Necromedia - Reversed Ontogeny or Posthuman Evolution?

You'll scream with laughter. It's the craziest death in the world
Vladimir Nabokov, The Original of Laura[1]

What is a being? . . . The sum of a certain number of tendencies . . . Can I be anything other than a tendency? . . . No, I'm moving towards an end . . . And what about the species? . . . Species are only common tendencies towards an end appropriate to them . . . And life? . . . Life, a series of actions and reactions . . . When living, I act and react as a mass . . . when dead, I act and react as different molecules . . . So I don't die? . . . No, undoubtedly I don't die in that sense, neither I nor anything that is . . . To be born, live, and pass away—that's changing forms . . . And what's important about one form or another? Each form has the happiness and unhappiness appropriate to it. From the elephant all the way to the aphid . . . from the aphid all the way to the sensitive and living molecule, the origin of everything, there's no point in all nature which does not undergo pain and pleasure.
Denisa Diderot, D'Alembert's Dream[2]

NABOKOV'S POISONOUS OPUS AND DIDEROT'S DREAM

Dying in a culture immersed in science and media with shifting paradigms of what it means to be human is anything but simple, both in technical and moral sense. This is the main message of Vladimir Nabokov's last novel "The Original of Laura", which will be read as a design manual or rather a manifest for creative ways of dying in the 21.century. This hacking kit for the "craziest death in the world" shows how various old and new media together with emerging neurosciences transform the human existence into a set of experiments with mortality, but also fame. Nabokov's manifest summarizes the paradoxes involved in this strange fusion of technology, media and death, leading us to the present obsession with digitally enhanced but also obliterated death to which we will refer as "necromedia"[3]. The novel reflects mortality and individuality as something that needs to be constantly objectified by means of media and the neurosciences. Villains and heroes are reduced to neurotransmitters, which are as ephemeral and as eternal as anything else in the universe, and the various media immortalize everyone to fifteen seconds of fame to let them perish into oblivion and void like some subatomic particles in a literary collider.

This strange combination of ephemerality, immortality and even certain immorality and decadence define the present necromedia and its online and technological forms as death related design. Such design is not a solution to a problem but a new form of an ars moriendi manual. It is a mereological meditation in which the relations between the ephemeral, newly defined biological and media fragments to some social and even cosmological unit are transient and often on a verge of collapse. Nabokov's necropolitical manifest embraces these experiments with fragments. It reduces the body to a network of interacting biological, social, political and media fragments that are in need of some design principle that will "save the phenomena" and create meaning. This design principle organizes the emerging fragments, networks, bodies and units and redefines the possibilities of life and death.

Mereological reflection as a design principle for an age immersed in science and technology is already anticipated in the Denis Diderot's famous dream attributed to d'Alembert. The dream presents an early attempt to resolve the paradoxes involved in similar fusion of technology, media and death. Both Nabokov's and Diderot's delirious works reduce their characters into biological, social and cultural fragments that are in constant collisions forming hard to define hybrids. The most realistic and scientific reductions (humans as physiological and cell events) go hand in hand with the most ephemeral media constructions but also dreams and distortions. "Memento mori" becomes a spectacle of human physiological but also media fragmentation. Both authors couple them together in a strange marriage which is also an important theme in these works.

Present necromedia are a continuation of these literary experiments with shifting definitions of life, death and technology. They bring together death and design in order to transform our fragmented bodies and lives into changing and often monstrous units and networks. They explore death as our relation to the inorganic "base" and open a question whether science and technology with their interest in the inorganic

world create conditions for reversed ontogeny and phylogeny to the inorganic past or they explore potential posthuman futures.

DESIGNING PLEASURABLE AND CREATIVE DEATHS

The main character of Nabokov's last novel, Philip Wild, is a lecturer in "experimental psychology" at the University of Ganglia where he experiments with death by shutting off his body from toes upward and restoring it again with the use of elaborate tools. The whole book is a "neurologist's testament"[4] of a "luxurious suicide"[5], a "poisonous opus"[6] describing a process of dissolution and self-obliteration in which the main character mimics "an imperial neurotransmitter on awesome messenger carrying the order of self destruction to (his) brain"[7]. Original forms of destruction, a possibility of a pleasurable suicide and creative death are also a domain of interest for Laura, Philip's wife, who uses media, books, and newspapers to experiment with various representations of her own death. The fragmented characters and the novel itself, written shortly before Nabokov's own death in 1977 and published more than 30 years later, present a manifest of creative ways of dying with the use of science, technology and media. The mediated fragments and scientific data betray any attempt for unity, identity and meaning for sake of variety, experiments and unexpected assemblages which are simultaneously literary, political and biological. Death simply organises the literary, political and scientific discourses into meditation upon the relation between newly defined parts to a larger and more organized systems and units (body, family, society, media industry, cosmology).

Science with its ability to define and construct new entities (cells, tissues, neurotransmitters) brings a political and social challenge of creating new units both in Nabokov's novel and in an earlier work, Denis Diderot's dream attributed to his estranged friend Jean le Rond d'Alembert (Le Rêve D'Alembert, written in 1769). Diderot's scandalous and fragmented dream talk was also published only in 1830, almost 50 years after the authors' death. Like Nabokov, Diderot also needs to negotiate the complex and unsettling relations between political power and personal "neuro-sensitivity" that bring together issues of personal, social and biological unity. The difference between centralized and anarchic forms of what Diderot calls "sensitive networks" (réseaux sensibles), defined as biological and political units, is developed in terms of boundaries between normality and monstrosity, reason and dream, interpretation and delirious speech. Diderot's discourse on politics, science, life and death summarized by these networks leads to proliferating biological and political hybrids and metaphors, monstrous units and decentralized organisms that are challenging our understanding of life but also of social institutions like marriage and politics.

Human polyps, odd species, strange compound creatures and various other monstrosities made possible by the challenging scientific ideas and emergent technologies define new and often creative forms of death and politics. D'Alembert's Siamese twins with their "double life and death of doubled being" have alternating periods of life and death[8] while his "human polyps"[9] are reaching immortality. The envisioned forms of life, politics and death are simply certain configurations of the "network", they organize the newly defined parts that are biological and political at the same time into new and emerging units. When the centre of some new network stops responding and ruling the "sensitive and excitable parts", a state similar to insanity and hysteria ("anarchistic" nervous system) but also death occur. Death always shapes the discourse on the hybrid networks as an issue of centralized power over newly discovered parts. The closeness of death to dream, insanity and to the technical descriptions of some instable configurations of networks define this type of cybernetic obsession with the limits of what is organic and non-organic, human and non-human.The same obsession also defines Nabokov's experiments and descriptions of pleasurable and spectacular deaths that are possible in the age of neurotransmitters and extreme objectification of our body into an alliance of various impulses and media phenomena. Death becomes an ability to overcome our tendency to anthropomorphise and to see everything through the "spectacles of our own system" (Bordeu discussing with Mademoiselle de L'Espinasse the issue of Siamese twins)[10]. Death makes us free to imagine new forms of life, beings, new social organisation, and these new forms of biological, technical and political networks based on new parts are always defining new ways of dying.

SENTIMENTALITY, INDIFFERENCE AND TRANSGRESSION OF NECROMEDIA

Pleasurable and creative deaths, these contradictions in term present an interesting design challenge for the present society immersed in various technologies of enhancement of the living and life in general. Technological solutions offering pleasurable and creative deaths vary from online recipes and social networking strategies for painless euthanasia[11] to extreme green guerrilla movements supporting voluntary mass suicides[12]. While websites and organizations supporting euthanasia face challenges in terms censorship agendas[13], the activist solutions for the extinction of humankind are conceptual projects supporting eco-fantasies of a healthy earth ecosystem. Services offering euthanasia to individuals often deal with issues of privacy, pain and illegality, while the numerous design ideas on green burials[14] and eco-cemeteries[15] present the less extreme projects that are nevertheless still scientifically, technologically and socially challenging. To this account we should also add the semi-serious online "Darwin Awards"[16] for the most impressive forms of deaths (with their infamous motto "Honouring those who improve the species by accidentally removing themselves from it!"), "Death Clocks" reminding us "that life is slipping away"[17], various online suicide pacts and rings[18] that romanticize death, Twitter live suicide notes[19] that border with new forms of reality show. Creative or pleasurable forms of death explore various aspects: from romantization and idealization of death to a need to provoke or even concerns related to some non-anthropocentric ideal of a healthy planetary ecosystem

The creative death spectacle does not concern only our physical body but also our virtual existence and we are starting to witness individual that commit mass Facebook profile suicides, game avatar suicides as a form of an art performance[20] and even game environments' massacres[21]. In the case of "virtual suicides"[22] targeting the online Facebook accounts[23], there is a genuine need to free ourselves from our virtual doppelgängers that we are feeding online on various social networking platforms.These growing numbers of solutions and design ideas that explore the possibilities of pleasurable and creative forms of deaths are probing the scope and depth of various data and traces we create as living beings in a mediated world. The purpose and function of all these creative explorations of our physical and virtual mortality vary from the more therapeutic to the more performative. People simply need a place where they can voice freely their thoughts, uncertainties and various musings on death without being hospitalized and normalized as we can from this example from a post on one of the websites: "It was so refreshing, so therapeutic to read the open discussion without the fear of people calling 911 or sending the emergency services on you and having you involuntarily committed"[24]. The death websites are discursive and fantasy playgrounds defined by questions such as "What would be a cool way to die?" or even descriptions such as "The 10 manliest ways to die"[25].

The actual design ideas behind these suicide recipes connect death with every thinkable aspect of our public and private lives like "dying by inhaling (cat) hairballs", "chopping your own head off while standing next to a major world Leader", "preparing a grizzly bear death" or even repeating Empedocles jump into some volcano, or some simulation of Kenji Urada's death by a robot. There are even reviews and crowdsourced wisdom related to the internet classic "Cool Ways to Kill Yourself" by Scott Christensen[26] and the lees famous "Layman's guides to suicide"[27] and a whole genre of fake YouTube suicides that give vivid instructions. Projects offering creative design solutions for death seem to give comfort or to make fun of our anxiety, and only some of them are also trying to work with the idea of immortality based on data[28]. We are constantly reduced to data in our online lives so the wish to preserve them is becoming as natural as anxiety we feel about the disappearance of our physical body.

We can categorize these design solutions and responses to death into roughly three groups. First would be projects creating new forms of technological sentimentality and kitsch which Milan Kundera famously defines as a "stopover between being and oblivion"[29] where we can place many of the online memorial sites[30]. Second category relates to projects which respond to the immense indifference of nature and the universe and which are inspired by Friedrich Nietzsche's idea of the eternal return[31]. Extreme movements supporting voluntary mass suicides for the sake of the planet or extreme ecological ideas could be a good example of such attitudes. The third approach relates to the technological forms of the "apotheosis of the perishable" (Georges Bataille)[32] in the form of various green burials but also virtual suicides that accept and even celebrate death with creative ideas on how to leave this form of existence. These three paradigmatic responses to death in terms of sentimentality, indifference and transgression point out to the

original iconography of death starting with the sentimental motive of the "death of the maiden", the indifference behind the "dance of death" and the transgressive qualities of every "triumph of the death" (Eva Schuster)[33]. The traditional iconography related to death together with these three philosophical and approaches (sentimentality, indifference and transgression) working with death offer various perspectives on the mereological question. These technological and design experiments basically probe which parts of our existence are part of which (individual, social, ecological and even cosmological) units and how to work with their redefinitions and transformations.

NABOKOV'S NEUROPOLITICAL MANIFEST

The "final" novel by Vladimir Nabokov "The original of Laura" summarizes well and anticipates these digital and technological types of deaths and the design choices involved in them. The extreme objectification of human existence and the loss of intimacy connected to death seem to define the transgressive forms of death that we are starting to witness online and that are described in the novel. Nabokov as one of the first designers of pleasurable and creative deaths as transgressions bordering between technological sentimentality and apotheosis of the perishable anticipates our present and future forms of dying via new media and emergent technologies.

Nabokov's spectacular forms of death remind us that we are actually dying while alive. We can monitor, control and make sense of every moment of our dying in a similar way in which the main character, Philip Wild, becomes aware of the pain of dying on the level of his cells and tissues and tries to immunize himself from the fear of death. This almost stoic but at the same time transgressive relation to death is a part of a strange, "ecological" wish to understand ourselves as a part of a larger system which is not spiritual nor religious but "material", related to the ecosystem of the planet or the complex system of neurotransmitters in our body. We place ourselves in relation to some large scale metabolism or even collective organism, we are part of a complex food chain and energy cycle that can encompass even the inorganic world to which we need to return.

The potential of this design approach to monitoring, experiencing and immunizing ourselves to death is already present in the applications that monitor everyday life functions used by the "The Quantified Self"[34] movement. These measurements can help us develop the fantasies of pleasurable and entertaining forms of death in which we imagine or slowly experience and discover our inorganic "heritage" in terms of molecules and physiology that are doomed to return to their origins. "The Original of Laura" is in this respect something of a prototype that introduces the idea of a design for the "craziest death in the world"[35] exploring these returns to our inorganic past. The famous neuroscientist, Philip Wild, haunted by jealousy because of his young, unfaithful and beautiful wife, decides to experiment with death by shutting off his body and restoring it again in order to experience the inorganic aspect of his being. This "mad neurologist testament" of a "luxurious suicide, delicious dissolution" [36] is transforming him into "an imperial neurotransmitter on awesome messenger carrying (the) order of self destruction to (his) brain"[37]. This well planned act of destruction develops elements of creativity and almost a Buddhist awareness of the inorganic end.

How can suicides be made into pleasure? What are the design principles for pleasurable and creative deaths? In order to answer these questions, the book plays with the difference between the human and the animal, the human and insect or even plant as the first steps in the understanding of our original and inorganic nature. These differences even define technology and science as that which brings us closer to the ultimate "inorganic" truth about our origin and destiny. The human characters in the novel are literally described in a very scientific, botanical and even entomological way: the main character is Flora, her grandfather is called Lev Linde, and there are numerous other flowers and animals referring to the characters. Inanimate objects are often described as living, so the clock on Flora's hand is "onyx eye on her wrist"[38], "telephone is ringing ecstatically"[39], etc. all in order to prepare us for their death. This almost animistic insight which connects the human and the non-human defines contemporary design that enables humans to understand their symbiotic or ecological relation to the planet as a relation to their inorganic past and future.

NECROTECHNOLOGIES AS THE REVERSAL OF HUMAN ONTOGENY AND PHYLOGENY

The whole novel is almost a catalogue of various ways of dying related to various media and technologies. Flora's grandfather who is a painter is defined by a boring death: "What can be sadder than a discouraged artist dying not from his own commonplace maladies, but from the cancer of oblivion invading his once famous picture."[40] Flora's father is a photographer who is the first to explore the spectacular forms of death related to technologically mediated suicides: "Adam Lind had always had an inclination for trick photography and this time, before shooting himself in a Montecarlo hotel (on the night, sad to relate, of his wife's very real success in Piker's "Narcisse et Narcette"), he geared and focussed his camera in a corner of the drawing room so as to record the event from different angles. These automatic pictures of his last moments and of a table's lion paws did not come out too well; but widow easily sold them for the price of a flat in Paris to the local magazine Pitch which specialized in soccer and diabolical faitsdivers."[41] This scene written by Nabokov in 1977 almost predicts the real-time, YouTube types of suicides that we are starting to witness today. We have to give a credit to Nabokov for realizing the potential of any new media and technologies as not only that which enhances our lives but also our deaths.

Technologies are simply defined as ways in which we explore our relation and connection with the animal, plant and later even the inorganic world. The social and media impacts of our deaths are just aspects of a very complex system of reporting on death in this novel. The memoirs of Flora (Laura) are written by her lover in order to destroy her in the act of portraying her. Parallel to this, we are witnessing the disturbing and strange diary of her mad husband that is trying to develop the same theme from a neuroscientist perspective. The first description of the "most creative suicide"[42] starts with a simulation of the neuroscientific jargon: "An enkcephalin in the brain has now been produced synthetically... It is like morphine and other opiate drugs... Further research will show and why morphine has for centuries produced relief from pain and feelings of euphoria... I taught thought to mimic an imperial neurotransmitter and awesome messenger carrying my order of self destruction to my own brain. Suicide made a pleasure, it's tempting emptiness." [43] The "tempting emptiness"of the creative suicide is further elaborated into a mental exercise in which the "student" who desires to die "projects the mental image of the way he imagines his suicide by slowly destroying the three divisions of the physical self: legs, torso and head" the "self emblemizing"[44] process. This process of "self-deletion" and amputation is in some moments even ecstatic: "deletion of my procreative system sweet death's ineffable sensation"[45], "the process of dying by auto-dissolution afforded the greatest ecstasy known to man"[46], "divine delight in destroying one's breastbone... Enjoy the destruction but do not linger over your own ruins lest you develop an incurable illness, or die before you are ready to die"[47].

The ecstatic descriptions of death are paradoxically close to Phillip Wild's scientific ideal of methodology related to what he calls "sophrosyne"[48] – the ideal of self-control stemming from man's rational core: "An act of destruction which develops paradoxically an element of creativeness in the totally new application of totally free will. Learning to use the vigour of the body for the purpose of its own deletion, standing vitality on its head"[49]. It is an experiment and expression of scientific curiosity[50] and a process of scientific testing a discovery: "Now when it is the discoverer himself who tests his discovery and finds that it works he will feel a torrent of pride and purity."[51] The strong connection between death as an exploration of our inorganic nature and the scientific method as another type of close examination of the non-human reality summarize the whole opus and its mission. Death defined by scientific curiosity means an interest in the "extravagant messages that reach the brain"[52] and this neuropolitical approach based on self-objectification and discipline is almost morbidly reminiscent of the late Michel Foucault's "techniques of the self"[53]: "In experimenting on oneself in order to pick out the sweetest death, one cannot, obviously, set part of one's body on fire or drain I of blood or subject it to any other drastic operation, for the simple reason that these are one-way treatments."[54]

Nabokov's sketchy notes on the science of neurotransmitters express one of the most powerful reductionism of human beings to facts in recent times. In this respect, the whole novel defines the science and technology project as a type of a death manifest. This novel performs the "stuff of which our dreams and nightmares are made of"[55], the neurotransmitters and the molecules as the bases of our identity ("the self –annihilation a deep probe of one's darkest self, the unravelling of subjective associations"[56]) and which leas us to accept our animal and later even inorganic past and future. These extreme and

posthuman ideas show how all of our technologies and science are actually a reversal of human ontogeny and even phylogeny. They are necrotechnologies and necromedia, simply ways in which we explore our return to the inorganic past and future. Nabokov's novel and the original connection of death with technology and media present a challenge to the popular transhumanist and posthumanist dreams of some future forms of evolution. They simply explore a type of "devolution" into inorganic nature.

SENSITIVE NETWORKS (RÉSEAUX SENSIBLES): POSTHUMAN EVOLUTION OR DEVOLUTION?

This discussion of our relation to some non-human, inorganic and non-alive world in terms of evolution or "devolution" starts with Denis Diderot's dream. This "dream talk" paradoxically presents one of the first attempts for a materialist philosophy and has a form of a frivolous conversation between Madame de l'Espinasse and the famous doctor Bordeu. The whole conversation revolves around the concepts of "réseau sensible" and „mileu" (sensitive network) describing a decentralized agency of the senses or other elements (points) that have a potential to create new unity – organs or beings. These new units are not always standard, expected and normal but often transgress into unexpected, strange and monstrous organisms, and the design of such unexpected new connections and networks is described as legitimate and even creative. The whole dialogue cherishes the ability of life to create such new connections and combinations between the points and the threads (networks, fil délié brin), the new types of networks and unexpected units. The agency of different elements in these networks is discussed in terms of "infinity of human animalcules", as vibrating strings and sensitive fibres or living points successively conjoining a single living unity: "*Each sensitive molecule had its identity (it's "me") before the accumulation, but how did it lose that, and how, from all these lost identities, does one end up with the consciousness of a totality? How does it fuse with other? Sensitive and living molecule fuses itself with a sensible and living molecules.*"[57]

In order to explain this part of D'Alembert's dream, doctor Bordeu makes an interesting, biological and political distinction between congruity and continuity, between assembly and total unity, and defines several types of networks and forms of life and death: clusters, large hives, polyps and animals of some (new) kind. "Sensitive molecules" either aggregate new units like tissues of small sensitive beings or create more centralized "unified systems" with an awareness of their own unity. In both cases, life and movement are absolute singularities (*In this immense ocean of matter, no single molecule resembles any other, and no single molecule resembles itself for more than a moment)*[58] that are interlinked in a perpetual flux which means evolution into something more complex as much as it means devolution into something more simple (*All beings circulate through each other—thus all the species . . . everything is in a perpetual flux . . . Every animal is more or less human being, every mineral is more or less a plant, and every plant is more or less an animal. Everything is more or less something or other, more or less earth, more or less water, more or less air, more or less fire, more or less of one kingdom or another).*[59] These forms of non-human agency and inorganic existence define the "réseau sensible" and the „mileu" (sensitive network) as a decentralized agency of our senses which reason as a tyrant has tries to organize in order to claim some unity. The agency is based on sensory data (datum) related to our molecules rather than that unity we construct our of this material. These data which are the life of the molecules are used by our reason in order to organize the network into some unity but that does not mean they are part of only one network and that they will disintegrate after some organism changes.

These sensory data related to the activity of smaller fragments and parts gifted with agency are the key issue in deciding on the meaning of death in relation to evolution and devolution. The word data in all its present omnipotence related to the rise of visualisations, data-analytics and simulations, has a very modest genealogy. The original meaning of "data" is simply a gift or rather a precedent of an unequal exchange. Kenneth L. Schmitz summarize the Middle Age discussions on the gift and creation as „the paradoxical character of a given which excludes a giver".[60] What is important is not the giver but the act of giving (the act of "praecisio"), the performativity involved in its unfolding in the presence of human observer which creates an exchange between unequals (gods and humans, slaves and masters). The original, Latin meaning of donum is a gift without obligation, as opposed to munus (present which customs induce to make, homage) and it is often related to the gift of freedom that a master can give to his slaves.

Scientific or any type of data have such potential to give freedom, to reconfigure both political and biological networks and create new units which Diderot describes in his dream as various monstrosities, oddities and potential new types of beings. The scientific data open the network to new reconfigurations. The creative evolution rather than devolution into some more original and inorganic past is the reason why also death of these new types of units and beings (twins, polyps) is more "creative" and complex. "Data" play an important role also in the recent discussions on sensor networks and the rise of online interaction over DNA, bio data and other form of sensor data related to our environment. We are constantly negotiating and integrating various data about our bodies and environments over online and mobile platforms and it seems that we are evolving and devolving with these data into new types of organisms.

Communities of people monitoring, sharing and making sense of such "objective" and "scientific" data in their everyday life are already exploring the future symbiotic relations between various types of agencies and experimenting with these micro-level connections between various scales. They are the true cosmopolites exploring emergent, often surprising connections, networks, and mashups between different data across (unequal) scales. This design revives the original idea of a data as gift involving impossible exchanges in which life and death are just various phases in the reconfiguration of new networks, organisms and units: "*Who knows the races of animals which will come after ours? Everything changes, everything passes away. Only the totality remains. The world begins and ends without ceasing. Who knows how long this inertia will last? Who knows what new race could result some day from such a huge heap of sensitive and living points? Why not a single animal? What was the elephant at its origin? Perhaps it was the huge animal as it appears to us, perhaps an atom, for both options are equally possible. They only depend upon the movement and various properties of matter . . . The elephant, this enormous structurally organized mass the sudden product of fermentation!*"[61]

REFERENCE:

[1] Nabokov, Vladimir Vladimirovich, and Dmitri Nabokov. The Original of Laura (Dying Is Fun). 1st ed. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2009, p.227.

[2] Diderot, Denis, D'Alembert's Dream. Translation Ian Johnston. Online
<http://records.viu.ca/~johnstoi/diderot/dalembertsdream.htm>

[3] We are extending the meaning of Marcelo Gorman's definition of "necromedia" as fusion of media and death by describing the dynamics of enhancement and obliteration connected to this. The original use of the word necromedia can be found here: Gorman, Marcelo. What is Necromedia? In Intermédialités, No.1, Printemps, 2003. Online
<http://cri.histart.umontreal.ca/cri/fr/intermedialites/p1/pdfs/p1_ogorman.pdf >

[4] Nabokov, Vladimir Vladimirovich, and Dmitri Nabokov. The Original of Laura (Dying Is Fun). 1st ed. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2009, p.3.

[5] Ibid, p.243.

[6] Ibid, p.3.

[7] Ibid, p.127.

[8] Diderot, Denis. D'Alembert's Dream. Translation Ian Johnston. Online
<http://records.viu.ca/~johnstoi/diderot/dalembertsdream.htm>

The passage starts with a reference to a story from a popular Royalist weekly "Gazette de France" on the Siamese twins, which Mademoiselle de l'Espinasse calls "a really odd species", and continues with Bordeu's description of the "alternating periods of life and death" experiences by the twins:

BORDEU: They took in milk given to them on a spoon. As I told you, they lived for twelve hours, one losing consciousness as the other came out of unconsciousness, one dead while the other lived. The first blackout of one and the first life for the other was at four hours. The alternating blackouts and returns to life which came afterwards were shorter. They died at the same moment. People noticed that their navels also had an alternating movement outwards and inwards, going in for the one who was unconscious and going out for the one who was returning to life....

MADEMOISELLE DE L'ESPINASSE: There we have an example of two linked souls.

BORDEU: An animal based on the principle of two sensing systems and two areas of consciousness.

MADEMOISELLE DE L'ESPINASSE: But only having the use of one of them by itself at any given time. Still, who knows what would have happened if this animal had lived.

BORDEU: With the experience of all these moments of life and the most powerful habits one could imagine, what sort of intercommunication would have been established between these two brains?

MADEMOISELLE DE L'ESPINASSE: Double senses, a double memory, a double imagination, a double ability to focus—one half of a being which observes, reads, meditates, which its other half rests; then this other half takes up the same functions when its companion is weary: the double life of a double being.

BORDEU: That's possible. And in time nature brings out everything possible, so it will produce some strange compound creations.

MADEMOISELLE DE L'ESPINASSE: How impoverished we would be in comparison with such a being!

BORDEU: But why? There are already so many uncertainties, contradictions, and foolish things in a simple understanding that I have no idea any more what would happen with a double understanding.

[9] Diderot, Denis. D'Alembert's Dream. Translation Ian Johnston. Online <http://records.viu.ca/~johnstoi/diderot/dalembertsdream.htm>.

The political and scientific effects and implications of the polyps and especially "human polyps" prove to be even more problematic than the one related to the "Siamese twins". Bordeau starts with a metaphor of almost "imperceptible bees" which can be killed only by crushing rather by cutting to describe two types of organic structures "bees formed continuously and the group of bees formed contiguously". The difference between the continuous and contiguous defines the difference between "normal animals, like us, fish, worms, and snakes", and "animal polyps".

Possibility of such extreme forms of life and death provoke Mademoiselle de l'Espinasse to hysterical laughter and speculation on "human polyps" on some other planets:

MADEMOISELLE DE L'ESPINASSE: "In Jupiter or in Saturn, human polyps! The males resolve themselves into males, females into females—that's an amusing thought . . ." (At that point he began to burst out laughing so hard I was frightened) "Man splitting himself up into an infinity of atomized men which we could keep between sheets of paper like eggs from insects which spin their cocoons, remain for a certain period in the chrysalis state, pierce through their cocoons, and escape as butterflies—a human society formed and an entire region populated by the fragments of a single individual—all that is very pleasant to imagine. . . ." (Then the bursts of laughter started again) "If there's a place where the human being divides itself into infinity of human animalcules, people there should be less reluctant to die. It's so easy to make up for the loss of a person that death should cause little regret."

[10] BORDEU: Perhaps nothing worth very much, but since we see everything through the spectacles of our own system and I don't want to be an exception to the rule, I say that it's the phenomenon of La Peyronie's trepanning but doubled in two joined beings. The networks in these two children were so thoroughly mixed together that they acted on and reacted to each other. When the centre of the bundle of one had the upper hand, it took control of the other child's network, and she immediately blacked out. And when the network of the second child dominated their common system, the situation reversed. In La Peyronie's trepanning patient, the pressure was directed downward from above by the weight of a fluid; in the twin girls of Rabastens, the pressure came up from below through the tension in a certain number of threads in the network: this hypothesis is supported by the alternating inward and outward movement of their navels—in the one returning to life the navel came out, and in the one dying it went back in.

[11] Exit International (Assisted Suicide/ Voluntary Euthanasia) http://www.exitinternational.net/

[12] The Voluntary Human Extinction Movement http://vhemt.org/

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