

## GLASS ONION DIALECTICS

When I first heard the Beatles song “Glass Onion”<sup>1</sup> back in 1968, I felt that it coincided with some of my encumbered thoughts about the opaque complexity of human society and history. I felt I understood what John Lennon was trying to express about the impossibility of seeing the core of true reality through all the multiple layers of erred judgement, distortion, artifice and fallacy hiding it. I imagined that a glass onion was some kind of sculpture created by the likes of Yoko Ono; ...but I was wrong.

“Glass onion” –or onion bottle– refers to the shape of bottles developed and used during the 17th and 18th centuries. So, I guess that Lennon was referring to seeing the world distorted if one is looking through the bottle’s neck hole. Actually, he later confessed he wrote the song to confuse people who read too much into the lyrical meanings of Beatles’ songs, which annoyed him. Lennon dismissed any deep meaning to the mysterious lyrics: “I mean, it’s just a bit of poetry.” –he said– “I was having a laugh because there’d been so much gobbledygook about *Pepper*.”<sup>2</sup>

In my young mind’s mystical interpretation of the song, the glass onion was a perfect, transparent glass replica of an onion, displaying dozens of concentric spheres converging on a glass nucleus. If one were to try to use it as a lens, the image the “onion” focused on, would be very distorted, no matter from what angle one would hold the glass sphere.



However, if one were to slice a real onion, one would see a series of concentric circles growing out of a central bud. The bigger the onion, the greater the number of circles, each identifying a stage in the onion’s growth from the bud outwards.

In a way, what I’m trying to do here is a form of dendrochronology –the scientific method of dating tree rings –or “growth rings”– to the exact year they were formed in a tree. As well as dating them, the wood of old trees can furnish data for dendroclimatology –the study of climate and atmospheric conditions during different periods in history. Dendrochronology is useful for determining the precise age of samples. It also provides data on the timing of events and rates of change in the environment (most prominently climate) and also data in wood found in archaeology or works of art and architecture.<sup>3</sup>



So, in this essay, I will attempt to construct a “glass onion dendrochronology” of human social development. In so doing, I will need to take into account: (1) a revised form of Hegelian dialectics, and (2) my Space/Time Reference-Framed Event Triangle, as appeared on my previous essay *Unpacking Husserl’s Matryoksa*, of January 9<sup>th</sup> 2023.

It is my contention that every moment of **real** human experience is followed sooner or later by its negation. This negation is manifested either as artifice, fallacy or exploitation, thereby completely distorting **Reality** into its existential opposite: **Illusion**. Following the onion or tree rings analogy, each ring is real (*thesis*), then is covered by a skin or bark –its illusion (or *antithesis*), and then resolved into the next ring (or its *synthesis*). This dialectical process is continued in space/time, as human actors intervene, forming the next ring, each phase moving further and further away from original reality.

In order to illustrate this process, I will use a very banal example: the history of the necktie. What was originally a crude piece of cloth worn by poor peasants, has been transformed into the luxurious –and useless– modern necktie.



The necktie traces its origins back to Croatian mercenaries serving in France during the Thirty Years' War (1618–1648). These soldiers, wearing their traditional small, knotted neckerchiefs, aroused the interest of the Parisians. Louis XIV began wearing a lace cravat around 1646 when he was seven and set the fashion for French nobility. This new article of clothing started a fashion craze in Europe; both men and women wearing pieces of fabric around their necks. From its introduction by the French king, men began wearing large cravats, or

jabots, which took a large amount of time and effort to arrange. During the French Revolution, the men of the Third Estate reverted to a plain cloth necktie, as a protest against the aristocracy.

International Necktie Day is celebrated on October 18 in Croatia and in various cities around the world, including in Dublin, Tübingen, Como, Tokyo, Sydney and other towns.<sup>4</sup> Some of the most expensive neckties sold today are the *Title of Work* brand handmade neckties, selling for up to \$1,500 each.

Perhaps in a future installment I will try to analyze what Lennon really meant by the lines: “Standing on the cast iron shore, ... Fixing a hole in the ocean” and “Trying to make a dove-tail joint ...” while looking through a glass onion.

Written by © Pascual Delgado, June 27<sup>th</sup> 2024.

<sup>1</sup> *Glass Onion* – Song by Lennon & McCartney (1968).

<sup>2</sup> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Glass\\_Onion\\_\(song\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Glass_Onion_(song))

<sup>3</sup> <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dendrochronology>

<sup>4</sup> <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Necktie>