. The play follows its own path of becomingness. For Gadamer, there is no end, no completion, only the relentless see-saw of play in the middle; and it does not matter who performs in the process, yet it is done best with an audience in mind, as if in a game. Presentation becomes representation, thus creating layers of the ‘in between.’

The idea of play is introduced by stripping society of any ontological meaning. The middle is inhabitable because there is no core and no concentrated forces pulling at it. There is no reason for polarisation when all we have is make-believe property. Here Gadamer’s player meets Deleuze’s nomad, who recognises borders and decodes the
games therein. More importantly, play is done for someone, and always has room for the Other. Play is reflexive, again to and fro, and this is perhaps the defining characteristic of the inhabitable middle. Gadamer’s reflexivity is suggestive of Deleuze’s use of schizophrenia and the middle: the divided self always has a concept of the Other, and it’s where the to and fro persist. Schizophrenia can be like living with a person you know. You talk to yourself and hear voices. Mental illness, in other words, is ‘Other directed,’ or reflective and medial.

Thus one recognises the middle by its oscillating reflexivity. Its other feature is a postmodern lack of seriousness. ‘We are in a moment of relaxation,’ explains Jean-François Lyotard, ‘— I am speaking of the tenor of the times’ (Lyotard 1993: 1). The apparent resolution of contrarieties and bipolar opposites, the twentieth century’s ‘classical’ paradigm, offers up a loss of tension, and perhaps a lack of intellectuality. The total or Hegelian experience of dialectic is gone. We thrive despite the destabilisation. The expansive sense of space is omnipresent, replacing the narrow two-front paradigm of old. The middle, as a celebration of space and difference, is not only inhabitable, desirable and unmistakable; it rescues humanism from the wake of titanic world wars. Curiously, the concept of the middle emerges at the end of the twentieth century. While 1900 began with a concept of unbridled ‘youth,’ the new millennium seems pointed toward a, dare-one-say, ‘less adolescent’ culture of thought which perhaps augurs well for all inhabitants.

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