

# KNOW YOUR FOOLS



## *The idiots*

*Fares Chalabi*

A bunch of idiots are populating the grid.  
They are organized in small groups, two or three at a time.  
They come in couples, like these funny characters: Laurel and Hardy,  
Mirene and Marwa, Heckle and Jekyll, The Daltons, Hatem and Omar,  
Ashkan and Jan, Mansour and Mansour.  
Maybe One needs to be Two to be an idiot.

Descartes was an idiot.  
But Descartes used to do it by himself, sitting in a small warm room.  
His other was a heater.  
Descartes had plenty of room to meditate.  
Descartes used to meditate alone.  
He needs to be alone, because he is a doubter.  
Descartes becomes an idiot when he decides to reach truth by himself.  
How can I reach truth, an absolute truth, while being by myself?  
In his solitary confinement Descartes starts doubting.  
He doubts his heater. He doubts his room. He doubts his handwriting.  
Then, pushing doubt to an extreme, he tries to doubt his doubting.  
At this moment doubt fails. Descartes cannot doubt his doubting.  
He declares "I doubt".  
But, "I doubt" is not a doubt. It says so, but as an activity it is an affirmation.  
Thus, Descartes declares "I think".  
"I think" is identical to the activity it is producing, thus it is an identity, a being.  
"I am".

Descartes performs his cogito. "I doubt", "I think", "I am".  
It is a logic of the implicit, where the transitions are made by jumps, and in relation to their productive acts. Each affirmation envelops an act, and it is the coming to light of this act that brings us to the next affirmation, and so on.

The Cartesian equations go like this:

- Nothingness = Destruction.
- Knowledge = Certainty.
- Being = I.

The truth that Descartes reaches is that the only truth which can be reached by one's self is: only this self is. "I am sure that I am, and the world is nothing, or if I am sure that I am, then the world is nothing."

To get Descartes out of himself and make him reach again for the world, God will have to intervene, but that episode will not be discussed here.

Another famous idiot is Melville's Bartleby.

Bartleby does not isolate himself in a room, but rather installs his room in a public space.

Indeed, Bartleby works, sleeps, and eats in the office of his employer.

His employer is a state functionary, a public notary.

Bartleby is inserted into the public administration, inside its most intimate imbrications and documents.

His robotic personality makes him quite good at what he does.

Bartleby does not think.

Bartleby does not talk.

Bartleby works and eats ginger biscuits.

If you ask him to do something that he prefers not to do, he will answer that he prefers not to. "I prefer not to", is his formula, as Deleuze puts it. Bartleby will utter this formula, regardless of all circumstances and propositions, until this leads him to prison and death.

We are dealing here with an order of preferences not of certainty.

Bartleby prefers not to.

The disjunction with Bartleby is not absolute, it is not the "I am". "I prefer not to" is a formula like in chemistry or physics. This formula solves the problem of a local and yet absolute disjunction. Instead of having an absolute destruction with no locus, Bartleby exercises a power of suspension.

His preference is without an object. It is neither an "I prefer not to help you" nor an "I prefer not", but a preference of a transitive

negation "I prefer not to". It is a modality of movement where movement is neither blocked nor passed through. The movement remains in location and does not cross space anymore, though it does not stop either. It is as if Bartleby injects an imperceptible void between the bodies in movement and their points of friction, which usually allow for displacement. The circulation of movement is deprived of its grip on space and space is freed from the movements of the grid.

What has come to light in this suspension are, on the one hand, the frenetic movements of the grid, and on the other hand, the impassibility of an immobile local space.

The problem is that this suspension of space is bound to the utterance of the formula. The space of suspension is identified with the location of Bartleby. It is a space that doesn't exist by itself. To recuperate the space and the fluidity of circulation, the authority will end up installing Bartleby in a prison where he will let himself die.

The Bartleby equations go as follows:

- Suspension = Abstract space.
- Knowledge = Formula.
- Being = Order of preferences.



Series of photographs taken on a Sunday afternoon, Beirut, May 2010.

So maybe the idiot needs to be bi-headed, in order to be able to do something by himself: Descartes and Bartleby, Laurel and Hardy, Deleuze and Guattari.

To be an organization will consist of voicing not the I but the II. Having two heads is, first of all, to stop talking for one self.

The organization will be a device to suspend the entanglement between the thought and the self. By speaking in the name of the organization, the movement of thought is freed from its ego center: it can become a collective thought, a thought that goes beyond space, time and self. But at the same time, the self-organized reconstructs a self of this para-spatiotemporal thought. It is not the anonymous thought of the institution, transcending space, time and selves, but a paradoxical floating thought with a self. The self-organism has preferences: preference for comics, contemporary art or music.

Thus the self-organized has an ego that concurrently goes beyond its limits, an ego of egos, and it is an organization with a suspension power. It suspends the flux of necessity and injects the preferences of its multiple egos. A solitary ego will not be able to participate to the grid (absolute ego - Descartes) while a pure suspension power will not be able to inject, in return, new images and preferences (absolute suspension - Bartleby).

To achieve this paradoxical being, the self-organized will plug its selves on the selfless body of the grid. They will have numbers, official status, and sometimes all the subsidiary elements: offices, phone numbers, rent contracts, etc.

The self-organism will intercept a flux of money or funds; rent some equipment or organize events. This will ensure survival in the grid. When its physical durability is more or less secured, the self-organism will start acting and perceiving. Its actions will consist mainly of liberating space. However, instead of having an abstract space, a space that only suspends movement, the new space will generate, in return, movements and images: movements of people visiting and traveling, and images to produce and look at.

These movements and images are the surfacing, in that specific point, of the virtual images and movements of the grid, which could not reach the surface otherwise. In fact, the grid is saturated by the economical and representational necessities. In general, movements and images are dictated by profit (commercial images, circulation of goods) or the consolidation of power (representational images and circulation of personalities).

The self-organized generates a movement that escapes these necessities, movements and meetings devoid of an identified goal, and images with no commercial value or sometimes with no value at all.

When viewed from the outside, from the grid, the self-organized seems to

be in a frenetic activity devoid of meaning and necessity: "Why are you doing this? What for?". It is often confused with charity organizations, however charity organizations are nothing but a resembling other. They are oriented towards necessary problems, problems that arise from the disfunctioning of the grid. That's why charity organizations are the grid complements, and not the grid suspension points.

Thus the self-organized doesn't even have the luxury of having a problem. Its problem is preferential and essentially optional, i.e., I prefer comics over modern literature. The insistent question from the grid comes back: "What for?". Looking from the outside, these self-organizations are tinted by their autistic idiotic origin; they seem disconnected from the world, and highly narcissistic. This is the case only when we postulate that the sole destination of any action is to solve a problem imposed by the grid, to react to necessities. While if we consider that the self-organized is a solution to escape the encompassing order of necessity and reason, and an excursion in the field of contingency and preferences, the inquiry is void. "What next?" is the haunting question of the self-organized, and not "What for?". "What next", in order to keep a flow of non-regulated movements and images, as a counter to regulated images and movements. The self-organized equations go as follows:

- Suspension = Liberation of a space.
- Knowledge = Preferences.
- Being = Self-organization.

