



**MONS**

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**Breaking Perspective**

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The Arthurian cycle and its attendant texts maintains a particular historical and social connection with medieval Europe, specifically the development of British culture, but as Joseph Campbell recognized, the overarching themes addressed by the cycle are connected to an allegory of human development. Examined speculatively, and unmoored from their particular lineage, these texts may be extended beyond even their claims to a humanist spiritual development and re-configured into an inhumanist trajectory. One of the founding texts of the Arthurian drama, Chretien de Troyes' Perceval remains unfinished. Perceval never quite completes the quest. The ailing Fisher King, whose mysterious impotence is connected with the decay of the realm, is never restored. We might imagine that Perceval never rescues the Fisher King, that the diagnosis of the King's illness was only the impetus for revolution, and that the unasked question is that of Lenin's imaginary, "What is to be done?"

## **I sat upon the shore Fishing, with the arid plain behind me Shall I at least set my lands in order?**

In Eric Rohmer's plastic and highly constructed retelling of the myth, we are drawn as much to the stilted artificiality of the sets, as we are to the ritualized manner of the performers. Monologue is directed straight at the fourth wall: "he withheld from asking how it could be, for he remembered the worthy man's council, so he did not ask." The question breaks through all points of the construct. Vision is so totalizing it beckons blindness. Orbis Arboreum, globules of plastic leaves like eyes rooted to the earth, populate the set and we observe with them the procession of the tragedy (or is it farce) that plays out before us. The topsoil, now little more than a plane of wood and astroturf, recedes towards a painted curtain; an atmospheric perspective of mountains deepening the depth of the limit.

**That corpse you planted last year in your garden,  
Has it begun to sprout? Will it bloom this year?**



Still from Eric Rohmer's *Perceval*, 1978

The naif Perceval trots through it all, the holy fool, ignorance personified; and that is his strongest weapon. Preserving ignorance is necessary to to maintain openness within the world, a sensitivity to its abyssal nature. Perceval is the fool when he knows the courtly manner and the betterness to politely avoid questions, but he is holy when he meets the world with curiosity

The abyss is the ururgrund upon which all contingent reality unfolds and the theater is already immersed. It is where the curtain parts in Rhomer's stage, the vanishing point beyond all perspectives. Merckx&Gwynne's Monsalvat is organized along a perspectival axis, the future vanishing into the euclidean horizon. Single point perspective is dependent upon the subjective position of the viewer in relation to the architecture for it to cohere. It is an illusion presented precisely for its ability to be dispelled, for what happens when we step to one-side? Parallax. The illusion breaks, the depthlessness of the backwall disjoints from the forced perspective of the foreground, and we realize, the grund up which we stand slips into a new urgund. Monsalvat; a space within a space and/or a space without a space.

*This space defined by linear perspective is calculable, navigable, and predictable. It allows the calculation of future risk, which can be anticipated, and therefore, managed. As a consequence, linear perspective not only transforms space, but also introduces the notion of a linear time, which allows mathematical prediction and, with it, linear progress.*

Hito Steyerl, In Free Fall: A Thought Experiment on Vertical Perspective

Capitalism maintains its dominance by naturalizing its perspective, and insisting that the only horizon worth setting upon must be golden. Profit is the only true instrument of navigation, and its transcendental efficacy must be maintained. There is but one grail, and one quest; one way to traverse the wasteland. Here are the empty vertices of Uccello's grail; a phantom fetish, bearing the blood of god for the catholic communion.

**Phlebas the Phoenician, a fortnight dead,  
Forgot the cry of gulls, and the deep seas swell  
And the profit and loss.**

Later Germanic mythologies, like Wagner's Parsifal, re-constituted the Chretien text, smoothing out the ambiguity of the question. For Wagner, the quest centers on the spear, whose restoration returns the King's lost potency and restores the land. In Chretien's tale, Perceval is shown a number of marvels at the Fisher King's palace, amongst which are the grail and the spear. In seeing these objects, the hero's central predicament is the asking of the question. The myth does not simply resolve into a single possible quest or future, rather the imaginary is left open.

*For Oedipus to be occupied, a certain number of conditions are indispensable: the field of social production and reproduction must become independent of familial reproduction, that is, independent of the territorial machine that declines alliances and filiations; the detachable fragments of the chain must be converted, by virtue of this independence, into a transcendent detached object that crushes their polyvocal character; the detached object (phallus) must perform a kind of folding operation-- a kind of application or reduction (rabattement): a reduction of the social field, defined as the aggregate of departure, to the familial field, now defined as the aggregate of destination-- and it must establish a network of one-to-one relations between the two.*

Deleuze and Guattari, Anti Oedipus

Chretien's account never finishes Perceval's thread, and it ends once it is revealed that Perceval was unable to ask the necessary question due to his abandonment of his mother, and her subsequent death. Deleuze and Guattari trace a biopolitical relationship between the schematization of filial and alliance relationships. The prohibition against incest produces the defining exclusion of the set that characterizes one's identity within the social order. One is named as a mother, a son, or a father according to this germinal structural difference. The land was constructed upon ley-lines, whose histories



**FEAR  
IN A  
HAND  
FUL OF  
DUST**

have been buried to us: the economic affordances of the system and the terrain of the imaginary seemingly become locked within the grid. However, desire in itself is only contingently subordinated to this structural difference, there is no absolute necessity. The ground upon which it has grown is not a linearly differentiated schema, verging upon a single horizon, but a broken perspective.

Your mother is dead, your father impotent, you wander a wasteland in search of a question. To where will you step, and spy new ground?

Perceval is made to do penance to Christ for his unheimlichkeit. Perceval has not completed his sentence. The project is incomplete, and it will always be incomplete. We abduct him from the earth and cast him towards the abyss.

**Speak, and my eyes failed, I was neither  
Living nor dead, and I knew nothing,  
Looking into the heart of light, the silence.**

Breaking Perspective by Joshua Johnson for Monsalvat by Merx&Gwynne at Bureau  
Uncredited Qoutes: TS Eliot, The Wasteland  
Cover Image: Paolo Uccello, Perspectival Study of a Chalice, 1450